

Soma Mihály Sipos:

Heavenly Signs and Mundane Reality: The Place of *Ulysses* in the Lifework of
Mátyás Seiber

Usually the only fact people know about Seiber in Hungary that he was a student of Zoltán Kodály and don't know too much – or at all – about his compositions. One of the reasons for this is the small number of recordings or scores available. One of his most important compositions – many consider it the most important – is his cantata *Ulysses* which was premiered on 27th May 1949. The conference in the Institute of Musicology in June 2015, Budapest remembering various anniversaries gave me an opportunity to speak about Seiber (who was born in 1905), to give a brief overview of his compositions and to present *Ulysses* to the music researchers by showing and analyzing certain sections of the piece. This presentation was needed because until very recently the cantata has not been released on a recording and accessing the score has also been complicated.

I take it as a telling sign that Seiber's choice of text fell on James Joyce's *Ulysses*. One of the novel's protagonists, Leopold Bloom, has Hungarian ancestry: his father Rudolf Virág (i.e. flower or bloom) emigrated to Ireland from the Hungarian town Szombathely. Seiber was himself an émigré who finally settled in England. It is very interesting that in the cantata Seiber doesn't attempt to give a summary of the novel's plot, but rather he selects a meditative section from his favourite episode. At night we see a 'Heaventree of stars' and then we are introduced into the world of the tiniest living creatures and atoms and finally the place of the spectators between these two different worlds, between macrocosm and microcosm. Seiber's music makes use of Joyce's words in a unique way and in my presentation I aimed to describe some of his basic musical ideas.