

In Strasbourg (France) the International Conference of Music Therapy (organized by UNESCO) was held between July 1st and 6th. Dr. Klára Kokas, staff-member of our Institute gave there a full day lecture demonstrated with films and video-tapes.

This summer the "Federation Internationale des Jeunesses Musicales" held its 30th Congress in Zágráb. From the Kecskemét Institute's staff Mihály Ittzés lectured there. His topic was: "Zoltán Kodály's music pedagogical concept and its role in the Hungarian music culture."

All these activities are parts of the very complex task the Institute has been carrying on and plans to carry on in the future in making all the values of Kodály's life-work - in Hungary and abroad - "public property".

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BULLETIN OF THE INTERNATIONAL KODÁLY SOCIETY

1980/1



Zoltán Kodály (1938)

"To enable the national spirit to express itself in a higher art form as well, it is necessary to raise the cultural level in the music of the whole nation."

(What is Hungarian in Music? 1939. The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály, Corvina Press, Budapest, 1974. p.33)

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THE INFLUENCE OF FOLK MUSIC RESEARCH ON KODÁLY'S WORKS

by Lajos Vargyas

There have always been artists who have also tried to conquer the field of their experience with a scholarly approach. Goethe and Leonardo are noted examples of this Kodály and Bartók represent the same type of artists; with them, however, it is more than a question of a greater than average interest of a greater than average intellect. They wanted to take possession of the realm of their experience even by the scientific weapon of research work. In Kodály, conscious search, the guiding role of consciousness in shaping his type was already evident when he embarked on his career. This is what he wrote in his recollections: "... if the aim of the composer was to hear the voice of his own people, as Herder heard the voice of the peoples, and then reproduce it louder in some form, then he first had to get acquainted with this voice". From that it follows that with him the two kinds of activity were not divided from each other, but constituted two sides of the same intellectual work, two possible reactions to the same experience. What kept him scientifically occupied, became at the same time the source of artistic creation, and what inspired him to artistic creation, also gave food for his meditation as a scholar and sooner or later he elaborated his scientific problems in music as well. It can be clearly traced how artistic works were born out of his folk music collection and scholarly results, and how his scholarly discoveries exercised a growing influence on his creative fantasy.

This interrelationship becomes obvious even by chronologically listing his collections and scholarly papers side by side with the compositions in which the subject or basic idea is provided by the collected and discussed folk-songs.

The comparison shows that the results of his research work and scholarly discoveries became transformed at once, or after a certain period of maturation, into artistic achievements.

The transformation into art however is not always a self-evident and simple process; sometimes the melody sparks off a possibility which can be perceived only by the imaginative power of the scholar or the artist. If one comes across the folk variant which has served as the starting point, one would hardly think of the possibility of "creation" inherent in them. Let us listen to the following flute melody:



Like this, it actually is a plain little piece with its uncertain, choking, soft notes. Only by placing it side by side with the third episode of the *Dances of Marosszék* will we notice the possibilities that were inherent in it:



The following recording of a swineherd's horn and trumpet tune is even more insignificant:

And this memory had given rise partly to the battle call in *Háry János*, and partly to the clock music with its fairy tale mood, a section of which we are quoting now:

Kodály was able to hear the noble tradition of figuration behind the thin sound of a single flute, and he was able to take it over into the figurations of his orchestral parts. The following example

presents the flute version of the melody *Oh I want a young and handsome husband*, which can then be compared with its instrumental form in the *Spinning Room*.

A knowledge and mastery of the folk style, and an ability to variate it was really necessary when he had to recognize – or feel – the genuine folk style hidden in old, sketchy notations. Again let us listen first to the original form of what existed *before* the creation, in order to be able to judge how much fantasy there was needed for endowing it with life. The question arises as to what response the following melody (from a notation dating from around 1800) would have provoked before it was treated by Kodály:

Presto

When Kodály elaborated the melody in the *Dances of Galánta*, he was not yet familiar with the following melody from Szék, Transylvania, nor its instrumental versions which can still be heard in some places in its vicinity:

Poco rubato ♩ = 92-120 Gr. 91 B. lej. L. Szék (Szolnok-Doboka vm.) 1941. I.

m de Jer bé a te-me-tő kert-be, j ird fel a sí-rom kövi-re,
 A vi-lá-gon, a föld szí-nén o-jan árva nincsen mint én
 Ár-va vagyok a-pa nél-kül, de még ár-vább anya nélkül,
 Ké-rem az én is-te-ne-met, hogy el ne hagy-jon in-gemet.

Yet he perfectly hit off the tempo of the elaboration, the dignified character of the melody and its ornamentations which are not at all conveyed by the sketchy fast piano piece, moving in eights.

But there is also another lesson here. Namely that the unity between scholarly and artistic-creative work is also valid the other way round: intuition often precedes conscious recognition. Kodály sensed something characteristic, something primeval in the sketchy melody dating from the past century, and resurrected it in its full mood – without having been aware of what has become known now: that the melody is related to the lament, and that it was a highly popular, far-reaching melodic type of old Hungarian dance music – something which was made clear by later research work and

Tänze aus Galánta: 50-58.

Cl.

sources found recently. At that time Kodály alone felt the unity between old Hungarian dance music and instrumental folk music, and he began to realize this unity in his works.

Yet, the cases where he had to sense some hidden beauty and unfold higher art out of this germ were not the ones that really characterized Kodály. The most general source of his inspiration was when he perceived perfect beauty in the folk-song and wanted to serve this exquisite beauty with his work. First among these beauties stand those which scholarly discoveries have established to be the most ancient – that is most national – elements of tradition. The melodies he elaborated in more than one form, that seem to have meant the most profound experience for him, are of a perfect beauty, and with one exception, are pentatonic, descending melodies most of them in quintal shift, that is they belong to our oldest folk-song style in which aesthetical value and historical significance have become intertwined, and which conveyed an ever-lasting experience to Kodály the researcher and the artist.

It is, however characteristic that he first arranged the *Székely Woe-song* collected in 1910, only in 1918, the song *I rove, I look around*, collected in 1912, only in 1917, while the *Songs of Karád* he composed in 1934, the same year as the collection, and the Peacock melody in 1937, two years after its discovery. By that time the scholarly problems had ripened, and he was clearly aware of the pieces found, and his artistic reaction to them was also imminent.

This indicates the gradual realization of the most ancient, most national style in Kodály's scholarly activity and the growing adherence to this most ancient tradition in his artistic work. But his scholarly recognition was also dependant upon the simple, monumental beauty of the melodies and the style as a whole. Because it should not be forgotten that this "scholarly value" is never a value from a scholarly point of view alone, but is always accompanied by an aesthetical value, the attractive force of beauty. These classical pieces which kept returning in his works, and also their other stylistic relatives, do not only excel in their historical significance but with their timeless beauty as well. It is characteristic of folk tradition that whatever it brings about as the most typical in the course of historical development is at the same time also the most mature beauty; the maximum of historical value being at the same time the maximum of aesthetic value.

However, it must be pointed out at once that Kodály never became one-sided under the influence of scholarly results. Whether you leaf through the volumes of *Hungarian Folk Music*, or *Háry János* or the *Spinning Room* with an eye for the melodies used in them, you will always encounter the most varied stylistic elements of folk music, and never exclusively old pentatonic melodies. Often even functional major melodies appear, when justified by some significance. And besides the pentatonic melodies, the only tune he arranged on two occasions was *Woe is me*, once as a choir in *Two Folk Songs from the Zobor Region*, and once in the series *Hungarian Folk Music* for voice and

piano, even though Kodály considered this melody of a scale of major thirds and minor sixths to be of Moravian origin. But in these great, summarizing musical pictures he wanted to embrace all the various forms of beauty that can be found in Hungarian folk music tradition. It was only the decisive role that he allocated to the most ancient Eastern features.

Anyone for whom folk melody is as important as to make the elaboration for the sake of the beauty of the melody so that what he has seen to be perfect in its original simplicity would appear in the most worthy possible frame, wants to enhance the melody with the accompaniment and not to hide it within it. Kodály's folk-song arrangements are noted for the fact that whether he used them in choral works or with a piano or orchestral accompaniment, his main care was not to have them burdened with the accompaniment, not to hide the melody, but let it freely soar. His piano accompaniment is often just an interlude between the stanzas of the song, otherwise the melody can arch above the sustained notes or discreet rhythmic accompaniment. As for example in *The Bad Wife*:

Allegro con brio $\text{♩} = 126$

ff *strepitoso*

simile

Lento

ff *p doloroso*

Jaj! „Jő-jön haza é-des-a-nyám!

espr.

Tempo I

Mert beteg az é-des-a-pám!” „Vár, lányom egykicsit, Hadd táncójak

egy ki-csit, Minnyár én is me-nyek. Eggyet kettőt for-du-lok, Minnyár otthon

le-szek?”

ff

ff Jaj!

Lento *mf più doloroso*

„Jő-jön haza, é-des-a-nyám! Gyóntassuk meg é-des-a-pám!”

In other cases the melody is enhanced by soft chordal repeats, in a rhythm differing from that of the melody, giving hardly more than a few sustained harmonies to support it:

Lento poco rubato $\text{♩} = 40$

Az hol én el -

me - nyék, Még az fák is sír - nak,

Gyen - ge á - ga - i - ról Le - ve - lek le - hull - nak.

pp

simile *dim.* *ppp*

Compositions with folksong-themes offered a specific task in polyphonic choirs. The Palestrina-like counterpoint does not let the melody – and still less the text – prevail to such an extent as Kodály would have wished. So he developed the kind of polyphony in which the other voice-parts under the folk-song sing without a text – to the syllable “a” – and the whole accompaniment deviates in its musical character from the folk-song: with its billowing-falling surge, its part-like yet not

melody-like motion, really being merely the counterpoint, a roaring background to the melody, which with its own definite line shows up, even in fortissimo, against this background, The *Székely Woe-song* (in its second, and particularly its third strophe) is like this:

ff

Tengérnek nagy partja Koporsóm oldala Tengérnek mélysége: Koporsóm fenekén

Aj! Aj!

Tengér sűrű habja: Szémtédelem lészén. Tengérnek zúgása: harangszómis lészén

aj! aj! aj! aj!

aj! aj!

dim. *rall.*

bom, bom, bom, bom,

ó ó ó ó

And this is what the song of the beseeching outlaw in the *Songs of Karád* is like:

Lassabban p (kérő hangon, beszélve)

Ké-rem a-lá-za-to-san az u-rakat,

pp *legato*

A

Engedjék el ezt a csekély ha-jomat! Hajtok bárányhajtok pörgét az urnak,

(A)

Csak engemet bocsásson el szabad-nak! Kérem a-lá-zatosan az

(A)

u-rakat, Engedjék el ezt a csekély ba-jo mat! Hajtok lovat harminchármat

(A)

fe-ke-tét, Kivel felszántom az u-rak me-ze-jét.

(A)

Ké-rém a-lá-za-to-san az u-ra-kat, En-ged-jék el ezt a csekély

pp *cresc.*

Ké - rém szé - pen az u -

ba-jo-mat! Haj-tok o-lyan da-ru-sző-rü pa-ri-pát,

pp *mf* *cresc.*

ra - kat En - ged - jék el

Hét vármegye nem ta-lál-ja fél pár-ját.

dim. *dim.* *pp*

a ba - jo - mat. En - ged - jék el a ba - jo - mat.

Kodály must have hit upon this solution in the ensemble of the soloist and accompanying women's woe-choir of *Psalmus Hungaricus*. A third solution, is when two melodies respond to each other, heard consecutively rather than under or over one another. The pair of melodies in the *Spinning Room, Far away though you may wander – Far away I'm going*, and several children's choruses provide examples for this (eg. *Lengyel László*). It could have been no accident that he wrote in his study, *Hungarian Character in Music*: "The thing in which personalities as different as Erkel and Liszt agree, is the dominating role of the melody; rich, telling rhythms...are all dear to Hungarian taste", and before: "If for example German polyphony is characterized by a certain excess of accompaniment, with Erkel it can be seen how much he refrains from this, what great care he takes that the soaring of the melody should not be too strongly bound by the accompanying apparatus". This could be observed only by one who himself heeded to it.

He for whom folk melody is as important as that – I have written above. And really, to no one has it been as important as to Kodály, no one has devoted as much composition work to the folk-song as he, not even Bartók himself. And yet if one surveys his composition work chronologically, one will see a surprising thing: folk-song as a theme and independent work came to the centre of Kodály's work relatively late. Chronology indicates three clearly divided periods in his career. The first closes in 1923 with the *Psalmus*, and it includes virtually no folk-song arrangements; the second embraces the period from the *Psalmus* to the *Spinning Room* in 1932, which presents exclusively folk-song arrangements and works with folk-song themes, and the third lasted from 1932 to the end of his life, when these types of work featured side by side.

Kodály himself counted his composing career from 1905, when he got acquainted with folk-song: this shaped his individual tone, vocal style and instrumental idiom. Yet during the first seventeen

years he wrote altogether one single work that might be termed a folk-song arrangement, the choral *Two Folk-Songs from the Zobor Region*, and composed two piano pieces out of folk-song themes: the *Székely Song* and the *Székely Woe-song*. There is a single historical song with piano accompaniment dating from that period, *Kádár István*. In addition he opened his first string quartet with a folk-song inserted like a motto – and with that we have exhausted the folk-song themes of this period. At the same time, he composed his chamber works, both his string quartets, his trio serenade, his violin-cello duets, his cello-piano sonata, a solo cello sonata, and a set of piano pieces and songs. But even the latter are all original melodies written to poems of contemporary and early poets, or to folk texts. And all that was crowned by the *Psalmus* which includes no direct folk-song recollection or theme whatever. And even when writing choral works – which in that period he did rather rarely – he composed original music to the words of poets and unknown authors (*Wine Song, Drinking Song*), and at the end of the period a women's choral piece without words, *Mountain Nights*.

After the *Psalmus* there came a turn in his work. It began with the appearance of his children's choruses with more than a dozen following one another until 1932. Then came *Háry János* (1926) the *Dances of Marosszék* (1927), *Máttra Pictures* (1931) and the ten volumes of *Hungarian Folk Music* (between 1924 and 1932). All that was crowned in 1932 by the *Spinning Room*. From 1932 on he again came forward with original works as well, but folk-song arrangements were never absent among his works. The *Dances of Galánta* and the *Peacock Variations* appear side by side with *Te Deum* and the *Concerto*, and in his choral works the original pieces such as *Old Folks, Jesus and the Traders, Who are Always Late, Huszt, To the Hungarians* and *Norwegian Girls* appear side by side with typical folk-song arrangements such as *Songs of Karád, Székely Woe-song* and *Anna Molnár*.

Bartók pointed out on several occasions that there are three grades in the use of the folk-song: 1. to provide folk-songs with accompaniment, this being the actual folk-song arrangement; 2. to use a folk-song theme in music works; 3. the final and most profound grade: by acquiring the idiom of the folk-song as a mother tongue, to compose original works in the spirit of the folk-song. Kodály availed himself of these three possibilities in a reverse order: after getting acquainted with the folk-song he immediately formed his musical mother tongue out of it, an individual-national musical idiom using the construction of fourths in place of thirds, and made up-to-date by pentatonic turns, the seventh as the consonant interval, the tritone and the many tonal possibilities found in folk-song; an exquisite vocal style of Hungarian prosody out of the rich rhythmic and melodic realm of the folk-song. His encounter with folk-song gave rise to his new national creative art.

This in itself would have sufficed since this already is everything. According to Bartók and according to logic, this is the perfect final goal.

What might have happened in the composer's mind that he still turned back on the road, with such a fundamental change taking place in his life? A conscious creator like Kodály could certainly put this change into words. And really, the explanation can be found among his statements dating from that time. In 1932, speaking about his earlier works, he said the following: "What I am going to speak about is a stage of my activity which can by now be considered closed; after all at fifty, one is supposed to hang the lyre on the peg..." To hang the lyre on the peg, is to abandon lyricism, to turn into an epic artist: to live and work not from within outward, but to abandon himself to the great experiences of the community so that they should be voiced through his artistic ability. The creation of the community – folk-song, its beauty and great national-human significance – became realized in him to such an extent that for him the task of placing this great value in its worthy place, to raise it to the level of world art, became more important than anything else.

To understand the real essence of this work we have to heed to another quotation. Soon after his words about the lyre hung on the peg, he said: "We have found in the village not only scores of songs... material that can be taken away and put to use, but also something else without which these songs could not have come into being: culture. However strange it might sound: a unified, homogeneous culture, of which the song forms an inseparable part, being its peak as it were, but in any case its organic blossoming." His endeavour to conjure up this human world through the folk-

song is evident in all of his folk-song arrangements. The piano accompaniments in the series *Hungarian Folk Music* further enhance the mood of the melodies; in the full-blown choral cycles such as the *Máttra Pictures* and the *Songs of Karád* the pieces strung into an array already recall moods supplementing each other: some greater unity of the life of the people of each region; *Háry János* already portrays behind the songs that human world from which they were born, even if this world appears filtered through the folk tale. The perfect solution is brought in the *Spinning Room*: there the action already serves only as a pretext to have the stylized picture of the village life outlined as a background to the melodies, so that the grief, farewell, love, jesting, the dread of death and its opposite, the frenzy of the wedding feast expressed in the songs should appear in the life-frame from which they were born, so that the human world and its essence condensed into the songs should enhance each other's effect. The *Spinning Room* is a stylized picture, raised to the height of art, of folk culture, that "homogeneous culture" which grew to giant proportions in the mind of Kodály the explorer of the village.

This is how this seemingly reversed development assumes meaning. And this is what lends meaning to his works conjuring up the past: the *Dances of Galánta*, the verbunkos music of the intermezzo in *Háry János*, *Belated Melodies, Psalmus Hungaricus, Song to King St. Stephen* – works that profess history and tradition their timeless Hungarian and human substance. The epic artist presents his art, like a wonderful instrument, to the community, to have in it and through it voiced all that which might have been heard once in olden times, all that eternal beauty that has been accumulated in tradition. When in a radio interview he was asked by his German interviewer whom he considered his spiritual forebears among the great masters of music, his answer clearly bore out this fundamental epic position: "...I recognize those unknown composers who lived centuries, perhaps thousands of years ago, from whom the still living Hungarian folk-song was handed down to us... For me the main thing has always been to make the voice of my people heard. This is why I always had to strive to seek out old songs... and to try to work in their spirit, in other words, to carry on old tradition. And I would already be satisfied by being kept in evidence as a not unworthy descendant of those old time composers who lived centuries and millenia ago."

The question arises whether this is in keeping with the tasks of the modern composer who has to provide an answer to the questions raised by life today. Is this not an escape from the present, from today's responsibility falling on the creator?

When at the beginning of his career Kodály reflected on how to create something new and wholesome out of the music of his age which was undergoing a crisis, and of Hungarian music which was in a special crisis, it was clear that what he sensed was the *human* crisis and he sought a human solution for it. In folk-song he found a human world, an unused, sound human emotional realm and its musical expression not being tied to time. He was fascinated by this human world and created a similar one out of it for himself, and then wanted to present the world with the most perfect possible totality of it. This human world which is made even more wholesome, comprehensive and timeless by its ancient elements – this was his response to the inhuman world of his age and its music which was becoming increasingly empty, to its alienation, if you like. This was his response to the alienated music of an alienated society. He did not want to express social disintegration itself, with increasingly disintegrating musical forms, but wanted to serve with an example for integration, for a healthy human reaction. Bartók expanded his personality into world dimensions through the human health of folk music, Kodály devoted his personality to have this healthy human world appear before the world in its individuality of world dimensions. The outcome in the two life's works is different and still identical in its roots: art revived through the human world of folk music, with the aim of giving new humanity in music to a world yearning for humanity.