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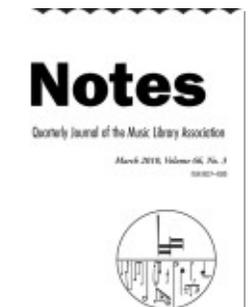
Sándor Veress: Komponist—Lehrer—Forscher (review)

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to give him his full due. In her work on Messiaen, Bruhn has assumed the interdisciplinary roles necessary to tackle his music in a successful way. Accordingly, for people interested in Messiaen, as well as French culture and music of the twentieth century, these two books are must readings.

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Sándor Veress: Komponist—Lehrer—Forscher. Edited by Doris Lanz and Anselm Gerhard. (Schweizer Beiträge zur Musikforschung, Bd. 11.) Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2008. [294 p. ISBN 9783761819333. €39.95.] Music examples, illustrations, facsimiles, bibliography, index.

While the life and work of Sándor Veress (1907–1992) is virtually unknown outside Hungary and Switzerland, the back cover blurb makes a good case why we should all care more about him: “student of Kodály, and assistant of Bartók; teacher of Ligeti, Kurtág, and Holliger.” Unsurprisingly, one major thread in the present volume is precisely the exploration of these important relationships, and Veress’s role as mediator between two great generations of Hungarian composers. Simone Hohmaier’s essay poses the audacious question of whether apparent stylistic parallels between the works of Ligeti, Kurtág, and their common teacher should be viewed as signs of direct influence (as Heinz Holliger had suggested). Hohmaier responds in the negative, since most of these musical features could rather be interpreted as signs of collective Bartók reception, traces of which are obvious in the oeuvre of all three composers. Nonetheless, Veress may still have been important to both of his students in terms of ethics: Ligeti called him “a role model, but no good teacher,” adding that he was “a hundred-percent downright person with an unbelievable ethos” (p. 143). Friedemann Salis focuses on a more specific issue—the possible connection between Veress’s pedagogic collection *Billegetőmuzika* (Fingerlarks) and Kurtág’s *Játékok* (Games)—but reaches a rather similar conclusion: even if the stylistic relationship appears difficult to substantiate, the way both series teach the piano student freedom in

the first place does relate the two works on a moral—or even political—level. Michael Kunkel’s interview with composer Heinz Holliger finely rounds off this topic by suggesting, among other things, that Veress’s pedagogical talent is reflected precisely in the above lack of direct influence: “He has not brought up little ‘Veresses’—that is the sign of a good teacher” (p. 176). The last contribution to this thread is Melinda Berlász’s edition of the correspondence between Zoltán Kodály and his ever humble student Veress, which is supposed to shed light on the *Granitfundament* of the latter’s creative life—that is, “the totality of Veress’s spiritual roots tying him to Hungary” (p. 223). While the German term comes from Veress himself, the rather less intriguing content of most of these letters suggests that such a *Granitfundament* in essence resembles an iceberg, insofar as its true size and weight cannot be reckoned from the superficial evidence such correspondence can provide us with.

The Kodály letters in fact appear in a quasi-appendix to the collection together with two other groups of primary sources. Doris Lanz presents the documents concerning Veress’s naturalization in Switzerland—the true story of a two-decade-long wrangling that the Swiss Holliger calls “an unbelievable disgrace to our country” (p. 180). If these official documents are no easy read, Claudio Veress’s and Andreas Traub’s edition of the letters written by the composer during his 1947 England trip to his wife present one of the highlights of the volume. Veress openly describes his growing anxiety regarding his professional future in Hungary, considers emigration ever more seriously, reports about his diverse plans and hopes that vanish from one day to the next, and bashes his local rivals—Britten in particular—for the comfortable position he himself should better have deserved. This series of personal confessions is deeply moving to read, and may help many to understand better the mindset of not only Veress himself, but of all twentieth-century émigrés in general.

Indeed, it is precisely this kind of exemplariness that Rachel Beckles Willson’s opening essay describes as our strongest reason to study in depth Veress’s life and works. As she points out, his career is paradigmatic for the twentieth century not merely because of the crucial role of displacement

(i.e., the composer's eventual emigration to Switzerland), but also due to the decisive influence of two major ideological currents of the era: nationalism and communism. Veress studies may therefore provide a welcome widening of horizon to music historical investigations in these three fields, which have until now been almost exclusively dominated by case studies focusing on Germany and the Jewish Diaspora. Andreas Traub's essay finely illustrates this thesis by identifying *Verlust und Utopie* (loss and utopia) as the keynotes of Veress's life and work, while Willson's second contribution provides another illuminating study about the composer's relationship to communism before his settling in Switzerland in 1949. As she suggests, Veress's solid position in the Hungarian musical establishment before the end of World War II may easily have been something he felt pressed to compensate for by joining the Communist Party in May 1945. The composer's final years in his homeland are also discussed in the article by his son Claudio Veress, which thoughtfully argues that each of his father's works in the period 1945–48 could be read as intentionally ambiguous, and their seeming "political correctness" in fact hides resolutely subversive ideas.

The collection also features a few analytical essays. Both of Bodo Bischoff's studies explore particular aspects of Veress's *Das Glasklängespiel*, a five-movement work for chorus and orchestra to texts by Hermann Hesse. In a less theoretical manner, Doris Lanz examines Veress's changing relationship with dodecaphony, a technique he categorically rejected in a note dated July 1951, but nevertheless adopted in a work completed as early as August 1952. According to Lanz's intriguing interpretation, through this apparent turning against one of his earlier aesthetic principles the composer might in fact have sought to perpetuate another, more important artistic preference: the quest for synthesis he so admired in the works of his former mentor Bartók. (Intriguingly, by 1954 Veress went as far as to draw a parallel between composing with a *Reihe*, and arranging folksongs.) The final essay by Péter Laki deals with Veress's most important ethnomusicological contribution, his collection of *csángó* folksongs (the Csango people are a Hungarian-speaking minority in Moldavia),

and is thus the only article in *Sándor Veress: Komponist—Lehrer—Forscher* to deal with the third major topic indicated in the title.

Taken as a whole, this collection fulfills its prime goal admirably by calling wider attention to a generally neglected figure of twentieth-century music, whose life and work can nevertheless help us understand several of his better-known contemporaries as well. Since the volume grew out of a single-day conference on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the composer's birth, the editors were of course not in the position to ensure all-round coverage of Veress's career—the virtually complete silence on the pre-1945 years is therefore understandable, though quite unfortunate. (And all the more so, for we do learn [p. 220] that the composer's letters to his brother, now preserved as part of the Veress estate in the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel, document this period in considerable detail.) At the same time, all readers will no doubt wish the editors had added a brief chronological overview of Veress's life, as well as a work list, in the absence of which some of the received information about such a little-known figure seems difficult to put into context. This minor flaw and the inevitably uneven quality of the contributions aside, the bilingual volume represents a welcome widening of our rather narrow traditional canon of twentieth-century composers worthy of study. If perhaps not a *Granifundament* that Veress's statue could be erected on, it does achieve a small but much-needed step toward a fuller understanding of a fascinating chapter in European music history.

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National Széchényi Library, Budapest

Roger Sessions: A Biography. By Andrea Olmstead. New York: Routledge, 2008. [xvii, 441 p. ISBN 9780415977135 (hardcover), \$120; ISBN 9780415977142 (paperback), \$47.95.] Illustrations, bibliography, index.

Roger Sessions receives surprisingly little attention despite his status as one of the most significant American composers of the twentieth century. His music is performed, but not regularly; there are record-