

## COLORISTIC TONAL AND HARMONIC COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES IN ZOLTÁN GÁRDONYI'S CHORAL WORKS FOR ORGAN

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**SUMMARY.** The topic of this paper is an analysis of two choral works for organ by Zoltán Gárdonyi. The purpose of this work is to reveal the compositional methods and tools used to create coloristic and fascinating tonal and harmonic movements in those two choral works. Alongside, how he crafts his works based on *cantus firmus* melodies and creates the organ chorals.

**Keyword:** Gárdonyi Zoltán, coloristic compositional technique, leitmotif-like cell, coloristic harmony, organ choral.

Zoltán Gárdonyi was a Hungarian composer and musicologist, he is viewed as a remarkable figure of the 20th century's Protestant church music in Europe<sup>2</sup>. He studied composition with Zoltán Kodály and Paul Hindemith.

Zoltán Gárdonyi's compositions include piano works, orchestral, chamber works for strings, woodwinds, *A Cappella* choral works for church choir. He also crafted a variety of genres of church music<sup>3</sup>. He started composing music for organ in the 1930's, his works include, lullabies, Christmas songs, preludes, meditation, and compositions based on chorale melodies<sup>4</sup>. In addition to his wide range of compositional works, numerous scientific studies, and books he contributed significantly to the research on

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<sup>2</sup> Gárdonyi, Zsolt, *Gárdonyi website*, [https://www.gardonyi.de/index\\_en.html](https://www.gardonyi.de/index_en.html)

<sup>3</sup> Karasszon, Dezső, *Zoltán Gárdonyi*, Mágus Kiadó, Budapest, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.



Franz Liszt and on J.S. Bach's art of counterpoint and the art of canon and fugue compositions<sup>5</sup>.

The **111/25 Nagy irgalmú Úr Isten** (Lord God of Great Mercy), organ choral composed in 1977 is based on *Cantus Firmus* melody, found in the *ReZeM 053, Ó és Új 111 Ének*<sup>6</sup> edition which is incorporated into the instrumental layer.

E.g. 1

25

The image shows a musical score for a choral piece. It consists of four staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 3/8 time. The lyrics are in Hungarian. The first staff has the lyrics: "Nagy ir - gal - mú Úr Is - ten, Kí - mél - jed szol - gá - dat." The second staff: "Ne hagyj. vég - leg el - vesz - nem, Bár áll min - den vá - dad." The third staff: "Sem - mi más Nem le - het Bű - ne - im\_\_ vált - sa - ga." The fourth staff: "Csak Fi - ad ha - lá - - - la." The score ends with a double bar line.

**Cantus Firmus: ReZeM 053 - 25**

The piece is written in simple triple meter, at walking pace (*andante*) which creates a grandly (*grandioso*) overall mood. The dynamics used in the work are *mezzoforte* (moderately loud) and *piano* (soft). As the piece is sacred music, these alternating dynamic markings throughout the piece suggest a feel of reflection.

<sup>5</sup> Richter, Pál, Gárdonyi Zoltán, in: [http://fze.hu/hu/nagy-elodok/asset\\_publisher/HVHn5fqOrfp7/content/gardonyi-zoltan/10192](http://fze.hu/hu/nagy-elodok/asset_publisher/HVHn5fqOrfp7/content/gardonyi-zoltan/10192) (Accessed: 2023.05.02).

<sup>6</sup> ReZem 053, *Ó és Új 111 Ének* (Old and New 111 Songs), Református Egyházzenei Munkaközössége, Budapest 1995.

**E.g. 2**

**Gárdonyi Zoltán: 111/25 Nagy irgalmú Úr Isten, bar 1-12**

The tonality of the piece is D major with short modulations to E major and A major. The choral is sixteen bars long, and the composer, for the melody part, is using one main rhythmic motif. The melody rhythmic motif is used 8 times, the rest of melody is based on variations of this. This recurring rhythmic motif can be considered as a leitmotif-like cell of the work.

**E.g. 3**

The melody rhythmic motif

Melody rhythmic motif variation 1

Melody rhythmic motif variation 2

**Melody rhythmic motif and it's variations**

This piece has four sections (A; A; Av1 and Av2), and it is composed in variation form, each section is 4 bar long.

The first **section A** is in the home key, D major, presents the melody with the main melody rhythmic motif and its variations. In the first bar the melody starts on the third of the D major chord and is supported by the tonic and dominant harmonies of the **I** and the **V** chords. In the second bar the melody is repeated, with the same rhythmic motif, starting again on the third of the chord but this time on the relative of the tonic (**VI** chord) and the relative of the dominant (**III** chord). In the third bar of the section, the melody starts on the third of the subdominant chord. As a new harmonic function appears, the melody is using the first variation of the main rhythmic motif.

This section is finished with an 'open' perfect cadence, the third of the chord being placed on top, which feels and suggests a repetition of the section. Here the melody is assembled with the second variation of the main rhythmic motif.

As we take a closer look at the melody line, it is crafted with colorful ornaments/movements around the 3rd of the first chord of each bar, except the last one which is the closing part of the section.

**E.g. 4**

Andante

*mf* (2<sup>da</sup> volta: *p*)

PED.

D major: I 3-2-3 --- 4 V<sub>6</sub> VI 3-2-3 --- 4 III<sub>6</sub> IV 3-2-3 --- 4 I<sub>6</sub> II<sup>8-7</sup> V<sup>8-7</sup> I

Harmonic

Function: T D T D S T S D T

**Gárdonyi Zoltán: 111/25 Nagy irgalmú Úr Isten, bar 1- 4**

The bass part of the section is a descending diatonic line, from the tonic down to the mediant, then followed by an II-V-I progression. The composer is using a repetitive rhythm figure in the bass part, long note followed by a shorter one, minim (half note) followed by a crotchet (quarter note). As we know that music evokes emotions and moods, this descending bass line denotes and suggests the feeling of rest, calmness and evokes lamentation. By analyzing the bassline, the inner and melody notes closer and deeper, the harmonic function of the section can be slightly changed in the second and third bars.

**E.g. 5**

Andante

*mf* (2<sup>da</sup> volta: *p*)

PED.

D major: I 3-2-3 --- 4 V<sub>6</sub> VI 3-2 IV<sub>3-4</sub><sup>6</sup> III<sub>6</sub> IV 3-2 VII<sub>3</sub> I<sub>6</sub> II<sup>8-7</sup> V<sup>8-7</sup> I

Harmonic

Function: T D T S D S D T S D T

**Gárdonyi Zoltán: 111/25 Nagy irgalmú Úr Isten, bar 1- 4**

In the second bar, the harmonic movement goes from tonic to subdominant and to dominant (VI-IV-III), and in the third bar goes from subdominant to dominant and tonic (IV-VII-I). These harmonic movements create an exceptional and colorful chain of functional harmony.

The **second section A** is a repetition of the first section, but this time with softer dynamics (piano), which suggest reflection (self-reflection), and with a perfect cadence, ending on the tonic note this time.

**E.g. 6**

Andante  
mf (2da volta: p)  
PED.

D major: I 3-2-3 ---- 4 V<sub>6</sub> VI 3-2-3 ---- 4 III<sub>6</sub> IV 3-2-3 ---- 4 I<sub>6</sub> II<sub>6</sub> V<sub>4-3</sub> 5 I  
Harmonic  
Function: T D T D S T S D T

**Gárdonyi Zoltán: 111/25 Nagy irgalmú Úr Isten, bar 5-8**

The third **section Av1** of the choral, bar 9 to 12, is a variation of section A. In this section the melody in all four bars is based on the main melody rhythmic motif. Moreover, the first two bar melody notes are exactly the same. The melody notes in the third and fourth bar of the section are also identical, but higher with a whole step. As the melody is repetitive, the composer uses modulation technique in this section, modulating to E major. Factually this section has one segment, which is repeated. The base line and the harmonic movement of bars 9 and 10 are also repeated in bar 10 and 11 in the key of E major.

Analyzing the inner part of the section, here we have a different technique used to create the inner part as in section A. In here, the inner part is crafted more likely as a counter melody, compared to section A. In the first section the inner part is based around the chord's notes, it has a chordal movement, while in this section the inner part has an ascending scalar movement. This section is a variation of section A, more likely is just the first bar variation from section A, which then is repeated throughout the section. Each time the repetition occurs is crafted in a different context which creates different colors. The section ends with the tonic chord of E major which becomes the pivot chord, setting up the modulation to A major into the next section. The repetitions of this section can also be considered as reflection. Bar 10 reflects bar 9, bar 12 reflects bar 11, and bars 11 and 12 reflect bar 9 and 10.

E.g. 7

D major: $V_5^6$	$V^2 - ^3$	I	$V_6$	I	E major: $V_5^6$	$V^2 - ^3$	I	$V_6$	I	A major: $V^7$
Harmonic										
Function: D		T	D	T	D		T	D	T	D

Gárdonyi Zoltán: 111/25 Nagy irgalmú Úr Isten, bar 9-12

The fourth **section Av2** of the piece, bar 13 to 16, is another variation of section A. In this section the melody is based on the melody rhythmic motif variations. Meanwhile, bar 13th melody is a variation of the melody from bar 9. The melody notes are the same but are adapted to the new key. This section starts in a new key, A major. To make it colorful, the composer starts on the tonic harmony but with the iii chord, the counter-relative to the tonic. Then the harmony moves to the tonic chord, with the major 7th color added to it. The first bar of the section ends on the subdominant chord, which is D major in the key of A, interestingly is the same chord as in bar 9, but there is the tonic chord in the key of D. The next bar of the section, bar 14, starts with an interesting and colorful chord, #IV diminished seventh chord in the key of A major, or a borrowed vii diminished seventh chord from the key of E major. As the harmony moves on to E major then becomes dominant seventh chord, which lands on the A major chord, more likely the first chord of bar 14 is a #IV diminished seventh chord. This chord creates a colorful result of fluctuating between the two key centers (A and E).

Another colorful technique used here is in the inner part. Similarly, is a counter melody like in the previous section, but this time is a descending scalar movement. The counter melody has been repeated, and also is shifted over the barline, like in the previous section, to create a blending feel. The last part of bar 14, the composer sets up the modulation back to the home key, in the same way as in the previous section bar 10. The last two bars of the section, which is the ending of the piece, is a repetition of the last two bars of the second A section. The same melody and rhythms are being used but with a different inner part movement to add different color to it.

E.g. 8



A major: III    I<sub>6</sub><sup>8-7</sup>    IV    #IV<sup>07</sup>    V<sup>8-7</sup>    I

D major: ii    V<sup>4</sup>    I<sup>6</sup>    II<sub>5</sub><sup>6</sup>    V<sub>4-3</sub><sup>5</sup>    I

Harmonic  
Function: T    T    S    S    D    T    S    D    T    S    D    T

**Gárdonyi Zoltán: 111/25 Nagy irgalmú Úr Isten, bar 13-16**

This choral is based brilliantly around one main melody rhythmic motif, moreover, four melody motifs are used in entire piece. While repetition is occurring, the composer uses the coloristic approach to prudently and carefully craft the piece to create a well-blended choral music for organ. Using color notes to craft the melody, color notes to create the inner part, and coloristic harmonic movements, the piece suggests a source of strength, unity, as well as means of easing worrying. The repetitiveness of motifs, which are assembled with different contexts and backgrounds insinuate reflection and mercy.

The other choral organ work **111/41 Ó, Felséges Atya Isten** (The Majestic Father God), is also based on *Cantus Firmus* melody found in the *ReZeM 053, Ó és Új 111 Ének*<sup>7</sup>.

The composer changed the tonality of the *Cantus Firmus*, while the original melody is in B Dorian, Gárdonyi placed it into C Dorian. Moreover, he blends the modal and tonal keys (scales). The melody notes values have been transformed, so, the melody becomes the bass part of the piece. The work is written in simple quadruple time signature (4/2, fourth-two), the original melody notes were converted into long note values. The time signature used in this score has a typo error.

<sup>7</sup> ReZem 053, *Ó és Új 111 Ének* (Old and New 111 Songs), Református Egyházzeneészek Munkaközössége, Budapest 1995.

Ó, fel - sé - ges A - tya Is - ten,  
 Ki u - ral - ko - dol menny - ég - ben,  
 Di - csér - tes - sél hí - ve - id - ben!

**Cantus Firmus ReZeM 053 - 41**

The piece has three sections, which are based on the melody sections from the *cantus firmus*. The first bar of the work is an introduction.

The **first section** of the piece, bar 2 to 6, is based on the first part of the melody from the *cantus firmus*. In the first bar of the section, the composer harmonizes the melody using the C Aeolian. He is using an A flat to depict the harmony, and this note reveals the Aeolian mode.

The composer creates colorful movement in the inner part which is placed above the melody. In the second bar of the section (bar 3), the composer is adding a new note to the *cantus firmus* melody, an A flat, which backs again the Aeolian mode. In the next bar, A flat appears again, supporting the chosen mode for this part of the section. As this part of the section is based on the Aeolian mode to harmonize the cantus firmus melody, and the colorful movement of the inner part creates a humble uplifting feel, a fell of supplication.

In the next two bars of the first section (bar 5 and 6), the composer introduces a new note (B natural) in the upper part, which is restated in the inner part too, the C minor harmonic tonality appears. As in bar 5, the seventh diminished chord has been revealed, a new and different colorful harmony appears, tension, which is followed by the tonic harmony, the music depicts a comforting and calming effect. Transitioning from modal to tonal harmony, bar 4 and 5, the composer uses the colorful compositional tool of the delay.

As in these bars the roots of the chords are delayed, this evokes a nice blending effect which supports the transition.

**E.g. 10**

C. f.

C minor:	I	VI <sub>6</sub>	V <sup>8-7</sup> - 6	VII II <sub>3</sub>	V	III <sub>6</sub>	II <sub>6</sub> <sup>9-8</sup> - 8	I <sub>6</sub> <sup>9-8</sup>	VII <sub>6</sub> <sup>9-8</sup>
Harmonic:									
Function:	T	D		S	D	S	T	D	

  

C minor:	I	I	VI <sub>6</sub>	V <sub>6</sub> <sup>b9-8-7</sup>	I	VI <sub>6</sub>	VII <sub>6</sub> <sup>9-8</sup>	I	VII V <sub>6</sub>
Harmonic:									G minor: II <sup>7</sup> VII <sub>6</sub> <sup>8-7-8</sup> I
Function:	T	T	D	T	D	T	S	D	S D S D T

**Gárdonyi Zoltán: 111/41 Ó, felséges Atya Isten, bars 1-11**

The **second section**, bar 7 to 11, is based on the second melody part of the *cantus firmus*. In the first two bars of this section, the piece stays in C minor harmonic tonality. In bar 7, the original melody's note has been altered, to fit the tonality. In these two bars the upper part has a descending line which clearly depicts the tonality supported with a colorful harmonic movement. As the melody arrives at the third bar of this section, bar 9, the A natural note appears, in the inner part, for the first time in the piece which depicts the C Dorian mode. As the harmony moves to the seventh degree then to the minor fifth degree of the scale, this can be considered as a pivot harmonic segment which leads into the new tonality. The last two bars of this section, bar 10 and 11, modulate to G minor melodic. As in the original melody of *cantus firmus*, the major 6th degree of the Dorian scale appears for the first and only time, the composer here uses the colorful tool of modulation to bring the piece into a new and different tonality. This modulation and arriving at a new tonal center create an elevating effect.

The last, **third section** of the work, bar 12 to 17, is based on the third melody part of the *cantus firmus* melody. In bar 12, the composer is using again the pivot harmonic segment from bar 9 to transition back to C, this time C Aeolian mode. As the A flat note reappears, that signals that we are back into the Aeolian mode. The descending melody line, baseline, of bar 13 and 14, is colorfully crafted with the rich harmonic movements placed above it.

**E.g. 11**

C minor:	<b>VII</b>	<b>V<sub>6</sub><sup>8</sup> - 7 - 8</b>	<b>VI<sub>6</sub></b>	<b>IV<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup></b>	<b>V</b>	<b>III<sub>6</sub></b>	<b>II<sub>6</sub><sup>9</sup> - 8</b>	<b>I<sub>6</sub><sup>9-8</sup></b>	<b>VII<sub>6</sub><sup>9-8</sup></b>	<b>VII<sub>6</sub><sup>9-7-8</sup></b>	<b>I<sup>3-2-3</sup></b>	<b>IV<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup></b>	<b>I</b>
Harmonic													
Function:	<b>D</b>		<b>T</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>D</b>		<b>T</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>T</b>

**Gárdonyi Zoltán: 111/41 Ó, felséges Atya Isten, bar 12-17**

The composer brings back the colorful composition tool of the delay, in bar 14 and 15, which evokes the feeling of reassurance and support. This helps setting up again the transition from modal to tonal harmony, the Aeolian mode this time moves into minor harmonic tonality. The use of B natural and A natural notes over the static baseline colorfully portrays the minor melodic tonality. As the new tonality is depicted over the dominant function of the seventh diminished chord, this suggests and creates the feel of arriving home. This suggestion is confirmed in the next bar (16), the melody arrives home, the harmony is back to its starting point, the Aeolian mode. Moreover, in this bar, the inner part depicts the entire descending Aeolian scale. The composer colorfully inserts the plagal cadence (amen cadence) in this descending scalar movement, which produces a strong feel of completion.

In conclusion, Gárdonyi's marvelous use and combination of harmonies, the craftsmanship of the inner part and its movements creates a wide range of colors and effects which help to paint and evoke the real mood and emotions music. While using the compositional tools of repetition and variation, and adding coloristic decorations to it, Gárdonyi creates a brilliant and astonishing colorful outcome which helps to enrich the listener sentiment and feeling to live through his music.

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