

## **THE FERENC LÁSZLÓ SCHOOL OF MUSICOLOGY. PERENNIAL LESSONS AND TESTIMONIES**

Review

**IULIA MOGOȘAN, Prof. Ph. D.**

College of Music "Sigismund Toduță", Cluj-Napoca, Romania

The passing of Professor Ferenc László left a void in Romanian musicology. Not only in the science of music and music historiography, but also in the attachment felt by his disciples, friends, and 'colleagues of the guild' (as he liked to call them), who are now left painfully bereft of his guidance. Professor László, Transylvania's most competent musical historian, passed away 10 years ago, having *inter alia* founded the first Mozart Society of the Eastern European bloc in Romania *avant la lettre*, resorting to the weaponry of diplomacy and etiquette to instil and maintain a cultural dialogue in true European spirit. Grade I scientific researcher Dr Elena-Maria Șorban's initiative to produce a collection of testimonials exceeds its initial limits –



namely, to confirm the existence of a "Ferenc László School of Musicology". *The Ferenc László School of Musicology. Perennial Lessons and Testimonies* (2020), published by Editura Muzicală in Bucharest, not only offers 'a mosaic of mirrors, in which each element reflects a portrait of the Professor', but also reveals that which the Professor himself appreciated most in each of his disciples, their development over the last 10 years, and their confident and prolific growth.

The volume sets off with a candid and heartfelt exposé of the foundational idea underpinning the book – namely, a set of inspiring questions from the editor to

the contributors who wished to pay tribute to their mentor about matters such as the relationship between his professional and personal sides, his choice of research topics, the support he gave to young performers or musicologists – as well as the professional development of his disciples during the past decade. These contributions are published in their original versions in Romanian, Hungarian, German and English, preceded by useful summaries in Romanian that aid their accessibility. The contributors' submissions dedicated to the teacher, the erudite *Kulturmensch* and musicologist Ferenc László, are preceded by two texts published during his lifetime, laying out his credo on Romanian musicology. These are laced with the strict criticism like only a loving parent could give, along with sound, hands-on advice addressed to the younger generation. The large number of contributions to this musicological commemoration (44 articles and a musical tribute by composer György Kurtág) does not allow for an in-depth presentation of each text. Thus, instead of aligning the ideas in order of publication in the book (a chronological order of providential meetings or collaborations with Professor Ferenc László), we chose to highlight the 'red threads' that run through the contributions, both to avoid repetition and to provide a summary upon reading the volume.

Ferenc László seems to have followed the advice of great sages and school founders, namely that 'the best school is the one in which the apprentice also teaches the master.' (N. Iorga) Most contributors refer to him as 'The Professor' (spelled with a capital letter), as students coming to his home on Voltaire Street not only received informed, pertinent and guiding answers to their questions, but also the warmth of the man beyond the specialist. The Professor's suggestions surprise with their boldness, as he pushes young people to educate themselves and dare to act like professionals. Whilst still a pupil of the Cluj Music High School, Dan Vlăduţiu – currently an Emeritus Professor of Internal Medicine at the "Iuliu Haţieganu" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Cluj – was encouraged to write music criticism about the concerts he attended. The Professor also asked Gabriella Kulcsár – musicologist, music critic; piano and music teacher at present – to accompany him on the piano *prima vista*, as he was her chamber music teacher playing the flute at the time. The famous 'Mozart Circle' not only inspired young people's interest in the works of Mozart, but also encouraged the responsibility and self-discipline of students that ensues from taking on the role of adjudicator of peers. Through these innovative challenges, the Professor trusted and supported the youth under his guidance more than any pedagogical concepts would have done. He knew how to approach people – young people in particular – and he maintained a naïve and unbridled curiosity which he instilled in others.

In this collection young musicologists will find a considerable amount of hands-on, useful and still-valid advice that they will not find elsewhere: the need to

ultra-specialize in at least two different fields; the moral obligation to be as demanding as possible with texts sent to print; the usefulness of texts submitted for publication being checked by other musicologists or specialists in the topic; the indispensable importance of training in university centres others than those in Romania; and many more.

Professor László's human side shines through all the submissions, which recall his 'gentleness,' 'generosity,' 'passion,' 'nobility,' and is directly reflected in the 'superb arching of the written text, which smiles' (Dora Cojocar). But it is precisely one's sense of self – assuming one's own individuality – that Ferenc László emphasizes is essential to a practicing musicologist, with all their flaws and strengths. The assumption of one's own identity inevitably leads to the transmission of the persuasive message, 'from man to man.' As the Professor said, 'when you write musicology, look directly into the eyes of your reader, so openly and intensely that he too can see the man behind your eyes.'

Hungarian-born into pluri-ethnic Transylvania, Ferenc László was married to cellist and viola da gamba player Ilse László-Herbert, an Early Music specialist; he was an instrumentalist whose passion for music also manifested in musicology; he was a professor of chamber music and a spiritual guide for musicologists. These roles still shine through his journalistic, musicological, teaching and mentoring efforts, as well as his organisational and artistic conception of cultural events – thus reflecting the symbiosis between the life that he lived and the legacy full of life that he left behind.

Given his specialization in the musical historiography of Transylvania, Ferenc László is appropriately described as *Homo transylvanicus* by his disciple Ursula Philippi. He tirelessly sought and promoted dialogue between the three main cultures of Transylvania (Romanian, Hungarian and German) in the spirit of conviviality, reiterated here by Ladislau Csendes. Continuous engagement between these cultures long preceded the concept of European spirit, which was promoted in Romania in the third millennium only. Helmut Loos, Professor of Musicology at the University of Leipzig, points out that Ferenc László not only supported musical life in Romania, but also initiated European cultural dialogue by co-founding the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für die Musikgeschichte in Mittel- und Osteuropa* (Working Group for Music History in Central and Eastern Europe), taking the concept of conviviality to a higher level. Ferenc László is therefore *Homo europaeus* as much as he is *Homo transylvanicus*. The European spirit was manifest in Transylvania for centuries *in nuce*, in 'the fruitful meeting of diversities, antagonisms, competitions, and complementarities' (Edgar Morin). Serving the concept of integrative local culture, Ferenc László took it upon himself to be a catalyst for action: 'He launched an idea, but did not monopolise it. Instead, he found people who would develop it, identified likeminded colleagues and encouraged them to create, whilst sharing his

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professional and human knowledge with them' (Valentina Sandu-Dediu). The irreversible transformation that the Professor put in motion is honoured by the gratitude of all those who have drunk from 'pure sources only' under his guidance. To use the metaphor of the man that Ferenc László dedicated no less than 13 volumes to, the 'sown seeds' that have come to fruition have crossed 'Bartók's bridge.'

*English version by Eva László-Herbert*