

## CONTEMPORARY VOICES FROM EGER. A CROSS-SECTION FROM THE PIANO WORKS OF LÁSZLÓ KÁTAI<sup>1</sup>

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**SUMMARY.** The main purpose of the article is introducing the Hungarian contemporary composer, László Káta. He is a retired associate professor who worked for almost 30 years at the Music Department of Eszterházy Károly College (Eger, Hungary). His compositions are strongly connected to Hungarian folk music and his musical language is based on Béla Bartók's style amongst some other influences. The analysis of four piano compositions is the essence of the study.

**Keywords:** László Káta, Bartók's style, piano pieces, musical analysis, Hungarian folk music

### László Káta: A Short Biography

László Káta was born on 5 May 1940, in Karcag. His father was Mihály Káta, Sr. (1906–1983), a painter and interior designer.<sup>4</sup> His mother was Sarolta Tóth (1911–1996). He had two brothers, Mihály Káta, Jr. (1935–),

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<sup>4</sup> He completed his studies in the Institute of Arts and Crafts and the Hungarian College of Fine Arts in Budapest. He went on a study tour in Italy, which had an immense influence on his art. He addressed historical themes, created portraits and altarpieces, among others. In 1974 and 1981 the Heves County Council awarded him with its Prize for Arts.

a painter and enamelist<sup>5</sup>, and Gábor Kátai (1943–1984), a journalist. The family moved to Eger, a historical town in Northern Hungary, in 1941.<sup>6</sup>

The children were brought up in a harmonious, happy family atmosphere. Having an artistic sensitivity, they found a genuine source of inspiration in their parents' appreciation for literature and music. Besides, the family would go on many an excursion to the exquisite countryside and tiny villages of the nearby Bükk Mountains. The painter father took his artistic toolkit along on these occasions and depicted the scenery. The children helped him mix the paints and followed the creative process with attention. Coming of age, the eldest of the siblings chose art as his profession, but the would-be composer also kept on painting for years.

He completed his secondary education in Bartók Béla Conservatory, Miskolc; his teacher of composition and music theory was Oszkár Frank<sup>7</sup>.

In 1960 he earned admission to the Academy of Music as a composition major. His professor of composition was Ferenc Szabó in the first year and Ferenc Farkas<sup>8</sup> from the second year on. He could learn from the cream of Hungarian musical educators of the time: he studied solfeggio under Miklós Forrai, while score reading first with Rezső Kókai, later with Olivér Nagy. The Budapest Academy of Music was the scene of most distinguished musical life, allowing Kátai to see and hear soloists and conductors of such international acclaim as Ernest Ansermet, Sir John Barbirolli, Igor Stravinsky, Lorin Maazel and Pablo Casals.

During his years at the Academy, dodecaphony had a deep impact on Kátai's early compositions. As per his account, each young composition pupil wanted to make a career as a "dodecaphonic composer" at the time: "Everybody wanted to be modern suddenly, they dived head-first into Schoenberg's style in a wink."<sup>9</sup>

Upon completing his studies in 1967, he became a teacher of solfeggio, music theory and composition at the Music High School of Szeged. He directed the school orchestra there and taught folk music at the Szeged Institute of Liszt Ferenc College of Music.

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<sup>5</sup> Majoring in decorative painting, he graduated from the Hungarian College of Arts and Crafts. He is a most influential figure in contemporary enamel art in Hungary. Folk art is the predominant inspiration of his works.

<sup>6</sup> The biographical data listed here are based on an interview with the composer and Sándor Adrián Fehér's *Kátai László élete és munkássága* (László Kátai: Life and Works), Eszterházy Károly College, Faculty of Humanities, 2010, undergraduate thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Oszkár Frank (1922–2019), Hungarian composer, music theory teacher. He published numerous monographs, studies and coursebooks on music theory.

<sup>8</sup> Ferenc Farkas (1905–2000), Hungarian composer, awardee of the Erkel Prize, Liszt Prize and Kossuth Prize (twice), Artist of Merit and Outstanding Artist of the Hungarian People's Republic. He studied composition with Ottorino Respighi at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with László Kátai in Sándor Adrián Fehér, *op. cit.* 15.

Kátai's own compositional voice matured during his years in Szeged. He himself dates the emergence of his own style to 1971, the birth of his piece entitled *Árvíz a Tiszán* [Flood on River Tisza], a work which was later to win second prize at a competition organized by New Ariel Recordings in the United States. He has been strongly influenced by Liszt's later compositions just as well as by Mozart, Prokofiev, Berg, Webern, Schoenberg, and Britten; nevertheless, Bach's and Bartók's music remained Kátai's main source of inspiration. Not only did his years in Szeged prove productive in terms of composition, but they also saw the birth of Kátai's first paintings.

In 1972 he left Szeged behind to teach piano in diverse music schools of the country. These few years were much more significant in the career of Kátai the painter than the composer: this is when he joined the artists in Lajos Vajda Studio<sup>10</sup> – a deed of great honor.

In 1976 he began teaching music theory and score reading, later also orchestration, at the Music Department of Ho Shi Minh Teacher Training College (now Eszterházy Károly University). He continued to do so as a full-time staff member until his retirement in 2002, and even for years afterwards as a visiting professor. Not only did his unquestionable professional prowess make his students admire him all along, but also his cosmopolitan mindset, distinctive sense of humor and empathic attitude as an educator.

Beside teaching, Kátai has played an indispensable part in Eger music life. He was a member of various choirs, which debuted several of his compositions in Hungary and abroad. He has been writing incidental music for theatres to this day. From 1977 he has had numerous composer's evenings in Eger. His works have been performed both in Hungary and in concert halls around the world (e.g., in Finland, Spain, Italy, Belgium, the United States).

He was awarded the Heves County Prize for Arts in 1987 and the Pro Agraria Award in 1998. He became a member of the Hungarian Composers' Union in 2000.

His compositional idiom is strongly connected to Hungarian folk music, just as well as his vocal works are to the Hungarian language and to Bartók's compositional legacy. Hungarian folk music is present in almost all of his works. The composer explains its importance thus: "In the collection of the Hungarian Institute for Musicology there are more than 200,000 registered Hungarian folksongs, out of which approximately 100,000 have been classified and published. It is an ancient national treasure that we are obliged to preserve and maintain, a wealth that composers may and must capitalise on, too."

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<sup>10</sup> The Studio was founded in 1972 by young artists, among others László Lugossy, István Zámbo and János Aknay. Its main goal is to display the works of contemporary artists.

Kátaí is fond of employing the piano as a percussion instrument. His works are distinguished by an individual use of distance scales and scale fragments, the whole tone scale, chromaticism, and chromatic planning. He extensively uses the  $\alpha$  chord and its segments, the  $\beta$  chord.<sup>11</sup> Other typical features of his works include the use of asymmetric and changing meter, a vigorous rhythm, and a rubato rendition in lyrical sections.

Kátaí willingly and meticulously collaborates with the performers of his works in the rehearsal process; besides, he is one of those composers who allow performers considerable freedom in interpreting one section of his work or another, in establishing its mood, or even in the choice of tempo.

***Chopiniada. To my colleague and former pupil, Erzsébet Marík, with love (In memory of your parents and Marcsi)***

The piece was written in memory of Erzsébet Marík's parents and her elder sister, who died at a tragically early age. Kátaí knew closely the whole family of his then pupil and would-be colleague and had a deep affection for them. The piece was inspired by his recollection of the times when Erzsébet gave a concert and her entire happy family listened with pride – they particularly liked her playing romantic pieces. His other source of inspiration was the family's true and profound belief in God, which fact manifests itself in the Biblical quote chosen as the motto for the work. The piano piece is a message of Faith, Love and Consolation, within a romantic facture reminiscent of Chopin.

This work of touching beauty takes its motto from the version of the Capernaum centurion's plea in Mt. 8.8 which is a part of the liturgy: "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my soul shall be healed." (Mt. 8.8)<sup>12</sup>

The first ten bars (repeated twice) consist of the declamation of the text in Hungarian, with the chordal arrangement amplifying the creed uttered in words.

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<sup>11</sup> Ernő Lendvai (1923–1993) was one of the first musicologists who investigated the presence, the musical implications and importance of the golden section and the Fibonacci series in Bartók's music. He was the first to describe the axis system and  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ ,  $\delta$ ,  $\epsilon$  chords based on the study of Bartók's works.

<sup>12</sup> Originally in the Holy Scripture: „my servant shall be healed.”

**E. g. 1**

Handwritten musical score for voice and piano. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features a vocal line with lyrics in Hungarian and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "mf Uram nem vagyok méltó hogy hajlékomba jöjj hanem csak egy fehérvil munda és meggyöggöl az én lelkem." The piano part includes triplets and a bridge section marked with a "2" and a "4" time signature change.

**Motto: "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof..."  
(Mt. 8.8)**

The short bridge section that follows is built on a whole tone scale ascending in parallel thirds, soaring to spiritual spheres. Albeit very indirectly, the melody already foreshadows the Chopin quotation later in the piece, which is the opening motif from *Ballade No. 3 in A-flat major*, Op. 47.

**E. g. 2**

Handwritten musical score showing an ascending whole tone scale in parallel thirds. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. The piano part features a melody of parallel thirds ascending through the whole tone scale, with a bridge section marked with a "2" and a "4" time signature change.

**Ascending whole tone scale**

The lyrically voiced 32 bars to follow (18–49) are built from sequences of distance scale fragments in a "Chopinesque" tone.

**E. g. 3**



**Distance scale fragments**

The turbulent  $\gamma$  and  $\delta$  chord figurations and distance scale fragments moving first in parallel minor thirds, then in mirror inversion in bars 50 to 65, allude to Bartók in their sound, but clearly to the facture of Chopin's piano works in their construction (e.g., *Etude in C minor*, Op. 25 No. 12).

**E. g. 4**



**Facture reminiscent of Chopin**

The following segment (bars 66–74) has a more robust material, which displays a distant melodic kinship with that of bars 18 to 49. The end of the segment is marked by a descending 1:2 distance scale, running from the two-line to the small register.

E. g. 5

The musical score for E. g. 5 consists of three systems of piano and vocal staves. The first system starts at measure 66 with the tempo marking 'a tempo più mosso' and a quarter note equal to 84. The piano part features dynamic markings of *f*, *mf*, and *f*. The second system starts at measure 69 with a *mf* marking. The third system starts at measure 72 with a *rit.* marking, followed by a *a tempo* marking. The piano part in the third system includes dynamic markings of *ff*, *fff*, and *f*. The vocal line is present in all systems, with various notes and rests.

New musical material

The actual musical quotation that has been alluded to at the beginning of the work comes after a short bridge: the beginning motif of Chopin's *Ballade in A-flat major* is played, naturally in Kátai's own voicing.

E. g. 6

The musical score for E. g. 6 is a piano score for the beginning of Chopin's *Ballade in A-flat major*. It is labeled 'FR. CHOPIN Op. 47'. The score shows the first few measures of the piece, with the piano part in the lower register and the vocal part in the upper register. The piano part includes fingerings and articulation marks. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto'.

The beginning of Chopin's *Ballade in A-flat major*

The image displays three systems of handwritten musical notation for piano. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system begins at bar 80, featuring a melody in the right hand with dynamics ranging from *p* to *ppp* and a bass line with a dynamic of *p*. The second system starts at bar 85, with the right hand melody continuing and dynamics including *pp*. The third system begins at bar 94, showing a more complex bass line with dynamics like *mp* and *pp*. The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

**The transformation of *Ballade in A-flat major* in Kátai's piece  
(from bar 4 in the left hand)**

Then comes a two-bar-long original musical material over a harmonic figuration so typical of Chopin. The whole tone scale played at the end of the section leads directly towards death-transubstantiation, which tails into the opening appeal – a heartening consolation at the same time: “Lord, I am not worthy...”. At the reprise, a chordal figuration complements the melody as an ornament.



The image shows three systems of handwritten musical notation for piano. The first system has a treble clef and includes markings such as 'poco rit', 'p', and a measure number '12'. The second system has a bass clef and includes 'p' and a measure number '3'. The third system has a treble clef and includes 'molto parlando - Tempo I', 'p' and 'mf', and a measure number '3'. The notation is dense with notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

**Harmonic figuration characteristic of Chopin in the left hand (bar 3), whole tone scale (bars 5–6) and the beginning of the reprise (bar 7)**

The piece concludes in the whole tone scale ascending in parallel thirds which has already been played in the introduction and is a symbol of arrival.

### ***Nine Piano Pieces***

The composer dedicated *Nine Piano Pieces* (2007) to Dr Krisztina Várady. Originally, she requested pieces from Kátai for her doctoral dissertation. The goal of the empirical study she had envisaged was to investigate whether the children of our age recognize folk music features in the piano pieces written by Kátai. Finally, due to its sheer volume, the research was not included in the dissertation. However, the pieces were composed and debuted in 2015 at a concert organized to celebrate László Kátai's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The pieces in the series are:

1. *Dobbantós Tánc II (Bartók Béla után szabadon...)* [Stamping Dance II – Inspired by Béla Bartók...]
2. *Elbeszélés* [Storytelling]
3. *Közjáték I* [Interlude I]
4. *Ének és tánc* [Song and Dance]
5. *Tétova keringő* [Hesitation Waltz]
6. *Közjáték II* [Interlude II]
7. *A szél éneke...* [Song of the Breeze...]
8. *Induló* [March]
9. *Csárdás-féle* [Czardas of Sorts]

Almost all the pieces deliberately evoke Bartók's style: the appearance of distance scales or fragments and  $\alpha$  chords points towards a thoroughly modernistic tone, while also preserving a strong folk music vein. A piece inspired by impressionism is also to be found in the series (*Song of the Breeze...*). The pieces are two to three pages long and the composer meant them to be possibly performed by younger players, too. Kátai does not use key signatures in any of them, the sense of tonality is created by accidentals. The pieces present a highly diverse rhythmic palette: changes in meter can be found in each, except for *Hesitation Waltz* and *March*, and the different time signatures follow in quite a quick succession at certain places. As for the titles, four mention dances expressly (*Stamping Dance*, *Song and Dance*, *Hesitation Waltz*, *Czardas of Sorts*), and three others are also fairly telling: *Storytelling*, *March*, and *Song of the Breeze*. Two pieces in the series are entitled *Interlude I & II*. It can be safely concluded that Kátai envisaged the series as a closed cycle, each piece of which can also be performed on its own.

The first one, *Stamping Dance II* is in its very title an allusion to a piece in Volume 5 of Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*. (This work was composed earlier than the rest of the series, in 1998. In fact, the composer added the further eight piano pieces to this one.) Kátai makes the implied relation of the two compositions explicit in the subtitle: "Inspired by B. Bartók /My Master, had you botched this piece, it might sound like this...". This gesture is typical of the composer's sense of humor and his often-excessive modesty about his own works.

The theme of Bartók's piece – just like that of Kátai's – consists of four lines and quotes a folksong. Kátai's composition does so, however, in changing meter. Both are variation pieces in nature, but in Kátai's the variations cannot be exactly isolated. In the rest of the piece, the theme is presented in different variations and transformations. The composer often employs mirror inversions when presenting the main motif, and several sections of imitation can be discovered. The fourth line of the theme tails into such a section of imitation based on a 1:2 distance scale, then a short bridge leads to the second major passage. Fragments of motifs and rhythmic segments characteristic of Bartók's

original work transpire through the musical fabric all along the piece, but an actual melodic quotation can only be found once, at the end of this section, from bar 52, in augmented rhythm in the right hand. Both pieces include first the Locrian pentachord, then the diatonic scale<sup>13</sup> in the right hand, but in Kátai's work the voice in the left hand produces a sonority completely different from Bartók's.

E. g. 9

Locrian motif borrowed from Bartók in Kátai's piece (from bar 3)

E. g. 10

Locrian motif in Bartók's original (from bar 2)

<sup>13</sup> Oszkár Frank, *Bevezető Bartók Mikrokozmoszának világába* [Introduction to the World of Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*], (Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 1994), 180.

The final segment, dissected by pauses, is defined by the theme's mirror inversion and its fragments. It ends in D major tonality.

*Storytelling*, in accordance with its title, conjures up a tale before its audience. With the sole exception of two bars in 4/4 at its very end, throughout the entire piece bars of 5/4 and 6/4 beat alternate. The explicit tempo indication *parlando, rubato* is indeed clearly implied by the musical material itself: a pensive, calm storytelling takes place in two-, four- and five-bar sentences, culminating in a lengthier, billowing phrase in the left hand. Besides distance scales and fragments, the chromatic "faltering" of the opening motif (G-F#-G-F) is a constant of the piece.

E. g. 11



Chromatic "faltering" (bar 1)

The third piece is *Interlude I*, which is an arrangement of the folksong beginning with "Hess páva..." [Shoo, peacock].<sup>14</sup> The folksong appears after a four-bar introduction, starting from G, with melodic variations and rhythmic twists here and there. Contrary to the original folksong, the three-beat stress pattern persists with no shortening of the cadences to two quavers.

E. g. 12

Tempo giusto. Muz. Fo. 502a). lej. B. Szováta, (Maros-Torda vm.) 1904. V.

Hess pá- va, hess pá- va, Csá- szár- né pá- vá- ja!  
Ha én pá- va vol- nélk, Jobb ré- g- gel fel- kel- nélk.

The original folksong

<sup>14</sup> Zoltán Kodály. *A Magyar Népzene* (Hungarian Folk Music). Editio Musica, Budapest, 1991, 221.

E. g. 13

**Kátai's arrangement (the melody is in the upper voice)**

The folksong's last line does not close in a cadence, it rather moves on to a bar of intensification in 3/4. Before the second stanza, three chords are played in a 4/4 *meno* section, then the folksong returns, this time starting a major third higher, on B. Similarly, to the first stanza, the fourth line does not close, but veers into a lengthier section leading to the end of the piece.

The fourth morceau, as its title suggests (*Song and Dance*), is of a dual construction. *Andante, rubato* "song" and *Allegretto* "dance" sections alternate in it, altogether twice. Both parts are folk music inspired: a slower and freer narrative song, reminiscent of a folksong of the ancient stratum of the Hungarian heritage, is followed by a *giusto* dance of perfect fifth transposing form, which evokes instrumental folk music. The second appearance of the *Rubato* section is much more plaintive due to its *forte* dynamics and the melody doubled in the upper octave, as if the composer declaimed the melody as an outcry.

E. g. 14

Musical score for E. g. 14. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves. The time signature is 3/4. The tempo and mood are marked 'Rubato, Andante'. The first measure is marked with a '3' above it, indicating a triplet. The second measure is marked with a '4', and the third measure with a '5', indicating a quintuplet. The dynamic marking 'mf' (mezzo-forte) is present in the first measure. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some slurs and ties.

The first appearance of the “song”

E. g. 15

Musical score for E. g. 15. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves. The tempo and mood are marked 'Andante, rubato'. The time signature is 3/4. The first measure is marked with a '3' above it, indicating a triplet. The second measure is marked with a '4' and a '20' below it, indicating a 4/20 time signature. The dynamic marking 'f' (forte) is present in the second measure. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some slurs and ties.

The second appearance of the “song” (from bar 3)

After that, the musical material tails into the dance anew, which closes this time in B tonality with a *meno mosso* section.

Despite its irresolute title, *Hesitation Waltz*, the axis of the cycle, is one of its most virtuoso pieces. The title refers to the composer interrupting the progress of the dance time and again with a few slow musical sections, as he puts it, “as if something distracted the dancers all the time.” The example below shows how the composer interrupts the waltz first with an *Andante*, then with a *Grave* section.

E. g. 16

The image shows a musical score for 'Interrupted waltz'. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system features a piano accompaniment in the lower staff and a vocal line in the upper staff. The piano part includes a complex rhythmic pattern of sixteenth notes in the right hand and chords in the left hand. The tempo is marked '(Andante)'. The second system continues the piano accompaniment and includes a section marked '(Din. mosso)' and '(Grave)'. The piano part in this section features a fast chord progression with abrupt octave changes in the right hand.

**Interrupted waltz**

The triple meter is realized in 12/8 time, mainly the right hand is filled with passages of sixteenth notes and distance scales. At the end of the piece a fast chord progression colored with abrupt octave changes closes the waltz.

*Interlude II* can be divided into three smaller sections. The first of these in 8/8 meter is an alternation of 3+3+2 and 3+2+3 groups of quavers, which creates a special, gently rocking sensation. Then from bar 14 the musical material becomes denser; the time signature changes to 12/8 and the composer achieves an emotional climax through a virtuoso section built from fragments of the  $\alpha$  chord and a set of notes from the 1:2 distance scale. This leads to the reprise, enframe the piece and closing it in a calm, swaying mood.

*Song of the Breeze over the Ruins of the Desolate Temple* is a special piece in the cycle in which a very marked influence of impressionism can be discovered, mainly evoking the mood of Debussy's *La Cathédrale Engloutie*. As per the composer's account, the mood of the piece was inspired by the rustling of the wind which he heard while walking among desolate church ruins. The calm chords and the onomatopoeic quaver movements produce a special impressionistic sensation. While Kátai rarely uses pedal markings in the entire cycle, only in the most essential places, here in the seventh piece he indicates the desired timbre all along by marking the pedal usage.



E. g. 17

The image shows two systems of handwritten musical notation for piano. The first system starts with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano). The notation includes various notes, rests, and slurs. The second system starts with a bass clef and a measure number of 10. It features a *rit.* (ritardando) marking, a *mezzo* dynamic marking, and a *Grave* tempo marking. The notation includes chords, slurs, and a fermata.

Pedal markings

The eighth piece, *March*, has a subtitle: “which is only useful until they start marching to it...”. In the composer’s own account, it refers to his own pacifism. The entire piece has an *alla marcia* character, since “marching” starts after the first two introductory, fanfare-like bars.

E. g. 18

The image shows two systems of handwritten musical notation for piano. The first system starts with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte). The notation includes various notes, rests, and slurs. The second system starts with a bass clef and a measure number of 10. It features a *mezzo* dynamic marking and a *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamic marking. The notation includes chords, slurs, and a fermata.





**The two introductory bars and the march that follows**

The whole process is driven by triplets of dotted rhythmic feel alternating between the right and left hand, keeping a constant *giusto* beat. The composer colors the A minor tonality with frequently alternating chromatic mediant chord changes.

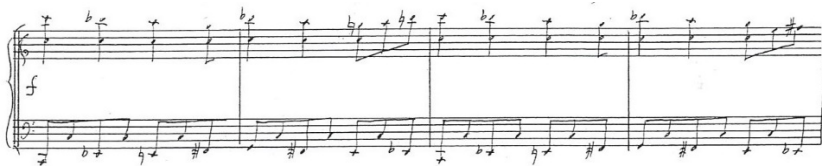
The last piece is a dance again, *Czardas of Sorts*. The title denotes that the czardas in question is not a regular one: the traditional Hungarian dance is played with a walking bass accompaniment borrowed from jazz and compacted to eighth-note movements. It is not the only “peculiarity” in this czardas, for the even 4/4 beat is succeeded by 7/8 bars in the second section. This gives it an incredibly special feel, as the original 4/4 “czardas” is here transformed into an asymmetric Bulgarian rhythm.

**E. g. 19**



**Czardas motif in 4/4**

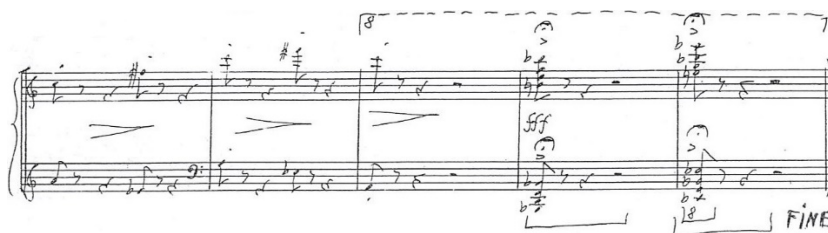
**E. g. 20**



**Czardas motif in 7/8**

A four-bar introduction helps getting attuned to the current meter signature both at the beginning of the piece (important when repeating) and before the section in 7/8 time. After the repeat the second section culminates in a monumental climax, followed by a 4/8 bar of general pause. A 1:2 distance scale run leads up from the contra to the two-line register, then follow quavers played with alternating hands in accelerating tempo until the very end of the piece. The ending is a dominant-tonic cadence according to E-flat tonality, closing in the right hand with incomplete  $\beta$  chords (frequently featuring in Káta's works) and with the classical dominant-tonic form in the left hand.

**E. g. 21**



**Closing progression**

### **Rondo**

**(In memory of my maternal grandfather and his parents)**

This piano piece dates from 31 January 1999 and was written as an homage to the composer's maternal grandfather and his parents.

Its lyrical rondo theme (8+7-bar period form) is a musical depiction of their idyllic family life, an image of a happy childhood created by loving parents.

The entire piece is built from instances of the rondo theme and transformations of the first interlude's musical material. The rondo theme symbolizes the family, whereas the material of the interludes depicts the grandfather's individual life story.

E. g. 22

The image shows a handwritten musical score for piano, consisting of three systems of staves. The music is in a key with two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a 6/8 time signature. The first system includes dynamic markings of *mp* and *p*, and features complex rhythmic patterns with eighth and sixteenth notes. The second system includes *mf* and *p* markings, with some notes marked *rit.* (ritardando). The third system starts with *a tempo* and *mp*, followed by *(mf)* and *mp*, and ends with a 3/4 time signature and a *rit.* marking. The score is densely written with many accidentals and slurs.

Rondo theme

The melody and rhythm of the first interlude clearly allude to the Hungarian folksong beginning with “Hopp, ide tisztán...”<sup>15</sup>

E. g. 23

Tempo giusto. ♩ = 63. Muz. Fo. 804b). Nagymegyer, (Komárom vm.)1910.B

Hopp i- de tisztán szép pa-lútt dész-kán, Nem lē-szek töb-bé nyo-szo-ló- lē-ány;  
Ha lē-szek, lē-szek, menyasz-szony lē-szek, An-nak is pe-dig leg-szebb-je lē-szek.

The image shows a musical score for a Hungarian folksong. It consists of two staves of music in a key with two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a 2/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'Tempo giusto' with a quarter note equal to 63 beats per minute. The lyrics are in Hungarian. The melody is simple and consists of eighth and quarter notes.

The original folksong

<sup>15</sup> Zoltán Kodály, *op. cit.*, 306.

### Kátai's "folksong" – First interlude

The composer elaborates on this ten-bar musical material throughout the interlude. The changes in meter, rhythmic trifles, sequences built from theme fragments and arpeggios all imply playfulness, a reference to childhood, as it were. The last scale run leading back to the rondo theme finishes on a B-flat note, over the dominant seventh chord of the E-flat tonality.

The second instance of the rondo theme (E major) is no longer lyrical in tone, the melody loses its mellowness. It suggests a young adult, still in their family circle, but the firm sounding section with *giusto* rendition is rather a depiction of parents anxious for their child. The last two bars of the E minor theme are repeated a minor second lower, in E-flat minor.

This key relationship at seven accidentals in the direction of flats already foreshadows the somber mood of the second interlude.

The second interlude is the longest section in the work, which depicts the turmoil of a grown man's life. Kátai's grandfather was born in 1871, he lived to see as an adult World War I, the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and the better part of World War II. Albeit strongly transformed, the second interlude continues the first one's thematic development, bringing back three motifs from its musical material. In the first motif the accompaniment moves together with the melody in the first eight bars, supporting it with 1:5 distance scale figurations.

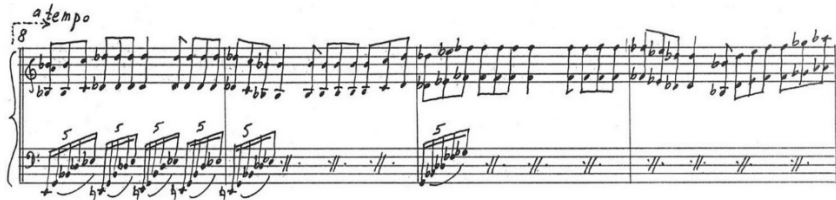
**E. g. 25**



**Second interlude - the first motif with eighth note accompaniment**

The accompaniment later densifies into  $\beta$  chords played in quintuplets. (The  $\beta$  chords are built by adding a major second on top of a diminished seventh chord.)

**E. g. 26**



**Second interlude - the first motif with quintuplet accompaniment**

The second motif is like the first one rhythmically and its accompaniment is similarly built from  $\beta$  chords played in quintuplets, starting from B-flat and G-sharp. In the upper voice a one-bar motif is repeated. The musical material becomes increasingly turbulent, the melody is underlined by quintuplets running up through several octaves.

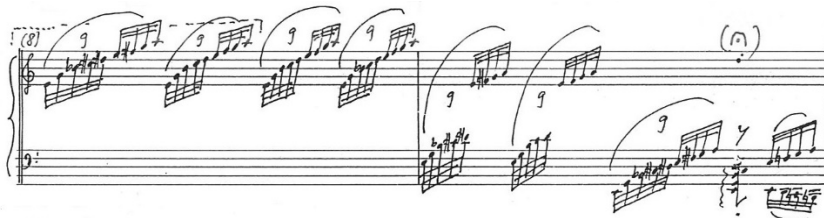
**E. g. 27**



**Second interlude - second motif**

The first part of the interlude ends with a virtuoso harmonic figuration arching from the two-line to the great register.

**E. g. 28**



**Harmonic figuration arching over three octaves**

The third motif of the second interlude is also built from the first interlude's material, but whereas the orchestration, harmonization, and musical formulation symbolized playfulness in the first case, here it depicts the brutality of war. This is the "leanest" and coarsest material of the entire piece with a chordal accompaniment, which is only occasionally softened by the insertion of a different melody. That, in turn, is supported by a 1:5 distance scale fragment.

**E. g. 29**



**Second interlude - third motif**

Both previous motifs of the second interlude repeat once more, with a further densification of the timbre.

**E. g. 30**



**Second interlude - second motif in a denser construction**

E. g. 31



Second interlude - third motif in a denser construction

The end of the segment is marked by a powerful major chord planning, which comes to a halt on a B major chord colored with a C note.

E. g. 32



Major chord planning and halt (bars 3–4)

The *Lento – rubato* section leading to the final appearance of the rondo theme is a harmonic figuration running up the whole range of the piano's keyboard (contra C to four-line B-flat). It symbolizes parting from earthly life and the "arrival" also present in *Chopiniada*. At the end of the work the rondo theme representing the family is played in the upper register, translucently, softened by arpeggios, as a reminiscence. It pauses occasionally to finally close the piece in a settled mood.



**E. g. 33**



**Rondo theme as a reminiscence**

***Gloria Tibi Domine* (In Memoriam Béla Bartók)  
(Four hands version)**

The work was originally composed for two pianos and percussion, the four hands transcription was written in 2003 to become one of Kátai's most frequently played pieces. The subtitle is a clear dedication, in the composer's words: "Glory to you my Lord for having brought Bartók among us on Earth." The Latin text in the title was chosen due to its exceptional rhythmic potentialities: what keeps recurring – also in the form of variations and diverse fragments – throughout the piece as the main theme is a melody composed on the textual rhythm of 'Gloria Tibi Domine.'

**E. g. 34**



**Main theme upon the text 'Gloria Tibi Domine' (bars 3 and 5)**

The piece starts with a slow introduction, the deep minor second droning of *secondo* evokes a mystic sensation in the listener. The simple, tonal harmonies in the upper voice are soon succeeded by chords reminiscent of tolling bells, featuring diminished eighths, and built from the notes of a 1:5 distance scale.



**E. g. 35**



**Tonal and distance scale-based harmonies in the primo voice**

The entire work is interwoven with the  $\alpha$  chord and its variations, which quite clearly shows Bartók's influence. Time and again, the 'Gloria Tibi Domine' theme interrupts the introductory section, but only to appear briefly and point forward to the next musical segment. Four bars in 5/8 meter attune listeners to the *Più mosso* section, then a 9/8 meter prevails in a special 2+2+2+3 division – exactly the way the main theme has been introduced at the beginning of the piece. The composer gradually constructs his material through ascending Locrian scale runs seasoned with chromaticism, while he joins *primo* to *secondo* to achieve a denser sound. Concurrently with *primo*'s entrée, *secondo* introduces the second theme, moving in the opposite direction from the Locrian motif.

**E. g. 36**



**Themes of opposite direction**

In bar 49 'Gloria Tibi Domine' is played in unison, sequentially, interspersed with bridging bars. This unison melody is succeeded by chords, but the motif only appears here once. After a caesura sign a Locrian run-on quaver starts low and works itself up in four bars into a chord progression, which in turn leads on to the Gloria theme, achieving fulfilment in the (G-flat/F) bitonality of the two voices.

**E. g. 37**

The image displays a musical score for a piano and voice. It consists of four systems of staves. The first two systems are piano parts, each with a treble and bass clef. The last two systems are voice parts, each with a single staff. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. A crescendo hairpin is present in the first two systems, leading to a forte (f) dynamic. The voice parts feature accents (>) and a 'g' marking above the notes. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

**Planning rendition of the theme**

This sixteen-bar-long segment is repeated with minor variations, while the musical material is densified with tremolos.

A section of the same length but of a calmer, ethereal, almost surreal sonority follows. Its chords, played in pianissimo and staying within the range of a diminished eighth almost all along, create a celesta-like tonal feel.

**E. g. 38**

Handwritten musical score for E. g. 38. The score is written on grand staves for piano and celesta. It includes measures 8, 100, 105, and 110. The piano part features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings such as *p* and *mf*. The celesta part is marked with *mf* and includes a crescendo hairpin. The score is enclosed in a dashed box.

**Celesta timbre**

After the decay of this section the 'Gloria Tibi Domine' theme returns for a third time. On this occasion, it is ornamented with trills, tremolos, and semi-quaver figurations.

**E. g. 39**

Handwritten musical score for E. g. 39. The score is written on grand staves for piano and celesta, with vocal lines below. It features dense textures with trills, tremolos, and semi-quaver figurations. The piano part includes dynamic markings like *mf* and *f*. The celesta part is marked with *mf*. The score is enclosed in a dashed box.

**Densification of the musical material**

A 5/4 bar of  $\beta$  chord figuration, arching over several octaves, leads to the monumental main theme. It appears here in augmented rhythm, to allow the introductory section of the entire piece to return and enframe the work, so to say. The closing to follow is yet again the Gloria theme, this time in a simple, secco rendition.

The four hands version underscores the importance of rhythm in this work: the composer uses the piano practically as a percussion instrument on numerous occasions, as a substitute for the percussive sound in the original version.

## Conclusion

Although the works presented above only embody a narrow segment of László Káta's oeuvre, they can be deemed typical of his entire creative activity and his compositional techniques.

As an organic continuation of Bartók and Kodály's legacy, the majority of Káta's works attest to a deep influence of folk music, which can be sensed even when the composer does not use a genuine quotation or folksong-like motif. Every time he talks about his works, Káta highlights the importance of the preservation and survival of the Hungarian folk music tradition.

Bartók had a great influence on Káta in other respects, too: the former's world of form and harmony (the use of distance scales, the  $\alpha$  chord and its segments, among others) pervades the latter's works.

Although Káta's compositional idiom principally rests upon classical foundations and does not part completely with tradition, he expands the classical framework just enough to present something perceptibly new through his modern and exciting rhythmic and metric playfulness, his unusual factures, daring harmonies and unexpected formal solutions.

As Káta's works are of genuine value and are easily received by audiences, they are worthy of inclusion both in concert hall and musical education programs.

## WORKS FOR PIANO

### Works for piano solo:

- *15 Little Piano Pieces*
- *18 Bagatelles*
- *Sonatina*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The sheet music of the first three pieces was destroyed in a flood.

- *Árvíz a Tiszán* [Flood on River Tisza] (1971)  
Premiere: Szeged, 1972. Performed by István Nagy
- *Szívek hangjai* [Sounds of Hearts] (1971)  
Premiere: HEMO, Eger, 1984. Performed by Erzsébet Marík
- *Variations on a Bartók Theme* – Dedicated to Erzsébet Marík (1984)  
Premiere: HEMO, Eger, 1984. Performed by Erzsébet Marík
- *Rondo – In Memory of my Maternal Grandfather and his Parents* (1999)  
Premiere: Arteveldehogeschole Gent, 2010. Performed by Krisztina Várady
- *Nine Piano Pieces* – Dedicated to Dr Krisztina Várady (2007)  
Premiere: Eszterházy Károly College, 2015. Performed by Judit Csüllög
- *In Memoriam Emil Pásztor* (2009)
- *In Memoriam Tibor Besze* (2010)
- *Chopiniada* – Dedicated to Erzsébet Marík (2011)  
Premiere: Eszterházy Károly College, 2015. Performed by Judit Gábos
- *Körtánc* [Roundelay] (2012)
- *To Dr Andor Nagy* (2013)  
Premiere: Eszterházy Károly College, 2015. Performed by Erzsébet Marík
- *In Memoriam Dr József Molnár* (2013)
- *In Memoriam Dr Miklós Thiel* (2013)
- *In Memoriam Dr József Nagy* (2013)  
Premiere: Eszterházy Károly College, 2015. Performed by Erzsébet Marík
- *Vén nagyvárosi sznob hölgy a Kongó folyónál* [Ancient Snobbish Metropolitan Lady by Congo River] (2015)
- *Csak ül és dúdolgat, de ő sem tudja, hogy mit?* [Just sitting there humming, not even knowing what?] (2015)
- *Levél TE-hozzád* [Letter to THEE] (2015)
- *A zongorista és a szemtelen madár* [The Pianist and the Cheeky Bird] (2016)
- *Ének és tánc a 9 zongoradarabból* [Song and Dance from Nine Piano Pieces] / simplified version dedicated to Tomi Tóth-Várady (2016)  
Premiere: Dunakeszi, 2016. Performed by Tamás Tóth-Várady

**Works for orchestra and piano:**

- *Piano Concerto No. 1* (2000)  
Premiere: Eger, 2000. Performed by the Symphonic Orchestra of Eger. Directed by Máté Szabó Sipos, soloist: Judit Gábos

### Works for four hands or two pianos:

- *Gloria Tibi Domine – In Memoriam Béla Bartók*, for two pianos and percussion, first movement (1978)  
Premiere: HEMO, Eger, 1984. Performed by Erzsébet Marik and Flórián Juhász (piano) with Ottó Ágoston (percussion)
- *Gloria Tibi Domine – In Memoriam Béla Bartók*, four hands version (2003)  
Premiere: Eszterházy Károly College, 2009. Performed by Erzsébet Marik and Krisztina Várady
- *Magyarok panasza és imája* [Plaint and Prayer of Hungarians]  
1. tétel: “Cím nélkül” 2. tétel: “Csillagok éneke” 3. tétel: “Mulatozás” [Movement 1;2;3: “Without title”; “The Song of Stars”; “Merrymaking”]  
(2015)
- “*Intermezzo*” from the *Opera Cavalleria rusticana* by *Pietro Mascagni* – transcription (2015)
- *Vigyázz, ha jön a ba-rock* [Heed when Ba-rock Comes] (2017)
- *Gloria Tibi Domine – In Memoriam Béla Bartók*, for two pianos and percussion, second and third movements (2017)

*English translation by Angelika Reichmann and Norbert Nagy*

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- “Id. Kátai Mihály” *Kieselbach Galéria és Aukciósház*, 14 Feb. 2019, [www.kieselbach.hu/muvesz/id\\_katai-mihaly\\_9770](http://www.kieselbach.hu/muvesz/id_katai-mihaly_9770).