

## CONSTRAINT AND FREEDOM. KODÁLY: CHILDREN'S DANCES AND 24 LITTLE CANONS ON THE BLACK KEYS<sup>1</sup>

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**SUMMARY.** The main goal of the article is to examine the constraints and freedom of the composer while using exclusively the notes of the pentatonic scale. For this purpose, we present Kodály's two piano cycles written on the black keys from different perspectives. In connection with the cycle *24 Little Canons on the Black Keys* the use of one-line letter notation pieces in solfege lessons will be introduced. From the other cycle, *Children's Dances*, we analyze pieces in which elements from Hungarian folk music or verbunkos can be detected.

**Keywords:** Kodály method, pentatonic scale, piano pieces, Hungarian folk music

### I. Foreword<sup>3</sup>

Kodály and Bartók's achievements marked a new epoch in Hungarian music pedagogy, a change triggered by their folksong collection in 1905–1906. They recognized authentic peasant music as a national treasure with

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<sup>3</sup> The chapters "Foreword," "Relative sol-fa and tonal experience" and "Folksong and musical value" are taken over from the author's doctoral dissertation entitled "Dobszay László: A hangok világa c. szolfézs-könyv-sorozat alkalmazása a zeneiskolákban" (Using László Dobszay's *The World of Tones Solfege Book Series in Music Schools.*) (UKF Nitra, 2008).



the capacity to become the foundation of a new, modern musical culture. That, in turn, would be created predominantly from a newly emerging *modern national art music*, on the one hand, and on the other from a new music education based on folk culture. Kodály dedicated his complete lifework to the realization of these two fundamental goals. The year 1925 marked a significant turn in his pedagogy: it came to be focused on the idea that musical culture must be made available to the broad masses.<sup>4</sup> To this effect he identified such important tasks as the introduction of daily singing classes in schools, the composition and use of reading exercises based on *relative sol-fa*, the establishment of audience education and of a wide-spread choral culture – all in all, he meant to put together a general musical reform programme to extend the results of professional music education into public education. The principles established with these objectives in mind are the basis of the *Kodály concept*.

Kodály's music pedagogy concept can be examined from diverse approaches, but *László Dobszay's* theory provides its most comprehensive and rigorous thematic classification.<sup>5</sup> He differentiates five main thematic concerns, wherein, beside the elements of musical education, Kodály's ideas on general human education are also represented. These five topics are: 1) Relative sol-fa and tonal experience, 2) Folksong and musical value, 3) Vocality and musical invention, 4) School and humanistic education, 5) Culture and personality.

What follows is a brief outline of those two topics out of the five which are tightly connected to the main argument of the present study.

### **Relative sol-fa and tonal experience**

Relative sol-fa was integrated into the *Kodály concept* comparatively late, in the 1930s, after the formation of Kodály's major pedagogical principles. It fitted the concept perfectly as an excellent tool in the realization of his ideas on musical education. Kodály saw the greatest benefit of relative sol-fa in the development of tonal hearing, musical thinking, inner hearing and just intonation. Relative sol-fa creates associations with every note during music-making. The impressions made by musical notes and relations between notes are not tied to prior theoretical theses, but rather to actual

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<sup>4</sup> As he stated: "Until about 1925 I lived the normal life of a professional musician, i.e. I didn't bother about the school, believing that everything was fine there, they were doing what they could, and the ones without musical hearing were lost to music anyway." Zoltán Kodály, *Vidéki város zeneélete*, (*Music Life of a Rural Town*). Nyíregyháza: lecture, 1937.

<sup>5</sup> László Dobszay. *A Kodály-módszer és zenei alapjai* (*The Kodály method and its musical foundations*). *Parlando* 10, no.11 (1970): 15–26.

musical experiences, thus facilitating tonal perception.<sup>6</sup> Relative sol-fa is used the most efficiently when it is tied to characteristic melodic patterns. The repetition of these patterns characteristic of any given style reinforces the development of tonal sensation.<sup>7</sup> Their internalization promotes just intonation and stylistic knowledge in a perfect alignment with pentatonic musical material. Relative sol-fa contributes to the achievement of the following three main objectives: *“Just vocal intonation, pentatony-based motivic content and the establishment of musical thinking.”*<sup>8</sup> Not even does the end of the Classical and Romantic periods limit the application of relative sol-fa. After a convincing theoretical refutation of this idea, *Dobszay* also presents actual examples of solmisation on folksongs and passages from Viennese Classicism, as well as on two short *Bartók* quotations in one of his articles.<sup>9</sup> Even though in the latter case only micro-tonalities and 6-7 note tonal sections are present, *Dobszay* proves that solmisation has its rightful place even in the interpretation of modern music.<sup>10</sup>

### Folksong and musical value

*“The folksong is Hungarian classical music par excellence<sup>11</sup>, the remnant of an ancient, general and universal Hungarian culture; thus, it is destined to become once more the basis of the whole nation’s musical culture – and its musical education in the first place”<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> *“Ultimately, solmization is a system of expression which reveals the true logic of the tonal relationships, which gives a truer picture of the relationship between pitches than does the measurement of intervals. It is no more and no less than TONALITY. It is not just an interval, but a relation.”* László Dobszay. *A szolmizáció* (Solmisation) *Parlando* 3, no.7–8 (1961): 17.

<sup>7</sup> To this end were Kodály’s reading exercises created, which offer teachers and students alike countless opportunities to practise the use of music reading and relative sol-fa, from the simplest two-note examples to exercises for two and three voices requiring serious skill.

<sup>8</sup> László Dobszay. *Kodály Zoltán zenepedagógiai eszméi és népzene kutatásunk* (Kodály’s Ideas on Music Pedagogy and Folk Music Research in Hungary) *Parlando* 24, no.2 (1968): 3–10.

<sup>9</sup> László Dobszay, “A szolmizáció.” (Solmisation) *Parlando* 3, no.7–8 (1961): 17.

<sup>10</sup> In the article, Dobszay publishes quotes from the music of the third door scene of Bartók’s *Duke Bluebeard’s Castle* and from the second movement of his *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*, illustrated with different possibilities of solmization.

<sup>11</sup> Zoltán Kodály, *A magyar népdal művészi jelentősége* (The Artistic Significance of the Hungarian Folksong.) In: *Visszatekintés* (Retrospect) *vol. I.*, ed. Ferenc Bónis (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1982), 35.

<sup>12</sup> Zoltán Kodály, *Százéves terv* (A Hundred Year Plan.) In: *Visszatekintés* (Retrospect) *vol. I.*, ed. Ferenc Bónis (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1982), 288–289. Kodály, *Magyar Népzene* (Hungarian Folk Music.) In: *Visszatekintés* (Retrospect) *vol. II.*, ed. Bónis, 135.

The two fundamental characteristics of Hungarian folksongs are their monophony and unaccompanied rendition. Their simplicity ensures their extensive usability in musical education. They are easy to perceive and understand, thus “*they can function as an excellent kind of musical alphabet.*”<sup>13</sup> Kodály did not want to stand up against art music and he propagated priority rather than exclusivity for folk music at the early stages of learning music: “*our goal must not be to push schools to the other extremity with folk material...<sup>14</sup> we must open the gates for foreign masters, regardless of their nationality.*”<sup>15</sup>

## II. Kodály’s works for the piano

Kodály was a prolific composer, but an overview of his works shows without doubt that the significance of his oeuvre is hardly based upon his works for the piano. He wrote very few works for this instrument, and they constitute only a minute segment of his creative activity both in scale and importance.

1907	Méditation sur un Motif de Debussy
1905–09	Nine Piano Pieces Op. 3. (without <i>Valsette</i> to be published independently)
1910–18	Seven Piano Pieces, op 11.
1923–27	Dances of Marosszék
1945	Children’s Dances
1945	24 Little Canons on the Black Keys

It is apparent that *Children’s Dances* and *24 Little Canons* were written after a 20-year break, and Kodály did not compose anything else for the piano after that.<sup>16</sup> His reason for turning to piano pieces for one last time was one of the fundamentals of his pedagogical concept:

<sup>13</sup> József Újfalussy. *Zeneoktatás és nemzeti hagyomány* (Music Education and National Tradition.) *Parlando* 26, no.1 (1984): 6–16.

<sup>14</sup> Zoltán Kodály. *Megjegyzések a ‘Szó-Mi’ népiskolai énektankönyv bírálóinak viszontválaszára* (Remarks on the Latest Reply from the Critics of the ‘Sol-Mi’ Music Coursebook for General Education). In: *Visszatekintés* (Retrospect) vol. I., ed. Ferenc Bónis (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1982), 152.

<sup>15</sup> Zoltán Kodály. *A magyar karének útja* (The Path of Hungarian Choral Singing). In: *Visszatekintés* (Retrospect) vol. I., ed. Ferenc Bónis (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1982), 53.

<sup>16</sup> After 1945 Kodály only wrote miniatures for the volumes of Mrs. Komjáthy’s piano method, which were all, however, arrangements of melodies from his 333 *Reading Exercises*. The piano method was published in 1966, whereas the Kodály pieces therein were only published on their own after Kodály’s death, in 1973, under the title *Twelve Little Pieces*.

*“Our public education has officially switched over to the folksong since 1941. Slowly, our instrumental music education also needs to be aligned to that. A homogeneous musical culture can only be built in a sole language. Children must be taught the simplest of Hungarian folksongs which avoid the semitones. There is a need for little pieces in letter notation which do not exceed the difficulty of folksongs in finding the rhythm and pitch and which move solely on the black keys.”<sup>17</sup>*

The interaction between the content and the device of teaching is the basis for every educational system. One of the most important fundamentals of the Kodály concept is that every child should first get acquainted with the music of their own nation and should foray into the world of European music only afterwards; that is why the musical education of a child starts with mastering children’s songs and folksongs. Thus, if we make those the subject for initial education, we cannot teach the related music theory along the so-called scalar approach, which focuses on the sequentially of notes, either.<sup>18</sup> In accordance with the folk material, a sequence has been developed, which first reaches pentatonic through expansion from a two-note tone-set.<sup>19</sup>

Kodály wanted to establish pentatonic also as the starting point for instrumental music education. This leads us straight to the piano, since pentatonic is a given on its black keys. Kodály also thought it fortunate to develop technique by starting on the black keys.<sup>20</sup> This view is debatable, to say the least, and generated serious controversy as early as in 1946. Opponents cited excessive tension in the hand and the possibility of ‘slipping off’ the black keys. Nevertheless, there are attempts in this direction even today, e.g., this trend also features in Tünde Aszalós’s three-volume piano method, *A zongorázó gyermek* (Child Playing the Piano). *“Aszalós recommends playing children’s songs for a long time only on the black keys. Her goal is to first teach the child to make the instrument sing and to establish*

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<sup>17</sup> Zoltán Kodály. *A magyar hangszeritanítás* (Instrumental Music Education in Hungary). In: *Visszatekintés* (Retrospect) vol. III., ed. Ferenc Bónis (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1989), 59-66.

<sup>18</sup> One of the arguments against scalar instruction is that intonation difficulties are usually caused by the intonation of the minor second in diatonic music, so it is worth practising the melodic turns without it at the beginning.

<sup>19</sup> Kodály also composed four volumes of his *Pentatonic Music*, serving identical pedagogical goals, at the time when these two piano volumes were published.

<sup>20</sup> *“Only those may speak of the effects of starting on the black keys on hand development who have tried it many times. I am convinced that it is far more beneficial than spending a long time on the white ones. And the mental benefits are invaluable.”* Zoltán Kodály: *24 Little Canons on the Black Keys – Foreword*, (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1961).

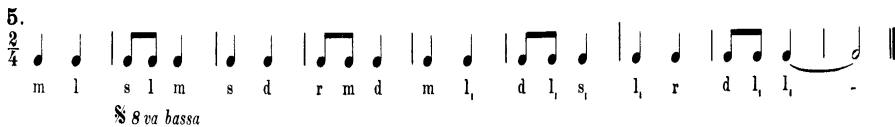
the connection between the two hands and the piano only afterwards.”<sup>21</sup> The little songs for alternate hands at the beginning of the first volume are played entirely on the black keys.

The very same considerations called into being Kodály’s two volumes written for the piano, *Children’s Dances* and *24 Little Canons*.

### III. 24 Little Canons on the Black Keys

This volume, written in June 1945, is an organic continuation of and a methodological preparation for *Children’s Dances*. It contains 24 short pieces, 16 of which are in one-line letter notation, and 8 of which are notated in canon form in pairs of five-line staves.

E.g. 1

5.  
 $\frac{2}{4}$    
 m l s l m s d r m d m l, d l, s, l, r d l, l, -  
 § 8 va bassa

Canon in letter notation<sup>22</sup>

E.g. 2



Canon in five-line notation<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Judit Csüllög, *A népdal szerepe a kezdők zongoraoktatásában Magyarországon* (The Role of the Folksong in Teaching Piano to Beginners in Hungary). Eger: Líceum Kiadó, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Source for the example: Zoltán Kodály, *24 Little Canons on the Black Keys* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1961).

<sup>23</sup> Source: Kodály, *24 Little Canons*. (my edition)

No key signature is written in the staff, but the reference in the printed music, the title and Kodály's preface all indicate that the tonality of the pieces is to be comprehended with F# for do and D# for la in mind. The volume contains 22 canons at the unison, one canon at the fifth and one mirror canon.

Although written for beginners, the *24 Little Canons* are not generally used for teaching the piano. Apart from the methodological controversies mentioned above,<sup>24</sup> one of the reasons for this is that the volume is not fit for use as a piano method.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the focus below shall be on some of the possibilities for using the pieces in letter notation in solfege lessons.

### Unison processing

Occasionally containing even challenging leaps, the pieces in the *24 Little Canons* are excellent examples for reading music. The pieces in letter notation also develop transposition skills effectively by combining the relative and absolute sol-fa systems, as well as facilitate practicing the circle of fifths.

Because of their simplicity, these pieces are well-suited for use in dictation. In the more commonly used, traditional form of dictation, after providing the clef, key and time signature and the starting note, the teacher sings or plays the whole piece for the children to notate. The other option is the so-called *framed dictation*. In this version of dictation, information is provided in the form of frames to facilitate the notation of the piece according to the skill level of the class. These can include relatively difficult rhythmic patterns or melodic motions but can also involve so much information that the child's sole remaining task is to notate the rhythm of the piece, or a single note or melodic motif here and there. It is a very good method and can be used as early as the beginning of the learning process. The higher the grade and the better the skills of a class, the less information is given about the piece in advance.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See: note 17.

<sup>25</sup> Just for comparison: in the first volume of his *Mikrokosmos*, Bartók has the children play in a pentachord's range, carefully observing the 'one note per finger' rule. The tone-set is always expanded by shifting the hand position, thus the child does not face a problem finding the correct fingering. In the *24 Little Canons*, the first piece already has a range of an eleventh, necessitating a considerable effort in fingering.

<sup>26</sup> In line one of fig. 3, the child only has to write down the rhythm of the piece. In lines two and three, the child is given less information about the piece, and has to notate both rhythm and melody. Line four shows the blackboard layout for a traditional dictation exercise.

## E.g. 3



**Framed dictation opportunities – blackboard layout**

Their brevity and good articulation make these pieces excellent examples for memorization even at the initial stage of learning solfege.

Their simple rhythm makes them suitable for singing from hand-signs. They can even be used at the beginning of a lesson for vocal warm-up.

Some folk music-inspired pieces are excellent for improvising the ends of lines.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The Hungarian folksong material provides an excellent opportunity for an early introduction of improvisation in solfege teaching. The improvisation of line-end variants can be introduced at an early stage of learning. Subsequently, by gradually improvising larger and larger musical units, the skill can be well developed. Certain skills, such as the sense of form, can only be assessed through improvisation. The pedagogical 'rules' established for dictation also apply to improvisation. Only improvising a well-known element or musical unit can be expected, after building preparation and consciousness through a sufficient number of listening experiences. Otherwise, instead of ensuring the child's musical freedom, we create an experience of failure with a task that seems insurmountable. In the first couple of grades, the principle of 'guided improvisation' should be applied. In this case, as in the case of framed dictation, the improvisation is given a framework, so that only a certain part of the music, such as rhythm, melody, or the last bar of a phrase needs to be improvised. An improvisation task is only corrected if its solution does not fit within the framework of the given style.



## Two-voice processing

The easiest way to process a piece in two or more voices is to perform it in canon. This can be done in several ways:

- The teacher sings the first part or plays it on an instrument, the children sing the second part.

- The children, divided into groups, sing in several parts.

- The children sing and then tap the rhythm of the piece in canon with themselves, all children sing and tap.

- For the most skilled classes, it is an excellent exercise (though dependent on piano skills) for the child to sing the first and play the second part of the canon. This is most useful when the work is not notated in two staves, but in only one line. In this case the child reads two bars simultaneously (e.g., sings bar 2 while playing bar 1).<sup>28</sup> The pieces included in this volume in letter notation are excellent for this type of processing.

- The most difficult way of singing in canon is when the children have no written music in front of them at all and must imitate the melody after the teacher's singing or playing. In this form, three brain activities take place simultaneously. The children intone their own musical material while observing and simultaneously memorizing the melody sung by the teacher.<sup>29</sup>

Another possibility for two-voice processing is to add a rhythmic ostinato to the melody. This method can be used from the very beginning of music learning, starting from tapping the beat. Rhythmic ostinato can be made more difficult in several ways: the length of the ostinato can be increased, the rhythms can be made more difficult, an ostinato can be composed that does not follow the lilt of the melody, or a two-part ostinato can be used. These techniques develop the sense of rhythm and meter, divided attention, and coordination.<sup>30</sup>

Canons can be turned into a chain of intervals very easily. The easiest way to do so is to transcribe the canon's voices into a two-part setting and use the harmonic intervals between the parts for dictation. Figure 4 shows the letter-notation of the intervals on crotchets.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The development of divided musical attention is one of the fundamental aims of music education. The development of this skill is essential in all forms of music-making, and its development should be a task in both instrumental and solfège lessons.

<sup>29</sup> For example, if a child is singing bar three, he or she should listen to and remember bar four, which the teacher is singing simultaneously.

<sup>30</sup> The principle of rhythm ostinato is also the basis of the 'body percussion' method, where listening to or singing the music is accompanied by rhythmic patterns using the body as an instrument.

<sup>31</sup> An interval chain exercise is traditionally notated in a five-line staff; in this case the chain of intervals was created while keeping the canon's original notation.


**E.g. 4**


m l s m s d r d m l, d s, l r d l, l,  
 m l s m s d r d m l, d s, l r d l,

**Canon turned into chain intervals in letter notation**

The quodlibet is another interesting way of two-voice processing. In the series several pieces are composed with the same tempo, character, beat and number of bars. Reviewing these, we can find several quodlibet possibilities, one of which is, for example, in pieces 5 and 6 (fig. 5).

**E.g. 5**

5. 

6. 

**Quodlibet possibilities in 24 Little Canons**

There have been but a few possibilities for using in solfège lessons the pieces written in letter-notation in *24 Little Canons*. Depending on the teacher's creativity, their range can be further extended to offer countless possibilities for developing musical skills.

**IV. Children's Dances<sup>32</sup>**

*Children's Dances*, written nearly at the same time as *24 Little Canons*, points beyond the pentatonic-based pedagogical goal discussed above. It also reflects another important aspiration of the time, namely the desire to create a 'modern', new national music by incorporating folk material into art music.

<sup>32</sup> The analysis of *Children's Dances* is based on Mihály Itzész. *Pedagógiai művekről* (About Pedagogical Works). In: *22 Zenei írás* (22 Writings on Music). (Kecskemét: Kodály Intézet, 1999).

As happens at every turn of an era, people of the modern age needed a modern way of self-expression, having completely turned away from Romanticism in terms of their sense of life. The musical world also tried to free itself from the grip of over-indulged Romanticism, and Bartók and Kodály saw the path to creating a specifically national music in integrating folk music into art music.

They saw a potential for the renewal of Hungarian music not only in the choice of themes, but also in the novelty of the treatment of folk material. Bartók distinguished three levels or methods for the integration of folk music into art music.<sup>33</sup>

1. the folk song is played in its entirety, with accompaniment, possibly with prelude and postlude
2. the composer invents folk music motifs and develops them in the work
3. there is no folk song present in the piece, yet it has folk music features<sup>34</sup>

*Children's Dances* was written in May 1945. It contains 12 purely pentatonic dances, ranging from very light little pieces to technically demanding works. The notation is without key signature or accidentals, but Kodály requests that each piece be played half a note higher or lower, so that each piece is played exclusively in the range of pentatonic notes inherent on the black keys of the piano. All five modes of pentatonic are represented in the volume, with six *la* pentatonic, three *do* pentatonic and one *re*, *mi* and *sol* pentatonic dance each.

The pieces are varied in both technical challenge and character and can be interpreted as a kind of composer's exercise in style. In the volume, we can find a piece resembling a Mari folk song, one referring to Hungarian music of the 1790s, one with the subtitle 'in the Székely manner', reminiscent of parlando rubato folk songs. All the pieces in the volume are ambitious, well composed works, proof that composing in the pentatonic tone-set is no compromise for the composer.

Below, four dances are presented which can be clearly linked to Hungarian folk or art music (verbunkos – recruiting music) material. When a style/genre is imitated (Bartók's type 2 and 3), characteristics specific to that style/genre necessarily appear in the work. If, for example, the composer

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<sup>33</sup> Source: Béla Bartók. *Mi a népzene?* (What is Folk Music?) (Budapest: lecture, 1931).

<sup>34</sup> This third type requires the most thorough grounding and the most complete knowledge of folk music. "It can be said in such cases: the composer has learned the musical language of the peasants and has mastered it as perfectly as a poet has mastered his mother tongue." Béla Bartók. *Mi a népzene?* (What is folk music?) (Budapest: lecture, 1931).

writes a melody like a certain Hungarian folksong type, he may borrow its melodic line, structure, rhythmic features, or some other definitive characteristic of the given type.

These 'borrowed' features are presented in the four children's dances to follow.

#### Children's Dance no. 4

E.g. 6



#### Children's Dance no. 4, verse 1 (1-8 m.)<sup>35</sup>

The C pentatonic piece is much more song- than dance-like. Its melodic contour and rhythm show a close relationship with the folksong type starting with *Aki szép lányt akar venni* (He who wants to marry a pretty girl).

E.g. 7

A - ki szép lányt a - kar ven - ni Har - ma - ton kell azt ke - res - ni Sze - gény le - gény

6  
Har - ma - ton járt El is vet - te a leg - szebb lányt.

#### He who wants to marry a pretty girl – Hungarian folksong<sup>36</sup>

The identical characteristics 'borrowed' from the folksong type are very striking, even by looking at the notation alone.

The biggest difference between the two melodies is that the scale of *Children's Dance no. 4* is C pentatonic, as opposed to the Dorian tone-set of the folk song.

<sup>35</sup> Source for the examples from *Children's Dances*: Zoltán Kodály. *Children's Dances* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1961). (my edition)

<sup>36</sup> Source: László Dobszay. *A magyar dal könyve* (The Book of the Hungarian Song.) (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1984), 226. (my edition)

Their melodic contour and line structure are identical, the fifth shift is real in the folk song and tonal in Kodály's piece, the difference being justified by the urge to remain in the pentatonic tone set.

Metrically, they are perfectly identical. Both melodies are bipodic, their time signatures are 3/4, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> bar in the 3<sup>rd</sup> musical line reduced to 2/4 due to rhythmic compression.<sup>37</sup> Rhythmically, the two pieces are almost perfectly identical, the only difference being that in the folksong's two-bar motives both bars contain identical patterns of two quavers followed by two crotchets, whereas in the children's dance, the two crotchets in every second bar are replaced by a minim.

We can conclude that when Kodály wrote *Children's Dance No. 4*, he adopted all the characteristic features of a Hungarian folksong type, except for its scale, which he changed. The exploration of analogies in teaching is important, because by the time of learning to play the children's dance on the piano, the child has already had a considerable auditory experience of this folksong type. Comparison helps to build dynamics, to articulate form and to have a correct concept of tempo.

*Children's Dance no. 4* has three verses. In verse one, the melody is accompanied by dyads in thirds. Verse two is a perfect canon started by the right hand; the imitation starts on the third beat of the bar. In verse three, the right hand plays the melody in a quaver repetition supported by pentatonic chords, thus, despite the imitation, the lower voice played in the original rhythm stands out. The piece concludes with a three-bar coda consisting of repetitions of the closing turn of the melody.<sup>38</sup>

### Children's Dance no.5

E.g. 8



<sup>37</sup>A typical folk music phenomenon is that the variation at the end of line three induces a melodic change at the beginning of line four. A textual expansion can often be found here in folksongs.

<sup>38</sup> See appendix 1 for verse three and the coda.



**Children's Dance no. 5, verse 1 (1-8-m.)<sup>39</sup>**

*Children's Dance no. 5* is also a song-like work composed in la pentatonic, related to the eleven-syllable folk song type, one of which is the folk song beginning with *Azt hittem, hogy nem kellek katonának* (I thought I wouldn't be conscripted into the army)].

**E.g. 9**

A musical score for a Hungarian folksong. It consists of two staves, both in treble clef. The key signature has two sharps (D major) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written on a single line. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Azt hit-tem hogy nem kel-lek ka - to-ná-nak, gond-ját vi-se-lem az é-des a-nyám-nak,  
 5 de már lá-tom ka - to - ná-nak kell men-ni, ha - tos ez-red csá-kó-ját kell vi-sel - ni.

**I thought I wouldn't be conscripted into the army – Hungarian folksong<sup>40</sup>**

The folksong is Aeolian in tonality, tempo giusto in rendition, while Kodály's work is la pentatonic and rubato.

The folksong's line structure is A B C D with a descending melodic contour, while the children's dance has A B Bvar C for line structure with an arched melodic construction.

Both pieces are bipodic (two 4/4 bars belong together) with a very distinctive rhythm. The two-bar motives start with eight even quavers in the first bar in both the folksong and Kodály's piece. The second bar consists of a quaver, a dotted crotchet, a crotchet, and a crotchet rest in the folksong, while in Kodály's piece there is a minim instead of the latter two. In the third musical line of the children's dance (measure 6 in fig. 8), the 'textual

<sup>39</sup> Source for the examples from *Children's Dances*: Zoltán Kodály. *Children's Dances* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1961). (my edition)

<sup>40</sup> Source: László Dobszay. *A magyar dal könyve* (The Book of the Hungarian Song.) (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1984), 374. (my edition)

expansion' mentioned above can be observed, with two additional 'syllables' added to the line.

Even though the two works do not have the same tonality, rendition, melodic contour or line structure, the strong association of the identical metrics and characteristic rhythm creates the sense that this work is still the closest of all to this particular group of Hungarian folksongs.

It should also be noted that in the corpus of Hungarian folksongs there is also a song type with eleven syllables but with *parlando rubato* rendition, yet this group is little known. Such a folksong is, for example, the one starting with *Ha felülök a bugaci halomra* (When I sit upon the mound in Bugac – fig. 10]. Comparing the children's dance to this folk song, the initial octave leap is identical in both works, in addition to their line structure and *parlando rubato* rendition.

**E.g. 10**

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first staff contains the first four measures of the melody, with lyrics underneath: "Ha fel-ü-lök a bu-ga-ci ha-lom-ra, On-nan né-zöm,mer-re le-gel a csor-da,". The second staff starts at measure 5 and contains the next four measures, with lyrics: "On-nan né-zöm,hogy űk me-re le-gel- nek, Abal-szá-ra meg-for-dul a cse-rény-nek." The melody is characterized by syncopation and a fermata over the final note of each line.

**When I sit upon the mound in Bugac -- Hungarian folksong<sup>41</sup>**

*Children's Dance no. 5* has three verses. The accompaniment in all three verses is based on syncopation. The right hand plays the melody in verse one. The fermata in brackets that appears in several places in the music notation is an interesting phenomenon. Kodály may have had the text of a specific folksong in mind when composing, the crowns presumably indicating an emphatic (emotionally colored) prolongation.<sup>42</sup>

In verse two, the melody moves to the lower register and the accompaniment changes slightly. The accompaniment of lines two and three of this verse is syncopated, with the addition of the melody's imitation entering with a one-bar delay.<sup>43</sup> In verse three the melody returns to the upper voice.

<sup>41</sup> Source: Lajos Vargyas. *A magyarság népzeneje* (Folk Music of the Hungarians.) (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1983). (my edition)

<sup>42</sup> Source: Mihály Iltzész. *22 zenei írás.* (22 Writings on Music.) (Kecskemét: Kodály Intézet, 1999).

<sup>43</sup> See: appendix 2 line two bar four and line two bar two.

## Children's Dance no. 6

E.g. 11

A musical score for Children's Dance no. 6, verse 1 (1-12.m.). It is written in 2/4 time and consists of two staves. The melody is a simple, repetitive pattern of eighth notes: G4-A4-B4-G4, A4-B4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4. The bass line consists of eighth notes: G3-A3-B3-G3, A3-B3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3.

Children's Dance no. 6, verse 1 (1-12.m.)<sup>44</sup>

Its rhythm and metrics are like the folk-dance song form commonly known in medieval Europe and to the Transdanubian girls' circle dance, reminiscent of the folksongs beginning with *Éva, szívem Éva* (Eve, my heart, Eve] and *Hervadj, rózsám, hervadj* (Wither, my rose, wither).

E.g. 12

A musical score for the Hungarian folksong "Wither my rose, wither". It is written in 2/4 time and consists of two staves. The melody is a simple, repetitive pattern of eighth notes: G4-A4-B4-G4, A4-B4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4. The bass line consists of eighth notes: G3-A3-B3-G3, A3-B3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3.

A musical score for the Hungarian folksong "Wither my rose, wither". It is written in 2/4 time and consists of two staves. The melody is a simple, repetitive pattern of eighth notes: G4-A4-B4-G4, A4-B4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4, B4-A4-G4-A4. The bass line consists of eighth notes: G3-A3-B3-G3, A3-B3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3, B3-A3-G3-A3.

Wither my rose, wither – Hungarian folksong<sup>45</sup>

The folk song is a Dorian and the children's dance is a la pentatonic melody, thus both are minor in tonal character. Both require tight rendition, tempo giusto for the folksong and vivace for the children's dance.

The line structure of the folksong is A B C D, that of the Kodály work is A B Bvar C, whereas their melodic contour is descending.

Metrically and rhythmically the two works are identical, their time signature is 2/4, both are six-syllable tripod bagpipe songs. Their rhythm consists of even crotchets throughout.

<sup>44</sup> Source for the examples from *Children's Dances*: Zoltán Kodály. *Children's Dances* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1961). (my edition)

<sup>45</sup> Source: Zoltán Kodály. *A magyar népzene* (Hungarian Folk Music.) (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1971), 206. (my edition)



The most important point in comparing these two melodies is the sameness of their rhythmic-metric features. However, an equally important criterion for discovering kinship may be the identity of the notes constituting the melodic skeleton of two pieces, which can ensure similarity between songs showing rhythmic differences. One would perhaps not immediately associate the children's dance with the folksong beginning with *Kis kertemben uborka* (Cucumber in my backyard], even though their melodic outline is identical, and their syllable count differs only because of the syncopation in the third bar of each tripodic unit.<sup>46</sup>

**E.g. 13**

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 3/4 time. The first staff contains the first six bars of the melody. Above the notes in bars 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, there are 'X' marks indicating the melodic skeleton. The notes are: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The second staff contains the next six bars, starting with a measure rest in bar 7. Above the notes in bars 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13, there are 'X' marks. The notes are: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Kis ker - tem - ben u - bor - ka Re - á - ka - pott a ró - ka  
 Várj meg ró - ka, meg - les - lek, Ko - má - rom - ba vi - tet - lek.

**Cucumber in my backyard – Hungarian folksong<sup>47</sup>**

In *Children's Dance no. 6*, the melody receives a bagpipe-style accompaniment in verses two, three and four after its unison exposition in verse one. In between each verse there is a three-bar (tripodic) transition section building from the bagpipe accompaniment material. In the 25-bar coda, the third and fourth lines of the melody return.

<sup>46</sup> The 'X' signs mark the notes that constitute the 'melodic skeleton' common to the folksong and the children's dance.

<sup>47</sup> Source: Zoltán Kodály. *A magyar népzene* (Hungarian Folk Music). (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1971), 127. (my edition)

**Children's Dance no. 8****E.g. 14**
**Children's Dance no. 8, verse 1 (1-8. m.)<sup>48</sup>**

In this melody of instrumental character, the two-bar motives contain a syncopé in the first beat and a semiquaver figuration in the second one. This specific instrumental figuration is typical of verbunkos music. Around 1800, several booklets of Hungarian national dances were published in Vienna. The melody of the children's dance shows kinship with the dances in those booklets.

**E.g. 15**
**Hungarian National Dance – excerpt<sup>49</sup>**

<sup>48</sup> Source for the examples from *Children's Dances*: Zoltán Kodály. *Children's Dances* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1961). (My edition)

<sup>49</sup> Source: Mihály Ittész. *Pedagógiai művekről* (About pedagogical Works). In: *22 Zenei írás* (22 Writings on Music.) (Kecskemét: Kodály Intézet, 1999). (my edition)

Kodály used these national dances in *Dances of Galánta* with the greatest mastery. The typical verbunkos rhythm of the syncopé followed by semiquaver figuration can be observed in the two examples below. In this case, there is only a rhythmic similarity between the motives of the children's dance and *Dances of Galánta*.

E.g. 16

Verbunkos rhythm – Dances of Galánta – excerpt<sup>50</sup>

E.g. 17

Verbunkos rhythm – *Dances of Galánta* score – excerpt<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Source: Zoltán Kodály. *Galántai táncok zongorára* (Dances of Galánta for Piano.) Budapest: Editio Musica, 1970).

<sup>51</sup> Source for the score: excerpt from *Galántai táncok zenekarra*:  
<http://petruccimusiclibrary.ca/files/imglinks/caimg/5/58/IMSLP508294-PMLP822489-KodalyGalanta.pdf>

Another motif in *Dances of Galánta* is reminiscent of the children's dance in its melodic contour, in addition to their characteristic rhythm.

E.g. 18

*Dances of Galánta* for piano – excerpt<sup>52</sup>

E.g. 19

*Dances of Galánta* score – excerpt<sup>53</sup>

## V. Conclusion

Kodály's music education focused on piano pieces are based on the principle of the Kodály concept, which states that all children must first become acquainted with their own folk music. Therefore, music education in Hungary builds up the acquisition of theoretical knowledge from two-note relations through pentatonic to the diatonic tone-set. Kodály wanted to extend this structure, which had already been introduced in public education, to instrumental education.

Two pedagogical piano cycles were written for this reason in 1945, *24 Little Canons on Black Keys* and *Children's Dances*.<sup>54</sup> The altogether 36 pieces are without exception pentatonic and meant to be played on the black keys of the piano.

<sup>52</sup> Source: Zoltán Kodály. *Galántai táncok zongorára* (Dances of Galánta for Piano.) Budapest: Editio Musica, 1970).

<sup>53</sup> My edition

<sup>54</sup> Another volume was published in 1973, entitled *Tizenkét kis darab* (Twelve Little Pieces), also containing pentatonic works to be played on the black keys. This volume brings together short pieces written by Kodály for other collections and piano methods.

The volumes are little used in piano teaching, but their pedagogical importance and usefulness cannot be questioned. They are also suitable for all-round skill development in the piano classroom, going beyond the solution of specific technical problems. The little canons provide a broad scope for consolidating theoretical knowledge, practicing the relative-absolute system, developing divided attention, and learning the rules and possibilities of canon construction. The observation of stylistic features and analogies in any one piece in *Children's Dances* not only develops a sense of style, but also strengthens 'knowledgeable piano playing'. The discovery of equivalencies helps to choose the right tempo, articulation, and dynamics, and to consolidate the rhythmic, metric, or melodic characteristics of a given style. All these options are complemented by the encounter with a special mode of playing, where the child plays only on the black keys.

If we believe that we need to teach more than just primary 'motor' skills in our piano lessons, it is worth exploring the volumes and looking for opportunities to incorporate them into our piano teaching.

Appendix 1 – Children’s Dance no. 4, verse 3<sup>55</sup>

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-4) is in 3/4 time, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand has a simple bass line. A crescendo (*cresc.*) marking is present in the fourth measure. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the piece, with a decrescendo (*dim.*) marking in the fourth measure. The third system (measures 9-12) concludes the piece, also featuring a decrescendo (*dim.*) marking. The score uses various chordal textures and melodic lines in both hands.

<sup>55</sup> Source for the examples in the appendices: Zoltán Kodály, *Gyermektáncok (Children's Dances)* (Budapest: Editio musica, 1947). (my edition)

**Appendix 2 – Children's Dance no. 5, verse 2**

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system begins with a piano (*f*) dynamic. The right hand features a series of chords, with some notes tied across measures. The left hand plays a rhythmic eighth-note pattern. A first ending bracket labeled '8' spans the final two measures of the system. The second system starts with a measure marked '5'. The right hand continues with chords and eighth-note patterns, while the left hand maintains its eighth-note accompaniment. A second ending bracket labeled '8' covers the final two measures of the system.

Appendix 3 – Children's Dance no. 6 – coda

Musical notation for measures 1-6. The piece is in 2/4 time. The right hand plays a melody of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The left hand plays a bass line of quarter notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. Dynamics include *sf dim.* with a dashed line over measures 1-6.

Musical notation for measures 7-12. The right hand plays a melody of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The left hand plays a bass line of quarter notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. Dynamics include *p* at the start of measure 7.

Musical notation for measures 13-18. The right hand plays a melody of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The left hand plays a bass line of quarter notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. Dynamics include *sf* at the start of measure 13 and *dim.* with a dashed line over measures 13-18.

Musical notation for measures 19-24. The right hand plays a melody of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The left hand plays a bass line of quarter notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. Dynamics include *p dim.* with a dashed line over measures 19-24 and *pp* at the start of measure 24. The piece ends with a fermata over the final note.



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