

Dalos, Anna. 2020. *Zoltán Kodály's World of Music*. Oakland: UC Press. 283 pp.

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In the English-speaking world, Béla Bartók is much better known than Zoltán Kodály as a great classical composer, but in Hungary, Kodály has always been more revered. Why do the Hungarians revere Kodály the composer? Hungarian musicologist Anna Dalos has written a compelling new book on the significance of Kodály as a composer, thinker, and cultural figure. Her work is the first on this topic to be published by a United States publisher, and the first English-language monograph on Kodály published outside of Hungary since Percy M. Young's 1964 biography, which was written under the composer's supervision. Internationally, Kodály is widely known for his pedagogical concepts, but one of Dalos's stated aims is to sidestep the saturated discussion on Kodály-based music education "to illuminate Kodály's thinking as a composer through a chronological discussion of his oeuvre" (1). As such, this is not a biography, but rather a roughly chronological series of essays that bring into focus various aspects of Kodály's compositional thinking, using Kodály's own writings to analyze his iconic works. Dalos also includes helpful chronological charts to categorize Kodály's compositions, as well as a biographical timeline of the composer's life at the end of the book. Well-positioned as Head of the Archives for Twentieth- and Twenty-First Century Hungarian Music at the Institute of Musicology of the Research Centre for the Humanities, Budapest, Dalos blends old and new sources from Kodály's archival papers in Hungarian, German, and English, some of which have never been accessed before. This book is a major contribution to the growing English-language literature on Hungarian music-history, which, as said, tends to center mostly on Bartók. As Dalos suggests, it is surprising that such disproportionate attention would be given to Bartók, since Bartók's work was largely shaped through Kodály's influence – starting from their turn-of-the-century collaboration on folk-music collection and culminating with Kodály's dominance within all areas of Hungarian musical life up to his death in 1967. Dalos, with her excellent command of English and expansive knowledge of Kodály's role in Hungarian music-history, is an ideal scholar to re-introduce Kodály to the English-speaking world as one of the great classical composers and minds of the twentieth century.

Zoltán Kodály's World of Music can be understood, chapter by chapter, as a set of arguments regarding Kodály's evolving expression of Hungarian musical modernism. Chapter One provides a historical overview of Kodály's career in light of the political turbulence in Hungary throughout his lifetime. Chapters Two through Seven trace how the young Kodály navigated the Hungarian musical debate at the tail end of the Habsburg era, between the

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progressives, who reinforced Austro-German cultural traditions, and the nationalist conservatives, who sought a distinctly Hungarian sound. While adopting old compositional techniques from German masters like Brahms, Kodály also found new ways to integrate Hungarian folk songs, which he collected and analyzed according to his own modernized methodology that emphasized the pentatonic scale. He moreover drew from Debussy's harmonic language, exemplified in his *Méditation sur un motif de Claude Debussy* (1907), and from ancient-Greece-themed literature written by his friends and other Hungarian writers, as in his song *Nausikaa* (1907), set to a poem by the feminist pedagogue, Aranka Bálint. In addition to the pentatonic Hungarian peasant folk-materials, these foreign influences in Kodály's compositional language – French (or what he referred to as "Latin") and Greek (or rather, what Hungarians wrote about ancient Greece) – served to dissociate his new Hungarian aesthetic from the German bias of the previous century, especially in response to the growing Hungarian resentment against Germany around the First World War.

After the great Hungarian tragedy of the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, which gave away over two-thirds of Hungarian land and people to neighboring countries, Kodály's writings and compositions became clearly driven by folk and art music-traditions aiming to reconstruct Hungary's past. Chapters Eight and Nine include detailed analyses of Kodály's highly celebrated *Psalmus Hungaricus* (1923), *Háry János Suite* (1926), and *Peacock Variations* (1939). Dalos demonstrates how his work from this time period legitimized a new Hungarian cultural movement, held together by his vision of a future Hungary reflecting past ideals, all in the face of a bleak present. Chapters Ten through Thirteen focus on Kodály's interest in the musical traditions of Palestrina, counterpoint, and the fugues of Bach during the interwar period as inspirations for the ideal, alongside the archaic, Hungarian folk-song. Dalos dives deep into Kodály's *Concerto for Orchestra* (1939-40), showing how the composer at times would synthesize historical layers of Hungarian influence, including German, notwithstanding his ongoing political opposition to Hungary's collusion with Nazi Germany. In Chapter Fourteen, Dalos examines one of Kodály's final oeuvres, his *Symphony* (1961), which by most accounts was less than a success. After the Second World War and the rise of communism, Kodály's composition and thinking could be described as anti-modernist, with the *Symphony* as a bulwark of Hungarian tradition in a sea of growing enthusiasm in Hungary for what Dalos describes as "the [avant-garde] musical trends of Western Europe" (182).

I found it appropriate for Dalos to analyze Kodály's contributions loosely through the lens of musical modernism, as Kodály's lifelong mission was to elevate his nation through a new, uniquely Hungarian musical aesthetic existing on a par with Western high art. The concept of modernism is so important to Kodály's mission that it might be useful here to cite historian Maria Todorova's contention that the common denominator of most theories of modernism is the capitalist and imperialist expansion of the nation-state (Maria Todorova, "Modernism" Introduction to Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny and Vangelis Kechriotis, eds., *Modernism: The Creation of Nation-States*; Budapest: CEU Press, 2010, at: <https://books.openedition.org/ceup/1955>). This claim is important in relation to the Hungarian musical modernism of Kodály because it places tradition and innovation – which switch back and forth as poles in Dalos's thesis of modernism – within the ideological power-structures of colonialism and imperialism, thus enabling us to evaluate Kodály's musical legacy in both aesthetic and political terms. In *Awangarda* (the next publication after Dalos's in the UC Press series of California Studies in Twentieth-Century Music), musicologist Lisa Cooper Vest

employs an understanding of modernism that is similar to Todorova's to explain the simultaneously forward- and backward-looking musical discourse with which Polish composers, scholars, and political leaders after the Second World War legitimized their distinctly Polish notion of progress against the backdrop of Soviet-backed state socialism (Lisa Cooper Vest, *Awangarda*; Oakland: UC Press, 2021). Like Vest, Dalos supplies a wealth of political context throughout her book to help explain Kodály's aesthetic evolution. We can use this context to engage theoretically with the concept of Hungarian modernism by connecting Dalos's rich discussion of Kodály's musical form and its psychological, spiritual, poetic and autobiographical meaning to an understanding of national progress that addresses and thereby opposes oppression.

Through Dalos's analysis, the reader gains a sense of why Hungarians revere Kodály as a composer, a sense that grows stronger with our reinforced understanding of Kodály's musical modernism in its dialogic relationship with Hungary's history of colonialism and imperialism. One example of where our understanding of modernism might benefit from this perspective is in Dalos's particularly interesting Chapter Six, which deals with women and modernism in Kodály's songs. We learn that Kodály had an active love life as a youth, with three real women serving as inspirations for three of his song-settings, all under the guise of Odysseus's three loves, Nausicaa, Circe and Penelope. As I mentioned earlier, Hungarian scholar Aranka Bálint authored the poem titled *Nausikaa/Nausicaa*, which Kodály then set to a song in 1907. Kodály's best friend at the time, poet and playwright Béla Balázs, introduced him to Bálint, and later the two became lovers. Kodály was also infatuated with German actress Eva Martersteig (Circe) who inspired the song that he set to Endre Ady's poem, *Sappho szerelmes éneke* ['Sappho's love song'] (1915-17). These two muses, neither of whom ended up as Kodály's wife, were cast within Kodály's musical language of the Other, a mixture of pentatony, chromaticism and Phrygian modality evoking ancient Greece. Whether this musical language reflects Kodály's modern or anti-modern understanding of women is not the point in Chapter Six. Rather, this Chapter makes very clear that Kodály's intimate friendship at a young age with Béla Balázs, who was known for his revolutionary views on many topics including politics, art, and women, also deeply influenced Kodály's outlook and life. With further detail from Kodály's personal and intellectual engagement with Balázs and their circle of artist-friends, we might describe Kodály's musical modernism as a response to the revolutionary climate of his time, underscoring the value of Kodály's songs of that time period for what they say not only about Kodály as an individual, but also, more broadly, about Hungarian society.

I can understand the reluctance of many Hungarian scholars to evaluate Kodály's musical choices in light of their political implications, because Kodály has a mythical reputation in Hungary for shielding Hungarian music from the political distortions encouraged by the Soviets during the Cold War. My late mentor, Mihály Ittész, the Head Archivist at the Kodály Institute, once told me that it might be better not to use the word "political" to describe Kodály's work, because of this word's association with the dirty politics of the communists. This protection of Kodály from his own political persona has led to an incorrect perception of Kodály as a conservative. Dalos in her book complicates this perception. Chapter Six contains surprising details, such as the love triangle entangling Kodály, Balázs and Bálint, and the way that Eva Martersteig's "lesbian disposition" was appealing to Kodály for its primitiveness. Dalos also provides a fascinating window into Balázs's practice of writing his thoughts on life, philosophy, friendship and love in a public diary that he would then share and discuss with the people he wrote about – Kodály, Bálint, and a few other friends – and his encouragement for Kodály to do

the same. Dalos mentions that Kodály was appointed to the Music Directorate and served as vice-director of the Academy of Music during the short-lived 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic. We learn from historian Mary Gluck that Balázs also served alongside Kodály in a cultural role in the Republic, through appointment by their fellow Sunday Circle leader, György Lukács, who held the position of deputy commissar of public education and culture, and who later became known as the father of Western Marxism. Lukács's cultural projects of 1919, which aimed to bring Hungarian high art into the reach of workers, most likely laid the groundwork for the political and economic dimensions of Kodály's famous educational concept of high-quality music based in peasant folk themes for everyone.

In November 1919, the Republic fell to far-right extremists under Admiral Horthy. At around the same time, Horthy's police broke into Balázs's apartment and confiscated all his diaries. Gluck writes that "[i]nstead of revolutionary theories and diabolical Marxist plots, [the diaries, much to the disappointment of the police,] contained for the most part 'wittily malicious gossip about literary foes' and indelicate, compromising details about ladies (which the police chivalrously vowed not to divulge)" (Mary Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation 1900-1918*; Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991, 210-11). Little did they understand how Balázs's musings on friends and women might actually be building blocks of a modernist critique of Habsburg political and economic oppression that – as Dalos begins to uncover in Chapter Six – resulted in an outpouring of artistic creativity by Kodály and others within Lukács's intellectual circle. Unfortunately, because of their Jewish origin, under the Horthy regime, most of the Sunday Circle were forced to flee Hungary, bereaving gentile Kodály of his flourishing artistic community and leaving him to fend alone for his Jewish wife, Emma Gruber (the third female inspiration for Kodály's works, based on the figure of Odysseus's wife Penelope).

Dalos writes about Kodály in a manner that evokes curiosity about both the human and political dimensions of his figure. We wonder, for example, whether Kodály's decision to double-down upon the Hungarian folk-music principle during the interwar period was not a break from his earlier modernist inclinations, but rather a continuity of his project of cultural renewal, begun with Lukács and Balázs, and repackaged in a manner that would be marketable to the new regime, as was recently suggested by Hungarian musicologist Lóránt Péteri (Lóránt Péteri, "National Icon and Cultural Ambassador: Zoltán Kodály in the Musical Life of State Socialist Hungary," *Sciendo*, 19.1, 2022, 147-181, 149, at: <https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/prm-2021-0011>.) We might also ask whether it is possible to separate Kodály's modern legacy from his efforts to teach musical taste to the masses. As we learn more about Kodály from a historical perspective, we are in a better position to critique his overall project while honoring his political and creative genius.