

**Simone Fontanelli**

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## ***„Can we generate hope through art?“***

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, dear friends.

I am very honored to be appointed as Honorary Member of this prestigious Széchenyi Academy, and I am very happy to be here with you.

As you know, for my lecture I chose the title "Can we generate hope through art?". But it might be as well: "Can art give us hope?".

For me to find such a title was difficult, and when I found it I said to myself: "And now what will I say?". I was scared...

The words "art" and "hope" contain infinite meanings.

We may define them historically, philosophically, anthropologically, etc. etc. etc.

They are two concepts both universal and individual, in continuous transformation.

Each one of us develops, throughout our lifetime, a personal "sentiment" of art and hope. And since life is always transforming, this "sentiment" also changes.

I do not intend here to make a philosophical speech. Great minds have already written about it, from ancient Greece up to the present day. I am incapable of doing this.

I will talk about a concrete aspect of living and making art, connected to real life which each one of us must face. I will talk about questions and doubts an artist might feel in living his/her daily life.

I think one thing is obvious: we are not born knowing what art is. We discover it.

Likewise, we are not born knowing what hope is. We discover it.

By discovering and cultivating both, we understand how necessary they are. Indeed, without art and hope, life cannot exist.

Let me consider now one peculiarity of art-making.

In my opinion, in a very simple way, art-making is the ability to imagine and then to transform what we have imagined into something real.

A fascinating and mysterious process of transformation. All this, driven and motivated by our desire to act in the world.

Here we can make a connection with hope.

Isn't imagination also a characteristic of hope? Can we hope without imagining? And hope without the will to act — is that still hope or just a melancholic illusion?

Surely, art and hope have something important in common. They both have the ability to project life into the future. They are two ways of living the present and projecting it into the future. To do this they both need imagination, will, and action.

But... there's a price to pay.

The great Italian romantic poet Giacomo Leopardi wrote about hope: "Hope is a very wild passion, because it necessarily carries with it the very great fear that things we are hoping for will not happen"

*"A remény egy nagyon viharos szenvedély, mert szükségszerűen magával hozza a félelmet, hogy amit remélünk, nem fog megtörténni"*

Actually, also the activity of the artist is a torment...

Maybe, by telling you a bit about myself, you will be able to understand why I came to this title. How my sentiment of art and hope was born and developed. And how it is for me now, that I am almost 64.

I am a composer, a pedagogue, a lecturer and, less frequently, a conductor. Many activities... But the most important for me is composition.

Well, honestly speaking, I had never thought of becoming a composer. When I was a kid I was in love with science, especially astronomy and my dream was to become a scientist. But things in life always change. We meet many people, visit many places, have many experiences, joyful and sad, in a sort journey which takes us everywhere. Also, to "places of the mind and imagination".

My curiosity made me begin my journey.

"Journey"... I remember the words of the Greek poet Costantinos Kavafis, from his poem called *Ithaca*: "As you set out for Ithaca, hope that your road is a long one, full of adventure, full of discovery."

*"Ha majd elindulsz Ithaka felé, válaszd hozzá a leghosszabb utat, mely csupa kaland és felfedezés."*

Was it me who decided to begin the journey? Was I aware of it? Maybe yes, probably not... Perhaps both things.

But then, how did I come to be a composer?

Well, I remember that when I was a very little kid my dad gave me a box of wooden bricks of different shapes, with which I could build anything. I loved it.

Then, when I was 5, my parents gave me a Lego box. In my youth it was not the Lego they sell now, with the box showing what you "must" build: a ship, a car, even flowers as I have seen. That Lego was just a box with a transparent cover and many different coloured bricks inside. Nothing else.

But this "simplicity" permitted my imagination to work and my fantasy to go free. Those bricks could become lots of things. Anything could be turned into anything else. I had only to imagine and to try to do it.

Once I built a very strange house, following my fantasy. I showed it to my mum. She looked at it and said: "But it doesn't look like a house!". In a way she was right, because my house was very strange, with wings and wheels... For me it was a house that could move and even fly. Why not?

(You always have to help adults to imagine)

In that little me playing with bricks, maybe something was taking direction. When I was 8 I began to study music. I must still thank my mum for this. She always encouraged me to do it.

Over the years, those bricks became the notes with which now I compose my world of sounds. Inventing.

Let's take this verb: "to invent." It does not mean to create anything from nothing. It comes from the Latin "Invenire", which means "to find". And you can find if you search.

But is it possible to start searching without a secret hope that something will be found? I think not.

Composition was not my first interest. I graduated in guitar. When I was 19 I went to university to study philosophy and psychology and, at the same time, I began to study Composition at the Milano Conservatory.

I did my best to do well all those things together, but then I realized it was not possible.

Sadly, I had to leave psychology, which anyway remained my passion.

For about 10 years I taught in several little music schools, paid by the hour and little. It was hard, but I managed it and it was useful.

The first time I came to Hungary was in the summer of 1982. I was 21. There was still the Iron Curtain and for me, born and raised in a big city in western Europe like Milano, crossing the border between Austria and Hungary was like entering another age. That fascinated me. Hungarian culture captured me.

That year I went to Szombathely, to the Bartók Festival and Seminar, where I was admitted as a conducting student with Somogyi László. I returned in 1986, to study with Eötvös Péter.

Hungary became my second country. It gave me so much, not only culturally: my wife Judit, our daughter Flora (who was born here in Budapest), and my parents-in-law (Földes Imre is a member of this Academy). Here I met personalities such as Kurtág, Jeney, Szöllösy, Eötvös, Tihanyi, Sári László and, among others, Ritók Nóra. Nóra is the Founder and Director of the wonderful Igazgyöngy Alapítvány (Real Pearl Foundation) which offers art education to disadvantaged children, to help them in the development of their personality. That is to say, offering hope through art.

With some of these people a great friendship was born.

As a teacher and lecturer, I love to talk about Hungary, Hungarian music, culture, poetry. ...I realize that I have been a witness to the last forty years of your wonderful country. Moments of hope and... also... moments of darkness.

In 2000, the Salzburg Mozarteum called me to teach there. Finally, some stability in my career. I was also active as a conductor, but composition was the way of making music that made me feel good. Not only an exciting activity, for me, composing is a therapy which I need.

Anyway, composing is not just writing a piece that maybe will be performed once. A piece of music, a poem, a painting — these are not just "products". They contain and must contain an entire world, with our secret hope that through that piece of art, however small, that world will come to life.

There is another aspect.

I think we artists (please allow me to include myself into this group) must be in touch with the world around us. Not to live in a room or a tower. Self-isolation makes our mind and creativity poor.

I would like to show now a little work of mine. It is called *3 Haiku (Against the War)*, 3 short pieces for guitar inspired by 3 Haiku by my colleague Simone Pansolin. These wonderful Haiku — modern ones which don't follow the traditional form — are about war. I wrote this piece in 2022. I myself made this video as well. Here is the Hungarian translation of the 3 Haiku

I silenzio: la sola preghiera ascoltata	silence: the only prayer heard	<i>csend: az egyetlen meghallgatott imádság</i>
II disperso, morto... piangendo due volte le stesse lacrime	missing, dead... crying twice the same tears	<i>eltűnt, meghalt... kétszer siratni ugyanazokkal a könnyekkel</i>
III colombe in volo — dov'è il confine?	doves in flight — where is the border?	<i>repülő galambok - hol van a határ?</i>

Thinking about current reality, I believe that words like concern, anxiety, and fear are nowadays very familiar to us. We are feeling disoriented, scared, sometimes hopeless.

When I was young what was important for me was looking for opportunities, pursuing a career. Over the years, many doubts came over me about the "function", the "role", the "meaning" of what now, as a composer, I am doing. But I think that is the case for all people in the arts.

Again the question: "What is the sense of being a composer?". "Is it just writing a piece, having it performed, and then being called "Composer"?".

I will try to answer considering two elements that are for me fundamental.

One is "**communicating**". Of course, always keeping a high quality. In this, I try to do my best. My "communication" is not a rational passing on of information from me to someone else. To do this, a laptop is more than enough.

It comes instead from a profound need of mine, which is not entirely rational but mainly emotional. This profound need is "**to share**". And this is the second element.

Not just sharing a work or an experience but a more profound "sharing".

For me even this moment, with me telling you about myself, is "**sharing**". Sharing that will not end - I hope - with the last second of my lecture, but it will remain in our memory. In my memory at least, along with the wish to tell those who are not here about it too.

Another way of "sharing" is "teaching". For me it is like a journey taken together with my students.

Through teaching we keep what we share with our students alive. Then they will take care of it and will share it on, even when we will be no more.

By doing this, we are moved by the hope that what is beautiful and valuable will remain and will live forever. By doing this, we generate in our students the love for beauty, truth and hope.

Actually, sharing a piece of music is a bit problematic. Music is abstract, and listening is something we have to learn. Moreover, a piece of music exists only if a performer and a listener exist.

When I compose, I keep these two entities in mind.

This does not mean that I am their servant. My works are my need to express and share. They are my thoughts and feelings. They are my conscious and unconscious being, collaborating with each other.

Ok, "Sharing". Certainly! Sharing a work of art is sharing knowledge, emotions, beauty.

Two important things must be considered, I believe.

First. A work of art which is only entertainment gradually loses its value and, in the end, becomes just a common and useless habit.

Second. A work of art will only exist in the future if at least one person will come into contact with it, will love it and will feel the desperate need to share it with other people. Only then we can hope for a future.

... We have mentioned three crucial words: Art, Hope, Future... But now I must strike a note of concern.

We are totally aware of the dark times we are living in.

I remember Bertolt Brecht's words from his poem *An die Nachgeborenen* ('To Those Who Follow in Our Wake'). I quote:

*Wirklich, ich lebe in finsternen Zeiten!  
Das arglose Wort ist töricht. Eine glatte Stirn  
Deutet auf Unempfindlichkeit hin. Der Lachende  
Hat die furchtbare Nachricht  
Nur noch nicht empfangen.*

Truly, I live in dark times!

An artless word is foolish. A smooth forehead  
Points to insensitivity. He who laughs  
Has not yet received  
The terrible news.

**Az utódokhoz**

*Valóban sötét korban élek én!*

*A jóhiszemű szó ostobaság.  
A sima homlok érzéketlenségre vall. S aki nevet,  
azért nevet csak, mert még nem jutott el  
hozzá az iszonyú hír.*

Crucial questions: "Can a piece of music, a poem, a painting save a country from dictatorship? Can they save at least one life while the bombed city is burning?"

They can't, I'm afraid. But after many years, when the last witness of that tragedy will be no more, then that piece of music, that poem, that painting will be the true witness of that tragedy. Those works will keep the memory of those tragedies alive. Those works will help people in future to know, reflect, understand, and learn — if they are willing to do so. To make this happen depends and will always depend on us, on our will to do and to share.

Once more, I believe being the witnesses of our time gives meaning to our work. This is our task now.

On this, I would like to quote Thomas Mann. In his *Appeal to Reason* (Ein Appell an die Vernunft), a speech given in Berlin in 1930, Mann says:

*"There are moments [...] when the artist cannot proceed according to his inner impulse, because more immediate concerns imposed by life drive away the thought of art; in which the tormenting crisis of the collectivity also upsets him [...]"*

*"Vannak olyan pillanatok [...], amikor a művész nem folytathatja munkáját saját belső impulzusa szerint, mert az élet által felvetett közvetlen problémák elűzik a művészet gondolatát; és a kollektivitás kízó válsága elborítja őt is [...]"*

In his later writings, reacting to the Munich Agreement in 1938 with the apparent diplomatic victory of Hitler, published under the title: *Achtung, Europa!* (Európa, vigyázz!), Thomas Mann writes:

*"What is needed today is a militant humanism, convinced that the principle of freedom, tolerance and doubt must not be exploited by a fanaticism which is shameless and without doubt."*

*"Ma harcos humanizmusra lenne szükség, melyet az a belátás táplál, hogy egy szemérem és kétség nélküli fanatizmusnak sohasem szabad a szabadság, türelem és kétség alapelveit kizsákmányolni és kiszorítani."*

He also warns about the dangers of manipulation through propaganda:

*"Today we are convinced that it is more important and easier to dominate the masses [...] introducing propaganda in place of education. [...] Violence is an extraordinarily simplifying spirit"*

*Manapság meg vagyunk győződve arról, hogy fontosabb és könnyebb is a tömegeket [...], oktatás helyett propagandán keresztül uralni. [...] Az erőszak elve pedig ezt rendkívüli módon leegyszerűsíti.*

Thomas Mann's words deserve to be read and meditated upon even today, in Europe and overseas...



Can we artists make a positive change, however small, or even just create hope for it?

Pessimism takes me, but a sentence by my compatriot Antonio Gramsci helps me: *"We must combine the pessimism of reason with the optimism of the will."*

*"Össze kell kapcsolnunk az értelem pesszimizmusát és az akarat optimizmusát."*

In my case, I strongly believe that a continuous and passionate sharing of art with people will generate knowledge, awareness, sensitivity, enthusiasm, and empathy. And therefore, I strongly believe that hope can be born through art.

To conclude this pleasant meeting, to thank you and greet you all, I would like to show you the video of a recent work of mine. It is a piece for violin and voice where the violinist must also sing while playing.

It is called ... *That Ebb and Flow by The Moon*.

*"...Mely árad s apad a hold szerint."*

The performer is Fiona Roberson, a fantastic Scottish violinist. I wrote this piece specifically for her, inspired by her talent.

The words are from *King Lear* — a Shakespearian tragedy I immensely love — and this is one of the most touching moments. The old King Lear and his daughter Cordelia have been imprisoned and sentenced to death. These are his last words to his daughter.

In my piece, the female voice sings these words, as if Cordelia herself is recalling them. This is a kind of "theatrical piece". The first part is instrumental, expressing the painful atmosphere of the moment. Then the voice appears...

Through the words of Cordelia, the profound relationship between a daughter and her father comes out. But also, Shakespeare's *King Lear* reminds us that life is very hard and uncertain, and that there is no substitute for moral rectitude, wisdom, understanding, and patience.

For the subtitles, I used the wonderful Hungarian translation by Vörösmarty Mihály.

I hope you will enjoy. Thank you very very much.

#### **KING LEAR - ACT V, scene II**

(IT, Ger, Esp, Hun translation below)

LEAR. [...]

We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage:  
when thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,  
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,  
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues  
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,  
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;  
And take upon's the mystery of things,

As if we were Gods' spies: and we'll wear out,  
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones  
That ebb and flow by th'moon.

LEAR

[...] E canteremo come uccelli in gabbia. E quando mi dirai di benedirti, m'inginocchierò, e ti chiederò perdono. E così vivremo, e pregheremo, e canteremo, e ci racconteremo antiche storie, e sorrideremo alle farfalle dorate, e udremo le novelle di corte dalla bocca di poveri vagabondi: e anche noi converseremo con loro, di chi perde e di chi vince, e di chi è dentro e di chi resta fuori, e ci daremo a riflettere sul mistero delle cose, proprio come se fossimo le spie di Dio. E così, fra le mura d'una prigione, cancelleremo dalla memoria ogni cosa che tocchi di fazioni e di sette dei grandi di questo mondo, che vanno e vengono così come la marea sotto la luna.

LEAR

[...]

Da laß uns singen, wie im Käfig Vögel.  
Bittst du um meinen Segen, will ich knien  
Und dein Verzeihn erflehn; so wolln wir leben,  
Beten und singen, Märchen uns erzählen  
Und über goldne Schmetterlinge lachen.  
Wir hören armes Volk vom Hof erzählen  
Und schwatzen mit, wer da gewinnt, verliert,  
Wer in, wer aus der Gunst, und tun so tief  
Geheimnisvoll, als wären wir Propheten  
Der Gottheit; und so überdauern wir  
Im Kerker Ränk und Spaltungen der Großen,  
Die ebbn mit dem Mond und fluten.

LEAR

[...] Cantaremos como pájaros en jaula.

Si me pides la bendición, me pondré de rodillas pidiéndote perdón. Viviremos así,  
y rezando, cantando, contando leyendas, riéndonos de los lindos palaciegos, oyendo  
a pobrecillos hablar de la corte;  
y hablando con ellos de quién pierde  
y quién gana, quién medra y quién cae; fingiendo entender los misterios de las cosas, cual  
si fuésemos espías de los dioses;  
y, encerrados en la cárcel, veremos pasar bandos y partidos de los poderosos  
que suben y bajan con la luna.

Shakespeare - Lear király  
ÖTÖDIK FELVONÁS - 3. SZÍN  
Fordította: Vörösmarty Mihály



[...] Ott fogunk mi, mint kalitban a madár,  
Dalolni ketten. Áldásom ha kéred,  
Letérdelek s kérem bocsánatot!  
Igy élünk majd, dallunk, imádkozunk,  
És agg regéket mondunk, nevetünk  
Az arany lepkéken, s mint mulatkozik  
A kócos nép az udvar hírein,  
És közbeszólunk, hogy ki nyer, ki vesz,  
Ki van benn, vagy künn, és oly rejteményes  
Arcot veszünk fel, mintha kémei volnánk  
Az isteneknek. Börtönünkben így  
Kivárjuk a viszálykodó nagyok  
Fondor világát, mely árad s apad  
A hold szerint.