

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY: HUSZT – A CHORAL WORK COMPOSED ON A POEM BY FERENC KÖLCSEY

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SUMMARY. Zoltán Kodály has composed two choral works to the poems of Ferenc Kölcsey: *Huszt* and *Bordal*. Both were composed for male choir. *Bordal* was composed between 1913 and 1917, followed by Kodály's *Huszt* in 1936. In this paper I will present an analysis of the *Huszt* choral work.

Keywords: Zoltán Kodály, Huszt, male choir, Kölcsey Ferenc, harmony, musical forms

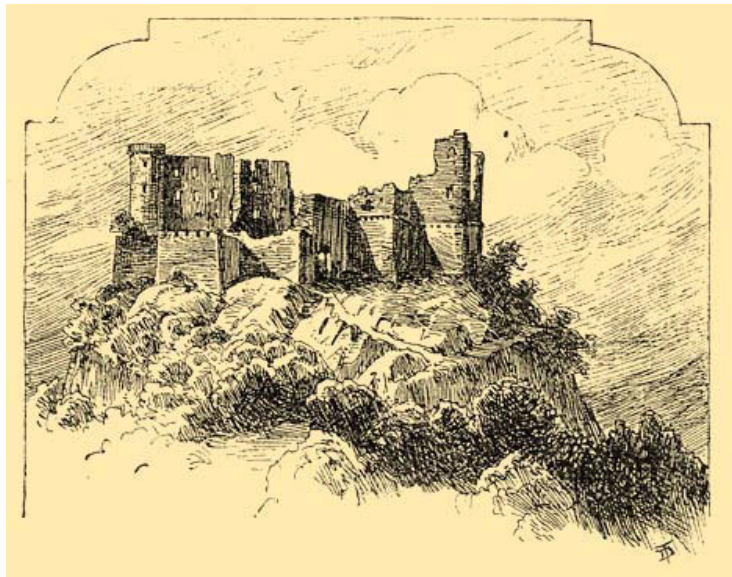
By way of introduction, let us see what the work is about, its basis, its background, and the biographical framework of its composition. The following images illustrate the castle ruins of Huszt and a drawing from its heyday, this one by Tivadar Dörre.

E.g. 1²



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² khust castle - Bing images (accessed in October 2022)



The fortress of Huszt is located in present-day Ukraine, in Transcarpathia, close to the current triple border. It is also where the Tisza leaves the Carpathians and becomes a slower, lowland river. The castle was built in the 11th century (under King Ján Ezder) and was then a very strong and important fortress, which played a major strategic role. It defended several towns, protected the Torun, Lehioniv and Yablunetskyi passes and controlled the road to the salt mines of Solotvyno. Over the years it was besieged by the Tatars, the Turks, and the Habsburgs. After 1541 it was taken over by the Transylvanian Principality. It had a troubled history rich in battles. In 1773, lightning caused a fire that destroyed the castle and was never rebuilt.

Ferenc Kölcsey visited Huszt Castle in May 1825. He was inspired by the sight even then and wrote an epigram entitled *Régi várban* (*In the Old Castle*). He later adapted this poem and thus his poem *Huszt* was born on 29 December 1831, in Cseke.

³ Huszt-Dörre - Huszti vár – Wikipédia (wikipedia.org) – The Huszt Castle, a work by Tivadar Dörre (accessed in October 2022)

“Bús düledékeiden, Husztnak romvára megállék;
Csend vala, felleg alól szállt fel az éjjeli hold.
Szél kele most, mint sír szele kél; s a csarnok elontott
Oszlopi közt lebegő rémalak inte felém.
És mond: Honfi, mit ér epedő kebel e romok ormán?
Régi kor árnya felé visszamerengni mit ér?
Messze jövővel komolyan vess össze jelenkort;
Hass, alkoss, gyarapíts: s a haza fényre derül!”⁴

*

(I stand on the sad crumbling walls of the Huszt Castle ruins.
Night moon has arisen from the clouds, silent was the world
The wind starts to blow, like wind from the grave; from the depths of the hall
a ghost comes to me and asks me: my friend
what are you looking for among these sad ruins?
Why are you looking to days long-long gone?
Look to the future and measure the present with by what you wish to achieve
Do, create, enrich, and the country will arise.)⁵

*

Zoltán Kodály composed his choral work *Huszt* in the spring of 1936, at the age of 54, when he was already a world-renowned composer. It is interesting to see what else happened to the composer in the same year.⁶

On 15 January 1936, Herbert von Karajan - then still a young conductor - conducted Zoltán Kodály's *Psalmus Hungaricus* in Aachen. The same day, in Vienna, the piece *Dances of Galánta* is performed under the baton of Oswald Kabasta.

On 20 February, Kodály falls ill and is unable to attend the ceremony at which he is elected an honorary member of the János Vajda Society. Hugo Kelen will convey his message of appreciation. In February, his article entitled “*Excelsior*” was published, promoting the development of the choral movement. During the spring of 1936, the author gives lectures on folk music at the Free University. In parallel with a commission from the

4 Kölcsey Ferenc: HUSZT | Verstár - ötven költő összes verse | Kézikönyvtár (arcanum.com) accessed in October 2022.

5 Source of the poem's English translation: <https://creativecommons.org/2007/04/28/day-2-cc-hungary/>, accessed in November 2022.

6 See: László Eöszé. *Kodály Zoltán életének krónikája (The Chronicle of Zoltán Kodály's Life)*. Ed. Zeneműkiadó, Budapest, 1977, pp. 154-158.

mayor of Budapest to write an *in memoriam* for the 250th anniversary of the recapture of Buda from the Turks, he composes several choral works, such as: *Hét könnyű gyermekkar* (7 Easy Children's Choruses), *Hat tréfás kánon* (6 Humorous Canons), *A 150. genfi zsoltár* (The 150th Genevan Psalm), **Huszt** choral work, followed by the folk song arrangement entitled *Molnár Anna*, a four-voiced canon named *A magyarokhoz* (To Hungarians) and *Forr a világ* (The World Is Boiling Over).

The latter work had its premiere on April 25 at the third Budapest Festival of Éneklő Ifjúság [Singing Youth]. The work became a symbol of the movement.

On 11 May, Kodály's arrangement of the folk ballad *Molnár Anna* is presented in Kecskemét, and three days later, it is also performed in Budapest. Also in May, the 4th volume of Kodály's *Népszerű Zenefüzetek* [Popular Music Sheets] series by Antal Molnár (a long-time student of Kodály) was published, which includes the first biography and a catalogue of the Maestro's works.

At the end of June (28-29), in Szombathely, the National Federation of Hungarian Singing Associations organized a song competition to mark the 50th anniversary of Liszt's death, with a performance of Kodály's work for mixed choir entitled *Liszt Ferenchez* (To Franz Liszt).

In July and August, the *Te Deum of Budavár* (the commissioned work) is completed, with its premiere in the Coronation Church of Buda on September 2.

At the same time, he also studies Jeppesen's *Counterpoint* and proposes a Hungarian edition of it, with notes to the author.

On October 18th, one of his early works, *Ave Maria*, is performed in Budapest at the organ inauguration of the Rákóczi College.

Next month, on November 13, the London Radio broadcasts *Te Deum of Budavár*. He is invited to conduct the Gloucester premiere of his work the following year. Also in November, the composer's *Jézus és a kufárok* (Jesus and the Traders) and *Mátrai képek* (Mátra Pictures) are presented in Frankfurt to critical acclaim, followed by a successful American concert series of the University Choirs with the premiere of the *Karádi nóták* (Songs from Karád) and his choral work **Huszt**.

In broad outline, these are Kodály's life events in 1936. It was an eventful year, both musically and socially. Compared to the *Te Deum of Budavár*, the choral piece **Huszt** is a small work, but like everything else, Kodály gives it meticulous treatment, special attention, and logical editing.

Zoltán Kodály: Huszt (1936). Analysis of the work

The choral piece entitled *Huszt* by Zoltán Kodály has a pentastrophic structure with a coda, which the composer wrote in variation form for a male choir with bass, baritone, and tenor voices. The **formal structure** of the piece is as follows:

E.g. 2

| A | Av1 | Av2 | Av3 | Av4 | Coda |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9 bar G.P. (1-9.) | 9 bar G.P. (10-18.) | 10 bar (19-28.) | 12 bar (<i>Half choir</i>) (From bar 29 <i>Baritone solo ad libitum</i>) (From bar 37 = <i>Tutti for all voices</i>) | 8 b. (41-48.) | 9 bar (49-57.) |
| B pedal – F# pedal α motif Raises it to the level of a leitmotif x-y | α crab α crab augm. var. | x var – y var. mysterious | G pedal – B pedal polyphonic α var. | | Summary of the music thus far |
| pp | ppp < mf > | < > < > | pp <i>misterioso</i> < <i>Tutti</i> | f <i>stable</i> | ff <i>stable</i> |
| <i>Maestoso</i> ♩ = 88 | <i>Poco più mosso</i> | | <i>Tempo I</i> | <i>Poco a poco accel. ... sostenuto ... più mosso</i> | |
| <i>E minor</i> ~ <i>nat. B minor</i> ~ <i>mel. B minor</i> | <i>A minor</i> ~ <i>F major</i> | <i>F major</i> ~ <i>E minor</i> ~ <i>G major</i> | <i>C minor</i> ~ <i>melodic E minor</i> | <i>Natural E minor</i> ~ <i>C major</i> | <i>C major</i> ~ <i>F# minor</i> ~ <i>A major</i> ... <i>V. degree</i> = <i>E minor I#</i> |
| Meter = 4/4 – stable until the end of the piece | | | | | |

The duration of the work, as defined by the author, is 3 minutes.
The verses fit into the above structure in the following way:

E.g. 3

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Bús düledékeiden, Husztnak romvára megállék; Csend vala, felleg alól szállt fel az éjjeli hold. | A |
| Szél kele most, mint sír szele kél; s a csarnok elontott Oszlopi közt | Av1 |
| oszlopi közt lebegő rémalak inte felém. És mond: | Av2 |
| Honfi, mit ér epedő kebel e romok ormán? + (Ó) Régi kor árnya felé visszamerengni mit ér? | Av3 |
| Régi kor árnya felé visszamerengni mit ér? Messze jövendővel komolyan vess özsze jelenkort; | Av4 |
| Hass, alkoss, gyarapíts: s a haza fényre derűl! | Coda |

Of course, there are textual repetitions within the framework of the form sections, especially in the polyphonic sections.

Description of the formal sections:

Section A

E.g. 4

The image shows a musical score for Section A, marked 'Maestoso' with a tempo of 88. It features three staves: Treble (T.), Baritone (Bar.), and Bass (B.). The key signature is E-minor (one flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into several formal sections and motifs:

- Section A:** The first section, starting with the lyrics 'bús dü-le-dé-ke-i-den, Husztnak rom-vá-ra, meg-ál-lék,'. It contains two melodic motifs: 'x y' and 'z yv', both highlighted with red boxes.
- Section Av1:** The second section, starting with 'Szállt fel a hold'.
- Section Av2:** The third section, starting with 'Csend vala, fél-leg a-lól'.
- Section Av3:** The fourth section, starting with 'Szállt fel az éj-je-li hold.'
- Section Av4:** The fifth section, starting with 'Szállt fel az éj-je-li hold.'
- Motif α transzp.:** A transposed version of motif 'α' is shown in a red box.
- Motif β:** A melodic motif in the Treble staff, highlighted with a blue box.
- Motif βv:** A melodic motif in the Bass staff, highlighted with a blue box.

The score is marked 'e-moll' (E-minor) and '(Föhanggal mélyebben is énekelhető)' (can also be sung deeper with a lower register). The year '(1936)' is noted in the top right corner.

melodic B minor

The composer indicated in brackets at the beginning of the work that "It can be sung by half a tone lower". The piece begins with a 9-bar A section, with no introduction, however, in the bass, the B pedal note, which lasts for 5 bars minus a quarter, enters a bar sooner by singing an O vowel. A short and very impressive mood-setting effect takes place with this one bar followed by the long-sustained B pedal, and then F sharp pedal note. While in *pianissimo*, the E minor followed by the melodic B minor also perfectly suggests a dignified, dark, and somber mood. In bar 2, the baritone voice in *piano* dynamic introduces the basic α (alpha) motif, which then permeates the whole work. In contrast to the descending profile of the α motive, in bar 6 the β motive is heard in the tenor voice, gradually rising an octave from its dominant 5th degree in B minor. With illustrative programmatic flair, Kodály faithfully depicts here the night moon rising from beneath the clouds. "Night moon has arisen from the clouds, silent was the world" - says the poem.

Section Av1

E.g. 5

F major

The Av1 section begins in bar 10 and, under the influence of the text "Szél kele most/ The wind starts to blow", on one hand Kodály varies the basic motif rhythmically and brings back the polyphonic entrances from the standpoint of their permutation (crab inversion = recurrence) and gradually raises its ambitus with the use of rhymed sequence. The tenor voice rises first to middle C4, then to E, then to F (considering the octave transposition). The words „oszlopi közt” (between the columns) causes the composer to switch from polyphonic to a chords structure. The chords represent the columns (see bars 17-18). There is also a change of tempo with this section, in bar 10 the

composer makes the tempo a little more agile with *Poco più mosso*. The key of the Av1 section is *A minor* and only in bar 15 does it modulate to *F major*. This modulation corresponds to the dynamic climax of *mf* of the section.

Just as the composer separates the A and Av1 sections with a *General Pause*, he similarly separates sections Av1 and Av2 in bar 18.

Section Av2

E.g. 6

The image shows a musical score for Section Av2. It consists of two systems of music. The first system (bars 19-24) has three staves: vocal line, piano accompaniment, and a lower vocal line. The lyrics are: 'osz-lo-pi közt le-be-gő rém a-lak in-te fe-lém'. The second system (bars 25-28) has three staves with lyrics: 'és mond: és mond: lélem és mond:'. Red circles highlight specific notes in the vocal lines, and green boxes highlight specific rhythmic patterns in the piano accompaniment.

Section Av2 repeats the *oszlopi közt* (between the columns) excerpt from section Av1, thus creating a link. The *oszlopi közt* excerpt is also solved musically here in a homophonic manner, with perfect fifths being sung by the tenor and baritone voices. Further, Kodály solves the word *lebegő* (floating) with an anapest that repeats the same note, with the third note of the *anapest* being prolonged (by a half and whole notes). Thus, musically, it suggests floating. And the word *rém* (spook) is sustained in the bass for nine quarter notes (see bars 21-24). The word *rém*, emphasized, is also sustained, not only in the bass, but in the above voices as well, whenever it appears. The words *inte felém* (beckons to me) also have a distinctive musical form, in the shape of a descending perfect fifth, and a distinctive rhythmic pattern (see bars circled in green). Musically, the x and y cells presented in bar 2 are varied, both melodically and rhythmically, mainly in their permutation (crab inversion) - based on the rhythm of the syllables. The basic dynamics of the section is *pianissimo*. From this, the composer establishes slight *crescendos* and *decrescendos*. Tonally, he begins in *F major*, and from bar 21 onwards he composes the figure of the floating spook ("rém") in *E minor*. In bars 27-28, he concludes the section in *G major*. Kodály also separates this section from the following Av3 section using *General Pause*.

Section Av3

E.g. 7

The image displays a musical score for Section Av3 of 'Huszt' by Zoltán Kodály. It features three vocal staves (Soprano, Alto/Tenor, and Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (bars 26-32) includes markings for 'Tempo 1', 'ppp (fika)', 'pp misterioso', and '(Solo ad lib)'. The second system (bars 32-36) includes 'cresc. poco a poco' markings. The third system (bars 36-40) includes 'tutti' and 'cresc.' markings. The lyrics are in Hungarian, and the score includes a complex musical phrase in bars 37-40.

There are several striking changes to section Av3. Firstly, the original tempo of the choral work returns. *Tempo 1*, indicated by the composer. Kodály inscribes *misterioso* for the bass and baritone voices alongside the *pianissimo*. The bass voice sings a G pedal for 8 bars short of a quarter note, then slides the pedal up to B by a passing note from bar 37, and holds this for 3.5 bars. To this suggestive pedal note on the O vowel, Kodály adds a baritone *Solo ad libitum* (= at will), which varies the α (alpha) motif in *ppp* dynamics and slow *crescendo*, and a tenor voice, which requires only one half of the choir to sing. The dynamic markings are the same for all three voices. It is not until bar 37 that the *tutti* chorus is heard again, in *crescendo*. Before this *tutti*, bar 36 matches the positive golden ratio of the work ($57 \times 0.618 = 35.22$). A crucial question is asked here: „... visszamerengni mit ér?” (*Why are you looking to days long-long gone?*). The section is composed in *C minor* and then modulates to melodic *E minor* in the bar that includes the golden ratio. A complex musical phrase is heard in bars 37-40, which Kodály enriches by composing the tenor voice in *divisi*. Elsewhere in the choral work, he rarely uses a voice division for such a long phrase. „Honfi, mit ér epedő kebel e romok ormán?” (*My friend what are you looking for among*

these sad ruins?)”, in our literal translation: “Patriot, what is your bosom worth on the face of these ruins?” - is the sad but real question. Through its *crescendo*, these few bars set the stage for the *forte* dynamics of the next Av4 section.

Section Av4

E.g. 8

α transposition

α var.

41 Ré - gi kor ár - nya fe - lé viz - szá - meréng - ni mit ér? Mesz -
ár - nya fe - lé meréng - ni mit ér? Mesz -
45 Mesz - sze jö - ven - dö - vel ko - molyan vess ősz - sze je - len kort,
- sze jö - ven - dö - vel ko - molyan vess ősz - sze, vess ősz - sze je - len kort,

The Av4 section starts with an up-beat in bar 40. The bass voice utters the opening motif of the work in variation, and in bar 41 the baritone and tenor take it up simultaneously, the baritone in variation on a E3 and the tenor in transposition on E4. All three voices continue to weave the motif's variation, in the first phrase in natural E minor, closed by a 1st degree Picardy third in bar 44, and then in the second phrase in C major. Kodály gradually extends the range of voices throughout the work, reaching a climax here in Av4, with the tenor voice's A4 (see bar 45). From the beginning of the section, the composer gradually raises the tempo with *poco a poco accelerando*, then switches to *Più mosso* - or a more moving tempo - through *sostenuto* at the end of the first phrase. The whole section is in *forte*. It is the verse lines here that justify the *forte* dynamics:

“Régi kor árnya felé visszamerengni mit ér?
Messze jövővel komolyan vess őszve jelenkort;”

(Why are you looking to days long-long gone?
Look to the future and measure the present with
by what you wish to achieve;)

*

The Coda

E.g. 9

49 *ff* Hass, al - koss, gya - ra - pits, a ha - za fény - re - de - rül!
ff Hass, al - koss, gya - ra - pits, a ha - za fény - re - de - rül!
ff Hass, al - koss, gya - ra - pits, a ha - za fény - re - de - rül!

C major **F# minor**

53 *ff* Hass, al - koss, gya - ra - pits! A ha - za fény - re - de - rül!
ff Hass, al - koss, gya - ra - pits! A ha - za fény - re - de - rül!
ff Hass, al - koss, gya - ra - pits! A ha - za fény - re - de - rül!

F# minor **A major** **V. = E minor I#**

The nine final bars of the work, the Coda, take the idea of the previous section further and develop it, not only formally, but also in terms of the musical material and dynamics. Composed in *C major*, then in *F# minor* and *A major*, it is entirely homophonic. The sense of the pole-counterpole shift from *C major* to *F# minor* is in fact to emphasize the *A major* final bars even more brightly. It creates contrast. The work closes on *A major*, 5th degree, which is also the Picardy 1st degree third chord of the main key *E minor*. The modulations in this form are created by tonal jumps, which is even more surprising than a chromatic modulation. Melodically, the A4 climax appears 3 times here in the tenor voice, and highlights the words *Hass* (*Do*) and *fény* (*arise*) in the text. “*Hass, alkoss, gyarapíts! A haza fényre derül!*” (*Do, create, enrich, and the country will arise!*) - the composer repeats the verse. The effect of the verse is enhanced by the frequent use of *General Pauses*. There are no less than 6 of them in 9 bars (see the framings in the musical example).

In brief, Kodály’s choral work *Huszt* is very unified in terms of its musical material. The rhythm of the melody is determined by the text. The composer builds his music in a very logical way, expressing the dramatic charge of the lines of verse through illustrative programatism (naive programatism). He uses tonal-functional harmonization in his chorus,

which is also logical, because the author of the poem, Ferenc Kölcsey, lived in the early musical Romanticism, was a contemporary of Franz Schubert and thought in that period.

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