

*The University of Hong Kong
Department of Music*

**RESEARCH COLLOQUIA
SPRING 2016**

Richard Kurth
(University of British Columbia)

*Dual Portrait: György Kurtág's
Attila József Fragments For Soprano Solo (Op. 20)*

György Kurtág's many vocal compositions reflect his discerning and uniquely responsive literary sensibility. He extracts fragments that reveal aphoristic geometries of vivid imagery, conceptual juxtaposition, and intensified diction. He prefers language that activates every dimension of vocalicity, so that the physicality of singing unleashes fundamental energies that his music can sculpt and magnify. The vocal contours galvanize the contrasts and nuances generated by alliteration and assonance. Kurtág creates music of exceptional linguistic performativity that amplifies the images, concepts, and associations evoked and liberated by the aphoristic fragment.

To explore Kurtág's approach to performative vocalicity, this discussion will focus on a work of the early 1980s, the *Attila József Fragments* for Soprano Solo (Op. 20), Kurtág's only work for unaccompanied voice. It will examine how Kurtág's approach to the voice amplifies the literary and sonic dimensions of the texts. And it will also explore how Kurtág generates multiple trajectories and continuities across a diverse field of fragmentary utterances and literary and musical associations, and gives multivalent form to the unfolding sequence of twenty fragments. The work will also be interpreted as a compassionate dual portrait of the poet József and his mother, in which the solo soprano voice signifies the lost maternal figure as a constant presence in the psyche of the grieving and troubled son.

Richard Kurth completed his doctoral dissertation on the music of Arnold Schoenberg under the supervision of David Lewin at Harvard University. He is Professor of Music Theory at the University of British Columbia, and since 2007 has served as Director of the School of Music. In addition to publications on other topics in 19th and 20th century music, he has an abiding interest in the interactions of poetry and music. His publications on vocal music have appeared in *The Cambridge Companion to Schoenberg* (2010, ed. Auner and Shaw), *Schoenberg and Words: The Modernist Years* (2000, ed. Cross and Berman), the *Journal of the Arnold Schönberg Center* (2005, 2003), and *19th-Century Music* (1999, 1997).

WEDNESDAY 6 APRIL 2016, 5:00PM

SEMINAR ROOM 11.01, 11/F RUN RUN SHAW TOWER, CENTENNIAL CAMPUS
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