

Beethoven “in drei Charakterbildern:” Three Beethoven Images from the Interwar Hungary¹

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Received: January 2020 • Accepted: May 2020

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ABSTRACT

In my study, I show how three different figures of the interwar Hungary saw Beethoven. The first of them, Dénes Bartha (1908–1993), was a musicologist and became an international specialist of Viennese Classicism. In the context of contemporary Hungarian literature, his first Beethoven monograph (1939) represents an emphatically anti-Romantic attitude. In the second part, I examine the popular image of the composer, on the basis of the planned operetta *Beethoven* (1929–1931) by Zsolt Harsányi, an author of popular biographical novels, and Mihály Nádor (1882–1944), a successful operetta composer. This piece follows the example of *Das Dreimäderlhaus*, and its music was compiled from Beethoven’s melodies by Nádor. In the third part I examine an essay about Beethoven by an important musician of the period, Ernst von Dohnányi (1877–1960), who was, according to Bartók, a leading Beethoven performer of his age. Although the text of his “Romanticism in Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas” was written during his émigré years (draft: 1948, revision: 1955), it summarizes well what the leading figure of the interwar Budapest musical life might have thought about Beethoven’s music.

KEYWORDS

Ludwig van Beethoven, reception history, Dénes Bartha, Mihály Nádor, Ernst von Dohnányi

¹ The present study was supported by a postdoctoral scholarship of the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office (PD 124 089). The author is a research fellow of the Budapest Institute for Musicology (Research Center for the Humanities).

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In my study, I would like to demonstrate how three very different personalities living in Hungary in the interwar period, Dénes Bartha, Mihály Nádor, and Ernst von Dohnányi, saw Beethoven. The three authors I choose represent three different segments of contemporary musical life: Bartha (1908–1993) was a musicologist, Nádor (1882–1944) a successful operetta composer, while Dohnányi (1877–1960) was a “serious” composer, pianist and conductor – an outstanding figure of twentieth-century Beethoven interpretation.

In the first part of my study, I will discuss Bartha’s first Beethoven monograph,² which, at the time of its publication in 1939, represented a surprisingly objective and emphatically anti-Romantic attitude. In the second part, I demonstrate what the average people living in Hungary might have known about the composer, on the basis of Nádor’s and Harsányi’s planned operetta entitled *Beethoven*, written in c. 1930, whose title hero is the author of the Ninth Symphony and whose music was compiled from Beethoven’s own musical works. Finally, I will examine the text of Dohnányi’s lecture, “Romanticism in Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas.”³ Although this essay was written later than the period in question (during his émigré years), it summarizes well what he might have thought about Beethoven’s music.

1. THE ANTI-ROMANTIC BEETHOVEN: BARTHA’S MONOGRAPH (1939)

The market of books ... is overwhelmed by studies of particular subjects and Romantic biographies, so much so that for the musicians and scholars who are seriously interested in Beethoven, it often needs hard labour and leg-work to look for the scattered material concerning his musical works and style.

– can be read in the preface of Bartha’s Hungarian Beethoven book (p. 7). Although this statement was meant to characterize the totality of the international literature concerning the subject, the same is even more true for Hungarian Beethoven studies published during the interwar period: before Bartha’s volume in question, his compatriots were only able to consult mostly Romantic biographies and studies in particular subjects. Writings belonging to the latter category discussed mostly the episodic Hungarian aspects of the composer’s biography, like the brief articles by Kálmán Isoz and Ervin Major published in the 1927 centenary year,⁴ or the short volume written by Viktor Papp, whose pathetic style and tone seem to be ridiculous today.⁵ In the genre of Romantic biography, it is worth mentioning the *œuvre* of the *littérateur* and musi-

² Dénes BARTHA, *Beethoven* (Budapest: Franklin, 1939).

³ “Appendix B. Dohnányi’s Lectures at Ohio University,” in Ilona VON DOHNÁNYI, *Ernst von Dohnányi: A Song of Life*, ed. by James A. GRAYMES (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 217–219.

⁴ Kálmán ISOZ, “A Beethoven-kultusz Pest-Budán” [The Beethoven cult in Pest and Buda], *Protestáns Szemle* 36/3 (March, 1927), 160–163.; idem, “A Fidelio első pesti előadása” [The first performance of *Fidelio* in Pest], *Crescendo* 1/10 (May, 1927), 1–3.; Ervin MAJOR, “Beethoven Budán 1800-ban” [Beethoven in Buda in 1800], *Zenei Szemle* 11/2 (November 15–December 1, 1926), 44–46.; idem, “Beethoven-bemutató Pozsonyban, 1822-ben” [Beethoven premiere in Pressburg in 1822], *Zenei Szemle* 11/4–5 (February–March, 1927), 101–103.; idem, “Újabb adatok Beethoven magyar vonatkozásaihoz” [Further data on Beethoven’s Hungarian relations], *A Zene* 9/3 (November 1, 1927), 47–49.; idem, “‘Magyar szüretelő ének’ Beethoven feldolgozásában” [“Hungarian harvest song” arranged by Beethoven], *A Zene* 9/9 (February 15, 1928), 175–178.

⁵ Viktor PAPP, *Beethoven és a magyarok* [Beethoven and the Hungarians] (Budapest: Author’s edition, 1927).



cologist (but rather *littérateur*) Romain Rolland, whose popular *La vie de Beethoven* (The life of Beethoven)⁶ was published in at least two Hungarian translations during the 1920s and 1930s.⁷ His other book dedicated to the composer⁸ was also available in Hungarian.⁹

Bartha was a student of the University of Berlin, where among his masters were such professors as the author of the great Mozart monograph, Hermann Abert;¹⁰ he earned his doctorate with a thesis consecrated to Renaissance music.¹¹ After his return to the homeland, he was active as a research fellow at the National Széchényi Library (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár) 1930–1942, as a professor at the Budapest University (Budapesti Tudományegyetem) from 1935, and as a music critic of the German-language daily newspaper *Pester Lloyd* (1939–1944). Following World War II, he was one of the founders of the Department of Musicology of the Liszt Academy of Music (Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Főiskola, Zenetudományi Tanszék), established in 1951; he also edited the periodicals *Zenei Szemle* (Music review), *Studia Musicologica*, as well as the serial *Zenetudományi Tanulmányok* (Studies in musicology).

Discussing Beethoven's works, Bartha takes over the nineteenth-century concept of the three style periods.¹² As is well known, Beethoven's work was divided into three parts already by Johann Aloys Schlosser in his 1828 Beethoven biography,¹³ whose part in question was already published as early as in 1818 (that is, already in the composer's lifetime).¹⁴ His periodization was imitated by François-Joseph Fétis;¹⁵ later it was widely disseminated by Wilhelm von Lenz in his 1852 French¹⁶ and 1860 German volumes.¹⁷ It should be noted, however, that Bartha modified the nineteenth-century concept in several respects, and moreover, he does not attribute so much significance to it as earlier authors did. He uses the traditional three-part periodization only for the piano sonatas (pp. 48–51), and his partition shows interesting differences compared to those of Schlosser, Fétis and Lenz. According to him, opp. 2–28 belong to the first period; opp. 31–57 to the second one; while opp. 78–111 are representatives of the third period. Two groups of sonatas do not belong to any of the three categories: the three pieces WoO 47, which are regarded

⁶ Romain ROLLAND, *Vie de Beethoven* (Paris: Hachette, 10/1927 [1/1903]).

⁷ Romain ROLLAND, *Beethoven élete*, transl. by Lajos MIKES (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1911); id., *Beethoven élete*, transl. by Andor CSERNA (Budapest: Rózsavölgyi, 1920).

⁸ Romain ROLLAND, *Beethoven, les grandes époques créatrices, 1: de l'Héroïque à l'Appassionata* (Paris: Sablier, 1928); 2: *Goethe et Beethoven* (Paris: Sablier, 1930).

⁹ Romain ROLLAND, *Beethoven: A nagy teremtő korszakok*, trans. by Marcell BENEDEK, 1: *Az Eroica-tól az Appassionata-ig* (Budapest: Dante, 1929); 2: *Goethe és Beethoven* (Budapest: Dante, 1931).

¹⁰ For Bartha's biography, see Marvin TARTAK, "Bartha Dénes," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 2, ed. by Stanley SADIE (Oxford: Macmillan, 2001), 782.

¹¹ Dénes BARTHA, *Benedictus Ducis und Appenzeller: Ein Beitrag zur Stilgeschichte des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Wolfenbüttel and Berlin: Kallmeyer, 1930).

¹² For the concept of the three style periods, see Maynard SOLOMON, "The Creative Periods of Beethoven," in *Beethoven Essays*, ed. by id. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1/1988), 116–125.

¹³ Johann Aloys SCHLOSSER, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Eine Biographie desselben, verbunden mit Urtheilen über seine Werke* (Prag: Buchler, Stephanie und Schlosser, 1828), 79–85.

¹⁴ N. N., [?Johann Aloys SCHLOSSER], "Ludwig van Beethoven. (Beschluss)," *Janus* 1/2 (October 7, 1818), 9–12.

¹⁵ François-Joseph FÉTIS, "Beethoven," in *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*, vol. 2, ed. by id. (Brussels: Meline, Cans et Compagnie, 1837 [2/1868]), 100–112.

¹⁶ Wilhelm von LENZ, *Beethoven et ses trois styles*, vols. 1–2 (St. Petersburg: Bernard, 1/1852 [2/1855]).

¹⁷ Wilhelm von LENZ, *Beethoven: Eine Kunststudie*, Bd. 2 (Kassel: Balde, 1855), 11–12.; Bd. 3–5 (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1860).



as youthful works, and op. 49 nos. 1–2, mentioned as earlier compositions than the other opuses falling into the second period.

In the cases of the remaining works, Bartha prefers other aspects instead of the style periods. In the presentation of the composer's oeuvre, he gives an overview according to genres: after the piano sonatas, the concertos are discussed (pp. 55–53); separate chapters are dedicated to Beethoven's chamber music (pp. 53–60), then to his symphonies and orchestral works (pp. 60–70). It is important to mention, that the vocal works are excluded from the genre-based overview; even *Fidelio* and the *Missa solemnis* are mentioned only in the biographical chapter of the book. This division shows that Bartha regarded Beethoven first of all as an instrumental composer. The whole of the remainder of the book (pp. 71–178) is a systematic study of Beethoven's style. Its main segments are the chapters discussing the composer's musical themes (pp. 95–123), the musical forms used by him in singular movements (pp. 124–135), as well as the order of multi-movement cycles (pp. 136–147); furthermore, separate chapters are dedicated to such subjects as Beethoven's youthful style (pp. 71–81), his compositional method and sketch-books (pp. 82–94), the problems of musical expression (pp. 148–172), as well as the role of free fantasy (pp. 173–174) and the variation principle (pp. 175–177) in his music.

Beside the emphasis on the composer's works instead of his biography, it is also a sign of his anti-Romantic attitude that Bartha emphasizes not only Beethoven's originality and individuality but also the importance of the historical antecedents of his style. For instance, in the case of the *Pastoral* Symphony (pp. 63–64), he refers to the research of Adolf Sandberger, who gave an overview about the historical antecedents of Beethoven's work.¹⁸ Similarly, in discussing Beethoven's use of instrumental recitatives (pp. 71–73), Bartha characterizes his practice as moderate in contrast to Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, pointing out that the latter already used this compositional device abundantly in his keyboard works well before Beethoven.

Bartha expresses his anti-Romantic views most overtly in the chapter whose subject is Beethoven's personality and character (pp. 16–46). He condemns the traditional heroic image of the composer inherited from the nineteenth century, pointing out that this image is based on the one-sided reception of his works, over-evaluating such pieces as the Third, Fifth and Ninth Symphonies while neglecting the Second, the Fourth and the Eighth (p. 16). He debates the relevance of the Beethoven image of such nineteenth-century authors as Robert Schumann and Richard Wagner, arguing that they both used Beethoven's name and authority for self-justification (p. 17). He also considers Rolland as an author perpetuating the nineteenth-century stereotypes and "regarding Beethoven as a self-overcoming moral hero" (p. 19). It is easy to understand his antipathy against a biographer, who characterized the object of his researches as "a Shakespearian visage – *King Lear*," who began his book with a poetic description of Beethoven's physical appearance and who closed it by quoting the Heiligenstadt Testament in full.

Bartha's critical Beethoven approach was certainly not without antecedents. According to the bibliography of his book, he used a wide array of international secondary literature as sources for his work. Among the volumes quoted, we find the fundamental nineteenth-century

¹⁸ Adolf SANDBERGER, "Zu den geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen von Beethovens Pastoralsinfonie" in id., *Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Musikgeschichte*, vol. 2: *Forschungen, Studien und Kritiken zu Beethoven und zur Beethovenliteratur* (Munich: Drei Masken, 1924), 154–200.



biographies by Franz Gerhard Wegeler and Ferdinand Ries,¹⁹ Anton Schindler,²⁰ Adolf Bernhard Marx,²¹ and Alexander Wheelock Thayer.²² Beside the above-mentioned works by Lenz and Rolland, he also used Gustav Nottebohm's sketch studies;²³ the 1925 edition of his thematic catalog by Theodor Frimmel;²⁴ Alfred Christlieb Kalischer's and Theodor Frimmel's edition of the composer's correspondence,²⁵ as well as the testimonies of Beethoven's contemporaries in Albert Leitzmann's 1921 edition.²⁶ Among the early twentieth-century books he used, are worth mentioning Hugo Riemann's three-volume analysis of the piano sonatas;²⁷ the second edition of Willibald Nagel's work dedicated to the same subject;²⁸ as well as Gustav Becking's study about the Beethovenian scherzo.²⁹ By far the most influential on him was, however, Arnold Schmitz's 1927 book entitled *Das romantische Beethovenbild* (The romantic Beethoven image).³⁰

Bartha's volume proved to be groundbreaking in the Hungarian context not only because he wrote a comprehensive monograph instead of particular studies, and not only because he focused on the composer's works instead of his biography. The book is also significant because it was written by an erudite music historian, who later became an internationally reputed expert of Viennese Classicism (or First Viennese Modernism, according to James Webster).³¹ Decades after the publication of his first Beethoven book, Bartha became internationally well-known as a visiting professor at several universities in the United States,³² and as a Haydn scholar. He published among other things Haydn's correspondence;³³ a monograph discussing Haydn's activity

¹⁹ Franz Gerhard WEGELER und Ferdinand RIES, *Biographische Notizen über Ludwig van Beethoven* (Koblenz: Bädeler, 1838).

²⁰ Anton SCHINDLER, *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1840).

²¹ Adolf Bernhard MARX, *Ludwig van Beethoven. Leben und Schaffen*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Janke, 1/1859).

²² Alexander Wheelock THAYER, *The Life of Ludwig van Beethoven* (New York: The Beethoven Association, 1921).

²³ Gustav NOTTEBOHM, *Ein Skizzenbuch von Beethoven* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1865); id., *Beethoveniana. Aufsätze und Mittheilungen* (Leipzig: Rieter-Biedermann, 1872); id., *Ein Skizzenbuch von Beethoven aus dem Jahre 1883* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1880); id., *Zweite Beethoveniana: Nachgelassene Aufsätze* (Leipzig: Peters, 1887).

²⁴ Gustav NOTTEBOHM, Emerich KASTNER and Theodor FRIMMEL, *Thematisches Verzeichnis nebst der Bibliotheca Beethoveniana* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1925).

²⁵ *Beethovens sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe mit Erläuterungen*, 5 vols. ed. by Alfred Christlieb KALISCHER and Theodor FRIMMEL (Berlin, Leipzig: Schuster & Loeffler, 1906–1908).

²⁶ *Ludwig van Beethoven: Berichte der Zeitgenossen, Briefe und persönliche Aufzeichnungen*, ed. by Albert LEITZMANN (Leipzig: Insel, 1921).

²⁷ Hugo RIEMANN, *L. van Beethovens sämtliche Klavier-Solosonaten: Aesthetische und formal-technische Analyse mit historischen Notizen*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Max Hesse, 1918–1919).

²⁸ Wilibald NAGEL, *Beethoven und seine Klavier-sonaten*, 2 vols. (Langensalza: Beyer und Söhne, 2/1923–1924 [1/1903–1905]).

²⁹ Gustav BECKING, *Studien zu Beethovens Personalstil: Das Scherzothema* (Leipzig: Germanisches Forschungsinstitut für Musikwissenschaft, 1921).

³⁰ Arnold SCHMITZ, *Das romantische Beethovenbild* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1927).

³¹ James WEBSTER, "Between Enlightenment and Romanticism in Music History: 'First Viennese Modernism' and the Delayed Nineteenth Century," *19th-Century Music* 25/2–3 (Fall/Spring 2001–2002), 108–126.

³² At Smith College (1964), Harvard University (1964, 1965), Cornell (1965–1966), Pittsburgh (1966–1967, 1969–1979), and Seattle University (1980–1981).

³³ *Joseph Haydn: Gesammelte Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, ed. by Dénes BARTHA (Kassel: Bärenreiter / Budapest: Corvina, 1965).



as an opera conductor, in co-operation with László Somfai and Dorrit Révész;³⁴ not to mention his critical editions of some Italian operas.³⁵ It should be noted that in 1956 (in the year of the anti-Soviet revolution in Hungary, when Beethoven's overture to *Egmont* became a symbol of the struggle for freedom), he also published a second Hungarian Beethoven book, dedicated to the symphonies, which was reprinted several times and published in a revised edition.³⁶ This volume proved to be of fundamental importance concerning the Hungarian reception of the composer. For my generation, it was the standard Beethoven reading even in the 1980s and 1990s, despite the fact that a Hungarian translation of the Beethoven entry published in the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* by Joseph Kerman and Alan Tyson became available in 1986.³⁷ Bartha's significance in his homeland is characterized by the fact that in 2008, on the centenary of his birth, the Magyar Zenetudományi és Zenekritikai Társaság (Hungarian Musicological Society) dedicated its annual conference to his memory.

2. STAGING THE HERO BEETHOVEN: ABOUT A PLANNED OPERETTA (C. 1929–1931)

Approximately two years before the publication of Bartha's Beethoven book, on February 19, 1937, a five-act play entitled *Beethoven* by the Austrian playwright Hermann Heinz Ortner was premiered at the Budapest National Theater. The premiere took place at the Vienna Burgtheater on April 17, 1935,³⁸ was given in Budapest in a three-act Hungarian adaptation by Imre Balassa,³⁹ while the incidental music was compiled from Beethoven's works by Mihály Nádor, who also conducted the orchestra at the first performance.

Nádor is an interesting figure of early twentieth-century Budapest musical life.⁴⁰ Born in 1882 in Timișoara in an assimilated Hungarian Jewish family, he studied music in Munich,

³⁴ Dénes BARTHA, László SOMFAI and Dorrit RÉVÉSZ, *Haydn als Opernkapellmeister* (Mainz: Schott / Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1960).

³⁵ *Joseph Haydn: Werke*, ed. by Jens Peter LARSEN and the Joseph Haydn-Institut, series 25, vol. 2: *La catterina*, ed. by Dénes BARTHA (Munich: Henle, 1959); vol. 4: *Le pescatrici*, ed. by Dénes BARTHA in Verbindung mit Jenő VÉCSEY and Mária ECKHARDT (Munich: Henle, 1972); vol. 5: *L'infedeltà delusa*, ed. by Dénes BARTHA and Jenő VÉCSEY (Munich: Henle, 1964).

³⁶ Dénes BARTHA, *Beethoven kilenc szimfóniája* [Beethoven's nine symphonies] (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1/1956); 5/1975 as *Beethoven és kilenc szimfóniája* [Beethoven and his nine symphonies], augmented with several chapters of his 1939 Beethoven book.

³⁷ Joseph KERMAN and Alan TYSON, *Beethoven*, trans. by Dorrit RÉVÉSZ (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1986) = *Grove monográfiák*. Kerman's and Tyson's entry was originally published in the 1980 edition of the encyclopedic dictionary, and its updated version was taken over into the 2001 last edition. See William DRABKIN, Joseph KERMAN and Alan TYSON, revised by Douglas JOHNSON and Scott G. BURNHAM, "Ludwig van Beethoven," *Grove Music Online*. <<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040026?rkey=n8xDiT&result=4>> (accessed October 7, 2019).

³⁸ For the playbill of the first performance, see <<http://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=bth&datum=19350417&seite=1&zoom=33>> (accessed October 3, 2019).

³⁹ The stage manual (N. Sz. B. 248), the prompt book (N. Sz. B. 248/1), as well as a further script of the production (N. Sz. B. 248/2) are preserved at the Színháztörténeti Tár (Theater Department) of the National Széchényi Library.

⁴⁰ For Nádor's biography, see "Nádor, Mihály," in *Magyar zsidó lexikon*, ed. by Péter UJVÁRI (Budapest: Pallas, 1929), 624; "Nádor, Mihály," in *Magyar színművészeti lexikon*, ed. by Aladár SCHÖPFLIN (Budapest: Országos



where he became a member of the orchestra at the Theater am Gärtnerplatz. At first, he tried to launch a career as an art-music composer: in 1901, his String Quartet won the prize of the Bonn Beethovenhaus; his Violin Concerto was successfully revived some years ago in New York's Carnegie Hall.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the premiere of his opera entitled *Donna Anna* (based on E. T. A. Hoffmann's short story *Don Juan*) at the Budapest Opera House (at that time called "Hungarian National Opera House," "Magyar Nemzeti Operaház") in 1920 was a failure. In the capital of his native country, he was mainly known as a popular composer of operettas and cabaret songs. His most successful operetta, *Offenbach*, was first performed in November 1920 at the Budapest Király Theater, where it was played more than 200 times.⁴² Furthermore, in 1922 it was also premiered in Vienna⁴³ and Prague;⁴⁴ its different adaptations were also given at the Berlin Komische Oper (as *Der Meister von Montmartre* in 1922)⁴⁵ as well as on New York's Broadway (as *The Love Song* in 1925).⁴⁶

Offenbach represents a popular kind of operetta of the interwar period. The prototype of this genre is Heinrich Berté's piece on Schubert, *Das Dreimäderlhaus*, whose first performance took place at the Vienna Raimund-Theater in 1916, and became enormously popular in Budapest, where it was performed in all operetta theaters between 1916 and 1924 in Zsolt Harsányi's translation as *Három a kislány*.⁴⁷ This nostalgic operetta type, featuring nineteenth-century composers and compiled from their melodies is all the more worthy of attention, because Nádor's incidental music to Hermann Heinz Ortner's piece was preceded by a similar operetta about Beethoven. The scenario of the planned piece was sketched by Nádor and its text was written by Zsolt Harsányi. It is worth mentioning that Harsányi was an experienced journalist and a man of theater.⁴⁸ He made Hungarian versions of several operas and operettas; moreover, he was a popular author of biographic novels on such historical personalities as Franz Liszt, Galileo Galilei, Matthias Corvinus (Mátyás Hunyadi), Peter Paul Rubens and Mihály Munkácsy.⁴⁹

The plan of the Beethoven operetta is attested by the musical and textual sources of the piece that survive in Nádor's estate and are preserved today at the Music Department (Zeneműtár) of the National Széchényi Library (for a list of the extant sources, see *Table 1*). According to the dates in the sources, Nádor was working on the piece between 1929 and 1931. A typewritten Hungarian script not belonging to his estate is also preserved at the library;⁵⁰ this source bears

Színészegyesület és Nyugdíjintézete, [1929–1931]), vol. 3, 309–310; "Nádor, Mihály," *Magyar színházművészeti lexikon*, ed. by György SZÉKELY (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1994), 535; Magda HORÁK, *A magyar értelmiségi veszteségei az 1940-es években* [Losses of the Hungarian intelligence in the 1940s] (Budapest: Author's edition, 1994), 123; Péter BÁRSONY, *A vézskorszak magyar muzsikusi áldozatai* [Hungarian musician victims of the Holocaust] (DLA diss., Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest 2010).

⁴¹ On May 2, 2013. <https://kulturpart.hu/2013/05/03/magyar_zeneszeket_unnepeltek_new_york-ban> (accessed September 30, 2019).

⁴² The 200th performance was celebrated in October 1922; *Zenei Szemle* 7/1 (November, 1922), 13.

⁴³ *Neue Freie Presse* no. 20685 (March 31, 1922), 10; no. 20687 (April 2, 1922), 15.

⁴⁴ *Prager Tagblatt* 47/244 (October 18, 1922), 9; 47/246 (October 20, 1922), 6.

⁴⁵ *Vossische Zeitung* no. 178 (April 15, 1922, morning edition), 4; no. 180 (April 16, 1922, morning edition), [3].

⁴⁶ Broadway Internet Database <<http://www.ibdb.com>> (accessed June 1, 2012).

⁴⁷ Péter BOZÓ, "Nádors Erzählungen oder das Budapester *Dreimäderlhaus*: Ein Beitrag zur Budapester Offenbach-Rezeption," *Studia Musicologica* 57/3–4 (December, 2016), 473.

⁴⁸ SZÉKELY (ed.), *Magyar színházművészeti lexikon*, 289.

⁴⁹ N. N., "Harsányi Zsolt," in *Új magyar életrajzi lexikon*, vol. 3, ed. by László MARKÓ (Budapest: Magyar Könyvklub, 2002), 135–136.

⁵⁰ MM 2026.



the name of Sándor Marton (a publisher of musical stage works) and the copyright date 1930. A set of manuscript orchestral and choral parts (and the manuscript full score of certain music numbers) are kept under the shelf mark Népsz. 1393, which belong, however, to the incidental music and were used on the occasion of the 1937 premiere at the National Theater.

Table 1 The extant sources of Nádor's planned Beethoven operetta (H-Bn)

Shelf mark	Source	Date
Ms. mus. 10.918/mell.	a typewritten German scenario	Budapest, September 1929
	Nádor's typewritten German synopsis of the piece	Budapest, May 1930
Ms. mus. 10.918.	a typewritten German script	
	a manuscript vocal score (partly Nádor's autograph, partially a copyist's copy)	"Budapest, May 1930, Mihály Nádor" (at the end) 1931 (in the caption title)
	an autograph full score	"The End, Budapest, August 1931, Mihály Nádor"

The fictive plot of the piece (treating quite freely the chronology of the composer's works) concerns Beethoven's failed love of the Immortal Beloved, identified with Therese Brunswick. The three acts represent three episodes of the composer's life: Act 1 "The Enchained Titan" takes place in 1806, Act 2 "Battle with Destiny" in 1814, while Act 3 occurs in 1822.

At the beginning of the piece, Schuppanzigh's Quartet is rehearsing the String Quartet op. 59 no. 1 in Countess Erdődy's salon. Following the event, the composer remains *tête à tête* with the Countess, to whom he laments his loneliness. While Beethoven is playing *Andante favori* in F Major, 16-17-year-old Therese appears. Love at first glance. Scene 2 takes place in a Mödling tavern where the orchestra plays the *alla tedesca* movement of the Piano Sonata op. 79 and Mödling dances. Accompanied by Henriette Sontag, Caroline Ungher, Anton Schindler and Ferdinand Ries, Beethoven appears, drinks some beer, then sings his *Flohlied* from Goethe's *Faust*. Therese and his brother Ferenc arrive and invite the composer to their Martonvásár estate. In scene 3, in the park of the Martonvásár castle, he wants to confess his love for Therese, but she runs away. Later, he finds the woman together with Prince Esterházy and believes that his love is unrequited. The finale is a festive party at Brunswick's, where Beethoven plays the Choral Fantasy op. 80 on the piano.

Act 2, Scene 1 takes place in the home of deaf Beethoven in Vienna, where he is composing his Piano Sonata in F Minor op. 23 *Appassionata* (it was in fact composed ten years earlier and the nickname is not authentic). He is, however, disturbed by several visitors: his housekeeper, his copyist, his pupils Anton Schindler and Stephan Breuning. Then Caroline Ungher and Henriette Sontag arrive and deride the lovesick Beethoven after they have found on his piano the manuscript of the song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte*, and his letter to the Immortal Beloved. After their exit, Therese appears for Beethoven as a vision. After the first movement of the Fifth Symphony is played as an entr'acte, Scene 5 follows. In the Kärntnertortheater, the public dress rehearsal of *Fidelio* is taking place in the presence of Therese, countess Erdődy and archduke Rudolf. The attempt of the deaf Beethoven to conduct his work himself results in chaos. He runs



away “as a storm.” The only scene of Act 3 in fact begins with a storm, when the old composer can be seen walking in Heiligenstadt (the corresponding movement of the Sixth Symphony is played). When the storm is over, he falls asleep and sees Therese as his wife and their children in his dream. Finally, however, he awakes and realizes that it was just a dream. The operetta is closed by the arioso dolente and the fugato of the Piano Sonata in A-flat Major op. 110.

According to a contemporary press report, Nádor’s and Harsányi’s piece was planned to be performed in Berlin in October 1930.⁵¹ Finally, however, it remained unperformed. The reason for this might have been that the fundamental idea was quite trivial: a number of operettas featuring renowned composers were written between 1916 and 1929, usually with unhappy endings, just as Nádor’s piece. Nevertheless, Nádor had an occasion to compile incidental music from Beethoven’s works, when some years later the premiere of Ortner’s play took place at the Budapest National Theater. Despite the fact that the title hero of the play is identical with that of the planned operetta, the plots of the two pieces are different, and the incidental music is not identical with the music of the operetta. Nevertheless, there are certain similarities. Ortner’s piece is also related to the composer’s love of the Immortal Beloved, this time identified not with Therese but with the Countess Giulietta Guicciardi (needless to say, the first movement of the Piano Sonata op. 27 no. 2, dedicated to the Countess, is played in Nádor’s instrumentation). Scene 2 takes place at Brunswick’s in Martonvásár, just as Scene 3 of Harsányi’s piece. There is a storm also here, accompanied by the fourth movement of the Sixth Symphony. The end of the piece is likewise tragic, but not so resigned, rather hymnic: while Beethoven is dying, parts of the final movement of the Ninth Symphony are played.

It should be noted that Ortner was a member of the NSDAP at the time of the premiere.⁵² Under such circumstances, the performance of his play was a political act: on the day of the public rehearsal, a reception in his honor took place at the Austrian Embassy in Budapest.⁵³ The Hungarian premiere also has a tragic postlude: in the period of the anti-Jewish laws (1939–1944), the actor playing Beethoven’s role, Ferenc Kiss became the head of the Theater and Film Arts Chamber (Színházművészeti és Filmművészeti Kamara, the Hungarian equivalent of the German *Reichstheaterkammer*), later the director of the National Theater during Szálasi’s terror in 1944. He was sentenced to prison as a war criminal in 1945.⁵⁴ Nádor did not survive World War II: he was called up for labor service (which set as its objective the elimination from the military services of all “unreliable elements” such as ethnic minorities, leftists and Jews), from where he did not return home.

3. THE ROMANTIC BEETHOVEN: DOHNÁNYI’S LECTURE (1948/1955)

Assuming that you rather like to listen to my piano playing than to hear me torture the English language, I was looking for a subject for my lecture, which would allow me to play a great deal. So I decided to speak to you about Romanticism in Beethoven’s pianoforte-sonatas.

⁵¹ *Budapesti Hírlap* 50/154 (July 10, 1930), [11].

⁵² <https://austria-forum.org/af/AEIOU/Ortner,_Hermann_Heinz> (accessed October 2, 2019).

⁵³ *Budapesti Hírlap* 57/40 (February 19, 1937), 8.

⁵⁴ N. N., “Kiss Ferenc,” in *Új magyar életrajzi lexikon*, vol. 3, 944–945.



– these words by Ernő Dohnányi (or, as he used his name outside Hungary: Ernst von Dohnányi) were meant as an introduction to a lecture-recital he first gave during his guest performance at Ohio University in 1948, later at the University of Wisconsin on November 16, 1955. The sentences in question were, however, deleted in the draft of the text, which is a typewritten script (prepared probably by his third wife, Ilona Zachár) with his manuscript corrections.⁵⁵ The lecture-recital is also documented by a tape recording.⁵⁶

Why Dohnányi's lecture is quoted here, in a study dealing with Hungarian Beethoven reception during the interwar period, needs an explanation. The reason for this is that he was a leading figure of the interwar Budapest musical life. It is not an exaggeration to say that, as the director of the Liszt Academy of Music (1919, 1934–1943), the leading conductor of the Philharmonic Society (1919–1944) and the music director of Hungarian Radio (1931–1944), Dohnányi was one of the most important figures of Hungarian musical life in the first half of the twentieth century beside Béla Bartók. However, World War II resulted in a drastic break in his career: Dohnányi, the omnipotent figure of the interwar Budapest musical life was regarded in his country as a representative of the *ancien régime* after 1945, and he spent the last years of his life in emigration, first in Argentina (from 1948), later as a professor at the university of a provincial American city Tallahassee (from 1949 until his death in 1960).⁵⁷ Nevertheless, on the basis of the text of his lecture in question, it is obvious that his views about Beethoven were formed much earlier than the writing in question was formulated, and it can be said that his Beethoven image was not radically altered during his émigré years, compared to that of his earlier years spent in Budapest. Hence, according to my interpretation, the text drafted in 1948 and revised in 1955 can also be regarded as a retrospective source of the interwar period. But what did Dohnányi think about Romanticism in Beethoven and his piano sonatas? He begins his 1948/1955 lecture with an overall definition of Romanticism:⁵⁸

The word comes from “romance,” a poetical narration in verse which began in the seventeenth century, after epical chivalrous poetry had fallen in[to] decadence. The word “romantic” was then used at various times in various meanings: as individualism, as religious or national feeling, as sentimentality, as irrationalism, as idealism, as liberty in poetry and art, but generally as opposed to the word “classic,” which always meant the conserving spirit. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, in different European countries a romantic school in literature {arose} [deleted: “developed”]. This school had its biggest development in Germany, where in the so-called “Sturm und Drang” period the writers almost celebrated excesses. In music we understand by romanticism a style, in opposition to the classical by the romantic period the school represented by {C. Maria}

⁵⁵ Florida State University, Warren D. Allen Music Library, Tallahassee; Kilényi-Dohnányi Collection.

⁵⁶ H-Bami; MZA-DE-TA-AV 2.017. For the information concerning the history and sources of the lecture, I am indebted to Veronika Kusz, who is at present preparing an English edition of Dohnányi's selected writings in cooperation with James A. Grymes. Her Hungarian translation of the text with commentary appeared in Ernő DOHNÁNYI, *Válogatott írások és nyilatkozatok*, ed. by Veronika KUSZ (Budapest: Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 2020), 108–114.

⁵⁷ For the accusations concerning Dohnányi, their consequences and for the details of his émigré life, see Veronika KUSZ, *A Wayfaring Stranger: Ernst von Dohnányi's American Years, 1949–1960* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020).

⁵⁸ I quote here his text from Kusz's edition in preparation, which is based on the primary sources. The words in curly brackets were later added to the typewritten text in pencil.



Weber, Schumann, Chopin {Liszt, Wagner} and others, in one word the music of the nineteenth century, while that of the eighteenth we call the classical.

Dohnányi defines Romanticism in music as the antithesis of Classicism. While Mozart is regarded as the *par excellence* Classical composer, and the main representatives of Romanticism would be Schumann and Chopin, Beethoven is somewhere between the two categories:

Classicism is law and order. Classical music is placed on formal elements, is of symmetrical proportions, is {tries to be} impersonal, objective. Romantic music is of loose[ly] jointed structure, of strong personal feeling, impulsive, subjective. The greatest classical composer is Mozart, the most significant romantic is Schumann {Chopin}, and between these two poles stands Beethoven. In fact[,] Beethoven is both, classical and romantic, so much so that in the time after him, when the dispute about classicism and romanticism arose, both parties claimed him as their own. He combined the expression of his subjective personal feeling with the objective architecture of the classical forms in a perfect manner which cannot be surpassed.

Similarly to Bartha, Dohnányi also takes over the nineteenth-century concept of the three style periods, nevertheless he combines it with a binary partition of the composer's *œuvre* on the basis of the Classic-Romantic opposition:

We distinguish three periods in Beethoven's music: in the first we find Beethoven still much influenced by Haydn and Mozart, though he shows already his own personality. The striving to extend the scheme of the sonata form especially in the so-called development and the coda, is quite Beethoven-like. But in the works of this period we scarcely find romantic elements, they are classical throughout. The second period is of more individual character and shows already many specimens which could belong to the romantic school. The third and last period - without abolishing the classical forms - is music influenced throughout by personal feelings. Here Beethoven is entirely romantic.

According to Dohnányi, the first Romantic pieces of the second-period piano sonatas would be op. 27 nos. 1 and 2 (each labelled as "sonata quasi una fantasia" by Beethoven), while the beginning of the third period is marked by the Piano Sonata op. 78 in F-sharp Major. Nevertheless, it seems that for him, the Classic-Romantic division is more important than the three-part periodization. He mentions several works which are exceptional in the period in which they were composed: "We do not want to occupy ourselves now with the first classical period, though the sonata op. 13, the so-called *Pathetic*, which belongs to this group, has some romantic features already."

Dohnányi mentions the Piano Sonata in D Minor op. 31 no. 2 and op. 57 in F Minor as the most emphatically Romantic pieces of the second period. However, "[i]t is remarkable, that the preceding great sonata, the *Waldstein* op. 53 has scarcely any romantic elements. This sonata like the C-Major op. 2. no. 3. has obviously pianistically virtuoso tendencies." In his view, there is an exceptional work even in the last period, which is labelled by him as "entirely Romantic:"

With the sonata in F-sharp major op. 78 we come to Beethoven's last period. Here is everything personal, everything [as] self-revelation. Here Beethoven is the poet! With the exception of the



“Les adieux,” the “Farewell” sonata, which is program music, the others all belong to the romantic school, or better expressed: they laid the ground for it.

It is highly characteristic for Dohnányi that he excludes op. 81a from the category of Romantic because it is program music. His reservations against verbal deciphering of musical works are also emphasized in the case of op. 31 no. 2. Mentioning the instrumental recitative of the recapitulation of the first movement, he adds that “[o]ne is inclined to put words under the notes of the recitative, but words can never explain music. Music is a language of ideas which cannot be expressed by words.”

Due to the research of Anna Laskai, who has recently reconstructed Dohnányi’s Budapest and Tallahassee library, it is known that he owned and read several books concerning the German composer.⁵⁹ In his American estate, whose items are now preserved at the Budapest Institute for Musicology, a copy of the 1921 American edition of Thayer’s biography was preserved.⁶⁰ Although it did not survive at the estate, in the list of his Széher Street library, several nineteenth-century Beethoven books are mentioned: Adolf Bernhard Marx’s monograph, Gustav Nottebohm’s 1872 and 1887 volumes, an 1909 German edition of Beethoven’s letters,⁶¹ a compilation of personal recollections of the composer’s contemporaries by Oscar George Sonneck,⁶² Viktor Papp’s aforementioned Hungarian book, a Beethoven novel by Felix Huch,⁶³ Karl Kobald’s German book about the composer’s relations to Vienna,⁶⁴ the English monographs by Alexander Mackenzie⁶⁵ and Marion M. Scott,⁶⁶ and also a German translation of Rolland’s second Beethoven book.⁶⁷ According to the evidence of a list prepared by his third wife, Ilona Dohnányi, in his old age he also acquired a copy of the psychoanalytic study by Edith and Richard Sterba, discussing Beethoven’s relationship to his nephew Karl.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, most of the Beethoven books he read (or at least owned) appeared between 1920 and 1939 – one more argument that the views he articulated in the later American lecture document in some way the interwar period.

Dohnányi’s understanding of Beethoven was based first of all on the profound knowledge of the composer’s works. As a pianist, he played practically the whole pianistic oeuvre of the composer: not only the 32 piano sonatas and the five piano concertos, but also his complete chamber

⁵⁹ Anna LASKAI, “Ernő Dohnányi’s Library and Music Collection,” *Studia Musicologica* 59/1-2 (June 2018), 99–208.

⁶⁰ H-Bami, MZA-DE-Ta-Script 3228.

⁶¹ *Beethoven’s Briefe*, ed. by Karl STORCK (Stuttgart: Greiner und Pfeiffer, 1/1909).

⁶² Oscar George Theodore SONNECK, *Beethoven: Impressions by His Contemporaries* (New York: Schirmer, 1/1927).

⁶³ Felix HUCH, *Der junge Beethoven* (Ebenhausen: Langewiesche-Brandt, 1/1927).

⁶⁴ Karl KOBALD, *Beethoven: Seine Beziehungen zu Wiens Kunst und Kultur, Gesellschaft und Landschaft* (Vienna: Amalthea, 1/1926).

⁶⁵ Alexander Campbell MACKENZIE, *A Biographical and Critical Discussion of Beethoven* (London: Aeolian, 1827).

⁶⁶ Marion M. SCOTT, *Beethoven* (London: Dent and Sons, 1/1934).

⁶⁷ Romain ROLLAND, *Beethovens Meisterjahre: von der Eroica bis zur Appassionata*, trans. by Theodor MUTZENBECHER (Leipzig: Insel, 1930).

⁶⁸ Edith and Richard STERBA, *Beethoven and His Nephew: A Psychoanalytic Study of Their Relationship* (New York: Pantheon, 1954).



music for piano.⁶⁹ His activity as a Beethoven performer reached its peak in the 1920/21 season (on the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth) and in 1927 (on the centenary of his death), when he played complete Beethoven cycles and also conducted his orchestral works at the concerts of the Budapest Philharmonic Society.⁷⁰ Béla Bartók reported on the 1920 concerts in the *Musical Courier* with the following words:

Budapest, November 17, 1920. – The dominating event of the season thus far is represented by a colossal – one may even say record-breaking – performance by Dohnányi. In celebration of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Beethoven's birth he will play all the piano sonatas, rondos and variations of the master in a series of ten pianoforte recitals and will then repeat the whole series for the benefit of the public of the neighboring town of Ofen [that is, Buda], in an (alas!) unheated concert hall. This is to be followed by a performance all the master's pianoforte concertos (with the Philharmonic Orchestra) and the trios and piano quartets (with the Waldbauer-Kerpely Quartet). If we remember rightly, a similar comprehensive undertaking has only been carried out once before, and that stands to the credit of Hans von Bülow, who, however, restricted himself to the rendition of the pianoforte sonatas.⁷¹

The exceptional significance of Beethoven's role in Dohnányi's repertoire did not change in his émigré years: "there was hardly a concert where he did not play some work of Beethoven's, whose oeuvre can rightly be called central to Dohnányi's American repertoire,"⁷² and his "major composer role model was undoubtedly Beethoven."⁷³

4. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Beethoven's music was of fundamental importance for the triptych of the Hungarian musicians I chose as the subject of my study: not only for the composer, pianist and conductor (Dohnányi), and not only for the musicologist (Bartha), but also for the popular operetta composer (Nádor). Moreover, Beethoven's figure proved to be an intriguing phenomenon even for the playwright and author of biographical novels (Harsányi), even if the aforementioned plan of a Beethoven operetta does not lack in fictive elements. As these examples show, the Hungarian reception of Beethoven's oeuvre during the interwar period was characterized by Romantic and objectivist tendencies at the same time.

⁶⁹ For the significance of Beethoven's music in Dohnányi's repertoire as a pianist, see Ilona KOVÁCS, "Dohnányi Ernő zongoraművészi pályája I. rész: 1897–1921" [Ernő Dohnányi's career as a pianist, part 1: 1897–1921], in *Dohnányi évkönyv 2005* [Dohnányi Yearbook 2005], ed. by Márta SZ. FARKAS and László GOMBOS (Budapest: MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, 2006), 73–79 and 113–118.

⁷⁰ Ilona KOVÁCS, "Dohnányi Ernő zongoraművészi pályája. II. rész: 1921–1944" [Ernő Dohnányi's career as a pianist, part 2: 1921–1944], in *Dohnányi évkönyv 2006–2007* [Dohnányi Yearbook 2006/2007], ed. by Márta SZ. FARKAS and László GOMBOS (Budapest: MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, 2007), 313–316.

⁷¹ Béla BARTÓK, "To Celebrate the Birth of the Great Bonn Composer, Dohnányi Gives Ten Beethoven Recitals in Budapest," *Musical Courier* 81/26 (December 23, 1920), [7].

⁷² KUSZ, *A Wayfaring Stranger*, 92.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 52. For the repertoire of Dohnányi's concerts in the United States, see also pp. 158–172.



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