

## THE REFORM OF LEO KESTENBERG – KODÁLY PARALLELS IN THE GERMAN MUSIC EDUCATION OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

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**SUMMARY.** Music education in Hungary has proven German roots. German textbooks and terminology were used in Hungary until the first decade of the 20th century, and German was the official language of music education. In this dissertation, we shall attempt to present the work and philosophy of Leo Kestenberg (1882-1962), and hereby an analogy with Kodály principles can appear. The two prominent music pedagogical reformers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century formulated essentially similar goals on several points. This proves that not only the common roots, but also the reform measures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century form a strong bond between the music education of the two countries.

**Keywords:** history of music education, Leo Kestenberg, German music education, Zoltán Kodály

### 1. Leo Kestenberg

Leo Kestenberg was a German music educator of Jewish origin, politician, the rapporteur of arts and music affairs and father of the most significant reform of German music education in the 20th century. He was born on 27 November 1882, the same year as Zoltán Kodály, in Ruzomberok (Rózsahegy, Rosenberg), then part of Hungary, now in Slovakia.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gruhn, Wilfried. *Wir müssen lernen, in Fesseln zu tanzen Leo Kestenberg's Leben zwischen Kunst und Kulturpolitik (We must learn to dance in shackles Leo Kestenberg's life between art and cultural politics)*. Hofheim am Taunus, Wolke Verlags, 2015.



He completed his primary and secondary studies in Prague, and his father as a cantor was transferred to the Czech capital, when Kestenberg was 7 years old. As an exceptionally talented pianist, he was intended to this career. In Berlin he was the student of Franz Kullak and of Ferruccio Busoni, one of the most prominent artists of the time, in Weimar.<sup>3</sup> After the turn of the



Source: <https://www.lkms.de/leo-kestenberg>

century he worked as a concert artist and piano teacher. From 1908 his first jobs were at the Stern'sches Konservatorium and the Klindworth-Scharwenka Konservatorium in Berlin. From 1905 he took an active part in the organisation of cultural events for the Social Democrats. In 1918 he was appointed as a delegate for art and music in the Ministry of Science, Arts and Popular Education.<sup>4</sup> From 1921, the Schulmusikwochen (School Music Weeks) were organised by Kestenberg as head of the music department of the Zentralinstitut für Erziehung und Unterricht (Central Institute for Education and Teaching).<sup>5</sup> His work titled *Musikerziehung und Musikpflege (Music education and culture)*, published in 1921, contained Kestenberg's ideas for a new German music education. As a

result of his work, the music teacher training in Germany was transformed and a reform of music education in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools were started.<sup>6</sup>

Kestenberg left Germany in 1934 and settled in Prague, later he was living in Tel Aviv from 1938. In 1953, he founded the International Society for Music Education (ISME), and under his direction the first ISME conference was organised in Brussels in the same year. It is important to note that Kodály's educational principles were introduced to the music educators present at the conference in 1962 through a lecture by Erzsébet Szőnyi, and Zoltán Kodály was elected as the vice-president of the ISME.<sup>7</sup> In addition to

<sup>3</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. „Die ‘Musikerziehungsidee’ von Leo Kestenberg (1882–1962). Zur Aktualität seines Reformkonzeptes für für die musikalische Bildung (The ‘Music Education Idea’ of Leo Kestenberg (1882-1962).” On the topicality of his reform concept for musical education). *Würzburger Hefte zur Musikpädagogik*, Vol. 8., 2016, pp. 13-61.

<sup>4</sup> Gruhn, Wilfried. *Wir müssen lernen, in Fesseln zu tanzen Leo Kestenbergs Leben zwischen Kunst und Kulturpolitik (We must learn to dance in shackles Leo Kestenbergs life between art and cultural politics)*. Hofheim am Taunus, Wolke Verlags, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. *op. cit.*, pp. 13-61.

<sup>6</sup> Gruhn, Wilfried. *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> McCarthy, Marie Frances. *Toward a Global Community: The International Society for Music Education 1953–2003*. ISME, 2003.

his international professional activities, Kestenbergs followed the cultural development of Germany until his death in 1962, but he was no longer involved in the reorganisation of music education in his country after 1945.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. The reform of Kestenbergs

Leo Kestenbergs started his ministerial work on 1 December 1918. He was responsible for the quality of music education and choral affairs in several colleges (Berlin, Cologne) and in public and private schools; for the appointment of directors, the making of laws and regulations, the development of a professional concept to help implement and enforce them; and for the organisation and implementation of further training for music teachers.<sup>9</sup>

Kestenbergs collaboration with Carl Heinrich Becker (1876-1933) was fundamental to his reform initiatives. Kestenbergs reform proposals are often considered as simply a reform of school affairs, since together with Becker, the non-party-independent Minister of Culture, they represented a new line, a modern approach, that was open to the world, in education policy. In addition to Becker's considerable help, the fact that Otto Braun (1872-1955) was Prime Minister of the Prussian state at this time also contributed to his success. This fact led to relative stability in education policy, as there were no major changes in general education matters during the 12 years of his administration. Due to the uncertainty and political instability caused by the defeat of the war, a social and cultural crisis arose, on which Kestenbergs shared his thoughts in 1923: *“There are more and more voices talking about the decline of our culture and the global crisis is considered to appear in music. Uncertainty is reflected in all areas of music.”*<sup>10</sup>

In Kestenbergs *Music education and culture* not only a comprehensive concept of the development of music education, but also of musical life can be read. *“Today we are looking for new ways leading the German society towards an integrated cultural national will.”*<sup>11</sup> – written in the introduction. With his writing he published the first document on the restructuring of music education from kindergarten to music college. In his study, he showed how

<sup>8</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. „Die ‘Musikerziehungsidee’ von Leo Kestenbergs (1882–1962). Zur Aktualität seines Reformkonzeptes für für die musikalische Bildung (The ‘Music Education Idea’ of Leo Kestenbergs (1882-1962).” On the topicality of his reform concept for musical education). *Würzburger Hefte zur Musikpädagogik*, Vol. 8., 2016, pp. 13-61.

<sup>9</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. *op. cit.*, pp. 13-61.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>11</sup> Kestenbergs, Leo. *Gesammelte Schriften in 4 Bänden. Band 2.1: Aufsätze und vermischte Schriften. Texte aus der Berliner Zeit (1900–1932) (Collected writings in 4 volumes. Vol. 2.1: Essays and miscellaneous writings. Texts from the Berlin Period (1900-1932).* Edited by Gruhn, Wilfried. Berlin, Wien, 2012. p. 437.

music culture could be made part of the everyday life of the German people. One of his most important proposals was that the state should take responsibility for musical education. He made recommendations for the transformation of music education in kindergartens: the presentation of valuable music should begin at an early stage in the education of children, and this requires that kindergarten teachers receive comprehensive musical training. He also considered important to introduce improvisation exercises to kindergarten teachers.<sup>12</sup>

In his writings, Kestenberg also identifies the two generally accepted types of training: the teaching of general musical activities - this can take place in kindergartens, in public schools, in secondary schools, at university and at public colleges (general training). He called institutions for the training of professional musicians collectively as music schools (music vocational training), including private schools, state music schools, music grammar schools, music colleges and schools of orchestra, music pedagogical and church music academies, and master schools. Kestenberg paid particular attention to 'freelance' musicians, and he sought to promote them through new performance opportunities and financial support from the public, municipal and private sectors. He wanted to make opera accessible to everyone. Kestenberg also wanted to give every opportunity to orchestral musicians to participate in high-quality general and specialised training, which would result in high-quality orchestras and highly qualified musicians. He made proposals to raise artistic reputation and to promote the choral movement and chamber music throughout the country and in different communities.<sup>13</sup> Kestenberg also emphasized the importance of strengthening the German national feeling, and to reach this he identified the teaching and performance of youth songs.<sup>14</sup>

Kestenberg saw the possibility of high-quality music education in the restructuring of teacher training. One of his plans was to establish an integrated Akademie für Kirchenmusik (Academy of Church Music). This was taken place only in 1922, when the Akademie für Kirchen- und Schulmusik (Academy of Church and School Music) was founded. This institution became the unique scene for the training of secondary school music teachers. A pedagogical department was set up, the number of teaching staff

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<sup>12</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. „Die 'Musikerziehungsidee' von Leo Kestenberg (1882–1962). Zur Aktualität seines Reformkonzeptes für die musikalische Bildung (The 'Music Education Idea' of Leo Kestenberg (1882-1962).” On the topicality of his reform concept for musical education). *Würzburger Hefte zur Musikpädagogik*, Vol. 8., 2016, pp. 13-61.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> Gruhn, Wilfried. *Wir müssen lernen, in Fesseln zu tanzen Leo Kestenbergs Leben zwischen Kunst und Kulturpolitik (We must learn to dance in shackles Leo Kestenberg's life between art and cultural politics)*. Hofheim am Taunus, Wolke Verlags, 2015.

was increased, and Carl Thiel (1862-1939) was nominated director. In addition to general pedagogical, methodological, and practical teaching subjects, music history, acoustics, aesthetics, literature and cultural history were added to the curriculum.<sup>15</sup>

On 25 April 1923, Otto Boelitz (1876-1951), Minister of Culture in the Braun government, published the writing titled *Denkschrift über die gesamte Musikpflege in Schule und Volk (Memorandum on the overall cultivation of music in schools and among the people)*. The study also contains the main ideas of Kestenberg's programme of 1921. Among other things, there is an analogy in the judgement of state responsibility in the field of the development of musical literacy. The first and main task of the state is to provide cultural education in schools, because music education in schools can promote not only our musical but also our human development. The idea of extending the curriculum of music subject also needs to be mentioned. According to the memorandum, singing needs to give an artistic basis, since it was a primarily technical subject until now, because music has an impact on our emotional life, on our imagination and expressiveness, and on the knowledge and enrichment of our inner world.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the many emerging Kodály analogies, it is important to note that, there are direct parallels between these ideas of Kestenberg and Kodály's principles of musical education. Kestenberg is not mentioned as one of the authors, but the standard scheme certainly originated from the adaptation of his work of 1921.

The Reichsschulmusikwoche (Imperial School Music Week) is belong to Kestenberg's work as well. This was founded in 1921, was revived in the 1950s and is still operating today.<sup>17</sup> The aim of this event was to organise a meeting where participants could present their talents and skills in any genre, and consult on a range of problems related to music education in schools.<sup>18</sup> The schedule of the qualifying examination for music teachers, proposed in May 1922, was also based on Kestenberg's proposals and formed the starting point of the reform of music education. When Kestenberg established the examination system, he assumed that the scientific, artistic, and

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<sup>15</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. „Die 'Musikerziehungsidee' von Leo Kestenberg (1882–1962). Zur Aktualität seines Reformkonzeptes für für die musikalische Bildung (The 'Music Education Idea' of Leo Kestenberg (1882-1962))." On the topicality of his reform concept for musical education). *Würzburger Hefte zur Musikpädagogik*, Vol. 8., 2016, pp. 13-61.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> After 1950, it is known as the Bundesschulmusikwoche (Federal School Music Week), nowadays as the Schulmusikwoche (School Music Week).

<sup>18</sup> Kestenberg, Leo. *Gesammelte Schriften in 4 Bänden. Band 1: Die Hauptschriften (Collected writings in 4 volumes. Vol. 1: The main writings)*. Edited by Gruhn, Wilfried. Berlin, Wien, 2009.

pedagogical training proposed in his programme was achievable and that the examination system could be parallel with it.<sup>19</sup>

From 1924, all matters concerning music, except for university affairs, were under Kestenberg's supervision. The regulations introduced in 1925 served to reform music education in schools. „*The implementation of these tasks followed each other almost constantly:*

- *April 1924: regulations on the music education in secondary schools,*
- *April 1925: Guidelines on the curriculum of secondary schools,*
- *December 1925: Regulations on lower-secondary music education,*
- *May 1925: Guidelines on private music education,*
- *March 1927: Guidelines on music education in public schools.*<sup>20</sup>

Even if not as an author, Kestenberg was involved in the making of all the above-mentioned laws as a contributor, critic, and creator of the ideological background. He stated that he also involved the relevant departments in the preparation, thus among others Carl Thiel, Richard Münnich (1877-1970) and Georg Schünemann (1884-1945) also took part in this process.<sup>21</sup> „*The drafting of the regulations was a collaboration.*”<sup>22</sup> It can be assumed, however, that the joint work was not without problems, due to fundamentally different views. Thiel was involved in the development of the music education system that emerged from Kretzschmar's reforms.<sup>23</sup> He promised to keep Kretzschmar's spirit alive and to continue his work at the deathbed of Kretzschmar.<sup>24</sup> As a result, Kestenberg's reform proposals were mostly met with Thiel's vehement opposition. Münnich, the editor of the monthly titled *Monatschrift für Schulgesangspflege (School Music Education)*, was one of Kestenberg's most important collaborators in the school music reform of the 1920s. He considered himself to be a leading figure in the reform, and his relationship with Kestenberg - presumably for this reason - deteriorated by the 1930s.

<sup>19</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. *op. cit.*, pp. 13-61.

<sup>20</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. „Die 'Musikerziehungsidee' von Leo Kestenberg (1882–1962). Zur Aktualität seines Reformkonzeptes für die musikalische Bildung (The 'Music Education Idea' of Leo Kestenberg (1882-1962).” On the topicality of his reform concept for musical education). *Würzburger Hefte zur Musikpädagogik*, Vol. 8., 2016, pp. 13-61.

<sup>21</sup> Günther, Ulrich. „Opportunisten? Zur Biographie führender Musikpädagogen in Zeiten politischer Umbrüche (Opportunists? On the Biography of Leading Music Educators in Times of Political Upheaval).” *Musikpädagogische Forschung*, 13., 1992, pp. 267-285.

<sup>22</sup> Kestenberg, Leo. *Gesammelte Schriften in 4 Bänden. Band 2.1: Aufsätze und vermischte Schriften. Texte aus der Berliner Zeit (1900–1932) (Collected writings in 4 volumes. Vol. 2.1: Essays and miscellaneous writings. Texts from the Berlin Period (1900-1932)*. Edited by Gruhn, Wilfried. Berlin, Wien, 2012. p. 411.

<sup>23</sup> Hermann Kretzschmar (1848-1924) was a reformer of German music education in the period before Kestenberg.

<sup>24</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. *op. cit.*, pp. 13-61.

Schünemann, the director of the Berlin College of Music, was Kestenberg's closest confidant and follower. He shared Kestenberg's views on the importance of music's impact on public education.<sup>25</sup>

From the 1930s Kestenberg had a close work relationship with Schünemann and Hans Joachim Moser (1889-1967), in whom he had the greatest confidence, since they completely shared his vision of good music education, and he knew that they would stand by him in the most difficult times. As the newly appointed director of the Academy of Church Music and Music Education, Moser took serious measures to implement and promote music education reform, which was disseminated at conferences and lectures by him and he published studies primarily in the *Zeitschrift für Schulmusik (School Music Journal)*.<sup>26</sup>

In 1932, at the high spot of the political and economic catastrophe in Germany, the reform of music education was in danger of becoming impossible. Following the change of government (1932), the new Chancellor Franz von Papen ordered the integration of the Arts Department into the Ministry of Science, Arts and Public Education.<sup>27</sup> Kestenberg was also wanted to be dismissed and left his position on 1 December 1932. The reform of music education, which could have continued without Kestenberg in 1933, received increasing support from representatives of the "national socialist spirit". The country began to develop, and there was progress in the field of music education as well. Music education in schools was given greater importance and became a central element in the theory and practice of national socialist education.<sup>28</sup> Kestenberg's keynote about music education were partly realized after World War II in the 1920s.

According to Kestenberg, the basic idea of education should be to strengthen musical understanding and expression. Children should grow up in the spirit of understanding music. He believed that allowing pupils to progress more freely in individual training should be considered, because of this the various tasks would not be connected to semesters but could be completed in shorter or even longer periods of time, depending on the pupils' abilities. Pupils should develop according to their own abilities and personalities,

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<sup>25</sup> Günther, Ulrich. „Opportunisten? Zur Biographie führender Musikpädagogen in Zeiten politischer Umbrüche (Opportunists? On the Biography of Leading Music Educators in Times of Political Upheaval).“ *Musikpädagogische Forschung*, 13., 1992, pp. 267-285.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. „Die 'Musikerziehungsidee' von Leo Kestenberg (1882–1962). Zur Aktualität seines Reformkonzeptes für die musikalische Bildung (The 'Music Education Idea' of Leo Kestenberg (1882-1962).“ On the topicality of his reform concept for musical education). *Würzburger Hefte zur Musikpädagogik*, Vol. 8., 2016, pp. 13-61.

<sup>28</sup> Günther, Ulrich. *op. cit.*, pp. 267-285.

rather than through compulsory assignments for all. He stressed that a good teacher should teach with love and enthusiasm. It is not only professional pedagogical skills that count, but also to be an active musician, thus, to be informed about music in both theoretical and practical terms. It is also important that the music teacher is no longer a representative of a minor subject, but a mediator of artistic impressions and knowledge of musicology and music theory. Kestenbergs also advocated a holistic approach to art education, in which pupils could explore connections between literature, the visual arts and music through the adaptation of the curriculum.<sup>29</sup> The official directives of Kestenbergs - guidelines, financial plan etc. - were of secondary importance. Much more important was the ideological and professional background that defined Kestenbergs work. The crucial factor in effective music education is the personality of the music teacher, who must combine the educator, the artist, and the scholar.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. Comparison

As an unusual summary, we have attempted to compare the basic principles of Kestenbergs and Kodály's music education. The first area is teacher training. Kestenbergs considered it as crucial to completely transform and renew. Under his direction, the Academy of Church Music and Music Education was established, and the music training of teachers and kindergarten teachers was reorganised.<sup>31</sup> Kodály's following idea, from 1929, is a synthesis of well-functioning teacher and music teacher training. *"It is more important who is the singing teacher in Kisvárdá than who is the director of the Opera. Because bad director fails immediately. (Sometimes even the good one.) But the bad teacher kills the love of music out of thirty classes through thirty years."*<sup>32</sup> Additionally, they also both stressed the role of the school as the primary scene for music education.

They also emphasized the importance of singing and choral music. According to Kestenbergs, singing should be put on an artistic basis, because the transfer effects of singing, learning music and playing music is beneficial

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<sup>29</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. „Die 'Musikerziehungsidee' von Leo Kestenbergs (1882–1962). Zur Aktualität seines Reformkonzeptes für für die musikalische Bildung (The 'Music Education Idea' of Leo Kestenbergs (1882-1962))." On the topicality of his reform concept for musical education). *Würzburger Hefte zur Musikpädagogik*, Vol. 8., 2016, pp. 13-61.

<sup>30</sup> Rehberg, Karl. „Von Zelter bis Kestenbergs (From Zelter to Kestenbergs).” *HFM informiert*, Nr.2/1973, pp. 15-26.

<sup>31</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. *op. cit.*, pp. 13-61.

<sup>32</sup> Kodály, Zoltán. *Visszatekintés I. (Retrospection I.)* Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1974. p. 43. – *Gyermekkarok* (1929).



on the human being itself.<sup>33</sup> A relevant quote can illustrate Kodály's thoughts mostly. *“Deeper musical literacy has developed particularly where it was based on singing. [...] The human voice, the [...] most beautiful instrument, can only be the fertile soil of a general, widespread musical culture.”*<sup>34</sup> While Kodály fixed that folk song should be the basis of musical education, Kestenbergs did not specify the material to be learned, but emphasized the role of improvisational activities. Although Kestenbergs was also interested in the comparison of relative and absolute systems of solmisation and in the question of musical literacy, his reform measures do not provide an integrated concept regarding them. On the other hand, the fundamental aim of Kodály's concept, in addition to the principles mentioned above, is the elimination of musical illiteracy, for which the use of relative solmization is an excellent tool.

Reform, method, or concept? In the case of Kestenbergs, it is obvious that we can talk about reform measures. His name is associated with several measures and regulations in the field of music education policy, but methodological annex was not produced to his measures.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, Kodály's reform is the concept itself, the methods, and the whole of which were summarised by his students based on Kodály's teachings. The question of auxiliary materials is also closely connected to the subject. Kodály composed several works for pedagogical purposes for all age groups, but to the name of Kestenbergs, since he was a music teacher and not a composer, music pedagogical compositions were not connected.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning a thought about the parallels between their folkloristic activities. According to Kestenbergs, music education in schools is one of the pillars of public education. He wanted to make opera performances and classical music concerts accessible and understandable to everyone.<sup>36</sup> The Kodály perspective on public education can be briefly summarised as *“Music is for everyone.”*<sup>37</sup>

*Translated from Hungarian by Edit Nagy*

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<sup>33</sup> Rhode-Jüchtern, Anna-Christine. *op. cit.*, pp. 13-61.

<sup>34</sup> Kodály, Zoltán. *Visszatekintés I. (Retrospection I.)* Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1974. p. 117. – *Éneklő Ifjúság – Bevezető cikk a folyóirat első számában* (1941).

<sup>35</sup> Gruhn, Wilfried. *Wir müssen lernen, in Fesseln zu tanzen Leo Kestenbergs Leben zwischen Kunst und Kulturpolitik (We must learn to dance in shackles Leo Kestenbergs life between art and cultural politics)*. Hofheim am Taunus, Wolke Verlags, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Kestenbergs, Leo. *Gesammelte Schriften in 4 Bänden. Band 1: Die Hauptschriften (Collected writings in 4 volumes. Vol. 1: The main writings)*. Edited by Gruhn, Wilfried. Berlin, Wien, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Kodály, Zoltán. *op. cit.*, p. 189. – *A népdal szerepe az orosz és a magyar zeneművészetben - Előadás* (1946).

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