

Ligeti by...



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Frieder Bernius

My first glance at the score of Ligeti's "Lux aeterna" struck me like lightning. In one fell swoop, it reshaped my understanding of new music, and convinced me that Ligeti was the most important composer of the 2nd half of the 20th century. The score of his "Requiem" has hung over my desk for 25 years, until I found the opportunity and reached the maturity necessary for its performance and recording. In addition, Ligeti's compositional technique has decisively influenced my understanding of how to achieve the same perfection for voices that is *a priori* self-evident for instruments: by largely dispensing with vibrato, and balancing open and closed vowels in different whole and half step intervals to improve intonation and balance. The closed "u" vowels in "Lux" will always sound softer than the open vowels in "aeterna," so they have to be balanced dynamically, and the open vowels need good tuning technique to keep them on the same pitch as "lux." It was more important to me than other awards that Ligeti wrote me in a letter about the "Lux aeterna" recording: "This is a rare pleasure!" *Frieder Bernius, Founder and Artistic Director, Stuttgart Chamber*

Choir

Translated by Clayton Parr, USA



Laura Antal

A transformative experience with Ligeti

In the first concert of the Free Voices Ensemble (<https://szabadhangok.wordpress.com/>) in 2003 two of Ligeti's *Nonsense Madrigals* were performed. In the subsequent years we continued to perform more and more pieces eventually including the entire avant-garde a cappella vocal oeuvre of Ligeti. As a choirmaster and a person who loves a challenge, I have been on the developmental and ever-inspiring adventure of teaching and interpreting Ligeti's music. I prepared special vocal exercises for each work and rehearsing with meticulous methodological steps. I searched for the most appropriate conducting gestures as well as the proper beating technique. One of the most demanding pieces in this regard was *A Long, Sad Tale* which I rehearsed with a twist by beating an even jazz pulse, not conducting the piece anymore when the piece was performed again – although this happened only with a very few pieces being a choir that works on projects out of passion. In our last concert we worked through Ligeti's compositional techniques used in *Musica ricercata*. The different tonal, structural and atmospheric characteristics of

the movements were set to music by directed improvisation with words of Sándor Weöres. In doing so I think we have succeeded in touching the most exciting field of choral improvisation, making reflexions to Ligeti's art with the highest skills an interpreter can contribute. *Laura Antal, conductor, adjunct professor at the University of Pécs, solfège teacher in the Zoltán Kodály Choirschool Budapest, Hungary*



Sarah Newman

This year I had the great fortune of getting vocally intimate with several of György Ligeti's works set to the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin. In addition to the "Drei Hölderlin Phantasien" for 16 voices, I also performed Ligeti's simple yet multilayered song "Der Sommer". In preparation for both, I learned a lot about Hölderlin's tragically romantic life and the way the different phases of his work reflected his mindset (and mental health). Once you understand that, Ligeti's settings become all the more perfect in their construction. The "Phantasien" consist of gorgeous lyrical lines that the listener only catches a small moment of before the canon

causes the colors to swirl together. The melodic and harmonic structures descend into the undefined, but every so often, a moment of clarity shines through (think “das Land” in 1. Hälfte des Lebens or my favorite part of the 3. Abendphantasie “sanfter Schlummer”) before taking another dive into “chaos”. His song “Der Sommer” is so simple in its text, yet the composition tells so much of Hölderlin’s story in his later years. His daily walks absorbing nature, the beauty and peace of his surroundings, and coming to terms with the fact that it will all still exist even when he is gone are all painted in Ligeti’s piano accompaniment while the vocal line dreamily floats along with it, sporadically swelling into desperation before softly resigning itself to the inevitable and dreaming once again. As a singer, it is a thrill to have the opportunity to bring such deliciously complex and rich music to life. ...you just have to make sure you don’t miscount! *Sarah M. Newman, professional singer, USA/Germany*



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Yuval Weinberg

Some years ago, even before I officially started my term as chief conductor of the SWR Vokalensemble, the choir’s dramaturge, Dorothea Bossert, told me she found out about a large number of a cappella works by György Liegti that were

never published. We were both excited and decided we were going to record all his music for unaccompanied choir. Dorothea got in contact with the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel (that had the manuscripts) as well as with Schott Music and some months later we started receiving the newly-printed scores. To our surprise, all of these early works, except for one, were in Hungarian. Many of them are arrangements of Hungarian folk music, and some are his own compositions of different Hungarian texts. The first thing we did was translate everything and find language coaches who would work with the choir and myself. To me it is fascinating to follow a composer's life through his musical creation; starting with wonderful miniatures from the 1940's such as "Magány" or "Temetés a tengeren", through to his "Éjszaka" and "Reggel" (1955- Night and Morning), which I would describe as his first musical turning point; the well-known "Lux aeterna" from 1966 and then – after almost 20 years of not composing choral music – the mighty "Three Fantasies after Friedrich Hölderlin" that explore the full range of a choir's vocal abilities, full of vivid pictures, word painting and polyphony. *Yuval Weinberg, Chief conductor of the SWR Vokalensemble Stuttgart*



**György Ligeti Complete Works for a
cappella Choir**

SWR Vokalensemble

Yuval Weinberg

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