

## Who has seen a Comet locked in a box?

(An essay written in 2001 by György Szabados)

It would be a unique enterprise in film history if someone would make a film about the friendship between Bartók and Kodály, being both generally known and highly appreciated figures of the universal culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The reason is not only because this friendship was a beautiful and virile bond of two great spirits, whose history constitutes a huge subject and challenge. And also, not because this friendship termed as legendary, has not been treated in the music history nor in the intellectual history, but not even in literature. The subject has remained so far taboo in the best sense, and therefore the intention itself is already peculiar.

The difficulty of a screen adaptation and at the same time its inherent enormous chance is provided by the subject's manifold and very rich, actually exemplary content of meaning, and its high suspense range. Since these two decisive men were not success-oriented, either in their nature, or in their ideals, and also not in their efforts, their spirituality and demeanor, their oeuvre and fate, were not at all "contemporary". They epitomized rather the Noble Man in cosmic sense, in a time when spirituality and values seemed to go astray.

Therefore, it is now high time to engage in and to realize deservingly the screen adaptation of the friendship between Bartók and Kodály. The artistic objective and true actuality of the choice of subject and of the undertaking, consist in the eternally valid, universal, and deeply human exemplary pattern – besides the promising success of the film. As a creative afterlife of this friendship and due to the unique power of the visual effect, this film could be a counterpart to the Gandhi film in intellectual and cultic sense, though of course, not in a social context.

### *Epoch and man*

The standard inherent in the subject and the requirement for artistic authenticity are extremely high. This height is set by the basically similarly oriented, however essentially different yet complementary stature, view, and character of the two men.

Further, it refers to the more and more suffocating atmosphere of a particular epoch of a thousand-year old culture and great civilization, which carries and creates heavy world problems – molding this friendship's dramatic environment. It is the milieu of a maximized energy field, between the poles of which two ingenious creative and visionary spirits are forced to show and to take effect by making use of their personality and their sensible artistic tools, and weaving into their art all problems pertaining to life. It is the world of Europe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which becomes more and more narrow and hopeless for the spirit. The closed order of the *arche* – however always open within its sacrality – started to

collapse in the Age of Enlightenment for a long period, or maybe forever. The rapprochement and mutual opening of cultures had accelerated at the turn of the century, a time lapse leading straight to the First World War. Mutual influences started to take effect, provoking with this horizontal movement a cultural and spiritual dilution, running into the paradise of possession, the pleasures' assumption of power – the latent preparation and anticipation of today's globalization. An ambivalent, swirling environment, its unbridled inner force caused this opening up with its unchanged will for conquering; a space where masses are permanently marching. Its unbridled consequence is the more and more unrestrained reality of the self-interested power escaping from the order of the *arche*. A universal uncertainty and the total cornering of the spiritual man, of the maintaining man, and with him of the spirit representing a nobler human quality.

In order to characterize this film project – and not only to give an epitheton ornans – let me quote a perfect comment of the taciturn but always meaningfully speaking Kodály. He was almost 70 years old in the fifties when he was invited to participate at a closed session of the leaders of the Hungarian Labour Party dealing with the subject of Bartók. After everyone had dragged him through the dirt, Kodály was asked for his opinion and he replied shortly: *Who has seen a comet locked in a box?*

Yes. Bartók's and Kodály's era was the world of the civilization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world of Bolshevization and Fascistization; the place where the spirit was locked in a box. It was an arrogant, self-degrading world; a world claiming to be godless, a perfidious world without a yardstick. Neither Europe, nor America represented a counterpole to this; moreover, they were the source of this world. It was the world of the soul's homelessness, from which Bartók, the more defenceless, died sooner. Kodály was able to tolerate it; he was better equipped against it. The great contemporary poet, Attila József expressed the same: *"I died of life – I'm not the only one."* (transl.: Ozsváth, Zsuzsanna; Turner, Frederick)

The space, which opened up, meant here only America, Africa, and Asia. The islands and air space, important for military purposes. The seas rich in treasures. The conquerer hopes his salvation will come from the space. Exceptions are those peoples, cultures, and spirits who go on keeping a watch on totality and maintaining their cults nolens-volens. Like the Hungarian people. Its language is steadier, sturdier, its way of thinking is spacious but careful and elementary, its taste is grandiose, and its art is symbolic. One only has to believe him, to believe in him. And it must be understood.

### *Man and epoch*

Kodály was born in a pretentious family of public officials (1882, Kecskemét. His father was station master in Galánta, and later in Nagyszombat). He had rather a philosophic disposition and he cultivated it. Following his grammar school and linguistic studies he acquired, in 1906, a doctorate degree in philology during his years of study at the music academy. During these years, which shaped his spirit and character, he met Bartók who came from the countryside to Budapest as well: in him Kodály recognized a kindred spirit and the great talent.

Bartók (1881, Nagyszentmiklós) has rather an instinctive predisposition. He is a man living through everything, extraordinarily sensible, spending his childhood in permanent illness and reaching his initiation through suffering. His way of thinking is at the same time analytic and systematic; he is searching in everything for factual security, and coherence, and harmony in the deepness of everything. And he finds them of course. He was brought up by his mother without paternal support (his father, a head-master of excellent capacities died early). The devoted mother with a musical passion was fully aware of her son's value and of the nature of this value.

Bartók spent in his youth in the pretentious musical environment of the small-town's intellectual life as it evolved under Vienna's influence by the turn of the century. Ferenc Erkel's son was his piano teacher in Pozsony (today Bratislava), and forbade him to follow his then already bubbling inclination to improvise.

But it was Kodály who directed him towards the music of Hungarian spirit and style, whose research had become the biggest passion of his life, as he admitted later.

Although they are each other's opposite in stature, shape, and other appearances, similarities abound in their character and views.

Extraordinary qualities in both of them brought them together, moreover, hurled them immediately into a friendly closeness. These qualities are the creative musical disposition, which manifested itself early (in Bartók even earlier) proving to be of a highly demanding attitude even in its content; the meditative mindset and analysing-thinking, being basic requirements for undisputable statements; their not-bohemian but scientific nature, mature insight, and the consequent persistence in their thought; nature's love and admiration; belief and conviction in a fundamental and eternal morality, and their endless diligence. And something more; the tradition still living in the environment of their youth.

Bartók was faster in his movements, more passionate and impulsive. Kodály was more disciplined like someone who consequently represents something even with his person. When looking back at their life and remembering their oeuvre, Bartók's inclination and force for adventures and changes are obvious, as well as his work to reshape and re-articulate everything in accordance with the faithful natural setting of traditions. This is markedly present in him. Renewing and renewal. In the extremely open minded Kodály we notice an almost tangible faithfulness to the orientating height of the divine intellect and perspective, to the maintaining, invisible, and eternal spiritual foundation. To the enlivening entity, to the Harmony. Kodály is pointedly a Christian man in his entire personality. His gaze point is the zenith of the middle ages, and being an artist, he observes and shows things through its transparency. This attitude is the main characteristic of his manifold working activities and rich musical world. Bartók, in contrast, is nearer to the pagan sacrality immanent in Christianity, and he has learned early that while the world is turning on a diamond axle, the accomplice of the evil on Earth is only man.

The way of thinking of both is as a closed system, because this is what the tested spiritual tradition and the admired nature suggested to them. This gave the certitude of their orientation and judgment and provided their moral steadfastness. And this is a great lesson.

But for the purpose that this enfolding friendship develops to an eternal – as it will turn out later – and exemplary beautiful and great friendship, and becomes due to their activities one of the pillars of the universal human culture's continuity – as it turned out that it became – the initiating hand of the big common work was needed, a work which they have engaged themselves for. This work is namely the admiration, stock-taking, and processing of the folk music tradition, and to make it to common good. The root of their friendship was the similarity of their mindset, but the seal of eternity was impressed on it by the commonly carried fate.

This fatefulness followed partly from the historical situation. The narrow field of their life, their struggling activities, and their mutually helping friendship was shaped by the end of the Hungarian monarchy, which at the turn of the century, defeated by international power – although the country had not yet recovered from the lost freedom fight of 1849-50 – and by the new, artificially-created Eastern Europe, full of irresolvable contradictions, and which had already turned its attention beyond Europe. This determination by Eastern Europe and this perspective follow them during their whole life. They don't complain. They accept that entwined within them is their burning belief in life, their willingness to serve, and an immanent feeling of being threatened. (This experience of being threatened will be dominant worldwide after Hiroshima, well characterizing this process on a big scale. Eastern Europe is not only the cradle of modern physics and mathematics, but also of the universal experience of being threatened.)

Further to their artistic and spiritual relationship, their friendship from their youth grew to a tacit soul-bond following Hungary's historic fate ending in a war, and the senseless dismembering of the country in front of their eyes. The honourable, tragic, general feeling following the First World War, and the deep worry because of the cruelty and cheap intentions of the act. The shock and the awakening. This should be the decisive atmosphere of the film, as a projection of the state of their soul. The First World War and what followed after made it evident to both that Europe was no more the place of the spirit's light. That King Lear's tragedy started to take place here. The parts, the children of a ghost with guilty feelings, jumped down each other's throats, and there was no transcendent power to hold back the increased tendencies with destructive intentions. Big spirits had the presentiment of that; that one had to be prepared for maintenance, saving, and defense; that this is the biggest and most obvious order of life of this epoch under a more and more spectacular and modern horizon; that the dangerous emergence of that tries every culture and burns in every human. This is the reason why the dissonance in Bartók's music and Kodály's supplication will be so credible, screaming to heaven. Epoch collides with man, man collides with epoch. Only God and the stars remain beautiful, as in the folk tales.

A decisive step which they took together was the role they played in the Hungarian Communist Republic (in 1919, March-August). Their participation was politically insignificant, but it greatly affected their life, and the Hungarian music life's further development in a certain sense. It is a story so characteristic for the era. The shameful World War produced in its last phase the Communist Republic, a regime in power during a few months, which wanted to make blank slate in almost every area of life. The old monarchic elite with a spirituality under a strong German influence was cleaned away, the people were intimidated by terroristic means, the poor were used or abused as the driving

force for the interest of a new and foreign power system representing an extremely radical ideology, which had nothing to do with the people, with its culture, with the natural way of thinking, with high spirituality, or even with the basic morality. Its only tool was total power in its material form. And its only usefulness was this great internal transformation. This power, serving again foreign aims, succeeded in churning up the social environment almost completely in Hungary, and put down the former political and spiritual elite, who for a long time were already unable to lead the country.

The Soviet style councils – this small-minded spirit of narrowness set free from the magic lamp - catapulted into power and directed even cultural life through so called “directorates”. Kodály and Bartók – already around 40 years old – recognized the historic moment and became members of the music directorate. This carefully considered step seemed at first glance as being a careerist move and had two consequences. On the one hand, they entered the circle of attention of the left-wing (later anti-fascistic) world movement, which later came to help them potentially in tougher and more paralyzing times. On the other hand, with this move they appeared as spiritual powers on the political scene which became more and more involved in, and dominated the cultural life. They represented and evoked the musical and cultic Hungarian tradition of universal value and beauty, so far considered as valueless and pushed down to the lowest level of society. This step, the use of the opening space and possibilities was a logical, although risky move, because it threatened their independent and dedicated spirituality. It speaks for the good instinct of rightful and sacrificing people that this step caused later disadvantages only in their material existence and rather thwarted Kodály. Their goal however, they have reached it for ever; the new music, evolving from the complete Hungarian music tradition, became dominant in the Hungarian music life, and through this the Hungarian peasantry; this layer of society maintaining this huge archaic knowledge, was lifted into the artistic, spiritual, and political public domain. Besides the grandioseness of their capturing music art, this consequence is probably the most important deed of their life, which also greatly affected the century’s perception of culture.

Meanwhile they watched out for the spiritual movements in Paris and Berlin as well as for the artistic trends, and noticed early (Kodály even earlier) their colors and anomalies. They saw the novelty, the topicality, and the modernity, but also the spirit’s pitfalls manifesting in them. They followed however with elementary curiosity, the emerging cults treated as exotic everywhere in Europe. They admired Debussy’s music and through his music, the Far-East. And especially Bartók admired the blacks’ music, the jazz, which he liked and which he considered as a belated sound world of the “*primary music ocean*”, a notion created by him. He appraised it with his perfectly functioning musical taste. He considered as essential music with equal value only that kind of jazz which represented a cultic expression. “*We don’t need jazz – he said – we have a wonderful folk music, it is not necessary that we fall into the arms of jazz.*” These standards of evaluation are characteristic for their view.

The world of their childhood emerged as a contemporary and complete answer; an experienced and warming world. They wanted to give a chance to the opening, to the essential renewal through music, through supporting this disappearing world. Opposed to cultural colonization, they believed in internal salvation. They found the only worthy answer to the huge historic, social, cultural, and other problems of life, as a solution for

these important questions in painful times, the answer to the spiritual challenges of the era in the great heritage of the past, in the peasant world and art, in its opening. They saw the answer in a timeless, analogous, and living quality, which haughty times rejected and condemned to be forgotten. The village's world close to nature suddenly became perhaps the most important and beloved field of their life. The peasant environment which still used to live – even in its decaying state – with its every movement within the sacrality and the *arche*. This gave the frame for life's daily, weekly, and timeless flow; life and death, joy and sorrow, day and night, and whatever activity in between, were embedded in this original source, in a sensible and graded inner differentiation. This simple functionality meant at the same time pure aesthetic, and this was essentially the pompous and symbolic visualization of the sacrality. Even in its profanity it remains the holy cult of the Secret Great Totality and of the Cause, which manifests itself in the causality, in Nature's Order. The cosmic homeliness of this world – in spite of all its historic and social misery – was almost paradisiacal, a stream whose shores led from the endless to the endless.

They collected not only the songs of the peasants (dividing between themselves the Hungarian language areas), but they absorbed their way of thinking, assumed their relatedness and behavior patterns. These impregnated their person and works. They have to impregnate the atmosphere of the film too. Deep in Kodály's music, literature, and ideas about education, these archaic processes of consciousness and harmless pure soul are present, as maintained by the peasant world, with the purpose to hand it over from child to child, from era to era. This is evoked in our soul; this is his music's spiritual ethos. Bartók and his music differ only in its dramatic attitude but not in its spirit. Scarcity and asceticism are considered by him too as nature's laws, similar to his life-moving rhythmic, and often with the nostalgia to evoke the ideas. All his life he craved for the world of the villages, near the nature, to the peasants' environment; there he felt happy, only there he felt at home. He referred to them as "*my dear peasants*". The Dutch music researcher, Denijs Dille, who later visited all the places frequented by Bartók, is an authentic witness of the secret desire and admiration of Bartók, when he met a beautiful and virtuous peasant girl with pure eyes – as he was told. What a secret escape from the world!

Bartók' and Kodály's answer was more complete, with more truth and more moral, of a higher order. Not churning up, not selfish, but restoring. "*There is and there will be no evolution in music, only change*" – said Bartók in 1933. This seems to be an anachronistic statement even today, whereas it is a wisdom about the true nature of things. A basic rule of a value order; a better base, a more comprehensive reality are not known by the human spirit and experience so far. The inherent universal morality is always the same, not because the world is decaying, but because man often becomes unworthy. This is the inner danger for cultures and civilizations.

### *Destiny*

The friendship between Bartók and Kodály roots in spirituality but it is sealed by their engagement in a common destiny. This seal, which seems to be from outside a beautiful twin-relationship full of struggle, when looked upon from inside, is a functionally

experienced geniality in the sense of service, a very conscious and disciplined experience of geniality.

The deepness of this friendship can hardly be followed in the private sphere. Neither of them allowed a glance into it. Bartók treated even his composer methods as a private secret. Otherwise, both lived modestly, in conditions allowing them only quiet work. They clothed with simple elegance, according to the time's fashion. They liked peasant furniture and objects. And they were often ill.

They often participated in social life but always in the service of their goals. The saloon was a favorite place of Hungary's upward-moving middle class. Erkel's passion was the game of chess; they had no other passionate pastime than music and music science, reading and watching the spiritual life. Kodály loved teaching and walking in the mountains, mostly barefooted in the forest (like in Galyatető, his favorite recreation area). Here is a typical letter, which he wrote to Bartók from the famous sanatorium in Germany in 1908.

*„Life in its form here has many things, which are necessary for my ideal life and what I am missing (sea, big nature), I endure knowing that I will have it later. The people are ugly and too many but I don't have to care about them. When I walk among them or cross over, they wander when looking at my head, after at my foot: one is in a sandal, the other has not even that. What we are doing here? We are bathing in water, air, sunshine, in between we do gymnastics, we eat a lot (here our appetite has doubled) and we drown in fruit and vegetables. When I remember sometimes that a music academy also exists – this vision disappears fast like a funny dream. When we do gymnastics, we realize that we have no idea about ourselves – and we take interest in anatomy, in muscles, etc. Shortly, maybe I was never able to forget so much about myself. And if I can hold on some more weeks, it certainly will be very useful. Not to speak about the wooden house: it is almost like sleeping outside. Main thing, I start getting information because there are lots of such places in the world, may be even better ones. Come here soon, it is the best occasion here to start with the “air bathing”, because it is an art and one has to start with it carefully. Put on your sandals, throw away your hat and take off your clothes! Let us start with a new life on this rotten earth. We have to preach at home also the idea of nakedness. It will be a great thing, just wait. And a lot more delight. Sickness will be wiped out within a short time.”*

Once a week, always at the same time, he studied the Greek language and philosophy; furthermore, he regularly visited the Lukács swimming bath.

Bartók too was an enthusiastic walker where he could satisfy his interests for botanic and insects. But he often gave concerts inland and abroad and had less time for such pastimes. He preferred travelling to teaching. Collecting folk songs, longer travels, and walks in their youth could be the most intimated, most homely places of their thoughts; places and occasions for meditation. The star-studded sky above meadows, the forests' cathedral, completed by the new experiences informing about a “world below history”. Looking back from this “existence outside”, things revealed themselves in a broader perspective. Nature's silence, the sounds emerging in the silence are for a musician the most freeing, most spacious “abode”. Nature is order and romantic – in one. Parable and energy field.

Their travels abroad were always completed by visits to museums and towns, observing local customs, local cults, the people, and its culture; especially for Bartók who gave more concerts and so had to travel more frequently. These journeys were the opportunities for wondering and comparing, for the spirit's orientation. Their correspondence provides enough evidence for it.

Physically Kodály was tougher and more trained. Bartók's physical condition (he had a pulmonary disease in his youth) could hardly follow the enterprises and the speed of his spirit. His journeys for collecting folk music and concert tours were often burdensome. But he cared less for the maintenance of his physical state and therefore needed caring. Both were obsessed with their mission, according to their predisposition.

While Kodály lived in two harmonic marriages; one in his youth, the other one in his old age, and these completely filled his private life, Bartók's emotional life was more dramatic and passionate. His love to Stefi Geyer, the very talented violinist, remained without response and was an emotional torment for a lifetime; she left decisive traces in his works, as the *Two portraits* (*Két arckép*) and the opera *The Bluebird's Castle* (*A kékszakállú herceg vára*), bear witness. Since this love added to the deep depression following an unsuccessful international composer and pianist competition (Rubinstein competition in 1905), it is evident why Kodály commented on the situation as follows; this disappointment in love pushed him to the "edge of non-existence".

Soon after their friendship was put to the test when they met Mrs. Emma Sándor, a lady with excellent general knowledge and a high level of music education. They both gave her lessons and in whose house – still as Mrs. Henrik Gruber – a kind of intellectual saloon took place, a meeting and gathering place of many young artists. They met each other in her saloon on the 18<sup>th</sup> March 1905. They admired her, this much older, not especially beautiful, but the more ravishing, empathic lady with an extremely positive spirituality – and they both courted her. Emma Sándor was aware of this and saw also the extraordinary qualities of both young men. Finally, she opted for Kodály; she divorced and they got married and they lived in an exemplary, lovingly cooperating partnership. Together with Kodály – and also according to her will – they always helped their much-appreciated friend. Notes, manuscripts, and beautiful letters prove this. Bartók shut this fiasco in himself forever. The drama taking place deep inside, never affected their life. Bartók's more expressive music might be a hint only for the few insiders; Kodály however never allowed any reference to his private sphere into his music. His letters written to his wife are as beautiful, pure, and exquisite as himself and as his particular, thankful love to Emma Sándor. Kodály had never abused his lucky "victory", he didn't even consider it as such. He loved, appreciated, and understood his friend more than that; he understood even his sometimes-fatal love-dramas. He was aware that Bartók also knew about all that and that this was the only worthy and supportable behaviour in their friendship. Bartók also married soon (1909, Márta Ziegler) and he also made efforts to propagate and to promote Kodály's music. After his own and Beethoven's music, he used to play mostly Kodály's works during his concerts. After the fall of the soviet style Republic (1919), when proceedings were initiated against Kodály and he was obstructed in his activities for a long time, Bartók stood up for him in every field, although he was equally affected. The family Bartók, soon with three members, used to live in Kodály's house for a while in the hard times after the First World War.



These events could be interpreted as a metaphor for their further fate. Kodály's esteem increased with time; Bartók's life became more and more of a struggle – in spite of his important reputation – until his early death.

A veritable great event was in the life of both of them – as well as in the history of the Hungarian music – the concert, which they held in the spring of 1923 on the occasion of the unification of Buda and Pest. Both gave the first performance of a great work. *Kodály's Psalmus Hungaricus* and Bartók's *Dance suite* (Táncszvit) were launched to conquer the world. Additionally, the influence which these two musicians exerted on the composed music of the civilized world now started now spread. These works clearly show one of the main differences between their musical and spiritual relationship: while Kodály looks deep inside his own culture in space and time, and builds upon the soul of the Christian (Hungarian) Middle Ages, Bartók is searching for deep likenesses within the human world. He collected music in Turkey and in North-Africa, he was excited by the “*primary music ocean*” and recognized again and again the timeless values of the Hungarian music. Slowly, Kodály became the apostle of choir music, one of the greatest composers of sacral music in modern times, and Bartók continued to research the foundations of the music culture, and so he confirmed his pantheistic views and joined the Transylvanian Unitarian Church as a secret heart-bonding.

Their destiny – although leading them on different paths – becomes rather the fate of men submitted to limitless powers. The National Socialist assumption of power in Germany and the lurking, threatening Bolshevik takeover of power, reinforce Kodály's community spirit prompting into a battle for survival. Bartók's nature is however less prepared to compromise. He gets into open fights, and just for the reasons of his works and just with his German partners (editors). They badly endure the more and more frightening events, mediocrity's dominating arrogance, which will be – after the Second World War in Hungary – the closed territory of Kodály and of the Hungarian spiritual life. Kodály is struggling for his people with the responsibility of a leading spirit; Bartók is fighting with the same concern against the “monster” with two heads and millions of soldiers. And as it turns out later, only one of its heads will fall in the awful war.

It is typical that unlike Kodály who never descended to the level of unworthy people, Bartók sometimes behaves himself in a provocative way. For example, in 1936 when Goebbels organized an exhibition in Düsseldorf with the title: *Degenerated music*, mentioning Stravinsky, Schönberg, Milhaud, and others but omitting him, he wrote a letter to the German ministry of Foreign Affairs protesting that his name was left out.

Kodály is more conservative, concrete, and religious. Bartók is medium and victim in one person. Bartók's life ended with the war and after it was Kodály who had to carry the totality of their mission, which he wanted to save for the future by the initiation of the children. The implementation of the system of singing lessons in schools and its high level was therefore a perfect idea, and his life's great deed.

Nothing could convince Kodály to leave his country, not even the world war provoked by German fascism, although he knew exactly the extent of the risks and danger. And he was aware of the final requirements resulting from the mission he accepted. Bartók married in 1932 his pupil, Ditta Pásztor, and in the second year of the war, in 1940, he said farewell

to Hungary during a memorable concert at the Music Academy. Trusting in his reputation, the recognition he gained in the international music life – after some orientation and information – he went to America with his family: to New York, to the Mecca of the New World, which was outside the madness of the war, and where he hoped to be able to live without fear. Due to his spiritual and phisic stature, Bartók was frightened of the cruel and narrow world, of the unnatural power and despotic logic represented by the German Fascism and the Russian Bolshevism. Frightened of this double-headed, double-faced phantom of war evoked by the materialistic way of thinking, which doesn't know either confidence or harmony. As a young man he had already experienced a horrible world war and collapse. He wrote: *I would have perished in a war even without a bomb attack.*” Even so, he had perished. He suffered leukaemia earlier – a sickness of the immune system – and it didn't improve in America. Only for short periods he was better off. And additionally, to this state of mind, he felt that he came to no-man's-land. He felt – as Antal Doráti reported later as a witness – that he lost the nest, the nourishing soil, which had inspired his works, his thinking, the essence of his life, for which he lived and worked; his spiritual and emotional home, the background of the reviving world of the peasants. This inner deprivation was probably the coup de grace which slowly extinguished his life. This might have been the reason that he was not able to write a word to Kodály for five years; as long as he stayed in America. However, he wanted to, he prepared to write but he always postponed it. He intended to write a detailed, long letter. After the ill-fated world of the *Concerto*, the *Piano Concerto III* became the long letter, which he recommended to his wife Ditta Pásztor, but which was addressed to the dear fatherland, and in it, to his friends.

Kodály survived the war together with his wife in Hungary with the help of several friends – and under the protection of Sweden – he luckily survived this “bloody vomit”, as the poet Attila József called it, the German occupation, the invasion of the Soviet-Union - and he could experience again in the smoothly polished Europe where the human spirit had landed. This barefooted walker in the forests had to experience that only one head of the monster dropped. That the conquering, destroying, egoistic spirit of the godless arrogance had survived, polished his boxes, and is invincible for the time being – due to a mysterious, common will. That none of the chronic, general evils had been solved, not in the world, and not in Hungary pushed now to the East. That the sustaining spirit, building on peace and harmony, has to settle down further on for defence against the pleasure-seeker and all-knower power usurpers. This country, humiliated in the war, has become from now on a profit-seeking socialism of the bolshevist great power, the remnant of a state during 40 years with dictatorship in the culture and in the intellectual life. Kodály is a rare example how the human spirit can remain in control and still serve higher and nobler purposes when facing impossible outside conditions. He rarely composed new works after this time. He served continuity with all his force: he interpreted and arranged the collected folk songs and maybe he did the most important thing - the initiation of the youth in a higher spirit and in a taste through tradition. He guarded the big idea, which only he was representing now; he kept the belief in and the spirit of the true reality devoid of lies. And as long as he lived, he sustained this belief in his community.

His wife's death evoked deep sadness in Kodály. (According to a legend, Mrs. Kodály, when sitting in a theatre a bit farther away from her husband, told him loudly: *“Attention Zoltán! A communist is sitting next to you”* – a clear statement of her horror towards the

new power.) Later on Kodály often went for a walk near the hospital where his beloved wife passed away in his presence. Kodály died in 1967 at the age of 81. We could say that the Creator brought him to himself since he didn't suffer from any ailment. One morning he didn't wake up. A whole nation buried his body into the earth and his spirit into his eternal memory.

In accordance with his bearing and importance, Bartók's sons brought his ashes home, over the ocean and over Europe after 1990. Both rest in Buda, in the Farkasréti cemetery.

**Notes:**

„Kodály and myself we wanted to create a synthesis of East and West. Based on our race and our geographical position, we aspire with right to this objective...” he told this to Serge Moreax in 1939, and this was a living formula and offer to the reviving Europe. A spiritual message sealed with a consequent way of life and the fidelity of a friendship. The question is if this story – those days still graspable – wouldn't be too “serious” for a film in today's godless, small-minded Europe, losing its memory, and above all, in a crumbled Hungary with smashed hopes with unfaithful and stupid “leaders”?

Translation by Marianne Tharan (November 2018)