

WOLFGANG MARX (ED.), *"I DON'T BELONG ANYWHERE": GYÖRGY LIGETI AT 100*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022). ISBN 9780367339555, 300 pp, £110 (hardback).

The year 2023 marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Hungarian composer György Ligeti (1923-2006). A highly innovative composer, as Wolfgang Marx suggests, Ligeti's music 'offered alternatives to the then predominating, Darmstadt-endorsed total serial style: most famously his micropolyphony, but also his play with nonsensical sounds and language as well as pattern-meccanico style' (vii). These aspects all contribute to making Ligeti one of the most studied and performed composers of recent times. Of the many tributes dedicated to him this year, this book presents a very original approach. Rather than a biography or an analysis dedicated to the music of Ligeti, this book gathers twelve contributions by internationally recognized Ligeti scholars to illuminate three different aspects of the composer and his work: 'Ligeti's music' offers an analysis of some of his works; 'Context and reception' focuses on the background in which he grew up and how this influenced him; and 'Reading Ligeti' presents a selection of previously unknown texts.

The chapters in the first part ('Ligeti's music') are not only engaging investigations of the compositions but also deal with the works of art in a new way, and offer fresh perspectives. Starting with the sketches of Ligeti's works in the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel, Benjamin Levy explains the compositional process in *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures*. The author highlights the hidden characteristics of the pieces, including ironic elements. For example, in the passage 'La Serenata' of *Aventures* the vowels are marked as nasal, to be performed with closed mouth; at the same time the accented consonants and 'quasi-pizzicato' markings suggest the sense of a plucked instrument to accompany the serenade, as a burlesque of the serenade of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. This fact suggests that they were created in an apparently ironic and surreal environment. Levy convincingly shows that Ligeti's work is not merely focused on creating chaos but instead explores a range of musical materials and techniques—such as the *lamento* motif and the balance of different rhythmic patterns—that contribute to each piece's unique sense of gravity.

In the second chapter, Britta Sweers sheds a new light on the much-studied *Lontano* by writing about the auditory perception of Ligeti's sound textures. In the following chapter, Pierre Michel and Maryse Staiber consider the relation between music and text, particularly taking into consideration the *Drei Phantasien* and why its texts (by Friedrich Hölderlin) were chosen. It is well known that Hölderlin was one of Ligeti's favourite poets. Where these settings are concerned, they argue that

he ‘actually chose those poetic fragments for their marvellous imagery and emotional aura’ (51).

In his contribution, Manfred Stahnke, a student of Ligeti for several years, makes a useful comparison between the Piano Etude No. 7 ‘Galamb Borong’ and the rhythmic complexities of the *ars subtilior* of the 1400s. Particularly, Stahnke focuses attention on the music of Johannes Ciconia from around 1400, noting that Ligeti made many comparisons during his classes between Ciconia’s music and the central African horn music of the Banda Linda. Many recent studies focus on the relationship between Ligeti and the sciences. Equally important is his interest in medieval music and theory which has received comparatively little scholarly attention. In the last essay of this section, Peter Edwards focuses on the Violin Concerto and explores the extent to which ‘innovations of the present are reliant on the past’ (iv). Edwards notes some interesting influences, for example, on the violin concertos of Thomas Adès and Unsuk Chin.

The second part of the book presents the contexts in which some of the works have been written, the stylistic influences on Ligeti, and how he was shaped by musical cultures around him. Ewa Schreiber discusses the importance of the ‘soundscapes’ of the different stages of Ligeti’s life and how they affected his work. The chapter evaluates the aural memories of his childhood – a topic that is also approached in the next chapter by Márton Kerékfy, who discusses this in terms of Ligeti’s very first compositions. Bianca Temes follows a similar line of investigation, specifically the influence that Romanian folk music has had on this style – particularly the *bocet*, a melody used at Romanian funerals. The last contribution, by Julia Heimerdinger, discusses the connection between Ligeti’s music and cinema. Her chapter provides a table with a list of films featuring music by Ligeti including short films, series episodes, documentaries and films and showing which pieces have been used. These pieces are drawn from different periods in Ligeti’s output, indicating the enduring nature of the connection with cinema, including *First of Fury* (Hong Kong, 1972) with Bruce Lee, and the famous *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) by Stanley Kubrick, up to *Other Worlds* by Ivan Maria Friedman in 2020.

Part III is dedicated to newly discovered, or widely unknown, primary sources of Ligeti’s life or music. This includes letters recently discovered in a Lithuanian archive from Ligeti to Aliute Mecys dated 1972, while Ligeti was spending a semester at Stanford University. Mecys worked with Ligeti as a scenographer for the first production of his work *Le Grand Macabre* in 1978. In the next essay, Heidi Zimmermann, curator of the Ligeti Archive at the Paul Sacher Foundation, focuses on Ligeti’s letters to his editors at Universal Edition, Peters/Litolff, and Schott. These letters concern new works and projects, as well as the republication of older works.

The book ends with Joseph Cadagin's transcript of a BBC Radio 3 interview in 1997 between Ligeti and John Tusa. While the complete interview was not aired, a part of it was used in a 2014 radio documentary. During the interview the composer discusses some of his pieces, in particular, how the first book of *Piano Etudes* was developed, the importance of the sounds of languages like English and Hungarian in *Nonsense Madrigals* and *Magyar Etüdök*, and the *Horn Trio* and the *Violin Concerto*.

In conclusion, the book offers an innovative approach that will be useful to both analysts and historians. The words in the title --"I don't belong anywhere" -- come from an expression that Ligeti used in an interview with Marina Labanova, and they go to the heart of Ligeti's identity: born a Hungarian Jew, which made him a minority on multiple levels in Romania, he spent the largest part of his life in Germany with an Austrian passport. The book gives a view of his multiple interests coming from different cultures, and it describes how he tried to put them together in his music. In this sense it is not focused on a particular issue, such as an analysis of some work or a biography, but on a path to the creation of new studies on Ligeti.

Federico Favali

Conservatorio di Alessandria