

Interviewer's note:

This is a short "B" type interview with one member of the Hungarian orchestra in Baden. The respondent was asked to tell his life story with particular reference to musical life in Communist Hungary.

From early childhood on I wanted to become a musician. My father was ~~was~~ musician too, but a person has special psychological reasons why he selects such an occupation. Anyhow, I made up my mind concerning music before the Communists took power. Later on when I saw the drawbacks of my occupation ~~is~~ ^{it} was too late to change it, but it might be that music was still a better occupation than anything else that was open for me in the Communist system. I was 5 years of old when I began to play music later on I decided for the flute as my instrument. Every day I spent many hours a day with music, on the other hand I often neglected my school studies and had some difficulties in the gymnasium. Finally, in 1947 I transferred to the so called musical gymnasium in Budapest. Being a good musician I had no more difficulties there, I got my baccalaureate in 1948. In ~~the~~ September of the same year I enrolled at the Zerk^eakademia, the famous conservatory of Budapest. I had high hopes when entering this institution but pretty soon I got disappointed, our weekly schedule consisted of 8 hours of Marxist education and half an hour of education in flute playing.

I lost my interest in the work of the conservatory at the same time I needed money, so I began to look around for a job. At that time it was very easy to get part time jobs as substitute for ~~an~~ somebody in the orchestra who got ill. In 1949 I was substituting pretty often in the different orchestras, in the orchestra of the radio, in a concert orchestra even in the orchestra of the Hungarian opera. About the same time I had some difficulties ~~with~~ ~~at~~ at the conservatory. I would not say that the difficulties were ^{of} political nature but it had pretty much to do with Communism. At the conservatory one of the colleagues was an old school mate of mine from the time in the gymnasium. He knew me for many years. One day he approached me and told me that there were some students here whom I should observe and report their behavior to him. It was not difficult to guess who he was. I did not want to be a police spy therefore I avoided the conservatory and did not show up at the classes. For a long time I received written warnings from ~~to~~ the conservatory telling me about my absentism, finally I was expelled as a student. By the time I knew that the diploma of the conservatory was not very useful anyhow so I was not sorry at all for what had happened. From 1949 to 1951 it was very easy to find a job, this was the time when every week a new orchestra sprung up

Because the large factories, the trade unions, the mass organizations of the Communism and so on organized their own orchestra. I worked with many of them, in the time from 1949 to 1956 I worked with at least 15 different orchestras; some of them were quite of a temporary nature for example a summer orchestra organized for a summer resort place, or again I had a two months job with the theatre in Miskolc. From 1950 to 1951 I worked for more than a year with the orchestra of the central council of the trade unions. This orchestra was a typical Communist organization. It was ^{established} ~~in~~ under the presumption that culture must be decentralized. Consequently the headquarters of the orchestra were at Pesterzsébet. At the same time all members of the orchestra were living in Budapest we had to go out by street car to Pesterzsébet for every rehearsal. It was a very crazy institution, if we needed some notes or anything like that the secretary of the orchestra had to take the street car and come to Budapest which took at least 3 hours both ways. In 1951 I joined the orchestra of the army. The main reason for it was that I was afraid of being drafted, it was still better to be a musician than a common soldier. My father too, played in an army band way back in the 1920^s. I think that in between the army orchestras did not change very much. We had to wear military uniform but in other respects

we did not have an army-life, we had plenty of free time, we could live at home. The members of the orchestra were simple musicians they were not interested in Communism or in military affairs. The conductor of the orchestra was a person in his thirties he had the rank of a captain. The other members of the orchestra were in their twenties, most of them were privates or anyhow not above the rank of the or corporal. My two years spent there were fairly good except for about 6 months when we had a new commanding officer who was a bad man indeed. The commanding officer of the orchestra was a military person in charge of the administration of the orchestra he was not a musician himself. This bad commanding officer was an enthusiastic communist, otherwise I haven't seen any real Communists in the army. Being members of the trade union of the musicians we received pay there. It varied between 1200 and 1500 forints. It was less than the usual salaries for musicians but it was still much better than the situation of the privates in the army. At the end of my two years with the army I was told that I can sign up for a further service of 3 years, I was promised the rank of a sergeant and the salary of 2800 forints a month. I did not want to sign up but later on I regretted this decision. In 1953

~~when~~ when I left the army the situation of the musical life changed pretty much. To understand those changes I have to speak about the musical policy of Communism. We got the first ~~test~~^{stage} of the Communist musical policy in 1949 when the Western music was prohibited. Among the prohibited composers was the American Gershwin who was very popular with the musicians. It happened that ~~we~~ fellows got together and behind the closed doors of an apartment we were playing Gershwin for our own entertainment but it was impossible to play him at the concerts. In 1952 and 1953 the rationalisation of musical organizations was carried out. It ~~meant~~^{meant} that the small orchestras were liquidated and only the large ones were permitted to stay. In old times for instance the radio gave employment to a number of orchestras, from now on it employed only two orchestras. The orchestras never played directly to the radio but their concert was taken on the magnétofon and transmitted from there, You could never ~~hear~~ a live voice in the radio only the magnetofon tapes. About the same time the ~~par~~ Party established the job of an educational secretary with each orchestra. The educational secretary was supposed, to deliver weekly lectures on Marxism to the musicians. We were supposed to attend these lectures

regularly and make a progress in studying Marxism.^y
The actual situation was that such an educational
meeting was ~~held~~ ^{held} ~~together~~ only once once in ~~xx~~ every
one or two months. Even at those occasions most musician^s
stayed away. After 1953 I experienced many difficulties
in finding new jobs. This situation was connected with
the general kader policy of the Party. There was a
trade union of musicians which theoretically was in
charge of the labour exchange, so any musician out of
job went there to register for a new job. It is inter-
esting to mention that 90% of the ~~members~~ musicians were
were not members of the trade union, at least they
did not pay their fees. But they still could go there
and register for the job. Practically the trade union
was unable to provide jobs for the unemployed musicians.
The actual situation was that if any conductor or any
orchestra needed ~~an~~ ^{musicians} he tried to find his men out of his
own acquaintances. The conductors or orchestra managers
approached very seldom the trade union. The trade union
of course, tried to ~~xx~~ follow the usual kader policy
of the Party. When the radio orchestra was organized,
it was organized on the basis that 20% of the workers
have to be of working class origin. It was impossible
to find so many musicians of working class origin .
Consequently a few members of the orchestra of the

Csipel works were transferred to the radio orchestra. It is interesting to know that there was great anti-Semitism in the whole system, there were too many Jewish fellows in musical life. Consequently the orchestra leader rang up the trade union and told them give me 3 violin players but none of them should be a Jew. The pay of the musicians was somewhat higher than other kind of pays and it could be compared to the pay of other professions, for example to the salary of engineers. After 1953 I made 2000 to 2500 forints a month which was quite a big sum. On the other hand my employments were interrupted with rather long periods of unemployment when I couldn't make any money. Soon after leaving the army I joined the orchestra of the employees of the post office. Here we had an educational secretary who was a former stable boy with the race tracks at Budapest. He did not know anything about music. At one of his lectures he told us that you boys can play even a viola gamba solo in way that it should be democratic. The orchestra was actually run by the conductor, by a so called manager and by an educational secretary. The 3 of them could never agree on the most important points and the members of the orchestra shared the effect of this general disagreement. One result was that the members of the orchestra were fired without any

good reason, just because they were caught in this personal antagonism. I was ~~firmly~~ fired in October 1954. Then I had a short succession of 2 or 3 jobs finally, I joined the orchestra of the organization of the provincial theatres. This orchestra was playing with the different provincial theatres during their seasons. It ment a wandering life, a gipsy life. For two months we were playing in the city of Miskolc then we went over to Győr then for a month to Sopron and to Szombathely. In the meantime we stopped at many smaller places for one or two nights. I did not like this gipsy life but I stayed there because it was difficult to find another job ~~for some time~~ It was a general policy of the Communist Party that young musicians should work in the province and the big jobs in Budapest were at least theoretically for the older generation. During my summer vacation in 1955 I played at a resort place at the Balaton. In 1956 when the whole political situation changed there were many rumours about organizing new orchestras. I was travelling pretty often to Budapest in order to find another job there. In October 1956 I was just on the train from Budapest to my orchestra when the Revolution broke out. The train stopped with me at a place near

Salgótarján and I couldn't go further. I had an aunt in a village nearby and so I went to visit her and stayed there for about two days. Then I decided to return to Budapest. It was the 2nd of November when I reached the home of my parents. I could see there the end of the Revolution and at the same time I had to see that we cannot hope for any change in musical life, so I decided for escaping from the country. I left Budapest on November 29th. The musicians in the Communist system are divided into 2 classes, the top people earned an enormous salary, they have a great personal freedom and they receive all the advantages the Communist system can give. I belonged to the average people in music. The average musician has about the same salary and the same prestige as an engineer, he is regarded as a professional but the difference is that the musician has certain aims he wants to play a certain music ~~but~~ but he cannot realize his aims because of the Communism. It is very difficult to get into the small circle of top people. A friend of mine was an excellent violin player indeed, he would have deserved to get there, he courted the secretary of the trade union as well as a party secretary for several months that the party should give him a solo concert. At one time

he was promised that he would get his solo concert but the promise was never carried out. The musical program of the different orchestras is determined by the cultural department of the Party. We had to play a lot of Russian music. We were always glad to play the Russian classical composers. However the contemporary Russian operettas and operas as well as the operettas composed by the Hungarian composers are the cheapest music I have ever heard. You cannot write a good music when the operetta is about a cow of the village co-operative. The musical life is run by the different party secretaries who do not know anything about music. Once when we arrived at a provincial city we were greeted by the party secretary at the railway station. In his speech he told us that he was glad because we brought the music of the people's democracy to their place. The national organization of the Hungarian women protested against a famous aria in the opera Rigoletto because its famous Hungarian text begins with the words, the woman is unstable. The national organization of the Hungarian women explained that all the women are stable supporters of the Communist system. Finally I want to mention that there are no good musical instruments in Hungary. The good musical instruments are ~~not~~ manufactured

in the Western countries, in the US, in Germany, in Italy and so on. We had never got currency to buy those foreign made instruments. I still use my old flute which I received from my father as a present in my times in the high school. It was good for a high school boy, ~~xxx~~ but it wouldn't be good for a real orchestra.