

Leó
WEINER

Toldi – Symphonic Poem



Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV
Valéria Csányi

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WEINER
(1885–1960)

Toldi – Symphonic Poem

Twelve Orchestral Pictures after the Epic Poem by János Arany, Op. 43 (1952)

- 1 I. [*The poet muses – The portrait of Miklós Toldi – Hot summer noon – The army of palatine Laci – Miklós indicates the way to Buda – The army moves on – Miklós walks home sadly, 'The range trembles under his heavy footsteps into the far distance'*] Mereng a költő – Toldi Miklós portréja – Forró nyári dél – Laci nádor hada – Miklós mutatja az utat Buda felé – A had elvonul – Miklós hazaballag, „súlyos lábnymától messze reng a parlag” **7:27**
- 2 II. [*Merrymaking, feast in Nagyfalu – György Toldi and his companions are visiting the Toldi home – György cruelly insults his brother, Miklós*] Vigasság, sütés-főzés Nagyfaluban – Toldi Györgyöt és kíséretét vendégül látják a Toldi-házban – György durván megsérti öccsét, Miklóst **5:45**
- 3 III. [*The wooden spears whirled in their hands' – 'The heavy stone flies' – 'The stone delivered stark death to a noble warrior' – 'Seize him forthwith']* „A fadárda vígan perdül” – „Repül a nehéz kő” – „Egy nemes vitéznek lón szörnyű halála” – „El kell fogni nyomban” **2:38**
- 4 IV. [*Miklós is in hiding – His loyal servant, Bence goes after him and brings him food*] Miklós bujdosik – Bence, a hű cseléd felkutatja a bujdosót, és étellel látja el **7:22**
- 5 V. [*Miklós fights two wolves – Miklós kills them, and hurries home carrying the carcasses on his shoulder*] Miklós viaskodik két farkassal – Miklós röviden végez velök, és félvállra vetve őket, hazasiet **2:10**
- 6 VI. [*Miklós lays the wolves beside György's bed in the darkness of the night – Moonlight – Everyone is asleep, only his mother is awake, crying – Miklós says farewell to his mother – The barking dogs wake the sleeping – György's men chase after the fleeing Miklós*] Az éj leple alatt Miklós a farkasokat György ágya mellé fekteti – Holdvilág – Mindenki alszik, csak Toldiné sír magában – Miklós búcsúzik anyjától – A kutyák felugatják az alvókat – György emberei üldözőbe veszik az elmenekült Miklóst **5:50**
- 7 VII. [*Thunderstorm – In the graveyard – A widow mourns her two sons*] Égi háború – A temetőben – A gyászoló özvegy siratja két fiát **7:40**
- 8 VIII. [*King Louis gives an audience to György – Dialogue, in which György insidiously accuses and maligns Miklós. He wants to put his hands on Miklós's share of the inheritance – The king sees through him and his intrigue: he will only give the inheritance to György on condition he face the Czech champion – György backs down*] Lajos király kihallgatáson fogadja Györgyöt – Párbeszéd, melyben György alattomosan bevádolja és becsmérléi Miklóst. Célja, hogy magának kaparintsza Miklós örökségét – A király átlát a cselészövésen: az örökséget azzal a feltétellel adná Györgynek, ha a cseh bajnokkal megívna – György meghátrál **5:12**

9 IX. [*Moonlight – Miklós stops the raging bull – Utterly alone – Memories – In the graveyard*] Holdvilág – Miklós megfékezi a bikát – Mindenkitől elhagyatva – Emlékképek – A temetőben **6:45**

10 X. [*Bence finds Miklós again – In the tavern*] Bence újra rátalál Miklósrá – A csárdában **6:49**

11 XI. [*A crowd is gathering on both banks of the Danube: On an island in the middle of the river the Czech warrior is about to duel – The Czech approaches seated 'on a large prancing horse', strutting confidently – Miklós appears on the Pest side of the river, ready to fight; he gets into a boat and paddles to the island – When the parties shake hands, Miklós crunches the hand of the Czech warrior – The Czech begs for mercy; Miklós spares him – As they are peacefully walking towards the bank, the perfidious Czech attacks Miklós from behind. Miklós anticipates the move: He kills him and with the point of his sword holds up high the severed head for the cheering crowd to see.] Gyülekezik a tömeg a Duna partján: a szigeten mérkőzni fog a cseh bajnok – Jön a cseh, „táncol nagy lovával”, hetykén „hányja-veti magát” – A pesti oldalon feltűnik Miklós, mérkőzni kíván; csónakba szállva a szigetre evez – Mikor az ellenfelek kezét fognak, Miklós összelapítja a cseh bajnok kezét – A cseh kegyelemért könyörög; Miklós megkegyelmez – Miközben békésen haladnak a part felé, az álnok cseh orvul támad. Miklós megelőzi ellenfelét: végez vele és kardhegyen felmutatja a lelkendező tömegnek a fejet **3:30***

12 XII. [*The king sends for the victorious warrior, and learns that it is none other than Miklós Toldi – Miklós is greeted with celebrations; among the cheering crowd there is old Bence, who also brought with him Miklós's mother – The mother and her valiant son weep tears of joy as they finally meet again.]* A király magához hozatja a győztes vitézt, kiről kiderül, hogy az nem más, mint Toldi Miklós – Miklóst ünneplik; az ünneplők közt ott van az öreg Bence, aki magával hozta Miklós anyját is – Toldiné és dicső fia boldog viszontlátásban örömkönyveket sírnak **3:29**

Leó Weiner (1885–1960): Toldi – Symphonic Poem

Twelve Orchestral Pictures after the Epic Poem by János Arany, Op. 43 (1952)

The composer and teacher Leó Weiner was born in Budapest on 16 April 1885. There is no reliable information available on who he started studying music with, but he must have been an accomplished musician by the time he decided alone, at the age of 16, to apply to the Royal Hungarian Music Academy, Budapest. Like most of his contemporaries (Dohnányi, Bartók, Kodály, Emmerich Kálmán, Victor Jacobi, Albert Szirmai, Jenő Huszka), he became a pupil of the prominent composer Hans von Koessler (1853–1926, known as 'János' Koessler in Hungary), who upheld the Brahmsian tradition of German Romanticism. After graduating with high honours, and following a short interlude of a European tour and working as a theatre accompanist, he took on a teaching post at his alma mater, where he remained practically until the end of his life. He tutored

generations of musicians in his composition and chamber music department for half a century. His pupils included conductors such as Georg Solti, Antal Doráti, Ferenc Fricsay and Fritz Reiner, among other prominent musicians. His work as an educator is also captured in his theory books.

In his early works, Weiner successfully created a unique synthesis of the German Romantic traditions and turn of the century Hungarian musicality. His compositions of the time were Hungarian to the core, although they contained hardly any direct citations of folk tunes. His fresh, appealing sound quickly became a success, the opuses of the young composer in his twenties were frequently played in prestigious international concert venues, and they were published by renowned European publishers.

The increasing popularity of new, modern musical movements different from Weiner's personality caused a crisis for him, and made him give up his position as a composition teacher at the Liszt Academy. He found his way out of the crisis through the inspiration of folk tunes. His approach was somewhat different from those of Kodály and Bartók. As his monographer, Melinda Berlász writes, 'Folk music represents an exclusively musical aspect in Weiner's output: a valuable musical material rich in individual features that – as he said – he could stylise into a "classical form" in his work "through careful compositional moderation".' These works of his were also international successes.

The horror of the Second World War led to a second creative crisis – this time lasting for seven years. After the war, he wrote a series of educational books, and spent his time polishing and orchestrating his early works. He died on 13 September 1960.

Weiner was not one of the revolutionary innovators of music history. He stayed faithful to the musicality and style of his early works throughout his career, never giving in to the avant-garde 'isms', just as he remained true to his Hungarian identity despite the persecution of the Jews during the Second World War.

This loyalty, or if you wish, attachment to his early aesthetic principles led to his reception as a composer being dependent on the passing trends of the art scene. The movement of neo-Classicism represented by Weiner gradually lost popularity beginning in the 1920s, becoming outdated after the Second World War, and hence disappearing from mainstream composition. This played a large part in his withdrawal from writing original melodies from the 1930s onwards, and almost entirely building his works on folk tunes. The most significant exception was the *Toldi* symphonic poem. Like his adaptation of *Csongor and Tünde* (a play by Mihály Vörösmarty) composed in 1913, *Toldi* (on an epic poem by János Arany) was also inspired by an emblematic masterpiece of Hungarian literature.

János Arany (1817–1882) was born into an impoverished noble family and ultimately became secretary-general of the Hungarian Academy of

Sciences. He was one of the most significant figures of 19th-century Hungarian literature beside Sándor Petőfi and Mihály Vörösmarty. He is often referred to as an epic poet, but he was also one of the greatest lyricists, his ballads having special importance. The first part of the *Toldi* trilogy (1847) made him a celebrated poet. The epic is a timeless success and became a classic work of Hungarian literature.

Weiner, who was refined, apolitical and only lived for music, happened to get the inspiration to write his symphonic poem based on the first part of János Arany's epic trilogy in the darkest period of the Stalinist Rákosi regime (1948–1953), and as the last great creative flare of his career. He probably started working on the first draft of the piece at the beginning of 1952 (possibly in 1951), the score is dated 'Budapest, 17 September 1952'. Still it was not premiered for another year. Its premiere was on 14 November 1953 in the Grand Hall of the Academy of Music, given by the Hungarian National Symphony Orchestra conducted by János Ferencsik. The premiere was followed by a complete media blackout, and the piece was not featured in concert programmes for the following 65 years, despite the fact that Weiner himself claimed that *Toldi* was one of his most significant works. The premiere was a failure, even though it was performed by the most prominent musicians of the time. Weiner for the first time in his life faced his biggest failure in connection with this late magnum opus. But he had faith in *Toldi*, and began to revise it. He turned it into a shorter, ten movement suite in 1954, but still without success. We have no information regarding any performances of this 30-minute work apart from a radio recording around 1958 by the Hungarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Tamás Bródy. A year later, in 1955, he prepared another, even shorter, 20-minute version of the suite comprising six movements, which was finally performed at the concert organised for his 75th birthday, on 14 April 1960, in the Grand Hall of the Academy of Music – the Hungarian National Symphony Orchestra was conducted by András Kórody. The composition had no greater success than before. Despite the performance being this form of the work's

world premiere, only one review went beyond simply reporting the event. This suite was also never played again. Weiner arranged excerpts of *Toldi* for piano, for the Irodalmi Színpad ('Literary Stage'), a reader's theatre established in 1957. The arrangement comprised 24 short movements illustrating the twelve cantos of the epic, some as an *intermezzo*, some as a melodramatic element. The premiere was on 24 November, followed by a further four performances that year, and another eight performances in 1958. Unfortunately, Weiner's pupil, the pianist Márta Blaha, left to get married in Italy, and so the programme continued without Weiner's music from then on.

Why did the contemporary music scene reject this work so coldly, when Weiner was a well-respected composer and his works were otherwise so popular? *Toldi* is problematic, even regarding its genre. First it was entitled a 'symphony', which was later rejected by the composer himself. He changed the title to 'symphonic poem', subsequently subtitled 'Twelve Orchestral Pictures'. Finally, he defined the genre of the piano version of the work arranged for theatrical interpretation as 'illustration music'. Which one is the best, which one describes the work most accurately? The piece is confusingly eclectic. Weiner uses musical toposes, but in an absolutely direct way. Moreover, the musicality of the piece is almost entirely the same as that of *Csongor and Tünde*, written 40 years before *Toldi*. It also has a peculiar form, as he inserts recitative-like sections into the progression of the music, which audibly loosen the structure. But why?

We have to look for the answer in the score. There are programme notes at the beginning of each movement, summarising the content of the epic's cantos. The twelve movements of the symphonic poem are matched to the twelve cantos of the epic. As we can see also in some works by Liszt, there are a number of quotations from the epic at the bottom of the pages in the score, but in this particular work of Weiner, these have a different function and greater significance. This grandiose piece of work is nothing else than a direct musical notation of Arany's grandiose epic. This was revealed during the rehearsals of the second performance of the work.

It was the idea of the conductor, Valéria Csányi, to go through the piece and see if it would be possible to project the text of the epic during the performance. We were surprised to find that the music not only follows the quotations included in the score, but could be matched to the whole text of the epic almost line by line. And it does this so closely, that upon editing the text to be projected, we did not have to cut significant structural parts of the poem, and only in one case did we have to change the order of sections from it. The concert that took place on 17 September 2017 performed by the musicians on this recording was an amazing success and ended with a standing ovation. As the audience knew the narrative of the music, success was guaranteed. The sonorous verses of Arany and the beautiful music of Weiner strengthened each other exponentially.

I cannot point to any other work that follows so closely an epic poem in its entirety; as far as I am aware, this is the only such piece in the symphonic repertoire. Weiner's creative imagination was not only captured by the potential of Arany's characters to be described musically and the diverse plot of the story, he was also inspired by the musicality of the poem's form. The way in which Weiner turns the poetic forms and structure of the epic into musical forms, tableaux and dramatic scenes is almost cinema-like.

In conclusion, Weiner's *Toldi* really is a magnum opus, but as the understanding of it without supplementary visual information requires an enormous literary knowledge for both Hungarian and non-Hungarian audiences, it will likely only receive the recognition it deserves as ballet music, rather than as a concert piece.

The illustrative nature of this musical work is best experienced by reading the original epic while listening to the recording. A rough English translation of the *Toldi* epic can be found in the Hungarian Electronic Library, as can its 1855 German literary translation (www.mek.oszk.hu).

Instead of a synopsis, I include the summary carefully written by the composer (found in the Weiner archive), which he probably prepared for the press before the premiere performance:

I. János Arany, the poet muses: He recalls times past, and the figure of the legendary hero, the Herculean Miklós Toldi. – Under the scorching summer sun at noon; the workers in the fields are resting, struck by the heat, only Miklós, the strong young man is on his feet. He watches as marching soldiers approach. – The army arrives, the leader coarsely shouts at Miklós: 'Where's the road to Buda?' – Miklós, hurt by the vulgar tone, hesitates to answer, but then changes his mind and takes the immense pole resting on his shoulder, grabs it at one end and holds it out long and straight, pointing towards the road to Buda. – The soldiers are astonished at seeing his tremendous strength. The leader of the army encourages the soldiers: 'Who will take him on?' The soldiers stay silent; none of them dares take him on. – The army leaves. – Miklós remains by himself, walks home sulking, the ground shaking under his heavy steps.

II. Great merrymaking and feast in Nagyfalú: György, the older brother of Miklós, who serves the king in Buda, is visiting home with his companions. The sluggish and haughty György dismissively asks his mother where his brother is. – Their mother is going to call Miklós, but György stops her: 'No need!' – Miklós unexpectedly enters, running towards György for a brotherly hug, but he harshly pushes him away and berates him. The brothers start to fight. Miklós wants to leave home immediately in his outrage, but first he asks for his rightful share of the estate: money, steed, weapons. – György slaps him in the face accompanied by these words: 'Here's your share, boy!' – Miklós is going to attack György, but their mother steps between them. – Miklós, out of love for her, backs down, and dejectedly walks to the back of the yard with his arms drooping, and sits on a piece of millstone, sobbing to himself.

III. After a hearty lunch, György's company entertain themselves throwing spears. – As György notices Miklós moping at the back of the yard, he encourages his men to aim their spears at him. – Miklós endures the nasty game for a while, but then loses his patience and throws the millstone he is sitting on towards the company. – The stone hits one of the men and kills him. – György gives orders: Miklós must be seized without delay!

IV. Miklós flees into a dried-up bog and hides there for days. – Suddenly he hears a rustle: It is Bence, the faithful old servant, sent by his mother. – Bence and Miklós are relieved to see each other. Bence, the merry, talkative, kind old man has brought food with him and gives it to the starving Miklós, and tries to persuade him to return home. Miklós is unwilling: He keeps to his plan to flee – Bence has to go home empty handed. – Miklós remains alone, deeply unhappy.

V. Miklós accidentally stumbles upon a wolves' lair where two whelps are whining. Miklós pets them; but only to his harm: the mother wolf approaches with a terrible howl. Miklós quickly kills her, and when the male wolf comes at him: he keeps striking him with the lifeless female until he passes too. Miklós hurries back home with the two wolf carcasses to say farewell to his mother in the darkness of the night.

VI. Miklós lays the wolves beside the bed of the sleeping György. – Moonlight. – Grotesque lullaby, in which Miklós compares the wolves to his brother. – Miklós softly knocks on his mother's door. She, awake and sobbing in her room, is startled by the knock on the door. – Miklós enters. Affectionate farewell, Miklós and his mother sob together in an embrace. A last farewell, from the doorstep. Miklós has to quickly flee, as the dogs are baying enraged by the smell of the wolf carcasses, waking everyone up. – György and his company are running up and down, 'left and right they rush like mad'. After him! Miklós must be captured!

VII. By divine providence, Miklós is helped by a sudden thunderstorm that hinders his pursuers. One of the men is struck by lightning. György is scared: he leads his companions back home. – By the time the storm has passed, Miklós is far away: He finds himself in a graveyard near Pest. – There a mourning widow is weeping heartbreakingly, leaning over a burial mound; she mourns for her two sons who were recently killed by a Czech warrior. Miklós promises the widow to fight the Czech warrior and avenge the death of her sons.

VIII. King Louis gives an audience to György. The movement begins with the intrigue motif attributed to György; the motif returns over and over again, always

more agitated. It describes the inner self of György, while his exterior is always smooth, polite and flattering. The king, although he sees the dark side of György, preserves his royal calm until the end. – During the conversation, György insidiously accuses and maligns Miklós. He wants to get his hands on Miklós's share of the inheritance. – The king will only give the inheritance to György on condition he face the Czech warrior. – György backs down.

IX. Miklós reaches Pest during his wandering. – Moonlight; the fine folks walk the streets. – Suddenly there is screaming, alarm, people shouting: A bull has escaped from the slaughterhouse, endangering the life of the pedestrians as it roams the streets. – Everyone cowers next to the walls of the buildings, only Miklós stands in the middle of the street, he waits for the bull, and when it lowers its head to gore him, he grabs it by the horns, stops it, and leads it back to the slaughterhouse. – The people are ungrateful, forgetting about Miklós's heroic actions in an instant. – The lonely Miklós realises that he is a fugitive, then thinks of his mother and the mourning widow. – He decides to fight the Czech, but he has no weapons or proper clothes. Suddenly he has an idea: he returns to the graveyard to ask the widow for her sons' weapons. – But the widow has already left. – He sadly falls asleep in the graveyard.

X. Miklós wakes up to the thud of hooves: His mother has sent Bence after Miklós again. – Bence has again brought food with him; when he tries to cut a slice of bread, the knife breaks: His mother has hidden a casket in the bread, sending 100 pieces of gold for him. Such a surprise! Miklós can now buy armour, a helmet, and whatever else he needs! But first they spend a gold piece in a nearby tavern to celebrate. – They find one close by. First they get their fill of wine, then a gipsy turns up: he plays some music for Miklós. – Miklós is in good spirits: 'He kept stoking up the dance and banging his head against the roof beam, in his good spirits he let out a whooping cry'. Then he gets tired of the merrymaking, puts his head on the table into his two great arms and falls asleep.

XI. A crowd is gathering on both banks of the Danube: on an island in the middle of the river the Czech warrior is about to duel. – The Czech approaches seated

on a large prancing horse, strutting confidently. – Miklós appears on the Pest side, he intends to challenge him; he gets into a boat and paddles to the island. – When the parties shake hands, Miklós crushes flat the hand of the Czech warrior. – The Czech begs for mercy; Miklós spares him. – As they are peacefully walking towards the riverbank, the deceitful Czech tries to attack Miklós sneakily. Miklós is one step ahead of him: he kills the Czech and with the point of his sword holds up high the severed head for the cheering crowd to see.

XII. The king sends for the victorious warrior, and learns that it is none other than Miklós Toldi. – Miklós is greeted with celebrations; among the cheering crowd is old Bence, who has also brought with him Miklós's mother. – She and her valiant son weep tears of joy as they finally meet again.

István Kassai

*English translation by Villam Translation Services
and Paul Merrick*

When I had the honour to start working on the Weiner series, I didn't yet know this piece. Having worked as a conductor for the Budapest Opera for 31 years, as soon as I looked at the score, I had a hunch that this music had to have something to do with the stage. As we had no means at the time to develop this idea further, we simply added projection to the performance at the 2017 modern premiere, held at the Pesti Vigadó. On the screen, as they listened to the music, the audience could read the text of the epic on which the symphonic poem is based. It was an amazing success that surprised even me. It also proved that my hunch was right: this music needs additional visuals to be truly effective. The illustrative character of the music proved a disadvantage at its 1953 premiere as a concert piece, but as ballet music it would become its biggest advantage. I am convinced that this symphonic poem will reach the success it deserves as ballet music, while the two suites arranged from it will find their rightful place in concert venues.

Valéria Csányi

Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV



Photo: Zsuzsanna Rózsa

The Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV (MÁV Szimfonikus Zenekar) was founded in 1945 by the Hungarian State Railways. Since then, it has developed a wide-ranging repertoire from music of the Baroque era to works by contemporary composers, and is currently ranked among the best professional ensembles in Hungary. The orchestra has performed throughout Europe as well as in Cyprus, Lebanon, Hong Kong, Japan, China, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and Oman. Performances have taken place at many of the most important and respected concert halls, such as the Musikvereinsaal in Vienna, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Suntory Hall in Tokyo, and the Shanghai Oriental Art Centre. The Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV was the only Hungarian orchestra to participate in Tokyo's legendary Three Tenors Production in 1999. In 2012 Péter Csaba became the orchestra's artistic director and chief conductor; Kobayashi Ken-ichiro has held the post of honorary guest conductor since 2014. www.mavzenekar.hu

Valéria Csányi



Photo: Zsuzsanna Rózsa

The Hungarian conductor Valéria Csányi (b. 1958, Budapest) studied at the Liszt Academy of Music, obtaining a music teacher's and choral conductor's diploma in 1982 and a conductor's diploma in 1984. She has attended masterclasses given by Karl Österreicher in Vienna, Péter Eötvös in Szombathely and Milan Horvat in Salzburg, and since 1983, has been a member of the Hungarian State Opera, initially as a répétiteur. She was given the opportunity to conduct opera in 1988, leading several works, including premieres, and between 1995 and 2009 she took part in all of the ballet productions of the State Opera. She has worked extensively at the Hungarian State Opera, conducting more than 700 performances. She has toured Austria, Germany, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Mexico. Csányi has made recordings for Naxos including the operetta *Fürstin Ninetta* by Johann Strauss II with the Stockholm Strauss-Orkester [8.660227-28] as well as the first complete recording of Ferenc Erkel's opera *István király* ('King Stephen') [8.660345-46], Leó Weiner's ballet *Csongor and Tünde* [8.573491] and Imre Széchényi's *Complete Dances for Orchestra* [8.573807].

Leó Weiner's influence as a teacher in Budapest was exceptional and his pupils were some of the greatest musicians of the 20th century. But it's only in recent years that his compositions, with their synthesis of German Romantic and Hungarian elements, have been brought to wider appreciation. Like *Csongor and Tünde* (8.573491), the symphonic poem *Toldi* was inspired by a masterpiece of Hungarian literature. Cast in twelve sections, the music follows the epic poetry in a way that seems to notate the text musically, a unique achievement. Weiner considered *Toldi* one of his most significant compositions, and he also composed two suites from the work which are available as a digital download on 9.70284.

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Complete Works for Orchestra • 2

1–12 Toldi – Symphonic Poem
(Twelve Orchestral Pictures after
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Op. 43) (1952) 64:49

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A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

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