

**Leó
WEINER**

Toldi Suites, Opp. 43a and 43b



**Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV
Valéria Csányi**

Leó Weiner
(1885–1960)

Toldi Suites, Opp. 43a and 43b

Toldi Suite, Op. 43a (1954)	37:27
1 Bevezető ('Prologue')	4:21
2 Vidám sütés-főzés a konyhán ('Cooking a merry feast in the kitchen')	2:03
3 György összevész öccsével, Miklóssal (‘A conflict arises between György and his younger brother Miklós’)	2:56
4 Gerely-vetés ('Spear throwing')	2:39
5 Miklós bújdosik ('Miklós in hiding')	3:26
6 Bence, a hű cseléd ('Bence, the loyal servant')	4:02
7 Miklós búcsúzik anyjától ('Miklós says goodbye to his mother')	5:53
8 A temetőben ('In the graveyard')	4:51
9 A csárdában ('In the tavern')	3:38
10 Miklós viszontlátja anyját ('The reunion of Miklós and his mother')	3:24
Toldi Suite, Op. 43b (1955)	21:05
11 Bevezető ('Prologue')	4:20
12 Vidám sütés-főzés a konyhán ('Cooking a merry feast in the kitchen')	2:02
13 Miklós búcsúzik anyjától ('Miklós says goodbye to his mother')	3:26
14 Bence, a hű cseléd ('Bence, the loyal servant')	4:01
15 A csárdában ('In the tavern')	3:38
16 Miklós viszontlátja anyját ('The reunion of Miklós and his mother')	3:30

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Leó WEINER (1885–1960)

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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 (1948–53), 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).

Suites, Opp. 43a and 43b

Weiner liked to revise or rearrange his works either of his own accord, or as requested by performers and pupils. For instance, the numerous revised versions of his incidental music to *Csongor and Tünde* were written for the purpose of delivering it from the restrictions of the theatre and bringing it to the concert platform and ballet theatre. The revisions of the popular *Peregi verbunk* were inspired by and written at the request of various musicians. By arranging *Toldi* into suites, the composer aimed to preserve the music of his magnum opus for the concert podium by giving it a more concise form.

The completion date of the ten-movement suite, *Op. 43a* is marked 1954

in the manuscript score. In a letter dated 4 February 1954 – addressed to Fritz Reiner, a former pupil of Weiner who was conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the time – the composer writes the following about the piece: ‘As I promised, I have arranged the Toldi as a suite, omitting a large part of it, and now it is about 33 minutes long; I think it should satisfy your request. [...] I believe that the composition is more appealing and more effective this way. Naturally, the printed programme will also be different (shorter) than the one I sent you previously.’ According to this account, Weiner wrote the suite for Reiner, but it was never performed. The synopsis is preserved in the Weiner archive.

Toldi: Suite, Op. 43a

I. Prologue. János Arany, the great Hungarian poet muses: He recalls times past, and the figure of the legendary hero, the Herculean Miklós Toldi.

II. Cooking a merry feast in the kitchen. Great merrymaking and feasting in Nagyfalu: György, the older brother of Miklós, who is in the service of the king at Buda, is visiting home with his companions.

III. A conflict arises between György and his younger brother, Miklós. When György asks where his brother is, his mother is about to call Miklós, György stops her: ‘No need! – Miklós however unexpectedly enters, running towards György for a brotherly hug, but he

harshly pushes him away and berates him. The brothers start to fight. In his anger Miklós wants to leave the house immediately, but first he asks for his rightful share of the estate: money, horses, weapons. György slaps him in the face accompanied by these words: ‘Here’s your share, boy!’ Miklós is about to attack György, but their mother steps between them. Miklós, out of love for his mother, backs down, and dejectedly walks to the back of the yard his arms drooping, and sits on a piece of millstone, sobbing to himself.

IV. Spear throwing. After a hearty lunch, György’s companions entertain themselves by hurling 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 patience and throws the millstone he is sitting on towards them all. The stone hits one of the men and kills him. György gives the order: Miklós must be seized without delay!

V. Miklós goes into hiding. Miklós escapes into the reeds of a bog and hides there for days. He falls asleep exhausted.

VI. Bence, the loyal servant. Suddenly the reeds rustle behind Miklós: It is Bence, his faithful old servant, sent by his mother. Bence and Miklós are relieved to see each other. Bence, a merry, talkative, kind old man has brought food and gives it to the starving Miklós. He tries to persuade him to return

home. Miklós is unwilling: he will stick to his plan to leave for foreign parts. Bence is forced to return empty handed. Miklós remains alone, deeply unhappy.

VII. Miklós says goodbye to his mother.

Miklós sneaks back into the family home during the night to say goodbye to his mother, which he finds very difficult to do. Moonlight. Miklós softly knocks on his mother's door. His mother, 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 escape, as the dogs have scented the carcasses of two wolves, and are howling in rage, waking everyone up. György and his companions run up and down, 'left and right they rush like mad'. After him! Miklós must be captured!

VIII. In the graveyard. In his flight, Miklós finds himself in a cemetery near Pest. There a mourning widow is weeping heartbreakingly, leaning over a burial mound; she is mourning her two sons who have recently been killed by a Czech warrior. Miklós promises the widow to fight the Czech and avenge the death of her sons.

IX. In the tavern. Miklós and Bence, who has been sent by Toldi's mother to find Miklós, visit a nearby tavern together. They spend on merrymaking one of the 100 gold pieces sent by her. The rest they spend on armour, a helmet

and whatever else is needed for the duel. In the tavern, they first have 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.'

X. The reunion of Miklós and his mother.

The king sends for Miklós, who has defeated the Czech warrior. Miklós is greeted with celebrations; among the cheering crowd is old Bence too, who has brought Miklós's mother with him. She and her valiant son weep tears of joy as they finally meet again.

The date on the manuscript score of the six-movement suite *Op. 43b* is May 1955, but the premiere had to wait until 16 April 1960, when it was performed at the orchestral concert organised for Weiner's 75th birthday. The music critic Zsigmond László wrote the following about the work: 'The Toldi music was played in a new form as a six-movement Suite, and this shortened, more concise version especially highlighted the poetic, evocative beauty and most of all the warm hearted lyricism of the piece. The epic by János Arany, turned into a musical masterpiece with transcendent vision, is enriched by picturesque illustrative features and saturated with a "blazing summer heat" by the lyricism permeating the piece from beginning to end.'

The manuscript of Weiner's synopsis for this suite is in the possession of the author of these notes.

Toldi: Suite, Op. 43b

I. Prologue. The poet (János Arany) muses: 'Like herdsman's fires blazing on autumn nights across the vast sea of the puszta...' ... 'I see, it seems, his towering form and the thrust of his lance in scorching battle. The thundering sound of his voice I hear you would now conceive as the wrath of God...' ... 'This was the man, when needed, who stood his ground...' ... 'his works would appear like sorcery...' ... 'The sun shrivels up...' ... 'Toldi shambles homeward, the range trembles under his heavy footsteps into the far distance...'

II. Cooking a merry feast in the kitchen. Miklós Toldi's mother is getting ready for the visit of her other son, György. Bustling preparations: '...The kitchen is busier than a little market...' Weiner illustrates this part of the epic with a fugue.

III. Miklós says goodbye to his mother. As we know, Miklós had thrown a millstone among the guests after the spear throwing, killing one of György's companions. Miklós had to flee... Miklós sneaks back into the family home during the night to say goodbye to his mother... 'Dear mother, do not be alarmed. I bring no harm on the house. I walk at night like a ghost, but they would kill me, you know, if I came by day.' The dogs notice

the late-night guest... 'The dogs, with an ugly barking, came to the door...' The baying dogs wake up György's men. After a last wave of farewell, Miklós has to flee again.

IV. Bence, the loyal servant. Bence finds Miklós in the marsh where he is hiding, bringing some food for him. He talks a lot, trying to persuade him to return home. All for nothing: Miklós stays. Bence has to go home empty handed, leaving Miklós behind. The end of the movement illustrates the deep sorrow and desperation of Miklós.

V. In the tavern. Miklós learns that the Czech champion keeps defeating the Hungarian warriors in Buda. Miklós resolves to himself defeat the Czech. But first, he decides to make merry: He visits a nearby tavern: he drinks and dances. The music illustrates this with a slow 'Sarkantyús' (spur dance), and a 'Friss' (lively dance).

VI. The reunion of Miklós and his mother. The king sends for Miklós, who has defeated the Czech champion. He is celebrated. Among the cheering crowd is old Bence, as well as Miklós's mother. They embrace each other, weeping tears of joy.

István Kassai

Translated by Villam Translation Services
and Paul Merrick

Conductor's Commentary

I had the honour of conducting the second concert performance of Weiner's symphonic poem, *Toldi*, functioning as a modern premiere of the piece, as well as recording it with the MÁV Symphony Orchestra. When I studied the manuscripts of the two suites – which have never been published – and saw that they could both be compiled from the existing recording, I realised the significance of this right away. The six-movement suite was performed on a single occasion, in 1960, and the ten-movement suite had never been played on a concert platform before the recording was issued. It is our duty to make these works known to the public. As I have spent more than half of my life at the Opera House, I am confident that the symphonic poem will receive the recognition it deserves as ballet music, and the two suites will be successful additions to the repertoire of 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 Musikvereinssaal 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



Photo: Zsuzsanna Rózsa

Valéria Csányi

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 Széchenyi's *Complete Dances for Orchestra* [8.573807].

Leó Weiner's influence as a teacher in Budapest was exceptional – 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. Weiner's great symphonic poem *Toldi* (Naxos 8.573847) was considered by the composer to be one of his most significant compositions, and was inspired by a masterpiece of Hungarian literature. These two suites from the work also follow the epic poetry in a way that seems to notate the text musically.

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Toldi Suites, Opp. 43a and 43b

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|--------------|------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1–10 | Toldi Suite, Op. 43a (1954) | 37:27 |
| 11–16 | Toldi Suite, Op. 43b (1955) | 21:05 |

Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV
Valéria Csányi

A detailed track list can be found on page 2 of the booklet
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