

KODÁLY'S IDEAL KINGDOM: THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF *JÁNOS HÁRY*

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Zoltán Kodály's singspiel *János Hány* (Op. 15) premiered at the Budapest Royal Opera House on 16 October 1926. Although Kodály had already encountered the planned libretto by Béla Paulini and Zsolt Harsányi in March 1924 (Breuer 1982: 129), the composition proceeded fairly slowly. Everything was finished at the last minute; it was an open secret that the singspiel was incomplete at the premiere. Just prior to the premiere, it became clear that an *intermezzo* was necessary between the first two adventures because more time was needed to move the set (ibid.: 131). This is how the *Intermezzo* from the suite version, which subsequently became quite a famous work, previously known under the title *Palotás*, came to be incorporated into the work. The *Intermezzo* was originally not composed for the singspiel but as incidental music (Bónis 2011: 201-203).

Since then, the work has been characterized by a number of new inserts and omissions: no two performances have been the same. The first revisions were completed right after the premiere. Following the third performance, Kodály cut the entire fourth adventure, in which the emperor's daughter, Marie-Luise, wants to throw herself into the void ("Nix") due to her doomed love and which included the *Dragon Dance*, since these scenes caused the first technical difficulties with respect to the staging and set (Eöszé 1975: 115). The *Dragon Dance* lived on as a stand-alone orchestral composition, with the title *Ballet Music*. However, omitting the fourth adventure caused the work to lose its formal balance. Subsequently, Kodály felt compelled to compose several new pieces for the singspiel, which premiered on 10 January 1928 (Reuer 1991: 15). The *Dragon Dance* was replaced by a *Duet with Women's Choir* and Kodály completed two brief inserts, the songs of Napoleon and Lord of Ebelastin. The singspiel's *Overture* premiered at the same time (the composition has always been performed with the title *Theater-Ouverture*) (Eöszé 1975: 120).

No.	Title	First performance	UE 1962	Omissions, extensions
Ouv.		10 January 1928		Played as <i>Theater-Ouverture</i>
1.	Kezdődik a mese / The tale begins	First performance	1.	
2.	A furulyázó huszár / Fluteplay of Hussars	First performance	2.	
3.	Az öreg asszony / The old women	First performance	3.	Not performed
4.	A zsidó család / The Jewish family	First performance		Not performed
5.	Sej! Verd meg Isten / God, beat them	First performance	4.	
6.	Ruthén lányok kara / Choir of the Ruthenian girls	First performance	5.	Not performed
7.	Piros alma / Red apple	First performance	6.	
8.	Bordal: Oh, mely sok hal / Wine song	First performance	7.	
9.	Duo: Tiszán innen / Duo: This side of Tisza	First performance	8.	
10.	Közjáték / Intermezzo	First performance	9.	
11. 11a.	Ku-ku-kukuskám / Cuckoo Song	First performance	10.	
	Háry a Luciferen / Háry on Luzifer	First performance	11.	Not performed
12.	Bécsi harangjáték / Viennese carillon	First performance	12.	
13.	Hogyan tudtál rózsám / My dear, how could you	First performance	13.	
14. 14a.	Hej két tikom / Chickens... Induló / Festive March	First performance 1950	14. 15.	Festive March (1948)
15.	Ébresztő: Sej, besoroztak / Choir of soldiers	First performance	16.	
16.	Franciák indulója / March of the French army	First performance	17.	
17.	Napóleon bevonulása / March of Napoleon	First performance	18.	
18.	Gyászinduló / Dead-March	First performance	19.	
19.	Dal: Oh, te vén süllülű / Song: Oh, you old...	10 January 1928	20.	
20.	Cigányzene / Gypsy music	First performance	21.	

21.	Hagyj békét viaskodó, oh! / Let me ...	10 January 1928	—	Not performed
22.	Toborzó / The song of Hussars	First performance	22.	
23.	Duett női karral / Duet with women's choir	10 January 1928	23.	
	Világvége jelenet és a Sárkányok tánca / Doomsday and Dragon Dance	First performance	—	Not performed; Dragon Dance performed as Ballet Music
24.	A császári udvar bevonulása / March of the court	First performance	24.	
	Behozzák a császár napát / The mother of the Emperor	First performance	—	Only text
25.	A kis hercegek bevonulása / March of the little princess	First performance	25.	
26.	Gyermekkar / Childrens' choir	First performance	26.	
27.	Kivonulás / Pullout	First performance	27.	
28.	Dal: Szegény vagyok / Song: I'm poor	First performance	28.	
29.	Dal: Felszántom a császár udvarát / Song: I'll plow up the Emperor's court	First performance	29.	
30.	Zárókar / Finale	First performance	30.	

Table 1: The numbers of *János Háy* (original version and 1962 piano reduction), partially absent in recent productions.

If you examine the piano reduction with the 1962 copyright, however, you will not find this version of the work. Table 1 shows what Kodály left out of the piano reduction and which pieces he later inserted into the work. For instance, he removed the insert number 4 (*The Jewish Family*). Certainly, he felt that, after 1945, it would be unacceptable to show Jews as illustrations of a nation. The piano reduction also does not contain the *Song of Lord of Ebelastin*, the *Dragon Dance* and the *Overture*, although Kodály's *Soldiers' Festival March*, originally composed in 1948 and adapted with text that fits the action of the singspiel, can be found there (Bónis 2001: 146).

New performances and recordings proceeded with additional revisions to the work. To get an overview of all of *Háy's* musical material, it is

necessary to compile various tracks from at least four different CDs into a single playlist. Table 1 shows that numbers 3, 4, 6, 11a, 21, and 23 are never played; these include not only *The Jewish Family* but also the *Choir of the Ruthenian Maidens*. There are other stand-alone Kodály compositions that find an adequate place in the singspiel: Kodály himself expanded the role of Marczi Kutscher as a temporary solution in 1938 with the first abbreviated version of his *Double Dances from Kálló* (Eöszé 1975: 167-168). He was therefore quite shocked when he saw the final version of the double dance, written in 1951, in a *Háry* performance in Moscow in 1963. He made several indications that the singspiel had been reworked to such an extent that he simply did not recognize it anymore: “I came here to see the work written in 1926, and encountered a completely new one” (Kodály 1989d: 533). Still, it is undeniable that these inserts can be situated so easily in the context of the work because the structure itself—the interspersing of dialogues and musical numbers—is very flexible.

As far as can be reconstructed from Kodály’s statements, the Moscow production was created in the spirit of Mussorgsky’s *The Fair at Sorochyntsi* and socialist realism. For instance, the first scene takes place at a folk festival at the annual market and not, as in the original version, in a dilapidated village tavern (Kodály 1989a: 532). The turn to communist power in 1948-49 obviously made it necessary to modify *Háry*’s libretto. The most obvious modification is that the location of the first adventure in the original version is on the border of Hungary and Russia, or on the border of Galicia and Russia, to be more precise. In the libretto the Russians were mockingly called “Muszka”, which is a corruption of “Moscow” (Hungarian: Moszkva). It is clear that the derisive nickname had to be omitted, and the revision changed not only the name but the place as well. The border was moved to another place completely: just like *Háry*, who pushes the border gate from Russia to Hungary, the border in the new libretto is pushed between Hungary and Germany. Now it is the Germans who receive a mocking nickname: they are called “Burkus”, which is etymologically derived from the phrase “someone from Brandenburg” (Hungarian: Brandenburgus) and is understood to mean Prussian. From now on, it is the Germans, not the Russians, who are the enemy.

Changes due to political reasons began occurring as early as the 1920s. Originally, the mother of the emperor was brought in when the entire imperial court moved in. She was so old that she was only able to repeat a single word: “Mamu” (Bónis 2011: 227). The word goes back to a Hungarian saying: someone is so old that instead of saying “Hamu”

(ashes), they can only manage to say “Mamu”. The figure of the emperor's mother was a direct reference to Franz Josef's mother, Princess Sophie of Bavaria, as she came to be known in the memory of the people as a figure, who, despite her old age, was always sticking her nose into everything. The outrage of the Hungarian royalists was so great that the satirical scene had to be cut from the work (Bónis 2011: 227).

The severe reaction to this humorous allusion shows that the libretto of *Háy* is full of common political references. This is a feature of the genre: as Tibor Tallián noted, the tradition of the singspiel was reawakened through Kodály's work (Tallián 1984: 232). On the one hand, you have the update to the genre while on the other, you have a fairy-tale-like text that is connected with musical inserts. Nevertheless, it is necessary to emphasize that Kodály was not involved in the writing of the libretto: he supplied only the musical inserts (Breuer 2011: 133). This means that it is impossible to determine from the available documents, such as the libretto, the extent to which Kodály identified with the political allusions or with the image of Hungary portrayed in the text. His statements, in most cases made in the 1960s, i.e., forty years after the premiere, primarily emphasize that János Háy represents the spirit of the Hungarian people (Kodály 1974: 502; Kodály 1989g: 460). Does this mean that the music does not ascribe to the same position as the text?

Kodály would have been aware of the work's relationship to the contemporaneous political situation. He didn't believe the singspiel capable of being successful abroad. For this reason, he composed a suite in 1927 designed to replace the staged work, which it did with considerable success indeed. Since the work has been performed many times in different countries, he was very surprised, as he had earlier so often complained that the libretto is not translatable (Kodály 1989b: 524; Kodály 1989c: 517).

The German translation was completed in 1926 by Rudolf Stephan Hoffman for Universal Edition and revised in 1962. For the sake of political correctness, the translation strives to downplay the oppression underlying the 250-year history of Austria and Hungary as well as the coarse, chauvinistic jokes about the French and the minorities of the monarchy, especially the Czechs. For instance: János Háy advises the empress on how to heal the emperor's gout. She then gives orders to the Bohemian footman, obviously in Czech. The German translation renders the sound of the Czech language using a cluster of consonants and even used some actual Czech words such as “Rozumite?” (“Do you understand?”). The Hungarian version instead uses pairs of words that are morphologically related. The third word pair, “sundás-mundám”, refers to

a devious manner since the last word, “plotty”, is a word play on the sound of shit plopping down.

After World War I and the redrawing of new national borders based on the Treaty of Versailles, the French, who had secured the location for the peace treaty, and the Czechs, who during the war had supported an intense propaganda campaign against Hungary as a country that oppresses minorities, became the main political enemies in public political discourse in Hungary (Zeidler 2001: 15–20). In this respect, the libretto of the singspiel directly reflects the political attitudes at the time in Hungary as well as the trauma the Hungarians experienced due to the Treaty of Versailles. The contemporary reception of the work, including Bence Szabolcsi’s review of the premiere, clearly perceived a link between the work and the peace treaty (Szabolcsi 1987a: 66).

Various forms of reception have attested to the influence of the peace treaty on the libretto through the early 1940s. The dramatic highlight of the singspiel occurs when János Hány defeats Napoleon, captures him, and then—as a form of revenge for the peace treaty of 1920—forces him to sign a contract in which he promises to make amends and pay for everything he has ruined. The first Hány film (Regisseur: Frigyes Bán, 1941) documents how the frustrations and inferiority complexes underpin the text of the libretto. In this scene Napoleon is dramatically shrunk: he is unable to crawl up onto the large chair and, next to the enormous János Hány, he barely reaches the table. In this way, the libretto is entirely in accord with the music. Numbers 16, 17 and 18 (*March of the French, Napoleon’s Invasion, Funeral March*) are some of the most ironic sections of the entire singspiel. In the *Funeral March*, for instance, a saxophone appears as a typical French instrument. The Marseillaise sounds distorted and out-of-tune, while the whole-tone scale appears in the *March of the French* as a typically French idiom.

What is even more striking is that, despite the critical formulations in the libretto, the Habsburg court is shown in a positive light. It is telling that the German translation completely omits these formulations. In the first adventure, when Marie-Luise thanks Hány for his help, he reacts with unabashed self-confidence: “Whenever our Habsburg brother was in trouble, Hungary was there to help him.” The German translation omits the dialogue entirely. A similar distortion occurs in the third adventure, when Marcsi the carriage driver attempts to console Hány’s beloved, Örzse (Ilka in the German version), when Marie-Luise wishes to marry Hány. Örzse erupts in bitter words: “The Austrians have already taken everything from us. Now we are to give them the emperor as well?” The outburst is much softer in the German translation: “Emperor Janos! No – no – no!”

Nonetheless, one must admit that from a musical perspective the Austrians present a delightful, friendly and fairy-tale-like world. Kodály composed the most colourful movements to characterize Austrians, such as Marie-Luise's *Cuckoo Song*, the *Viennese Musical Clock*, the *Appearance of the Imperial Court*, or the *Appearance of the Little Princes*. The music captures an idyllic quality. This idyllic image, as Kodály has noted, is created in the imagination of the Hungarian people: it shows how the Hungarian people imagine the Viennese court (Kodály 1989g: 460). A spectacular example of this is the *Viennese Musical Clock*, in which Kodály transformed a melody for natural horn into the style of an 18th-century Viennese musical clock (Example 1 and 2).



Example 1: Natural horn melody from the region of Bars (Berecky at al. 1984: 50).



Example 2: Háry János, no. 12: Viennese musical clock.

According to Bence Szabolcsi's interpretation, the music of the singspiel is comprised of three different musical layers: Hungarian folk music, 18th- and 19th-century verbunkos literature, and Kodály's original compositions (Szabolcsi 1987b: 362). As Szabolcsi put it, an important role of the original compositions is to provide colour, since the Neo-classical gestures of the verbunkos style clearly reference the time of the story (the 18th and 19th centuries) and also serve to represent the heroism and the greatness of Hungary. The function of the folk song is, as Kodály often emphasized, to bring Hungarian folk music closer to an urban audience. It is as if the use of folk songs were part of a cultural mission, as Kodály's pithy remark from 1965 would have it: "[the folk song] brings the air from the village into the city" (Kodály 1989h: 556).

Szabolcsi even observed that Kodály did not choose the most beautiful folk songs but rather those that, as Szabolcsi thought, open up to us a whole new world (Szabolcsi 1987b: 363). If you examine the folk songs yourself, it becomes clear that their selection was not merely aesthetic but principally political in nature. Table 2 shows when and where the folk song arrangements were collected. With two exceptions, Kodály collected

the folk songs himself. One of the exceptions, the folk song “Tiszán innen, Dunán túl”, lent the work a symbolic function: the fifth shift structure—i.e., repeating the first half of a song at a fifth lower in the second half, which is a characteristic feature of Hungarian folk songs—became a symbol of the homeland. Béla Bartók collected this folk song in 1906 in Felsőíreg (Tolna County), i.e., in the region from where the historical figure János Háy originally comes. It should be mentioned that the other folk songs, collected by Kodály from the time before 1918, especially from the period between 1912 and 1914, were collected in the regions of present-day Slovakia (early Upper Hungary) and Romania (especially in the Hungarian villages Istensegíts and Hadikfalva in Bukovina).

Folk song	Village	Country today	Region	Collector	Date
A zsidó család / The Jewish family	Istensegíts, Hadikfalva	Romania	Bukovina	Kodály	04/1914
Sej! Verd meg Isten / God, beat them	Nyírvaja	Hungary	Szabolcs, Ost-Hungary	Kodály	11/08/1916
Ruthén lányok kara / Choir of the Ruthenian girls	Istensegíts	Romania	Bukovina	Kodály	04/1914
Piros alma / Red apple	Mohi	Slovakia	Bars	Kodály	1912
Ó, mely sok hal / Wine song	Alsócsesze Bakonybél	Slovakia Hungary	Bars Veszprém, West-Hungary	Kodály Kodály	1912 06/08/1922
Tiszán innen, Dunán túl / This side of Tisza	Felsőireg	Hungary	Tolna, South Hungary	Bartók	1906
Ku-ku-kukuskám /Cuckoo Song	Nyitraegerszeg	Slovakia	Nyitra	Kodály	1910
Bécsi harangjáték / Viennese carillon	Mohi Kemensőmjén	Slovakia Hungary	Bars Vas	Kodály Kodály	1914 15/09/1922
Hogyan tudtál / My dear, how could you?	Alsócsesze Páty	Slovakia Hungary	Bars Pest	Kodály Kodály	1912 10/06/1922
Hej, két tikom / Chickens...	Balatonlelle Bolhás	Hungary Hungary	Somogy Somogy	Kodály Kodály	7-8/09/1924 25/12/1922
Sej, besoroztak /	Érd	Hungary	Pest	Emma Kodály	08/1917

Choir of soldiers Nagyabonyban / In Nagyabony	Zsigárd Nagyabony	Slovakia Slovakia	Pozsony Pozsony	Kodály ?	1905 ?
Ó, te vén süllő / Oh, you old...	Nyitraegerszeg Alsóbalog	Slovakia Slovakia	Nyitra Gömör	Kodály Kodály Kodály	1910 1912 1911
A jó lovas katonának / The song of Hussars	Zsére	Slovakia	Nyitra	Kodály	1911
Gyújtottam gyertyát / Candle lighting	Mohi Gyarmatpuszta	Slovakia Hungary	Bars Komárom	Kodály Kodály	1912; 24/05/1914 10/10/1921
Elment a két lány / The two girls have gone	Nyitraegerszeg	Slovakia	Nyitra	Kodály	1908; 1910
Ábécédé / A-B-C-D	Nagyszalonta Garamszentgyörgy	Romania Slovakia	Bihar Bars	Kodály Kodály	08/10/1916 1912
Szegény vagyok / I'm poor	Zsigárd Komárom	Slovakia Hungary	Pozsony Zala	Kodály Kodály	1905 1925
Főlszántom a császár udvarát / I'll plow up the Emperor's court	Szalóc Szilica	Slovakia Slovakia	Gömör Gömör	Kodály Kodály	01/1914 1913

Table 2: Folk melodies with their origins in Hány János (after Berecky et al. 1984).

There is an obvious connection between the areas in which these folk songs were collected and the setting of the singspiel. In Figure 1, the most important settings of the Hány legend are indicated in red: the border between Russia and Hungary (or, more precisely, Galicia), Vienna, Milan (where Hány defeats Napoleon), and Hány and Örsze's home village of Nagyabony near Vienna (today Vel'ké Blahovo in Slovakia). The places where the folk songs were collected are marked with green flowers. Most are found in the region of Nagyabony in Upper Hungary, where Kodály often collected folk music since this region, especially the cities of Galánta and Nagyszombat, were where he spent his childhood (the Kodály family lived in Galánta between 1885 and 1892, and they settled in Nagyszombat in May 1892; Eöszse 1975: 9, 14). He must have felt a very strong emotional connection to this region, particularly after the Treaty of Versailles, which cut it off from Hungary. The same area is also the home of János Hány, which is the historical reason that the characters that appear in Hány's imagination later in life, such as Marie-Luise, Napoleon, or Lord von Ebelastin, sing songs from this region.



Figure 1: Locations of collected folk songs (flowers) and settings of the legend (frames).

Kodály expanded his earlier collections between 1921 and 1924 with variants that he found inside the new national borders. It is generally accepted that the most archaic folk songs are preserved on the periphery outside the centres. Collecting folk songs in Upper Hungary was so important to Kodály because this region actually lies on the cultural, linguistic and national periphery. After World War I, it seemed to him even more significant that, more than ten years following his initial travels to collect folk songs from the periphery, he was able to find variants of those same folk songs near the centre in the middle of the country. It is as if he had discovered some aspect of the old Hungary in these new variants that demonstrated the cultural unity of the ruptured nation. It was probably for this reason that he made an arrangement in the singspiel of the folk song “Hej két tikom tavali”—the only song that did not originate from the part of the country that was split off following the peace treaty but from Somogy County (near the Balaton Lake). Kodály collected the song in 1922 and probably hoped that a variant of the song could be found in Upper Hungary. Kodály also combined different variants of the songs, meaning that he did not use any “pure”, authentic forms of the folk songs.

The inserts that stem from his collection from Bukovina represent three different nations in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy: here he collected the violin melody of the *Jewish Family*, the musical material for the *Choir of the Ruthenian Maidens*, as well as *Gypsy Music*. As previously mentioned, two of the three supplements in the performances were later omitted, although they played an essential role in the work’s historical authenticity. Kodály tried to represent the monarchy in a way that reflects the colourfulness and national cultural heritage of the modern and ideal empire. This authenticity lies at the core of the concept: János Háy, who served as a soldier on the border between Galicia and Russia, was actually capable of encountering the music of the Jews or Ruthenians of Galicia.

The historical authenticity and the fairy-tale-like character of the story are combined, which, in the musical sense, is of great importance for Kodály. In the 1960s, he emphasized that in the story of *János Háy*, just as in folklore, the historical facts and elements of fairy-tales flow together (Kodály 1989f: 589). The story is built around a kernel of truth but the events are not portrayed as they took place in reality. Kodály spoke about this at the time of the premiere: “The court music, for example, does not appear in original form, but in the form in which a peasant might present it.” (Kodály 1989e: 491) The blending of reality and fantasy can also be heard in the *Viennese Musical Clock* piece, the melody of which is an arrangement of a natural horn melody from Bukovina. For this reason, the selection of authentic historical folk songs and the proximity to the

historical life of Háry's fantasies were so important to Kodály. It was here that he found the aesthetic layer that he could add to the libretto, to this political pamphlet.

But the authentic historic folk songs were all Hungarian. Even the melodies of minorities are interwoven with the manner of Hungarian music-making: Kodály collected these melodies from Hungarian peasants. He himself noted that János Háry's world view is "Hungary-centric". "I never claimed," said Kodály, "that it is good because of this. On the contrary: many of our old sins, the political errors of Hungarian history, are ingrained therein. The task of art is not to teach, judge, or convince; it need only to represent." (Kodály 1989e: 491) Kodály's Háry makes it clear that the idyll of the monarchy could only appear to be idyllic from this Hungary-centric perspective. Zoltán Kodály's ideal empire can only be constructed from the ruins of its common history.

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Film

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