

Fodor Géza (2 May 1943 – 7 October 2008) dramaturg, aesthetician, university docent. Doctor of philosophy, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, his field of research was aesthetics of theatre and drama. He received several awards.

He used to work at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, then he lectured at the Aesthetics Department of ELTE University and at the University of Theatre, Film and Television. He worked as leading dramaturg and artistic advisor in the National Theater, in the avantgarde Katona József Theater (cofounded by him in 1982) and in the Hungarian State Opera. He worked as a music critic for literary and professional reviews for decades: (Muzsika, Élet és Irodalom, Holmi).



Géza FODOR

(1943 - 2008)

„I must admit that there is something majestically primitive in the overture of Nabucco. And I am saying this with the greatest respect and admiration for Verdi...”

Works:

- **Zene és dráma** (Music and Drama) (1974)
- **Az ajtón kívül** (Outside the door) (libretto for Sándor Balassa's opera, 1979)
- **Operai napló** (Opera Diary) (1986)
- **A Mozart-opera vilásképe** (Vision of the World in Mozart's Operas) (Typotex Kiadó, Budapest, 2002 ISBN 978-963-9326-47-7)
- **Das hoffnungslose Meisterwerk** (Cuxhaven-Dartford, 1999)
- **Zene és színház** (Music and Theater) (Budapest, 1998)
- **Petri György költészete** (György Petri's Poetry) (Budapest, 1991)

Citation from a review:

Fodor's analyses are more or less built up of three levels: one on the language of music, melodies, harmonies, counterpoints and instrumentation, the immediate level of musical expression and of the interpretation of the dramatic process and finally, philosophical (philosophy of history, anthropological) reflexions. These levels are usually not separated by strict caesuras. The first and second levels are characterised by the well-known methods of academic works: they draw on previous observations of scientific literature and enter into arguments with others. The third level contains the author's most original thoughts that can only occasionally be confronted with the views of other thinkers (first of all with those of Kierkegaard in relation to Don Juan). In this case, however, he only briefly summarizes – and when necessary, questions – the views of the most important scientific literature belonging to the second level, and then provides a new interpretation on the first level without one single reference; this automatically and in a very condensed form leads into everything else, in a style that almost says “let us leave further reflections to the reader”. It is not easy to read (it is certainly not recommended for music critics with score reading difficulties) but is definitely worth it.

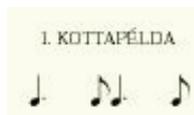
About him:

„Géza Fodor moved the day-to-day, elusive genre of opera reviews to the ranks of essay writing.”

„Many of us liked to read him because we always felt that this is just the way to write reviews.”

Mozart's Don Juan, extract from the book:

„Kierkegaard says that sensuality, sensual erotic as a principle, as a force, as a realm was created by Christianity when it defined it as an independent, opposite principle to the mind. „As the spirit, conclusively specified as spirit, renounces this world, feels that this is not simply not its home but not even its scene of action, and withdraws up into the higher regions, it leaves the worldly behind as the arena for the power with which it has always lived in conflict and for which it now steps aside. As the spirit then frees itself from the world, sensuality appears in all its power; it offers no objection to the change, it too sees the advantage in being separated, and rejoices that the Church does not prevail on them to stay together, but hews asunder the bond that binds them. Stronger than ever before, sensuality now awakens in all its richness, in all in rapture and exultation, and just as that recluse in nature, the reticent echo that never speaks first to anyone or speaks without being asked, found such great pleasure in the knight's hunting horn and his love ballads, in the baying of hounds, the snorting of horses, that it never tired of repeating these over and over again and, in the end, completely under its breath, so as not to forget them, so the whole world became an abode for sensuality's worldly spirit, echoing from all sides, while the spirit had abandoned the world. The Middle Ages have as much to say of a mountain not found on any map; it is called Venusberg. There the sensual has its home, there it has its wild pleasures, for it is a kingdom, a state. In this kingdom language has no home, nor thought's sobriety, nor the laborious business of reflection. All one hears there is the elemental voice of passion, the play of the appetites, the wild din of intoxication; indulgence, only, in an eternal tumult. The first-born of this kingdom is Don Juan. This is not yet to say that it is the realm of sin, for we must grasp it at the moment when it appears in aesthetic indifference.” Mozart's Don Juan depicts the last hours of this state of affairs. In the d-minor andante introduction of the overture, the opera begins with the unexpected return of the spirit. This beginning, conceived purely from music, is at the same time the most fantastic inner vision of musical literature: a veritable apparition. The asymmetrically arranged blocks of the d-minor tonic, dominant accords sounding in the whole of the orchestra suggest unbroken monumentality, a kind of mass-like trait. The intonation is numbing, no wonder Albert associates it with the image of the Medusa head. But there is a sudden change in the musical material. The former dense and solid tone becomes sublime, translucent, almost aerial. At the same time there are clearer sections. On one hand, a definite and consistently repeated rhythm is formed:



On the other hand, the octave steps of the wind-instrument players, these enormous, yet weightless spirit steps validate a clear periodicity. Thus, the apparition becomes even more unreal and at the same time specific. This is when a lively inner dynamisation begins: the first violins draw a melodic line, while the sixteenth movement of the second violins creates an unsettled surge. The liberated energies are discharged in threatening sforzatos that immediately die. But it is evident that the music is evolving to the explosion of tension. And indeed, two – almost volcanic – outbreaks testify to the manifestation of an irresistible power. This is succeeded by a slow withdrawal, a withdrawal not in the least less scary than the explosion. The above-mentioned rhythm reappears in the bass, while the scale movements of the flutes and the violins (crescendo upwards, piano downwards) terrify us with the

ambiguous gesture of rushing forward, then retreating, of threatening and calming down. Finally, the immediate danger is over, all emotions turn towards the inside, everything is swallowed and integrated by the monumental pulsation of the basic rhythm and by the burning tremolo, and then in the last beats tension almost boils away, the apparition disappears, becomes hot steam and flies upwards in the sharp staccatos of the violins. At the beginning of Renaissance tragedies, the allegoric figure of Revenge often appears to announce: the guilty will be punished. He himself only intones the drama, he steps aside and does not intervene in the course of the plot. Still, he is the one who is behind everything, the spectator sees things through him. Here, in the slow introduction of Don Juan's overture, an apparition appears, then dissolves. It signals and decides something. The spirit disappears so that the world drama, the exit of spirit from the world and the release of sensuality, may seemingly take place again. But the recipient who hears the music feels that this cannot be entirely true. The power that manifested itself in this d-minor music was not the one who does not find its place in the world anymore, but a Shakespearean „perturbed spirit”. And it is impossible to ever forget this intonation of the opera. Hotho is right in saying: „This painful, profound, deadly gravity suggested to me and warned me about Don Juan's fate that he cannot escape.” But this is just a presentiment of the recipient. When the apparition disappears, the realm of sensuality occupies the world stage without being aware of this warning. The end point of the d-minor andante, organ point d, is at the same time the starting point of the d-major molto allegro. Between the two parts, there is a turning point instead of a transition, the second part almost knocking over the first. The second part of the overture is a single symphonic movement, with a homogeneous inner meaning. The whole thing is a direct, unreflected manifestation of explosive energy, life force, sensuality and joy of life. All inner differentiations, contradictions and resolutions, tensions and balances, varieties take place within this homogeneous manifestation, as its constant change of shape, as its ever-changing emotional and atmospheric quality. The d-major molto allegro of the overture is the musical image of the realm of sensuality. The two parts of the overture of Don Juan are based on strikingly different constructional principles. The first part is a series of musical mosaics where not one theme is elaborated. The only precisely seizable continuity is the consistent inner quickening which is indeed a harmonious tendency from the half notes of the beginning to the thirtysecond notes of the end. But the basic characteristic of the slow introduction is the ambiguity that the extracts thematically structured side by side integrate into an atmospheric process. This compositional peculiarity precisely expresses the ambiguity of meaning of the first part. There is no dramatic figure yet, the plot has not begun. This apparition – just like Hamlet's father's ghost for Horatio, Bernardo and Marcellus – is just a „dreaded sight”, an „apparition”, a „portentous figure”, an „illusion”. The music audibly shows us „this spirit, dumb to us” through this compositional contradiction, this spirit that suggests so much by its mere apparition. The second part of the overture, however, is a closed and complete symphonic movement, elaborated in consistent, thematic work. It is a musical world that ignores everything apart from itself, standing in itself, multi-facetedly manifesting its possibilities within itself. Thus, the overture connects two worlds that oppose each other in everything, most profoundly in their composition. Or to be more precise: it confronts two opposite poles of a split world. Thus, this enormous symphonic prologue promises a world drama. The overture remains open with a c-major accord on the Vth degree of f-major: the musical curtain is raised.