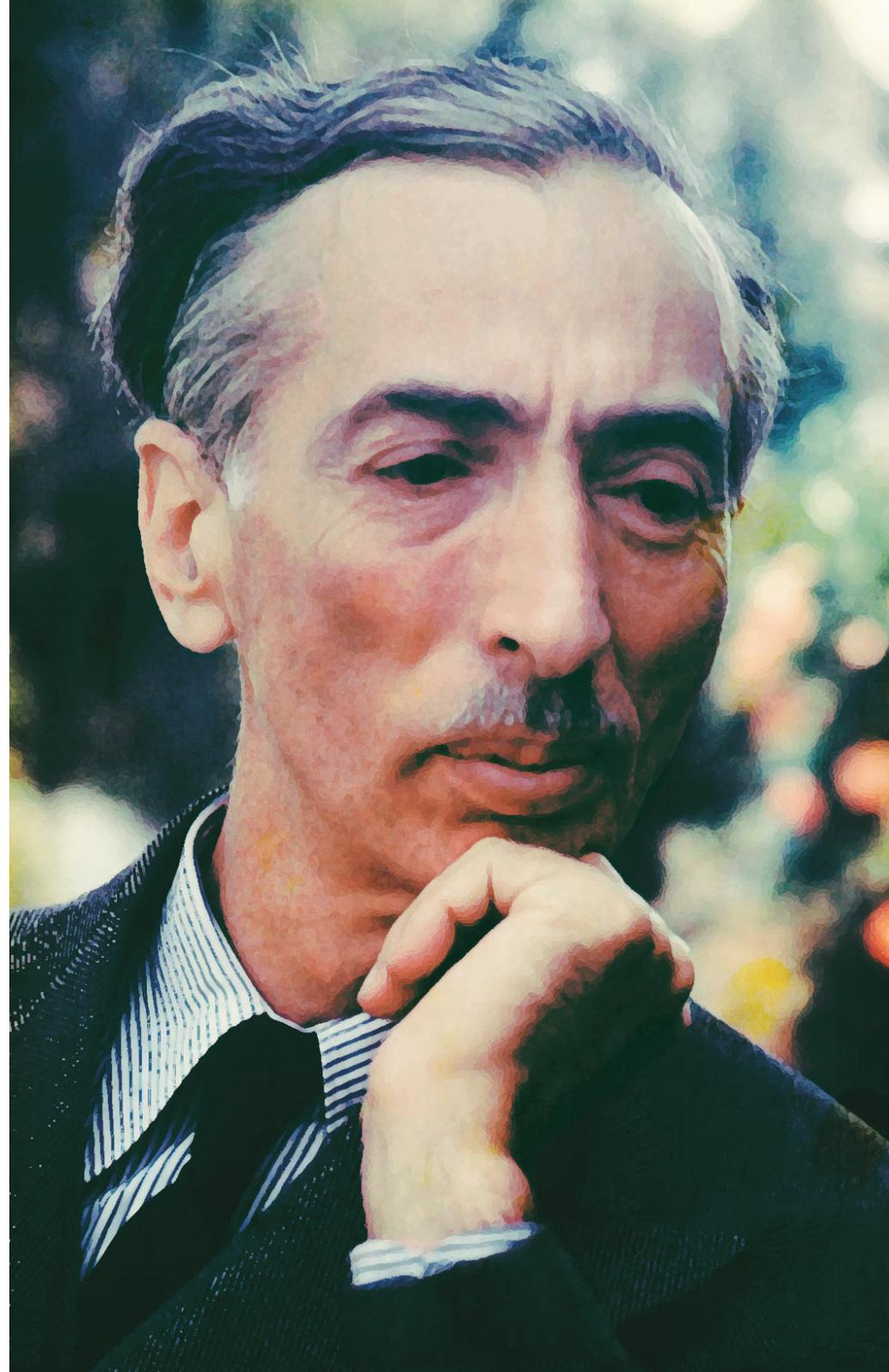


Eugene
ZÁDOR
The Plains of
Hungary
Fantasia Hungarica
Variations on a
Merry Theme
Rhapsodies

Budapest Symphony
Orchestra MÁV
Mariusz Smolij



Eugene Zádor (1894–1977)

Dance Overture · Elegie, ‘The Plains of Hungary’ · Rhapsody for Cimbalom and Orchestra Fantasia Hungarica · Variations on a Merry Theme · Rhapsody for Orchestra

According to musicologist Nicolas Slonimsky, ‘Eugene Zádor was a Classicist; he was a Romantic; he was a modernist. There is no contradiction in these three categories: in Zádor’s music there breathed the air of Romantic lyricism within the framework of Classical forms; and there were ingenious modernistic innovations in his elegant scores. This unity in variety was the secret of the universal appeal that Zádor’s music so fortunately inspired.’ This fifth volume in the continuing Naxos series of orchestral works by Zádor focuses on works from the last two decades of his career – most of them composed after he had retired from orchestration work to focus purely on composition. They reflect, in various ways, Zádor’s Hungarian roots, evoking the ethos of his native land without resorting to authentic folk material (all themes are the composer’s own).

Dance Overture, composed in 1965, opens with a secondary idea – an interplay of triplet figures from two trumpets. Violas introduce the principal motif, a four-bar phrase that sounds like it could be the start of a fugal figure (although Zádor does not initially develop it in that way). Another secondary motif appears later in the form of a lyrical clarinet duet. But Zádor’s working out of the main theme makes up the bulk of this brief piece, and he subjects it to numerous, almost kaleidoscopic variations. He alters the rhythm and the orchestration with effortless flow; at various points he transforms it into a waltz and a mixed-metre idea, and virtually every instrumental section gets a crack at it.

Zádor composed his *Fantasia Hungarica* for double bass and orchestra in 1970 at the suggestion of bassist Gary Karr, to whom the score is dedicated. ‘Flavoured by Hungarian folklore’, the composer wrote, ‘the *Fantasia* conveys a variety of moods in both movements, retaining always the balance between soloist and orchestra. Since I like to write for so-called “underprivileged” instruments, I am well aware of the possibilities and limitations of these instruments. The *Fantasia* is a fundamentally simple work, but I treat the double bass as a solo instrument and I give the player good opportunity to show his virtuosity.’ Indeed, in its two relatively brief movements, the *Fantasia* displays many sides of the instrument’s capability – lyricism,

technique and range (often playing in registers more associated with cellos and even violas). As the composer points out, he carefully creates orchestral sonorities that support and interact with but never cover the soloist. Consider, for example, the brief duets in the second movement, *Poco vivo*, when Zádor silences the full orchestra and features the soloist in tandem with, at certain points, cellos, piccolo, tuba and violins.

The absence of any overarching shape justifies the composer’s use of ‘fantasia’ in the title. The opening horn solo generates much of the thematic material of the first movement, its opening short-long rhythmic figure immediately announcing its affinity with Hungarian folk music. The bass soloist introduces the livelier idea that permeates the second movement, often played in counterpoint with a scurrying flourish of skittish semiquavers.

Edward Bernard Benjamin (1897–1980) was a New Orleans industrialist and philanthropist who ardently believed that life should be surrounded with beauty. To that end, he worked with composer Howard Hanson to establish the Edward Benjamin Award for Restful Music at the Eastman School of Music. Initially awarded only to Eastman students, it was later expanded to include commissions for The Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy. Among the latter were *Notturmo ungherese* by Zádor’s compatriot and colleague Miklós Rózsa (1963). Zádor’s *Elegie*, written four years earlier, was well received at its premiere on 11 November 1960. A Philadelphia music critic described it as a piece of ‘distinction’, ‘greatly influenced in its dolorous and impressive unfolding by Hungarian folk music. It is a rather stark and lonely piece of undoubted integrity.’

Zádor initially intended to call the work *The Hungarian Plains* but changed it to *Elegie* to better indicate ‘the abstract universality of its moods’, relegating the original name to a subtitle. The music is essentially a subdued dialogue between strings and woodwinds – primarily clarinet, which introduces the principal theme in bar 11: an expansive, ruminative melody with a prominent Lydian fourth. Zádor may have been using the clarinet to imitate

the sound of the Hungarian *tárogató*, a folk instrument with a modern, single-reed version that sounds like a cross between a clarinet and a saxophone. (Indeed, the review quoted above suggests that Ormandy may have substituted a *tárogató* for the clarinet called for in the score at the premiere.) Brass (except for solo horn) and harp provide mostly a supporting role; there is no percussion. Strings try to add an astringent tone to the conversation midway through, but the clarinet will have none of it, and solo oboe eventually brings back the placid opening idea.

The California Chamber Symphony commissioned the *Rhapsody for Cimbalom and Orchestra* in honour of Zádor’s 75th birthday in 1970. The dulcimer-like instrument, a mainstay of Hungarian folk music, is a relative newcomer to the concert hall. Stravinsky was an early enthusiast, and Kodály’s popular suite from *Háry János* features the instrument prominently. Pierre Boulez, Peter Maxwell Davies and Louis Andriessen are among the contemporary composers who have used the cimbalom in their works. Film composers, too, have exploited the instrument’s exotic and ethnic sound, including Rózsa in *The Power* (1968), which features the cimbalom in the main title (where it is also seen on screen) and throughout the score. Zádor, however, did not orchestrate this particular film for Rózsa, having retired from orchestration work after *The V.I.P.s* in 1963.

The principal theme of the *Rhapsody* sounds, remarkably, like a Hungarian version of *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, its rising-and-falling shape remaining consistent throughout the piece. The solo instrument alternates between principal and accompanying roles, interacting with all the other instruments in this lightly scored piece. (Other than strings, Zádor restricts his palette here to single flute, clarinet, horn and trumpet.) Although the composer does not label the piece a concerto, he provides the soloist with a relatively lengthy cadenza before bringing the *Rhapsody* to a swift, pithy conclusion.

The first performance of *Variations on a Merry Theme* took place in Birmingham, Alabama, on 12 January 1965. The composer wrote: ‘The main theme, played by the flute, is my own idea. I like vital music, so I chose a theme of gay nature. The theme appears in different keys, is played by different instruments, augmented in rhythm and then abbreviated. Sometimes it is lyrical (alto saxophone) and

sometimes it is dramatic (trombone). It ends in a gay fugato, bringing the piece to a happy climax.’

The work’s title and the composer’s description perhaps suggest a ‘light’ piece, but hearing it reveals a much more varied experience with shades of light and dark. Zádor makes effective use of his large orchestra (triple woodwinds, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, piano, four percussion players and strings) to keep changing the colour throughout, making it almost a concerto for orchestra. The theme itself is teasing and elusive – nominally in D major but with enough non-harmonic tones in its seven-bar span to make that uncertain; only its head-motif is easily grasped and clearly noticeable in the ten variations that follow.

Strings and woodwinds introduce the first sombre and acerbic notes in the slow second variation, succeeded by a processional in the third and curt brass in the fourth. The lyrical but bittersweet alto sax solo of the fifth variation plays over a bed of strings, who seem to engage in an increasingly angry debate with woodwinds in the sixth. The playful dialogue between pizzicato strings and piano in the seventh is set off by a trombone solo, and the eighth variation suggests a waltz – although not a very elegant one with its frequent cross-rhythms. Susurating strings alternate with excited woodwinds in variation nine, while, in the tenth, brass intone stentorian fanfares that lead to the concluding fugato. Zádor inserts a reprise of the alto saxophone solo before bringing the *Variations* to a swift end.

The ill-fated events of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution impacted Hungarians all over the world – including in Los Angeles. Its failure brought Zádor’s brother Imre, his last living sibling, to America. It also inspired Miklós Rózsa’s *Overture to a Symphony Concert, Op. 26*, a work he dedicated to Zádor after the latter suggested that a few cuts in the work might make it more easily programmable – a move that noticeably increased the number of performances. Zádor in turn dedicated his *Rhapsody for Orchestra*, premiered by the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1962, to his long-time Hollywood colleague and friend. The work develops two principal ideas – both built on intervals of a fourth. The first has a fanfare-like shape, very similar to a fanfare from Rózsa’s recently completed score for *Ben-Hur* (suggesting that the homage might have been intentional). The other main theme sounds like the start of

a brisk march. Both ideas return often, but always in new treatments, with varied orchestration and rhythm.

Other important recurring ideas include the opening passage for strings that displays a bit more angst than the principal themes, although it also incorporates two gentle cadences featuring a move from subtonic to tonic chords. A more eerie passage, also primarily for strings, evokes Bartók with its mysterious, *nachtmusik* whisperings. In its shifting moods, the *Rhapsody* demonstrates not only Zádor's facility with melody, harmony and colour, but also

his gift for conciseness – no idea lingers too long or overstays its welcome.

In his review of the premiere, critic Albert Goldberg noted, 'The compliment of one Hungarian composer to another, conducted by a third [László Somogyi], was, as one might expect, in the Hungarian folk style, although the material is original. It is an enjoyable and entertaining work, free-wheeling, melodious, harmonically rich and zesty, and lushly orchestrated.'

Frank K. DeWald

Zsolt Fejérvári

Award-winning double-bassist Zsolt Fejérvári studied at the Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest. Between 1994 and 2000 he led the bass section of the Budapest Festival Orchestra (BFO) followed by three years with the Suisse Romande Orchestra, subsequently returning to the BFO in 2003. In 1996 he was personally invited by Sir Georg Solti to participate in the UN 50th anniversary concert in Geneva, as a member of the World Orchestra for Peace. Fejérvári plays regularly with many renowned artists and ensembles including the Liszt Chamber Orchestra, members of the Bartók, Kodály, Éder and Auer Quartets, Nobuko Imai, Kim Kashkashian, Zoltán Kocsis, György Konrád, Alexei Lubimov, Milan Turkovic, Alexei Ogryntchouk, Alexander Rudin, István Várdai and Tamás Varga, among others, and has been invited to many prestigious European festivals. As a soloist he has worked with conductors such as Iván Fischer, Mark Wigglesworth, Leonidas Kavakos and Gábor Takács-Nagy. Zsolt Fejérvári is a lecturer at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest.

Kálmán Balogh

Kálmán Balogh is a Hungarian cimbalom player with a Hungarian Gypsy musicians lineage. A graduate of the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, he completed his studies in 1980 under the supervision of Ferenc Gerencsér and has since studied Gypsy music in Europe and Asia. He has completed many tours throughout the world including North America where he has performed with renowned orchestras and ensembles and has performed with many folk bands as well as recording dozens of albums. In 1985 he was awarded the Hungarian distinction of Young Master of Folk Arts, and two years later he won second prize in the Aladár Rácz cimbalom competition. As an artist he has performed with Hungarian bands such as Jánosi, Ókrös, Téka, Méta, Muzsikás, Zsarátnok, Vizöntő, Vasmalom, the Swedish Orient-Express, the Dutch Sultan and Ot Azoj, the English Transglobal Underground, the American Peter Ogi, the Joel Rubin Jewish Ensemble and was musical director of the Magneten Gypsy Show.



Photo: Zoltán Sárosi



Photo: Zsófia Rátfay



Photo: Evin Thayer

Mariusz Smolij

Polish conductor Mariusz Smolij has won great acclaim from the international press and has led over 120 orchestras on four continents. In North America he has collaborated with the Houston Symphony (Resident Conductor, 2000–03), the New Jersey Symphony, the Orchestra of Chicago Lyric Opera, the Rochester Philharmonic, the Indianapolis Symphony, the Symphony Nova Scotia and the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra. He also enjoys a notable reputation performing with important orchestras in Europe, South Africa and China. He is the founding member of the Penderecki String Quartet, former artistic director of the Lutosławski Philharmonic Orchestra, Wrocław, and the International Festival Wratysłavia Cantans, Poland, and currently serves as music director of the Acadiana Symphony in Louisiana, the Riverside Symphonia in New Jersey and the Toruń Symphony Orchestra in Poland. His recordings for Naxos include releases of works by Andrzej Panufnik, Tadeusz Szeliński, Miklós Rózsa, Eugene Zádor and Ernst Bloch. In 2015, his recording of music by Polish female composer, Grażyna Bacewicz [Naxos 8.573229], won the prestigious Fryderyk Award. www.mariuszsmolij.com

Budapest Symphony Orchestra (MÁV)

The Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV (MÁV Szimfonikus Zenekar) was founded in 1945 by the Hungarian State Railways. Since then, it has developed a wide-ranging repertoire from music of the Baroque era to works by contemporary composers, and is currently ranked among the best professional ensembles in Hungary. The orchestra has performed throughout Europe as well as in Cyprus, Lebanon, Hong Kong, Japan, China, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and Oman. Performances have taken place at many of the most important and respected concert halls, such as the Musikvereinssaal in Vienna, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Suntory Hall in Tokyo, and the Shanghai Oriental Art Centre. The Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV was the only Hungarian orchestra to participate in Tokyo's legendary Three Tenors Production in 1999. In 2012 Péter Csaba became the orchestra's artistic director and chief conductor; Kobayashi Ken-Ichiro has held the post of honorary guest conductor since 2014. www.mavzenekar.hu



Photo: Zsuzsanna Rózsa

In the last two decades of his career Eugene Zádor, whose music fused Classicism with Romanticism to universal acclaim, wrote a series of works that reflected his Hungarian roots. Subtly flavoured by folklore without any direct quotations, Zádor's facility for melody, harmony and colour is exemplified in the *Rhapsody for Orchestra*, while his gift for lyricism and pithy concision is to the fore in the *Fantasia Hungarica* for double bass and orchestra. The *Rhapsody for Cimbalom and Orchestra* reveals his ceaselessly inventive imagination in music that is orchestrated with the deftest touch.

**Eugene
ZÁDOR**
(1894–1977)

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|----------|---|--------------|
| 1 | Dance Overture* (1965) | 7:32 |
| | Fantasia Hungarica* (1970) | 11:03 |
| 2 | I. Moderato | 5:58 |
| 3 | II. Poco vivo | 5:05 |
| 4 | Elegie, 'The Plains of Hungary'* (1960) | 9:32 |
| 5 | Rhapsody for Cimbalom and Orchestra (1969) | 12:14 |
| 6 | Variations on a Merry Theme* (1964) | 22:20 |
| 7 | Rhapsody for Orchestra* (1961) | 14:59 |

*** WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Zsolt Fejérvári, Double Bass 2–3 • Kálmán Balogh, Cimbalom 5
Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV
Mariusz Smolij

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