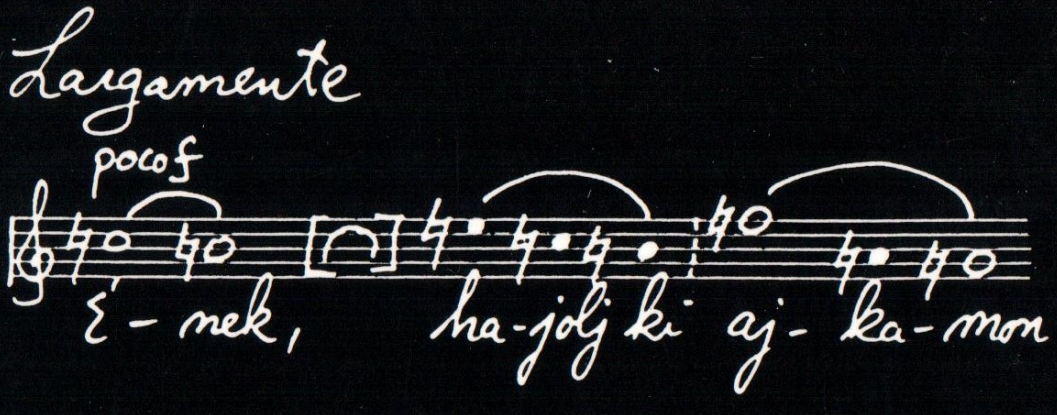
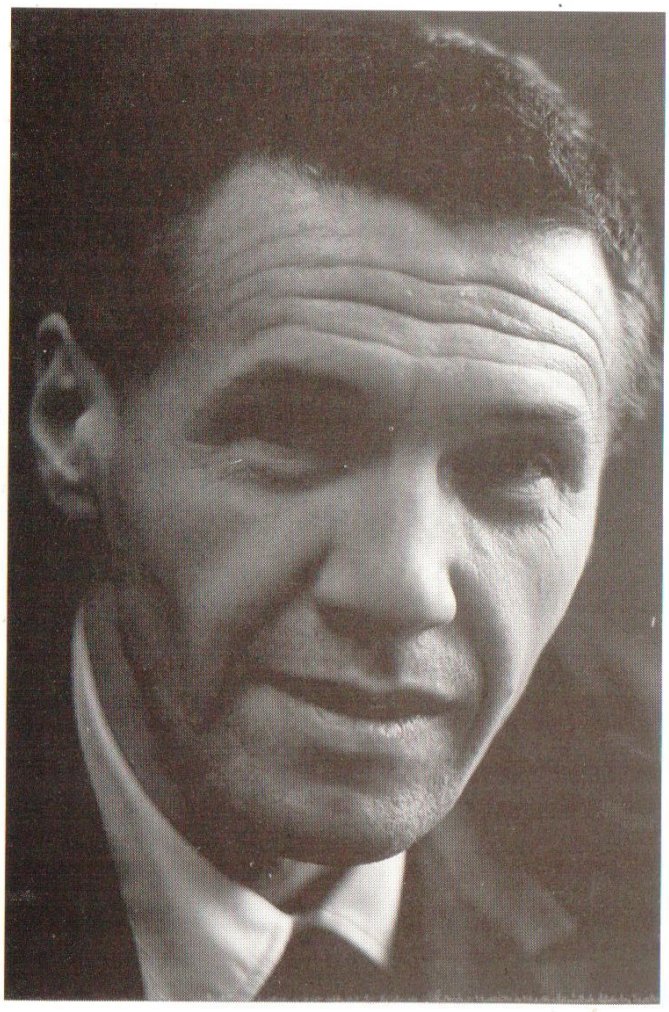
HUNGARIAN COMPOSERS – 3

Péter Halász

György Kurtág



MAGUS PUBLISHING



Portrait, 1960s
(Photograph by Sándor Nagygyörgy)

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György Kurtág
by Péter Halász

Translated by Peter Woodward
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György Kurtág
(b.1926)

György Kurtág can be ranked alongside György Ligeti as one of the most widely known, and frequently performed, contemporary Hungarian composers. His music, which has achieved worldwide recognition since the 1980s, has intrigued audiences with its enigmatic conciseness and unprecedented powers of expression. Kurtág has created a uniquely individual sound through the synthesis of three elements – the experiments of the avant-garde composers, his Hungarian musical inheritance, and many strands from the music of previous centuries. In spite of his refusal to court popularity his music speaks to audiences at the end of the twentieth century with a directness which can only be compared to that of Bartók in the first half of the century.

Student Years

György Kurtág was born on 19 February 1926 in the Romanian town of Lugoj (formerly known by its Hungarian name of Lugos). He began the formal study of music in Temesvár (Timişoara), where from 1940 he studied piano with Magda Kardos and composition with Max Eisikovits. In 1946 he continued his studies at the Music Academy in Budapest where he studied piano with Pál Kadosa, and in 1951 was awarded his degree. His composition teachers were Sándor Veress (1946-1948) and Ferenc Farkas (1948-1955). During this time he also studied chamber music with Leó Weiner. Kurtág came under many important influences in the stimulating environment of the Music Academy. He attended lectures on folk music given by Zoltán Kodály, took part in the choir conducted by Jenő Ádám,

and benefited in particular from Bence Szabolcsi's music history classes and Ernő Lendvai's analyses of Bartók's music. Kurtág formed a close friendship with his fellow student György Ligeti, and after their first meeting he looked upon him as his "spiritual mentor".This friendship, which continued even after Ligeti emigrated in 1956, remains a continual source of stimulation for Kurtág.

In 1947 Kurtág married the pianist Márta Kinszker, a contemporary of his at the Academy. Márta had a deep understanding of her husband's music and proved to be a dedicated and persuasive performer. Their son, also named György, was born in 1954, and like his father has become a composer. Since 1979 he has lived in France.

Kurtág's earliest compositions show the influence of Bartók. The result of this choice of role-model can be felt most strongly in the *Viola Concerto*, which gained Kurtág both his degree and the Erkel Prize, named after Ferenc Erkel, a 19th-century Hungarian opera composer. The Bartókian traits in the *Viola Concerto* are i) the use of octotonic scales, ii) the juxtaposition of keys according to the Axis System of Lendvai, and iii) rhythmic and scoring characteristics. In later years when looking back on his student work Kurtág said: "It is clear today what features of my *Viola Concerto* are outmoded. In those days I regarded them as novel and daring."[1]

In the spring of 1957 Kurtág went to Paris, originally planning to emigrate. During the course of the following year he was to experience events that led to the development of his own individual voice and to his first mature creative period. He attended composition classes given by Darius Milhaud and Olivier Messiaen. Milhaud's liberal approach was a revelation to Kurtág, after the traditional and strict teaching of the Budapest Academy. Messiaen's methods of rhythmic organisation proved to be of particular interest. Most important of all, however, was the contribution made by a study of the music of the Second Viennese School, little of which was available in Hungary. In particular the scores of Webern's music and a close study of Hanns Jelinek's book "Anleitung zur Zwölftonkomposition" proved to be valuable in widening his horizons, and enabling Kurtág to become acquainted with the possibilities of free atonality and the dodecaphonic system.

Ultimately his discussions with the psychologist Marianne

Stein were even more important, for out of these sometimes turbulent, informal conversations developed one of the important principles of Kurtág's musical thought processes: the search for the most concise and economical ways of expression. Marianne Stein formulated a compositional maxim: "Combine no more than two sounds." During his months in Paris Kurtág wrote several piano pieces, which around 1960 developed into *Eight Piano Pieces* Op. 3 and were evidence of his striving for the utmost economy of expression. Over and above the musical value of his stay in France he learnt a lesson that was to be crucial for the remainder of his life: "I returned home in the knowledge that I now know what my task will be, and that outward circumstances cannot influence what is now happening to me."[2]

On the way home from Paris, in the spring of 1958, Kurtág stopped for a few days in Cologne. There he heard a recording of Karlheinz Stockhausen's "Gruppen", as well as a recently composed piece of electronic music by Ligeti. These two works helped in the formulation of his aesthetic principles: "The intensity and directness of expression, the fine balance between humour and tragedy appeared unsurpassable to me. ... On returning to Hungary ... I began a 'new chapter' with my Op. 1 – I vowed that I would strive to produce in my own way something similar to that I experienced in Cologne when listening to 'Artikulation'."[3]

The First Decade (1959-1968)
(The Development of a Personal Style)

During the ten years following his return from Paris Kurtág composed the first works that can be said to indicate the development of a personal voice. First there appeared a set of instrumental pieces, and then, between 1963 and 1968, a "concerto" for soprano and piano to texts by a sixteenth-century Hungarian literary preacher, *Bornemisza Péter mondásai* (The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza) Op. 7. As György Kroó remarked in 1970: "Kurtág is the only Hungarian composer over forty for whom music is a language, not merely a sound or a seeking for effect. He is the only one who during the last ten years has written not merely his ideas but his anguishes and emotions as a new chapter in the history of his nation's music."[4]

In the first works of this period Kurtág remains, on the whole, true to the traditional techniques of the time as regards instrumentation, a large amount of dissonance, and controlled rhythms. There are, however, several indicators that are relevant for the future. Among them are his use of chamber combinations, music built up from short or very short pieces, the breaking away from traditional forms of thematic development, and here and there the use of free, almost improvisatory rhythms. The influence of Bartók, Webern and Stravinsky is usually quoted as the source of this new style, for it was from a close study of Bartók's scores that he learned about symmetrical structures, from the Viennese master about conciseness and brevity of expression, and from the Russian composer about timbre and tone colour.[5] From the integration of these influences Kurtág developed an individual voice and, without doubt, a new way of composing.

The works that he wrote during this period (scarcely more than an hour of music) ensured his unique position in the musical life of Hungary. A devoted performing group, committed to a deep study of his music, was formed around him.[6] His work as a tutor at the Bartók Music School in Budapest (1958-1963) and as a musical coach employed by the concert agency National Philharmonia (1960-1968) enabled him to evolve his own ideas about teaching methods, which he was able to develop further after 1968 in his work as Professor of Chamber Music at the Budapest Music Academy. These responsibilities helped him to maintain continuous contact with masterpieces of music history and to refine a unique method which was concerned with all the smallest details of interpretation.

The first composition in this "new chapter" of Kurtág's creative life was the *String Quartet* Op. 1, which was completed in 1959. It is not merely its chronological order that makes this work a significant milestone, but also its extensive (by Kurtág's standards) character and rigid construction. The work has six movements, rather similar to Bartók's "bridge form", but without a central turning point, in which each pair of movements reveals characteristic relationships: The closing movement sums up all that has gone before and even quotes from the opening movement. The second and fifth movements use ostinato techniques, whilst the two inner movements are reminiscent of the contrast
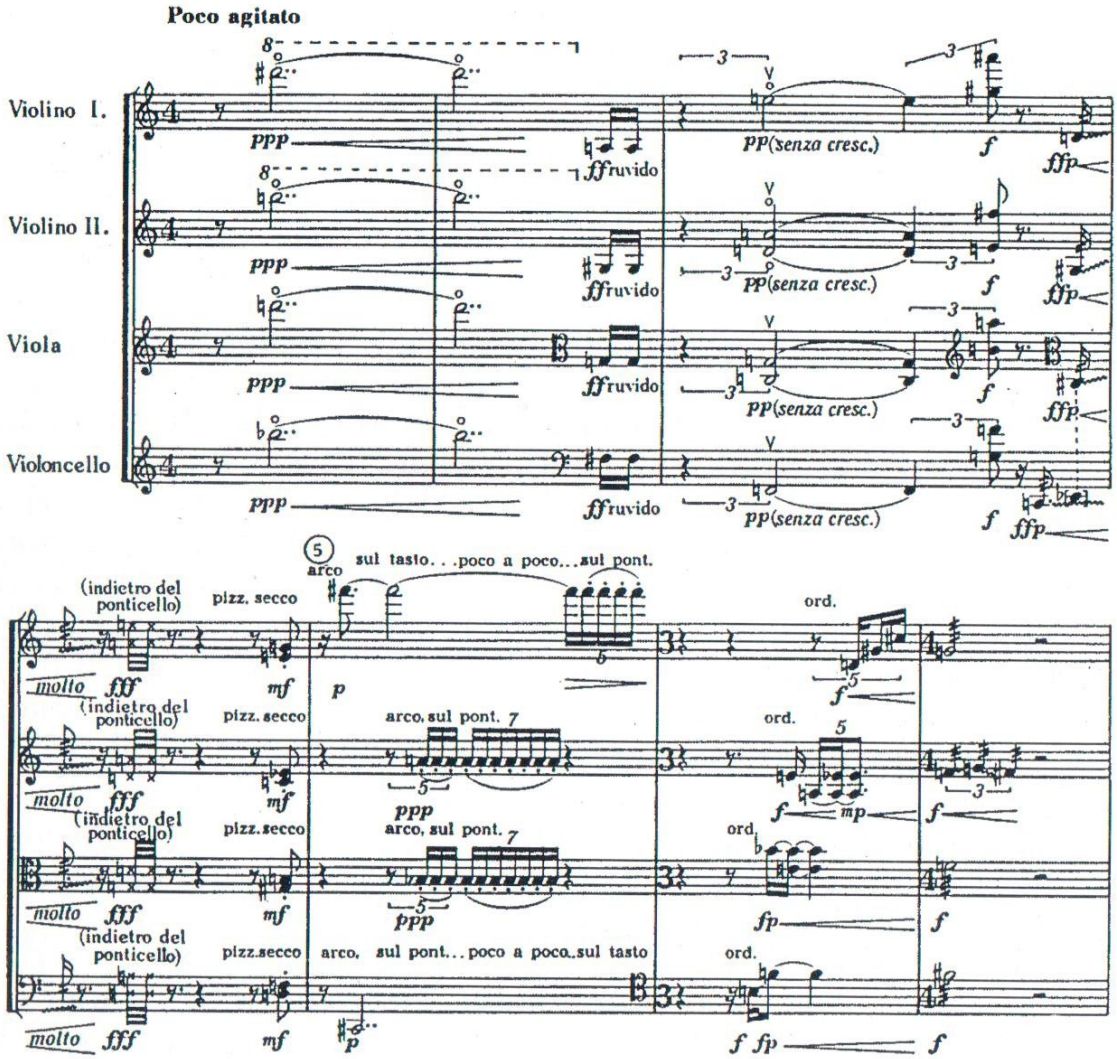
between a slow movement and a scherzo. The movements have the brevity and precision of Webern. However, the lasting influence of the classical tradition is still noticeable, in that a scherzo and a slow movement occur also in the *Wind Quintet* Op. 2, whilst in the *Eight Duos* Op. 4 and *Jelek* (Signs) Op. 5 Kurtág writes slowly unfolding slow movements and fast finales. Instead of the traditional four movement sonata form, series of short movements with similar characters fulfil the function of the individual movements. This method of structuring a work is reminiscent of *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza* where 24 short movements are combined to form four larger sections. *Vallomás* (Confession) suggests an opening movement, *Bűn* (Sin) a scherzo, *Halál* (Death) a slow movement, and *Tavasz* (Spring) a finale.

Kurtág regards the first bars of the *String Quartet* as a summary of his compositional techniques, so it is worth examining them in more detail (see Example 1, on p.8). The meticulous structure and overall arch-form are in the spirit of the classical/romantic tradition, but what is missing is that essential musical device – a theme. Instead we find isolated, individual "points" of sound, all differing in pitch, rhythm and character. They form refined and transparent textures, and with a single sound can portray meaning. Scarcely audible harmonics are followed by a harsh chromatic chord. This is succeeded by a tower of bare fifths, which in its turn is interrupted by a new dense, but widely spaced chord. After a series of glissandi, pizzicati and quickly repeated sounds, a more tuneful, short musical sigh closes the section. The rhythm of these few bars is equally varied, and the dynamic markings range from *ppp* to *fff*. All the various sound effects to be obtained from string instruments are found in this short section. In the space of barely 30 seconds we hear some ten different musical effects which are linked with, but also contrast with, one another. Each, however, is full of meaning. At the same time a more thorough analysis of the organisation of this apparently random sequence of events reveals a strict, almost serial system of working.

Although the score does not contain a literary quote it nevertheless has a programmatic element. The composer revealed that he had wanted to preface the work with the words of Tudor Arghezi: "I have caused a new beauty and worth to rise from mould, suppurating wounds and mud".[7] That art should be created through humiliation and self-torture has been a central

belief for Kurtág. It enables us to understand his striving for the latent possibilities hidden in the most simple musical procedures. There is a paradox at the centre of his output: How is it possible to elevate a work to its highest level of expression using the simplest compositional devices?

Succeeding instrumental works carried on along the route taken by the *String Quartet*, but there were indications of new developments that went hand in hand with increasing economy and extreme condensation of Kurtág's musical ideas. The *Wind Quintet* Op. 2 has shorter movements and a more simple structure than the *String Quartet*. Various innovations are discernible,



Example 1. String Quartet Op. 1, 1st movement, bars 1-7

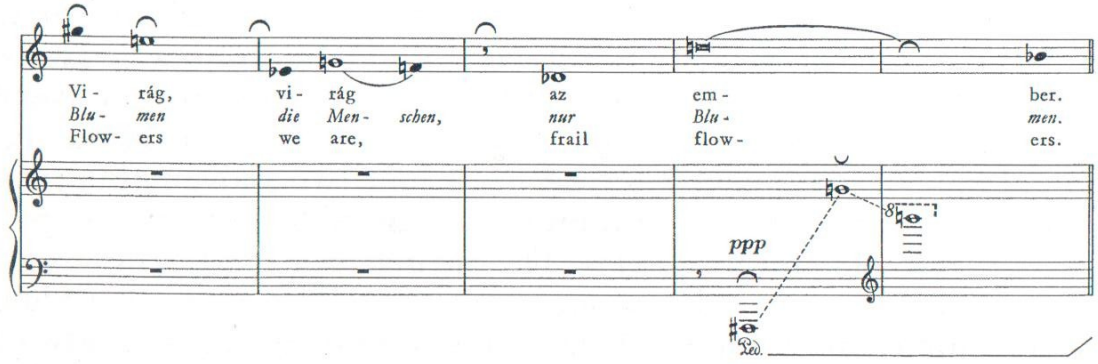
such as the rhythmical freedom from the tyranny of the bar line in the second and eighth movements, and the experiment with aleatoric techniques in the fifth movement. Some movements of *Eight Piano Pieces* Op. 3 were the outcome of his work in Paris with Marianne Stein. Her dictum "Combine no more than two sounds" was realised to an extent in the first movements, which begin on *C* and close on *C sharp*. The fifth and eighth movements bear the influence of Stockhausen's "Piano Pieces", which Kurtág held in high esteem. The next work, *Eight Duos* Op. 4, shows a new departure in instrumentation – the combination of violin and cimbalom. These two instruments were to play an important role in Kurtág's later works, but it was in these duos that he purported to have captured the "essence" of the cimbalom. He did not write for it in the traditional Hungarian manner but in a way reminiscent of Webern's short studies. In these duos we become increasingly aware of the characteristic "soundscape" of Kurtág. His use of trills, muted tremolos, percussive sounds, his imaginative use of ostinato techniques – all indicate that a new musical language is being developed. The composer was aware of the dangers of self-repetition, and the last of his early instrumental works *Cinque merrycate* Op. 6 for guitar remained unpublished. Ten years later he used just two movements in a new context, in *Szálkák* (Splinters) Op 6c and d.

Bornemisza Péter mondásai (The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza) Op. 7 for soprano and piano already lay claim to be Kurtág's most important work so far. It was written after a study of Heinrich Schütz' sacred concertos, and from twenty-four short movements he creates a cycle of almost forty minutes duration. The text is powerful, and has surprisingly modern psychological overtones, which allow the composer many opportunities for madrigalian "word-painting" and directness of expression. As György Kroó commented: "Kurtág's music is proof that we have a creative genius in our midst."[8]

It is worth noting the links that exist with the music of previous centuries in the complex web of sound that constitutes *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza*.[9] Echoes of Beethoven are discernible in the large-scale organisation of the opening movement, and of Monteverdi in the agitated *concitato*-style writing. Bach is brought to mind in the dense polyphony of the piano accompaniment, as is the tradition of the German Lieder, baroque cantatas

or ancient dirges in the voice part. Naturally Kurtág's immediate predecessors, Webern and Bartók, also make their influence felt.

In the slow movement, *Halál* (Death), a tone-symbol appears which later became a feature of Kurtág's work. The text of this part is a simple sentence, *"Virág az ember"* (Flowers we are). These few words distil the essence of man's helplessness in the face of mortality, and at the same time the beauty of maintaining his life. The first four melodic sounds quote the pair of thirds as symbols of purity from the opening chord of the *String Quartet*. The rhythmic notation is noteworthy in that exact time values are not indicated, only an approximation of the relationship between long and short notes. Details of the interpretation are left to the performer. This movement indicates that Kurtág was gradually moving away from a belief in strict structural procedures and saw the composer's task as creating less well-defined musical gestures with a strong irradiation.



Example 2. The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza Op. 7, Part III Death, 3rd movement

The world première of *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza* took place on 5 September 1968, as part of the Darmstadt Festival. Although some of Kurtág's music had been heard before at Darmstadt, and Westdeutscher Rundfunk had recorded various pieces, international recognition remained non-existent. For an audience entranced by the music of Stockhausen Kurtág's music proved to be too modern, and at the same time too traditional.[10]

Second Decade (1969-1978) (Transitional Years, *Játékok* and Beyond)

After *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza* Kurtág entered a period of crisis. In five years he completed just two vocal compositions. It seems that in addition to periods of inspired creativity Kurtág also experiences periods of involuntary cessation in the creative process. We are entering a very personal area when we discuss the self-torment of such unproductive years, but crises such as this are an inevitable element in the struggle towards a mature style.

Kurtág really mastered the art of song-writing for the first time, in one of the two works mentioned above, *Egy téli alkony emlékére* (In Memory of a Winter Sunset) Op. 8, which consists of four fragments to poems by Pál Gulyás. As an accompanying instrument to the solo voice he used not the "neutral" piano, but the combination of violin and cimbalom that he had already used in his *Eight Duos.*[11] The use of this particular timbre forged a common link between the two works. The first and third songs quote respectively from the last and third movements of *Duos*, whilst the tormented ostinato in the final song is a portent of the opening piece in *Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Troussova* Op. 17. In the other vocal cycle of this period, *Four Capriccios* Op. 9, István Bálint's poems with their dry humour, sometimes verging on the absurd, are much more akin to Kurtág's own personality. The colourful instrumental accompaniment, consisting of wind and string quintets, harp, celesta, piano and percussion was an innovation for Kurtág, and he treated it using all the timbres that such a combination offered.[12]

The largest, but most frustrating, undertaking during this period was the composition of *24 Antiphonae* which Kurtág worked on whilst he was on a DAAD scholarship in West Berlin in 1970-71. He said later about the reasons for the trouble he experienced with this work: "I had definite ideas about two of my works, but both remained unfinished. One of them was the *24 Antiphonae* – I worked on them in Berlin in 1971, and have only finished three to date. ... It appears that if one knows too much about a certain work the creative process does not flow – at least that's the case with me."[13] It seems a touch ironic that whilst in this period of crisis Kurtág was awarded the highest Hungarian state honour for culture, the Kossuth Prize.

A resolution of the predicament came about in 1973. Kurtág recalls it thus: "A piano teacher by the name of Marianne Teöke asked me to write a few pieces for her collection of pedagogic pieces. ... Within a short space of time I had written almost 200 pieces. Before this I had written nothing for three years."[14] After this fortuitous beginning, this series of pieces, entitled *Játékok* (Plays and Games), has increased to become a collection of over 300 short items. Presumably the weight of his creative impasse was taken off Kurtág's shoulders by the idea that these teaching pieces did not represent "real composing". It is worthy of note that *Játékok* is the first mature work that does not have an opus number, i.e. it cannot be counted as a "work of art". Although not regarded as "real compositions" they enabled the composer to explore all the possibilities of extreme brevity and conciseness of form.

To a degree *Játékok* follows in the tradition of Bartók's "Mikrokosmos" in that they are both intended for pedagogical purposes. Kurtág's aim was that young children should approach the piano without having to learn precise note values, awkward fingering systems or carefully prescribed ways of playing, but should take joy in a command of the keyboard in a different way than hitherto. As he wrote in his preface: "Let us tackle bravely even the most difficult task without being afraid of making mistakes: we should try to create valid proportions, unity and continuity from long and short value notes – just for our own pleasure." However *Játékok* is rather more than this, for it is a veritable treasure house and workshop of the composer's techniques. Compositions of the next decades have always to be viewed in the context of *Játékok*. That's why similar genres appear later on for string or wind instruments and for orchestra. Together with his wife Márta, the composer has often given performances of items from *Játékok*. These occasions also served to introduce him to the public, as he is naturally shy and retiring. The atmosphere at these concerts – intense, intimate and almost ceremonial – had an influence on Kurtág's later international following, and on the picture audiences formed of his individuality.

The pedagogical idea in *Játékok* is really only manifested in Book I, where often the same musical idea is presented twice; for the first time with indefinite pitch sounds and cluster of

notes played with the palm of the hand, and then with more accurate and precise indications of pitch. Kurtág, who in earlier works had been meticulous in his indication of pitch relationships, now suddenly abandoned this principle, and preferred to give approximations. He freely and intentionally used ideas gleaned from his predecessors or contemporaries. "I hardly ever dismissed a single idea. If a piece resembled the style say, for example, of Ferenc Szabó [an elder contemporary Hungarian composer, writing in a rather conservative style], nothing prevented me extending it in the same style. The result would be entitled Hommage à Ferenc Szabó. ... Besides such compliments I added other 'snapshots', just like a musical diary in which I could jot down just what came into my mind."[15] In addition to influences from the past a number of more recent experiences are discernible in the first four books of *Játékok*, for example the influence of his composer colleagues from the Új Zenei Stúdió (New Music Studio), and his knowledge of Gregorian chant from when he sang in the choir Schola Hungarica conducted by László Dobszay. The diary-like character of the collection is shown by musical obituaries to friends who have passed away.

The period during which Kurtág was involved with *Játékok* marked the beginning of a renewal of creative energy. Two of the abandoned guitar pieces *Cinque merrycate* were rearranged for cimbalom and completed with two other movements, one of which, written in memory of a violinist friend Ştefan Romaşcanu, establishes an atmosphere of mourning, which was to become typical of Kurtág. The title of this new cycle *Szálkák* (Splinters) is borrowed from the Hungarian poet János Pilinszky. The next two song cycles are based on his and on Dezső Tandori's poems. Both have as a common theme the closed world of the lonely and alienated human being and his search for redemption. This paradox is depicted in the first cycle in a tragic, and in the second in a satirical, manner.

Four Songs to Poems by János Pilinszky Op. 11 contains, in its first piece, the most sombre of Kurtág's compositions. The singer recites the words on one single pitch with agonising slowness, and following instructions such as "on the palate", "with a pressed sound", "with glottal sound". Accompanying the voice is a single held note played with a bow on a zither. Many opportunities present themselves to the composer in setting the

words of the poem *Alcohol* ("I conjure up the impossible,/a house stands on it and a bush,/a silent, silent creature,/and a trouser leg in falling darkness", translated by László András), but Kurtág avoided these opportunities for word-painting and opted for a simpler setting, which only becomes a reality through the self-tormenting performing style. This is enough to create the necessary tension. Kurtág's aesthetic principle at this time was: "A minimum of notes – a maximum of expression."

Eszká-emlékzaj (S. K. Remembrance Noise) Op. 12 continues the self-mocking tone of *Four Capriccios*, but the colourful instrumentation of the latter is replaced by a sparse accompaniment from a single violin which throws an even sharper light on the ridiculous nature of a senseless world. The key to the work is in the use of the "objet trouvé" (found object). This idea, of elevating everyday objects to the status of art, originated with the painter Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), who invested quasi-functional devices with human foibles and characteristics. Kurtág's use of the term "found object" derived from a volume of poetry by Dezső Tandori.[16] A single word suffices, or an interval, a glissando, a rhythm. It is important only that the insignificant trifle being positioned at the central point should be invested with unexpected quality. The meaning of the poem is revealed using simple musical ideas such as an ascending scale, a waltz rhythm, intervals of a third, slowly expanding chromatic passages. These elementary ideas can, however, illuminate with perfect brightness the meaning of the words.

The compositions called "microludes" which were used by Kurtág as part of *Játékok* attained independent status in the string quartet *Hommage à András Mihály* Op. 13, written in 1977-78. The idea behind a series of microludes is like the rediscovery of tonality, that is the recognition that music is in some way related to a single basic sound. The twelve microludes are based on each degree of the chromatic scale – similarly to Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier". Kurtág's interpretation of scales is not based on theoretical preconceptions but on practical experiences with music history. The first movement of the string quartet based on the note *C* has a festive character developing from long-held chords. Shimmering tremolos and a whispering melody represent *C sharp*. Shrill repetitions of an ostinato pattern in thirds characterise the one on *D*. *E flat* evokes a world of

mystery and fear, and *E*, in a glorious melody, creates a musical picture of almost heavenly quality. (Ten years later this melody was to be used again in the closing movement of *...quasi una fantasia...* Op. 27 to represent an ideal world.)

The experiences of *Játékok* were carried on in the small cycles of Op. 14. The aborted guitar pieces of Op. 15 were later rearranged as Op. 15b and Op. 15c. The former one, A *kis csáva* (The Little Predicament) Op. 15b, with its distinctive instrumentation (piccolo flute, guitar, trombone) betrays the influence of Russian culture. Kurtág was at this time (1978) making an intensive study of Russian language and literature. We can hear echoes of Moussorgsky's "Promenade" in the *Fanfár* (Fanfare) for trombone, of Stravinsky's "Symphony of Wind Instruments" in *Himnusz* (Hymn), whilst the mysterious trills and ghostly glissandos above the guitar chords of the final movement, *Nachtstück* (Night Piece), summon up the world of Dostoyevsky. This is no coincidence as Kurtág was already working on his first Russian-language cycle, *Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Troussova*.

Third Decade (1979-1987)
(The Spell of the Singing Voice)

The recognition that eluded Kurtág on the occasion of the world première of *Bornemisza* was forthcoming on 14 January 1981 when the first performance of the *Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Troussova* took place in Paris. The work, commissioned some four years previously by Pierre Boulez and his Ensemble InterContemporain, was Kurtág's largest work to date and excited the international audience. An English musicologist remarked: "One almost expects Kurtág to experience now the same kind of uncertainty about what direction to take next as he did after the earlier work [i.e. *Bornemisza*]."[17] But a combination of factors helped to maintain this renewal of creativity. He had found the ideal performer in the singer Adrienne Csengery, for whom other song cycles were written in the 80s. A very important element was Kurtág's intense interest in, and feeling for, the Russian language, especially for the work of Rimma Dalos, a Russian poetess living in Hungary. The brevity and precision of her work, in particular her poems in the form of the Japanese haiku, suited

Kurtág's way of working. The subject of her poetry – woman's alternation between suffering and despair – opened up new vistas for the composer.

It is not easy to classify the genre of *Troussova.* There are those who see it as a twentieth-century equivalent of Schumann's Lieder cycle "Frauenliebe und -leben". Others see it as an opera in disguise, or a sort of stageless monodrama. The organisation of several short movements into larger sections is reminiscent of *Bornemisza*, but *Troussova* is not a structure built on the solid support of four symmetrical pillars, but on the dynamic contrast of three disproportionate sections. The longer, and internally more sectional, six movements make up the first two parts. The fifteen shorter songs which constitute Part Three give the impression of being a coda. Because of its greater variety, however, Part Three seems to dominate, which leaves the listener at a loss to find the central climax. Entitled *Loneliness,* the first part is built on the contrast between anxiety and a disturbed tranquillity. The heroine of *Troussova* fluctuates between protesting against an intolerable situation and resigning herself to the inevitable. In the second part (*A little eroticism*) the brutality of passion breaks through most powerfully in the central instrumental intermezzo. It is a characteristic paradox of Kurtág that the meaning of the text becomes more evident when it is silent, and becomes more comprehensible when crossing over into incomprehensibility. The third part (*Bitter experience – Delight and Grief*) is constructed from a series of short mosaic-stones in which happy and memorable moments are juxtaposed with depressing and agonisingly unforgettable experiences. This last part acts as a counterbalance to the more extensive preceding sections. The intense emotion of this last section is made more tolerable by its brevity, its sudden changes and its use of snapshots instead of longer descriptive passages.

One of the features of *Troussova* is an unprecedented range of tone colours. For the most part the ensemble of over 20 instruments is used in smaller, chamber music combinations, but there are movements for solo voice (*Why should I not squeal...*), imitating the sound of a pig, plus one in canon form for voice and cimbalom (*Great misery – that's love*). Percussion plays a very important role. Shivering is suggested by the swish of maracas, whilst a scraped cymbal and the sound of broken

glass illustrates a metaphorical stab through the heart. Textual meaning is mainly carried by a clear system of musical motifs, but these examples of "word painting" are merely the outward manifestation of an inner meaning. The irrevocably lost companion of the abandoned woman is always associated with the horn, which is also used in the epilogue, where it highlights the final loss of dignity and tragic descent into despair: "For everything/we did together at some time–/*I'm* paying" (translated by Stuart Campbell and Ksenia Norall).

Troussova appears to be a love story, but one that consists only of fragments of memory. The differing emotions of the three parts have a common characteristic in that the individual songs do not sustain a common thread. They are more like brief jottings torn from a notebook or diary. The logical continuation of *Troussova*, and at the same time its counterpole, is *Scenes from a Novel* Op. 19, in which the concept of passing time is all-pervasive. In the second verse, which in another scoring closes the cycle, the poet is obsessed with the transitoriness of time: "From meeting to parting,/from leave-taking to awaiting/– that was my woman's lot" (translated by Peter Sherwood and Gillian Howarth).

There can be no doubt that the heroine in *Novel* is identical with the heroine in *Troussova* who travelled from desire through disappointment to a symbolic death. As István Balázs put it: "The heroine of *Troussova* is resurrected in *Novel*."[18] But this heroine, who perhaps speaks to us from the next world, has gained new experiences. The universal solitude, disturbed sensuality and perpetual disillusionment of *Troussova* becomes a closed, introspective world. Anxiety is replaced by intense self-reflection, and the scoring takes on a more bleak and sparse texture. *Novel* uses a "gypsy band" instrumentation (violin, cimbalom and double-bass) where a sharper, more homogeneous and precise timbre dominates. The emotional pendulum swings more often towards the grotesque. Contrast is used as the most common dramatical device. Trancelike lyrics alternate with more clearly delineated songs. Two perpetuum mobile movements (*Rondo* and *Sundays*) form the climax of the cycle. In the final song the heroine's last bleak farewell is illustrated by a timeless descending scale passage.

The last cycle that Kurtág composed to poems by Rimma Dalos, *Requiem for the Beloved* Op. 26, is, in its closing movement

a symbolic completion of the interface between musician and poetess. "Farewell, Beloved, forgive me./I have nothing to regret, /I have nothing to forget" (translated by Éva Mikes). The major chords in the accompaniment slowly drift away – an effect that was to reach fruition years later, in a rearrangement of the same song at the end of the "Double Concerto" *Op 27 No 2*.

Following the series of works based on poems by Rimma Dalos, Kurtág turned once more to his native Hungarian poets, namely to Attila József. This meeting of minds was only to be expected, but it is somewhat surprising that the composer turned for inspiration not to the regular canon of the poet's output, but to incomplete and hastily written fragments. It was equally innovative to set them for unaccompanied voice. These *Attila József Fragments* Op. 20 are so natural and unsophisticated that they give the impression of someone reading or humming them to himself. Kurtág compares them to leaflets or notes that can be handed out to all and sundry. They do not adopt a strident tone, but rather that of a gentle protest which alienated and unloved man shows to the world, sometimes with an accusing finger, at other times with self-pity. Compared with the Russian settings they express a broader range of thought. Beyond the intimate concerns of the individual there arise general questions such as crime and punishment, death and art, much as they did fifteen years earlier in *Bornemisza.* In some unfathomable way the composer's personality illuminates the texts so powerfully that in spite of their fragmentary nature they appear before us as if carved in stone.

It would appear to be a natural progression from here to Kurtág's next, and to-date most important vocal work *Kafka-Fragmente* Op. 24, which is set for minimal forces of soprano and violin. The great variety of thought expressed in Kafka's phrases – sometimes commonplace, sometimes innocently childlike, and occasionally enshrined in an enigmatic parable-like form – led Kurtág to possibly his most comprehensive portrayal of the world. The meeting of minds between writer and composer brought about a union of two personalities that complemented each other perfectly. The quotations from Franz Kafka's letters and diary combine every aspect that can be found in earlier settings by Kurtág. These fragments are characterised by a consistent philosophy which emerges from frightening and

wonderful moments, from tragedy and satire. Individual and collective disintegration and unity are contrasted, a grandeur is detected in trifles, and a necessity in chance. The form is built on small cycles containing a series of aphorisms, as in *Bornemisza* and *Troussova*. In *Kafka-Fragmente*, however, the individual sections do not have specific subjects because the whole cycle is concerned with the same problems. After contradictions and remote structural connections, the last movement links vocal and instrumental sounds in a final apotheoses which fulfils Kurtág's omnipresent seeking for beauty.

There is scarcely another work of Kurtág's in which brevity and elegance combine in such a natural way. The composer's virtuosity is evident in every bar, yet there is no indication of ostentation. Every word and nuance is transformed into a sound picture. Meanwhile the musical motifs derived from the words are musically complete in themselves. However, the *Kafka-Fragmente* only forms a perfect unity in the combination of words and music. The psychological and physical worlds meet here, and Kurtág's work achieves the ultimate aim of all music: to add its own existence to the image we create of our own.

Fourth Decade (1988-1998)
(Orchestral Works and Composed Programmes)

By the end of the 80s Kurtág had become one of the most widely known of contemporary European composers, and his works were performed at international festivals in Berlin (1988), Salzburg (1993), Paris (1995) and Edinburgh (1996). In addition, he was the recipient of several prestigious awards, including the Herder and Siemens prizes in 1993 and 1998 respectively. This recently found international recognition has enabled him to live abroad since 1993, first in Berlin and Vienna, and lately in Amsterdam where, besides completing commissioned works, he directs a series of very popular chamber music courses. A further result of these changes in Kurtág's circumstances is that his music is now played and recorded by international artists such as Kim Kashkashian, the Arditti String Quartet and Claudio Abbado.

After he set aside the composition of *24 Antiphonae* in 1971, Kurtág did not try to compose anything for large-scale orchestra.

This lacuna in his output appeared to be rectified when, following the success of *Troussova,* the BBC commissioned a piano concerto. Again however, the music remained in sketch form only. Another commission, this time from the Berlin Festival, resulted in a work for piano and instrumental groups *...quasi una fantasia...* Op. 27 which can be described as an orchestral work, but with certain reservations. The instruments are not used as an orchestra in the traditional sense, but are arranged in groups and positioned not only on the platform, but in various locations in the auditorium. This "stereophonic" effect was not new in music, but Kurtág was able to treat it in an individual way.

...quasi una fantasia... signalled the beginning of a stylistic change in the composer's output. The intense concentration and economy of means which had been a feature of his work hitherto was now succeeded by a more expansive form and an increase in instrumental resources. World premières took place in Berlin, Frankfurt and Vienna of works such as *...quasi una fantasia...*, *Grabstein für Stephan, Op 27 No 2*, and *What is the word?* – all of which varied in length between fifteen and twenty minutes, and used thirty to fifty-plus accompanying instruments. When these works are compared with those dating from ten or fifteen years earlier it is almost as if one were dealing with a different composer. There are links however with the past. *...quasi una fantasia...*, for example, begins with a mysterious *Introduction*. This is followed by the nightmarish images and fantasy of a Schumannesque scherzo, and a *Recitative* in which the trombone is used to summon up the Last Judgment. Then comes the final *Aria* which is a reworking of a movement of the string quartet *Hommage à András Mihály*, thus providing a link with the past. A feature of the movement is the contrast between the staccato "points" of the piano chords and the more sustained phrasing of the strings. This contrast is reflected also in the accompaniment where the "points" of sound are supplied by instruments that are essentially percussive, such as harp, cimbalom, vibraphone and celesta, whilst the more lyrical moments are scored for flute, horn and harmonica. The "points" finally die away and the original string melody descends until it comes to rest on a single cello sound. One analyst called this movement "a promise of Paradise", an apt description of this almost inaudible search after beauty and purity of sound.

Beethoven described his sonatas Opus 27 No 1 in E flat and No 2 in C sharp minor as "Sonata quasi una fantasia", and it may have been chance that led Kurtág to give his work with the same opus number a similar title. However, it must have been a much more conscious decision that led to the numbering of his next work as *Op 27 No 2.* Its relationship with Beethoven is to be found not in the superficialities of genre and style, but somewhere in a more abstract sense. The work in question is a double concerto for cello and pianoforte, accompanied by a double chamber orchestra.

In this composition Kurtág tries for the first time to write movements whose internal construction is organised on more traditional lines. The slow opening and final movements, both reworkings of earlier songs and piano pieces, are linked by two fast movements in which musical ideas are repeated and developed. This hitherto unknown way of working raised its own problems for the composer. Having replaced his former epigrammatic brevity with expansion and development, he was inevitably faced with having to distinguish between thematic and non-thematic material by the composition of "neutral" transitional passages. Kurtág was incapable of sacrificing the tautness, tension and concision of his writing for the sake of irrelevant passage work. Some indication of the struggles can be recognised in the constant stops and starts that characterise these two movements.

It is remarkable that Kurtág had not attempted to compose a work in one movement for thirty years. Only in recent years, in works such as *Grabstein für Stephan* Op. 15c and *What is the word?* Op. 31, do we find compositions that are not based on the principle of contrast between individual sections. The former work, which is based on one of the unpublished guitar pieces of Op. 15, is built upon a stylistic feature of the 70s – a "found object", in this case the plucking of open strings. This "mourning" motif, suggestive of peace and tranquillity, is surrounded by the murmuring sounds of other instruments dispersed in different parts of the performing area. Contrast is still found, however, in the middle section, where a unique outburst of emotion contrasts with the inevitability of mortality expressed in the outer movements.

Samuel Beckett's last complete work *What is the word?* is written in the poetic idiom associated with him – that of "disruptive

continuity". Contrary to his usual practice, Kurtág set the work to a Hungarian translation. The reason for this decision must be sought in the person of the performer who was the inspiration behind the composition. Ildikó Monyók, a former pop singer, had suffered an impairment of speech as the result of an accident, but after much therapy and hard work she recovered sufficiently, whith the result that Kurtág could compose the piece for her. The text, a meditation on the futility of expression, has links with the struggles that the composer had endured in his own creative development. Words, music, and performer proved to be ideally matched. Just as in Kurtág's first vocal movement *Confession* in *Bornemisza* this new composition is about the hazards of creation. In the 60s this self-torment was embodied in an unprecedented density of texture and in the composer's acknowledged problems with the creative process at the time. A quarter of a century later Ildikó Monyók's efforts in articulating the words and sounds are sufficient to express the same situation. The original setting for reciter and upright piano (probably an out-of-tune piano) became known in a later version for large orchestra – used in spatially separated groups – and choir, enunciating the original English version of the text. *What is the word?* is the one work of Kurtág that encapsulates the essence at the core of his art – frailty. That desperate, intolerable, inhuman frailty which makes the creative act both impossible and, at the same time, necessary.

Although these latest works were a step towards writing for full orchestra, Kurtág had not yet reached the stage at which the orchestra was seated on the platform in the traditional manner. This only happened in 1994 with the composition of *Stele* (i. e. tombstone), a commission from the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Like other works written in the previous decade, this one too retained links with the past. The first section of this three-movement work uses a motif from *Lebenslauf* (written in 1992 for the 85th birthday of Sándor Veress – a Swiss composer of Hungarian origin who studied with Bartók and was Kurtág's composition teacher). The second movement features a typical Kurtág-type obstinately revolving motif. A slow, mournful chorale-like succession of block chords – quoting from *In memoriam András Mihály* (included in Book 6 of *Játékok*) – brings the whole work to a close.

Although *Stele* is scored for an orchestra of more than 100

instrumentalists, all seated on stage in the traditional manner, it has several features unusual in orchestral writing. Kurtág hardly ever uses doubling, neither does he contrast subtle combinations of tone colour. Emphasis is placed on clarity of texture, as in other complex scores such as *Troussova* or *Op 27 No 2*. Homogeneous groups of instruments play an important role, such as the choirs of flutes and clarinets in the opening section, or the chorale-like Wagner tubas at the close of the first movement (*hommage à Bruckner*). The finale uses one of the composer's favourite instrumental combinations – that of piano, harp, cimbalom and vibraphone, as well as a percussion group consisting of bass drum, cymbals and tam-tam. The sombre, opalescent timbres of the latter group become, in later years, an indispensable part of the composer's "mourning" motif.

Two external factors are involved in the construction of Kurtág's third string quartet, *Officium breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky*. Understandably one of them is the use of the slow movement, Arioso, from Endre Szervánszky's "Serenade for String Orchestra" (1947). The other is the closing movement of Webern's last work, "Cantata No. 2". These two works, composed within a few years of each other, inhabit different worlds, but taken together they symbolise Kurtág's own student days, his Hungarian roots and his European orientation. Webern's piece, with its canonic textures and stark harmonies, is paraphrased in movements V, VI and VIII before appearing in its original form in the tenth movement. Szervánszky's Arioso is also paraphrased in the second and third movements and is then quoted directly in the fifteenth, the last, movement. There is no parallel in subtle artificiality to *Officium* in the rest of the composer's work.

In recent years Kurtág has gradually become more involved in ways of presenting his works in the concert hall. He deems it ideal if the audience experiences his music as if partaking in a special kind of ritual. This had already happened with his performances of *Játékok*, and he created the same atmosphere for works such as *Kafka-Fragmente*. He refers to them as "ceremonial concerts".

In 1993 Kurtág assembled a concert programme based around his "orchestral" works composed between 1988 and 1991, which he called a "composed programme". In it he attempts

to give a portrait of his work and, whilst demonstrating the links between the various pieces, he also aims to safeguard their individuality. In a similar composition, *Rückblick* (Retrospect), emphasis has been put on the ordering of works both old and new, in original scoring or in revised versions, in such a way as to reveal connections that may not have been perceived hitherto. The performing group consists of four musicians – two of whom playing contrasting melody instruments (trumpet and double-bass), the others a group of keyboard instruments (grand piano and upright piano, celesta and harpsichord). This particular combination of instruments is explained by the dedication of the work to Karlheinz Stockhausen, whose son, daughter and son-in-law played in the world première of the work in Berlin.

The range of music in *Rückblick* spans a period of more than thirty years, between 1960 and 1992. In choosing such a wide spectrum Kurtág ignored the striking stylistic changes that had taken place in the meantime. He once said, with characteristic naivety, that he agree with Joyce, who remarked: "I always keep in mind the ideal reader – one who will devote his life solely to reading my works." More than fifty short pieces are used in *Rückblick*, among them the cycle of *Eight Piano Pieces* Op. 3, *Four Songs to Poems by János Pilinszky* Op. 11, and some movements from *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza* Op. 7 rescored for the occasion, as well as a series woven from the hommage movements or scherzo-like pieces in *Játékok*. Their order is determined by dramaturgical considerations rather than chronological ones, and the resultant smaller series are framed by a new three-part sequence of movements written for the *Rückblick* ensemble.

It cannot be said, however, that *Rückblick* provides a comprehensive overview of the composer's achievements. Thoughts of death and mortality are never far from the surface, as his quotation adapted from the Great Testament by François Villon testifies: "In this xth year of my life/When I had drunk down all of my shames/Being neither wholly wise nor foolish" (translated by Anthony Bonner). It is characteristic of *Rückblick* that the period following 1975 is represented not by compositions supplied with opus numbers, but by a steady stream of *Játékok* movements. The feeling of farewell that is undoubtedly present in *Rückblick* is not simply the introspection of a 67-year-old who is conscious

of his own mortality, but a nostalgia for lost youth, and for colleagues who have passed on.

Recent vocal settings, such as those for solo voice to texts by Hölderlin, Beckett and Lichtenberg remain unpublished, and therefore difficult to comment upon. They may well follow in the line of *Attila József Fragments* Op. 20, also for solo voice, and show that Kurtág is once again taking a step back from larger forms and colourful instrumental groups, towards a more familiar asceticism and greater economy of means. His life's work may well be further enriched by this change of direction in this his fifth decade of creative activity.

Notes

1. Bálint András Varga: Ein Gespräch mit György Kurtág, in: *György Kurtág – Komponistenportrait im Rahmen der 38. Berliner Festwochen* (Berlin 1988), 40.
2. *Ligeti und Kurtág in Salzburg*, ed. Ulrich Dibelius (München 1993), 91.
3. György Kurtág: Laudatio auf György Ligeti, *Die Musik und ihr Preis* (Zug-Regensburg 1994), 392.
4. György Kroó: *Ungarische Musik – gestern und heute* (Budapest 1980), 196.
5. Parallels with the mentioned composers are explored in: János Kárpáti: György Kurtág, *Muzsika* 17 (1974), No.1, 24-30.
6. Among the artists were Ádám Fellegi, Judit Hevesi and János Székács who represented the composer's views in an interview with Imre Földes in *Harmincasok* (Hungarian composers in their thirties) (Budapest 1969).
7. Bálint András Varga: *op.cit.*, 42.
8. György Kroó: *op.cit.*, 206.
9. Both János Kárpáti and György Kroó have written analytical studies of the work in Hungarian (see in the Bibliography).
10. For a summary of the critical appraisal, see Wilfried Brennecke's article, in: *György Kurtág* (Bonn 1986), 18-27.
11. Some ten years later this was also the scoring for *Scenes from a Novel* Op. 19, but this time with the addition of a double-bass.
12. It was an indication of the composer's uncertainty during this period that *Four Cappriccios* was not published until 1996, after being revised.
13. György Kurtág: „Az ember sohasem érkezik túl későn" (One Never Arrives Too Late), *Muzsika* 39 (1996), No.2, 12.
14. György Kurtág: *op.cit.*, 15.
15. *Ligeti und Kurtág in Salzburg*, 79.
16. Egy talált tárgy megtisztitása (Cleaning an Object Found).
17. Stephen Walsh: György Kurtág, *Tempo* 1982, No.145, 15.
18. *György Kurtág* (Bonn 1986), 77.

List of Works and Recordings

In preparing the following list I used András Wilheim's György Kurtág: List of Works 1943-1996, and György Kurtág: Discography, *Hungarian Music Quarterly* 7 (1996), 1-2/21-26.

Abbreviations: B = bass, Bar = baritone, BFO = Budapest Festival Orchestra, che = chamber ensemble, cimb = cimbalom, cond = conducted by, db = double-bass, **E:** edition, ed. = edited by, EMB = Editio Musica Budapest, fl = flute, Ger = in German, guit = guitar, Hun = in Hungarian, HU = Hungaroton, mch = mixed choir, Ms = manuscript, orch = orchestra, pf = piano, pf 4 = piano duet, PC = György Kurtág – Portraitkonzert, Salzburg 10.8.1993 col legno WWE 2 CD 31870, **R:** recording, Rec = recitation, Russ = in Russian, S = soprano, sel = selection, SQ = string quartet, tr = trumpet, tromb = trombone, UE = Universal Edition, vc = violoncello, vl = violin, vla = viola.

Early Works (Selection)

- Klárisok (Beads) – mch (Attila József – Hun), 1949. **E:** EMB 1994 (Z. 13.955). **R:** Savaria Vocal Ensemble, cond: I. Deáky, HU HCD 31290.
- Suite – pf 4, 1950-51. **E:** EMB 1956 (Z. 2210). **R:** E. Schlagmüller, G. Mollek, HU LPX 1188.
- Táncdal (Dance Song) – children's choir, pf (Sándor Weöres – Hun), 1952. **E:** EMB 1952 (Z. 717).
- Koreai kantáta (Korean Cantata) – B, mch, orch (Katalin Kotzián – Hun), 1952-53, Ms.
- Viola Concerto – vla, orch, 1953-54. **E:** EMB 1961 (Z. 3210).

Works with Opus Number

Op.

1 String Quartet – 1959. **E:** EMB 1964 (Z. 4481). **R:** Éder SQ, HU SLPX 11846; Arditti SQ, Disques Montaigne 789007; Keller SQ, ECM 1598.

2 Wind Quintet – 1959. **E:** EMB 1965 (Z. 4623). **R:** Jeunesse Wind Quintet, HU SLPX 11846; Quintetto Arnold, Stradivarius STR 33304; Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet, BIS CD-662.

3 Eight Piano Pieces – 1960. **E:** UE 1965 (UE 14140). **R:** I. Antal, HU HCD 31290; Z. Kocsis, HU HCD 31290.

4 Eight Duos – vl, cimb, 1960-61. **E:** EMB 1965 (Z. 4492). **R:** J. Hevesi, J. Szalay, HU HCD 31290.

5 Jelek (Signs) – vla, 1961. **E:** EMB 1965 (Z. 4643), revised: 1992, Ms. **R:** K. Kashkashian, ECM 1508.

5b Jelek (Signs) – vc, 1961, 1984-, in progress, Ms.

6 Cinque merrycate – guit, 1962, withdrawn, Ms.

6c Szálkák (Splinters) – cimb, 1962, 1973. **E:** EMB 1976 (Z. 7563). **R:** M. Fábián, HU SLPX 11686; M. Fábián (1. movement), HU HCD 31290; I. Vékony, BMG Ricordi CRMCD 358162.

6d Szálkák (Splinters) – pf, 1962, 1973-78. **E:** EMB 1979 (Z. 8735).

7 Bornemisza Péter mondásai (The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza) – concerto

for soprano and piano (Hun), 1963-68, revised: 1976. **E:** UE 1973 (UE 14493). **R:** E. Sziklai, L. Szűcs; HU HCD 31290.

8 Egy téli alkony emlékére – négy töredék Gulyás Pál verseire (In Memory of a Winter Sunset – Four Fragments to Poems by Pál Gulyás) – S, vl, cimb, (Hun), 1969. **E:** UE 1974 (UE 15907). **R:** A. Németh, J. Hevesi, M. Fábián, HU SLPX 11686.

9 Four Capriccios – Four Songs to Poems by István Bálint – S, che (Hun), 1969-70, revised: 1993. **E:** UE 1996 (UE 30892).

10 24 Antiphonae – orch, 1970-71, withdrawn. **E:** Antifona No. 3 – In memoriam Igor Stravinsky, in: In memoriam Igor Stravinsky, ed. D. Révész, Budapest: Zeneműkiadó 1972, 115-127.

11 Four Songs to Poems by János Pilinszky – Bar or B, che (Hun), 1973-75. **E:** UE 1979 (UE 16841). **R:** I. Gáti, Budapest Chamber Ensemble, cond: A. Mihály, HU HCD 31290.

11a Three Songs to Poems by János Pilinszky – Bar or B, pf (Hun), 1973-75, 1986. **E:** UE 1988.

12 Eszká-emlékzaj (S. K. Remembrance Noise) – S, vl (Dezső Tandori – Hun), 1974-75. **E:** EMB 1978 (Z. 7940). **R:** A. Csengery, A. Keller, HU HCD 11586; A. Csengery, A. Keller (7. movement); PC.

13 Hommage à András Mihály – Twelve Microludes for String Quartet, 1977-78. **E:** EMB 1979 (Z. 8716). **R:** Arditti SQ, Disques Montaigne 789007; Keller SQ (4., 6., 10., 5. movements), PC; Keller SQ, ECM 1598.

14a-cHerdecker Eurhythmie – fl, vl, Tenor-Leier, Rec (Ger), 1979. **E:** EMB 1983 (Z. 12.533-12.535).

14d Six Bagatells – fl, db, pf, 1982. **E:** EMB 1982 (Z. 12.494).

14e Tre pezzi per violino e pianoforte – 1979. **E:** EMB 1996 (Z. 14.104).

15 (Pieces for Guitar) – 1976-77, withdrawn, Ms.

15b A kis csáva (The Little Predicament) – piccolo flute, guit, tromb, 1978. **E:** EMB 1981 (Z. 12.020).

15c Grabstein für Stephan – guit, che, 1978-79, 1989. **E:** EMB 1989 (Z. 13.813). **R:** J. Ruck, BFO, cond: P. Eötvös, PC; J. Ruck, Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, cond: C. Abbado, DG 447 761-2; J. Ruck, RAI Milan Symphony Orchestra, cond: Z. Peskó, BMG Ricordi CRMCD 358162.

15d Hommage à R. Sch. – clarinet (bass drum), vla, pf, 1975-1990. **E:** EMB 1996 (Z. 13.809). **R:** E. Brunner, K. Kashkashian, R. Levin, ECM 1508.

16 Omaggio a Luigi Nono – mch (Anna Akhmatova, Rimma Dalos – Russ), 1979. **E:** EMB 1980 (Z. 12.037).

17 Послания покойной Р. В. Трусовой (Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Troussova) – S, che (Rimma Dalos – Russ), 1976-80. **E:** EMB 1982 (Z. 12.021). **R:** A. Csengery, Ensemble InterContemporain, cond: P. Boulez, HU HCD 31576; R. Hardy, Ensemble Modern, cond: P. Eötvös, SONY SK 53290.

18 Песни уныния и печали (Songs of Despair and Sorrow) – mch, che (Mikhail Lermontov, Aleksandr Blok, Sergei Yesenin, Osip Mandelshtam, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetayeva – Russ), 1980-1994. **E:** EMB 1996 (Z. 14.077).

19 Сцены из романа (Scenes from a Novel) – S, vl, cimb, db (Rimma Dalos – Russ), 1979-82. **E:** EMB 1985 (Z. 12.661). **R:** A. Csengery, A. Keller, M. Fábián, F. Csontos, HU HCD 31576; Ch. Whittlesey, M. Tacke, M. Fábián, Th. Fichter, SONY SK 53290.

20 Attila József Fragments – S (Hun), 1982. **E:** EMB 1984 (Z. 12.304). **R:** A. Csengery, HU HCD 31576.

21. Piano Concerto – pf, orch, 1982, in progress, Ms.

22 Seven Songs – S, cimb (or pf) (Amy Károlyi, Kobayashi Issa – Hun), 1981-82. **E:** EMB 1987 (Z. 12.499). **R:** A. Csengery, M. Fábián, HU SLPX 31120.

23 Eight Choruses to Poems by Dezső Tandori – mch (Hun), 1981-84. **E:** EMB 1984 (Z. 12.947).

24 Kafka-Fragmente – S, vl (Ger), 1985-87. **E:** EMB 1992 (Z. 13.505). **R:** A. Csengery, A. Keller, HU HCD 31135.

25 Három régi felirat (Three Old Inscriptions)– S, pf (Hun and Ger), 1986-87. **E:** EMB 1992 (Z. 13.378). **R:** A. Csengery, Z. Kocsis, PC.

26 Реквием по другу (Requiem for the Beloved) – S, pf (Rimma Dalos – Russ), 1982-86. **E:** EMB 1990 (Z. 13.892). **R:** A. Csengery, Gy. Kurtág (4. movement), HU HCD 31576; A. Csengery, Z. Kocsis (4. movement), PC; A. Csengery, Z. Kocsis, PC.

27 ...quasi una fantasia... – pf, che, 1987-88. **E:** EMB 1989 (Z. 13.742). **R:** H. Kretzschmar, Ensemble Modern, cond: P. Eötvös, SONY SK 53290; Z. Kocsis, BFO, cond: P. Eötvös, PC; A. Pestalozza, RAI Milan Symphony Orchestra, cond: Z. Peskó, BMG Ricordi CRMCD 358162.

– Op 27 no 2 "Double Concerto"– vc, pf, double che, 1989-90. **E:** EMB 1990 (Z. 13.988). **R:** M. Perényi, Z. Kocsis, BFO, cond: P. Eötvös, PC.

28 Officium breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky – SQ, 1988-89. **E:** EMB 1995 (Z. 13.959). **R:** Arditti SQ, Disques Montaigne 789007; Keller SQ, ECM 1598.

29 Hölderlin: An... (Ein Fragment) – tenor, pf (Ger), 1988-89. **E:** EMB 1989 (Z. 13.038).

30a Siklós István tolmácsolásában Beckett Sámuel üzeni Monyók Ildikóval: Mi is a szó? (Samuel Beckett: What is the Word?) – Rec, upright piano (Hun), 1990. **E:** EMB 1991 (Z. 13.989).

30b Samuel Beckett: What is the word? – Rec, mch, upright piano, che (Hun and in English), 1991. **E:** EMB 1991 (Z. 13.990). **R:** I. Monyók, Tomkins Vocal Ensemble, BFO, cond: P. Eötvös, PC; I. Monyók, Arnold Schoenberg Choir, Anton Webern Ensemble, cond: C. Abbado, DG 437 840-2.

31b Ligatura-Message to Frances-Marie: The Answered Unanswered Question – vc (with two bows) or 2 vc, 2 vl, celesta, 1989. **E:** EMB 1995 (Z. 13.957). **R:** Keller SQ, M. Perényi, Z. Kocsis, PC; Keller SQ, M. Perényi, Gy. Kurtág, ECM 1598.

32 Lebenslauf – 2 bassethorns, 2 pf (the second pf tuned a quarter tone down), 1992. **E:** EMB 1992 (Z. 13.967).

33 ΣΤΗΛΗ (Stele) – orch, 1994. **E:** EMB 1995 (Z. 14.060). **R:** Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, cond: C. Abbado, DG 447 761-2.

34 Üzenetek (Messages) – orch, 1993-, in progress, Ms. **R:** Inscription on a Grave in Cornwall – Flowers We Are: Gächinger Kantorei, Cracow Chamber Choir, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, cond: H. Rilling, Hänssler Classics CD 98931.

35 Hölderlin-Gesänge – voices and instruments (Ger), 1993-, in progress, Ms.

36 ...pas à pas – nulle part... – Bar (Samuel Beckett, Sébastien Chamfort – in French and English), 1993-97, Ms.

37 Einige Sätze aus den Sudelbüchern Georg Christoph Lichtenbergs – S (Ger), 1996. **E:** EMB 1998 (Z. 14.129)
38 Tre pezzi per clarinetto e cimbalom – 1996. **E:** EMB 1998 (Z. 14.131)
38a Tre altri pezzi per clarinetto e cimbalom – 1996. **E:** EMB 1998 (Z. 14.131)

Works without Opus Number

- Elő-Játékok (Pre-Games) – pf, 1973. **E:** EMB 1977 (Z. 7769), In: Tarkabarka, ed. M. Teöke.
- Játékok (Plays and Games) – pf, pf 4, 2 pf, 1973-. **E:** I-IV: EMB 1979 (Z. 8377-8380), V-VI: EMB 1997 (Z. 14.002, 14.068). **R:** V. Szervánszky, R. Cavaye (I-IV, complete), Victor (Japan) ECD 93002/1-4; Gy. Kurtág, M. Kurtág (sel), HU SLPX 11846; Z. Kocsis (sel), PC. Plays and Games and Bach-Transcriptions (sel): Gy. Kurtág, M. Kurtág, PC; Gy. Kurtág, M. Kurtág, BMG Ricordi CRMCD 358162; Gy. Kurtág, M. Kurtág, ECM 1619.
- 13 darab a Játékokból (13 Pieces from Plays and Games) – 2 cimb, 1975-76. **E:** EMB 1980 (Z. 8773).
- Átiratok Machaut-tól J. S. Bachig (Transcriptions from Machaut to J. S. Bach) – pf 4, pf six hands, 2 pf, 1973-91. **E:** EMB 1991 (Z. 13.823). **R:** see Játékok (Plays and Games).
- In memoriam György Zilcz – 2 tr, 2 tromb, tuba, 1975. **E:** EMB 1984 (Z. 12.580), In: I. Máriássy-F. Varasdy: Bevezetés a rézfúvós kamarazene gyakorlatába II.
- Keringő (Waltz) – on a poem by János Pilinszky, for his voice and two pianos – 1984, Ms. **R:** Pilinszky János, Z. Kocsis, Gy. Kurtág, HU HCD 31290.
- Il pleut sur la ville – S, pf, 1981-91, Ms. **R:** A. Csengery, Z. Kocsis, PC.
- Lajka-emlék (In Memory of Layka)– for magnetic tape (joint composition with György Kurtág Jr.), 1990.
- Jelek, játékok és üzenetek (Signs, Games and Messages) – for string instruments in different combinations, 1989-96, Ms. **R:** János Pilinszky: Gérard de Nerval: M. Perényi, HU HCD 31290; M. Perényi, PC. Aus der Ferne: Keller SQ, ECM 1598. Tamás Blum in Memoriam: Z. Gál, PC. 9 pieces for viola: K. Kashkashian, ECM 1508.
- Naplójegyzetek fúvósokra (Diary Notices for Wind Instruments) – 1984-85, 1993, Ms.
- Rückblick – Altes und Neues für vier Spieler (Hommage à Stockhausen) – tr, db, keyboard instruments, 1992-93, Ms.

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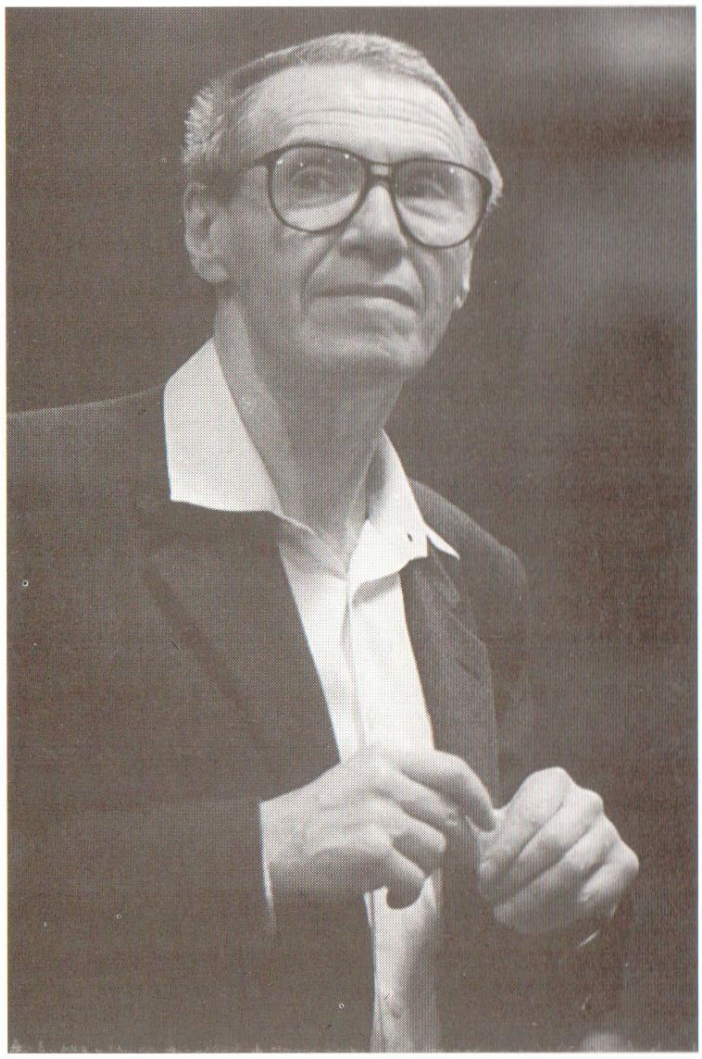
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LEFT: *With György Kurtág Jr., 1969 (Photograph by Sándor Nagygyörgy)*

BOTTOM: *At the piano with Márta Kurtág (Photograph by Andrea Felvégi)*





In rehearsal at the Academy of Music
(Photograph by Andrea Felvégi)

Over the last fifteen years György Kurtág's name has become known and recognized throughout the world. His art, which in István Balázs's view offers the listener "beauty obtained through suffering", is characterized by tension between an ascetic use of music resources and an irresistible expressive force.

In a fascinating and personal way his vocal works (e.g. *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza, Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Troussova* and *Kafka-Fragmente*) and his instrumental pieces (e.g. *String Quartet, Plays and Games* and *...quasi una fantasia...*) shed light on the tragic and absurd plight of 20th-century man.

The present study analyzes Kurtág's oeuvre, and includes a list of works and recordings, a bibliography, photographs and music examples.

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