Introduction

Danilo Kiš fled Serbia for Hungary in 1942, learning at the tender age of seven that Hungarians were the most hospitable, industrious, religious, valiant, loyal people of all, that the Hungarian plain was the most beautiful vista in the world, and that the Hungarian language was the most ravishing in the world ('all others pale in shame beside it'). He would also discover that Hungary protected Europe from Turkish barbarians, that its history was thus the most bloody and heroic in the world, that Hungarian rulers were the most noble and civilised ever, and yet that these unimpeachable heroes had frequently been betrayed by evil foreign powers.[1] These last myths, alas, may now seem fatefully self-perpetuating. Indeed Hungary's twentieth century might be represented as a domino-like chain of disasters, each typical of the country's fate since its 1526 defeat by the Turks, yet in sum transcending all past crises. Hungary in the twentieth century was oppressed by Austria under the Habsburgs, stripped of its most cherished territories after the First World War, and taken over by German fascists during the Second World War. Then, tragically, it was absorbed into the Soviet bloc in 1949 to become a pawn in the Cold War.

Viewed in a broader perspective, a more balanced view of power relations between Hungary and its neighbours emerges rather rapidly. Contextualising the country in the post-Habsburg lands shifts attention from the country's unique and tragic fate to a more realistic portrayal of regional strife. (Had Kiš fled Hungary to Serbia, he would have heard in Serbia the mirror image of the myths he absorbed in Hungary.) Reading Hungary as a satellite of the Soviet Union is a comparable move and currently a very enticing one for musicology, as recent scholarship has potently analysed the way the cultural Cold War shaped musical thought and practice.[2] Indeed the three elements in my title can be slotted neatly into this frame: Hungary experienced the Soviet attempt to force music into slick communist propaganda;

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[1] 'The Gingerbread Heart, or Nationalism', trans. Ralph Manheim and Michael Henry Heim in Kiš 1996: 15–34, at 24–5.

[2] Following on from related projects in the visual arts, the research of Amy C. Beal, Mark Carroll and Richard Taruskin in particular has positioned modernist music and music criticism of the West within political ideologies hitherto ignored; meanwhile, the research of Peter Schmelz and Danielle Fosler-Lussier is testimony to the value of examining the intersections between political currents and musical practices in the former Soviet bloc. Beal 2000 and 2003; Carroll 2003; Taruskin 2005: 1–174; Fosler-Lussier 2001; Schmelz 2005.

the Iron Curtain ensured, moreover, that György Kurtág's celebrated status was invisible in the West; it also led György Ligeti to cut himself off from the East. In Hungary we have a model for communist homogenisation, and in Kurtág and Ligeti we have prisms through which to examine the musical and ideological East–West divide.

In fact, however, focusing on a nation complicates the polarised global picture considerably and, I suggest, usefully. Sundering the world of music along a single axis runs the risk both of essentialising musical narratives into the bombastic rivalry of superpowers, and of erasing national and regional complexities. It is instructive, for example, to observe that although writers and composers in Cold War Budapest adopted Soviet rhetoric, they nonetheless conceptualised music in ways that were bound up with long-established aspirations particular to Hungarian musical thought. Additionally, as decades of the Cold War passed, writers came to identify a leading compositional figure for their national musical life, Kurtág, who thus became an ennobled musical presence – a 'genius' for Budapest, but not for the East generally. In time Ligeti, a long-absent compatriot, re-entered national discussions, reaffirming what should really be obvious: when he became a player in the post-war avant-garde in the West, he was not only a dissident from the East, but an émigré from a particular national sphere. Émigré, genius, and nationalist discourse: these are three facets of a culture that was involved in, but not saturated by, the Cold War. Even while wary of Hungarian nationalist mythology, then, we would lose much by subsuming the country entirely into the Soviet bloc.

The main part of this book, consequently, is informed by the Cold War but consists of three nationally defined explorations. Broadest of these is an analysis of ways in which music and competing ideas about it evolved in Budapest during the period. In order to give this some historical depth, I initially set the scene in the inter-war years. Indeed several key concerns in the Cold War period are rooted in that time.[3] Thus in Chapter 1, 'After 1920', I map the era with the central power of Dohnányi, the rise of Kodály, the choral movement, the departure of Bartók and, crucially, the way the centrality of the national language in political and cultural debate could impact on musical development. My outline of this particular phenomenon is indebted to Otto Dann's theorisation of the 'invention' of national languages, in which vernaculars evolve into written languages, and can then be administered and

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[3] As Tony Judt observes, the roots of the Cold War extend at least as far back as the end of the First World War and the subsequent series of communist experiments in Europe. Judt 2005: 103. Hungary's communist government of 1919 was the first to be established after that of Russia, but lasted only 133 days. The ensuing regime ('White Terror' replacing 'Red Terror') could play on fears of communist resurgences to justify its intolerance of dissent.

policed as 'state languages'.[4] As will become clear, there was an attempt to implement an analogous process in the sphere of music. The first sections of Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6 illuminate the prime ways in which the Soviet Union's occupation effected change and reaction, how new compositional ideas were subsumed into or rejected by ingrained habits, and how shifts in global and regional political situations can be linked to musical activities and arguments.

I narrate these sections of the book in order to provide a frame against which the others (Ligeti and Kurtág) create friction. This seems a necessary step to establish a provisional basis for grasping the period, for this is clearly lacking at the moment.[5] Rather than attempting a comprehensive history, however, I offer a critical starting-point, namely a construction of what writers and musicians in Budapest expansively termed 'the Hungarian music life' (*a magyar zenei élet*), and an exploration of its relationship with institutions and events.

The aim of providing a much more specific narrative too – the meteoric rise of Kurtág – is both to reveal a highly characteristic facet of Hungarian culture more broadly, and to offer a particular insight into art under communism. Hungarian constructions of Kodály and Bartók have frequently had recourse to messianic rhetoric, and the tendency is equally evident in the reception of writers and painters: Kurtág's rise is thus representative of a pervasive trend in Hungarian thought in the twentieth century.[6] The construction of Kurtág, however, was also a product of the society that had evolved under the Soviet regime. As I discuss in Chapters 3, 4 and 6, 'Kurtág' as figure of discourse was initially a product of oppositional desire, for he was understood as resistance to the occupation. Increasingly, he was constructed as an otherworldly individual, pure, and beyond the reach of language, and yet he was also increasingly involved with mainstream organisations, and became engaged in a symbiotic relationship with official institutions and their narratives.[7]

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[4] 'The Invention of National Languages' in Blanning and Schulze 2006. I am grateful to Professor Dann for sharing his paper with me prior to publication.

[5] Kroó's book from 1975 surveying Hungarian compositional development over the preceding thirty years is the most recent study. See Kroó 1980 for the German version.

[6] Recent publications bear this out. See, for instance, Hadas 1987, a sociological analysis of the Kodály phenomenon. Peter Laki's 'The Gallows and the Altar: Poetic Criticism and Critical Poetry about Bartók in Hungary' (Laki 1995: 79–100) reveals multiple examples of the devotional spirit of 'following' Bartók. Éva Forgács addresses the critical construction of the 'national genius' in the sphere of visual arts in Hungary in Forgács 2003. András Schiff's account of the 'guru system' in Hungarian performance pedagogy is also suggestive: see Schiff 2003: 40.

[7] In the context of a Cold War study the Kurtág phenomenon gives pause for thought, for there is a distinct contradiction between communism and romantic individualist ideology. Might such romanticised constructions of artistic 'geniuses' have been part of other communist societies? I suspect that translations of the communist cult of the individual into the artistic sphere deserve

To use Ligeti as a third story in a study of Hungarian music may seem a forced move. Whether one subscribes to the rupture or the continuity narrative of his development over the 1956 watershed, there is little doubt that the music he wrote subsequently was a response to developments in Western Europe, rather than in Hungary.[8] And yet from another perspective, positioning him alongside discussions about contemporary Hungary is long overdue for, as I demonstrate in Chapter 3 below, his severance from Budapest was by no means complete. During the first three years after his departure he corresponded regularly with compatriots (both outside and inside the country). Then in the late 1960s he began what proved to be an exceptionally extensive project of public reminiscence and self-construction, and I discuss this printed material in Chapter 5. Once it is combined with the (very different) ways in which he was discussed in Budapest, we have a rich textual basis through which to examine Ligeti as Hungarian émigré.

My main sources for constructing these narratives are Hungarian music periodicals and cultural journals from 1920 to 1989, complemented by newspapers and books from the same period. During the early years of communism (1949–56) the single music periodical in Budapest, *Új Zenei Szemle* (New Music Review), was the party organ, and consequently it represented the party line alone. New journals founded in 1958 (*Muzsika*) and 1960 (*Magyar Zene* – Hungarian Music), however, reveal that the party came to take a less monolithic position at that stage: the journals included some cautious coverage of artistic developments in the West. During the 1970s *Muzsika* began to shift in tone by providing a channel for arguments about central institutional change: this style became more prominent in the 1980s. In addressing these sources I have benefited from recent work on nineteenth-century criticism, not only drawing from research into the social construction of musical meaning and value (as in DeNora's work on Beethoven), but also more recent explorations of how music affords – and may cater to – particular modes of appreciation (as in Gooley's work on Liszt).[9]

more attention than they have yet received. The term 'genius' was not used of Kurtág until 1982 (see Kroó 1982b, and also Tibor Tallián's remarks in Tallián and Ujházy 1987: 47), indeed it would have jarred with official printed vocabulary prior to that. Nonetheless there are many links to be made with the romantic genius construct, and my own understanding of this benefited from Tia DeNora's groundbreaking sociological study of Beethoven in Vienna. See DeNora 1995.

[8] The key works in debates about Ligeti's relation to his Hungarian past are Dibelius 1994; Friedemann Sallis '1950 – Un tournant décisif pour György Ligeti?' in Albèra (ed.) 1995: 14–27; Sallis 1996, and Pierre Michel's 'Die Sechs Bagatellen für Bläserquintett von György Ligeti und ihre musikalische Substanz im Vergleich mit Musica ricercata und seinen Werken der folgenden Perioden' in Fricke, Frobenius, Konrad and Schmitt (eds.) 1999: 155–61.

[9] DeNora 1995; Gooley 2004.

I have also drawn on less readily available sources to thicken out the picture that published texts provide. Minutes from meetings of the Hungarian Musicians' Union (housed at the Hungarian National Archive and the Hungarian Music Council) offer traces of the practical enactment of music policy between 1949 and 1956 in less than predictable ways. Sketches in the György Kurtág Collection and letters in the György Ligeti and Sándor Veress Collections of the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel have also provided material through which to move beyond the well-established narratives about Ligeti and Kurtág. Whenever possible I have also interviewed musicians and writers in Budapest, and reference these where drawing on them directly.

While I base much of the book on sociological observations and discourse analysis, aiming to construct the social fabrics that shaped music and the ways in which it was experienced, I am nonetheless concerned to reconstruct some of the intractable ways in which this music could have been experienced too. Despite current scholarly suspicion of the aesthetic sphere, if we are seriously interested in understanding music as a part of history, it is not sufficient to point out its political context, mediated political suggestiveness, or ready-textualised political messages alone. Rather, it seems important to parallel those projects with an attempt to find dimensions of it that are resistant to that.

To this end, I have additionally drawn attention to the way music by both Kurtág and Ligeti is not only very multivalent (and thus difficult to pin down with specific political readings), but also resistant to the conceptual in general as if in a *deliberately* engineered strategy. Needing a broad concept to characterise this feature, I draw on 'presence', thanks partly to a recent essay by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. Gumbrecht's theorisation reaches back to Aristotle and draws on a range of writers including Heidegger, Karl Heinz Bohrer, Jean-Luc Nancy and Gianni Vattimo in order to challenge the current dominance of metaphysical hermeneutics in cultural criticism.[10] His primary argument is that we should consider vacillating between historical interpretation and presence 'moments'. We should, he argues, embrace – not evade – the fact that we can be overwhelmed by certain experiences in ways that momentarily prevent us from conceptualising and historicising them.

The point of Gumbrecht's argument for me is not only that it reminds us of the unpredictable and unstable effects of musical events in the past, but also that it can be harnessed to problematise what may seem highly persuasive musical readings. As is entirely obvious, but often tacitly avoided, listening

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[10] Gumbrecht 2004.

to music may impact substantially on our construction of its history: there is an implicit reciprocity between reading texts, listening and writing. I am particularly resistant to the implications of the claim by Taruskin in the context of Shostakovich's Symphony no. 5 that if one rejects a certain type of narrative about the work, one is also 'rejecting the music outright'.[11] Do we wish to graft meanings onto music permanently? Is it even possible? I suggest that – fortunately – it is not and, especially in the explicitly political field of 'Cold War Studies', it may be important not to harden up our interpretations too resolutely. Thus, and as a deliberately provocative step, at certain moments in Chapter 3 I supply an alternative and more speculative historical suggestion by invoking what I term the 'presence' suggested by Ligeti's music. In Chapter 4 I use 'presence' to explore (and complicate) the dynamics of Kurtág's composing and reception in Budapest.

Rather than the writing of Gumbrecht, however, it is Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy of presence that I draw on directly. Nancy has used presence to theorise qualities of experience that are essentially uncapturable, events that are (always already) over. His most salient example is Birth, for the happening of birth also contains its ending; but Death is another key 'presence moment', for it is 'always already past'.[12] Nancy reflects on these moments as means through which to approach art's evocation of transient and affecting happenings, thereby drawing us away from textual explication of artworks towards the continuing recollection that artworks themselves can intrude on us as illusive (and always past) events. Using laughter (and problems of 'representing' it) as exemplary, he says:

> Laughter always bursts – and loses itself in peals. As soon as it bursts out, it is lost to all appropriation, to all presentation. This loss is neither funny nor sad; it is not serious, and it is not a joke. We always *make* too much of laughter, we overload it with meaning or nonsense, we take it to the point of tears or to the revelation of nothingness . . . Let's not make too much of it. If possible, let's let it present – lose – itself.[13]

It seems to me that this description of laughter is something to keep in mind when addressing certain music – even when historicising that music. Of course, our experience is mediated by our social conditions (as is that of past listeners). But music nonetheless can make an inexplicable impression. It can make skin creep, eyes prick, cause shivering, excitement, laughter, or embarrassment. And it is over: it will not be heard in exactly the same way again.

[11] Taruskin 1997: 519.   [12] 'Identity and Trembling' in Nancy 1993: 9–36, at 13.
[13] 'Laughter, Presence' in Nancy 1993: 368–92, at 368.

Nancy's discussion of presence is sufficiently broad to offer a space through which to create friction between quite disparate musical experiences. One can hardly claim similarity between the music of Ligeti and Kurtág, and yet they seem to me to invite us to engage with two sides of the same coin. Ligeti's music is often heard as a highly physical presence. As noted in analytical literature, it often seems to 'become present' by delineating an 'emergence' (rather than a clearly established beginning) and a 'dissolution' (rather than a conclusive ending). The music opens with a very quiet, extended note that expands progressively in dynamic and is joined by other notes; it closes in a reversal of the process: *Lontano* (1967) is perhaps the archetype for this 'emergence–dissolution' model. To take one example from the many attempts to grasp this music's quality of 'presentification', I quote Britta Sweers on a section within *Lontano*:

> When the micropolyphony evolves into a homophonic surface, the constitution of the sound shifts from indistinctness to an increasing presence and clarity until it seems to stand there right in front of the listener.[14]

Volumina (1961–2, rev. 1966) for organ may serve as an even better illustration. It seems almost symbolic that its title coincides with Hans-Georg Gadamer's word for the non-conceptual dimension of poetry: 'volume'.[15] The listener experiences this 'volume' not just as something 'right in front', but as pressing from all around, especially if that listener is in a church, where the organ is frequently invisible. The term 'sound mass' is particularly apposite not just because of its evocation of indistinct density, but because 'mass' also suggests that sound develops weight, pushing into the body of the listener. Something seems to 'arrive', heavily, and then sweep away from us and back to us in various different guises and capacities for fifteen minutes.

Kurtág's musical presence, on the other hand, is primarily a highly spiritualised mode of performance and interpretation. Indeed a historical and romantic notion of presence may explain aspects of his music that are otherwise baffling. The first piece in his collection of piano miniatures, '12 Microludes' (part of *Játékok* (Games) Volume II, 1973–8), consists of a middle C (a breve), followed by a chord of the same C and its neighbouring B and D (a crotchet, with a staccato marking and a horizontal line above it), followed by a pause mark. Beneath the C, there is also a crescendo

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[14] Britta Sweers, 'Raum und Zeit' in Engelbrecht, Max and Sweers 1997: 67–88, at 78. The reference is to a section beginning in bar 41. 'Presence' is translated from 'Präsenz', 'constitution of sound, from 'Klanggebilde'.

[15] Referred to in Gumbrecht 2005: 64–5 and 107. Gumbrecht quotes from Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Hermeneutik, Ästhetik, Praktische Philosophie*, ed. Carsten Dutt (Heidelberg 2000), 63.

marking, which, approximately two thirds of the way into the C, is replaced by a decrescendo. In other words, the pianist holding the already struck note is requested to make it expand in volume, before allowing it to decay. As Halász puts it,

> The dynamic stipulation is not a technical instruction, but a demand that the performer who has an adequate strength of concentration should conjure up the illusion intellectually.[16]

Halász goes on to quote Kurtág's own words about his first 'Microlude' to demonstrate that his thinking is basic to the Western classical tradition, for it hinges on 'opening', 'closing', 'tension' and 'release'. Halász argues that Kurtág's music weaves that tradition further because, although its sonorities are novel, they evoke 'traditional musical communication'. Indeed the conundrum of the 'Microlude' and the remarks of Kurtág – but also the claims of Halász – bespeak, even construct, that tradition. The construction involves music's ostensible power to mysteriously effect sensations and elevate the spirit, combined with the wager that this power lies beyond the materiality of the notes on the page that are but codes for something intractable, 'beyond'. This is the 'Real Presence' of George Steiner.[17]

These presences oppose Ligeti and Kurtág diametrically: one is an illusion of physicality, while the other is an attempt to canonise, a romanticisation of music's immateriality. Yet Speers' and Halász's commentaries share something: they are engaged with the 'event' character of music, they have an explicit concern with the emergence and dissolution of the sounding reality, its 'presence – loss'. Both make explicit the sonorous intransigence that is music, the sonorous intransigence that emerges within a world of concepts, can be grasped with new concepts and yet – importantly – does not contain any concepts of its own, and may affect us in ways that we find hard to conceptualise. They provide enticing ways of taking musical sounds seriously.

Taking sounds quite this seriously may seem to rub history up the wrong way. In part, though, I do it here as a component of historical narrative. The move should help us lend a sympathetic ear to Ligeti's fiery insistence that while music reflects its social environment and can be made into a tool, on another plane, and *additionally*, it is 'of a region which lies elsewhere'.[18] One cannot entirely detach this resoluteness from the years Ligeti spent in a regime where music's alleged 'meanings' and political programmes were discussed with so much dogma and so little sophistication. To that extent

[16] Halász 1995: 172.   [17] 'Real Presences', in Steiner 1996: 20–39.   [18] Ligeti 1978a: 22.

his striving for the 'elsewhere' is rooted in Hungarian history. An admission of music's intransigence also opens us up more generously to the aestheticist critical discourses of Budapest I discuss in Chapters 4 and 6. By examining the ways in which music's 'elsewhere' was constructed, we can understand how desirable it was for some to believe in its remoteness; moreover, even while claims about being moved 'beyond words' by music are a function of ideology, they may not be *purely rhetorical*.[19] Language mediates listeners' senses and offers us a cipher for their time and place; but those listeners opened themselves up to being moved and touched by music.

Ultimately, though, I seek to confront the (usually tacitly buried) fact that no matter how hard we desire to imagine a past world of ideologically mediated listening, we are embedded in our own. I do want to 'make sense' – to borrow Bernard Williams' terms – of the musical traces of the past by placing them in a historical narrative.[20] Yet I also accept the thought that my placings are provisional, something that the illusiveness of musical presence – paradoxically – can make particularly tangible.

In my Epilogue I take another, equally sceptical, glance at my histories, reflecting back from a rather more distanced and detached perspective. All these arguments have their own ephemerality: I let them 'present – lose' themselves here.

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[19] In making this statement I am not judging the ideology of the past, but drawing on the neutrality with which Geertzian anthropology reads ideology as an operative system that structures meaning and – by extension – mediates feelings, understandings, and behaviour. See Geertz 1973.
[20] Williams 2003: 233–70.

PART I