# *A patriot, not a nationalist*

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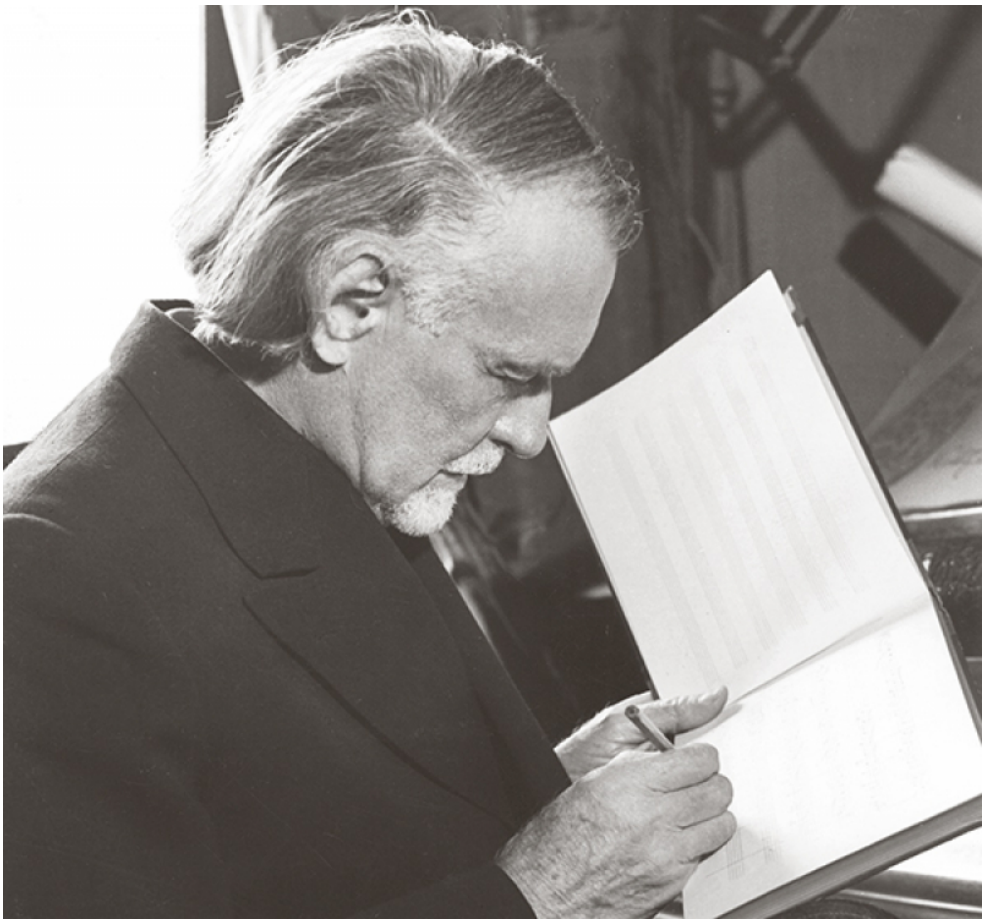

Zoltán Kodály is usually mentioned as a national composer, one whose style and spirit are nationalistic. This characterisation is essentially correct and the composer himself stated that his sole aim was to make his nation's voice audible. He also wrote that he had wanted to be "praeceptor Hungariae" or "a teacher of Hungary", i.e. of the whole nation.

In the field of education, Kodály wanted to teach his nation, the Hungarian people, in practical terms how "to be more Hungarian and more educated in music". As he himself confessed, the international interest in Hungarian music education and in his works was an unexpected bonus.

When dealing with Kodály's musical works and writings, one very quickly recognises that the national feeling and spirit in his attitude was never hostile to other peoples or nations but in support of his own nation. It is perhaps therefore more appropriate to call him a patriot rather than a nationalist or

even a chauvinist.

Kodály, along with some of Hungary's leading intellectuals, realised that the Hungarians had a special situation and role in Europe in terms of their geographical and cultural position. In this respect, he saw the Magyars as being between East and West. It is a historical fact that during the Great Migration, the Magyars and the Turkic tribes that joined them settled in the Carpathian basin, far away from any closely related peoples. Their language exists here in isolation between the Slavic, Germanic and, in a wider context, Romance languages. When the Hungarians were Christianised and joined the Western church in about 1000 AD, they expressed a desire to belong to the Western-European cultural (and political) sphere. This did not mean, of course, that our ancestors threw out their entire Eastern heritage. Although the nation's language, culture and music have been modified by successively newer influences, some of the very ancient characteristic features have survived the storms and hardships of the centuries. It is thanks to this that our folk song collectors, including Kodály and Bartók in particular, still found many old elements of Hungarian music in the folk tradition at the turn of the last century. Within this musical tradition, preserved as it was by the peasant class, they found some extraordinarily interesting and valuable material with which they created a special kind of very high-level Hungarian art music. It is well known that Kodály viewed this from a primarily historical point of view, wanting to try to dig as deep as possible into the past, while Bartók's concept was based on a wide geographical interest. Although they, especially Kodály, wanted to create a new genre of Hungarian art music based on the more or less ancient tradition they had discovered, their concept was certainly not a narrow-minded, nationalistic one. As ethnomusicologists, they realised that genuine Hungarian characteristics could only be described through carrying out comparative work. For this reason it was very important to become acquainted with and collect the folk songs of the neighbouring peoples, as Kodály mentioned in one of his articles. During their research, they discovered that anhemitonic pentatony was one of the most important characteristic features of ancient Magyar tradition, which stretches back to the time of the Great Migration.

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Kodály could hardly have expressed the following ideas as either a composer or a music educator without his experiences in the field of ethnomusicology: “The purpose in the life of a country and a people situated at the point of impact between East and West can only be to belong to both, and to smooth out and blend the contradictions between the two.  We can and must learn from the musical culture of all nations. In its character Italy lies closest to us because it is also based mainly on singing, but we must learn from the Germans and French as well.” He imagined the new Hungarian “classical” music as a special synthesis of oriental and occidental traditions.

In 1947, Kodály’s concept of music education was criticised in a review. The criticism was based partly on the ideas of conservative music teachers and partly on a misunderstanding. Kodály answered it in an article entitled A Hundred Year Plan: “Nobody wants to stop at pentatony. But, indeed, the beginnings must be made there; on the one hand, in this way the child’s biogenetical development is natural and, on the other, this is what is demanded by a rational pedagogical sequence.” He emphasised this two-fold point because “pentatony is not only ‘a segment’ of the treasury of Hungarian folk songs but its very centre: it is the Hungarian approach to music.”

I seriously think that Kodály’s idea is still valid today, although it is true that since he wrote his article, ethnomusicologists have realised that there are more ancient layers with narrow-range melodic types beyond the pentatonic scale. Furthermore, forms have survived in the folk music tradition that are different to the pentatonic style, with its more or less wider range that is based on the influences of ancient Bulgarian-Turkic tribes of the time of the Great Migration.

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Both Bartók and Kodály were very much interested in the Eastern tradition and connections between it and Hungary, and this is clearly reflected in their writings on comparative ethnomusicology. In the late 1950s, Kodály encouraged one of his assistants, László Vikár, to travel to the region around the Volga and Kama rivers in Russia, where the Finno-Ugric peoples live. Vikár collected a very large number of folk songs from the Cheremis people and their Turkic neighbours. This rich vein of material made a significant contribution to clarifying the Eastern relationships of Hungarian folk music. In addition to the scientific results of Vikár's "expedition", the songs provided material for Kodály's artistic output, as he arranged five Mountain-Cheremis melodies for voice and piano using some of László Vikár's earliest finds.

One may well ask why Kodály's ideas about specifically Hungarian issues are being quoted here, when we are dealing with questions of multiculturalism. All will become clear if we quote some more of Kodály's words: "Finally, pentatony is an introduction to world literature: it is the key to many foreign musical literatures, from the ancient Gregorian chant through China to Debussy. Indeed, several other geographical cultural territories can be mentioned here in which pentatony is an integral part of the tradition or appears as one of the elements of the present-day musical language. For instance in some kinds of American-Indian music, or in the Celtic heritage of the music of the British Isles, etc. But of course several different musical idioms have been or can be produced from the pentatonic system of tones, depending on the combination of other musical factors."

Continuing with the theme of pentatony necessitates the quotation of a section from the afterword of Volume IV of Pentatonic Music. According to Kodály, dealing with Chuvash and related folk music deepens the knowledge of Hungarian children about their musical roots. He also wrote: "We can establish our knowledge about the world, and through the light of other musical languages we can understand ours better as well.  The world becomes more and more open, and the art limited to one nation loses its sense as time passes. We are closer to the realisation of world music than to the world literature imagined by Goethe."

Two more of Kodály's remarks may be referred to here. In the first, he calls our attention to the fact that Carl Orff, the other world-famous composer-cum-music pedagogue, agreed with him that pentatony is the most suitable

material for beginners. The second is in connection with the adaptation of the Kodály concept in other countries. According to several foreign music teachers, the Hungarian method or system cannot be easily adapted, if at all, due to the lack of pentatonic layers in their own musical heritage. However, it must not be forgotten that Kodály's aim was not to impose pentatony as the only appropriate material for starting to teach beginners. In one of his American lectures he said: "Each nation has a great many songs which are especially suitable for teaching. If we select them well, folk songs will become the most appropriate material through which we can present new musical elements and make them perceptible." In this respect, Kodály's thoughts may be continued to suggest that even if a nation's musical language differs from that of the Hungarians, one can still begin with a step-by-step sequence of building up the melodic tone-set elements, albeit a different one. In this case, pentatony can represent another culture, i.e. a foreign type of musical language for the learners.

*"Finally, pentatony is an introduction to world literature."*

Zoltán Kodály

Zoltán Kodály also emphasised the fact that a nation can only take its well-deserved place in the great choir of the world if it preserves its own voice. He thought that "Hungarians can find their way more surely towards world music via Chuvashia than by going directly towards the West." It is also known that in Volume III of Pentatonic Music, he published a series of Cheremis folk melodies for pedagogical purposes. The same musical material provided the basis for most of the two-part arrangements in Volume IV of Bicinia Hungarica and the Five Mountain-Cheremis Folksongs for voice and piano mentioned above. It should also not be forgotten that Finnish folk songs were used in Bicinia and in the beautiful work for female chorus with piano accompaniment, Wainamoinen Makes Music.

It could be argued that the music mentioned so far does not actually display any true multiculturalism because it is all more or less connected to the -Hungarians: although their predecessor tribes parted well over a thousand years ago, the Cheremis and Finnish peoples still belong to the Finno-Ugric

language family, as do the Magyars. For cultured society, the discovery of ancient layers of Hungarian folk tradition was regarded almost as a foreign, non-Hungarian musical idiom. By introducing the almost forgotten but newly discovered, rich material into both his compositional and pedagogical work, Kodály was practically opening a gate into a new realm of music. This was especially true for those who were living under the very strong influence of Western and particularly German musical thinking, and for a wide strata of society that had only been familiar with 19th century popular song literature as played mostly by gipsy bands.

In as early as 1929, Kodály wrote a foreword to a little collection of folk songs for scouts compiled by Lajos Bárdos. Kodály wanted to popularise Hungarian folk music among the young and wrote: "Let the Hungarian boy sing the songs of other people, sing these songs with their original texts. So from these songs he can get acquainted with the nations, □ But first we have to know ourselves." This idea is very similar to Schumann's thoughts as he wrote in his Musical Rules for the Home and in Life: "Listen to all folk songs attentively, for they are the treasure trove of the most beautiful melodies and through them you can get to know the character of peoples."

This challenge was also formulated in one of Kodály's lectures in America in 1966: "If we want to understand other nations, we first must understand ourselves. There is no better means for this than folk music. Getting acquainted with the folk songs of other countries is the best way to get acquainted with other peoples." This can be taken as a summary of Kodály's humanistic and cultural tolerance.

*"Listen to all folk songs attentively, for they are the treasure trove of the most beautiful melodies and through them you can get to know the character of peoples."*

Robert Schumann

Many of Kodály's pieces directly represent his aim to combine Eastern monophonic thinking with the polyphonic and harmonic world of the West.

In the afterword to Volume I of Bicinia Hungarica he wrote: “For the Hungarians [Magyars] as a people with Eastern-type unison thinking, the main problem is not the rhythm and melody but music written in parts.” A great many singing exercises were written by him to establish a Western-type musical feeling that was based on the ancient Hungarian monophonic melodic material. He also amalgamated the two worlds in several of his folk song arrangements. A short example provides a complete solution to the problem and may be considered representative: No. 28 of Tricinia is based on Kodály’s own pentatonic theme. It has a polyphonic or imitational development and then a variation appears, transformed into an acoustic scale. The coda finally combines the major harmony and the pentatonic melody with a minor third. Here, we can see East meeting West in miniature.

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MIHÁLY ITTZÉS: ZOLTÁN KODÁLY IN RETROSPECT

East meets West: Multicultural Ideas in Kodálys Writings and Musical Works