

THE ROLE OF ZOLTÁN KODÁLY'S MALE CHORUSES IN THE GENRE'S HISTORY, POSSIBILITIES OF THEIR APPLICATION IN THE REPERTOIRE OF AMATEUR ENSEMBLES

MÓNIKA VÉGH¹

SUMMARY. Zoltán Kodály's publication titled *Férfikarok (Male Choruses)* is a truly diverse collection: in addition to the composer's works in the genre, one can find folk song arrangements, religious pieces, compositions inspired by historical events and even transcriptions, of various lengths and levels of difficulty. It is common knowledge that Kodály was not fond of exclusively male ensembles, being rather uninterested by male voice choirs and indeed his opinion was that these choral societies should be converted into mixed choirs. However, after travelling extensively in the country – thus gaining insight into the operation of these groups – he began to contribute to the genre's repertoire. The composer began to view the case differently, as he thought that amateur male choirs – of which there were still many in the 1930s – should rather sing compositions of a higher value, as opposed to pieces of the Liedertafel-style. At the same time, the *Férfikarok* collection contains many pieces that are not suitable for amateur ensembles due to their challenging nature in terms of intonation and tone production. In this paper – in addition to presenting the volume – I intend to introduce a certain way of categorization based on the compositions' level of difficulty, through an analytical approach, which may be of help to those who work with such ensembles that are rare, but worthy of appreciation.

Keywords: Zoltán Kodály, male voice choir, Liedertafel-movement, choral societies, Hungarian poetry of the 19th century.

The majority of Zoltán Kodály's male choruses may be found in the similarly titled publication, which is akin to the *Choral Works for Children's and Female Voices*, and the *Choral Works for Mixed Voices*.

¹ *University of Debrecen, Faculty of Music, PhD, assistant professor, head of the Solfeggio and Music Theory Department, veghmonika74@gmail.com*



It was first published in 1944, however, it contained significantly less works than the second edition published in 1972 by Editio Musica, during the Kodály-anniversary. All three of the composer's a cappella volumes had been reissued for the 90th anniversary of Kodály's birth with the assistance of Lajos Bárdos, the *Male Choruses* being extended by eleven additional compositions. The first issue contained thirteen works, while the second edition contained twenty-four as other pieces – mostly written after 1944 – were added.

We may get well acquainted with Zoltán Kodály's works for male voice choirs through these volumes.

Types and periods in Kodály's male choruses

Kodály's male choruses can be categorized as follows:

- choral arrangements of works by Hungarian poets (14 pieces)
- other literary texts set to music (4 pieces)
- folk song arrangements (6 pieces)

It is also important to mention the composer's transcriptions: not all the above works were originally written for male voice choirs, while there are male choruses that were later transcribed for other settings by Kodály.

- for children's and male choirs: *Jelenti magát Jézus, A csikó, Semmit ne bánkódjál*

- for male and mixed choirs: *Fölszállott a páva*²

- for mixed, children's and male choirs: *A magyarokhoz* (1936), *Ének Szent István királyhoz, Esti dal, A szabadság himnusza, Jelige*

Zoltán Kodály began composing male choruses in the 1910s, while his final piece in the genre was completed in 1963.

² The male choir arrangement completed in 1937 was later transcribed for mixed choir by Miklós Forrai in 1960: *Tíz újabb írás 1969-1974 (Ten newer writings 1969-1974)*. Ed. Zeneműkiadó, Budapest, 1974, pp. 219-220.

Table 1

Period of composition	Choral arrangements of works by Hungarian poets	Other literary texts set to music	Folk song arrangements	Transcriptions
1910-1920	Bordal (1913) - Ferenc Kölcsey	Mulató gajd (1917) - 17th century unknown author		
1921-1930			Jelenti magát Jézus (1927)	Jelenti magát Jézus (1927)
1931-1940	Huszt (1936) - Ferenc Kölcsey A magyarokhoz (1936) - Dániel Berzsenyi Fölszállott a páva (1937) - Endre Ady	Justum et Tenacem (1935) - Horatius Ének Szent István királyhoz (1938) - Bozóky Songbook Semmit ne bánkódjál (1939) - Song of András Szkhárosi Horvát	Kit kéne elvenni (1934) Karádi nóták (1934) Katonadal (1934) Fölszállott a páva (1937) - Endre Ady Esti dal (1938)	A magyarokhoz (1936) - Dániel Berzsenyi A csikó (1937) Esti dal (1938) Ének Szent István királyhoz (1938) - Bozóky songbook Semmit ne bánkódjál (1939) - Song of András Szkhárosi Horvát
1941-1950	Ferenc Rabhazának fia (1944) - Sándor Petőfi Isten csodája (1944) - Sándor Petőfi Élet vagy halál (1947) - Sándor Petőfi Hej Büngözsdi Bandi (1947) - Sándor Petőfi Jelige (1948) - Ferenc Jankovich	A szabadság himnusza (1948) - Rouget de L'Isle		Jelige (1948) - Ferenc Jankovich A szabadság himnusza (1948) - Rouget de L'Isle
1951-1960	Nemzeti dal (1955) - Sándor Petőfi A nándori toronyőr (1956) - Mihály Vörösmarty Emléksorok Fáy Andrásnak (1956) - Mihály Vörösmarty			Fölszállott a páva (1960) - Endre Ady
1960 után	A franciaországi változásokra (1963) - János Batsányi			

His first pieces written for this specific setting are titled *Bordal* and *Mulató gajd* which are often referred to as *Two male choruses*. During the following years Kodály did not take particular interest in the genre, having produced only one arrangement of *Jelenti magát Jézus*.

The composer's most fruitful era regarding male choruses began around 1934. Initially he mostly wrote choral pieces that were rooted in Hungarian folk songs, such as: *Katonadal*, *Kit kéne elvenni* and *Karádi nóták*. Later, Kodály began to set the works of significant Hungarian poets to music, which led to the birth of *A magyarokhoz*, composed after a poem by Dániel Berzsenyi, another piece based on Ferenc Kölcsey's *Huszt*, and *Fölszállott a páva*, an arrangement of Endre Ady's identically titled poem. (It is rather peculiar that during this time Kodály repeatedly expressed his concerns about amateur choral societies.)

1944 meant a new milestone after the previous, considerably productive decade. This grim phase of history saw the creation of multiple Petőfi-arrangements, namely: *Rabhazának fia*, *Isten csodája*, followed by *Hej Büngözsdi Bandi* and *Élet vagy halál* in 1947.

After producing two additional pieces titled *A szabadság himnusza* and *Jelige* the composer only returned to the genre around 1955. These new works – *Nemzeti dal*, a Petőfi-poem set to music; arrangements of Vörösmarty's *A nándori toronyőr* and *Emléksorok Fáy Andrásnak* – conveyed an even more profound sense of strength through musical elements as well as the text, both

aiming to express national unity. These two compositions were followed by *A franciaországi változásokra* in 1963, Kodály's final male chorus that was inspired by the similarly titled poem of János Batsányi.

It is important to note that the 1972 edition of Kodály's Male Choruses (prepared with the assistance of Lajos Bárdos) does not contain each of the composer's works in this genre. His *Stabat Mater* – originally written for male voice choir by the sixteen-year-old Kodály studying in Nagyszombat (now Trnava, Slovakia) – is absent from the volume, having been subsequently arranged for other settings. (The final version was completed in 1962 – this was sent by the composer to dr. Sándor Szepezdi, parson of the Saint Ladislaus Parish Church in Kőbánya.)

Canticum nuptiale,³ a piece written in 1928 as a wedding present for Bence Szabolcsi is also worthy of interest, Szabolcsi kept its framed manuscript in his study for fifty years.

We can find only a handful of works with notes of dedication. *A nándori toronyőr* and *Emléksorok Fáy Andrásnak* were arrangements of Vörösmarty-poems, composed for the vocal ensemble of the Piarist Grammar School in Budapest. *Semmit ne bánkódjál* was written for the Reformed Teaching School's centennial in Nagykőrös, while Kodály dedicated his *Nemzeti dal* to the Choir of the Hungarian People's Army and its conductor, Lajos Vass.

The latter was premiered by the aforementioned ensemble and their director, along with the two Vörösmarty-arrangements of the composer on 18 August 1956.

Lajos Vass later said the following about the composition in a radio interview:

*“Remarkable is the youthful momentum of the piece. We cannot hear the staggering tone of Kodály's former great Petőfi-choruses. This is exultant music, shaking up everything (...) Surely everybody can understand what joy it is for the Choir of the People's Army and myself to present the Nemzeti dal.”*⁴

As we know, these words gained devastating topicality a few months later.

³ Wedding song.

⁴ Poems and writings of Sándor Beliczky Jóó, writings of Éva Buzás Beliczkyné: *Kodály Zoltán – Petőfi Sándor: Nemzeti dal – bemutató (Zoltán Kodály – Sándor Petőfi: Nemzeti dal - premiere)*. (<https://xn--hajdnc-lwa7t.hu/kodaly-zoltan-petofi-sandor-nemzeti-dal-bemutato/> Accessed on 9.12.2022)

Kodály's relationship with male voice choirs

It is a well-known fact that Kodály could not identify entirely with the concept and the presence of male voice choirs in Hungary. He declared his opinion numerous times.

*"I know well: male ensembles cannot cease overnight... But we have to face the fact that as of now, they are still – or already – avoided by musicians of good taste, who think of them as a necessary evil at best..."*⁵

*"If we are to serve artistic and educational purposes with our choral singing: it has to be reborn entirely. The olden atmosphere of choral societies with empty, patriotic phrases and un-Hungarian, unartistic music has become obsolete. The future belongs to the mixed choir, which makes a way towards high art..."*⁶

During a speech given at a concert in Békéscsaba, he expressed his concerns about the genre and its repertoire as well as the advantages of establishing mixed choirs, in a point-by-point manner:

*"Hungarian choral singing – in order to become a powerful momentum of genuine value in the national public life – has to be more Hungarian and more artistic. Both will be achieved, if it: 1. shifts to mixed choirs from exclusively male ensembles; 2. mercilessly exterminates pulp literature from its repertoire; 3. prioritises expressing in all manners the Hungarian spirit; 4. takes only masterpieces from foreign lands, cultivating them not under a local, native disguise but with the intent of recognising the foreign spirit, preferably in the original language; 5. does not take works by domestic composers without careful selection. As the ancient people said: 'even Homer nods!' Meaning: a great poet too can write a faulty opus. All the more can him who is not Homer, even when awake!"*⁷

Kodály also pointed out the limited nature of the male voices in terms of sonority and timbre, as opposed to the female registers:

⁵ Kodály, Zoltán. *A magyar karének útja (The path of Hungarian choral singing)*. In *Visszatekintés (Retrospect)*, op.cit. (100th footnote)

⁶ Kodály, Zoltán. *Zenei belmisszió – Nyilatkozat (A musical mission - Statement)*. *Visszatekintés (Retrospect)*, p. 50.

⁷ Vargyas, Lajos (editor). *Kodály Zoltán. Közélet, vallomások, zeneélet (Zoltán Kodály. Public life, confessions, musical life)*. Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1989, p. 399.

“...the female voice adds brightness, serenity and warmth to the choir, along with other means of expression that the male voices do not possess. Therefore, where men prefer to remain among themselves: art fades into insignificance.”

Despite the above, Kodály did take an interest in writing for male ensembles and there are multiple potential reasons for this. Based on the composer's own statements these may be the following:

1. Creation of a choral repertoire that represents the merits of 19th century poetry
2. Education of the people, a desire for national unity
3. Expansion and improvement of the repertoire

The first of these suggestions could be supported by the following words of János Breuer:

“Kodály confronted amateur choral societies – who kept to their faulty Liedertafel-tradition – with the revolution of Kölcsey, Petőfi, Ady and his own musical revolution.”⁸

Forasmuch as the magnificence of 19th century poetry is undisputable and so is the greatness of authors whose poems had been set to music, their art is heroic and revolutionary. However, no similar work was added to the Hungarian choral repertoire at the time, therefore Kodály might have intended to remedy this situation. Furthermore, to evoke great poets of the past through male voice ensembles – their brazen timbre resonating in unison with masculine determination – could be perfectly suitable to express emotions and thoughts inspired by historical events of the twentieth century.

This leads us to the second suggestion: the educational and fellowship-forming qualities of choral singing had always been regarded as an exceptional opportunity by Kodály. This is represented by the subjects of his compositions in many ways. Ideally, the aforementioned arrangements – which set the patriotic nature of the selected Hungarian poems to music – touch the souls of its performers, which is conveyed to the audience, resulting in an atmosphere of togetherness. Though by different devices, arrangements of Hungarian folk songs affect us in similar ways. Depending on the topic of the original folk song they communicate sentiments of sorrow, joy or liberation, and in a fortunate moment they might even awaken a desire of collective singing.

⁸ Breuer, János. *Kodály-kalauz (Kodály-guide)*. Zeneműkiadó, Budapest, 1982, p. 317.

Lastly, an improvement in overall quality and the repertoire was a reasonable desire of Kodály's. Liedertafel-traditions were truly foreign from the Hungarian culture, amateur choral societies demonstrated a rather low standard in performance and choice of repertoire, while the composer also criticized the type of behavior which took over the meetings and rehearsals of these amateur ensembles. Despite all this, they played an important role at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in Hungary and their presence had positive effects as well.

A glimpse at the history of amateur choral societies

The first person who wrote about the past and the future goals of choral societies was Kornél Ábrányi, Sr. According to him, the history of these amateur ensembles goes back to 1673, but they began to flourish around 1800 along with the creation of the first Liedertafel in 1809 by Carl Friedrich Zelter, who compiled the ensemble from members of the Sing-Akademie he had been directing for almost two decades by then. The first group was followed by another one in Zurich, and later by many more Liedertafels in Austria and Switzerland. In France, they became so popular that Napoleon III requested such ensembles to be established in the army. His purpose was the same as that of Kodály: to establish a patriotic spirit and a sense of unity.

The Hungarian movement of amateur choral ensembles began to spread in the 1800s, although male voice ensembles had already been present since the previous century. One such group was the Reformed "Kántus" of Debrecen, started in 1739 by the theologians of the College. The movement peaked in the 1840s when numerous amateur ensembles were formed, singing pieces of primarily German origin from the Liedertafel-repertoire.

The draft bill presented at the National Assembly of 1843 in Pozsony (now Bratislava, Slovakia) – which advocated the usage of the Hungarian language in education and all public endeavors – influenced amateur ensembles singing predominantly in German as well. From then on, singing in their mother tongue became increasingly prevalent among members of amateur choral societies. The ensembles formed in the 1840s did not last long as public performances became impossible and choirs ceased due to the War of Independence in 1848-1849.

Amateur ensembles had recovered after the Revolution, although they needed an official permit to operate which had serious prerequisites: all pieces resembling revolutionary or patriotic ideas had to be avoided. The use of metaphors thus became very frequent (sorrowful birds, estranged storks and swallows represented fellow imprisoned or hiding countrymen).

Many ensembles had started despite these circumstances and the movement of amateur choral ensembles was in full bloom again by the 1860s. Their repertoire still consisted of mostly German works, but the First National Hungarian Choral Society tried to change this trend by encouraging the usage of the Hungarian language. The aim of the Society was to uplift the Hungarian culture through its printed medium titled *Zenészet* lapok (*Musical Pages*).⁹

Independently from the above-mentioned organization, the National Association of Hungarian Workers' Choral Societies was formed in 1908, and by the dawn of the 1900s the movement of amateur choral societies was present in all social classes.

Practicalities of performing the male choruses

The movement of amateur ensembles strengthened its position by the beginning of the 20th century and Kodály – as a result of the motives discussed earlier – began to take interest in composing for the genre around the 1910s.

The composer's male choruses differ in difficulty.¹⁰ Some may even be sung by amateur groups, however there are some seriously challenging works to which only professional ensembles can do justice in performance (such choirs in Hungary are the Béla Bartók Male Choir, the Honvéd Male Choir or the smaller but equally excellent Saint Ephraim Male Choir). The challenges lie in the high number of parts, the wide vocal range and intonationally demanding passages. *Bordal* and *Mulató gajd*, the first two male choruses of Kodály are already among his more difficult pieces. While both are excellent compositions, they probably are not as organic structurally as his later works. They are also voluminous, using five to seven voices at times through division, the tenor part being especially taxing due to lengthy passages in the higher register.

The great Petőfi-arrangements – *Isten csodája*, *Élet vagy halál* and *Nemzeti dal* – require particular endurance in my opinion, due to their length, ambitus, and intensity, it is best to perform them with larger ensembles. In this regard they are like some of Kodály's more significant mixed choruses (*A magyar nemzet*, *Mohács*, *Balassi Bálint elfelejtett éneke*).

⁹ The society changed its name multiple times. From 1936 it operated as Országos Magyar Dalosszövetség (National Hungarian Song Society).

¹⁰ Bárdos intended to put the works published in the 1972 editions in order according to their level of difficulty. Bárdos, Lajos. *Tíz újabb írás 1969-1974* (*Ten newer writings 1969-1974*). Zeneműkiadó, Budapest, 1974, pp. 219-220.

Most of the choral compositions are relevant to – besides professional ensembles – male voice choirs that consist of members with previous musical education, and enough singers needed for a satisfactory performance. Such are the vocal ensembles operating within institutions of musical education, some of which I had the opportunity to work with at the University of Debrecen's Music Faculty. In a fortunate period, the group had twenty-five members (just like Zelter's Liedertafel). This way – after detailed rehearsals and coaching – it was possible to perform without major difficulties the following works: *Rabhazának fia*, *Katonadal*, *Jelenti magát Jézus*, *Fölszállott a páva*, *Kit kéne elvenni*, *Karádi nóták*.

Additional pieces suitable to be performed by the ensemble were: *A szabadság himusza*, *Jelige*, *Ének Szent István királyhoz*, *A csikó*, *Esti dal*, *A nándori toronyőr*, *Emléksorok Fáy Andrásnak*, *A franciaországi változásokra* (which poses a challenge to tone production due to some high passages in the tenor voice), *Justum et Tenacem*.

Huszt – while composed for fewer voices – would have meant an even greater challenge concerning intonation and musical expression, but it is no impossible feat. Most of the compositions just mentioned are written for three parts, consisting of homophonic passages and some polyphonic areas with imitative sections. Their vocal range is – aside from a few exceptions – optimal.

The presentation of a few male choruses, examination of problematic sections from the performers' viewpoint

Petőfi-poems – Rabhazának fia (Son of Captive Land)

These works are worthy of discussion partly because of the Petőfi-anniversary, but also because of their significance.

Kodály's main source of inspiration for his male choruses was the poetry of Sándor Petőfi. The composer set five of Petőfi's poems to music, beginning with a bouquet of four arrangements borne of wartime events between 1944 and 1947. The fifth piece of the series – *Nemzeti dal* – was written in 1955, before the following revolution, presumably as a reaction to the contemporary political situation.

The two compositions written in 1944 (*Isten csodája* and *Rabhazának fia*) were reflecting on the occupied country turning into a theater of war. It is interesting and probably intentional that the second poem was set to music exactly one hundred years after its birth. The piece is a clear reference to the situation of the oppressed country as it gives a voice to the soldier who died for his homeland. It is parallel to his mixed chorus *Akik mindig elkésnek*. "*Forró lesz nékem a sír*" ("*Scorching will my grave be*") – "*Meghalni se tudunk*

nyugodtan (“Nor our dying may be in peace”), both fragments of the texts illustrate the faithful patriot sacrificing himself for his land.

Rabhazának fia is not the most well-known poem of Petőfi, but the concept of adopting the fate of the homeland as a personal matter was assumably novel at the time. This could have attracted the well-read Kodály, along with the unconventional structure used: the syllable count of 7/4/2/7/8/8 with a iambic lilt and the a-b-b-a-c-c rhyme scheme. Among all the Petőfi-choruses *Rabhazának fia* is probably the least challenging technically, but it requires an in-depth approach from performers due to its subject and musical content.

The piece begins with a text-painting motif descending within the bass part, above which the baritone sustains the stationary F♯. This passage has a special timbre, especially difficult in fact as it is an F-sharp Lydian scale, the first four notes forming a whole-note tetrachord. The difficulty of singing the C natural of the latter alongside the F♯ in perfect tonal purity requires particular care (measures 2-4).

The bass voice remains independent from the two upper voices moving in parallel, and after a plagal leap (m. 7) we hear the main chord of the G-centered tonality. The previous sequentially repeated motif leads to the first culminating point (m. 10), which is settled down by the following four-measure unit. We may therefore consider measures 6-13 a Schoenbergian sentence. The forceful climax at “*viselted, viselted honfi sebedet*” (“you bore your wound, patriot”) introduces a tense harmonic structure, the outlines of subminor, augmented, pentatonic and major seventh chords finally arriving in an F♯ unison, which is best sung with a carefully coordinated sense of emptiness.

The contrast between the cold “*sírj*” (“grave-night”) and “*forró sír*” (“scorching grave”) sections is mostly realized by an advancement in dynamics and the distribution of motifs among voices. After ominous sonorities of diminished fifths built on a motionless F♯ (m. 14-16) we experience the second climax in the first section of the piece, conveyed by the homophonic outcry of B♭ and G major chords related by a third: “*Meleg, forró lesz a sír nékem.*” (“Warm, scorching will my grave be.”) (m. 18-20). Yet again, the dynamics transition rapidly from pianissimo to forte thus challenging the performers, while the leaps of a fourth in the tenor and bass voices may cause intonational difficulties as well as the fragment of a whole-half diminished scale descending in the baritone voice.

The first section finishes on an F♯ major chord (m. 24) paving the way for the second section, which begins with a B Phrygian character. The short middle section (m. 26-36) accommodates an imitative passage in a different tempo, whose entries need practice (beginning at m. 25). Voices of the

polyphonic texture enter a fourth apart while the motif also begins with a leap of an authentic fourth, this creates an ascending quartal harmony (F \sharp -B-E-A) illustrating the possible deliverance the Day of Judgement could bring. The still-ascending musical material contains additional demanding leaps – mainly in the baritone part – where thorough practice is needed for an aesthetic result (m. 31-32).

The climax of the composition takes place in the 33th and 34th measures, unifying all voices in an exclamation that pronounces the poem's essence: “*S hazám bilincseit lerontja...*” (“*And destroys the shackles of my homeland...*”). It happens on a B major chord depicting the falling chains, whose picturesqueness is supported by the following general pause under a fermata. However, formally, and harmonically it functions as a dominant chord leading into the third section, which may be considered a reprise from an emotional and structural viewpoint. At the beginning of measure 36 appears – for the first time in the piece – an E-centered tonality formerly suggested by the key signature, as a major chord, although the downward whole-note melody in the bass immediately washes over it.

The last brief imitative section beginning in measure 39 refers to E minor, the beginning notes of each voice represent the subdominant of the latter, somewhat indicating the forthcoming finale of the work.

“*S hűvösben nyugszom ott alant.*” (“*And I will rest in the cool below.*”) The last sentence brings gradual enlightenment through sharp notes as the dominant ninth chord slowly emerging in the penultimate measure is resolved by a perfect E major, hinting at the deliverance and tranquility of death.

Huszt

I took the opportunity to work on this piece multiple times, since – though I did not have a chance to conduct the piece in performance – it is one of the finest and most interesting works among Kodály's male choruses.

A rather unknown fact is that Ferenc Kölcsey wrote two versions of his *Huszt*. The epigram of 6 lines titled *A régi várban* (*In the ancient fort*) was born in May 1825. Its message is entirely different from that of the second brief poem – titled *Huszt*, later set to music by Kodály – written in December 1831 in Cseke.¹¹ After reading the two poems it is clear that *Huszt* goes beyond its predecessor, a painful ponder over the destroyed nation. It looks ahead: evoking the spirit of the Reform Era and expressing Kölcsey's progressive philosophy it encourages active resistance against oppression.

¹¹ Dr. Bene, Kálmán. *Útban Kölcsey: Huszt című epigrammájához* (*On the way to Kölcsey's epigram: Huszt*). (http://acta.bibl.u-szeged.hu/27764/1/modszertani_031_005_282-284.pdf Accessed on 6.12.2022)

The text prompted Kodály to compose in 1936, when it appropriately expressed the contemporary situation of the Hungarian people. One of the composer's own thoughts represents even better his and the epigram's common principle:

“Instead of complaining over the tragic fate of my nation I tried to alleviate it, strengthening her consciousness. Crying is useless. We cried a lot already. Let us look into the future with clear eyes.”¹²

In Kodály's arrangement, the structure is also influenced by the text in addition to the above. The musical material is segmented in accordance with the poem's lines, and it is easy to recognize partitions in the form by following the literary content. We can observe two opposite poles, a usual feature of epigrams: a preparatory section or first phrase (m. 1-28) and the “twist”, i. e. the second part (m. 29-49) ending with a forward-looking conclusion (m. 49-58), from which the composer omitted the conjunctive *s*, assumably to facilitate musical phrasing.¹³

The beginning of *Huszt* resembles that of the previously discussed *Rabhazának fia*. This time the stationary note is provided by the bass, which is no easy task as it must be even and quiet. Above it is the downward leaning ambiguously Phrygian melody executed by the baritone, where accurate intonation of the descending motif demands awareness. The rhythm follows the epigram's dactyls, but the rigorous spondees are relaxed by a quarter-note rest in the second measure. The halt suggested by the text is illustrated by rhythmic augmentation (m. 1-5).

By the second line of the poem, the immobile note of the bass sinks to F# while the baritone brings a kind of rhythmically varied imitational answer from the dominant's territory. Above these levitates the rising melody of the tenor, portraying the Moon in ascension, where the delicate pianissimo is rather difficult to sustain (m. 6-9). The tone row here is clearly one of the modes of the heptatonia secunda, the “kuruc” – or Picardy Aeolian – scale, and the passage comes to a stop on an F# major chord.

The tempo becomes livelier depicting the wind (from m. 11), the structure becomes imitative, the melody twists and turns as it surges upward. The first two voices to enter evoke the Phrygian mode again, then the lastly cued baritone gives the sensation of A minor, and later C major. These make

¹² Kodály Zoltán. *Közélet, vallomások, zeneélet (Zoltán Kodály. Public life, statements, musical life)*. Editor: Lajos Vargyas, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1989, p. 399.

¹³ The archaic word *öszve* was probably replaced with its modern counterpart *össze* for the same reason.

the B \flat major chord in measure 15 even more interesting, which summons the flat-seventh major of the Renaissance while the text mentions the ancient hall. The archaization is further emphasized using triads, and the following D-minor environment ended by an Aeolian Vth.

“*Oszlopi közt...*” (“*Between its columns...*”) After the mysterious beginning of the tenor and baritone voices singing a open fifth, we are promptly diverted from the previous C-major milieu (m. 19) by the penetrating F \sharp – the “*rémalak*” (“*sinister phantom*”) – of these two voices which is the polar counterpart of the continuous C natural in the bass. This moment also resembles the whole-tone section of the Lydian mode, making the intonation rather difficult in the tenor voice (m. 19-22).

The first section is connected to the second by two words: “*és mond:*” (“*and says:*”). The music continues with a plagal movement through A minor and G major (m. 26-27).

The misterioso monologue of the phantom may be sung in two different ways as per Kodály’s instructions, performed either by a soloist or the entire baritone section. However, he recommends using only a half chorus in the tenor, evidently due to its triple piano (!) entry on the one-lined G note (m. 29-31).

This line of the poem is unprecedentedly repeated twice, and the ensemble is split into four voices in the second part. (from m. 37) The bass sustains its stationary behavior in both parts, the baritone and tenor voices interact in parallels of an octave and a sixth in an imitative passage which is enriched by Kodály with an inner arch-shaped contrapuntal motif. Again, the tonalities of each smaller section bear a Phrygian character as a G Phrygian environment is followed by a B Phrygian area, the latter gaining a Picardy Aeolian-color through accidentals in the counterpoint. Both voices of the imitation finish on the scale’s keynote on which a major chord is built, thus we perceive the interrogative sentence in the text as a dominant harmonic function in the music. There is increasing tension in the second section generated by dynamic escalation and friction between the four voices.

The texture becomes increasingly cohesive from measure 45, and finally we can hear the closing words of encouragement in perfect homophony as brighter and brighter triads interpret the main message of the poem: „*Hass, alkoss, gyarapíts, s a haza fényre derül!*” (“*Affect, create, elaborate, and the homeland will arise!*”).

Kit kéne elvenni (Whom to Marry)

This was one of the favorite pieces of my male choir, not without reason. It can be learned easily, the structure is strophic, with variations that are closely related to the vividly portrayed text. In addition, the comical and sometimes satirical, even grotesque portrayal of different characters introduce us to Kodály's humorous side. As is the case with many of the folk melodies he collected, Kodály composed arrangements of this song: one for solo voice accompanied by piano, another one for male voice choir and an orchestral transcription as part of his *Székelyfonó*.

The composer first visited the Székely Land in 1910, where he was deeply touched by his encounter with this archaic layer of Hungarian folk songs in its authentic environment. During his journey he traveled to Gyergyószentmiklós (now Gheorgheni, Romania), where he heard a song titled "*El kéne indulni, meg kén' házasodni*" ("*I should depart, I should marry*") performed by Mihály Csobot.¹⁴ Later, Kodály wrote the following at the end of the voice-piano arrangement, as a sign of respect: "*Csobot Mihálytól tanultam Gyergyószentmiklóson 1910-ben*" ("*This I learned in Gyergyószentmiklós from Mihály Csobot in 1910*").

The composer only produced a piano accompaniment to the piece in 1924, and it took an additional five months until it was heard on stage during the season-opening performance of the Blaha Lujza Theatre as part of his *Székelyfonó*. The audience also had a chance to hear the song performed by Imre Palló, vocalist, and Ottó Herz, noted chamber musician and collaborative pianist, in the Grand Hall of the Academy of Music on April 2, 1925. Four years later, in April 1929 it was recorded by His Master's Voice, the global gramophone company, and the score was published in the 4th issue of the periodical *Magyar népzene (Hungarian Folk Music)*.

Kodály completed the arrangement for male voice choir a decade later, in 1934. It was premiered in Békéscsaba along with the presentation of the composer's frequently mentioned lecture, *A magyar karének jövője (The future of Hungarian choral singing)*. The composition was performed by the MÁV Musical and Choral Society of Békéscsaba along with *Karádi nóták*, another new work, under the baton of János Simon.

The voice- and choral settings both follow the folk song's strophic structure. Each verse describes a possible future wife of a bachelor who wishes to get married. The candidates are represented by highly characteristic musical imagery in Kodály's varied strophes. A sense of variation in the voice-

¹⁴ Kecskeméti, István. *Kodály Zoltán. Kit kéne elvenni? – Népdalfeldolgozás három változatban. A hét zeneműve (Zoltán Kodály. Kit kéne elvenni? – Folk song arrangement in three variants. Musical piece of the week)*. Zeneműkiadó, Budapest, 1984, p. 399.

piano arrangement is provided by the accompaniment's colorful material which faithfully represents the lad's straightforward personality. In addition to the accompaniment's interactive elements, Kodály set high standards for the musicians as he expected an authentic, trustworthy performance. He often had an exact idea of specific singers suitable for interpreting a particular work.¹⁵ This song was first sung by Imre Palló, who along with Ferenc Székelyhidny was held in high esteem by Kodály. Although his interpretation was good and tasteful, it was surpassed by that of Endre Rösler, who often yelled and shouted in accordance with the plot during the performance of *Székelyfonó*.

The variations are probably even more exciting in the male choir arrangement, since the main melody is distributed between the different voices as different people are portrayed. The puzzling question – “*Kit kéne elvenni*” (“*Whom to marry*”) – is vocalised by the tenor alone in F minor pentatonic, followed by the piano grumbling of the bass. Despite the above (or maybe because of it), the beginning of the piece is not easy: the tenor's entry must be uniform and categorical but not too boisterous, while the lower voice has to sing without delay in a quiet but rhythmically punctual manner. Also, the descending melody of the folk song needs persistent intonational counterbalancing (m. 1-8).

The refrain-like wailing then turns into an imitative passage (from m. 13), and the strophe ends unresolved on the subdominant with a major triad to indicate the cluelessness of the boy, which is only strengthened by the following measure rest.

The “*kisasszony*” (“*damsel*”) is displayed by the tenor (from m. 18), her squeamish stomping is indicated by offset eighth notes in the accompanying voices who then lament her shameful shortcomings in a unified descending cry. Here the piano melody of the tenor might pose difficulties, and attention must be paid to the pairs of eighth notes entering after rests, which are not easy to execute accurately. The strophe ends on the submediant.

The crone arrives in the bass part creating a stark contrast (m. 36), her quarrelsome personality is projected by the ever-rising wail of the subordinate parts, perforated by short rests. The situation escalates in the refrain, where cross-related augmented seconds and patterns of sixteenth and dotted eighth notes add to the fright of her “*égi háború*” (“*thunderstorm*”) and finally, the ensemble unites in an unisono forte passage, stopping on a curt key note after an augmented repetition. Not getting overwhelmed by the thunderous material is probably the most important objective here for performers, as the tone must not become aggressive.

¹⁵ Op. cit. 402.

Poverty appears through a painful solo; the melody and the sighs of the accompanying voices are characterized by a discreet piano tone. Here the first upward leap of the latter requires particular attention (m. 56). The accompaniment descends along with the melody and the adjacent tonality of B \flat minor is further darkened by the fleeting appearance of the Neapolitan C \flat (m. 62). The strophe comes to a halt on a hesitant dominant-like C-E major third, of which the E is prone to be sung rather flat by the tenor section.

The final quiet moments of the stanza are followed by an extraordinary contrast brought by a series of uproarious, rhythmically intense rising fourths representing wealth (m. 76). It is difficult to sustain the tempo and rhythmic accuracy against the augmented sentence in the bass, which should be brought out: *“enyémből élsz, hitvány fajta!”* (“you live off me, worthless kind!”). The musical material rises because of the curse and its escalation is facilitated by an appearance of the melodic minor in the texture. It is also an amusing encounter with the composer’s humour: he permits the tenors to grotesquely imitate the female voice (which they are very keen to do...).

By now, all possible future brides have been reviewed and after a measure rest with a fermata, we hear the vacillation of the lad in the baritone solo (m. 93). Here the division of the tenor section and the following passages of parallel thirds must be handled with care regarding intonation, color and tonal purity.

After the halt on a dominant seventh chord we hear the conclusion introduced by a major opening: *“jó lesz a legénység nékem továbbra is”* (“I’ll still be fine as a bachelor”). Attention must be paid to the intonational challenges set forth by the brighter tonality of the closing verses, and the accurate and effective execution of the changing tempo in the final measures.

Overall, *Kit kéne elvenni* is a rewarding composition. It is relatively easy to teach and it’s an ideal piece for recitals, much loved by the audience.

Unfortunately, male voice choirs are rarely seen nowadays, but Kodály’s volume is very useful for the active ensembles. At the same time, it is worth discovering by all lovers of music and choral singing since it is a rich collection of interesting musical works, containing choral compositions of diverse temperaments with unique tonal characteristics.

Translated from Hungarian by Dániel Kovács

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