

MEMORIES OF Lajos Montag

(1906-1997)

By István Enreiter

Professor Lajos Montag was one of the outstanding European double-bass players in the 20th century. He was born in Budapest on 26 May 1906. He began studies with Bertalan Tintner in 1921 at the Franz Liszt Academy and graduated in 1927 as the student of Ferenc Schwalm. In 1946-47 he was the principal bass of the Hungarian Radio Orchestra. From 1929 until his retirement he was principal double bass with the Budapest Opera and Philharmonic Society Orchestra. He performed all over Europe with these ensembles.

Between 1931 and 1964 Montag taught at the National Conservatory (Nemzeti Zenei) then in its successor the Béla Bartók Conservatory. From 1966 he was the professor of the Teachers' Training Institute at the Academy. He had numerous private students, many of whom became members of orchestras in Hungary and abroad: Mihály Farkas (Munich), Kavamata Acumi (Tokyo), Ferenc Lendvai (Caracas), András Lévai (Pretoria), Ferenc Csontos (the first interpreter of György Kurtág's works) and Péter Kubina (professor of the Academy in Budapest).

Lajos Montag was an excellent artist of his instrument and a virtuoso soloist who gave frequent concerts in Budapest. He had many performances in Vienna, Prague, Berlin, Dresden, Weimar, and Salzburg. In 1963, on the 200th anniversary of Domenico Dragonetti's death, he gave a memorial concert in Budapest. In 1981 the periodical *Das Orchester* published a long article by professor Klaus Trumpf in honor of Montag's 75th birthday. In April 1985 (aged 79) he gave a concert in London with the first interpretation of the Bass Concerto No. 3 written by his younger brother Vilmos Montag. In 1986, on his birthday concert (aged 80!) he played the first part in a movement of Bernhard Alt's Quartett and one of his own works. In many instances, he played his own *Microconcert*, the first performance of which was given in Budapest in 1962.



Professor Lajos Montag in a lesson.

Montag organized the first large international doublebass competition in Europe, staged in Geneva 1969. He was a jury member for several international competitions in Geneva, Berlin, Wrocław, Markneukirchen, Rome, and Munich. He gave masterclasses in Weimar and Sion.

His *Double Bass Method*, published in 1955, is one of the most up-to-date study-series in seven volumes (the eighth volume is not published). With its detailed material and excellent methodical structure this set offers the best ways to learn and to teach. Montag also composed other studies, concert-pieces, cadenzas and a solo-concert. He made an arrangement of some of Kodály's *Epigrammes* with the help of the world-famous composer. Montag's activity in enlarging the double bass repertoire was exceptional, and he encouraged many contemporary composers. The pieces found in *Works for Bass by Hungarian Authors* in three volumes were mainly composed for him.

He was a fanatic of his instrument, and as a young man he also learned instrument making with Lajos Kovács and built a double bass too.

From a young age he was busy in researching the history of double bass. His book on *The History of Bass* (in German) is known only in manuscript. In Hungarian he published a couple of essays. He died in Budapest January 25, 1997. (You can see photos of Montag in the Montag files of www.nagybogo.hu).

István Enreiter is a double bassist and teacher in Budapest, Hungary.



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