



# *György Ligeti*

Beyond Avant-garde and Postmodernism

Translated by Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch

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## Preface

From September 30 to October 4, 1962, the Society of Musical Research held its International Musicological Convention in Kassel. I vividly recall the concluding session, on “Problems of Structure in Contemporary Music”, in which György Ligeti, in a captivating paper on electronic music, pleaded for a conception of music capable of accommodating also the interstitial/intermediate areas of the musical. His path-breaking presentation made such a powerful impression on me that I decided forthwith to concern myself at closer range with the works of the then 39-years-old, still relatively little-known composer.

After Ligeti’s appointment to the Hamburg *Musikhochschule* in 1973, I had repeated opportunities to be in contact with him and over the years got to know him as an altogether unconventional, intensely curious individual of profound wit and comprehensive knowledge and a warm-hearted friend. I began to scrutinize his works, whose musical idiom had always fascinated me, and to publish essays about them. It gave me particular pleasure to introduce some of his compositions, at times even before their first performance, in articles that appeared in the Swedish journal *Nutida Musik*. In 1975, Ligeti was awarded the noted Bach Prize in Hamburg, and I was chosen to present the eulogy. From 1987 on, I gave lectures about his music not only in Hamburg but in Vienna, in Graz, in Hitzacker, in Gütersloh and in the Rhine region.

In the spring of 1989, I told him of my intention to write a book about him. On July 24, he wrote me:

I read your eulogy with great pleasure and thank you most cordially for it. I think it is much too laudatory (but I can bear it ...). I am also delighted that you will be giving a seminar about my music at the Musicological Institute next semester, and am equally delighted that you are writing a book about my music. If you need me, I am of course at your disposal. I will spend the summer in Vienna, but if you want to talk with me, Ms. Duchesneau will always know where to find me.

Of primary importance were the conversations I had with Ligeti in his Hamburg apartment. This book is initially based on these conversations and on an intensive study of his numerous writings and the many interviews he has given. The first (introductory) part centers on questions of biography, art and music theory, the psychology of creation and general aesthetics and concerns basic traits of Ligeti’s personality and work, his intellectual physiognomy and the phenomenology of his music. The more extensive second part comprises

discussions of his most representative works, with special emphasis on the processes of creation. For the first time, Ligeti's drafts will be an object of scholarly investigation in this book. I was particularly concerned to elucidate the genesis of his works, to outline the technical problems of composition that occupied him, to explore the relation between imagination and construction, and likewise to elucidate the extra-musical associations accompanying the compositional process.

A focal point of this study is the discernment that it is Ligeti's synaesthetic endowment that opens up a deeper understanding of his music, a music that requires an analogous synaesthetic perception on the part of the listener. Synaesthetic aspects will therefore be continually considered in the analysis and interpretation of the works.

It goes without saying that this study, too, would not have come off without the support of dear friends and numerous amiable colleagues. My principal thanks are owed posthumously to György Ligeti for his patience in answering my questions and his permission to inspect the drafts and partcelli of his works. Dr. Louise Duchesneau stood tirelessly by me throughout the writing of the original version. She got hold of books, scores, and recordings for me and advised me on numerous questions. My colleagues Prof. Peter Petersen and professor Albrecht Schneider kindly put recordings of radio interviews at my disposal. Mr. Péter Hálász and Ms. Edit Spielmann helped me in rendering the Hungarian texts in Ligeti's drafts. From conversations with the composers Wolfgang von Schweinitz, Professor Manfred Stahnke and Professor Altug Ünlü I derived valuable information about Ligeti as a teacher. The Universal Edition of Vienna, B. Schott's Sons in Mainz and the Henry Litolff / C.F. Peters Publishing House in Frankfurt let me have important music material. My gratitude goes to all of them.

The present English translation of the book differs from the original German version by some substantial additions. Dr. Vera Ligeti kindly put some hitherto unknown portraits of her husband at my disposal. My friend Professor Dr. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch of Indiana University once again provided a translation of uttermost scrupulosity and raised numerous questions, which we were able to clarify in our correspondence. My most cordial thanks go to him. I am also much obliged to Professor Dr. Altug Ünlü for the formatting of the volume, and to Michael Rücker and Andrea Kolb of the Peter Lang Publishing House for their generous editorial advice.

Hamburg, May 2014

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