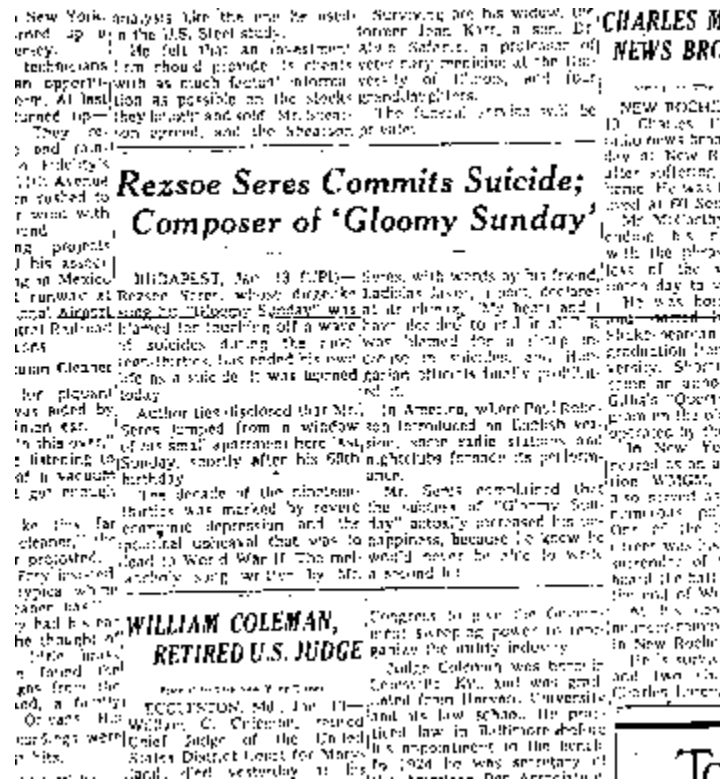


The Melancholy Melody that "Kills"

Cheng Guo - 3/1/2019



Picture source:

[sites.google.com/site/vmarcenne/Home/imgs/hyt_14.01.68_pg84_suicide Gloomy Sunday.gif](https://sites.google.com/site/vmarcenne/Home/imgs/hyt_14.01.68_pg84_suicide_Gloomy_Sunday.gif)

Nobody would believe what they first learned from the press report of a series of mysterious suicidal cases by the time when European people's despair on the consequences of the Treaty of Versailles, 1919 has been too extreme. But it did happen, according to the urban legends, that a song, "Gloomy Sunday," composed by a dejected pianist in Budapest is what was behind at least 20 suicides in Hungary and the US during the 1930s, including its composer, Rezso Seress. "Gloomy Sunday" has triggered public panic, which earned itself a nickname - Hungarian Suicide Song.

"Gloomy Sunday" was a popular song in Hungary between the World Wars, and Paul Robeson, the famous bass artist, introduced the English version to the US. It was hard to imagine the popularity of "Gloomy Sunday" after several governments around the world banned its performance.

But, how? How did a song kill people? How was it composed? How did it affect those poor victims and lead them from committing suicide? The song was still a mystery in many ways. However, one concern that stands out is that under what circumstances is this song composed?

The History of “Gloomy Sunday”

Rezso Seress was a middle-of-the-road musician who was born Jewish and raised in poverty during the World War Era in Budapest, Hungary. He once was a poor victim of the labor camp of Nazi Germany, but fortunately, he survived and started working at a circus as a Trapeze artist. His concentration turned to music writing and singing after he suffered injuries to his body.

Seress composed several songs, including one that is the purpose of commemorating Széchenyi Chain Bridge for the Hungarian Communist Party. However, his song did not earn him any fame, so he left his home country and traveled to multiple places around Europe.

It was Paris where he composed the notorious song “Gloomy Sunday,” and it was an age of the great depression in Europe, as well as in the US. The report of suicide reached its peak in history, and people could only drown themselves in various kinds of pop culture that could let them forget the misery of life.

Despite the age of devastation, Hungary was almost a place filled with suicides. Even now, the suicide rate in Hungary is still high across the world, which largely affected the life expectancy there. Probably due to the political atmosphere after WWI, Hungarian youths were raised in a suppressed environment. It was obvious that a large proportion of them would become alcoholics. Ironically, the slight drop in the suicide rate in Hungary towards the end of the 20th century is said to be related to increasing alcoholism in the nation, so people just chose a slow way, but they both reach a similar outcome.

Seress's music career was nearly fallen as Seress broke up with his girlfriend in 1933. He fell into despair and composed the music. It was not smooth at all when Seress first tried to publish the song, however, by the time he published the song, he contacted his ex-lover for a reunion and she agreed. You might think that this is a turning point in Seress's life, but it is not. His girlfriend took

her own life with poison after their contact. It was by then Seress titled the song "Gloomy Sunday" where he found the inspiration from his girlfriend's last note.

The Effects of "Gloomy Sunday"

The Hungarian Police first noticed "Gloomy Sunday" when they were investigating one of the series of suicides in Budapest. It was three years after its release, and the song was just like other songs composed by Seress - not famous at all. However, two more suicide cases are correlated with the song, since the police have found quotes from lyrics or sheet music at the scene of the suicide.

As the press reported those mysterious cases, people became frightened of the song. Soon the Budapest police officially banned the song, but they could not stop its spread secretly among youth. Since the song has spread to other nations in Europe, report of suicides related to the "Gloomy Sunday" never stops. Ranging from 14 years old to over 80 years old, multiple victims have committed suicide, some of the cases are shown to correlate with the song while others are not sure. Up to now, police has found evidence of victim listening to "Gloomy Sunday" before they commit suicide in at least 20 of the cases across Europe. BBC struck first. They banned the song as the death number increases. The U.S. network followed them. Several months later, BBC released a revised version of the song, but a new report of suicide after listening to the new version followed, and BBC finally banned the song completely to this day.

35 years after its release, Seress confronted the same fate with his love as the song has already linked with a series of strange cases. It is not surprising to note, that his suicide marks the end of the horrible suicide wave in Europe and the U.S.

The Mystery of "Gloomy Sunday"

The linkage between "Gloomy Sunday" and the series of suicides is a mystery. According to one of the publishers, the song contains a "terrible compelling despair" in its melody. Every survivor confessed its "horrible depressing effect" in the lyrics. However, since the original version of the song is destroyed, and the revised version online has changed a lot, no one could ever experience the horror in the music anymore.

It turns out that some press reached out to Seress and asked him about the composition of such a melancholy melody, and he replied, "I stand amid this deadly success as an accused man. This fatal fame hurts me. I cried all of the disappointments of my heart into this song, and it seems that others with feelings like mine have found their hurt in it." The public did not accept Seress's explanation since some possible "victims" of the song are either too young or too old to be in love.

Until now, the relationship between "Gloomy Sunday" and the suicide waves is still not clear. Our only hope is that fewer people could be affected by deadly rhythm anymore.