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**Тоска, одержимость и игра:
ранние сочинения Лигети для женского хора¹**

Аннотация

В данной статье исследуется ряд ранних (написанных с 1944 по 1956 годы) произведений Лигети для женского хора с целью выявления их значения в стилистической эволюции композитора. Прослеживаются основные вехи его обучения (в основном по сочинениям и интервью), пережитый в юности травматический опыт. Далее рассматривается генезис хоровых сочинений и композиторская техника; обозначаются характерные для его музыки нелинейные влияния; исследуются многочисленные связи между внутренним «я» автора и композиционным процессом.

Ключевые слова

Дьёрдь Лигети, хоровая музыка, женский хор, эволюция стиля, травматический опыт, композиционный процесс

**Longing, Obsession, and Play:
Ligeti's Early Compositions for Women's Choirs²**

Abstract

This paper investigates a selection of Ligeti's early compositions for women's choir, written between 1944 and 1956 in order to shed new light on the significance of this repertoire in stylistic evolution. It first retraces the main events during his years of study (mainly thanks to his writings and interviews) and draws attention to the traumatic experiences he endured in his youth. The study examines therefore the genesis of the choral pieces and the compositional technique Ligeti developed, highlighting the dense tangle of influences that characterizes his music and exploring the complex and multiple connections between the composer's inner self and the compositional process.

Keywords

György Ligeti, choral music, women's choir, style evolution, trauma, compositional process

¹ В основе статьи лежит доклад, прочитанный на Международной научной конференции «Четыре времени Дьёрдя Лигети» (28 марта 2023 года) в Московской консерватории.

² This article develops and deepens the lecture I gave at the International Scholarly Conference "The Four Seasons of György Ligeti" (March 28, 2023) at the Moscow State Conservatory.

György Ligeti (1923–2006) began studying composition at the Conservatory of Cluj (now Cluj-Napoca, Northern Transylvania) in 1941. He opted to pursue music after his application to the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the University of the same city was rejected, due to his Jewish background. As he recounts in an interview with Eckhard Roelcke [14, 15], he chose the composition class at the city's conservatory only after that negative response and to avoid compulsory military service. His interest in science and his talent for mathematical models will undoubtedly leave a lasting mark on his life and, as we will see, on his music (see also: [3], [22]).

His teacher in Cluj was Ferenc Farkas. In his 1949 essay “Neue Musik in Ungarn”, Ligeti placed Farkas among the most important Hungarian composers and praised his melodic skills and the modernity of his work [11, 7]. Farkas was a pupil of Leó Weiner and Albert Siklòs at the Liszt Academy in Budapest and then furthered his studies in Rome with Ottorino Respighi. His language is eclectic but with a classical imprint, reconciling multiple influences, from Mediterranean melodism to Hungarian folklore, from classical polyphony to dodecaphonic technique [2, 37].

Ligeti recalls that Farkas based his teaching on the study and writing in the style of Renaissance counterpoint [13, 92]. He was an extremely meticulous and demanding professor, especially in correcting exercises in polyphony that he taught using Knud Jeppesen's counterpoint manual [5]. Ligeti emphasizes his expertise in the use of imitative techniques, which he had learned and practiced skilfully from the beginning, thanks to the quality of Farkas's teaching: “I owe most of my skill as a composer to Ferenc Farkas, harmony, counterpoint, and what's more, a certain truly professional way of thinking <...>. I feel that I learned most from Ferenc Farkas, and that's not just my own personal experience, he was the greatest teacher for a whole generation of musicians.” [15, 205]

Ligeti also had the opportunity to receive private lessons from Pál Kadosa, a fervent disciple and great interpreter of Bartók. Kadosa was not considered an avant-garde composer; however, it was a crucial encounter because he initiated the young Ligeti into the scientific analysis of Hungarian folk music, focusing particularly on rhythmic-metric articulation [4, 83]. During this period, likely on Kadosa's recommendation, the student delved into some compositions by Stravinsky and Hindemith that will leave a mark on his stylistic development.

At the Cluj Conservatory, Ligeti found himself part of a lively group of students and musician friends who gathered at the home of a German businessman, who later became his father-in-law.

However, Ligeti's productive studies at the Cluj Conservatory came to an abrupt halt when, in January 1944, he received a telegram instructing him to fulfil military service. As a Jew, he was not deemed suitable to join the regular army, similar to people from minorities such as Romanians, Ukrainians, and Serbs, who were considered suspicious and were not entrusted with weapons, thus being employed in support roles for the army.

In two detailed memoirs ([14, 54-68], [10, 20-28]), Ligeti recounts with surprising clarity his dramatic experience during the war. He learned about his call to arms with dismay, even though his name had been on the enlistment lists for two years. In the following months, he faced exhausting tasks in the army, lived in constant danger and witnessed the daily deaths of his comrades.

During the spring of 1944, all Jews were deported, and Ligeti learned that his entire family had met this fate, although the existence of extermination camps was not yet known. In August of the same year, Soviet forces surrounded the fortress where Ligeti's company was stationed, forcing him to flee to a safer village. In the following days, he was compelled to transport goods in open fields, constantly threatened by machine guns and bombings.

After being transferred again, Ligeti's company found itself surrounded by Soviet army troops and had to march for days, eventually coming under a barrage of fire. The composer miraculously survived, while most of his companions were killed by Russian tanks. He was

captured by the Soviets more than once but, thanks to a series of fortunate events, managed to escape and return to Cluj. He found no trace of his family and belongings; his home had been occupied by strangers. He later discovered that his father and brother had died in concentration camps, while his mother had survived by working as a doctor in the women's camp at Auschwitz.

In 1945 Northern Transylvania returned to Romanian administration, and, after the war, Ligeti fled illegally to Budapest, where he was admitted to the prestigious Liszt Academy. In the post-war period, despite destruction and poverty, Budapest experienced an extraordinary resurgence of cultural activity, initially not under strict state control. Magazines, academies, and concert organizations resumed their programs in full swing; modern music, prominently featuring Bartók, was performed, and innovations from the West began to penetrate.

Ligeti's teacher at the Academy in Budapest was Sándor Veress, a direct disciple of Bartók and Kodály, who held prestigious positions at the Institute of Folklore in Budapest. Like other composers of his generation, Veress undertook significant expeditions in Hungary, Transylvania, and Moldavia, where he recorded a substantial number of folk songs. His musical language strongly reflects these experiences, combining folk melodies with an extremely rigorous contrapuntal technique inspired by the Italian Renaissance. The result is a highly polished language characterized by a bold use of dissonance.

Ligeti recalls that, during his years of study with Veress, he acquired the basics of major analysis techniques and delved again into the study of Renaissance polyphony and Bach's counterpoint. He wrote about his teacher: "[Veress was] a man of total integrity, very much like Bartók. On the other hand, he was a much less skilled teacher than Farkas. With Veress I studied Palestrina-style counterpoint, form analysis, and had to compose in any given style, as I had done in Farkas' class" [8, 255].

Ligeti's study notebooks preserved at the Paul Sacher Foundation document a significant number of Renaissance counterpoint exercises for the academic year 1945/1946, ranging from three to four voices, along with pages in the style of Haydn and Mozart. In the following year, he composed several two- and three-part inventions inspired by Bach's works.³

During these years, he also actively participated in choral practices, both within city ensembles and with his conservatory peers. This involvement allowed him to develop a certain familiarity with Renaissance polyphony and the Hungarian choral style: "Inspired by Kodály, there was a strong turn towards vocal polyphony in Hungary – there were many professional and amateur choirs that sang both compositions of renaissance and works by more recent Hungarian composers. In my student days, I often sang with my fellow students in small private ensembles, although I had a very bad voice. I then composed a series of a cappella choral pieces for these ensembles".⁴

Throughout his years at the Liszt Academy (1945-1949), he penned numerous free compositions, among which are more than twenty pages for choir. These comprise elaborations of Hungarian folk songs (such as *Bujdosó*, *Húsvét*, and *Magos kösziklának*) and original pieces like *Bethlehemi Királyok* (with lyrics by Attila József) and *Magány* (taken from a poem by contemporary Hungarian poet Sándor Weöres). These compositions demonstrate a great mastery of polyphonic technique and a certain ease in the use of dissonance. Even if his early style is prominently influenced by Stravinsky and Hindemith's neoclassicism, his teacher Veress and Bartók, it foreshadows the development of a personal style in which some characteristic elements of his more mature style can already be glimpsed.

³ See *Catalogue des œuvres: Cahiers D'esquisses* 11-27: [4, 234-35].

⁴ "Angeregt durch Kodály, gab es in Ungarn eine starke Hinwendung zur vokalen Polyphonie – es gab viele Berufs – und Laienchöre, die sowohl Kompositionen der Renaissance als auch Werke neuerer ungarischer Komponisten sangen. In meiner Studienzeit sang ich oft mit meinen Kommilitonen in kleinen privaten Ensembles, obwohl ich eine sehr schlechte Stimme hatte. Für diese Ensembles komponierte ich dann eine Reihe von A-cappella-Chörstücken" [9, 143]. Translation is made by the author of this article.

One of the first collections Ligeti wrote after the war for women's choir is *Idegen Földön*, (*Far from home*, 1945-46), four pieces for soprano, mezzo-soprano and alto. He took texts and melodies from various sources:

— *Siralmas Nékem* (*It's sad to me*), text by Bálint Balassa;

— *Egy Fekete Holló* (*A dark raven*), traditional poem, Transylvania, edited by Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály in *Erdélyi magyarság: Népdalok* (Budapest: Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 1921) [6, 164];

— *Vissza Ne Nézz* (*Don't Look Back*), traditional poem, Transylvania, edited by Béla Bartók in *A magyar népdal* (Budapest: Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 1921) [6, 165];

— *Fujdogál a Nyári Szél* (*Summer sends a gentle breeze*): Slovakian traditional poem in the Hungarian translation by Béla Balázs.

In this work (like the majority of the compositions of that time, including *Bujdosó*, *Magány* and *Ha Folyóvíz Volnék*) certain themes appear frequently: exile, wandering, distance from the beloved, the impossibility of reunion, grief and loneliness. As mentioned above, during World War II, the composer spent long periods away from home in inhumane living conditions, lost most of his family and fled illegally to Budapest in 1945. It is not surprising, then, that the young Ligeti selected for these choral pages texts that could express his emotional condition, which was deeply troubled at the time and steeped in nostalgia for his native Transylvania, where his mother and his beloved Brigitte Löw were living.

The compositional style Ligeti adopted to express his emotions in music is quite surprising: dry melodic lines, archaic modes, but, above all, a rather rigorous imitative counterpoint, which in this context may have been adopted by Ligeti to keep the very deep anguish, that troubled him, under control. Counterpoint, in this context, seems to put the musical material under strict observation, as within a scientific laboratory (remembering Ligeti's love for science) where every element is purified, dosed and distributed with absolute precision to neutralise, as far as possible, the strong emotions expressed by the text. This is how Ligeti tried to deal with these terrible experiences, but at a certain distance, as their burden was so severe that it would have been impossible to expose himself more directly to them.

The first piece, entitled *Siralmas nékem*, is a striking representation of the gap between the dramatic meaning of the text and the dry contrapuntal treatment of the music, which in the first bars takes the form of a severe canonic writing at the third. The text is following:

Siralmas nékem
Idegen földön
már megnyomorodnom,
szívem meghervadt
nagy bánat miatt,
nincs már hova fognom.

*It is miserable for me
to grow old
in exile,
my heart has withered
because of my great sadness
I have nowhere to go.*

Laktam földemről,
szép szerelmemről
mikor gondolkodom,
jutván eszemben
ott én mint éltem,
könyveimet hullatom.

*When I am thinking,
it comes into my mind
how I lived in
my homeland and, my beautiful love,
my tears fall
for I live on foreign land.*

Numerous musical “figures of speech” are taken from the polyphonic technique of musical rhetoric: hypallage, pathopoeia, and paragoge. However, as Amy Bauer notes [1, 112], some elements are inspired by Transylvanian folk music, for example, the predominantly syllabic style, the composite modal range, which moves between Doric and Hypodoric, the descending fourth leap, the movement of parts by parallel thirds, and a rhythmic articulation characterised by a short-long figure (Example 1).

Poco lento, semplice (♩ = 60)

Sopran
p
 Si - ral - mas né - kem i - de-gen föl - dön
 Mir ist so we - he fer - ne der Hei - mat,
 Life is so drear - y far from my home - land,

Mezzo-sopran
p
 Si - ral - mas né - kem i - de-gen
 Mir ist so we - he fer - ne der
 Life is so drear - y far from my

Alt
p
 Si - ral - mas né - kem
 Mir ist so we - he
 Life is so drear - y

3 (*>*) *espressivo*
 már meg - nyo-mo-rod - nom, szí - vem meg - her - vadt nagy bá - nat mi - att,
 matt bin ich zu To - de, wie, wenn ich stür - be, so bin ich mü - de,
 my joys are all past now, and I'm so wear - y, yes, I'm so wear - y;

föl - dön már meg - nyo - mo - rod - nom nagy bá - nat mi - att, nagy bá -
 Hei - mat, matt bin ich zu To - de, so bin ich mü - de, so bin -
 home - land, my joys are all past now, and I'm so wear - y, yes I'm -

i - de-gen föl - dön már meg - nyo - mo - rod - nom nagy bá - nat, nagy bá -
 fer - ne der Hei - mat, matt bin ich zu To - de, so bin ich, so bin -
 far from my home - land, my joys are all past now, yes, I'm so wear - y, -

Example 1. György Ligeti, *Siralmas nékem*, bars 1-5 (Schott Music, 1988).⁵

The same mastery in the use of contrapuntal writing characterizes “Vissza ne nézz”. The piece is based on a Transylvanian folk song, whose theme, once again, revolves around exile and homesickness:

Mikor a nagy erdőn kiméesz,
 arra kérlek, vissza ne nézz,
 ne legyen szívednek nehéz,
 hogy az idegen földre mész.

*When you walk through the big forest,
 I ask you not to look back,
 Let not your heart be heavy,
 Because you go to a foreign land.*

The piece features an even more essential compositional technique, as it is entirely based on the rhetorical figure of the preamble: the canon imitation is executed only by the two upper voices, while the alto does not merely fill in harmonic gaps (as usually happens in this rhetorical

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figure) but presents the same thematic elements of the theme, maintaining its rhythmic aspect but introducing some melodic modifications.

The deliberate handling of voices gives rise to numerous inverted triads (especially in the second inversion), that impart a sense of instability, seemingly expressing the restless state of the exile, which only resolves towards the end of the piece. The succession of triads, furthermore, does not follow the rules of functional harmony and, at the same time, is on the verge of modal writing, within a transposed Dorian mode.

The rather unusual choice of the canon at the second gives rise to some exposed seventh dissonances at the beginning of the measure (bars 2, 4, 7), which are always resolved according to contrapuntal rules, while almost the entire piece is characterized by consonances. These elements, along with the perfect rhythmic construction where the pulse of the quaver note is never interrupted and the narrow range of pitches used, result in a perfect mechanism that not only demonstrates Ligeti's precocious compositional aptitude towards counterpoint but also testifies once again to a perfect control of vocal textures, rhythmic configuration and sonic space.

Once again, Ligeti not only demonstrates an in-depth knowledge of polyphonic language but effectively interprets, albeit in a measured manner, the evocative images proposed by the text. The vigorous octave leap proposed at the beginning of the melody suggests, according to this interpretation, a broad movement away from the native land and the solemn progression that characterizes the entire piece, based almost entirely on long chains of quavers, seems to imitate the slow steps of the exile in a foreign land.

In 1954, Zeneműkiado (Budapest) published a pedagogical collection of 165 canons (*165 kánon*, ed. by Péter József, 109 p.)⁶, which included two short compositions by Ligeti: *Ha folyóvíz volnék* (*Like a steam gently flowing*, 1947) and *Pletykázó asszonyok* (*Gossiping Women*, 1952). The score does not specify to which voices the canons are dedicated; the cover of the 1999 Schott re-edition clearly states that the canons are for mixed choir, but the treble clef of the second canon suggests that it is intended for female voices. What is peculiar is that almost all the performances of the two canons that I have found are interpreted by women⁷, including those on the Sony Ligeti Collection CD⁸ (which has received the approval of the composer himself), so we can assume that these compositions were written for women's choir.

Ligeti probably found the text of *Ha folyóvíz volnék* (1947) in the Hungarian song collection *A magyar népdal* by Bartók: he only took the text and wrote original music. The composer processed the text through iteration as the verses were repeated in a gradually more fragmented and disordered way. The result is a disjointed text where the repetition of verses, in mutilated and increasingly shorter sentences, intensifies the dramatic effect of the content. In a similar way, the music tends to become more and more deconstructed, starting with a rich and varied melody that gradually tends to fade out. This compositional process, which is characterised by a kind of progressive dissolution of text and music, was perhaps used by Ligeti to translate the content of the text musically: the desire of the protagonist, as well as that of the composer, is to dissolve his pain in the water of the stream that makes its way from the mountain into the valley.⁹

⁶ 165 kánon, Zeneműkiado, Budapest Péter József (ed.), 1954, pp. 109.

⁷ The only exception I have found is the recent recording by the SWR Vokalensemble conducted by Yuval Weinberg, in which the two canons are performed by the male section of the choir. On May 31, 2023, I met with the conductor, and he informed me that he chose to do this for both organisational and aesthetic reasons. Organisational reasons included the scarcity of pieces for men's choir, compared to the abundance of compositions available for women's choir, and the necessity of rehearsing alternately. Aesthetic reasons stemmed from his interest in having men perform something typically associated with women, such as chattering. See: György Ligeti, *Complete Works for a cappella Choir*. [in 2 discs]: [CD] / [György Ligeti (composer)]; South West German Radio Vocal Ensemble, Y. Weinberg (conductor). Poing: Naxos Deutschland Musik & Video Vertriebs-GmbH, 2023. (SWR19128CD; SWR Classic).

⁸ György Ligeti: *A Cappella Vocal Works*: [CD] / [G. Ligeti (composer)]; London Sinfonietta Voices, T. Edwards (conductor). New York: Sony Music Entertainment Inc., 1996. (SK 62305; György Ligeti Edition 2).

⁹ See also: [18].

Prior to delving into the second canon, *Pletykázó asszonyok*, it is necessary to consider the evolution of Ligeti's life and the political situation in Hungary after the war. Beginning in 1948, the democratic coalition, which held power in the nation after the war, underwent a gradual transformation, shifting towards a Stalinist-style dictatorship. This transition was marked by a consolidation of authority and a tightening grip on various aspects of societal functioning. As part of this authoritarian shift, strict state control was imposed over all cultural activities, exerting influence over artistic expression, intellectual discourse, and creative endeavours. Within this oppressive framework, avant-garde music, characterized by its innovative and experimental nature, faced particular scrutiny and condemnation. It was branded as degenerate by the authorities, viewed as a threat to the established order, and subsequently subjected to outright prohibition. The regime imposed a compositional style characterized by simplicity and inspired by the tonal tradition of classical music and the folk repertoire that was familiar and understandable to the Hungarian people.

The increasingly stringent government restrictions and the composer's gradual divergence from the national cultural policy led to a palpable sense of scepticism and uncertainty about the future of Hungarian music, so Ligeti's productivity, starting in 1948, experienced a sharp downturn. He talked about the terrible experience of the communist regime, in many writings and interviews, underlying the atmosphere of terror, the lack of communication with Western countries and the musical servility to the state.¹⁰

In 1949, he accepted a scholarship to study Transylvanian folk music in Romania, where he lived for almost a year. From the very beginning, the composer's creativity was stimulated by the richness of this extraordinary heritage. Ligeti later drafted two articles on the outcomes of this experience and also wrote many compositions based on Romanian music. The importance of this experience is not limited to the use of traditional music in his later compositions. The transcription of the intricate heterophonic textures and complex rhythmic configurations of the colinda as well as the adoption of unusual modes, long pedals and ostinatos, left an important mark on Ligeti's style.

Ligeti returned to Budapest in July 1950. After a brief stint at the Academy of Sciences, he was hired as a teacher of music theory at the city conservatory. As a state employee, Ligeti was obliged to write, perform, and publish music and, therefore, respond adequately to what was demanded by the regime's cultural policy.

In this harsh context, he matured with the intention of completely reformulating his compositional style and emancipating himself from Bartók's model. From 1950 onward, a noticeable division emerged between compositions commissioned for formal occasions by city ensembles and those of a more experimental nature, acknowledged by Ligeti as destined solely for his private collection. Ligeti's ambition was to chart a distinctive stylistic course, deriving richness from minimal musical elements while imposing rigorous constraints on pitch selection, intervals, and rhythmic structures. However, these avant-garde endeavours faced challenges gaining acceptance within the broader musical milieu.

Pletykázó Asszonyok has been published in the canons collection despite its very experimental style. As Simon Gallot suggests [4, 47], the strict board of censors misunderstood the numbers corresponding to the entries of the voices for those of the beats and therefore did not understand the resulting overall dissonant sound.

The composer built the canon *Pletykázó Asszonyok* using three fundamental elements: a concise ostinato pattern comprised of repeated sequences of quavers, brief scalar fragments and a short-long rhythmic figure. The nervous motion created by the fast canon constructs dense clusters and evokes the gossiping women, conferring a sort of obsessive and frantic, nonetheless quite ironic, quality to the composition (Example 2). The canon also foreshadows a musical behaviour that characterizes his more mature style, namely micropolyphony.

¹⁰ See also: [12], [13].

Vivacissimo

1. *p* *cresc.* 2. 3.

Ju - li né - ni, Ka - ti né - ni le - tye pe - tye le - pe - tye, ül - dö - gél - nek a sa - rok - ba,
 Tan - te Ju - le, Tan - te Kä - te, pap - per - lap - per lap - per - papp, ho - cken in der So - fa - e - cke
 Aunt - ie Ju - lie, Aunt - ie Ca - thy, nat - ter chat - ter nat - ter chat, sit to - ge - ther for a prat - tle,

4. 1 *p*

jár a nyel - vük mint a rok - ka, le - tye - pe - tye le - pe - tye! „Hal - lot - ta, hogy le - tye - pe - tye?“
 und er - zäh - len um die Wet - te, pap - per - lap - per lap - per - papp! „Sag - te ich schon pap - per - lap - per?“
 and, my good - ness, how they tat - tle, nat - ter chat - ter nat - ter chat! “Have I told you nat - ter chat - ter?”

Example 2. György Ligeti, *Pletykázó Asszonyok*, bars 1-7 (Schott Music, 1999).¹¹

Pletykázó Asszonyok presents some of the features that Wolfgang Marx, in his essay on the relationship between Ligeti’s music and cultural trauma [16], associates with the terrible experiences the composer had in his early years. These are related to musical parameters such as micropolyphony, phonetic features of the text, as well as modes of expression like parody, irony and the grotesque.

According to Marx, the most intriguing characteristic of micropolyphony, in relation to cultural trauma, is its ability to create “imaginary spaces in the minds of listeners” [16, 79], which refers to the music’s capacity to be ambiguous and inherently allusive. In the complex micropolyphonic texture, traditional parameters such as melody, harmony, and rhythm recede in favour of a more comprehensive and layered perception. This process confuses the listener, as familiar tools for predicting the music’s development are not provided: its highly organized structure is not perceived in its entirety, which lends a certain indeterminacy to the listening experience. The teleological sense becomes blurred and elusive, replaced by a mode of perception that requires a different and more intricate approach [16, 79].

Moreover, the treatment of the text in *Pletykázó Asszonyok* is oriented to the interest in the text’s phonetic quality and the deconstruction of meanings: the listener perceives only a mash of vowels and consonants. Even if not a single word is intelligible, the overall onomatopoeic result restores the original meaning of the composition: the musical depiction of a group of gossiping women. This composition features an ironic and grotesque quality, since the poem by Sándor Weöres seems like a simple children’s tongue-twister but it is, in actual fact, an allusive and mischievous narration of a betrayal. For Marx, Ligeti’s use of irony, parody and the grotesque (more widely used in later compositions like *Aventures*, *Nouvelle Aventures* and *Le Grand Macabre*) can be interpreted as expressions and signs of a difficulty in engaging with his own emotional state and, particularly, in relation to his traumatic past: “Music indeed showed a reluctance to engage with emotions, instead emphasising what can be called irony, alienation or often even the grotesque” [16, 85].

As previously mentioned, Ligeti was obliged to pen music for official occasions and arrangements of popular music continued to play an important role in his work as a composer. *Négy lakodalmi tánc* (*Four Wedding Dances* for female choir and piano, 1950) have been published by Zeneműkiadó in 1952. The collection is set in a sort of narrative form, that depicts various moments of a wedding. The first poem describes the bride’s joy but also her hesitation, and in the second piece, the bride opposes the wedding, fearing the preparations have not gone far enough. Filled with pride, the girl wants to become “the most beautiful bride” in the third

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poem. Finally, the last poem speaks of the groom thinking confidently about his wedding while his uncle plays the violin.

Those compositions are certainly the most traditional of those examined so far, as they are simple strophic harmonisations of folk songs. The plainness of these pieces fits very well within the official context in which they were performed, namely, as part of a program on Hungarian radio Petőfi Rádió, performed by the vocal group *Menyecskék* (Young wives) [7, 146]. The piano merely plays simple chords, and the texture of the voices is mainly homorhythmic; in the first and in the last compositions the parts move often in parallel thirds, the second piece has a responsorial structure, characterized by numerous repetitions, and the third piece is a solo voice with piano. We do not know exactly why Ligeti chose such a simple style for these compositions; surely to pass the censorship, perhaps to accommodate the needs of the choir that would have performed them, likely a non-professional ensemble (as its name suggests). This collection, however, seems a parody of the simplicity required by socialist realism. Nevertheless, the collection had a certain success, since the pieces were performed many times, even after Ligeti's escape from Hungary [7, 146].

In 1956, in fact, the composer, after witnessing the brutal repression by the Russian army during the 1956 uprising, decided to flee the nation clandestinely for refuge in Austria. The previous year he composed *Mátraszentimrei Dalok* (*Song from Mátraszentimre*) for women's or children's choir. Written shortly before Ligeti fled from Hungary, it is dedicated to the Mátraszentimrei children's choir (an ensemble from a village in Heves County, Hungary) and consists of simple harmonisations of four traditional songs. As Kerékfy attests, the manuscripts were given to Ligeti by the collector and ethnomusicologist Ilona Borsai [6, 180]. Like in *Négy lakodalmi tánc*, the language is quite simple. The melody is often presented in unison or parallel octaves; counterpoint and imitation only occur in a few cases. The subjects are quite light-hearted and vary from declarations of love to a children's game with buttons and barrels of wine.

The first piece of the collection is *Három hordó* (*Three Barrels*). It is a somewhat grotesque nursery rhyme in which various objects are listed, such as wine barrels, lettuce, and red currants, but all that is wanted is the love of the girls. The music has an ABA structure, in which the first part is in a transposed Dorian mode and features a forte ostinato, marked on the text "three barrels" (and then later three heads of lettuce and three bushes of red currants). This melodic-rhythmic ostinato emphasizes the bizarre character of this text (Example 3).

Allegro giusto

feszesen.,
f straff, strict time

Sopran

Há - rom hor - dó bo - rom van,
Hab' drei Fäs - ser ro - ten Wein,
I've three bar - rels full of wine,

f marcato

Alt

Há - rom hor - dó, há - rom hor - dó,
Hab' drei Fäs - ser, hab' drei Fäs - ser,
I've three bar - rels, I've three bar - rels,

Example 3. György Ligeti, *Három hordó*, bars 1-4 (Schott Music 1984).¹²

In the middle section, the mode is a brighter Mixolydian, in which the minor third appears at times. This part, in which the text abandons the list of three objects but invites the people to drink cheerfully, is characterized by short descending melodic fragments and contrasts greatly with the darker character of the first section (A).

Also the third piece of the collection, *Gomb gomb*, also features a melodic-rhythmic ostinato, but unlike the previous one, it is light and playful, all hinged on the word "pompon". It

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accompanies the charming and delicate folk chant, which is initially entrusted to the upper voice. In the middle section, the melody is instead performed in the lower voice, carried to the fourth degree. The piece ends with the reprise of the first part, which, this time, however, ends on the key of the relative minor.

The use of ostinato patterns, which Ligeti deepened during his studies on Romanian music, is actually a characteristic of many other choral works composed after 1950 (such as *Kállai kettős*, *Haj, ifjúság!*, *Inaktelki nóták*, *Pápainé, Éjszaka-Reggel*) and it gives the pieces an unquiet and sometimes obsessive character, even when it features children's songs like *Gomb gomb*.

In conclusion, the analysis of the choral pieces examined shows that Ligeti's stylistic choices were not only influenced by his teachers or affected by the cultural models imposed by socialist realism, but also profoundly determined by the necessity of managing his reactions to the traumatic events that characterized his Hungarian years. During this dramatic period of his life, in fact, music represented an effective means for converging inner conflicts into a creative act and for facing otherwise unspeakable experiences. This approach will also define some characteristics of his mature works, as Marx thoroughly analyzed [16]. In his compositional language, traces of trauma remain, imparting Ligeti's style with a detached emotion, that reveals, deep down, a chasm of inner turmoil.

As has been pointed out, the rigorous use of counterpoint (like in *Idegen Földön*) served as an effective tool, in various ways, for dealing with the composer's most sensitive issues, such as loneliness and sorrow, especially when interpreting poems steeped in grief and nostalgia. The deconstruction of text and music seems to reflect the shattered soul of the composer, while the recursive use of ostinato patterns reveals something enigmatic and obsessive. Nonetheless, the more traditional compositions, like *Négy lakodalmi tánc* and *Mátraszentimrei Dalok* show an extraordinary mastery of holding a dialogue with traditional music, especially when it deals with joyful themes like weddings or children's games.

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