

# *MUSICA TRANSILVANICA – POLYPHONIC VESTIGES OF THE MUSICAL HERITAGE OF THE "TREASURE CITY"*

**Ph.D. student EMESE SÓFALVI**  
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

Emese SÓFALVI. A graduate of the *Gheorghe Dima* Academy of Music of Cluj-Napoca, currently a Ph.D. student at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Emese Sófalvi carries out a research on the musical events of the 19th-century Cluj (the title of her doctoral thesis: *Musical Education at the Cluj Conservatory between 1819 and 1869*). She has published works on the history of the first musical society in Cluj, on the cooperation of the Music Conservatory with local theatre groups (1821-1848) and on the careers of various prominent figures of the Transylvanian and international lyric stage (especially of soprano Rosalia Schodel).



## **ABSTRACT**

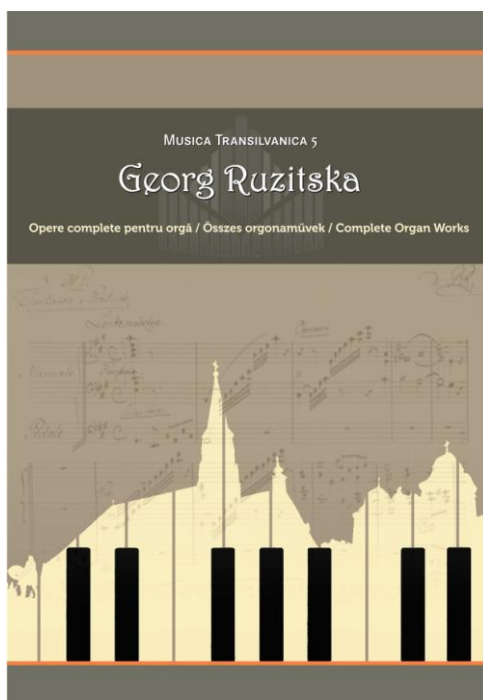
The present review highlights the success of the recently published edition of Georg Ruzitska's complete organ works. Based on the composer's manuscripts, the editing of the scores and the CD represent the first stages of the process of reintegration of Ruzitska's compositions in the current landscape of artistic practice. In the absence of printed sources, our presentation attempts to complement and correct the information contained in the preface to the edition. Based on Ruzitska's manuscripts and personal papers, as well as on the documents of the musical institution where he worked as a teacher and director, the text provides new information on the biography of the author and on the place of the organ repertoire in the context of the composer's creative output.

**Keywords:** Georg Ruzitska, organ works, musical manuscripts, Bach reception in Transylvania

The recently published edition of composer Georg Ruzitska's complete organ works represents a novelty both for the connoisseurs of the repertoire of the queen of instruments, and for those interested in the Transylvanian representatives of 19th-century classical music. The 5th part of the series *Musica Transilvanica*, the score (ed. István Potyó: *Georg Ruzitska Opere complete pentru orgă*, Editura

Media Musica, 2015, 68 p.) and the CD (Georg Ruzitska *Opere complete pentru orgă*, performed by István Potyó and Erich Türk, producer “Asociația Ansamblul Baroc Transylvania”, 2015, 49:59 min.) contain the complete organ works of the musician of Czech origin, trained in Vienna, who spent nearly six decades in the city of Cluj and its surrounding areas.

Dedicated to the research and performance of Transylvanian music, the editor and the two performers provide a professional and complex approach to the musical manuscript material. The clean, well-proportioned and easily legible score contains 14 pieces – preludes, fugues, fantasies and transcriptions for organ – from the documentary collection of composer Georg Ruzitska.



The editing of the musical material, i.e. of the score itself, represents the first stage in the process of reintegration of Ruzitska's compositions in the current landscape of artistic practice. Relying on the dating of the manuscripts, editor István Potyó grouped the pieces in chronological order: the 7 fugues dating from 1824 are followed by the compositions written between 1847 and 1849, which are already conceived for the Romantic sonority of the new organ of the Piarist church. The score renders the titles in their original version, with the mostly German

musical terminology being at times interwoven with French expressions.<sup>1</sup> The editor emphasizes the fact that no interventions were made even in the case of the missing articulation signs.

The introductory text contains the information required for the placement of composer Ruzitska's musical output within the context of the European classical music of the time, while also presenting the noble intention of the edition. Based on the research conducted by István Lakatos, the preface outlines a brief biography of the talented musician: composer, performer, teacher and organizer of the musical life of the city of Cluj for decades. Originally from a well-developed cultural centre, employed by a family of aristocrats and later recognized as a valued citizen of the treasure city, Ruzitska shared the destiny of many Eastern European artists. In his case, however, it should be noted that his talent, his leadership abilities and not least his constant connection with the church and the Catholic ceremonies enabled not only his establishment as an artistic personality but also his exceptional and enduring contribution to the musical life of the city lying at the heart of Transylvania.

The three variants of the preface (Romanian, Hungarian and English) are not entirely identical, which is actually understandable given the limited space allocated to the translations. However, there are a few errors and inadvertences that need correcting: Georg Ruzitska was born in 1786 and not in 1789, as assumed by István Lakatos in his works dedicated to the musician<sup>2</sup>. The manuscripts of the composer's organ works can be found in the music department of the National Széchenyi Library<sup>3</sup> in Budapest, under Ms. Mus. 229-232 (and not 299-301). Preceding his last fugue, the *Fantasy No. 3 in F major* is dated by the editor in 1849. Found under the same shelf-mark (NSzL Ms. Mus. 230), both the *Fantasy No. 3* and the *Fugue No. 7* originally bear the inscription 1824 (May and February, respectively) – while 1849 is probably the year when the score was reviewed.<sup>4</sup>

In the absence of a monograph or of a complete list of compositions, it is natural that the brief introductory study cannot place the organ repertoire within

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<sup>1</sup> The present review does not comment on the inconsistency of the names used in the score or CD edition. To facilitate the approach to this text we will refer to all the names in a unitary manner: Fugue, Prelude, Fughetta, Prelude pathétique etc.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. István Lakatos *Egy erdélyi muzsikussal vallomásai (Confessions of a Transylvanian Musician)*, Editura Minerva, 1940, Cluj.

<sup>3</sup> In what follows we will refer to Ruzitska's manuscripts as NSzL Ms. Mus. X (National Széchenyi Library, musical manuscripts, manuscript number).

<sup>4</sup> A subsequent inscription also indicates that the piece was performed in 1911 in Budapest, on the organ of the Music Academy.

Ruzitska's compositional output (1786, Vienna – 1869, Cluj).<sup>1</sup> Acclaimed by his contemporaries, the musician who settled in Cluj published several of his scores abroad (in Transylvania there was no specialized publishing house for sheet music). Available only in manuscript form, but frequently used in liturgical practice, the five masses along with other works related to the Catholic liturgy (*Tantum ergo*, *Regina coeli*, *Responsorii*, *Pangue lingua*, *Imnuri*, *Pater noster*, *Graduale*, *Libera me* etc.) were part of the sacred music repertoire performed in Cluj beginning with 1820. Having composed several character pieces and chamber and symphonic works, Georg Ruzitska also ventured in the world of theatre music, not only by presenting his work *Alonso, oder die Wege des Verhängnisses* (*Alonso, or the Road to Misfortune*) but also through the many inserts and transcriptions of the lyrical masterpieces that he adapted for the theatre's orchestra, or transcribed for the salon music of the years 1840-1850. His rich pedagogical activity resulted both in the development of several musical methods (basic principles of music theory, elementary studies of singing, violin, piano, organ or figured bass) and especially in several pieces of a lighter character, miniatures appropriate for the basic study of singing, piano or cello – an instrument which, besides the organ, was Ruzitska's favourite.

Serving as *Regens Chori* at the Piarist Church in Cluj, it was only natural for Ruzitska to use the organ as accompanying instrument in the musical masses. However, in some of the pieces written for the Catholic liturgy, the composer gave a more prominent role to the instrument. An illustrative example is the *Gradual* in E-flat major (NSzL, Ms. Mus. 214), composed “per soprano e organo *concertanti*” (our emphasis). Further research will probably clarify the relationship between the musical material of the organ works and that of the sacred compositions, as well as the level of complexity of the organ parts in the liturgical works. Given the preponderance of the instrument in Ruzitska's works, we suggest that the term used by the editor (complete works for organ) could be nuanced as “complete works for organ *solo*”.

Ruzitska's seven fugues are among the first of his scores which, based on their dates and inscriptions, can be directly and undoubtedly linked to the city of Cluj. In the 1820s, the organ works were preceded only by a few sacred works, including the aforementioned *Gradual*, written in April 1824 and dedicated “a suo amico” Philip Caudella, a renowned pianist residing in the Transylvanian city.

The knowledge acquired in Vienna – where, besides the musical training in composition and figured bass, the young organist participated in the liturgies of

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<sup>1</sup> Besides the compositions written in Vienna and Pest, the composer's manuscripts include over 50 documents kept at the Széchenyi Library in Budapest and at the Cluj Academy Library, with some of them containing several titles of miniatures or transcriptions.

the Piarist church in a time when masses were performed under the personal guidance of Joseph Haydn, Franz Kommer or Joseph Priendl – were complemented throughout the decade spent in an apparent isolation in Nuşfalău (1811-1819), in the service of Count Bánffy, by the study of the great masters' masterpieces. During the genesis of his first organ works, their models were already present in the young composer's collection, in original or copied form<sup>1</sup>: musical works (Johann Sebastian Bach *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier I.*, BWV 846-869, *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue* BWV 903, *Due fughe per due clavicembali* [probably from *Die Kunst der Fughe*, BWV 1080], or Johann Georg Albrechtsberger *24 versetti per l'organo o clavicembalo*, Op. 10), as well as theoretical works (Johann Joseph Fux *Gradus ad Parnassum*, Daniel Gottlob Türk [probably *Kurze Anweisung zum Generalbassspielen*], Johann Philipp Kirnberger *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik*). Although still far from the Bach revival generated among others by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy in Vienna, in 1820, the *Allgemeiner Musikzeitung* had already made reference to the *36 Fugues on the B-A-C-H Theme* by Johann Christian Knutzen.<sup>2</sup> Another *hommage* piece with a possible influence can be the *Fugue über B-A-C-H* in G minor by Albrechtsberger – a composer held in high regard by Georg Ruzitska.

Thus, continuing the Viennese Bach tradition in Transylvania as well, it was not by accident that Ruzitska chose Bach as his master, and the fugue as an exercise of compositional development. Testing his limits with the most complex musical form, the seven fugues provide a vivid picture of the organist-composer's compendium. Starting from the simple forms and up to the *Fugue No. 6, BACH*, Ruzitska manages to accomplish the assigned task *cum laude*.

In the printed edition, the fugues are followed by freer works: fantasies, preludes and transcriptions, already conceived in the Romantic spirit.<sup>3</sup> While apparently departing from the severe polyphonic style and influenced by the impressions of the contemporary symphonic music and of the lyrical stage, as well as by the ideal of a fuller instrumental sonority, the organ works written between 1847 and 1849 remain nevertheless faithful to the aforementioned models. Functioning as an integral part of the liturgy, the *Prelude*, *Fughetta* and *Grave* illustrate the composer's conservative spirit. On the other hand, the *Fantaisie ou*

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<sup>1</sup> We mention only the musical works to which Ruzitska makes direct reference in his *Confessions...*, as well as those which bear his signature or are his own copies.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Kolneder *Bach-lexicon*. Gondolat, Budapest, 1988, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Here are some of the works from Ruzitska's Romantic repertoire: *Fantasy and Potpourri for Flute and Piano* (NSzL, Ms. Mus. 243), *Fantasy, Variations and Finale for Orchestra* (NSzL, Ms. Mus. 240), *Zrinyi Overture* (NSzL, Ms. Mus. 239), *Introduction et variations brilliants sur un thème hongrois concertants pour violoncelle et piano* (NSzL, Ms. Mus. 237), *Introduction, variations et finale pour flûte et piano concertants* (NSzL, Ms. Mus. 236), string quartets and quintets (NSzL, Ms. Mus. 233 and 234).

*Prelude* or the *Prelude pathétique* already allow Romantic inserts of virtuosity, along with rhythmic and melodic features specific to *verbunkos* music. However, both the elements of Hungarian national music and the virtuoso passages are contrasted by strict sequences.

Hoping that the coming generations of organists will give proper consideration to his works, we draw attention to one specific issue related to the genesis of his compositions for solo organ dating from the years 1848-1849. In the midst of the 1848 events, Ruzitska – whose both sons were on the battlefield – turned his attention to the music of the great masters. If his fugues dating from 1824 pay tribute to Bach, the works and especially the transcription dating from July and August 1849 (the period during which the fate of the revolutionary forces was sealed) look back to Beethoven for inspiration.<sup>1</sup> The art of the “immortal masters” thus becomes a refuge for the musician, whose documents from after the rebellion include, in addition to the rigorous reviews, only a few ceremonial compositions and transcriptions.

In the absence of new compositions, Georg Ruzitska dedicated the last decades of his life to teaching music and serving as a cantor. At the age of 78, in an interview with a former student, he confessed that “he is still a great admirer of Johann Sebastian Bach's organ music, and lives, body and soul, in the liturgical music.”<sup>2</sup> A part of this soul is still alive through his organ music.

We cannot emphasize enough the remarkably professional work of the editor, as well as his inspired and faithful interpretation of the composer's meticulous instructions. Not only have István Potyó and Erich Türk brought back to life the scores forgotten for more than a century, but through the artists' performance, the works have returned to where they belong: St. Michael's Church and the Piarist Church in Cluj. By introducing the two instruments (the Hahn/Binder organ of St. Michael's Church and the Maywald organ of the Piarist Church), the CD invokes the space where Ruzitska probably performed most often.

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<sup>1</sup> The transcription for organ of the *Sonata Mondschein*, Op. 27, No. 2 stands side by side with his reductions of Beethoven's works, which hold a prominent place among Ruzitska's compositional works. The author's collection includes an almost complete transcription of the version for chamber ensemble of the *Symphonies* No. 3 Op. 55, No. 4, Op. 60 and No. 6, Op. 68 (NSzL, Ms. Mus. 258), along with fragments from the *Mass in C major* Op. 86 and *6 Lieder*, Op. 48 (NSzL, Ms. Mus. 226).

<sup>2</sup> Interview with István Bartalus in the newspaper *Az ország tüköre*, published in Pest, 1864, Issue No. 3, January 21, p. 25.



We hope that editor István Potyó's initiative along with the Musica Transilvanica projects will continue – perhaps with the composer's masses, given the orientation of the artists who contributed to the present edition –, and that Georg Ruzitska's musical works will (re)gain their well-deserved place in the daily practice of the organists, in the liturgical practice or in the concert repertoire, and eventually in the Transylvanian music history of the time.