

*SFS: SYMMETRIC FORUM OF THE SOCIETY*

**ERNŐ LENDVAI**

(b. Kaposvár, February 6, 1925 – d. Budapest, January 31, 1993)

Born in 1925, Ernő Lendvai was one of the few musicologists who have earned world fame on the basis of their genuine research results. As early as during his piano studies at Budapest's Music Academy, he caused controversy with his novel Bartók analyses. Alien, often hostile to parts of Bartók's oeuvre, Hungary's cultural policy granted little support to Lendvai's research. He was attacked for ideological reasons and his scientific achievements failed to become integrated into the mainstream of Hungarian musicology. In his case, life and work progressed on different planes.



Director of the music primary school in Szombathely, then of the Secondary School of Music in Győr, he was later employed as musical director at the Hungarian Radio, and worked as a reader at Editio Musica Budapest, while holding courses in the department of musicology at the Academy of Music. From the late sixties he was a fellow of the Institute for Cultural Research.

Though he threw new light on the works of Kodály, too, and his interest also extended to Verdi and Liszt, it was his revolutionary system of analysis of Bartók's works that brought him renown. He discovered the fact that Bartók's music is closely connected with nature, developing a system of integrating every aspect of a composition - form and rhythm and proportion, together with melody and harmonic structures. "Polymodal chromaticism": that is how Bartók himself termed his own style. Lendvai had in mind the goal of systematizing the phenomena within the scope of polymodal chromaticism, and providing a practical method for a comprehensive analysis of Bartók's music.

Theoretical methods show their value in that, like keys, they help to unlock hitherto closed doors, shedding light on previously unintelligible connections. Lendvai disclosed that Bartók, at the time of composing his *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, was acquainted with principles which the pioneers of modern “stereo” recording did not begin to develop until the early sixties: the sonic stage, the symbolism of left and right, here and far away, deep and high, mono and stereo effects, etc..

Lendvai also threw new light on the Kodály Concept. The symbols of the Kodály System each designate a musical character. If we recognize which sign represents light or darkness, which is accompanied by a rise or descent, which embodies a materialistic and which a spiritual experience, why the content of one is expressionistic and the other impressionistic music - if, through the help of signs, we can differentiate between cold and warm colours, between positive and negative tension - then we shall have conquered something of the realm concealed behind the notes.

Always in search of signification where others see mainly structures, Lendvai also examined the meaning of the different form-types (e.g. the so-called “bridge form” and “large sonata form”). According to him, Bartók’s and Kodály’s ideas can serve to find and interpret new facts in musicology - simultaneously leading us to a wider outlook on the organic development of music history. Finally, he developed a computer model of functional harmony (the harmony of 18th and 19th century music).

Apart from numerous articles, Lendvai published eighteen books. Among his books are: *Bartók’s Style*, *Bartók’s Dramaturgy*, *Toscanini and Beethoven*, *Bartók’s Poetic World*, *Verdi and the 20th Century*, *The Workshop of Bartók and Kodály*, *The Kodály Concept*, *Modality: Atonality: Function*, *Verdi and Wagner*, *Computer Language of Music*.

Lendvai’s standard work on Bartók’s music was published in seven languages and nineteen editions, among others by Boosey and Hawkes, Bärenreiter, Stanmore Press, and Corvina Budapest. His film “Golden Section” won six international *grand prix*, and he held lectures worldwide.

In acknowledgement of his contribution to scholarship, the Hungarian state awarded him the Erkel Prize, followed in 1992 by the Széchenyi Prize, the highest national honour.

Erő Lendvai died in January 1993 in Budapest.