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Textures in male choir repertoire from the
romantic period to the present day

DLA thesis

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Introduction

The textures of the different materials are multifarious in the nature. We are surrounded by materials with a variety of structures, from soft-stemmed plants with a loose structure, to different types of wood with a more compact structure, to solid granite. The compact structure inherent in fossilized materials resists the storms of nature, however, materials with a looser structure are less durable and react more sensitively to extreme weather, but to a large extent they provide the conditions necessary for life. Materials found in the environment are processed by humans according to their structural properties. Stones are used to make timeless walls, wood is used to create furniture, and textiles are used to make light pillows. Let's think about what it would be like if we slept on stones and built our houses from light textiles? Materials are present in our lives in different textures and areas, and the quality of the surrounding materials also affects our way of life.

Texture is also an important shaping factor in visual arts. A sculptor's use of materials and tools determines the texture of his work, just like the material used by a painter and the quality and quantity of paint applied, not to mention the use of brushes and the effect of post-work. In gastronomy, the texture of food greatly influences the perception of flavors and the effect on their processing.

In music, the structure of the sounds created by the composers also displays different textures, which are further differentiated by the voices and the timbres played by the instruments. The texture in music can be perceived mostly by hearing, however, the structural analysis of the works further helps the understanding, processing and emotional impact of the musical processes. In sheet music, we can observe the structural difference caused by the narrow and wide range arrangement, the structure of simple and complex chords, the homophonic and polyphonic structures, the size of the sound range. The sound image caused by the totality of these technical properties defines the texture of the works well. For example, a polyphonic, wide-arranged, large-ambitus work results in a looser texture than a homophonic, narrow-arranged, small-ambitus work, but a polyphonic, narrow-arranged, small-ambitus work results in a tighter texture than a homophonic, wide-arranged, large-ambitus work.

In addition to the basic structural elements, if we examine the timbre, we get an objective picture of the texture of the composition. The sound image of the female choir results in a transparent, loose texture thanks to the high notes, the wide range of sounds of the mixed choir results in a full sound, while the male choir results in a compact texture due to the use of deep tones and a narrow range of sounds. In addition to the composer's solutions, the texture of the sound can also be clearly perceived in the singing technique of the choir. My hypothesis is that the sound formation of the tenor staff in male choirs affects the sound of the whole choir, because the use of head voice, falsetto or chest resonance results in different tones and textures.

In my thesis, I mainly pay attention to the role of male voices in music history from a textural point of view, especially emphasizing the Hungarian aspects. The *Liedertafel* movement is the starting point of my thesis, since the sound image of the men's choir started and continued to develop under the auspices of romanticism. In my research, I also consider it important to examine the question of the authenticity of a performance. My assumption is that, from a dramaturgical point of view, male voices are more authentic than mixed choir or female choirs in the representation of patriotic, nationally charged themes.

In all cases, the texture depends on the context, so it is worth examining the works by era and composer. In a later chapter, I will analyze emblematic male choir pieces by the major composers, in which I am curious to what extent the composer differs from the romantic male choir sound and to what extent he builds on traditions, as well as what effect the composer's solutions have on the texture of the works. In my research, I investigate whether different eras have an effect on the composer's style and use of the choir. My hypothesis is that the composers go back to the romantic movement in their choice of themes, but enrich their works with new compositional tools characteristic of the era.

The structure of the research

I considered it important to review the situation of male voices, which gives a broad historical picture of the role of men in the choir. In the next chapter, I deal with the circumstances of the formation of the *Liedertafel* movement and its role in performance, as it was one of the defining movements of the men's choir culture, which

dominated the structure and content of the male choir works of the era for several decades.

The basis of my research is the analyses in the following chapters, which review the male choir works of major composers from the Romantic period to the present day. In the analyses, I also cover the aspects of performing arts in several cases. I put special emphasis on the male choir works of Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, as they stand out from the choral arrangements of Hungarian composers and define the compositional direction of the later composers of the era, in addition, the two composers treat the texture of the male choir works in opposite ways, which clearly highlights the difference between compositional techniques and textures. After the mostly *a cappella* analyses, I examine the role of male choirs in operas.

In the continuation, I mainly based my work on foreign literature, which clearly shows how the sound space, voice formation, the quality of singing, and the location of the singers influence the sound of the choir. In performances, the quality of the sound is the most important, as it determines the audience's acceptance of the music. In conclusion, I will describe my experiences of the situation of the amateur male choir movement, the obstacles to its development and its possible direction.

The results of the research

A large number of composers – regardless of the era – used the tool of word painting in the male choir works, of which I singled out a few examples and illustrated them in my analysis. The study of the works clearly showed that the choice of themes of the male choir works can be well defined, and is mostly based on the *Liedertafel* movement. The compositional method and the texture of the works revealed that the proportion varies by composer and theme, but homophonic and narrow arranging methods are present in greater numbers. This finding is also due to the narrower voice range of the male choir compared to the sound of the mixed choir, and the number of voices also greatly influences the way of arranging. With Kodály, it can be observed that works with 3-4 parts have a looser structure, while 5-6 parts result in a dense texture.

Voice training is a defining element of the sound of male choirs as well, proper voice training increases the quality of the choir, but there are also many other factors

that influence the sound, for instance the sound space, the relative distance of the choir members, the line-up of the voices, and so on. During my research, based on the literature, a huge difference between falsetto and head voice vocal technique was revealed, the difference of which can also greatly affect the choir sound.

The use of male voices results in a more powerful sound in the case of the male choir inserts used in operas, as well as in most works with a national theme. In addition to patriotic themes, wine songs are still present in large numbers in male choir literature, their origins can be traced back to the themes of the *Liedertafel* movement. The sounding of the two themes by the male choirs results in a more authentic presentation than the sound of the mixed choirs or the female choirs, this is due to social stereotypes and the stronger, deeper male voices. Most of the post-romantic composers' arranging method for male choirs avoids the use of valiant chords, in most cases they stick to simpler harmonies, which results in a light texture, but the narrow arranging method makes the sound of the male choirs heavy in many cases.

Compared to all the analyzed composers, Bartók treats the male voice in a deep setting more courageously, and he mostly uses a narrow arranging method, which results in a dense, gloomy sound due to the acoustic properties of deep voices. Bartók's works stand in stark contrast to Kodály's male choir works, which is mostly due to his arranging and texture.

From my empirical investigation over several years, I have come to the conclusion that the artistic standard of men's choirs has improved, but does not yet reach the high artistic standards envisioned by Kodály. During my research, I gained insight into the operation and colorful repertoire of the male choirs. The male choir compositions offer serious professional opportunities, but both amateur and professional performers can find compositions of the high artistic standard set by Kodály. The German *Liedertafel* movement left a great impression on the male choir repertoire, which is still part of the performances of several male choirs today. One of the most important tasks of today's choirmasters is to maintain the right balance between the maintenance of the traditions of the male choir movement and works that highlight high artistic standards and national values.

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