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BOOK REVIEW

Anna Dalos (2020). *Zoltán Kodály's World of Music* (Oakland: University of California Press, ISBN 978-0-520-30004-0), *California Studies in 20th-Century Music*, vol. 27

Reviewed by ***Simone HOHMAIER****

The publication of an internationally accessible study of the life and work of Zoltán Kodály is long overdue. Anna Dalos has already succeeded in providing a concise summary of his life and oeuvre in her contribution to the German-language encyclopaedia *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (2003). Now, nearly two decades later, Dalos follows this work with the fruits of long intensive study of the composer. That Kodály was virtually ignored by international musicologists for so long is surprising, especially in view of the attention that his contemporary and longtime friend and colleague Béla Bartók received from international researchers, and that Kodály was able to exert a more direct influence on Hungarian music history than Bartók, especially as a teacher.

The intention stated in the introduction "to illuminate Kodály's thinking as a composer through a chronological discussion of his oeuvre" (p. 1) seems a bit old-fashioned in a time when it is *en vogue* to survey cultural maps, to question temporal relations in the historical sciences, and to order contexts according to systematic rather than historical connections. Dalos succeeds, however, in crystallizing characteristic and systematic aspects from the chronological presentation of Kodály's creative path.

The decision to exclude Kodály's internationally influential music education method is understandable on the one hand, as it tends to overshadow his work as a composer and researcher. On the other hand, this leaves possible interactions unexamined, and it is to be hoped that further research on this will follow in an internationally accessible language. Investigating such interactions between his writings and his compositional output yields compelling results in Dalos's study. Moreover, following Edward T. Cone, she proceeds from the not uncontroversial premise "that biographical/autobiographical instances [are] perceptible in [Kodály's] works" and serve "to reveal their poetic context" (p. 4).

The reviewer does not share the desire to find concrete relations between a composer's works and events or persons from his biography. For example, I consider it possible, but not compelling, that Kodály's choice of an erotic drama by Zsigmond Móricz *(Odysseus bolyongásai)* as the libretto of an opera in 1924 emerged from the 17-year-old trauma of Kodály's forced decision between three women. Nevertheless, Dalos provides an illuminating context for

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Kodály's stay in Berlin in 1906/07, his general attitude towards women, and the foundation of that attitude in Friedrich Nietzsche's and Ernst von Wolzogen's thoughts as conveyed by his former roommate Béla Balázs, reconstructed with the help of Kodály's and Balázs's diaries. And the facts that his characterizations of various women from his environment are, in the choice of vocabulary, reminiscent of his views on folk music (p. 67) and that his art songs predominantly – not only through the vocal register – take on a male perspective, is an interesting aspect with regard to the connection between life and work. With analytical reflections on songs from different creative periods Dalos underlines the "mysterious otherness of women" in Kodály's oeuvre and asserts that the "marked masculinity and narcissistic traits strove in the main to express the emotions of men." She also finds noteworthy the contrast between "male" pentatonic and "female" chromaticism in Kodály's Second String Quartet, influenced by Bartók's work of the same title.

Through intensive source-studies, Dalos succeeds in dispelling myths of previous Kodály research and portrays him less as a unique lone wolf than as a contemporary and interacting artist. Though she draws on patterns of reception established in Kodály scholarship, especially the integration of historical models into his oeuvre based on Kodály's enormous knowledge of music history, she aims to interpret Kodály as part of a neoclassical movement in the twentieth century. She does so not only by highlighting his individual approach, but also by countering the one-sided emphasis on the specifically Hungarian character of his oeuvre and by contextualizing his work with international currents. In addition, an analysis of previously unknown sketches provides Dalos with illuminating insights into Kodály's compositional methods.

In her introductory biographical account ("Zoltán Kodály's path"), Dalos rightly emphasizes that the idea that Kodály's life and work were straightforward and stable is a myth of music historiography. The concise and focused presentation of biographical and world-historical contexts in the first chapter forms a good basis for the following chapters, which rather focus on the compositional oeuvre. Dalos sensibly begins her study with the most important compositional influence on the young Kodály, hitherto rather underestimated: the reception of Brahms's compositions mediated by his teacher Hans Koessler. Drawing on a wide variety of sources, she examines Kodály's reception of the contemporary Brahms literature on the basis of his annotations in the texts; she studies Kodály's analyses of Brahms's works; and she relates these insights to a composition by Kodály from the relevant creative period, namely the Sonatina in D major (1903). Kodály's interest in Brahms centred on formal proportions and, above all, on variation techniques (which he also studied in Beethoven's works), variation understood as a classical change of melody and harmony as well as in the sense of Schoenberg's developing variation. Both principles can also be traced in Kodály's later works.

The study of Kodály's early engagement with Hungarian folk music also begins with his reception of the literature on the subject available to him. It shows that Kodály not only came to a new conception of the scholarly study of folk music, but that this reception also influenced his compositional use of Hungarian elements, which he sought to integrate into his work primarily through variation and rondo forms. Here, too, Brahms's work served as a model, especially the Rondo of the Piano Quartet in G minor. Dalos demonstrates this through a comparison of rondos from Kodály's different creative periods. According to her, Kodály's individual approach to the integration of Hungarian folk music, which goes beyond Brahms's model, is to be found not only in the development of new scholarly rules for its study, but also in his effort to combine the idea of a national music with the achievements of Western art music.

On the basis of the First String Quartet op. 2, Dalos shows how Kodály developed his own strategies of variation technique with reference to Brahms and Debussy, finding "the voice of his deepest inner self" and also drawing on variation techniques of his models – including Beethoven – in later works such as the *Peacock Variations* (1939). In her interpretation, with this quartet and the juxtaposition of genuine Hungarian music in the first three movements and a Hungarian popular song in the last movement as "delusion and fallacy," Kodály should stand in a tradition of string quartets with a clearly programmatic content (like Bedřich Smetana's or Alban Berg's). This claim, however, could in my opinion be more extensively underpinned with arguments.

In a detailed chapter about Kodály's *Peacock Variations*, Dalos discusses not only the variation techniques but also the connection of the composition to a poem by Endre Ady, whose work became a symbol of resistance in the 1930s and who became a poet of great importance to Kodály as well as to Bartók. In doing so, Dalos shows that the reference to the poem is not only a symbolic representation of "freedom and Hungarian revival" but also defines the formal structure and thus succeeds in contrasting the previous numerous interpretations of the form of the variations with a new, more convincing solution. Kodály thereby develops the entire composition through developing variation from a fundamental feature of the theme, following a Schoenbergian ideal of organic composition. With regard to Kodály's development of modern harmony, however, Schoenberg is irrelevant as a model. Kodály's break with functional harmony was not (only) caused, as one might expect, by his engagement with the scales of Hungarian folk music, but by his compositional preoccupation with the music of Debussy, as shown in detail by Dalos on the basis of Kodály's texts and sketches – above all on the analysis of his *Méditation sur un motif de Claude Debussy*. As a result, "[t]he whole-tone scale became one of the musical devices for breaking away from functional thinking." One would like to know more about the assumption that the appearance of the whole-tone scale is always connected with a certain domain of meaning in Kodály's oeuvre (p. 61).

More space is given to studies of Kodály's renewed interest in musical traditions after World War I and his relationship to neoclassicism. In addition to the reference to musical traditions, Dalos emphasizes the importance of a general international cultural transfer for Kodály's oeuvre. Despite the title "Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man," borrowed from Thomas Mann, she convincingly demonstrates the extent to which two of Kodály's major works, the Singspiel *Háry János* and the *Psalmus Hungaricus*, are thoroughly political works not only in their plots and texts but also in their musical conception, even though she again emphasizes autobiographical backgrounds with respect to the latter work. The political significance of the compositions can also be seen in the numerous reworkings and versions of the Singspiel in the course of its reception history, as well as in the politically motivated selection of the melodies used.

In general, it is admirable how Dalos summarizes the state of research on each subject in an entertaining way and takes it as a starting point for her own reflections. For example, Dalos contextualizes Kodaly's turn to counterpoint and to models of Renaissance music with the renewal movement in Catholic Church music initiated by Pius X's demand of the motu proprio *Tra le sollecitudini* (1903). This apostolic exhortation initiated a movement of renewal in Catholic Church music, which, in short, called for a closeness of liturgical music to Gregorian chant. The ideals formulated there also shaped Kodály's early reception as a Church and choral composer, especially the assertion of a connection to Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina and Orlando di Lasso. In addition, Dalos provides an excellent overview of Kodály's Catholic,

Protestant, and religious folklore compositions, with one exception all intended as "concealed political messages rather than liturgical readings" (p. 135). Focusing on *Csendes mise* (the organ version of his *Missa brevis*), Dalos emphasizes that Kodály's impulse to compose Church music did not stem from the new Church music movement, but from his own dissatisfaction with contemporary Church music practice, especially with regard to compositional deficiencies such as the lack of thematic-stylistic unity and cohesion of key. Contrary to common music-historical assumptions, Dalos sees no connection between Palestrina's contrapuntal technique and Kodály's Catholic Church music, but rather holds Bach as a point of reference.

A meticulous analysis of various contrapuntal studies and works by Kodály allows Dalos to take a far more nuanced view than the frequently found assumption that with his contrapuntal compositions Kodály merely followed the Palestrinian style as described by Knud Jeppesen. This insight is supported by Kodály's notes and exercises located in a voluminous folder labeled "Kontrapunkt" in the Kodály Archives. Analyses of the motet *Pange Lingua* (which Dalos calls "the most evocative of the Palestrina style of any of Kodály's choral works," p. 155), the hymn *Ének Szent István királyhoz*, the two-part *Bicinia Hungarica*, and other two-part pieces reveal differences from and similarities with the Palestrinian style: on the one hand, the songlike character of the contrapuntal choruses, on the other the usage of rhythmic formula, of prepared and passing dissonances and of the theme as a cantus firmus. Kodály believed that thinking in two voices was helpful in breaking out of modern four-part harmony. According to Dalos, the characteristics of Baroque music found in his two-part works – richness of rhythm, chromaticism, tonal melodicism – prevent these compositions from being too close to the Palestrinian style, while the use of melodies from folk music or their imitation, especially through their modal structure, rather suggest a closeness to the Palestrinian style. On the basis of their use in *Bicinia Hungarica*, Dalos impressively shows how Kodály arrived at the expression of a specifically Hungarian counterpoint with the aim not so much of revitalizing Renaissance music but of finding solutions to compositional problems. Approaching the end of the book, Dalos artfully links Kodály's opus summum, the *Concerto*, to Heinrich Wölfflin's concept of the Baroque. In his writings from the time of the *Concerto*'s composition, the composer refers to a duality of "Latin and German creative spirits" possibly adopted from Wölfflin's writings. Dalos claims that the fact that this also includes an emphasis on national differences and a rejection of "German" characteristics also has to do with the political circumstances of the time, specifically Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939. However, while the opposites of musical styles are emphasized in the writings, Kodály finds a synthesis in the *Concerto*: "The [Hungarian] pentatonic and [German] diatonic principles that dominate the fast sections of the Concerto match Kodály's concepts of the Hungarian and European characters: Kodály, surprisingly, here identifies Europe with Germany. Yet to his mind the two principles synthesize into the whole musical universe" (p. 180).

In the last chapter, the author devotes herself to Kodály's late works, which can be classified into four thematic groups: a musical reflection on the politics of the day, compositions for and about children, transcriptions of his own and other composers' works, and compositions on personal subjects, the latter including the symphony written in 1961. She is not deterred from a close examination of the work by the symphony's problematic contemporary reception and sees its characteristic in the dichotomy of C-major tonality and extreme chromatic modulations – the tonal C major functioning (as in other works by Kodály) as "the one reliable, clear event in the sound-world of the modern, 'chromatic' era" (p. 191).

Since "[t]he late works … are increasingly permeated by self-reflection" (p. 184), Dalos follows Breuer's view of the symphony as a fictitious autobiography with her interpretation of the piece as a kind of "Bildungsroman, in which familiar Kodályian idioms … transmit his self-interpretation as a composer" (p. 194). It is left to the readers whether they are inclined to follow the interpretation of the C-major scale as a marker of the "main protagonist, grown aged or old-fashioned, as a composer who insists firmly on the old, tonality-based order" (p. 194).

It is one of the great merits of the study to summarize and critically illuminate the findings of the previous Hungarian-language secondary literature. At the same time, it makes the desiderata in the availability of the sources for the non-Hungarian-speaking research community painfully apparent: there is a lack of a (digital) critical complete edition of the writings and especially of the multilingual correspondence, which would serve as a basis for translations into at least one of the world languages.

If one wanted to find a fly in the ointment of the study's outstanding overall impression, it would perhaps be desirable for a second edition to indicate the year of origin for some of Kodály's quotations, so that readers would not have to carry out challenging research (e.g., pp. 8, 11, 32). In addition, a reliable catalogue of works, including unfinished compositions, would be just as helpful as a larger number of musical examples, especially of unpublished works.[1] Overall, the great merit of Dalos's extremely informative and readable book is to bring Kodály out of his shadowy existence as "Bartók's little-known, almost mysterious companion" (p. 196). Since the book not only represents an enormous scholarly gain but is also eminently suitable for pedagogical purposes, it is certain to be widely received.

[1]As an editor with relevant experience, I advise the publishers of composers not yet free of rights to understand more extensive music examples as a free advertising measure for future performances, instead of preventing them through excessive fees.