

Experiencing the timeless In Memoriam György Szabados

Gábor Turi talks with Rudolf Kraus, Webmaster of the site: „[The World of György Szabados](#)“ December 2016/
January 2017



*Gábor Turi (G.T.):
Are you related to music? What is your background?*

Rudolf Kraus (R.K.):



I have loved music as a passive listener since my earliest memories can recall. Later I used to make a living out of music (between 1979 and 1983) as the owner of a record shop where I sold only jazz and blues records, and along with this, I also ran a mail-order business. Furthermore I was active as a concert and festival organizer between 1982 and 1986. Music is in my DNA.

G.T.:

How did you come to know Mr. Szabados? How would you characterize your relationship with him?

R.K.:

This is a very interesting story.

First meeting with Hungary (July 1981)

One day I received a post card with an order for 4 jazz records from Hungary. I sent the records off, however the parcel was returned with the notification that the Hungarian customs did not grant the import permit. Since I was planning a visit to a jazz festival in Wiesen (Austria), I decided to go to Budapest to try to deliver the records personally. The post card indicated a postal address in the Central Post Office of the XI.th department in Budapest. The woman behind the counter however couldn't understand me; I showed to her the post card and tried to ask her who could be the person who had ordered the records. Due to the language barrier we got nowhere. Finally, after a lot of trial and error, she called somebody who spoke some German and she handed me the telephone receiver. Unfortunately, the gentleman couldn't speak German well enough to understand me. After a half an hour of futile efforts, we gave up. I said goodbye and left the post office. My companion and I almost reached the street when someone called my name. Tibor in shorts, sporting a long beard, stood there like a chassidic story-teller, fallen out of time. He said in German that he was just picking up his mail at the post office when the lady at the counter informed him about me. It turned out that he was the brother of Zoltán Zomborác, the person who had ordered the records. Should we have left the post office a half minute earlier or later – I couldn't give this interview today. Life sometimes produces strange coincidences.



First meeting with György Szabados (10th September 1981 - Debrecen Jazz Days)

The meeting with Tibor at the post office in Budapest resulted in a long family friendship till his death in 2007. Spontaneously he invited us to his home, where we had a warm and cordial reception and spent some unforgettable days; Hungarian paprika, strong coffee and the breath of an older time. There he told me for the first time about "Szabados": Tibor's unique story telling portrayed a lively picture in my mind; I could see this person with my inner eyes, and that is why I dedicated this website to him. Tibor and his brother Zoltán introduced me to Péter Szigeti and Jenő Hartyándi, enthusiasts of the jazz movement, with György Szabados as a central character. The door opened for me into the world of the improviser, music philosopher, and teacher of a younger generation, and engaged myself in the culture of free improvisation in this part of the world. It was for me an initiation into the Hungarian world of jazz, which in those days was totally unknown. Soon after returning to Germany with my mind full of all these intensive memories and meetings, and carrying in my suitcase the „[Modern Jazz Anthology 64](#)“ with the 1964 recording of „B-A-C-H“, and of „[The Wedding / Az esküvő](#)“ (1974), as well as a few cassettes with concert recordings recorded by collectors, Tibor and his friend Jenő, visited me in Germany in my jazz and blues record shop. We reunited and enthusiastically breathed jazz for several days and nights.

During a second trip to Hungary in September 1981, a visit was scheduled with Péter Szigeti at the "Debrecen Jazz Days 81", and there I met for the first time György Szabados. It was a meeting, which – as it turned out – had a deep transforming effect on my life and consciousness. I was a bit nervous when I was introduced to him before the concert and he greeted me with "a good evening". In fact it was a good evening, a wonderful beginning of a story, resulting later in an unparalleled friendship. Like church bells – Szabados belongs, since that day, to the soundtrack of my life.

1. Daxberger Situationen (May 1983)



The fact that the music of György Szabados was practically unknown outside the countries of the former Eastern Bloc was motivation for my creativity. His music could resurrect the dead: the listener has the impression that someone is playing from the tower of an archaic temple, and he meant business! He was virtually unknown in the western countries in those days; I wanted to change this situation. I organized an international jazz festival, the „1. Daxberger Situationen“ where he was the center of the event. The „Nickelsdorfer Konfrontationen“, which I visited the first time in 1982, had served as a model for the festival. Jenő Hartyándi organized a first meeting between Anthony Braxton and György Szabados

in Győr in March 1982, (I was lucky enough to be present at this concert; much was written in Hungary about the cultural importance of this evening) and so it was evident that a second meeting between two of the best representatives of free jazz should take place. This was the program for Saturday: György Szabados solo, Albert Mangelsdorf/Lee Konitz duo, and Anthony Braxton solo. After the solo concert of Anthony Braxton a duo performance took place without any previous arrangement; an improvisation of 16 minutes, and after a jam

session of Monk's composition "Epistrophy". The event, as well as the solo concert by Szabados were highly praised in the local media, as well as in the specialized press. These concerts can be listened to on the website:



Daxberger Situationen '83 – Szabados Solo



Daxberger Situationen '83 – Braxton & Szabados

Duo



Szabados' presentation was considered a sensation - so far

unheard-of. He was called a Hungarian sorcerer who enchanted his public. One of the critics saw in him as the new Béla Bartók and he said that in Western Europe only Chick Corea would be worthy of kissing his feet. A second solo concert was organized spontaneously in the Aschaffenburg Stadttheater: the concert was sold out. The reactions again were exuberant, and a foundation for his fame and regard in the region of Aschaffenburg, and far beyond, was firmly established. Other concerts followed in Germany and in other countries in Western Europe in the following decades. Szabados' music was frequently reviewed, especially by the jazz critic Bert Noglik, who dedicated himself to promoting Szabados in several in-depth articles and radio programs. He also organized invitations for concerts. Other critics and reviews have also been published in different papers.

2. Daxberger Situationen May/June 1986 and other events in the late eighties and nineties

The eighties can be considered as excellent, in view of the international attention of Szabados' work. The publication of the records „[Adyton](#)“, „[Szabraxtondos](#)“ and „[Sons turned into stags](#)“ were discussed frequently in the specialized press. In particular, the duo album „[Szabraxtondos](#)“ had evoked very positive echoes in the relevant circles in the USA. In this climate and milieu I organized the „2. Daxberger Situationen“ in May/June 1986. This festival followed a dramatic composition, creating an artistic tension above the whole Hungarian environment. The Szabados/Dresch Duo, the Mihály Dresch Quartet, the Franz Weilenhammer/Attila Kubinyi Duo with Béla Bartók's Sonatas for Violin and Piano No. 1 & 2, and his Rhapsody for Violin and Piano, a composition by András Szentkirályi, and furthermore, a concert with the group „Nomád“ playing Hungarian folk music from Transylvania. The critics declared that the most intensive and expressive music of the whole festival was the Szabados/Dresch Duo, which resulted in more invitations for concerts.



1986: Daxberger Situationen '86 – Szabados & Dresch Duo



In the following years we met again and again during concerts everywhere in Europe: Antwerpen 1987, Berlin 1987, Aschaffenburg 1987, 1991, Hamburg 1990 as well as during my frequent visits to Hungary (1985, 1986, 1989 etc.). The meetings were always very friendly and cordial and substantial discussions about "God and the world" took place. In the nineties, up to 2002,

there was a long period when we did not meet personally. I was rather busy with my job and could only follow my friend, Gyuri's activities scantily. I acquired, however his published records, and later CDs - the „[Ruttings of the Sacred Phoenix Bird](#)“ (1990)“, „[Sands Music](#)“ (1991), „[Forgotten Songs](#)“ (1994), „[Revelation](#)“ (1996), „[The Secret of the Events](#)“ (1996), „[Time Music](#)“ (1997) - and listened to them with interest and pleasure. His CD „[Sands Music](#)“ is for me one of the three works which I should put in my suitcase when leaving for the famous "lonely island". It is a window opening to the future; a music on the foundation of old masters.

Reunion in 2002 and above

After more than 10 years a reunion took place during a concert in the Hungarian Cultural Institute in Stuttgart in June 2002. This solo concert is one of the most intensive concert experiences of my life. A hot summer evening, open windows, a small understanding audience, and an intense, transcendent concert. Szabados was so united with his piano on this evening that he pulled the piano toward him several times during the

performance, like a lover pulls his beloved closer. A musical love act – and it was not always evident whether Szabados plays the piano or the piano plays Szabados. The two were dancing through the summer evening and when the performance was over, I awoke from a trance. The message of this evening caught me again directly after so many years of distance, and my personnel Szabados journey again took its natural course. A more intense contact followed; a concert in 2004 in Karlsruhe, and a visit in his house in Nagymaros (Hungary) in the winter of 2006. In April 2007, a very special event at the place of my greatest delight: Gyuri gave a private concert at the occasion of my 50th birthday in Český Krumlov (Czech Republic). The Szabados morning concert on an Easter Sunday in the small theatre of the little historic town was a moving gift and an unforgettable



Tibor and his family presents basket full of Szabados CDs

experience. Tibor, whom I owe my first meeting with Szabados' music in 1981, died unexpectedly the week after my birthday celebration, in Budapest. Three days before, he had given me as a birthday present a folder with CDs - private recordings he had made with his friends during Szabados concerts over the course of many years. All of these great recordings were completely new to me and later constituted the basic content when I started to build the website.

I often listened to these recordings in the following years and I had the feeling of having a

"private Picasso" at home, which was actually meant for the public. Without the gift of these CDs the website would not have been born. Tibor recorded the private birthday concert with his video camera:



Video Český Krumlov - Szabados Solo



I visited Gyuri and Judit in Nagymaros in the summer of 2009 and 2010, and I was aware of his sickness. Being a

physician, he knew that his days were numbered. Once we were talking about the final farewell and finiteness, he took me aside and confided to me that he was prepared, his soul had peace, and that he knew that the farewell was near. That was in July 2010. In June 2011 we said a final farewell to this wonderful and great artist and man. I went to his funeral and I have been travelling every year to Nagymaros to see his wife Judit, and a bond has developed between us, going deeper and beyond his demise.

T.G.:

How did you find his music as a unique mixture of jazz, classical music and Hungarian folklore?

R.K.:

György Szabados' music generated an overwhelming response in me when I listened for the first time to „[The Wedding](#)“. It sounded familiar and somehow a bit strange, when compared with the free music I had ever heard in those times. I could feel an element, a line of tradition of the Hungarian music environment, which was unknown to me. Later, after having listened to authentic Hungarian folk music, (which I could purchase in the beautiful record collection published by Hungaroton), and experienced Bartók's music, it all became familiar. This rooting in the Hungarian tradition, as well as in an archaic music sphere, and the development a unique free improvisative music based on these foundations was fascinating. Up until then I was familiar with the free jazz from the USA in the sixties and seventies. At that time, the liberation from the traditional style jazz included a strong bodily element, whose gesture and its justification arose largely from an attitude of protest, of rebellion, while in the case of Szabados, there was a rootedness and love to something present, which I didn't fully understand during those times. The jazz research has pointed out repeatedly that when Szabados had begun to play free music in Hungary at the beginning of the sixties, he was not aware of the parallel trends in the USA. So works a genius' inspiration: he captured information from a sphere beyond the material sources, long before becoming common knowledge. Little by little, it became apparent to me that Szabados really drew from a source where he found elements of an archaic world and often from a timeless sphere which didn't fit our rational world of the 20th century. It was something sacral for my ears, to perceive an almost holy element and a seriousness of the performance, which captured me and my innermost nature, and has never released me since.

T.G.:

What made you start the home page? How did it develop?

R.K.:

After we bade the final farewell to Gyuri, it was obvious that his legacy deserved its own website, where the audios, interviews, and videos scattered around should be collected and made accessible to the public, and presented in a form worthy of his importance. I presumed that someone in Hungary would take on this task. During my visits to Judit, his widow in Nagymaros, Hungary, I always brought up the subject but after several years no action was taken. So I launched the project myself. Judit promised her support immediately and happily, and agreed to act as patroness. Over the decades of our friendship with Gyuri I collected a lot of material. Since most of the written material is in Hungarian, it was difficult for me to manage, because I don't speak Hungarian. I also had no idea about the creation of a website. My partner, who runs a website vocationally, gave me a helping hand at the start. After that, everything ran its course. Christmas 2014 was the date of the beginning, and at Easter 2015 I announced the news of the website in a newsletter. Spontaneous support started streaming to me from all the important people who contributed with their journalistic work, and led to public communication in German and English during the creative period of Szabados. Just to mention a few: Bert Noglik, Andrew Choate, Johannes Bauer, and Peter Wolfram Emter; I asked them to grant the rights for publishing the different interviews, essays, articles, etc.

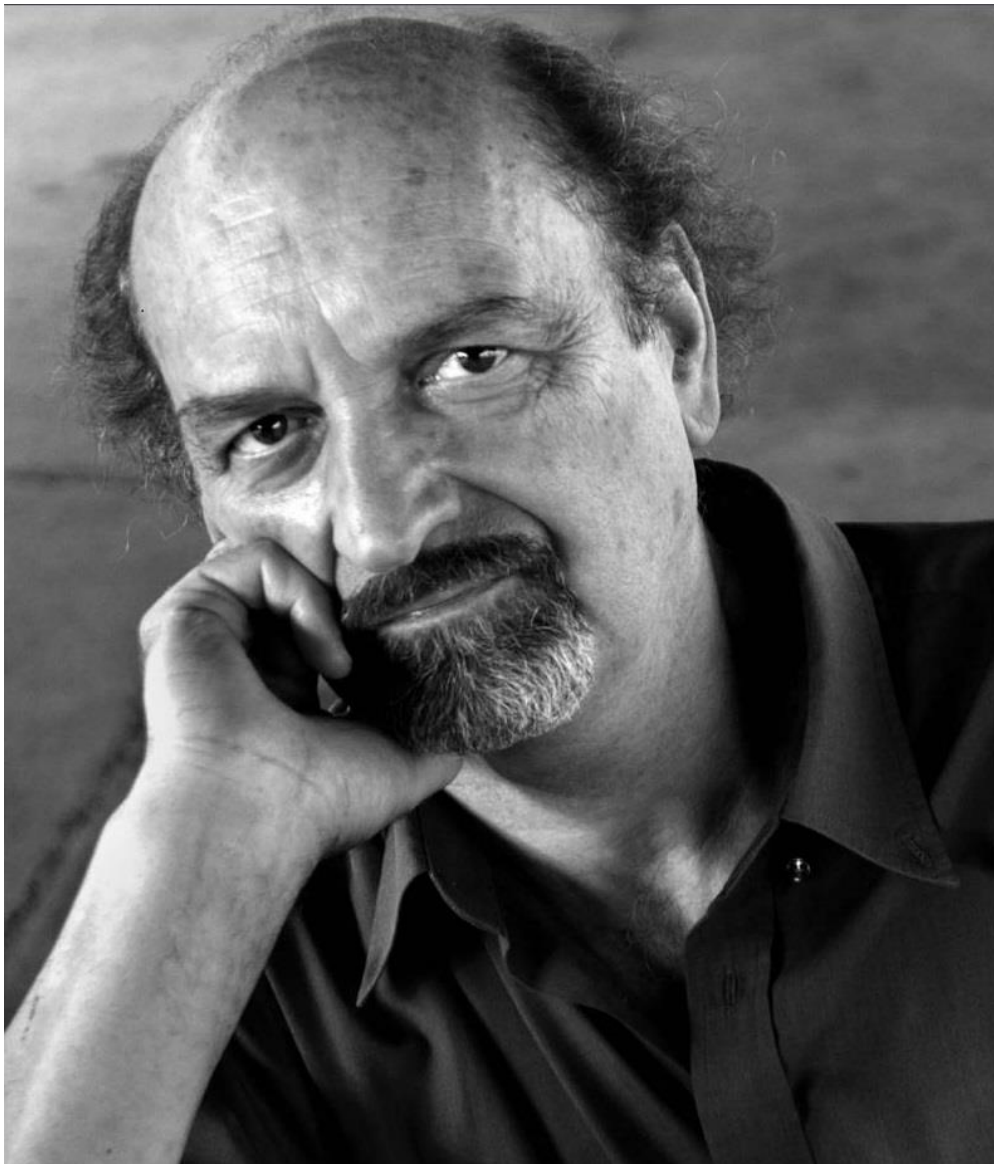
T.G.:

His music is partly composed but largely improvised. From a theoretical point of view, what are the chances to preserve and display this kind of music that is so much related to the person?

R.K.:

A very interesting question. May I counter with another question: what is a person according to his deepest nature? In the case of Gyuri you might agree with me: his person was the unique carrier of this music, the music however flows only through his person. In an abstract sense his person could be considered merely as an instrument, which served to make perceivable the beauty of the Creation. He had a blessed talent: he was an extraordinary thinker, had a comprehensive education, he was a music historian, a philosopher, a great visionary, and as an artist, a totality; complete, perfect, undivided, at home in the heavens and on Earth. I mean it literally, not proverbially. He was a servant in Lord's garden. An era like ours could only partially understand him. One who was lucky enough to share with him directly an experience, was touched. Whoever had the opportunity and the pleasure to talk with Gyuri, might have experienced timelessness intensively, an impression which occurred often after such discussions with him. Timelessness, so often evoked by him, was experienced during a conversation directly. The hours were an experience of an intense presence, beyond space and time. After such conversations one returned to the daily world, yet remained for a long time as if raised by a heart in whose aura one stayed. It was a direct effect because a power was transmitted through his person. His performances and compositions were often ceremonies with ritual aspects.

We do justice to Szabados only when we describe him in spiritual terms. I often had the impression of watching a magician at work, oblivious of time, and blissful. Spiritual grandeur is missing in our times, and whoever still

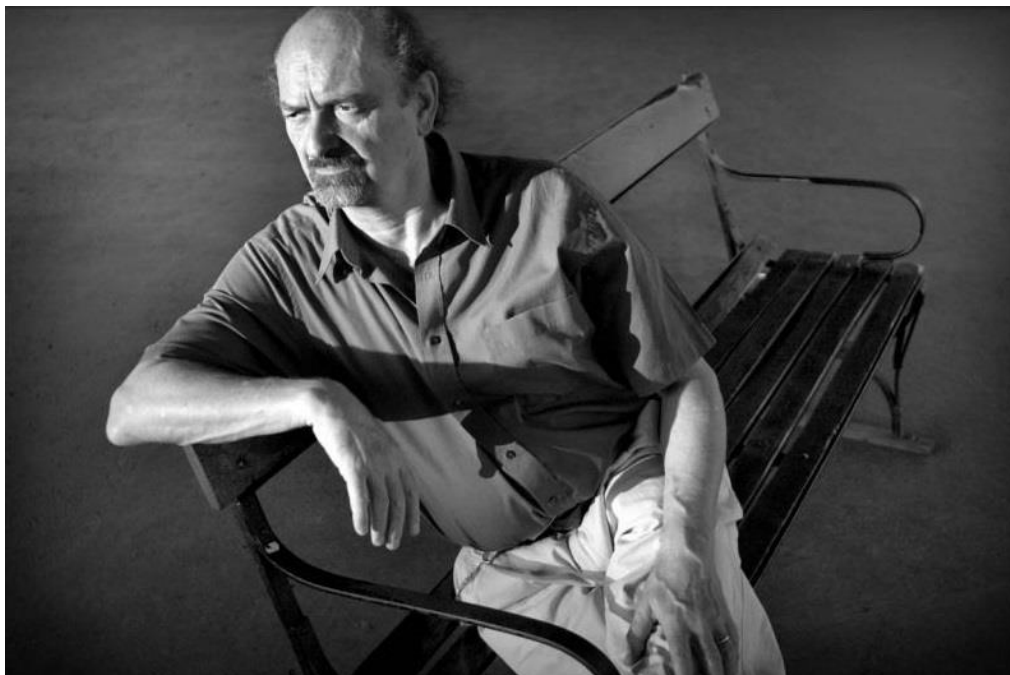


has soul and spirit prays to heaven for help. I always heard that when Coltrane played: a transcendent scream-prayer for redemption. Albert Ayler's hymns taken directly from an archaic tradition, and Shostakovich, Lutoslawski, and Bartók also joined the same archaic powers, even if coming from different cultural environments, making an effort from deep below to prevent the break of contact with the energy field, which provides life, and ensures survival. The connecting link is Szabados and his MAKUZ

orchestra; the re-installment and anticipation of a new period, where the Sun as a perpetual giving and life sustaining symbol and principle regains again his eternal rights at material, but above all, at the spiritual level.

He often stated that a new world is going to be born from the seed. Those who knew him could feel that as an artist he saw his main task as leaving behind a life-work, which drew from the timeless space where future paths reveal themselves, to lead the way out of the agony of a sinking material culture and direct to a new alliance of man with the Creator, so that man understands again that his task in the garden is to look after it and not to plunder it. I am convinced that future generations will clearly deduce what led our civilization towards decline and into destruction of a whole world. Criminal energy, born out of power, greed, and a corrupt seed dominates today's business life. Multinational concerns are more powerful than states, and the political rulers have long since submitted themselves to the dictate of these powerful interest groups. Humanity's best qualities, such as love of the community, brotherly love, and the moral compass for what is morally admitted and not admitted are all lost. There is no self-limitation and understanding, no elite or moral force, to resist against this materialistic, rational world-view aimed at self-destruction. A doomed world. Szabados put his finger on the weak spots. Since his artistic work was not required to support his family, because he worked as a physician, he was not influenced by the marketing interests for his artistic activities. His comprehension can be considered as deeply religious, however not in the sense of any confessional direction, but in the original meaning of the word. Re-ligio means literally re-connection to the timeless dimension, to eternity. Reflection, contemplation, acting in a good spirit, modesty, preservation and promotion of good qualities, worthy life, building of spiritual cathedrals, edification and love, caring and dedication. I mean that Szabados experienced a future and sowed the seed of a new world, which will grow as soon as the self-destruction is finished.

„Pride goes before a fall“, according to an old German proverb.



Some may be surprised because I talk about the social reflections of Szabados' heritage in an interview referring to his life and work. But since I am no musician, this aspect, the political, social, and spiritual implications of his heritage has for me a weightier significance

than a purely musical analysis. The spirit and with it, the inner stance of this man touched me from the very beginning. He was a living model. His seriousness which he dedicated to his vocation implied something shamanistic. He could lift souls. He could create from an inner center a community feeling. He drew his powers from beyond the rational recognizable world. He was the uncrowned king of his "Hungarian Royal Court Orchestra", MAKUZ. I loved this man from the first moment and magical forces moved my compass. When we are at the service of a good spiritual power, this ignites the strongest powers.

T.G.:

There is a group of former friends of Gyuri who have been contributing to the site. How did you find them and how did the whole project evolve?

R.K.:

Sometimes life is shuffling the cards and produces a real high card. Here a few good souls came together with

great interest and engagement to honour the work of this extraordinary man, and to convey it to the next



generation. Soon after the launching of the website in the winter of 2014 a circle of friends joined together with the purpose to cultivate Szabados' legacy in Hungary. The group included Ferenc Bognár, Csaba Molnár, György Polai, Mihály Ráduly and Mrs. Judit Szabados. Very quickly we agreed to start working together. At this time I knew only Judit personally and none of the other gentlemen. I cannot say whether the creation of the circle of friends was a consequence of

the publication of the website or whether the idea already existed. Most probably, it was a lucky coincidence. Judit and Bulcsú Bognár, son of Ferenc, who I met and became fond of during my earlier visits in Nagymaros, coordinated the contact between the circle of friends and I. Soon Marianne Tharan took over the translation task, a priceless contribution and necessary for the fruitful cooperation. In the meantime we met two times in Nagymaros; these get-togethers were enjoyable and in the spirit of a beautiful cooperation: the finest teamwork.

Further support emerged in the person of Zoltán Bicskei from Serbia, an old friend and close confidant of György Szabados; they had an intimate relationship lasting over decades. And later on, from you as well, when you granted me the permission to make use of all articles referring to Gyuri, which are published on your website. Since then, many other lovers of Szabados' music have contributed to the website with remarks, corrections, articles, etc.. Additionally, the circle of friends has discovered important facts while examining the Szabados oeuvre. These are also published by the website. No commercial interests motivate these activities, they are born by the power perceivable in the oeuvre; we can say, the friends carry out these tasks out of love and respect for the oeuvre.

Since the beginning, the website has enjoyed attention and approval. The statistics show clearly its importance and reach: there are over 4000 regular visitors from around the world. Also some journalistic work was supported by or was executed with the help of the website: Hubert Bergman's essay: „Klang eines verschwundenen Kontinuums – Zur Aktualität des Wirkens von György Szabados”, 2016 (*Sound of a lost continuum – contribution to the actuality of the work of György Szabados*) as well as the study of Márton Szegedi – Kompositions- und Improvisationsstrukturen in der Musik von György Szabados am Beispiel des Stückes „The Wedding”. (*Composition and improvisation structures in the music of György Szabados, using „The Wedding” as an example for the explanation*).

It is worth mentioning that a number of important interviews, essays, and films have been translated into German and English and are for the first time available for use to interested professionals outside Hungary.

T.G.:

Could you introduce the web site both in terms of technicalities and content?

R.K.:

The website domain is registered in 1&1 Mediengroup one of the largest German organizations. The platform is „WordPress” and I opted for „Lush” as the theme; a theme designed for bands and musicians. Several plug-ins complete the necessary functions of the website. Besides the officially published records and CDs of audio recordings of Szabados music, which are managed directly by the Lush theme, all other audio recordings are available through the stream service „SoundCloud”. The video films were hosted by YouTube until July 2016.

After this, the new and so far unknown videos and films are accessible through the plug-in „S3MediaStream“. I invite the reader to visit the website and to get to know it. It is too large a website to enumerate the whole structure of the menus, as the website consists of 1500 single pages and is growing practically every day. I would however point out some highlights:

We have the „[Szabados Music Directory](#)“ with so far more than 130 audio recordings; all the official recordings, as well as those that were recorded by audience members during concerts over the course of several decades. They have been collected, documented and treated by Ferenc Bognár with a loving eye for detail, helped and supported by many collectors of this music as well as by former musician friends of Szabados. The audios are arranged chronologically.

Another menu item enlists all known [videos](#) so far available: many items can be discovered here, which had disappeared or were inaccessible for decades. Here they are published after thorough restoration work, some with German and English subtitles. New videos have recently been found in the archives of the Novi Sad TV and we are trying to obtain the rights to publish these videos on the website.

Another menu item deals with Szabados' written legacy, arranged in two groups: texts written by Szabados, and texts written by others about Szabados. The Hungarian visitor can read the extensive interview collection by Mihály Ráduly: „[Ráduly Mihály interjúsorozata](#)“, including six interviews with István Grensó, Róbert Benkő, Attila Csányi, Gábor Turi, János Gonda, Bulcsú Bognár; the last interview has also been published in the Hungarian magazine Replika. More interviews are expected.

T.G.:

It is a site in three languages. How can you get the pieces translated?

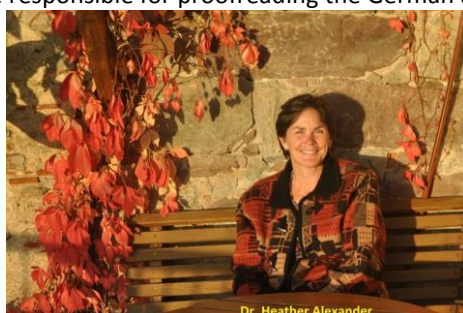
R.K.:

A small team takes care of this. Its task is to make accessible all relevant writings, longer essays, interviews and other texts for the German and English speaking public, currently available only in Hungarian. György Szabados' spiritual/philosophical work is even less known outside Hungary than his music, it is more precisely, totally unknown.

The team is composed of following persons: Marianne Tharan, as already mentioned, certified translator, who obtained her diploma at the Zürcher Dolmetscherschule; she is living in Nagymaros. Mrs. Gunda Olschok, in Urspringen, Germany, pedagogue: she dealt in her active years with the integration processes of migrants and held lectures in Germany about the subject. Further, Dr. Heather Alexander, research associate and communications manager at the Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre in Bamfield, Canada, and myself, the Szabados webmaster, are responsible for proofreading the German and English texts. The contribution of Mrs.



Marianne Tharan



Dr. Heather Alexander



Judit Szabados Gunda Olschok

Marianne Tharan is especially

acknowledged; without her engagement all this work could not be achieved. Additional support is desirable – if anybody feels interested, they are warmly welcomed to the team - please let me know. The available written material awaiting translation is gigantic. Should a team emerge willing to translate the works in other languages such as French, Russian, or others, their contributions would be much appreciated.

Considering these circumstances, it is amazing that the translations of several long [interviews](#), two big essays and the subtitles of two films have been completed within two years. The translations are read by a small but very interested circle of readers who look forward excitedly to each new translation.

T.G.:

As far as I know this is a unique initiative in Hungarian culture by someone who is not Hungarian. Now, with all sorts of material (scores, music, texts) on display, how do you see the role and mission of the site?

R.K.:

It is a great honour for me if you consider that I, as non-Hungarian, may contribute to the Hungarian culture. I love Hungary since my first visit in the eighties, I consider Hungary as a kind of second home. It is a warm, hospitable country, where I always felt welcome; a country with wonderful and extremely interesting people, and with a fascinating culture in her mixture of oriental and occidental elements, deeply rooted in the Carpathian basin and beyond, drawing spiritual strength from a mythic, archaic folk tradition, which has almost disappeared in Europe's other countries, including mine (Germany). This is possibly the reason why Hungary has produced such a great artist as Szabados, whose importance and grandeur has yet to be discovered. Sometimes I have the impression that Szabados plays a peripheral role even in his own country, in spite of the award of the Kossuth prize and of his state funeral. This website should help to introduce and promote the totality of the oeuvre of this great artist to a larger German and English speaking public. The collected material allows research in all directions, and for all and who wish to study this life work seriously, they can discover much here.

A truth in me knows about this mission you have mentioned. It is about a live power from beyond space and time; the experience of timelessness, which I mentioned at the beginning of this interview. As an artist, Szabados gave wonderful answers to basic questions of our time. At the end, let me evoke Szabados with his own words: *"The living music joins Heaven with Earth, Man with God, Man with Man. Because it is related to Creation, to God's otium."*



Translation by Marianne Tharan (January 2017)