

Pécs University, Faculty of Arts, Doctoral School

Thesis of the DLA Dissertation

entitled

**Interpretation elements of György Kósa's
series of Chinese songs in an art psychology
approach**

by

KRISZTINA SINKA

2023, Pécs

I. Antecedents of the Research

Several factors played an important role in choosing the topic of my dissertation. First of all, I would like to mention that György Kósa, whom I met during my career as a performer, not only does not get enough repute and recognition in the concert halls, but even after studying the specialized literature, only one summarized volume represents his praise. In that volume, too, only one chapter gives a broad overview of the art of song that permeates the whole of Kósa's oeuvre. The processing of the so-called *Chinese songs* as a central theme is justified from several points of view. The published summary volume also marks it as the pinnacle of his song-writing, but at the same time it does not give a deeper insight into the world of songs: it only analyses 3 songs out of 12 and examines them only from a music theory and harmonic point of view. The 9 songs of the second series are only mentioned.¹

Writing this thesis is also part of my professional renewal. The world of the stage has completely new and higher expectations for the performance career, even compared to 10 years ago. Thus, by combining the two latter factors, I developed the aspects of the analyses and at the same time of the writing of the thesis: I analyse the entire song material from the point of view of the currently highest-level performer's concept (art psychology). Among the three pillars of the method, I only dealt with the part of musical knowledge during my research and analysis since its description - as a singer - can be fundamentally scientifically unprejudiced and objective at the same time. My most personal motivation regarding the choice of topic is not only the fact that in my previous career I have already been able to perform songs by György Kósa and the first series of *Chinese songs* that suit my vocal abilities in their entirety, but also that I can absolutely identify with the author's artistic concept. For György Kósa, the sung text fulfils a missional role and conveys confessional content to the listener. In his role as a creator, he considers value presentation and value transmission to be the most important. His text choices are based on his deep knowledge of Hungarian and world literature. Each of the songs is a separate microworld, which is connected to the given state of existence, time, and emotional tone of the individual, and the literary and musical toolbox can be accurately mapped in its representation. In his compositions, the outstanding function of the singing voice is to bring the text to life more comprehensibly and dramatically. For this, he used additional and instinctively appearing musical resources (formal, harmonic or embedded in the piano accompaniment). In my research and analysis, I set out to explore them.

¹ Szacsvai Katalain: *Dalok, dalciklusok*, in Kósa György (ed.: Berlász Melinda), Akkord Kiadó, Bp. 2003. p.45-77.

II. The method of the Research

I started my entire research by exploring the basic elements. It also included an overview of the song's genre. I also considered it important to revive the basic knowledge, because this is how György Kósa's works can be placed in their entirety in both Hungarian and universal song literature. This part of the thesis is based on a literature review.

Another pillar of the thesis deals with performing arts issues. Here I have outlined all the accepted approaches, also based on specialized literature: the excess of the concept of musical knowledge material of the art psychology approach can only be perceived in this way compared to previous perceptions.

The content of the poem set to music plays a central role in György Kósa's song-writing. The correct interpretation of Po Chü-i's poems is unavoidable, even if the composer openly stated that he himself had neither studied Chinese culture nor the art of the medieval poet.²

The literary summary of Po Chü-i's poetry can only be found in Hungarian to a very limited extent, so I also used Arthur Waley's related work from the literature available only in English."³

For the precise interpretation of the poems, additional literature research was required, as well as an overview of the Chinese Taoist and Chan Buddhist doctrines, with the help of which the symbolism of the poems on which the songs are based can be correctly interpreted and their exact meaning revealed.

The musical analysis of György Kósa's songs was done in a traditional way. The analysis proceeded according to tonal, formal, melodic, and rhythmic aspects. Along with this, the complete analysis and interpretation of the songs has already been formulated, where the content of the text and the musical means of expression associated with them appear together.

In the final part of my thesis, after the in-depth analysis of the two song series, I summarized György Kósa's musical means of expression according to the aspects of the musical knowledge of the art psychology approach: from the point of view of text treatment, musical form, melody and harmony, and vocal-piano accompaniment. The subject of my investigations remained György Kósa's focus on text and meaning, how and with what tools it appears in the *Chinese Songs* series.

² Szacsvai Katalin: *Dalok, dalciklusok*, in Kósa György (ed.: Berlász Melinda), Akkord Kiadó, Bp. 2003. p.64.

³ General works in Hungarian: Csibra Zsuzsanna: *Klasszikus kínai költészet*, Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem, Bölcsész- és Társadalomtudományi Kar, 2018, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2018.; *Po Csü-ji versei*, translated by: Weöres Sándor, Raw translation and notes written by: Csongor Barnabás, Szépirodalmi Kiadó, Budapest. 1952.; Tőkei Ferenc - Miklós Pál: *A kínai irodalom rövid története*, Gondolat Kiadó, Bp., 1960.; Works dealing with the life and poetry of Bai Juyi in English: Kwei Chen, "Po Chu-i: People's Poet," in *China Reconstructs*, Vol. 4, July/August, 1953, p.31-5. <https://www.enotes.com/topics/po-chu/critical-essays/criticism> Last download date: 01.07.2022 and Waley, Arthur: *The life and times of Po Chü-i*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1949.

III. The Results of the Research

Trends in prior knowledge

The genre of the song was not originally intended for concert halls or large audiences, but for playing house-music in front of a small audience. It is basically an intimate genre. The works of both well-known and less prestigious poets were set to music. When receiving, understanding, and thus analysing the songs, the understanding and analysis of the content and the text is primary. In the 19th century, it was typical for song evenings held at private houses that the poems on which the song was based were read out first. From the point of view of my thesis, primary Eastern themes appeared in music from the beginning of the 20th century (read: European music literature).

Since the appearance of the genre, the songs have been performed with piano accompaniment. The role of the piano was initially only subordinate. The change began with Schubert, the essence of which was that the piano became an equal partner with the singer: it played an independent part, depicted the state of mind and the atmosphere of the work in the preludes and postludes in the same way as during the work. Instead of the romantic types of accompaniment, later impressionist and then the so-called objective accompaniment, in which the authors use stylized sound symbols, became characteristic. The solution is reminiscent of the accompaniment of recitativo secco and aria songs of the Baroque era, where the goal was to convey the key idea with a simple continuo accompaniment.

The task of the performer is to convey and interpret the works for the recipient, the audience. Until the 19th century, the person of the creator and the performer was the same. The development of instrumental virtuosity and opera in the 19th century, as well as the musical events of social gatherings typical of bourgeois life, already demanded excellent performing skills, and with this, the independence of the art branch began along with organized education. It was a basic expectation of the performers that they could dazzle even an audience not familiar with music, with their preparation. During the 20th century, the persona of the composer and the performer split almost permanently.

According to one of the most general concepts of 20th-century musicology, the performance is a necessarily imperfect approach to a fixed, although unknowable, ideal embodied in the score. Sheet music is the primary, and sometimes the only, source for most performers.

László Stachó (1977-), a teacher at the Liszt Ferenc University of Music and the University of Szeged, formulated his theory of musical and performing ability from his musical, linguistic, psychological, active musical concert experiences, and other knowledge. However, his thoughts go far beyond the boundaries of psychology and art psychology, and all segments of interpretation can be fully understood from them. In his system, the three pillars of musical excellence are musical knowledge, attention, and personality.

Musical knowledge that can be learned and developed includes musical meaning. It can be divided into five basic categories: a) gestures (movement patterns born with us and learned); b) the characters (they can express emotions directly); c) tonal structure (exploring this is the task of the performer); d) temporal formal structure and e) narrative and dramatic structure. It is important to emphasize that these five categories must be present and prevail during the performance to be complete. I analysed György Kósa's series *Chinese songs* with this theory in mind.

General characteristics of the songs

Kósa's two song series are a series of miniatures. The basic explanation for this is the scope of the processed poems: apart from 3 works (*Örökké egymásra gondolunk*, *Téli éj*, *Görcsfa*), they are adaptations of typical Chinese four-line poems. Like poems, songs can also be understood as epigrams. Their themes are varied, but they are basically woven through the medieval Chinese worldview. This is how the love of nature and the great questions of life (life-death, passing away) appear through the approach of Chinese Taoism and Chan Buddhism, but we also find genre images among them. The processed Po Chü-i poems are basically impressions of personal poetic experiences, but they also carry the characteristics of Chinese poetry, so they are also universally valid. However, their understanding and acceptance are complex precisely for this reason: it is necessary to know not only the poet's life situations, but also the worldviews of the Tang era.

György Kósa's aim with the singing voice was (also) to convey the meaning and feelings of the poem set to music, quoting his own words: "I don't play music in order to assert myself, but in order to become a humble mediator of either piano or composed works."⁴

The musical resources of the songs

Text, prosody, declamation

Examining the relationship between the poem and the melody in György Kósa's two series, it can be concluded that they are not just simple musicalizations. The use of the original text is only characteristic of the songs *Örökké egymásra gondolunk* ("We think of each other forever") (I/1.), *Az elhagyott udvarhölgy* ("The Forsaken Courtesan") (II/3.), *A nevezetes fűzfa* ("The Notable Willow Tree") (II/6.) and *Az öreg színésznő* ("The Old Actress") (II/7.).

The other works of the two song series are also characterized by the free use of text, but never arbitrarily, but with a defining function in the piece. The expansions could be made using the original text material. Their task is to reinforce what must be said or to enhance the mood. Among György Kósa's text treatments, stanza formation also appears in the first series: he breaks up longer texts into stanzas that express the content well.

Form

György Kósa's two series do not cross the boundaries of classical and folk music forms in these two series. The most common form of the songs is the traditional song form (ABA), in which sometimes a varied melody is used for the reprise. In the first series, the classical folk song form (AABA_v) also appears in the first song. The form was determined not by the author's intention, but by the literary works that served as the basis of the composed song.

⁴ Kósa Anna 148, cites Szacsvai Katalin, in Kósa György (ed.: Berlécz Melinda), *Akkord Kiadó*, Bp. 2003. p.49.

Melody, vocal part

The two series of songs encompass the entire melodic world of György Kósa. Similar to Chinese music, Kósa's melodies are mostly (anahemitonic) pentatonic melodies, which he implements in a modal system - even in infradiatonic conditions, with a section. Kósa's early period is characterized by a simple, concise, and flexible melodic world, and he avoids classical musical twists. We also find large ambitus, declamatory and mosaic-like melodies. The use of tone, meter and character change helps the expression of mood and content in these two series as well.

The relationship between the singing part and the piano accompaniment

The piano part is an integral part of the works, following all the changes in the melodies. Considering György Kósa's artistic concept, the songs are an important part of the dramaturgy of the texts. We do not meet simple piano accompaniments, but as an equal partner alongside the singer, it has various functions: it paints a mood, creates an atmosphere, expresses the thoughts behind the lines or gives emphasis to what is being said. It also plays a role in the introduction and closing of the piece: the prelude prepares the mood of the given song, while the postlude rounds off the songs and strengthens the mood of the content idea.

Among the novelties of his third song-writing period from 1943, in addition to the mosaic-like and declamatory melody, was the so-called "objective accompaniment" used together with the declamatory melody in the piano accompaniment.

In addition to highlighting the content as a function of the piano part, its complementary nature should also be highlighted. In many cases, the piano and the vocals alternate and complement each other in the works, with specific roles.

IV. Novelty values of the dissertation

The fundamental novelty of my dissertation is a complete and comprehensive in-depth analysis of György Kósa's series of *Chinese songs*.

All the works of the two series is based on a detailed analysis. The previous and only summary work⁵ contains only the main features and a detailed analysis of only 3 songs (*Elválás*

⁵ Szacsvai Katalain: *Dalok, dalciklusok*, in Kósa György (ed.: Berlász Melinda), Akkord Kiadó, Bp. 2003. p.45-77.

a déli öbölnél, Téli éj és a Görccsfá) (“*Separation at the South Bay*”, “*Winter Night*” and “*Gore Tree*”), but my dissertation analyses a total of 15 works from both series.

On the one hand, the analyses are processed based on the same analogy (origin history, analysis, then the comparison of content and musical elements), and on the other hand, with the help of aspects of the musical knowledge material of art psychology (as the main organizing principle), it contains a more detailed comprehensive analysis, which is also proven by sheet music excerpts.

Due to the need to strive for completeness, the dissertation clarifies the previous and only specialized literature analysis and basically expands the literature on the undeservedly neglected work of György Kósa.

V. Bibliography

Berlász Melinda (editor): Kósa György, Akkord Kiadó, Bp.2003.

Bieliczkyne Buzás Éva: Találkozásom Kósa Györggyel (1980.május 07.), Bieliczkyné Buzás Éva: Emlékezzünk Kósa György zeneszerzőre, 2020.június 15.

<https://xn--hajdtnc-lwa7t.hu/emlekezzunk-kosa-gyorgy-zeneszerzore/> Last download date: 01.07.2022.

Csibra Zsuzsanna: Klasszikus kínai költészet, Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem, Bölcsészeti és Társadalomtudományi Kar, 2018, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2018.

https://mersz.hu/dokumentum/m382kkk_4/ Last download date: 01.07.2022.

Dobák Pál: A romantikus zene története. Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest,1999.

Heinrich Strobel: Paul Hindemith.,Mainz, B. Schott's Söhne, 1948.

Kwei Chen, "Po Chu-i: People's Poet," in *China Reconstructs*, Vol. 4, July/August, 1953, p. 31-5.

<https://www.enotes.com/topics/po-chu/critical-essays/criticism> Last download date: 01.07.2022.

Po Csü-ji versei, fordította: Weöres Sándor, Raw translation and notes written by: Csongor Barnabás, Szépirodalmi Kiadó, Budapest. 1952.

Romsics Ignác (2001): *Magyarország története a XX..században*, Bp. Osiris

Stachó László: A zenei képesség és az előadóművészi kiválóság. Parlando, https://www.parlando.hu/2014/2014-1/2014-1-02-Stacho2.htm#_edn2

Szekeres József (szerk.): Az ismeretlen Sztanyiszlavszkij, Színháztudományi Intézet Budapest,1960.

Tőkei Ferenc - Miklós Pál: A kínai irodalom rövid története, Gondolat Kiadó,Bp., 1960.

Waley, Arthur: The life and times of Po Chü-i, New York: Macmillan Company, 1949.