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**Appearances of authentic Forms of Hungarian Folk Music in the  
20th Century Choral Music**

**Theses of DLA Dissertation**

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Both folk music and choral singing have been present playing a dominant role in my life since my childhood. I consider both important, as folk music is nothing more than our musical mother tongue, on which musical studies and musical knowledge can be built, and through it our national identity is strengthened. Also, choir singing has a community-building power, which is a value-creating part of the society, since it gives the choir members content and purpose for a fuller development of their personality. Collectivity, positive approach and attitude to the population are also essential for integration into society.

I have chosen the topic of my dissertation after a long deliberation, including my professional activity so far with its complexity, focusing on the preservation and transmission of the traditions of the past. Accordingly, my chosen topic is: “Appearances of authentic forms of Hungarian folk music in the vocal music of the 20th century”. Many people have researched Hungarian folk music in many ways, but the stylized vocal compositions inspired by folk music since then have not been studied in this respect.

The novel image of the dissertation is given by its focus on choral music. It has been more than a hundred years since Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók made their first works using pure, authentic forms of folk music, and since then generations of composers have continued their work: the simple music of the people was elevated to artistic heights, but retaining their ancient purity and value.

The dissertation consists of four parts. The opening chapter examines the relationship between folk music and art music. Folk music and art music have lived side by side since the Middle Ages and interacted with each other. The coexistence of the two musical layers can be seen in action in the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig van Beethoven, for example, but folk music has really only had a significant effect on art music since the time of national romance.

As with most national music cultures, Hungarian music includes three main fields: art music, folkloristic art music and folk music. As we know, art music is always an individual composition of composers, and Hungarian music, like the music of all European nations, is closely connected to the European music culture. Art music is practically of the same age as the development of musical writing. Folkloristic art music is the work of a known or unknown composer. In many cases, folkloristic art music was considered to be folk music because it occurred that the songs of a well-known composer spread word of mouth, in the same way as folk songs. Most of the melodies treated by Liszt as “folk music” also cover only the popular

melodies of the urban gentry layer, so the difference between a folk song and a folkloristic art song is significant. Folkloristic art music uses imitations of folk music without a high degree of artistic sophistication. It is very difficult to define what folk music is. Béla Bartók defines it as follows: "In a broader sense, actual folk music encompasses songs that are still sung or have been sung by people living at the same latitude, and which are elementary expressions of the musical instincts of those people. In a narrower sense, folk music is the whole of melodic creative art which, as it is organically connected to a group of people, shows a certain degree of unity in terms of emotional arrangement, albeit in different styles."<sup>1</sup> So folk music is music that is formed by the people themselves, whose authorship, place and time of origin are almost elusive. It could very simply be said that folk music and art music are in a complementary relationship, that is, they often follow different musical fault lines, but they complement each other. One of the fundamental questions of the dissertation is how folk songs find their place in the different forms of art music, and what possibilities composers have when they use folk music, and furthermore what options exist for the composers to compose art music from folk music.

In the next chapter, the dialects, dance types, instrumental music and song culture of the Hungarian folk music are discussed. This is important because based on this we can find out what the characteristics and the form of the given folk song are, and then it is possible to see if the authentic marks can be discovered in a given adaptation. The music, dance, customs, language and costumes of the individual dialect areas show differences and diversities, as customs and traditions are preserved in different ways everywhere. Adjacent ethnographic groups can be distinguished on the basis of their characteristics. Hungarian folk music is uniform in point of the basic features, but there are differences in terms of preserving traditions and in innovations, so there are typical regional styles and melody types. Around 1920, Béla Bartók temporarily defined four major dialectal areas in Hungarian folk music: "Transdanubia, Upper Hungary (north of Transdanubia and the bend of the Tisza), the Great Plain, and Transylvania - counting Bukovina to Transylvania."<sup>2</sup> Later, as more and more folk music collections became available, it was possible to separate additional dialect areas. This way, Moldavia, located east of the border of historical Hungary, was the fifth to join the four music dialects defined by Bartók. Within these five large dialect areas, other smaller dialect areas can be distinguished.

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<sup>1</sup> Collected writings of Bartók: Hungarian Folk Music. Zeneműkiadó 1966, p. 579.

<sup>2</sup> Bálint Sárosi : Our musical mother tongue. Regional and folk music. A Planétás Kiadó és a Mezőgazda Kiadó közös kiadása 2003, p. 93.



The regional division of dance culture is closely related to the historical-social innovation of the population of a region. The development of the Hungarian dance types is due to the collective effect of the demarcating and unifying factors operating during historical progress. If we want to get an idea of the regional differences of the dance dialects, we have to take into account the common nature of dance music in the regions, the composition of instruments and bands providing dance music, dance opportunities and dance customs. The names of certain regions are adapted to the names of the dialect or ethnographic group in question. The dance types of the Hungarian language area can be divided into three parts: I. Western or Danubian, II. Middle or Tisza, III. Eastern or Transylvanian dance dialect.



1. DUNA-VIDÉK 2. TISZA-VIDÉK 3. ERDÉLY

A realistic performance of dance melodies would require knowledge of dialects, which knowledge conductors often lack and sometimes also composers miss it. However, there are examples of phenomena and moments that can be discovered in the adaptations, which testify to the composer's knowledge of dialects.

In the third chapter of my dissertation I deal with the analysis of the song material of the examined choral works, as well as with the roots of the melodies of the choral works. According to Kodály, "Hungarian folk music is a hundred-tone organ, it has a voice for everything from gentle jokes to tragedy."<sup>3</sup> Centuries ago, the research and mapping of Hungarian folk music began, which provides a way to get to know and describe the similarities and differences characteristic to the territorial and ethnic groups, as well as their changes over time. The collection of folk music began at the suggestion of Béla Vikár, followed by László Lajtha, Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, but many collectors continued the work started at a high standard, and the collections covered all areas of ethnography. Bartók and Kodály also created significant elements in the classification, research, systematization and use of folk songs. They discovered the peculiarities and characteristics of Hungarian folk music. Hungarian folk songs have several systematization systems, the primary definition of which was to group and categorize the songs according to certain characteristics. Having reviewed the systematisations of Hungarian folk songs, in the dissertation I analysed folk songs according to the Bartók order. On a formal basis, Bartók categorizes folk songs into three major style groups: old style, new style and mixed style.

The final chapter of the dissertation is "Folk songs in an art musical robe, examples of Hungarian choral art". Here you can read - supported by examples - in what form folk songs appear in adaptations. Nowadays, due to the urbanization of the society, Hungarian folk songs reach people primarily through art music. Béla Bartók stated the following: "I am convinced that each of the real, so-called folk melody is in the narrower sense a true model of the highest order of artistic perfection. I consider them as masterpieces in little, as a Bach fugue or a Mozart sonata in the world of larger forms. Such a melody is a classic example of the very compact expression of a musical thought that avoids all that is superfluous."<sup>4</sup> It is very important that composers incorporate folk music into their works in a way that they capture its soul, permeate its whole being and attitude. To do this, it is important to master the tools of musical expression inherent in folk music. Many people think that since the theme itself is given, it is very easy to harmonize folk melodies, which is a misconception, as it requires the knowledge of the specifics of a given folk melody. Béla Bartók's opinion was: "The essential thing is to transfer the inner character of peasant music into our art music that cannot be described in words, to let the air of peasant music into it. It is not enough to simply

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<sup>3</sup> Zoltán Kodály : In Retrospect I. Zeneműkiadó Budapest, 1964. p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Bartók breviary: The significance of peasant music in the new Hungarian music. Zeneműkiadó 1980, p. 429.

incorporate peasant music motifs or imitations of such motifs into the art music: such a thing would only lead to external encryption.”<sup>5</sup> According to Béla Bartók, folk melodies can be manifested in three ways in art music: 1. The composer can add accompaniment to the original folk melody without any changes, or possibly with a slight variation, or may compose a pre- and post-play to it. <sup>6</sup> An example of this can be Bartók-Kodály: Hungarian Folk Songs, a work jointly written by Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály in 1906, in which twenty Hungarian folk songs are adapted for voice and piano. 2. Another manifestation is when the author “invents” a folk melody imitation, i.e. he uses a non-authentic melody and harmonizes it.<sup>7</sup> An example of it can be Bartók's worldwide best-known two- and three-part choral cycle, the 27 choruses written for children's and women's voices. Encountering folk lyrics was a direct source of inspiration for writing vocal music. The composer marked the selected texts, refined them in many cases, and often formed them later in the process of composing, mostly for rhythmic reasons. He either formulated the title of the final textual forms himself, referring to the folk custom or mood evoked in the play, or made the first line of the folk poem to be the title. Only a small proportion of folk poems are children's or play songs, most of them carry serious content, not just for children. 3. The third manifestation is when the air of folk music flows from the composer's work, ie it does not adapt any folk melodies or folk melody imitations, but it can be said that the author “masters” the language of folk music almost as a mother tongue.<sup>8</sup> In the works of Zoltán Kodály we can find many examples of this, such as in *Psalmus Hungaricus*, in the Hungarian Psalm. The theme of the work is the psalm melody that runs through the entire work, which resonates with its characteristic pentatonic sound world for its people for the first time. As an example, we can also mention here Béla Bartók's one-act opera entitled *The Castle of the Bluebeard*, in which the Bluebeard appears as the hero of a Hungarian folk ballad, which is emphasized by Bartók's revived interest in Hungarian folk music at that time. Music and text form a close unity in Bartók's opera. Both are based on and follow the foundations of ballad folk music. It is basically structured on the basis of the pattern of pentatonic folk songs.

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<sup>5</sup> Bartók Breviary: The significance of peasant music in the new Hungarian music. *Zeneműkiadó* 1980, pp. 441-443.

The beginning of the XX. century is a turning point in the history of music. This is when the composers start using the results of the scientific folk music researches of the beginning of the century. Authentic folklore, authentic peasant music is combined with the musical aspirations of the age. On the other hand, to have this as the real starting point, the author needs to get to know the peasant music of his country on a native level. Hungarian composers embarked on collecting journeys themselves to learn and get to know this mother tongue, and so peasant music could have the most intense influence on them. This enables the transfer of the inner character of peasant music into the art music, and then the air of folk music can flow from it.

Finally, I would like to take an example from the dissertation, in which I find it justified that the composer got to know the folklore environment of the given folk melody.

In the old times, Karikázó was a characteristic dance performed by young women; it was a female circle dance that girls could only join when they had reached adolescence. Karikázó was always danced to cappella music unaccompanied by any instruments. The guiding element is the song, so it is not the alternation of steps that is important, but the songs lined up one after the other with countless lyrics. Karikázó is a uniform, controlled dance because the circular, closed chain of the girls doesn't give room for individual improvisation. Young men could only watch this from the outside. All this is perfectly shown by Ferenc Farkas in his cycle *Gyöngyöri-gyöngy* since he selected and adapted a Karikázó like melody in each movement. The first movement of the cycle is entitled *Karikázó-dance*. Several things reflect the fact that in this case, the author sought the original folk sounding and authenticity.

Right at the beginning of the movement, we can observe the long-held sounds of the lower part as an organ point above which the melody, the folk song itself, sounds. All this intends to reproduce the characteristics of a bagpipe folk instrument, since the specificity of bagpipe music is that the melody is accompanied by organ point-like persistent sounds.

In the upper part of the work, a monophonic structure is heard, while humming, composed in the lower part and used as a counterpoint, illustrates the contemplative young men, alluding to the authenticity that young men could only witness the circle dances. In fact, it is a picture, a visual situation formulated into sounds with great composing tools by Ferenc Farkas as he composes the humming into the lower part. It sounds as if the boys were whispering among themselves, and each boy was talking about a girl of his choice. We can feel ourselves in a rural environment, which the author displays in sounds in a way that we can visually see the situation in front of us.



# Gyöngyöri-gyöngy

## 1. Karikázó tánc

Farkas Ferenc

### Tánc lépés (Moderato ritmico)

*p*  
A szen-na - i li-pi-sen, la-po-son, le - e - sett a sza-la-gos ka-la-pom,  
*sfp* *sfp* *sfp*  
vm vm vm

7  
ar-ra kér-lek Bö-zsi-kém an-gya-lom, ga-lamb-om, ve-gyed fel a sza-la-gos ka-la-pom,  
*sfp* *sfp*  
vm vm

13 *mf*  
ar-ra kér-lek Bö-zsi-kém, an-gya-lom, ga-lamb-om, ve-gyed fel a sza-la-gos ka-la-pom.  
*sfp* *sfp*  
vm vm

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