

GYÖRGY MARÓTHI'S WRITINGS IN THE FIELD OF MUSIC THEORY

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SUMMARY. György Maróthi (1715-1744) was a broad viewed, well-learned and versatile teacher of his time. During his short, but very prolific period of work he had noteworthy contributions to the field of music teaching. He introduced singing in four voices in musical education in the Hungarian boarding schools, he published two psalmodies in which he also included works on various aspects of music theory. The specialized literature considers these writings the earliest Hungarian music theory treatises.

Keywords: harmonic singing, psalmodies, solfeggio exercises, tenor praxis.

The reform of greatest effect in music teaching in the Hungarian schools of the 18th century was the introduction of singing in many voices, i.e. the „harmonicus cantus”. This reform was achieved mainly due to György Maróthi.

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He was born on February 11th, 1715 in Debrecen. His first teacher was his father who was a respected, wealthy, learned citizen of the town of Debrecen who held sciences in high regard, spoke Latin and German and was well versed in the law. After the first four classes of grammar school and a two-year course in the arts, at 16 he set out abroad for his collage studies.

He spent six and a half years in Switzerland and the Netherlands. In Zürich he studied theology and law, respectively German and French. During his studies in Basel he was accommodated in the Collegium Erasmianum. The students accommodated here studied mainly theology in order to be able to work as pastors or teachers, but it was also expected of them to participate in the activities of the Collegium Musicum, which provided opportunities for practicing singing and instrumental music and engrossment in musical studies. Coming to know the practice of singing in several voices and seeing its role in the practice of the western churches he proposed to use his experience in is field to promote this practice also in his home country. Besides these he studied also Greek and Latin literature. As he graduated from his school in Basel he was awarded a pastor's diploma.

In Bern, the third location of his studies he mainly broadened his French and English language skills, but he also learned more on eastern languages such as Hebrew, Syrian and Arab. Besides these he studied history and mathematics. In the fourth town of his studies, in the Netherlands he studied experimental physics and astronomy at the universities of Groningen, the Hague, Utrecht, Leyden and Amsterdam. His advanced language speaking skills made it possible for him to be informed from the specialized literature on every field of contemporary science (theology, law, the arts, history, geography, mathematics, physics, algebra, geometry, astrology, astronomy and music)². His diligence, perseverance and the depth of his knowledge predestined him to be the reformer of education in the Hungarian boarding schools.

Concluding his studies abroad he returned home on January 11th, 1738 taking with him a great amount of knowledge, rich language skills and many, many books. A teaching job to teach mathematics, physics, history, geography and rhetoric at the boarding school of Debrecen was awaiting him. He started a family, he married Katalin Szódi³. He died in 1744, still a man in his youth.⁴

² He had great thirst for knowledge. He learned mainly by reading and less often by listening to lectures on a subject. Therefore he bought an astounding amount of books. Side notes in these books bear witness to the various stations of his studies abroad.

³ They had three children, but all three of them died at a very young age.

⁴ He died of dysentery.

1. His work

Maróthi lobbied for boarding school education to have a curriculum elaborated in detail. He made teaching of modern languages and studying geography and astronomy a greater part of the curriculum. He made important reforms in teaching methods for mathematics. His book entitled *Arithmetica vagy a számvetésnek mestersége (Arithmetic or the Skills Needed for Calculus)* (1743) written in Hungarian defined teaching principles and curriculum for mathematics. His attempts to reform the contemporary school system are reflected in his works entitled *Idea* (1740), *Opiniones* (1741) and *Methodus* (1770). Besides these he published also translations (Osterwald: *A szent históriának summája (A Summary of the Saint Story)*, 1735) and manuals (*Phaedrus*, 1740; *Minucius Felix*, 1740; *Flavius Eutropius*, 1741.) He started to compile also a Latin-Hungarian dictionary, which was left unfinished due to his death.

He initiated the opening of the first observatory in Debrecen. He convinced the school to buy experimental equipment from abroad for his physics classes. He had initiatives to modernize the printing press of the town. He donated to the library books bought with his own money.

2. Introduction of harmonic singing in four voices

Maróthi was displeased with musical culture of the youth. He attempted to introduce in the boarding school of Debrecen the science of transcription to musical notes and score reading and the so called harmonic singing or singing in four voices according to the practice he saw at the Collegium Musicum in Basel. During the great plague of 1739-1740 in Debrecen he formed from the boarding school students of the upper classes who survived the plague the first vocal formation in four voices. It had four members. They sang psalm adaptations by Goudimel. According to the musical practice of the age the cantus firmus was in the tenor voice. The four voices were sung thus: the tenor and bass were sung by men and the discantus and alto by boys or falzettists. This group of singers sang regularly at funerals. After the plague was over they became the praeses of the boarding school, i.e. the leaders for the four voices in the choral group that started gaining more and more members.

Maróthi published two psalmodies. The first one was published in 1740 and it was a hymn book with scores presenting songs in one voice. The book consisted of a foreword, followed by the 150 psalms, the song of Simeon, the tune of the Lord's Prayer and several score reading exercises and a musical theory treatise. The second psalmody was published in 1743.

A'
'SOLTÁROKNAK
 N É G Y E S
N O T Á J I K,
 úgy mint
 a' *T E N O R, B A S S V S,*
DISCANTVS és *ALTVS.*

Mellyek
 a' *Harmoniás Éneklést szeretőknék*
 kedvékért, a' *Német és Francia Peldák szerént,*
 és a' *Spéiba Andrá's* Deák 'Sóltária *Éneke*
 Magyarúl most leg elsőbön
 ki-adattattanak.

Utol hozzá ítéttének
 Némelly más Énekeknek Nótájik;
 A' *Harmoniás* és mésterségesebb
 Éneklésről való
R Ó V I D T A N I T Á S.
 fal együtt.

*Ditserem az URat az én életemben; éneklék az én li-
 tememnek, míg élék. 'Sólt. 146: v. 2.*

Nyomtatott DEBRECZENBEN,
 M A R G I T A I J Á N O S által,
 1 7 4 3. *Ezrennévben.*


Psalmodie – published in 1743

This one presented psalms in four voices, i.e. harmonic psalms inspired from a German publication of psalms of Zürich from 1707 and a French one from 1715. In this work Maróthi prepared for publication the simplest variant, that of 1565 of the harmonic psalms in four voices by Claude Goudimel (1514/20-1572)⁵, the so called *Jaqui version*. The book consists of the 150 psalms, *the Song of Simeon*, the tune of The Lord's prayer as adapted by Luther, nine songs of praise in four voices, the twelve *rather artificially tuned* *terzettos* by Kyburtz⁶ whose source was the *Sing-Stunden* volume of 1723, two so called fugues, i.e. canons and a musical theory treatise.

⁵ Goudimel meant his psalm adaptations not for church use, but as a basic manual for teaching family singing, congregational singing, boarding school choir singing and singing in several voices.

⁶ He translated the lyrics of these *terzettos* himself.

LES
PSEAUMES
 DE
DAVID
 Mis en Vers François,
*Revis de nouveau sur les
 precedentes Editions
 avec les*
CANTIQUES SACREZ
 Pour les principales Solen-
 nitez des Chrétiens & sur
 divers autres Sujets.
*On a aussi ajouté dans cette nouvelle
 Edition en Faveur des Amateurs de la
 Musique au plein chant la Basse.*



à Zurich.

Chez **DAVID GUESSNER.**
 M D C C X V.

7. Az 1740. évi zsolnártkiadáshoz felhasznált zürichi francia nyelvű zsolnárt (1715) címlapja

hen. Joh. Heinrich Ryburken/
 Pr. des H. Ev. zu Herfogen-Buchsee

Sing-Stunden.

Insbefonder dienende dem
Singenden Chriſten
 Samt einem
 Allgemeinen Register der Lieder
 aus den Halliſchen und andern Geſang-
 Büchern/welche nach gleichen Melodeyen
 können gefungen werden.



Das erſte mal ans Licht gegeben
 Im Jahr M D C C X X I I I.

Psalmodie of 1715 and Sing-Stunden volume of 1723

The psalm adaptations in four voices contained in the book applied tenor praxis, but in the case of 12 out of the 150 psalms the main tune is in the treble, i.e. the discantus. Usually these have an isometric adaptation and simple harmonies. The main and secondary pitches are default or reversed sixths.

E.g. 3

XC. ZSOLTÁR

Te ben - ned bíz - tunk e - le - i - től fog - va,
c. f.

UR - am! té - ged' tar - tot - tunk haj - lé - kunk - nak,

Mi - kor még lem - mi he - gyek nem vól - ta - nak,

Part of Psalm 90, tenor cf.

Maróthi overtook the harmony of the psalms from Goudimel with only slight changes. It is probable that the setting of the praise songs harmonized in four voices was made by Maróthi following the style of the

psalms. This psalmody was republished three times during the 18th (1756, 1764, 1774) century and more and more songs were added to it.⁷

E.g. 4

Psalm 100 - discantus, tenor, alt, bas voices

Maróthi did not have psalm adaptations of his own, instead he aimed to make it a practice in Debrecen for the psalms to be sung in the congregation in several voices as it was customary in the Calvinian period in Switzerland, a practice he came to know and like during his studies in this country. Although common sense holds it that Maróthi introduced singing in many voices to the Hungarian territories, one should know that there are harmonized psalms also in the hymn book published in the congregation of pastor Eperjesi in 1635 and that also in Transylvania there were canons who knew and practiced regular singing in four voices as well in the first decades of the 18th century.

3. His music theory treatises

The fact that in the two psalmodies we find only the first stanzas of every psalm leads us to believe that he did not intend the book for congregational use, but as a basic manual for the education of singing in several voices and for boarding school choir practice. He also published in these volumes three treatises containing theoretical knowledge. The specialized literature considers these to be the earliest treatises of music theory written in Hungarian.

⁷ The music theory treatise of 1756 was amended by János Varjas (1721-1786), Maróthi's successor and he also harmonized several praise songs; he also attached a new annex to the 1774 edition, which contained 95 Hungarian praise songs and 5 German Protestant choral tunes. With few exceptions these tunes are identical to those in the scored hymn book published in Cluj-Napoca in 1744. Later they were taken over also to the hymn book published in Debrecen in 1778.

He wrote a *Foreword* to the psalmody in which he communicates the purpose of the scored publication: "... this was our aim, to deliver a true copy for those who will learn how to sing from a score with the help of the Lord." He mentions also his source: a German publication of psalms of Zürich from 1707 in four voices and a French one from 1715 for tenor and bass. He offers explanations regarding score reading dealing with the place of the clef, accidental for the tune of each psalm and the form of the repetition sign and pause sign. He emphasizes correct singing of the tune, condemns singing with embellishments and suggests unified manner of presentation.

The second theoretical treatise entitled *A' Soltároknak A' Kóták szerént való Éneklésének Mesterségének Rövid Summája (A Short Summary of Psalm Singing According to the Score)* was first published in the psalmody of 1740. Later it was amended by Varjas, Maróthi's successor and included thus in the 1756 edition. Maróthi summed up the main points of music theory in fifteen entries: he wrote of the stave, the scale, the interval; he introduced ABC and solfeggio denomination of musical notes; he also explained how to read C clef on the third line of the stave and the problem of half and whole intervals between notes; he wrote on accidentals and the application of accidentals as *ordinary* (ordinarium) if musical notation or *fictum* if occasional. After dealing with tonic he discussed major and minor features, he suggested a method to identify the proper initial note, he established the measure for the major and minor third, he enumerated note values commonly used in psalm singing and defined their duration, he wrote on the sign for measure division, on the pause sign, on the *custos* and the repetition sign. At the end of the book there are several solfeggio exercises for beginners. Among these there are some scales like tunes steadily rising or descending, note lines based on a sequence and tunes for practicing the third, the fourth and the fifth.

E.g. 5

The image shows two musical staves with solfeggio exercises. Each staff begins with a C-clef on the third line and a key signature of one flat. The notes are represented by diamond-shaped symbols. Below each staff, the notes are labeled with letters.

Staff 1: f g f g a g f g a b a g f g a b c b a g

Staff 2: f g a b c d c b a g f g a b c b

a g f g a b a g f g a g f g f

f g a f a g a b g b a b c a c b c d b d

d c b d b c b a c a b a g b g a g f a f

f a g b a c b d b c a b g a f

f b g c a d a c g b f

f c f g d g c f

Solfeggio exercises

The writing in the annex of the psalmody in four voices published in 1743 is not harmony. Its title is: *A Harmóniás Éneklésről való rövid Tanítás (A Brief Teaching on Harmonic Singing)*. The author wrote on the sequence of notes according to pitch and on the form of the clefs used by the various parts of a canon. He presented the two forms of the F clef placed on the third or fourth line of the staff; the C clef on the fourth line of the staff used rarely by the bass; the g clef of the discant part on the third or second line of the staff; the C clef of the alto on the third or second line of the staff; the manner of chord structuring, of intonation improvement and of singing the inflections in the tune. In a separate paragraph he discussed the form of the various note values, measures, tempo, the principle of bisecting even values, the sign for quadruple and triple time, the correct form of pause signs, of the dotted notes, of the melisma, of the tempo and of the accidentals, the rules of canon singing.

In his time Maróthi can be considered a pioneer in the field of music. Although he was not the only one who aimed to reform the musical practices of the Reformed church. In Transylvania bishop Gyula István Szigeti who died in 1740 attempted earlier to elevate the level of music teaching and congregational singing in the church. In 1742 Pál Bardóc introduced harmonic singing in Satu-Mare. A practice followed in 1746 by Cluj-Napoca, in 1752 by Sárospatak and in 1766 by Odorheiu Secuiesc. The hand-written choral books used for singing by the students of the boarding schools in these towns are a living proof of that. In spite of all this Maróthi's work can be considered the most successful and having the most lasting effects. He introduced to the Hungarian Protestant church choral practices and congregational singing in several voices, an act of modernization even if measured by European measure these were considered outworn by the time he introduced them. His psalmodies can be considered important sources, while the Cantus of Debrecen born from his initiative to form a quartet of students singing in several voices is the oldest continuously functioning Hungarian choir.

Translated by Borbély Bartalis Zsuzsa

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