

Thesis of DLA Dissertation

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Zoltán Gárdonyi's Religious Music in the
Context of his Pieces for Mixed Choir

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I. The precursors of the research

There are only a handful of studies devoted to Zoltán Gárdonyi's activity as a composer. From the last decades, such are Dezső Karasszon's and Balázs Szabó's summaries of Gárdonyi's life's work and their analyses of a few especially important pieces. Thanks to the efforts of Zsolt Gárdonyi, his son, and publishers ReZeM and Kálvin Kiadó, a significant portion of his religious choral pieces became more widely known in the early 2000s. Zsolt Gárdonyi's notes included in these volumes and certain lectures and studies from Sándor Berkesi are considered the first presentations of his religious pieces. The catalogue of Zoltán Gárdonyi's works is available from two sources: the Gárdonyi-Monograph by Karasszon and the catalogue compiled by Johanna Mária Győri.

Several treatises attempted giving a summary on Zoltán Gárdonyi's academic work, two of Melinda Berlász's essays were of significant help in writing my thesis. One is called 'Emlékfüzér Gárdonyi Zoltán centenáriuma', in which former students remember their

master; the other one is the summary titled 'Gárdonyi Zoltán zenetudományi munkásságának bibliográfiája'.

However, the aforementioned studies only touch on Zoltán Gárdonyi's religious pieces. This is the very reason why I aim to carry out a thorough, groundbreaking examination of this area in my thesis.

II. Sources

The primary source materials for my analysis were the collections 'Szívemnek kösziklája', 'Magasztaló ének' and 'Válogatott kórusművek' edited by Zsolt Gárdonyi as well as the scores of oratorical pieces 'Dícsérő ének' and 'A tékozló fiú'. My secondary sources were articles by Zoltán Gárdonyi relevant to my research, most of which were published in the periodical 'Evangélikus Népiskola' in the 1930s and 1940s. Furthermore, concerning the influences affecting him as a composer, I drew from the following treatises by him: 'Kodály, a zenepegagógus'; 'Palestrina szakrális zenéje Kodály tanításában'; 'Négy szemeszter Hindemith iskolájában'; and also from his theoretical

books about Bach's style and the characteristics of Viennese classical composers.

In the first part of my thesis I endeavor to put Zoltán Gárdonyi's religious pieces into context in terms of music history and religious music. A reliable basis for my research was provided by the above-mentioned summaries as well as Zoltán Gárdonyi's own publications and essays. I tried to the best of my abilities to portray him, the composer of religious music in his complexity. For this very reason I examined two main areas in more detail – although not exceeding the limitations of the thesis. These areas are his Sopron years at the start of his career and his role in Reformed cantor training.

III. Method

In the first part of my thesis I explored the role religious mixed choirs played in Zoltán Gárdonyi's life's work, then I investigated the impact other composers had on him, also reviewed his work in the field of music history and his diverse activities in Reformed religious music.

The analyses included in the second part aim to categorize his mixed choir pieces. The examination of their position in the practice of religious music of their time was an important factor along with the review of the impacts discussed in the first chapter, showing how the more conservative style of his great predecessors interlinks with the contemporary Hungarian music of the early 20th century. I grouped the pieces based on their complexity: simple harmonizations, minor motets, major motets, and pieces for organ accompanied mixed choir. Within these categories I strove to display the differences and similarities between pieces composed to a set melody (cantus firmus) and those born of free invention, and to do so from several points of view.

IV. Results

Thanks to his essential theoretical books the Hungarian musician scene is well aware of Zoltán Gárdonyi's work. In my thesis I'd like to demonstrate that his activity and significance as a composer in the field of Reformed religious music is even greater than acknowledged.

Through acquainting the wider public with his works it is paramount to recognize their exemplary structure and high-level musicality. By doing so we could ensure that Gárdonyi's pieces take their rightful place in the history of Hungarian sacred music.

Furthermore I wished to highlight that the professional and humane qualities of the Kodály-school left their marks on his personality as well as his career. He led his life following in his master's footsteps merging in his soul the dual personality of a composer and that of a highly trained scholar of music. In the meantime he became one of the most significant educator of Hungarian Reformed religious music through his publications and pieces of varying difficulty.

The research for my thesis bore some unexpected fruit as well: in Sopron, in the early days of his career (1931–1941) Gárdonyi worked for the periodical 'Evangélikus Népiskola', as an associate of the Cantor's Section first, then as the leader of the same section for years. He published nearly forty articles in numerous topics with which he intended to provide his readers with accurate professional knowledge and practical advice.

Besides, more than ten of his pieces were discovered, which were unaccounted for by the Győri-catalogue. These were supplemented by another few of his publications printed in sundry periodicals which weren't mentioned in the Berlász-bibliography. Some of these documents I perused during my research and at the same time added another twoscore entries to the bibliography of Zoltán Gárdonyi.

V. Documentation of the activities related to the subject of my thesis

As the chorus master of the Gárdonyi Zoltán Énekkar of the Reformed congregation of Sopron – where I worked for more than 10 years (2004–2017) – I had the opportunity to present Gárdonyi's pieces for mixed choir at services and church choir conventions at least quarterly.

Some of Gárdonyi's major motets also made their way into the repertoire of Kórus Spontánusz, my other ensemble in Sopron. These were performed in Sopron at our own subscription concerts as well as at concert series 'Sukoró Zenei Nyár 2017'.