

THE RESEARCH OF GYORGY SANDOR LIGETI'S STRING QUARTET NO.2

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Abstract - In this work, György Sandor Ligeti's music life, his own composing technique and String Quartet No.2 are studied. György Ligeti made his first composition works with Zoltan Kodaly, Pal Jardanyi and Sandor Veress in 1945-1949. He was influenced by Bela Bartok. The effects of Hungarian folk music are seen in his works. He used the musical texture as the main element of his compositions. He developed his own micropolyphony technique and pioneered the future composers. He avoided the concept of tonal and classical melody. He has extended his understanding by using microtonality or different tuning methods. Ligeti's String Quartet No.2 is very difficult to interpret. Compared to other compositions composed in the same period, it is in a very traditional style. It attracts attention with its timbral difference and texture. As a result of this research, it is aimed to make it easier to understand Ligeti's music and his second work for the string quartet.

Keywords - György Ligeti, sound mass, microtonality, string quartet.

I. LIGETI'S LIFE

Ligeti was born May 28, 1923 in Dicsoszentmarton, Transylvania, which, although it had been within the borders of Hungary before World War I, was at that time part of Romania. In 1929 his family moved to Cluj, which in 1940 would be declared by Hitler to again be part of Hungary. It was here that Ligeti received his initial education. Although Ligeti developed an interest towards music when he was very young, it was not until the age of fourteen that he began to actively pursue it by learning to play the piano. (Power, 1995, p.3)

As Ligeti progressed in his studies as a pianist he continued to compose short pieces for his own amusement. When he turned eighteen his family's intention was for him to study physics at the university, but the anti-Jewish laws that were in effect by that time made this wish practically impossible. It was decided instead that he would go to the conservatory to continue his musical training, and within a year he knew that he wanted to make composing his profession. (Griffiths, 1983, p.15)

Ligeti's teacher at the conservatory was Ferenc Farkas, and during the summers he had lessons with Pal Kadosa in Budapest. Bartok was the biggest influence upon his music at this time, and he was also interested in Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. (Griffiths, 1983, p.18) His studies were interrupted in January of 1944, however, when he was called for military service. (Power, 1995, p.3)

II. LIGETI'S MUSIC

The exploration of new sounds is an important aspect of twentieth-century music composition. One compositional method that resulted from this search for new and innovative music is constructing blocks of sound from masses of individual sound elements - elements which in themselves are not readily

distinguished aurally. From 1958 onward, György Ligeti wrote a number of works in which he employed various compositional techniques to generate sound mass. He focused on the development of textures based on clusters and dense polyphony in which harmony and rhythm, as structural elements, were destroyed and the importance of other musical elements was greatly diminished. In other works he employed "meccanico" techniques. The most characteristic features of his early compositional style are clusters: very soft, sustained groups of pitches; micropolyphony, often in the form of canons; and *meccanico* style compositions (Hoogewind, 2000, p.117).

Ligeti's significance lies in the fact that he did not imitate, but absorbed into his style of composition the most advanced techniques of the music of the twentieth century. Having rejected the compositional methods of many avant-garde composers, including serialism, aleatory, and electronic music, he set forth on a different path: the development of musical texture. Throughout his music, there remains a concern with the interplay of musical lines. Not only were the textures important, but also musical forms, the overall shape of the fabric. His greatest achievement in works of the 1960s was the realization of new sounds and of the multi-layers of electronic composition by means of traditional instruments and techniques—namely, micropolyphony and canons. Ligeti's sensitivity to the idiomatic demands of various instruments, singly or in combination, as well as the singing voice, led to innovations in tone color and brought change and development to the areas of orchestration and choral composition. His masterful works have contributed greatly to instrumental and vocal literature (Hoogewind, 2000, p.118).

Ligeti composed a significant number of chamber pieces during the 1960s as well. These include the

String Quartet No.2 (1969), the Chamber Concerto (1969) for thirteen musicians, A ventures (1963-1965), and Nouvelle Aventures (1965), both for three singers and seven instruments. Other pieces include the fluxus works *Trois Bagatelles* (1961), *Poeme Symphonique* for 100 metronomes (1962), and *Fragment* (1961), for ten instruments (Sachani,2001,p.3).

III. GYORGY LIGETI'S STRING QUARTET NO.2

Gyorgy Ligeti's String Quartet No.2 was commissioned by J.K.S. and the Siidwestfunk Baden-Baden, and composed between March and July, 1968. It is his first and, as of this writing, only work for string quartet since his departure from Hungary in 1956. The five-movement piece received its premier at Baden-Baden, West Germany on December 14,1969 by the LaSalle Quartet It has been recorded by LaSalle on the Deutsche-Grammophon label and by the Arditti Quartet on the Wergo and Sony Labels. The score is published by B. Schott's Sohne (Power,1995,p.1).

In order to display the process of change, Ligeti's music presupposes an imaginary axis designating relationships of opposition. The extreme ends of this axis represent states of simplicity and complexity. Any musical parameter can be described in terms of these oppositions, and thus the difference between any two musical states can be measured (if only in an imaginary sense) based upon where they stand on the axis. The most common transformational pattern in Ligeti's music is that which moves from a simple state to a more complex one and then back again. Taken by itself, this procedure is excessively bare, but the possibility of an infinite number of positions between the poles of opposition mentioned above gives it an additional dimension of depth. Ligeti very rarely makes use of the axis' extremities, but instead prefers states that can be described in terms of both oppositions (e.g. a dynamic level of *mp* rather than *niente*). Furthermore, the axis allows us to measure the degree to which a particular state has transformed (Power,1995,p.27).

The work consists of 2 violins, viola and violoncello. The work is remarkable with its timbral difference and texture. It consists of five sections.

1. Allegro nervoso
2. Sostenuto, molto calmo
3. Come un meccanismo di precisione
4. Presto furioso brutale, tumultuoso
5. Allegro con delicatezza

Movement I is a study in Ligeti's "splintered type" of form. Several contrasting textural states are abruptly juxtaposed with each other, establishing an expectation for disruptions, but still surprising the

listener since these changes occur at unexpected moments. (Power,1995,p.41). In the 19th meter, the chord, known as Ligeti chord, and that consists of minor 3rd - a major 2nd tone is displayed. The sound mass and the flageolets, which accelerate gradually to this accord, are repeated.

The second part is similar to a very slow moving mechanism. It reflects the slow and subconscious effect of the first part. It is observed that the chromatic sounds are added, the musical texture is completely at the forefront, and the tone is tried to be changed with tremolos. Bow techniques that are unique to 20th century were used. The third part has a mechanical structure consisting of pizzicato notes in Bartok style. Repetitive notes are in remarkable sharpness and ostinato form. It resembles Bartok's Fourth String Quartet with the use of the Bartok pizzicatos and the similarity of the structures. Repetitive notes end with *morendo* in 10th meter. The fourth part is fast. It is observed that the textures, colors and techniques used in the previous three chapters are used together in this part. The micropolyphony compositional technique takes attention. The fifth part creates contrast with the other parts. In this part, sound masses which are decorated with calm and floating timbres and consisting of chromatic and thirds are used. A rhythmic pattern similar to a Continuum is presented on the first and second violin. The microtonal structure created by flageolets in the viola and the violoncello is displayed.

CONCLUSION

Gyorgy Sandor Ligeti, one of the most important composers of 20th century music, has brought a new perspective to the texture and timber elements in music. The effects of minimalist movement on his works draw attention. He used the sound masses and the micropolyphony technique, which he developed himself. He has worked on texture, sound color and timber. The orchestra, chamber music and solo works written by these techniques reflect the Avant-garde movement. It is unclear in terms of form and has a difficult structure to analyze. Rhythm understanding in his music is mechanical and repetitive. He has lived through political problems. Despite this, his music is both intellectual and amusing. The String Quartet No.2 is a unique work that clearly reflects the music understanding of Ligeti and harmony – rhythms structure is at the forefront. Sound mass, chromatic and pizzicato notes, microtonal structure, which are often used in other works of Ligeti, are striking.

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