

NO. 435

"B-5" FACESHEET AND RATING

ML

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July, 1957
Baden

1. V-11
- 2.
- 3.
4. 35
5. M
6. German ("sváb")
- 7.
- 8.
9. Married
10. None
11. Musician (clarinetist)
12. Musician (clarinetist)
- 13.
14. Middle class
- 15.
16. Czechoslovakia, etc.
- 17.
18. Yes
- 19.
20. Budapest
21. Budapest
- 22.
- 23.
24. October 29, 1956
25. Baden, Austria
- 26.
- 27.
- 28.
- 29.
31. "8"
32. "8"
33. "6"
34. ?

After 1945, I was a clarinetist of the Hungarian Concert Orchestra - Hangversenyzenekar - until the winter of 1946-47 when I was arrested for participating in anti-Communist agitation. I was fired from the orchestra in the spring of 1947, but the orchestra, which wanted me back, saw to it that I ~~was~~ was freed from prison. My trial was in 1947 or '48 and I was acquitted. After 1948, I was ~~a~~ a member both of the opera and the concert orchestra~~x~~ - With the combined salary of 5,300 forints. I also taught the clarinet at the ~~K~~ Béke[']starhos Gymn[']asium, which was Kodály's pet project.

At first when the Communist Party came to power in ~~1948~~ 1948, they exerted a tremendous pressure on the public in order to make ^{it} ~~them~~ listen to Russian music. This was connected with the so-called Stalinist cult of personality, because most of these Russian musical works praised Stalin and exalted his greatness. A very few Hungari[']as composers participated in this Stalinist cult, among them Kadosa and Sárkö[']zi. In addition to this, the works of pre-Soviet Russian composers were also cultivated by the orchestras and the opera. In spite ~~mg~~ of the public's lack of interest, the opera was forced to perform Fadeyev's The Young Guard. Actually, this was not at all bad musically. The opposition and resistance of the audience was felt at all performances. For instance, the programming policy of concerts became a serious problem, because if a Russian work was the first number on the

program, then the audience made sure to arrive for the second. Whoever planned the program was faced with an unpleasant situation because he was held responsible for this ~~mx~~ sort of thing. Thus, he had to make sure that the Russian works were placed on the program, cunningly, so that the audience could not ~~mx~~ escape.

Many Russian artists were sent to Hungary; I use the word sent advisedly - they didn't merely come. Every year there was a Soviet music month; the Soviet Union's cultural Committee chose artists who were to represent the Soviet Union in the satellites. This cultural month was in February in Czechoslovakia, March in Hungary, etc., so that they wouldn't have to send two groups. We never knew in advance who would be sent, and what the program would be. And we had to be just as happy with bad musicians as with good. We got a share of both. The Russian~~x~~ artists are good technicians, but they are not personalities - not individuals. I believe that the Russian artists' knowledge is not equal to that of the Western artists. A real artist has to be an individual personality, and the Soviet artists can't be accused of this. Their playin_g affects me like this: the Soviet artist starts practice at 8:00 a.m. and continues until he goes to his concert in the evening at which he continues to practice. After the concert he goes home and what does he do? He practices. Oistrakh is a colossal violinist who serves the aims of the Party well, making good propaganda for the Soviet Union. When he was

in Hungary it was impossible to talk to him man to man because the people around him didn't allow it, and he didn't protest against this. It ^{is} ~~was~~ just fantastic ~~was that~~ that he placidly accepted this status! It is true that when he plays the violin he is a personality, a prominent representative of the good old school of Russian violin playing. But one would expect him to be a little more of a human being, too, if he can play like this. I remember an episode which happened at the Budapest World Youth Conference in which Oistrakh participated. There was a pre-arranged scene which consisted of all the Soviet artists standing on the stage and waving their red handkerchiefs at Stalin's picture on the wall. This group included Oistrakh. The director gave Oistrakh hell for waving the wrong way, and Oistrakh took it without any comment. I was just amazed! Russian music is not Soviet music. The new Soviet composers, in order to exist, naturally do everything to please and praise the regime and Stalin.

In Hungary music was controlled by a few musicians, composers, such as Ferenc Szabó and Kadosa, who naturally saw to it that their own music was performed most often. Ferenc Szabó was a former Russian major, a Party member and member of Parliament, and leader of the Stalinist trend in music even the year before the Revolution. Between the two world wars he was a teacher at the Academy of Music in the Soviet Union. He was one of the leaders of the Association of Composers in Hungary. The Association was

an important one, partly because it received a very large income from the restaurant industry, since every restaurant, nightclub, etc., which performed any sort of music on its premises, had to pay 5 percent of its profits to the Association. The leaders of the Association naturally divided the money chiefly among themselves. Szabó received the highest yearly royalties for his works, in spite of the fact that neither the musicians nor the public liked his works. This sort of thing was typical, prevalent in every area of the Communist regime. Where there are ~~big~~ big dictators, you will have small dictators also.

Of course, they were unable to take Kodály and Bartók off the opera and concert programs because the public demanded that their music be performed. They are the two most characteristically Magyar composers. Kodály was especially popular because people knew that he didn't sympathize with the regime;

He was known

to have made many sarcastic statements against the Communists. For instance, when the music school of Békestarhos built a concert hall, using an old building as its basis, he asked the county leader ~~xxx~~ ship (not the Party leadership) who was the former owner of the castle. When he was told that he was an aristocrat, a baron, if I remember correctly, Kodály retorted: "He'll get a very handsome house when he returns."

In Hungary one manifestation of the Eastern trend was to use

folk products in every field, to use folk music as source material to the greatest possible extent. I think this stress on the use of folk motifs is detrimental to creativity, and leads to ~~the~~ ^a lack of ~~imagination~~ and invention in musical works. What about Kodály's use of folk music in his work? I think that Kodály is not as great a composer as Richard Strauss. Kodály's music has a certain national content, he represents his people in music. But Strauss' orchestration is far greater than Kodály's, and Strauss' state works are more easily understandable by the foreigner. Bartók and the folk element? Bartók's great works: The Man Carved of Wood - (Fábfaragott Ember,) etc., are not essentially the products of folk music. Bartók is a far greater, a far more robust ^{musical} personality than Kodály.

The Communists attempted to make music understandable ^{to} ~~by~~ the wide masses, with the result that the music written ~~by~~ according to the prescription of Party bureaucrats was tenth rate hack stuff, and thoroughly unenjoyable. At first, the Communists tried to suppress Bartók, when the Soviet music plenums called him a formalist. They were unable to suppress ~~of~~ him, however, because those who were willing to pay money to listen to music, those who bought the concert tickets - formalism or no formalism - ~~w~~ wanted to hear Bartók. For instance, although for a while they didn't allow the Marvelous Mandarin - (Csodálatos Mandarin) - to be performed at the opera, with the end of Stalinism it was performed again with

enormous success, in 1954 or '55. Kodály was often asked to write a Stalin ode and similiar adulatory works but always refused, nor was he willing to write Party songs and marches which were all the rage, and were extremely well paid.

The orchestra for which I played had political seminars, of course, but hardly anybody attended them. They didn't even bother to call me because they knew that I just wouldn't be interested. Some artists entered the Party and they eventually became the directors of the regime's music policy. But I never suffered any disadvantage ^{from} ~~for~~ not being a Party member; they merely shrugged their shoulders and said: "Well, he is a bohemian". This was generally the case regardin^g artists. I lived a life which had no purpose because I saw no way out. I merely waited for the moment ^{when I could} ~~to~~ get my freedom. I succeeded but those left at home didn't... That's why I don't want to go to the United States, because it didn't help Hungary in the Revolution. I don't think that the Soviet Union is a Communist country. It is militarism, soldatesca, imperialism which characterizes the Soviet Union. Real Communism cannot be militarism. That was a wonderful feeling during the Revolution, singin^g ~~ink~~ the National Anthem on the Apponyi Place, that surging overpowering feeling of freedom... I hate every ism. I can imagine being for a party while it is in minority but after it has achieved a majority it always turns against others. It is impossible to organize against the Eastern regimes; one can only

have unorganized, spontaneous revolution against a Communist dictatorship because the terror organizations, the AVO, etc., are too perfect.

Not only was I not allowed to travel in the West, but ~~x~~ because of my imprisonment and anti-Communist record they didn't even allow me to visit the border zone. The period of the most oppressive isolation from the West was from 1948 to 1954 when Anni Fischer was just about the only Hungarian artist who was allowed to visit the West. This caused a great deal ^{of} ~~if~~ indignation and protest among Hungarian musicians and demonstrate the sort of curb which was most chaffing to artistic circles; ^{the} limiting ^{of} their individual freedom. To a musician the foreign stage is a necessary element, just like air. The artist has to test ~~him~~ himself before many kinds of audiences; he needs the foreign audience. There were a great many protests against this isolation from the West; after the death of Stalin there was some relaxation in this respect. I got married, not because I was in ~~love~~ love, but because I wanted to go abroad, and they would not let me unless I had a hostage to leave behind. When the orchestra was abroad, we got very definite instructions not to mix with the natives. I went on some concert tours in the satellites. It is just amazing that the regime was so frightened and careful that it didn't allow the citizens of two satellites to mix and compare notes.

The shortage of musical instruments available to orchestras ~~and~~ music schools provides a very interesting footnote to Hungarian economic planning. Orchestras, etc., had very low priorities and ^{well} very often unable to get necessary musical instruments. However, a DISZ or a ~~kolkhoz~~ ^{kolkhoz} often spent its cultural funds for the purchase of a Steinway Grand which was of no use to them. When that happened, ~~then~~ the school or orchestra which needed such an instrument would go to the kolkhoz and buy the piano from it, the piano which nobody on the collective farm could play. At other times they would send us hundreds of instruments of which only a few were needed in the entire country; for instance we ~~xx~~ received an enormous number of F clarinets, expensive imported instruments for which we had no use.

One of the aims of the regime was to train music teachers in ^{ace} order to repl~~xx~~ the present generation of teachers whom they considered reactionary. In order to carry out this plan, they established many music schools in small towns in Hungary, ~~in~~ in order to train new musicians and music~~k~~ teachers, who would replace the old guard. They invested a lot of money in this project without results because regardless of their origins, the students realized after a certain time, after they have reached a certain age, the real meaning of the Communist regime, and turned against it. The ~~xx~~ ^{Music} Béke¹starhos/Gymnasium where I taught was one of these

schools, whose additional purpose was to exploit the reputation of Kodály. The school was Kodály's pet project. These forcible methods of training a new intelligentsia proved unsuccessful. Why? Many of the teachers were first-rate men, but the pupils were not selected carefully enough. It is true, of course, that only musically talented children were admitted to Békestáros, all of whom had to have an absolute ^{pitch} ~~ear~~. However, too many other subjects were taught at the school which interfered with the musical training: Marxism, military training, political seminars, etc. In addition to music and these political subjects, they also had to take the regular gymnasium subjects. The ~~xxx~~ result was that they learned a little of everything and not enough of anything. The aim was to ^{train} ~~teach~~ instrumentalists and music teachers to replace the so-called reactionary teachers. The emphasis was on pedagogy. ~~xxx~~ The school had a choir, and choir teaching had a very ~~x~~ bad effect on instrument teaching because a choir is a very inaccurate musical mechanism. Then there was the káder problem. From 30 to 40 percent of the students had to be peasants, partly because Kodály insisted on it. This was far too many peasants in a school of this type. Only 5 percent of the students came from the intelligentsia, and the rest from worker, artisan, and other backgrounds. Another reason for the failure of the school was that the majority of the faculty consisted of amateurs who did not measure up to the standards and aims of the

school. The good teachers were transients from Budapest who came down to teach their classes and returned to Budapest, and didn't have sufficient time for the students. Kodály visited the school only once a year, and the school made lengthy preparations for this visit. The director of the school and the Ministry of Culture chose the ~~xxx~~ teachers. The teachers generally hated the regime and were apathetic, feeling that nothing mattered any longer, that there wasn't much point in their knocking themselves out for the regime, when they may be arrested tomorrow. Throughout Hungary the teaching of music was carried on for extra supplementary income, and not as a profession worth pursuing full time. I got paid about 1,000-1,400 forints monthly for teaching at the school. The ~~school~~ was closed around 1954, when there was a big wave ^{of} ~~in~~ cut-backs in state expenses. By then the state had ceased to consider this investment in the school sensible. I ~~myself~~ left the school in 1953 or '54, at any rate a year before it was closed. I left it because I realized that it didn't produce musicians. At the same time as the school was closed the regime also stopped the "traveling opera," which performed opera in the provinces.

The regime found the school unsatisfactory politically because here, as elsewhere, the teachers were not Communists. The teachers would try to minimize the stress on Communist political training by ~~xxx~~ scheduling the ~~x~~ meetings of the chief academic subjects at the same time as the political hours. ~~xx~~ Most of the time, the

students would skip the political seminars to attend the regular classes. But the teachers did not go beyond this sort of thing in their opposition to Communism; they didn't attack the regime or anything like that. The one thing I approved about this school was that the boys and girls were separated and not mixed as in other schools where this mixing often led to orgies. The fashion, the regime's attitude, was that "it is a girl's duty to bear children ..." - ("Lánynak szólni kötelesség".)

You can't establish a music school in the middle of the countryside; a good music school has to be in a big town where the students have ^{access} ~~access~~ to concerts, the opera, etc. The peasant kaders were the most difficult to handle and they learned extremely slowly. The majority of them didn't want to be musicians; upon inquiry they would admit that they wanted to be doctors, mechanics and everything but musicians. They merely came to Békéstarhos because it was free, including board and room. The best students were of intelligentsia origin, showing the greatest interest ⁱⁿ ~~toward~~ music. The students at the school were always hungry because they got so very little to eat. In fact the teachers often brought them food. After a while a certain amount of com^araderie, of trust, developed between the teachers and the students. If a teacher made an anti-regime statement, the student might answer: "Yes, my father would agree with you. He often tells me that in the good old days...."

Interviewer's Note:

Interviewer was unable to complete the interview.