

About the „Kodály-question”

The „Kodály-question“, and the „Bartók-question“; both are matters of a musical mother tongue. We cannot look separately at this connection, because a culture can never be considered as completed, void of new possibilities, even when one approaches the subject with the perhaps justified bias of self-defense aspects of different interest fields and orientations.

It is easy to understand the essence of this matter, and this is not only the result of the backward perspective of „the fifties“. Although the strings are entangled, an unbiased thus honest answer is required for the following three questions in order to see clearly:

1. Which were those musical, educational, and cultural political aspects, which contributed to the loss of weight (and importance) of Kodály’s acts, and of the subject of the Hungarian musical language, so that they have become a “Kodály-question”?

2. How far has a not-Kodály, a not-Bartók system – or let us call it a system á la Stockhausen or Cage – a right to live in the approach of music and music practice, and which consequences can we expect, as well as all those cultures, which are based on firm communal traditions (opposed to the culture of North-America)? This is interesting in the Eastern-European music cultures too, since their spectacular spiritual identity has been created only 50-80 years earlier, a lapse of time which is in fact negligible.

3. Kodály’s behaviour, objective, role, and influence within the cultural politics of the “fifties” and the consequences.

The first question must comprise such a broad range, since we have to differentiate between the activity, research, and creative freedom of a composer – and the rather timeless, slower - because more existential - perspective of a people. But these last characteristics are exactly those that keep the essence of a culture; they keep it living and stimulating, they keep it as something special, unique, and complete. The same applies to the musical mother tongue, even if unexpected, and again will apply further on. Therefore, it is not good and not acceptable to replace the aspects of the musical mother tongue by the aspects of the so-called art music, which aims at originality and success, moreover, it must not be placed in a subordinate position. And if this trend á la Kodály and Bartók is not fashionable now – this happens in the scope of arts – it will become and stay certainly “fashionable” in a broader time, and will radiate its effect due to its solid basis, contributions, and special values. Because the biggest novelty seems to reside in what it will express; the emptiness rationalizing the denatured beauty will not sound in it, but man, and everything which leads in man to completion, will be voiced. The composer may deviate from it, but it is his matter and doesn’t depend upon the above question.

The second question is actually the most important, in the depth of which hides a justified suspicion; whether the two randomly mentioned concepts are capable of offering a minimum as complete and established musical basic education as Kodály does, which has been crystallized out during thousands of years, and which follows nature’s principles,

moreover, is based on a musical mother tongue. Not to talk about the redeeming gesture of the requirement “music for all”. We can catch here an unfortunately decisive phenomenon: the high tension between the continuity and the schematic answers of the highly industrialized schematized world.

The answer is for us not at all indifferent, and that is the reason why the Kodály-question is really a question. To the third question - only that much that I mean Kodály’s altruism is undisputed, and I don’t believe that we will find manipulation on *his* desk (as János Breuer suggested it in his article in the 1979 April issue of the magazine “Kritika”).

György Szabados (1979)

Translation by Marianne Tharan (January 2017)