

*Division of Heaven and Earth* was written for the Swedish pianist (and neuroscientist) Fredrik Ullén, who premiered it in Stockholm in 2006. Ever since I first heard Fredrik play in 1999 in New York, I had always wanted to write a solo piece for him. It took seven years - - until my Fulbright year in Budapest, 2005-2006 – for this to come to fruition. Although I am half Hungarian and my father lives in Budapest, I had never spent extended time in Hungary prior to that year. In close proximity to places where Liszt had lived and worked, I was studying music by Hungarian composers, much of which was new to me. As I wrestled with the influence of that music, I grew more and more aware of an innate Hungarian ‘DNA’ present in my own music, and which it became alluring to develop. *Division* is something of a pianistic working-out of this process, and more specifically a kind of ‘battle’ with the *Transcendental Etudes* of Liszt. The Liszt, present in the guise of quotations which are never direct, but always subtly modified with the addition of chromatic tones and ‘bending’ of their rhythms and figurations, represents the idealized music of the past (‘heaven’), which I could feel as a vibrant force around me - -yet its echoes were dusky, somehow always slightly overripe, on the way to dying. I needed to figure out what they meant to me, and to find a place for them in the present. The piece is conceived as a single 14-minute melodic trajectory over an arch. It starts as an ‘empty shell’, slowly filled by fragmentary echoes of the Liszt. In the ‘battle’ of the piece, the non-quoted music (ie. ‘my’ music) prevails, as a rhapsodic chordal melody enters in the mid range and slowly blossoms, finally descending to ‘earth’ in the work’s final measures.

- Kati Agocs