

Composition students hold a concert in New York

Between October 29 and November 2 2004, four composition students were guests at the Juilliard School of Music in New York. At a very successful concert on November 1, the following compositions were presented to the American public in an excellent performance: Bird's Eye by Bálint Bolcsó, Iunctim by Marcell Dargay, Septet by Dániel Dinyés and Burnt out Lovers by Ilona Meskó. Compositions by young American composers – Kati Agocs, Mathew Fuerst, Reena Maria Esmail, Nobert Palej and Justine Chen – were also performed on the same occasion. After the concert, in a public debate chaired by Robert Basey, Head of the Composition Department at the Juilliard School, the participants compared the musical thinking of the young American and Hungarian composers and drew lessons from the concerts in New York and Budapest. (The same compositions had been played at a concert in Budapest in the presence of the American composers before the trip to New York.)

This ambitious project was started in 2003, when Kati Agocs, an American composer of Hungarian origin who is a PhD student at Juilliard, contacted me in Budapest and suggested we organize concerts with American and Hungarian compositions at the end of 2004, thus starting a collaboration between the two famous institutions. Naturally I agreed to this wonderful idea. The event was named "New York-Budapest Twin Concerts".

During the course of 2004 the pieces to be played at the concerts were selected in both places and after getting the necessary financial support, we started to plan the details together with Kati. It was only then I realized what a formidable task we had undertaken, but one thing was clear: irrespective of the success of the concerts, the work we were doing would be amply rewarded. (The energy we put into the planning can be measured in the number of e-mails exchanged, which amounted to quite a few megabytes).

From October 20, 2004 the American composers were guests at the Franz Liszt University of Music. Their compositions, as well the Hungarian ones, were performed by Hungarian musicians on October 23, on the Open Day held at the Music Academy within the framework of the Budapest Autumn Festival. The nine compositions were played at different places in the building and the reactions of the audience of several hundred who listened to the whole long concert, proved that the pieces played at the Twin Concerts deserved to be included in this programme. The performances of two of the pieces, compositions by Agocs and Dinyés, were world premières.

We left for New York a week later. We had high hopes for the trip as it is very rare that young composers get the opportunity to go to America to listen to a performance of their music. This was made possible by the Friends of the Music Academy and some other sponsoring organizations, who together covered the travelling costs. On the first night of our five day stay in New York we attended a concert by the Juilliard Orchestra, where a piece by Christopher Rose, Composition Professor at the School, was played in an astonishing performance. (It was interesting to see that about hundred people tried to get tickets at the last minute before the concert, so keen were they to hear the Juilliard orchestra). We spent the weekend rehearsing the Hungarian composers' music with American musicians. The four Hungarian composers met after the rehearsals and their

general opinion was that one seldom hears such instrumental presence, intensive style of rehearsing, such curiosity and respect for their compositions.

The rehearsals resulted in a concert in the Paul Hall of the Juilliard School on November 1. All nine pieces were a great success. I think this success can perhaps be the beginning of further collaboration between Hungarian and American composers.

On our return home, we agreed with Kati Agocs that the Twin Concerts must be continued and the contacts between the two universities developed further. We hope we can organize a similar production in two years time!

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Balázs Horváth,

Composer, Organizer of the Twin Concerts,

Assistant Professor at the Franz Liszt University of Music