

# **LÁSZLÓ HORTOBÁGYI**

*interviewed by*

**Lucia Udvardyova**

*of*

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*Hungarian musician and musicologist László Hortobágyi was born in 1950 in Budapest, where he still resides today. An explorer and scholar of music and sounds from all over the world, he first visited North India in 1967 in order to learn instruments such as the rudra-vina, sitar, surbahar and the tabla, but also to record music and delve into Indian musicology. He takes part in the design and building of a few organ throughout in Hungary, East-Europa.*

*In 1981 he founded the Gáyan Uttejak Society, an imaginary musical organisation which functioned at the same time as a studio and an archive of his discoveries in ethnomusicology. A keen innovator in the technological arena as well (devising his own sound processing software and using computers in music as early as 1988), he frequently combines instruments and musical structures from the past and the future, East and West, in order to create the lush, exotic soundscapes of the worlds and cultures he brings to life in each of his pieces.*

*This interview was conducted by Lucia Udvardyova in January 2018.*

## ***Prologue by László Hortobágyi***

I would like to express my gratitude for the intention of the questioner, and for asking such quality questions. Apparently, the questioner is not of Western origin, as questions asked from that part of the world elicit techno positivist giggling (and not the exploration of cause-effect relationships); I feel solely far-fetched individualism and vigorous disgust towards an algorithm of a global common denominator of any kind. There is no Western/American film or blog in which an investigation of social ranking or social alienation would occur. Everyone has heard of the New York based 'artist' of the menstruating *Barbie doll*, but who designed the *Hubble Space Telescope*? ( I'll tell you, by way of example: *Nancy Grace Roman, NASA.*)

In the Western world, the concealment of real working processes and their enjoyment is part of a mendacious, hypocrite tradition in which alienated *meme-plex* portfolios of competing human objects are racing with each other in a network space. The sanctimonious practice of the techno positivist *smackreation* (*one snap creation*) phenomenon is deeply conservative: instead of the constraint of evil in humans it is interested in this evil's liberation and its conditioning for power-oriented purposes.

Therefore, one of the biggest questions of the future is whether the media that enables the masses to upload virtual reality (and which has also practised neuromarketing) – for example, *Facebook* ('*Fatebook*', in reality, whose *filter algorithms* undermine Western democracy) is really able to create a concentration of power over its users connected through a permanent network and won't even '*the gates of hell prevail against it*'. Its daily routine teaches the participants that re-digitalized human cultures should be regarded as the source of profit and individual enrichment. Financial interests are able to swallow all human feelings, hence society looks like scavenging *bio-aliens*' rag-fair. We can say it out loud: our age's homogeneous social system - that is increasingly becoming global - has an astonishing and unique ability to deprave human spirit and traditional culture. Now that the *IoT – Internet of Things* - is a reality, a global syncretic unity of existing things and organisms shall soon come in which *IP* numbers of men and smart *home power* meters will be combined in the same registration protocol as the *Big Data* on the “surface” of the Earth. At the same time we might also say: the erosion of the social system ripens its inhabitants' enlightenment *a posteriori*.

## Interview

***How do you recollect your childhood? You were apparently inspired by fantasies of other-worldly and alien cultures. Do you think this was somehow influenced by the Cold War 'Space Race', or the political turmoil of the 1950's? (the Hungarian revolution, etc.)***

One must provide the freedom of a personal space for him/herself. Otherwise it will amount to a deficiency on a collective level, which has led to a civil society without citizens in *Hungisthan*. Unstructured society always has its own severe consequences. In Eastern Europe's destructed, mutagenic societies – also in *Hungisthan* – state and communal life functioned within the logistical system of the

*Austro-Hungarian Empire* whose rigid structure was a tapped pattern of the traditional *Prussian* scheme. This logistical structure continued working almost unbroken after the '*communist*' overtake in 1948, but it also hybridised with the *Byzantine-like Moscovite* structure. This liquid, semi-Asiatic experience of daily life consisted either of the 'legal' order of civil service or the local *comprador* castes scrounging on the Cold War, a game played by the World Powers (and of course all the fake life priorities vindicated by the police in order to maintain their power), or formed the *kuruc*-like [anti-Habsburg rebels in Royal Hungary between 1671 and 1711 – *ed.note*] resistance – but it is impossible to establish what happened when. The elastic social consciousness epitomises its strategy for survival in such situations: *be adaptive, but don't be law-abiding*.

The collective consciousness set up for surviving strategies (tending to egoism, but not to autonomous individuality) should have integrated a common logistical system – inter alia – that feeds on historical experiences completely unknown in this land, for example proportionately and conventionally supported public burden or century-old practices of urban self-management. Therefore, not only the *Trianon-Holocaust* trauma-collectives calcify into inclusions; all the other inextricable and indissoluble injuries have become paranoid and social-epileptic '*niches*' in the conglomeration of social homeostasis, in which non-existent and - by authority, always deformed and controlled - social research and its deficient database through which an incomplete social vision can be brought into parity, materialises the complete lack of discourse between classes. After all, there is no place in the world where there is representative democracy without a stable wealthy and politically empowered middle-class articulation of interests and traditions.

*Hungisthan* is not the only place lacking this; it is impossible to find such places anywhere in the whole post-communist *Zone* (*see: Tarkovsky's Stalker*). However, because of the lack of middle classes, a cluster of hatred emerged between social groups – as the only channel for communication -, one has to face such historical circumstances.

Slowly, the awareness about the Ukrainian famine, *holodomor*, during which 3 million people died in the 1930's – as a decision of the Soviet leadership; and the fact that Germans killed three million Soviet POWs during the war become more widely spread. In 1943, organised Ukrainian militarists killed thousands of Polish people in the hope of an ethnically homogenous state; or let's recall the little we know of Katyn – what would had happened if Stalin hadn't destroyed Polish intellectuals, if

*Wehrmach-Schutzstaffel* hadn't been trained for the preparation of such massacre during the execution of masses of Ukrainian Jews.

There was no such region in the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The closest similarity would be to the Chinese famine between 1958 and 1960 with about 30 million people dying - though that took place on a much larger area. Or the rapid execution of the Cambodian massacre that 'affected' 1,7 million people – well, the values of the eastern mass society are reflected with regards to the human existence's reason d'etre.

The clusters of slaughter that took place in this region remain unparalleled, with (at least) three biggest European massacres of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more or less, happening in spatial overlap. This is where – Zakopane - *Stanislaw Lem* wrote his novel, *Eden* in 1959. This geopolitical and social background of this tiny spot on Earth is the reason why the Western world doesn't understand almost anything from the thinking of the people living here. When all this evolves, there is no other '*Fate-book*' left for the immortal, but the misconception: that an individual can only be free internally. At this point, in the spirit of a thousand year-old practice, the '*Road*' ('*marg* in Sanskrit') opens for the masses towards the dark inner spaces and irrational worlds of the individual - we call it stylishly *Mahāyāna*. Or towards a scientific world – in lesser cases – stylishly called *Hinayāna*.

Personally, I'm pretty certain that this ship-wrecked, Asian-type of existence lacking alternatives, lead me to the elaborate investigation of music. I was attracted by the rationality in music. That it can be a perfectly established, rationalised stairway to heaven or hell, or rather to the past and the future. After all – no philosophical-religious trend talks about this – there is nothing good in humanity's existence in the Universe – the tiny contaminating entity of the *Galactica* – , as it's not good for anyone or anything. Least of all, for nature itself and for the majority of people having the imprint of suffering as their allotment for thousands of years by defective family and social softwares.

Although, man as a matter of fact, is hyphenated from this involuntary biological existence by language (and humour), science and music. (*Some people say that porn is also included.., yes, the “Mithraic” Wold is dual.*)

By language I mean the ability of putting things down, such as in mathematics. Music, however – also as science – is able to physically 'save' your '*fate-booking*' existence and is developed by accident during evolution by a rational system of

codes. For me, the story of the dragons was the same, kind of a *bodhi* condition. They are wonderful beings with seven heads, breathing fire and flying. Then someone always comes to chop their heads off, all seven of them, instead of taking a closer look to see how they breath fire, how beautiful their skin is, and how damn rare entities they are. I cannot understand why must dragons be killed? What is happening here?

***When did you first encounter music and in what form? Were you always interested in both its execution and study?***

The materialised socialism I was born into was an atomised and mind-withering Asian-type system. It was easy to recognise its similarities with daily lifestyles of Asian systems having great history. In my opinion, a daily life of a sensitive human being living in Budapest between 1964-65 was not too distant from the essence of an *imaginary* Asian-Indian daily lifestyle. It must be a human thing, but the world we live in always needs to be explained. Hence, until now, the existence on Earth was lucrative only for a few. The subjugated majority needs disciplinary ideologies – *socium's* own network structure, its automation and *Gödel's* regulation produces this – it rewrites the prevailing “*fate-books*” with a zero starting point, and gives 'sense' to miserable life on Earth, once advertised as temporary.

It was also obvious, that the majority of people went to the *East* to heal their Western misery. What I saw was a much bigger hell in the East, but a hell that has been functioning for thousands of years, a delicate hell that should be investigated. From the aforementioned, what followed, was the daily practice that became a *ganja*-like inhalation of uncontrolled musical genres which lead me to certain decision-making situations on stylistics. When, at the end of the '50's, I was dead into Indian classical music (*Hindusthan, Senola, Zonophone* 78 r.p.m.) I listened to it on shellac disks I had found in the vaults of the grand family *secretary desk*; all I was listening to at that time had crucially determined what came next. The perceived '*common language*' in music, regulated by traditions, with its practice and rules became the measure.

The period lasting until *J.S. Bach's* death (July 28, 1750) - from the music of the middle ages (*Martim Codax, P Abelard, Landini, Wolkenstein, Ciconia, Languedoc,* and troubadours etc.), starting from the grand gothic maestri (*Tinctoris, Obrecht, des Pre, Abricola, Ockeghem, Ghizeghem,* and later *Palestrina*) mapping through the

whole *baroque* period, was the source of pleasure. Professionally quite valuable, but from the point of view of progression, classical music and opera (dominant today, even if dead, still alive as (*zombies*) living dead) were unacceptable and impossible for me to consume - but there are *great* exceptions from this period as well e.g. *Max Reger*, etc. As it was a redemption to do so, I appreciated listening to *Louis Vierne*, *Dupre*, *Durufle*, *L. Burgeois*, *Petr Eben* and the sound and the construction of *Cavaille-Coll's* organs. This led me to participate in designing and constructing certain Eastern-European organ projects between 1969-1974. I built a three-manual one for myself, for home use with the help of my friend, *Péter Soós*.

From all the existing music I had collected I could hear the common multiple of the world, and its underlying but identical language. It was not only the music that was important when collecting, but also the socio-cultural '*bio-voltage*' floating from different segments of their time and culture, as a reaction; and the elaboration and interpretation of their message. Important, but only secondary, was the analysis of the musical superstructure and structure. Respectively, there is only one rational way to learn what was the *baroque* way of bow-using in order to be able to express what it wanted to express. From the *troglodyte* or the *African Ga* tribe polyphonic drum language to the French organ master, *Cavaille-Coll* with hundreds of registers in his organs – actually all these things have one thing in common.

Here, the common root overarching cultures and time is nothing but the distillation of millennial human grief that connects the seemingly strange but at the same time familiar worlds inhabited by humans and the millennial aim to escape from those worlds by their common ancient art-technique. The fact that one is tempered and the other is a *Hindu* scale with 22 degrees is only the cultural-anthropological packaging.

***How was it to study and make music during the previous regime? In Hungary, there were these three categories of arts – supported, tolerated, banned. What was your position vis-a-vis the regime? Were you able to pursue your interests and music freely? How did the infrastructure and access to information - especially in terms of the advancements in technology etc. work back then?***

In a certain sense, the situation here in *Hungistan* was worse than elsewhere, because effectively it was a one-party state selection system's 3 T. world. (*in English: rule of the power structure: subvention-sufferance-proscription*)

Post-WWII Eastern-European products of music history emerged between the frame of a materialised world of '*socialism*'. Not in Western countries where the industrial revolution triggered the original accumulation of capitalization through the exploitation of faraway continents and countries, made possible for exotic goods and music to become freely available on the shelves of all shopping malls. But in the East, or rather in Eastern Europe, where us, people could feel the drifting of history on our skin, a history we were not able to form. We could only imagine it.  
*So we imagined more than actually happened.*

It could only happen here that a brilliant band from Debrecen called *Panta Rhei* – at the beginning of the '70s a *Moog*, *Serge* or *Buchla* synthesiser or its documentation were unprocurable – built themselves a self-developed one, and performed the music of *Bartók*, among others. This didn't last for a long time because the official attitude and *Bartók's* heir barred it. Information seeped in with difficulty and manipulated radio broadcasts seethed people's imagination; they overthought reality and adjusted their intellectual benchmark according to their own imagined qualities. These humanoids with steaming brains, later during the age of the *Internet*, were deeply disappointed when they saw and heard the reality of the fulfilment conditions of the real world.

The legal bands of that era were legitimised by their ideological loyalty-portfolios and caste preferences of the privileged, not their talents. It's only symptomatic that these idealised bands' fake *halo* is still looming large, the reason for this being the era's practice in selection; only those who were legally permitted to make recordings survived. And those of course, who are able to be in sync with mass social vibration and false consciousness, and false consciousness's irrational daily practice.

Such a social homeostasis implements all cruel self-clearing reflexes with completely unconsciously created sociological rules, through which the 'homeostate' badgers out its *xenoliths*, its cancerous cells - the ones that don't want to live synchronously with the ethos of the prevailing social stratification.

Here, lots of musicians passed away to the other side.

*Ergo, this selection, by distorting the personality, will be reduced to suicide, addictive lifestyle and diseases caused by individuals to themselves. Besides that, through becoming obsessed with a kind of general depression, it has effects on those individuals, who otherwise, possibly just because of their strangeness and deviation, could have new ideas and approaches that would stimulate society. This kind of*

*selection hindered innovation and destroyed the pursuit of community improvement and renewal of shared energy.*

I, for example, was reading *Fairlight* and *Synclavier* user manuals, knowing that I will never ever be able to actually use them. I imagined that with these technical prostheses I could reconstruct and re-orchestrate the counterpoint structure of *Palestrina's* lead, or the *banjar* orchestras rhythmic comparisons from the island of Bali, but I will not recount all my dreams that never came true. Later, as it turned out, even in places where these devices were available, none of such endeavours had been achieved either (though there are some meagre exceptions). They had actually rather served the music industry. Even though that's why they were made – often with military background; The career of Australia's *Fairlight* started with an 8-bit sampling sonograms database for submarines, for example.

A man, living in *Mukachevo* or *Cluj*, had an easier life in this respect, because information about contemporary technical opportunities in music-making had never reached him in the first place.

When the borders opened in the middle of the '80's, it turned out, of course, that the imaginary reality stood far away from the visions; Western practice seemed to be dumber and more primitive than at home. The sound was better, but the '*message*' was primitive and kitschy, *too*. Just like today.

The original die-hard fans of progressive music still stand in perplexity at the concerts of *Grand Funk* or *Led Zeppelin* at a *Playboy House party*, seeing them playing in sequined jabots, not even to mention their astonishing amount of later detected musical plagiarism.

The distinction from daily life, this abstraction, this pure alienation helped in one thing only. I have noticed, that despite of the mildewed of the social system *voted* for by more and more people – these parts of the Earth, which were previously in isolation regarding time and culture, we're still able to float information and make it accessible even at the periphery of these Western kingdoms. But only as much as a white man is able to understand from these cultures.

I also realised that - thanks to globalisation - this flow of information is finite and only lasts for a certain amount of historical time, because after (a while) these sources of information disappear. *Heisenberg paradox*: the observer at the same time destroys the source of his interest.



That is how I invented a private - mythological *Hungisthani* world music, and as such (imagined) India's future music which became part of the repertoire of *Gáyan Uttejak Orchestra* as the mixture of a musical language of the past and the present.

It is an imaginary musical vernacular for whose evolution all conditions were given, but (for understandable reasons) it could never be materialised. In my opinion *Guo's* repertoire can be viewed as part of a musical utopia developed in a failed utopian social system and collection of visions. There is a psychedelic community on this Earth with decent values and persistent stability, new ecological concepts, and apart from the phony kindness of religiousness, possessing the attitude of being able to attain “*biblical redemption*” of all creatures, living their life with an evolutionary classless solidarity. They are the *catacomb*-beings of our age, leaving this misguided world with their culture and music, obligated subjects of the prevailing society in this manner, cast away sociologically, so they stop being the political base of ideology and power hence fermenting this world's possible fate with their growing magnitude.

Whereas there will be no more revolutions on this planet anymore, the Western youth movements – which I think are the last spontaneous countercultural movements of humankind – will be perished on the thousand year-old ramparts of states and corporations, where the shadows of the past will sit as a nightmare on our descendants' mind.

The conventional social homoeostasis is so broken and restructured that no collective global will, not even an *e-jihad*, is able to redeem it. The very last bastion of resistance would have been the world of hackers, but the first pilot-fish member of hackers who infiltrated into the *Pentagon's* secret pages in a brilliant way, could not go further than putting a text saying '*lick my ass*' instead of downloading all the secret information and sending them to satellites to make them available for everyone.

For a moment, it seemed that virtual inheritors of the seized youth revolution will be the last communities of freedom in hackers' tiny '*podS*', but that was the best these errant cyber-knights could do. Later, real publications (*Wikileaks*) were filtered through such strains that broadly invalidated any *considerable* consequences of its social impact.

In our age, collapsing generations can be compared to a *tsunami*, rich in pigment and

waving through continents; and all the critical intellectuals who are able to see more or less the absurdity of the whole system are banished to smaller and smaller islands. But a global community that I call *Planet-Earth Transociety Movement*, and its inhabitants, create their virtual culture through spiritual exoduses that cover the hemisphere as onionskin (*subliminal sociostasis*), invisible to the real world.

***"Today we have the following choice: to live in a Gulag, or to eat hamburgers," you once said. Following the collapse of communism, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have underwent so-called transition to capitalism, often at turbo-speed. How do you view the post-1989 development, also in the arts (music) in your home country?***

It must be a human thing, but the world we live in always needs to be explained. Hence, until now, the existence on Earth was lucrative only for a few. The subjugated majority needs disciplinary ideologies – as the result of *socium*'s own network structure, its automation and *Gödel*'s regulation - which rewrites the prevailing '*fate-books*' with zero starting point, and gives 'sense' to miserable life on Earth, once advertised to be temporary.

In post-1989 *Hungisthan*, chaotic conditions have not been cleared in terms of political and historical traumas until today.

In this circle, it is necessary to know history that in Europe is chopped up disparate societies and divided into asynchronous historical-structural zones. In this countries to expropriate the right of the monopoly of the exploitation over the compatriots, take away the new fellow countyman and give it back to the old: it never happened.

The erosion of rotting public institutions could be compensated by personal network connections, but personal relations are not perishing because of the disintegration of public institutions, rather *vice versa*. Citizens have learned their adaptation strategies during dictatorships; to defend their corruption systems they sunk deeply into their familiar, client-based network of clanship that strengthens its tribal nature in contrast to society's democratic character. These are pretty tight ghetto-like psychological and ethical structures, and though they seem to be rigid, they actually are quite obsequious: that's what's the most dangerous about them, in the long term.

Here - and also in Western 'democracies' – economic interests are deflecting political processes into a direction that the already overwhelmed democracy is unable to (follow), housing political decision-making towards commonwealth, and its base of

existence remains capitalised human blood.

Although life is much more colourful in these demolished Eastern-European societies than in the recently declining Western communities, it is not the East and neither the West – in *Hungisthan* it is called '*ferry land*' - that has been commuting between two shores for centuries.

Therefore, surviving here is only possible with the help of abstraction and alienating transformation as a part of a reactive curiousness and comparative global worldview that allows an intelligent, *Hungisthani* humanoid to become a cosmopolitan.

In this, for example the universality of Hungarian folk music would help. So, being here has its benefits as well, but it is not a privilege to be part of this old nation. Though you cannot be really surprised by any other country or culture if you're accidentally born to be *Hungarian*.

The '*art*' of the West to me appears in the form of *Virginia* class nuclear-powered submarines. It is worth to have a look at rocket controller navigation software and gravitational gyroscopes and their technical documentation to be aware of what is to be found there in the service of an evil purpose. At the same time, what an astonishing achievement of the human mind; compared to this, everything is just pallid. *Monstrance*, lying in the seabed of the Red Sea, exists in parallel to a *galla* farmer that pesters the craggy Ethiopian highlands with a wooden plough.

It's worth to compare contemporary classical avant-garde concerts, or other art-resistant groups' performances and their efficiency - how they suggest changes in society symbolically, sometimes they are quite droll - to the communication specialist at the *Pentagon* or any other humanities' jargon to the efficiency of a multinational industry's logistic engineer.

In our age, all human ambition should measure itself to this level. Here, in Eastern Europe, we're used to standing on the riverside, and watching boats float towards the future. We are not sitting in them, but we know very well why, and sometimes we do everything to not even be able to fit into them. This also means that we have unique analytical capabilities. Some of us manage to convert this ability into the field of sciences or arts. The various flourishing schools of Indian philosophy were also part of an atomised society without property, not to mention the classical grand German schools of philosophy and their *Weltschmerz* world.

Nothing has changed after 1989 in *Hungisthan*'s musical life, all the social structures subsisted, all the vultures transformed into peacocks on the other side of the social

tree.

Nowadays on the collateral of this global procedure the 'modern *nation-state*' flourishes as a wishful thought besides the traditional phenotypes of exploitation and capital allocation, respectively against the *EU* (or the inevitable *World-State*); the (economical) revolution pursued this vision, proving Eastern European social systems' virulent persistence.

In the past, capitalism was able to feed the nation (even though the food was *named* a hamburger); materialised socialism, the world of contemporary *gulags* or the *talib* is unable to do so. Though it is likely that the price of a *satiated* stomach is an *iPhone* (which has a capacity "to fly to the moon") and an *emoji* language which refers to the standard of prehistoric hieroglyphics.

To *Hungisthan*, only such type of *proto-capitalism* arrives; its Western motherlands were wretched under a power structure that has never been seen before; this structure was built up by approximately 4,000 multinational corporations that unconsciously launched the process of globalisation.

After all, the corporations of Western countries optimised for carefree-cloudless consumption had bought off all possible deviances from all fields of life, elastic Eastern-European societies were also not able to show any kind of self-contained cultural image. So there was no breakthrough in music, the former cultural rank's (ungifted) performers and its beneficiaries' hydrocephalus system continues to clone its *latifundium* with constant efficiency.

As social systems are combining into one finance-capitalist global structure on the planet, electronic world music becomes an increasingly monotonous and primitive 'vernacular' that is just as desolate as its predecessors; it cannot be differentiated by its performers, though, no matter if they are from New Zealand or Vladivostok.

Humankind deprived itself of its most most amazing ability (to be able to play music) - which is able to elevate it beyond human existence - into the sweet poison of the music industry. If someone remembers *Arkadij & Boris Strugackij's sleg* - they will understand what is happening here.

At the same time, alternative *trance* parties offering modest-progressive magic are the only thing bringing warm liberation and community in this society that is becoming more and more alienated and irrational. Such as in early *goa trance* small communities' electronic language, also certain types of *dubstep* (despite their later devolution) are warning signs to me: their best materials *created* in Ukraine and

Transylvania instead of Birmingham or Detroit. Here, I would like to refer back to *Planet-Earth Transociety Movement's* virtual presence.

As a local *shipwreck*, I am part of all the aforementioned conditions and the World. I, of course, tumble *inside* my own head daily, but that's not enough.

At the moment, I am a crippled *sudra* that diddles in a wet sandpit, and who has to decide what is closer to its heart: the *Fairlight*, or a flame-thrower.

I do not believe that other composers would be thinking in different ways with regards to crossing certain limits.

*«the rules of music cannot be changed without shocking the states' primary rules»* – said *Socrates*.

It is also not coincidental that *Chin Si Huang-it Qin* (i.e.260-210) had the number of strings of the instrument *ku chin* decreased since its sounds elicited dangerous and unnecessarily deep feelings in humans...

*(László Hortobágyi 2018, [www.guo.hu](http://www.guo.hu) and corresponding member of "Puppies & Kittens of Budavár" website)*