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Dohnányi's American Years
The Role of Commissions in the Development of His Late Style

This study is based on the author's PhD theses: *Dohnányi amerikai évei, 1949–1960* [Dohnányi's American Years, 1949–1960], defended in 2010 (research director: László Vikárius).

Ernő Dohnányi spent the last ten years of his life (October 1949–February 1960) in the United States, as professor of piano and composition at Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee. Teaching joined composing and concert performance as a decisive activity and source of income for him. The teaching was at a remote provincial university of a hardly middling academic standard, certainly not comparable to Berlin in the early years of the century or the Budapest Academy of Music in the 1920s and 1930s, where he had spent earlier periods as a professor. This plunge in status, isolation from international cultural life, defenselessness against the many political slanders made against him in the post-war period, and daily difficulties as an émigré all left marks on his creativity. I set out in my dissertation to offer a monograph treatment of the period based on original, hitherto unknown source materials to be found in Dohnányi's American papers. This study sums up its findings in one respect: the role played by the commissions he received as a composer.

1. Antecedents of the research: the sources

Interest in Dohnányi and his musical activity has grown considerably in the last decade. There had appeared a monograph by Bálint Vázsonyi[1] and some other, minor studies during the first forty years after his death, but scholarly discourse and an actual research process had not really begun. The renewed interest in the 1990s had some political motives behind it, but systematic research into Dohnányi was also prompted by a change of musicological approach.[2] The most significant event in international research came on 1 January, 2002, when the scholarly activity finally gained an institu-

[1] Bálint Vázsonyi, *Ernő Dohnányi* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1971; [2]Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 2002).
[2] The two most significant publications of new Dohnányi scholarship in about 2000 were James A. Grymes, *Ernst von Dohnányi. A Bio-bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut/London: Greenwood Press, 2001) and Deborah Kiszely-Papp, *Ernst von Dohnányi Ernő* (Budapest: Mágus, 2001).

tional background: the Dohnányi Archives of Budapest (Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences).

Yet research into Dohnányi has not been equally fruitful in every field: publication of the data and source materials essential for it and research into the composer's draft versions have been upstaged by complex, critical examination of his life's work[3] and by musical analysis in general,[4] although the underlying work should have come first. Thorough knowledge of the composer's work and place in history has extra importance in Dohnányi's case, as consensus on his assessment has yet to be reached at home or abroad, and in part that is precisely because those interested are forced to rely on superficial knowledge, for want of the kind of the specialist literature needed to form a judgment. For that reason I undertook in my dissertation to study and form a critical assessment of the composer's American years (1949–1960), as a definable stage in his life and creativity.

The American years, like Dohnányi's earlier periods, have yet to be studied in depth. A history of the decade was presented by Marion Ursula Rueth,[5] but her subject was only a thin slice of the composer's activity (his FSU professorship), and she presented important data without scholarly interpretation or evaluation. This left the chapter in Vázsonyi's monograph, some twenty pages long, as the most comprehensive study of the period so far. He touched on many aspects, but primary sources have shown that his data were often unreliable and his interpretation assailable. In view of the limited literature on Dohnányi's American years, I took the primary source materials as my basis and starting point. I had the chance to do research in the most important US Dohnányi collections (the Dohnányi and Kilényi–Dohnányi collections at the Warren D. Allen Music Library of the FSU, Tallahassee), as a Fulbright grantee in 2005–2006, when I took part in cataloging work there as well. I also used sources in Ohio University (Athens), the George Bragg Estate (Fort Worth, Texas), the National Széchényi Library (Budapest), and elsewhere. So my thesis is based on 5000 original, mainly unpublished items of source material – Dohnányi's correspondence, his other official and personal documents, his notebooks and pocket calendars, scrapbooks with newspaper cuttings and concert programs, autograph musical sources, printed scores of Dohnányi works, the composer's collection of printed scores of other composers' works, and DAT recordings of his concerts.

[3] See for example the press reception of Dohnányi's work between 1887 and 1905, published by László Gombos (in the *Dohnányi Yearbook*s for 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006/7).

[4] See for example Ilona Kovács, "Dohnányi Ernő zeneszerzői műhelyében. Az I., A-dúr vonósnégyes (op. 7) I. tételének születése" [In Dohnányi's compositional workshop. Birth of the 1st movement of the String Quartet No. 1., A major], *Magyar Zene* 43/2 (May 2005), 155–178.

[5] Marion Ursula Rueth, *The Tallahassee Years of Ernst von Dohnányi,* MA thesis (Florida State University [FSU], Tallahassee, 1961.)

2. Dohnányi in Florida: living conditions, finances, and activities

Dohnányi left Hungary in November 1944 and spent most of his time in Austria up to 1948. He chose Argentina as his place of domicile, mainly for family reasons: there was no other country prepared to accept his partner in life, Ilona Zachár, and her teenage children. The conditions they found in Argentina, however, were worse than expected, and the family was soon thinking of another move. The United States was an obvious choice, as Dohnányi had enjoyed a high reputation with the public there some decades before.

At the music department of the FSU there was very rapid development at that time. A new, excellently equipped building was opened and new graduate programs commenced, followed in 1951 by an organized doctoral teaching program in music.[6] The dean of the music faculty was Karl Kuersteiner, who had studied for a short time in Budapest and knew Dohnányi's reputation well. So when Dohnányi's American impresario, Andrew Schulhof, got in touch with the FSU about a possible concert in Tallahassee, the dean took things a stage further by offering Dohnányi a chair in composition and piano.[7]

The newly appointed professor arrived in the capital of Florida on 17 October 1949. Tallahassee at that time was a small, remote city of 30,000 inhabitants of no cultural or touristic importance, although it would provide a quiet haven for the Dohnányi family. The place may well have seemed favorable after the troubled period of almost exactly five years since they had left Hungary. Whatever the case, this is how the composer recounted his first impressions:

> When I saw Tallahassee I immediately liked it. I always said it was like a village in an enormous, beautiful garden. The age-old oak trees that line the streets, from which Florida moss is hanging at present, the squirrels jumping here and there, the winter-flowering camel[l]ias and the spring azaleas, whose lush colors magically transform the city into a fairyland. Everything, everything was enchantingly lovely. […] I love Tallahassee.[8]

At the university, Dohnányi taught piano at several levels in several forms: he gave private and group tuition mainly to students at *graduate* level, while running one *under-*

[6] John Kilgore, "New Building Helps: FSU Music School Winning Top Rank", *Tallahassee Democrat* (without date) (FSU Dohnányi Collection).
[7] Kuersteiner's letter to Dohnányi, 8 April 1949 (FSU Dohnányi Collection).
[8] The passage quoted is missing from the English translations. Cf. Ernst von Dohnányi, *Message to Posterity,* Ilona von Dohnányi (transl.), Mary F. Parmenter (ed.), (Jacksonville, Florida: Drew, 1960). Second edition: Ernst von Dohnányi, Ilona von Dohnányi, "Message to Posterity", in *Perspectives on Ernst von Dohnányi,* James A. Grymes (ed.) (Lanham, Maryland–Toronto–Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), 193–215.

graduate and one *graduate* course in composition, to which were added in later years the tasks of conducting the orchestra and holding dissertation consultations. One permanent fixture on his timetable was an open *piano repertoire class* that was extremely popular with students and staff alike. It was a twist of fate that teaching contributed the most to his income in a period when he was dealing with students of modest capabilities. Yet he grew fond of his American students, who naturally appreciated him hugely – for many he became a friend, more broadly a professional support, and even a kind of father figure. Their devotion is exemplified in this farewell letter from one of them:

> I shall enjoy my year here – but I can hardly explain my feelings about leaving you. To say the very least, it is upsetting. My two years of study have been heaven for me – but you already know that, I am sure. You couldn't help but have felt that all this time. I can scarcely use so weak a term as "thank you"… it doesn't nearly express my real appreciation.[9]

His work with composition students proved less successful. Dohnányi had already expressed to the dean, in letters when he was concluding his contract, his poor opinion of the generation of young composers. This did not alter during his Florida years:

> There are nowadays very-very few composers in the whole world who should be allowed to compose. […] Now I don't mind "modernity" if the composer knows his "business", but generally he knows nothing, generally he hardly can harmonize decently a simple melody not to speak of his inability to solve the easiest task of counterpoint. Here most probably I shall want an assistant teacher; at least my demand will be that the student is well acquainted with the rules of harmony and the elements of counterpoint.[10]

Vázsonyi gives a very negative description of the university milieu and the conditions in which Dohnányi worked, but knowledge of the original documents casts doubt on his version, making it somewhat tendentious to say that the insensitivity and jealousy of the Tallahassee leadership led to the terms of the first contract being overturned and indirectly to the collapse of the aged composer. It appears from surviving source materials that discounting private students, Dohnányi took six to eight lessons a week, which crept up to twelve in two terms, but fell to four to six in his final years. So his timetable was filled to the extent envisaged by the university only in the hardest year. If it is noted that his absences were more frequent than had been envisaged in the original negotiations (47 teaching days in 1955, for instance) and that the number of recitals and other performances he gave were far fewer than Kuersteiner had expected, it becomes

[9] Sitges's letter to Dohnányi, 8 August 1955 (FSU Dohnányi Collection).
[10] Dohnányi's letter to Kuersteiner, 3 August 1949 (FSU Dohnányi Collection).

clear that the university leaders cannot be blamed for the difficulties to the extent that Vázsonyi claims.

Dohnányi contracted with the FSU for a sum of $5600 for the three terms of the 1949–50 academic year,[11] and he thought up to October 1949 that he would be able to augment his teaching salary with high fees for giving concerts. The concerts, however, were canceled one after another, partly for political reasons, which shook the family's position. The financial difficulties eased in subsequent years as Dohnányi's salary increased to $7500 in 1950–51 and $8400 in 1955–54,[12] which was augmented by fees for concerts and commissioned works. But this did not prove comfortably sufficient for the family. Their attitude to bank overdrafts, which differed from the American view, were coupled with the anxieties that had built up over the previous straitened five years to enhance their general ill-feeling. Yet Dohnányi's income did not give them a critically low standard of living. They bought a house of their own and paid off the loan in seven to eight years. They were able to put their foster children, who were in their twenties, through university and give them further financial assistance, so that the other members did not have to go out to work. In fact US economic statistics show that Dohnányi's income was relatively high: average income was $2366 in 1950 and $3440 in 1955.[13] Dohnányi had undoubtedly lived much better at earlier periods in his life, but these figures must alter the previous picture of his finances significantly. The statements in the biographies that the canceled concerts led to looming financial crisis and that he faced unpleasant conditions at the university need at least to be toned down.

The political accusations against Dohnányi clearly had a bearing on some of the concert cancellations around 1949–1950. The libels started in post-World War II Europe were revived in 1947 by Ferenc Göndör, owner of a Hungarian-language paper in New York, who approached several musical and political bodies pressing for a boycott of Dohnányi. Attempts to refute the false accusations were made by several of Dohnányi's Hungarian and American colleagues (including Edward Kilényi, John Kirn, Imre Waldbauer, Miklós Schwalb, and Tibor Serly), but even after some years, no satisfactory conclusion was reached. The pressure put on him slowly began to ease in the mid-1950s, probably because the political winds of McCarthyism blew in the opposite direction, but it emerges from family letters that the central arguments of those close to the composer were that his career had been hampered mainly by political prejudices and "livelihood jealousies" disguised as a political issue.

Despite the difficulties, Dohnányi appeared on the concert platform 124 times between his settlement in the United States and his death.[14] This averaged about once a month. Though in his youth he had been known to play publicly ten or even fifteen

[11] FSU's letter to Dohnányi, 6 July 1949 (FSU Dohnányi Collection).
[12] Dohnányi's contracts, 18 May 1950, August 1954 (FSU Dohnányi Collection).
[13] <www.census.gov> (accessed: 8 September 2012).
[14] For a list of the concerts see the dissertation.

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times a month, it is a sizable number bearing in mind his age and teaching commitments. Most of the Tallahassee concerts (around a third of the total) were under his agreement with the university. Those held elsewhere were more important in several respects, not least financially, but it was important to his political rehabilitation that his audience should not be geographically confined. A real breakthrough would have involved successes in big cities, but there had been no repeat of his 1953 New York premiere. The usual venues throughout the period were smaller provincial, usually university cities.[15] He built up excellent ties with smaller cities, where he appeared several times, and these may well have been the most decisive bonds in his American years. Notably there was Athens, Ohio, where there arose almost a cult around Dohnányi personally and his appearances there. As one Athens music critic put it in the tenth season:

> This reviewer has written so many passages about our perennial and celebrated visitor, Dr. Ernst von Dohnanyi, that to do so again is to revert to a habit. Nevertheless, the annual visit of this world renowned musician to our campus never fails to be of interest, never fails to bring encouragement and renewed enthusiasm to our musical community.[16]

The enthusiasm was largely these were composite occasions (and not just in Athens). He would appear at once as a pianist, a chamber musician, a conductor, a lecturer, and of course a composer. As the same reviewer goes on to say:

> […] we know him so well that we are not surprised when he reveals to us something new about himself.[17]

Dohnányi had much need of the appreciation he won in that university environment, for his attempts to break into the metropolitan area of American musical life had been less than successful. Only sporadically could he appear in major American cities, through the influence of earlier acquaintances such as Doráti and Reiner. It is no exaggeration to say he was largely ignored by the musical establishment. Typically, Dohnányi's name scarcely occurs in the great US music-history monographs and dictionaries of the 1950s and 1960s, though they deal in detail with the contribution of the émigré European composers who arrived during and after World War II.[18] The main

[15] His one concert in New York City took place in Carnegie Hall, on 9 November 1953; he played his Piano Concerto No. 2. Some concerts in other major cities: San Francisco (1951), Chicago (1954), Minneapolis (1957).

[16] Paul Fontaine, "Celebrated Musician a Master in Field of Chamber Music", *Athens Messenger* (28 March 1957).

[17] Paul Fontaine, "Famous Artists Give Piano-Violin Recital", *The Athens Messenger* (13 March 1952).

[18] For example: John Tasker Howard and George Kent Bellows, *A Short History of Music in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967); Irving Sablosky, *American Music* (Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969); H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1969) = *Prentice-Hall History of Music Series*.

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reason to see Dohnányi's American years as the most problematic period in his life is because his mark and status did not improve in ten years. By comparison, the financial problems and the overwork exaggerated by Vázsonyi seem less dramatic.

Still, another factor behind his neglect by concert-goers outside the universities may well be his conservative musical style. The US music world of the 1950s can hardly be blamed for failing to embrace an émigré whose style had counted as anachronistic for decades. It is interesting to see how Dohnányi himself viewed the case, for he had been steadily losing support since the end of the 1930s and his relation to contemporary music had become a key livelihood issue for him. This conflict and the isolation he bore with varying degrees of resignation became a prime feature of his American years, and the most decisive one in his musical output as well.

All in all, Dohnányi can certainly be called active as a composer in his American years. If the *Second Violin Concerto* (op. 43, 1949–50) begun in Argentina is included, nine works belong to this period, of which three piano pieces (op. 44, 1951) and two flute compositions (op. 48, 1958–59) share opus numbers. In addition there are two sets of piano études vital to his teaching work; two re-workings of the 2nd Symphony he wrote in the war years; and some other works left incomplete or in sketch form, or planned pieces which he did not to my knowledge begin. These form a varied group in genre and apparatus, and several opuses are exceptional for him. The flute works and the *Harp Concertino* (op. 45, 1952) are instrumental departures, while the *Stabat Mater* (op. 46, 1952–53) stands out for its religious text and the *American Rhapsody* (op. 47, 1952–53) for its loan materials.

The unusual features are often explained by composition circumstances, for some were commissioned. This again distinguishes his American period, as Dohnányi had a deep distaste for commissions and had seldom accepted them. In America, though, he needed the commissions to help him assert himself (to ease his isolation, gain greater recognition as a composer, and stave off the political calumnies) and for financial reasons. However, there were other, more significant factors than choice of instruments, texts, or musical material behind the question of whether a work was composed in this period had or did not have a commission to back it. This aspect is considered in the sections that follow.

3. Commissioned compositions

Within Dohnányi's life's work, *Stabat Mater* is perhaps the most unusual of the American works. The choice of a religious text is unusual for him, if not unprecedented. Was he turning to religion after the trials he suffered in the war and in exile? Even more surprising is the apparatus: the work is for double boys' choir. Naturally this could occur in a commissioned work. The commission came from George Bragg in Texas, choirmaster of the Denton Civic Boy Choir. The choir, which is still active, was

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a few years old in 1952, when Dohnányi was approached. There was no doubt about the young choirmaster's ambitions, however. It already emerged in a newspaper article of 25 September 1952 that Dohnányi was only the first, not the only composer Bragg would commission to compose for the Denton singers. (As planned over 125 contemporary composers enriched their repertory over ensuing decades.)[19] Dohnányi had been to North Texas early in 1949, before he settled in the United States, and his recitals and master classes had been favorably received. Indeed the director of Texas Christian University in Fort Worth offered him a tenured professorship,[20] although Bragg did not meet him at that time and his choice of him had different grounds:

> The medium of boy choir has in it many of the qualities of a chamber group. […] We knew, of course, that we were looking for a master of chamber music. Ernest von Dohnanyi, the noted pianist and composer, and composer-in-residence at Florida State University, was selected since his concerted chamber works have long been highly valued by the world's greatest artists, and since his compositions have always had a freshness and youthful enthusiasm about them. He is a composer of melody with a touch of modern inventiveness. These outstanding qualities in his work led us to choose him for this first step in enlarging the modern repertoire of boy choir music.

The instrumental and chamber-music character of the oratorio-like composition is indeed a special attribute, apparent in the shaping of the work, disposition of the text, and fabric of the music. Here as in other one-movement instrumental works, Dohnányi blended his classical forms. The sonata-allegro, rondo, and variation forms can all be identified: *A–B–A'–B'–C–C'–A"–B"–coda.* The concept is far from self-evident, for *Stabat Mater* settings akin to it in period (Poulenc, 1950) or musical style (Dvořák, 1877; Verdi, 1898) or other criteria (Pergolesi, 1736) normally follow one of two formal strategies: either to build in line with the strophe breaks in closed movements, or to order structurally by the suggested textual images. Dohnányi followed a different principle of arrangement through interpretation of the text, by fitting it into a strict instrumental form.

Patterns for the work's formal build appear in Dohnányi's output mainly in his chamber music, and the same applies to the fabric: the variation principle is decisive. Apart from the variation relations of the formal units in the equation, there are found many other more reticent motif connections, which ultimately produce the work's homogeneous style. The motif relations derive from the orchestral introduction, which acts as a thematic kernel, for almost all the musical material bears some relation to it.

[19] "Denton Choir Commission to Dohnanyi" [without author] (25 September 1952); newspaper cutting in Bragg's diary without source (Bragg's Estate, Fort Worth, Texas).

[20] Ilona von Dohnányi, *Ernst von Dohnányi. A Song of Life,* ed. by James A. Grymes (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 168.

The introduction appears to follow two historical models: the "Selig sind" movement in Brahms' *German Requiem,* and Pergolesi's beginning to his *Stabat Mater,* as a link to its historical predecessors. So musically, the *Stabat Mater* does not add anything new to Dohnányi's earlier works, and indeed it ties this work closely to them. Although it cannot be ruled out that the choice of text reflects an aged, beleaguered composer turning to religion, the work's harmonics, shaping, and fabric, and *Weltanschauung* apparent in the individual constructions he puts on the text,[21] match so closely Dohnányi's earlier compositions that this – not some new-fangled religious outlook on life – is the context in which to interpret it, strengthened perhaps by the change in his living conditions.

A radically different creative environment appears in Dohnányi's single-movement orchestral *American Rhapsody* (op. 47), which can be assumed to mark an adaptation to his new country and a tribute to it, as an earlier analyst, Laura Moore Pruett, pointed out in the title of her study.[22] It was written for the 150th anniversary of Ohio University, as a result of the relationship with Athens described already. The commission dated from 1951 and the work was first played in February 1954 to the university public, and it was a huge success, of course. Like the *Stabat Mater* it has a single movement, which can be seen as a multi-movement form drawn into one. This is how the composer introduced it:

> The work begins with the popular "On Top Of Old Smoky" freely used as Introduction. The first main part consists of 3 variations on the White Spir[i]tual "I Am A Poor Wayfaring Stranger" (Andante quasi adagio). The third variation leads imperceptibly into the middle section, a gay Kentucky Mountain Song, "The Riddle" (Allegretto vivace). This is interwoven with the universally known "Turkey in the Straw". After a short return to the first measures of the "Wayfaring Stranger" worked up contrapuntally, the third, concluding part begins as a quick Presto. The well known "Sweet Betsy From Pike" appears in one of two Country Dances. The work ends with a few measures of "Alma Mater Ohio" together with one of the Country Dances and referring once again to "Old Smoky".[23]

To make the account easier to follow, let me distinguish five passages *(A, B, C, D, E)* of key dramatic importance, although the introduction (*A,* bars 1–44) and the return of the "Wayfaring Stranger" melody (*D,* bars 217–36) cannot be seen as separate. This unusual form was labeled a rhapsody, a term which Dohnányi said placed no curbs on him, as it implied formal freedom, digression, and a "rhapsodic" character. He added

[21] For the analysis of Dohnányi's *Stabat Mater*-interpretation see the full text of the dissertation.

[22] Laura Moore Pruett, "Dohnányi's *American Rhapsody,* Op. 47: An Émigré's Tribute to the New World", in *Perspectives on Ernst von Dohnányi,* ed. by James A. Grymes (Lanham, Maryland–Toronto–Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), 165–179.

[23] Dohnányi's program note without date (Ohio University: Baker Files).

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that Opus 47 might even have been named "American Fantasia".[24] Yet the disciplined, traditional approach to form taken by Dohnányi is exemplified in the way his seemingly free overall form is made up of traditional units: a slow introduction *(A)* is followed by a three-section variation form *(B),* joined later by a fourth variation *(D),* surrounded by two trio forms (*C, E* – the second with a type of theme more reminiscent of a rondo).

Yet the links between the sections are a little problematic. At the cusp of *B* and *C,* for example, the last motif of the "Wayfaring Stranger" melody becomes the start of a section of "The Riddle" (bars 134–46). Although the composer's description has "the third variation lead imperceptibly into the middle section", the resolution of the motif transformation does not fit snugly into the musical sequence. The other units are also linked loosely, and the units of form are dramatically independent, yet too brief for the work simply to appear as an *attacca* juxtaposition of several instrumental forms. One wonders what this strange form, tied though quite conventional in its elements, can refer to, what the brokenness and unevenness of it can mean, and what relation all this can bear to the basic melodic material.

The looseness of overall form can be ascribed partly to the diversity of musical material. Most imposing is the "white spiritual" entitled "Wayfaring Stranger": an Aeolian (Dorian) key, a pentatonic stock of tones, polysyllabic lines, and an arched *(aaba)* structure. The two lines of "Old Smoky", on the other hand, offer minimal basic musical material. Perhaps the clearest is "The Riddle" with its dance step and simple Mixolydian alternation of fifths, while "Turkey in the Straw" seems overly complicated in its motifs and "Sweet Betsy" too simple, especially compared with the Hungarian folk songs Dohnányi used in other works. The composer's hierarchy is reflected in the way he presents, treats and shapes them, and in some cases this suggests why he chose them. The last two mentioned, for instance, appear only as a fleeting comic episode. Their material is not used elsewhere in the work, making them isolated in motivic terms. "Sweet Betsy", in fact, appears just once, as a contrast to other material. Still, such comically simple tunes can be witty if appropriately orchestrated, which is probably why they came to Dohnányi's attention. He also cuts the "Old Smoky" melody off from its environment, but it was probably chosen for an expressly motivic reason: it must have been brought into the *Rhapsody* for its fanfare-like melodic opening of triads. He may have been drawn to the country dances and "The Riddle", so much more emphatic than the previous passages, since they too provided raw material ripe for motivic treatment. So all in all it seems that Dohnányi considered various *musical* criteria when making his choices, not their historical environments or texts, or any interrelations between them.

[24] Myron Henry, "Would Join OU Faculty: Interview With Composer von Dohnanyi Furnishes Interpretation of 'Rhapsody'", *Ohio University Post* (26 February 1954).

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The sole exception seems to be "Wayfaring Stranger", where he expressly underlined its independence and mint condition, so setting it on the peak of his treatment hierarchy (Example 1a). Elsewhere he is inclined to hurry along the development of a melody on its first appearance, but for "Wayfaring Stranger" he leaves ample time, making it an untouched island in the composition process, its intimate tone standing in stark contrast to its colorful, even brash environment. The composer largely broke up the other melodies he used, while the tune of "Wayfaring Stranger" is left whole even during the variations. Furthermore, the form attaching to it proves to be the fullest and most singular of the units of the composition. So it is fair to assume that for some reason the melody had greater significance for Dohnányi.

Pruett assumed that Dohnányi saw in "Wayfaring Stranger" a symbol of his own destiny in the difficult wandering years that followed his emigration.[25] This insight gains credence from a comment in the *Song of Life,* a biography of Dohnányi written by his third wife:

> I knew that this voyage could bring us wealth, fame, and comfort, I feared that we would instead remain unhappy aliens and wayfaring strangers forever.[26]

Pruett drew out this justifiable assumption into a programmatic explanation for the diverse characters of the variations. He even went so far as to bring up "Wayfaring Stranger" to explain the second variation, the one furthest in mood from the theme melody,[27] arguing that its combativeness conveyed Dohnányi's feelings on the cruelty of fate. This assumption seems less than convincing, but offers a good starting point for seeking some kind of program in that dramatic sequence of character variations.

Hearing the spiritual played on cor anglais in *American Rhapsody* over an organ point of strings, it is not hard to link it with the slow movement of Dvořák's *New World Symphony*. Yet there is a deeper relation discernible in the composer's own works: in terms of these the orchestration of the "Wayfaring Stranger" melody is irrefutably reminiscent of the variation movement of *Symphonic Minutes* (op. 36, 1933–34). There is a resemblance in its centering on the cor anglais, in the plaintive subject, and in the musical structure: upward fifths and a Dorian tinge (Example 1a–b). The dramatic similarity between the two passages becomes even plainer when the variations begin. There is kinship in the soft woodwind decoration of the melody and in the strong character, fabric and span of the second variations, offsetting the fine intoning. Likewise, the similarly developed subject and variations with a similar texture appearing in conspicuously the same order suggest that Dohnányi simply rewrote the variations of *Symphonic Minutes* using new material. So the set of variations can be said not to be

[25] Pruett, "Dohnányi's *American Rhapsody*", 171.
[26] Ilona von Dohnányi, *A Song of Life,* 168.
[27] Pruett, "Dohnányi's *American Rhapsody*", 171 and 173.

Andante quasi adagio

Example 1a: *American Rapsody,* the variation theme

Andante poco moto

Example 1b: *Symphonic Minutes,* beginning of movement IV

conceived musically in a strict sense: the subject is not determined by its own musical attributes, but rather derived from the crystallized scheme or variation strategy of an earlier composition. In the light of that, it is worth searching for ties to other pieces in the composer's life's work.

By the time *American Rhapsody* was written, the American musical nationalism of Aaron Copland and Roy Harris could be said to be out of style.[28] Dohnányi, of course, had no affinity with any political or social aspects of musical Americanism, or only insofar as it embodied an accessible, anti-modernist style of writing. If a parallel is sought for the Americanism in Dohnányi's music, it might be Dvořák's Ninth, *New World Symphony,* where the specific musical resemblances combine with a related approach. For Dvořák's subtitle "From the New World" describes an essential situation: the work reflects the impressions of an alien, a visitor to the New World environment. The title is addressed to the non-American public, to the Old World. Similarly, Dohnányi's *Rhapsody* is tied far more to the European past than it can be said to seek a means of expression in the extant American music of its day. In examining the factors behind Dohnányi's Americanism it should be remembered that *American Rhapsody* would never have been composed without strong support from the Baker family, and above all had it not been for Dohnányi's strong obligation to Ohio University. All this suggests that *American Rhapsody* is a symbol of intimate friendship, rather than homage to a new home country.

One model for his work that Dohnányi mentioned was Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody* series, perhaps for the underlying formal concept, perhaps for the stylistic and qualitative heterogeneity of the melodies arranged, but perhaps also because the term rhapsody in his case too suggested a kind of fragility. The "whole" whose fragments he wished to recollect was not American folk melody tradition, but things far closer to Dohnányi: the 19th-century tradition of composed music and his own life's work as a composer. It is questionable how much this was a conscious recollection, but there is no doubt that *American Rhapsody,* despite its modest length, gives an impression that Dohnányi wished it to sum up his life's work, and is all the more able to do so as it is the composer's last work, integral to his œuvre.

Besides, there is deeper significance in the strong role played by the "Wayfaring Stranger" melody. One can accept Pruett's surmise that Dohnányi saw in the wayfaring figure a symbol of his own destiny, but it is equally possible that Dohnányi did not lift the expression out of its context – that he identified with the mortal near to death, bidding his life farewell. As the wayfaring stranger of the lyric wanders, preparing for consolation in the next world, so does Dohnányi, through the earlier stages of his career, recalling the tone of the brightest, most colorful pieces. Nor may it be fortuitous that his

[28] Barbara Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1980).

memories are jogged by a pentatonic tune, as that attribute establishes associations with Hungarian folk music. Though the *Rhapsody's* timbre is bright and lively, in line with its promotional function, the recollections turn out not to be positive in tone. Composer and listener come to realize that deep down the present must make do with a rather pointless revival of a brighter past; the busy, attractive surface disguises in a way the want of a message of current importance.

It is possible, of course, to see the recollecting gesture of *American Rhapsody* just as ennui and dismiss it as less than successful, all the more because Dohnányi himself complained of lacking inspiration. But it must count in several ways as part of his œuvre, above all as an inescapable composition of his American period. Of these the least objective and in a way solemnest observation is that *American Rhapsody* is attractive, a fine example of Dohnányi's display style, whose more recent popularity appears also in the number of recordings.[29]

Another reason not to dismiss it as an occasional piece, less revealing of the composer's thinking, is that it shows at several points how Dohnányi too was aware of its problems and limitations. One prominent case of irony and self-deprecation appearing behind a fresh, smiling mask comes in a phrase in section *D,* where the "Wayfaring Stranger" melody returns in a tragic mood. The sound may well deceive listeners, as there are grounds for a tragic reading of the melody and of the wayfaring stranger as a symbol. Yet the "punchline" (hard indeed to identify in the tone) has escaped analysts of the work: under the woodwind imitation of the subject are heard the strings with a counterpoint of the most comic of the melodies, "Turkey in the Straw", what is more in a strongly altered, more grotesque form. So there is no treating section *D* just as a romantic climax, for the composer blends into the work's wistful tone elements of the banal and the distorted, which convey a self-disparagement prompted, perhaps, by the sterile and undeservedly lowly conditions around him at the time.

4. Non-commissioned compositions

Dohnányi in the earlier stages of his life had only composed to order occasionally, but this was reversed in his American years. There a mere two opus numbers covering a total of five pieces appeared independently of any commission: the *Three Singular Pieces* for piano (op. 44), and two flute pieces, *Aria for flute and piano* (op. 48/1) and a *Passacaglia for solo flute* (op. 48/2). The first were clearly written for his own use, to have something new for his American solo recitals. The flute pieces were intended

[29] BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Matthias Bamert (Chandos 9647, 1998); Radio-Sinfonie-Orchester Frankfurt, cond. Alun Francis (CPO 999-308-2, 1998); English Sinfonia, cond. John Ferrar (ASV 1107, 2001); Danubia Symphony Orchestra, cond. Domonkos Héja (Warner Classics 2564-62409-2, 2005).

for Ellie Baker, daughter of the university rector at Athens, but they were not commissioned as such. Here is how the flautist remembers the inception of *Aria:*

> It was after one of these concerts at the university, […] that I said to Dohnányi, who had just played a Brahms sonata so magnificently, "If only Brahms had written some solo music for the flute!" He replied instantly in his courtly gentle way, "I will write you something instead". The next spring, he showed up in Athens with the Aria, opus 48, no. 1 completed.[30]

Ellie knew even less of the birth of *Passacaglia,* and it can be stated clearly that these works were composed independently of any commission. Of the three piano and two flute works, more heed needs paying to this *Passacaglia* and to *Burletta* (op. 44/1).

The tone of *Burletta,* whose very title heralds playfulness, is not typical of his œuvre. As a Florida critic of the time put it pertinently, if somewhat naively:

> [Dohnányi's] compositions were surprisingly modern, staccato and entirely different from what one would expect of the grey-haired dean of the Florida music world.[31]

Milton Hallman in a short study of Dohnányi's piano œuvre asked whether he might not have been imitating, even parodying the mode of expression of contemporary music in this series.[32] Apart from the tone, what could suggest such an approach, and what could have motivated Dohnányi to take it?

Several of Dohnányi's piano works are built on an original, witty idea of some kind. The idea in *Burletta* is a constantly changing time signature, to which several people have drawn attention; the composer himself mentioned this aspect of it.[33] No detailed analysis of the work has appeared so far, but contemporary descriptions note that *Burletta* follows a basic time sequence of $\frac{5}{4}$–$\frac{4}{4}$–$\frac{3}{4}$–$\frac{2}{4}$, but this is sometimes broken, giving the piece an asymmetry and unexpectedness of its own. Although the surprises are a conscious element in the piece, I would like here to present the opposite: the regularity of the varying time signatures (although the basis for it is not the $\frac{5}{4}$–$\frac{4}{4}$–$\frac{3}{4}$–$\frac{2}{4}$ sequence) and its role in creating the form.

[30] Eleanor Lawrence, "The Flute Compositions of Ernst von Dohnányi", *The Flutist Quarterly* 21/4 (Summer 1996), 60–66, 62. Though Eleanor's memories are not too reliable since Dohnányi did not play Brahms sonatas at all during his American years. She may have thought of the concert on 26 March 1957, when he played the Rhapsody op. 119/4.

[31] "Famed Pianist Wins Acclaim" [unsigned], *The Palm Beach Post* (26 January 1954).

[32] Milton Hallman, "Ernő Dohnányi's Solo Piano Works", *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 17 (June 1985), 48–54, 54.

[33] "The Burletta, Opus 44. no. 1. composed May 1951 in Tallahassee (Florida) has a characteristic change of beat. 5/4, 4/4, 3/4 and 2/4." Dohnányi's letter to Peter Andry (EMI), 18 November 1956 (FSU Dohnányi Collection).

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The overall form of *Burletta* is not unusual: a simple three-part form in which the main section is spare, marked by thematic treatment emphasizing a tritone, while the middle section is expressly melodic. However, the regular threefold form of the work is structured in an unusual way out of unusual elements. The smallest pieces are a bar each in length. The four most important motifs *(a, b, c, d)* appear consecutively right at the beginning of the piece (Example 2, m. 1–4). Discounting the melodic trio subject of the middle section, the whole work is built up of dozens of such motifs, which are strongly akin to each other. The system of kinship derives mainly from the presence of two musical elements: (1) a largely chromatic falling motif, and (2) a *sforzato* leap at the border of motifs *a* and *b*. Typical variation techniques used are abbreviation (part of the motif being omitted to shorten the bar, e. g. in the relation between *b* and *c),* extension (a longer rhythm value or rest being inserted, e. g. in the relation between $d_{t(=mirror)}$ and *f),* and approximate mirror reflection of the melodic motion, the last of which appears right after the first appearance of *a–b–c–d* (as a_t–b_t–c_t–d_t in m. 5–8).

Meanwhile four kinds of meter (5, 4, 3 and 2 quarter-notes) alternate, usually from bar to bar. Each time signature is changed within three bars, and even pairs of bars in the same meter are rare. So my argument is that the changeability of the meter is not random: the bars with the various time signatures are built in a planned way into units, although it is noteworthy that the regularity does not simply mean they follow the $\frac{5}{4}$–$\frac{4}{4}$–$\frac{3}{4}$–$\frac{2}{4}$ order found at the beginning of the piece. Interestingly, it is precisely where the grotesque sonority of the main section ends that the role of the changing meter appears with the lyric trio theme, which Dohnányi conveys with time-signature changes almost every bar. It may be thought that the flexible rhythm just lends the melody a kind of timbre and pulse, except that the composer has retained it even where the melody appears in canon, and the entry differences cause collisions in the metric system of the two parts. The trio theme appears in fact in two versions, each symmetrical in metrical structure (5–4–3–2–2–3–4–5 quarter-notes, 5–4–3–2–3–4–5 quarter-notes), and each retaining this even when the canon appears.

But other rules emerge in the trio's final section: its meters are in declining order. The difference is not random, as it refers back to the main section, where the changes of bar signature are also regular and likewise in declining order (combinations of 5–4–3–2, 5–4–4–3–3–2, 5–4–3 occur). Since the process of breaking down the units, defined clearly in this way, is structured accordingly, and the build of the units differs markedly from the classical elements of form, it seems more apposite to call the units "rows" rather than phrases or periods. This is not intended to suggest the row concept of serial music, but simply to distinguish the rows of *Burletta* from the traditional units of form, while referring to the special way of varying them, for instance with a big role for the mirror-inversion principle.

So I call rows the components of the work at a level between that of bar motifs and of formal sections. I call the basic row of elements the *a–b–c–d* heard in the first four bars of the work *A1,* and the succeeding four-bar unit of mirrored motifs *A2*. The

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Example 2: The beginning of *Burletta*

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essence of the variation after *A2* is extension, as an element of familiar $\frac{4}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ musical material is inserted to make the basic row a–b–a_t–c–d–d. (I have marked this row B, but it comes into being by abbreviating row D, for instance.) The features of the "row"-based structure of *Burletta* can be summed up like this: the rows with reducing (main section) or symmetrical (trio) meter orders consist each of three to six one-bar elements and may vary only within a set field – several are related to the basic row marked *A*.

It is worth noting that the formal units I have termed rows hardly vary as they pass through the key changes of the threefold structure. The first passage of the main section moves from the main key of E flat minor through to C flat minor; the next passage turns from C flat minor back to the main key, and moves on toward B flat minor; the third appearance built on similar pillars of tonality finally remains in E flat minor. The modulation is carried on in row *B,* and as this is notably static, the change of key comes unexpectedly: the preparation for the various cadences relies in practice on a single bar, the final beat of row *B*. Such sudden modulation is possible at all because the piece is uncertain harmonically and intentionally incoherent throughout. Dohnányi stresses this, or utilizes it, when he plays with the elements of the piece almost like building bricks, pushing them about freely onto successive tonal planes. This duality of shaping principles – rigidity that concurrently lends an almost improvisatory freedom – marks a bold excursion beyond the composer's "late Romantic" style.

The elderly composer stated his views rarely and usually with great caution about contemporary music that was remote from his own lines of composition. When he did so, he expressed doubt mainly on two heads: one was the primacy of originality, and the other that in meeting it, many composers did not start from the music or their own natural musical talents. Instead they composed according to various abstract techniques and devised systems. As he put it in an American interview:

> [Twelve-tone music] is confined within a system, so it is dull. Music must be free, a composer must write from inspiration. I do not listen a great deal to what is called "modern" music.[…] But I do not have to hear so much of it to know that the modern trend is too speculative. You see, if you are just trying to do something because that thing hasn't been done before – if that's the reason for doing it – the result will naturally not live long. I call this method of composition "college style".[34]

The strict order of *Burletta,* which ultimately conveys in performance irregularity and chaos, may well be a result of these very notions and a jibe at them. The humor and grotesqueness assert themselves especially well in the composer's own playing of

[34] Doris Reno, "Pianist Dohnanyi: A Serene Artist" [without source and date] (FSU Dohnányi Collection.)

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the work – typically, for instance, where Dohnányi seems to rush into the continually shortening meters, as if he were doing a forward somersault.[35]

Of course it can be assumed that there lie behind *Burletta* more specific and probably more intimate models as well: Bartók's Burlesque No. 2 for piano, *A Bit Drunk,* which was in Dohnányi's repertoire, or the Burletta movement in his 6th string quartet. The latter sounds eerily similar to the stock of motifs in the Dohnányi piece, while the similarity in the piano piece is more one of sound. But the main subject in all three has staccato material with an initial grace note, repeated notes, and clashing intervals, and kinship can also be heard in subsequent contrasting, more melodious passages, where Bartók incidentally also has changes of meter. The chime is so strong that it can probably be judged deliberate. Certainly the influence of Bartók, or perhaps more correctly the chance imitation of Bartók, seems to be an aspect of Dohnányi's music that needs systematic examination.

It is hard to say whether the strange shaping and tart, dissonant sound are more than a smart idea, slipping over into irony. There are grounds for saying he meant as a joke the contrast between the piece's speculative organization and the fragmentary main tract of the lyrical middle section: *Burletta* can be read as a nice caricature of system-ruled composition. But the assumed inspiration from Bartók is probably not ironic – note that traces of Bartók's music appear in other "serious" works – but a case of Dohnányi finding in Bartók's musical parlance a pattern for eliciting the style of contemporaries. That along with their common émigré remoteness from their native land and past may be how he came to recall it.

Of Dohnányi's other American output, *Burletta* bears several resemblances to the *Passacaglia for solo flute,* whose variation theme is the experiment in his life's work that goes furthest in harmony terms. The special nature of the theme is that all twelve tones appear consecutively in the first half. Of course the melody as a whole is not atonal (see the resolution into triads of the opening minor, the melodic sequences, and the A minor/E Phrygian final cadence). Although Bálint Vázsonyi wrote that the piece is composed throughout in "regular rows",[36] in fact the closed units that succeed the theme have nothing to do with dodecaphonic rows either. But Vázsonyi's general analysis seems convincing: based on the contrast of the dodecaphonic theme and the tonal coda following the variations, he cautiously assumes the piece expresses Dohnányi's irony, his none-too-flattering opinion of modern music.[37] To back this is the theme-reversing transformation, which almost exactly matches the first statement in notes,

[35] DAT recordings of the following concerts: 21 March 1952 (Tallahassee), 28 February 1954 (Athens), 16 November 1955 (Madison); and a studio recording by His Master's Voice (1956), modern edition: "Dohnányi plays Dohnányi: The Complete HMV Solo Piano Recordings, 1929–1956" (APR, 2004).

[36] Vázsonyi, *Ernő Dohnányi,* 320.

[37] Ibid., 319–324.

but changes its nature, above all by shedding its rhythmic, melodic and dynamic homogeneity. The neatly grotesque return leads to the explosion of a coda, whose lengthy A major organ point offsets the variations' chromatics. So Dohnányi seems to parody the smooth, solemn theme suited to the genre. He gives it a comically maudlin air: overemphasized *tenuto* notes, broken-up chromatic leaps to the cadence, effect-seeking rests, fade-out, and the tone of D sharp inserted into the melody are followed by a liberated tonal coda that says he was only joking.

Interpretations of *Burletta* and *Passacaglia* shed light on each other. The former seems to be playful, even jocular about Dohnányi's more progressive composer colleagues, but *Passacaglia* calls for a subtler explanation. Conventional tonality triumphs over the twelve-tone theme, yet there are signs in the large-scale form, serious tone and other features, that Dohnányi did not see his own style as absolutely above theirs – there was uncertainty about it.

It emerged in the first section of this paper that *Stabat Mater* and *American Rhapsody* are akin mainly to Dohnányi works written decades before. The latter is a piece emblematic of the American years, not just for its Americanism, but for pointing to the most important attribute of the composer's late style: that despite appearances, the commissioned American pieces written for publicity refer back in several ways to earlier works of his. As for the exciting musical experiments of his later years, they were not commissioned or in some cases even performed in his lifetime. The works displaying a new inspiration and notable adjustment to his new environment were those closest to his European creative periods, while those where he sought new paths were digressive. Those two facts isolate the unusual feature of his later period: a cautious search for a path finally abandoned in introspection.

5. Two concertos – two stories

The difference in scope for the commissioned works and those not commissioned is clear in the tone, structure and dramatic force of two American-period works in the same genre. But it must be said that opposing or juxtaposing the *Second Violin Concerto* and the *Concertino for Harp and Chamber Orchestra* is not fully justified. First, *Concertino* is chamber music in some respects. Second, this too was commissioned originally, although the fact is not recorded in the catalog of his works or in his biography. However, the autograph fair copy of the score bore some dedication, which the composer later erased carefully, signifying that the cooperation was broken off at some point. Although very few documents linked with the composing of the work survive, it is possible largely to reconstruct from them what happened. In 1956, four years

after Dohnányi had told the impresario Andrew Schulhof that he would undertake to write a harp composition,[38] he put it like this to his publisher:

> I had with Edna Philips [sic] some differences which I don't want to discuss now. She is too much under the influence of the Salzedo School which makes the Harp to [sic, "do" may be meant] everything, only not to what it is made for.[39]

The composer was aware that the famous Philadelphia-based harpist Edna Phillips was a pupil of Carlos Salzedo, and he might have guessed she would be a devotee of the new modern tones and playing techniques of the Salzedo school.[40] But he may not have realized that this would preclude him from working with her. Phillips, according to one source, was deeply disappointed to receive a piece in the "neo-Romantic" style, so far from her taste, and flatly refused to perform it.[41] So it was heard first in Athens, the city faithful to Dohnányi, in 1963, three years after his death, performed by Lucile Jennings, harp professor at Ohio University. (Thus it was the one composition with an opus number never performed in his lifetime.)

The *Second Violin Concerto,* on the other hand, arose from notably successful co-operation between composer and performer. It was written for Frances Magnes, the American soloist.[42] It is unclear who brokered the commission, only that Schulhof was active in drawing up the contract. The impresario had good reason to promote the composition of such a new, representative work that might, like the previous opus 42, the *Second Piano Concerto,* be expected to establish Dohnányi on the concert scene of his new home, and which, unlike the previous work, would have a chance of performance even in the composer's absence. The assumption crops up several times in the letters of Dohnányi's younger sister that having Frances Magnes perform it might benefit him politically as well, for her father, Judah Leon Magnes, was a well-known reform rabbi active in the United States and in Israel. So Schulhof and a Dohnányi being accused of war crimes and anti-Semitism may have intended this cooperation with a violinist from a prominent Jewish family as a symbolic gesture. A more tangible reason for accepting the offer was that Magnes paid $2500, which was a high figure compared with what he received for later commissions: $500 for *Stabat Mater* a couple of years later, or $1000 for *American Rhapsody.* Furthermore, she bought exclusive rights to perform it for five years from the date of its premier and she regularly gave concerts abroad, so that

[38] Dohnányi's letter to Schulhof, 25 April 1952. Éva Kelemen, "Kedves Mici… Dohnányi Ernő kiadatlan leveleiből, 1944–1958 (4. rész)", *Muzsika* 45/11 (November 2002), 10–16, 10.
[39] Dohnányi's letter to Kurt Stone (AMP), 22 June 1956 (FSU Dohnányi Collection).
[40] Saul Davis Zlatkovsky, "In Memoriam: Edna Phillips Rosenbaum", in *The American Harp Journal* 19/3 (Summer 2004), 55.
[41] Sara Cutler's information (by email, 23 September 2008). Yet in an undated letter, Phillips wrote to Dohnányi that she was still learning the piece and trying to find an appropriate place and date for its first performance (FSU Dohnányi Collection).
[42] Contract with Magnes, 25 November 1948 (FSU Dohnányi Collection).

Dohnányi might expect his work to be heard in Europe as well, although in the event he would be disappointed in this respect and even the premier was postponed, probably because of Magnes' commitments. It was eventually heard in New York as well, on 15 February 1952, when it was received rather more coolly than on earlier occasions. The five relatively long reviews agreed in calling the *Second Violin Concerto* a clearly conservative composition, whose favorable reception was mainly Magnes' merit.[43]

The renowned New York critic Olin Downes remarked that it was as if Dohnányi had tailored the work expressly to Magnes' personality as a performer.[44] What was that personality? Dohnányi called her "an exceptionally fine violinist, brilliant and full of temperament".[45] The composition's underlying mood was indeed strong and temperamental. Each movement displays drama: contrast effects, preponderant developmental sections, and strong recapitulations. Dohnányi is almost making his soloist speak, and so creating stage conflicts and events in the instrumental piece. The mutually stimulating dialog of solo and *tutti* is clearest at the beginning of the development, where lengthy converse between violin and orchestra emerges as an easily comprehended dramatic scene (Example 3). At the end of the exposition, the drifting violin melody is tinged only by an ominous timpani tremolo. Suddenly an angry phrase appears in unison in the lower strings, from which emerges a striking chromatic theme – the material of the development section. However, what the string orchestra "said" is not convincing enough for the violin; its irascible response flows back to the soft melody, and another orchestral warning is needed before it surrenders and takes up the theme begun by the orchestra. To delve deeper, it is as if the individual represented by the violin were hesitating to knuckle under to the events of the outside world, and would like to remain an observer, but circumstances ultimately prevented that.

The other peculiarity of the composition lies in the orchestration: Dohnányi left out the *tutti* violins. His intention was probably to point up the contrast between the two players in the drama, the violin and the orchestra, to darken further the intonation of the work, and perhaps to make the solo instrument stand out more than usual. But this, noted a critic at the time, was not entirely successful,[46] although Dohnányi certainly strove to make the violin central.

[43] John Briggs, "Dohnanyi's Violin Concerto", *New York Post* (15 February 1952); Olin Downes, "Work by Dohnanyi introduced here", *The New York Times* (15 February 1952); Francis D. Perkins, "Concert and Recital: Philharmonic-Symphony", *New York Herald Tribune* [15 February 1952]; Miles Kastendieck, "Philharmonic At Carnegie", *New York Journal* (15 February 1952); Louis Biancolli, "Young Lady Violinist Rises to Top", *New York World Telegram* (15 February 1952).

[44] Downes, ibid.

[45] Dohnányi's letter to Sir Malcolm [without date] (FSU Dohnányi Collection).

[46] "No doubt a dramatic effect is wanted from the orchestra as well as the solo player. But it sounded as if there were miscalculated balances. Miss Magnes is one of the few violinists who might be expected to override these sonorities, as she did." Downes, ibid.

[Molto tranquillo]

Fl., Ob., Cl.
Fg., Cor., Trb.
Timp.
Arpa
Vl. solo
Vla., Vlc., Cb.

pp
rit.
f
accelerando molto
pp
Glissando
pp
espr.
rit.
dim.
pp
Molto più mosso
ff
impetuoso
perdendosi
ppp
rit. Molto più mosso
ff impetuoso
pizz.
accelerando molto
f

Fl., Ob., Cl..
Fg., Cor., Trb.
Timp.
Arpa
Vl. solo
Vla., Vlc., Cb.

Allegro molto
rit.
p
rit.
pp
Glissando
dim.
rit.
pp
A Tempo. Allegro con brio
ff
arco
ff
ff
pizz.
f

Example 3: The beginning of the development of the *Violin Concerto*

While the texture of the *Violin Concerto* gave Magnes plenty of scope, Phillips the harpist probably missed more than prepared strings from Dohnányi's harp part in *Concertino*. She would have been just as disturbed by the restrained treatment of the solo instrument: by the fact that the work is far from spectacular from the harpist's point of view. Only sporadically does the harp have a distinct thematic role: one short theme in the opening movement and a longer solo passage in the final slow movement. Elsewhere it just contributes to the harmonic backing, and rarely reproduces even effects known from *Variations on a Nursery Song*. So the *Concertino* differs in texture from other Dohnányi works at most in including a prevalent harp sound and producing in a broken-chord accompaniment the most varied configurations. In fact the work lies closer in sound and structure to an intimate chamber piece than to a grand concerto. It is worth turning briefly to its musical attributes to see the consequences of that.

The short dominant theme of the opening movement of *Concertino,* hardly more than a gesture *(Theme A),* appears first in the woodwind parts, above an undulating harp accompaniment. Even here, in the first section of the first movement, it does not take the same form twice (bars 1–16). It retains its outlines in the ensuing units of form, but its character changes too. Examples 4a–b shows the two main transformations in the first section of the theme. Within the twofold character, the first three note intervals, for example, are very variable: in one place a major second narrows to a step of a semitone, in another one or other or even all the fourths change into tritones, and later even wider intervals.

It is no accident that in identifying the formal parts of the movement, it is enough to use the term "A, B, C section". For even though Dohnányi wrote the opening movement of almost all his instrumental cycles in an easily recognizable sonata form and explored the dramatic scope in doing so, it seems as if he chose a different path with *Concertino*. The terminology of the sonata form does not fit well in this case, although some features of it can be identified. Instead the structure of the movement can be recorded as *A–B–C–D–A'–B'–C'–D'–A".* This series, heard twice and then starting a third time, gives the impression that the form is an open one, just a snippet of an endless musical process built out of rather rigid units.

The drama of departing from the sonata form derives also from the harmonic features of the movement. Typical of its tonal flexibility is the way the early bars fail to confirm the main key; the first tonal evidence (F major, a tritone distant from the main key of B major/B minor) appears only in bar 24, which marks the beginning of the third section *(C)* in thematic terms.

So the opening movement of *Concertino* is unusual in several ways for Dohnányi's œuvre, even if the stylistic eclecticism is considered. The rather insubstantial main theme, the dominance of thematic transformation technique, the strung form departing from the dramatic structure of a sonata, and the harmonic flexibility are all reminiscent of Debussy, even though Dohnányi's music rarely displays any French influence. The

same kinship appears in the intonation, which is of course consequent on the fabric and the unusual formal attributes.

The fact that *Concertino* is not in fact a representative, virtuoso concerto, more an intimate chamber composition, appears most clearly in the last movement, which is slow to a degree unexampled in Dohnányi. This too is built on Theme A, as if the still unanswered questions posed by the open form of the first movement were being raised again. The transformed theme presents a more unusual face than any before: a rather vague turn has become a broad phrase harmonized in self-evident simplicity. Its repeated soundings build up an arched melody that differs strongly from the improvisatory displays of the theme in the first movement.

The tonal and structural taming in the third movement of the flamboyant first-movement subject has consequences for the sound as well. While the first movement is airy and improvisatory in style, the third has a heavier, more feelingful intonation. This is reinforced by the orchestration: the melody is heard for the second time by the cellos and violas, and the *espressivo* coloring in the lower strings differs radically from what preceded it. It is as if Dohnányi had turned from Debussy to Brahms and imbedded some rather alien, resistant material into his own style. There seems to be a curious reversed pairing of the ideal and the distorted here. What comes over as "impressionist" and "romantic" in the handling of melody and harmony turns at most in character terms into a juxtaposition of "restive" and "contented". The strange dichotomy is certainly basic to the concept of the work. It makes the function of cyclical organization more original than usual and its message more intimate. Anna Dalos too identified in terms of Debussy's influence a similar narrative based on contrasting different styles and fabrics in Kodály's 1st String Quartet,[47] but in his case this took "story of self-discovery" in the opposite direction, from Brahms to Debussy, as Dalos put it. The names of Debussy and Brahms emerged in relation to Dohnányi's *Concertino* as well, but in her account, unsurprisingly, Brahms, or rather adherence to Brahms triumphs. So the elderly Dohnányi's narrative half a century later goes the opposite way to the young Kodály's, seeming to state the impossibility of breaking with the old paragon.

Still, it must be said that the loveliest, fullest melodic form in the third movement comes from the cellos and violas (bar 24ff.) The sound of the viola had special significance for Dohnányi, as his father had been an amateur player. So the positioning of his display of the instrument in the intimacy of the movement's last bars is probably intentional. The closing *Poco adagio* section merely recalls fragments of the themes heard previously, stressing the harp *glissando* and string *pizzicato* passages against a quiet, intermittent B natural organ point on the timpani, which it may be no exaggeration to hear as a heartbeat. The dying throb and dissipating material around it probably denote

[47] Anna Dalos, "1. 4. Az önmagára találás története" […], in *Forma, harmónia, ellenpont. Vázlatok Kodály Zoltán poétikájához* (Budapest: Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 2007), 81–100.

Example 4a: The beginning of *Concertino*

Più mosso (Allegro ma nono troppo)

Fl.
Ob., Cl.
Fg.
Arpa
Vla.
Vlc. Cb.

Fl.
Ob., Cl.
Fg.
Arpa
Vla.
Vlc. Cb.

Example 4b: The transformation of the main theme of *Concertino*

Example 5: The closing barr of *Concertino*

Fl.
Cl. Si♭
Cor. (Mi)
Fg.
Timp.
perdendosi
ppp
Arpa
dim.
pp
ppp
Vl. 1
Vl. 2
Vla., Vlc., Cb.

Example 5: Continuation

an expression of mortality: the composer's own passing, and most importantly, a glimmer of his own earliest and strongest ties of sentiment (Example 5).

So *Concertino* can be taken as a cautious search for a path, in intonation, but also in theme-shaping, variation strategy, and grand form. All this, one might say, is "put in its place" in the third movement, where the dying close presents a broader interpretation: that Dohnányi, in a new environment toward the end of his life, is unable, even at a risk to his livelihood, to break with his own traditions and sees at most his passing as a resolution. It is hardly surprising that a composition with such an intimate tone did not charm an alien performer. Nor is it strange that the composer did not enter into discussion with her on possible changes, but was content to leave the work unperformed, as if he had not intended it for the public.

So the American works fall into two groups: those tied closely to his œuvre and retrospective in style, and those where he tried out new means of expression. This division coincides with whether he was writing to commission or not (the harp *Concertino,* as a failed commission, lies between the two, but here too the "reversal" is apparent in the piece). Of course it must be said that as the possibility of irony or self-deprecation arises with the "experiments", they do not essentially display a change of style either.

Everything suggests that Dohnányi's attitude and aesthetic scale of values were unchanged, despite the obvious verdict of the critics – he seemed like a living fossil in the second half of the 20th century. But his works show that the difficulties of his American career, his isolation, and even his age, had made him reconsider whether his path was right. The responses to his doubts differ in different works, but in essence are similar. Though he could try to draw into his style new harmonic elements, composing strategies, and inspirations, there was no other way he could write than in the eclectic, retrospective style he had cultivated all his life. The duality between his doubts and his ultimate, definitive viewpoint means the American period must be seen as one of the most interesting chapters in the Dohnányi œuvre and a remarkable occurrence in 20th-century music history.

(English translation by Brian McLean)