

Thesis of a DLA Dissertation

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Accompaniment by Bárdos for Mystery Plays

Accompaniment by Lajos Bárdos for Valéria Dienes's Mystery Plays
and the Alexius Suite

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I. The Antecedents of the Research

In the second half of the 1920's Valéria Dienes started performing mystery plays together with the students in her Orchestics School. For the accompaniment she requested the entrant Lajos Bárdos, who partly composed, partly compiled the music, also taught it to his choir (the Saint Cecilia Choir), and Bárdos was also the leader and conductor of the musical parts. For Bárdos the significance of this fifteen-year-long co-operation for Bárdos was both the inspiration and the experience he gained in choir training and performing, which later as composer of choral works he could apply very well.

Processing, being introduced to and familiarizing with the accompaniment composed for mystery plays have so far escaped attention of researchers. The literature concerning Bárdos's artistic work could be called rather incomplete: articles about him and his compositions tell us only about the teacher. An overall picture is given in two books I found: one is Anna Dalos: *Form, Harmony, Counterpoint, Sketches for Zoltán Kodály's Poetics (Budapest: Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 2007)*, where Bárdos's work is described in connection with the introduction of the Kodály School. While enlarging upon the Kodály oeuvre, the book analyses the role Lajos Bárdos played in the ongoing change of the 20th century Hungarian music and also provides valuable information on and paints a realistic picture of Bárdos as a composer and theoretician.

The publishing of the other book: Mihály Ittész: *Bárdos Lajos* (Budapest, Mágus Kiadó, 2009, edited by Melinda Berlász, in series "*Hungarian Composers*" Vol. 36) has filled a great need. Its thoroughly edited material is of high standard. It focuses on the composer Bárdos and gives an overall picture of him while provides a great amount of supplementary information and a systematically compiled register of his work of art. It can be the starting point of any future research, and will be of great help for those who undertake to explore the less known areas of Lajos Bárdos's rich and valuable oeuvre.

II. The Sources of the Research

My primary sources were mostly manuscripts, which along with the relating information also gave a special experience. The accompaniment composed for the mystery plays has never been published¹, so the basis of my analysis were copies of the still existing, but unfortunately often not complete manuscripts, which I was provided with in the Bárdos Museum.²

I also found a great quantity of useful information at the manuscript archive of the National Széchenyi Library (NSzL), where I studied the legacy of Valéria Dienes. The extraordinary amount of unprocessed material (detailed diaries, letters, translations and other documents) helped me to get acquainted with the philosopher's relation to music, free dance, and also to orchestics, a dancing system raised to scientific level, that was developed by her. The documents also revealed Valéria Dienes's lifelong working relationship with Lajos Bárdos.

I obtained knowledge of the great interest, attention and success (and favourable reception) of the performances based on reports of concerts and critics I found in the microfilm library of the NSzL.

I got to know Bárdos's efforts and missionary work to revive Hungarian choral life and to create a valuable repertoire from studying the "Magyar Kórus" (Hungarian Choir) magazines.

In the Institute for Musicology I was given the opportunity to read through the manuscript of Zsuzsa Merényi's *Hungarian Free Dance Trends and Their Musical Relations* (1912-1944), which helped my orientation among the different schools of dancing history. I found and was reaffirmed several times during my research that the leaders of the most important dancing schools were all professionals in music, too.

In my musical analysis I took Bárdos's theoretical and academic works as a basis, such as *Modal harmonies* (Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1961), *Thirty writings* (Budapest,

¹ The publishing was probably hindered by the fact that Bárdos composed only part of the music to the mystery plays himself, some parts he inserted in from other composers. This meant partly re-discovered renaissance pieces for his unprofessional choir, partly compositions of his ex-musician mates in composing.

² The cooperating musicians (organist, pianist, percussion etc.) often played according to Bárdos's oral instructions; their composed parts were not written down in all cases, the scores contained only different indications and referring entries.

Zeneműkiadó, 1969), *Romantic Harmonies* (edited by Mária Póczyoni according to Bárdos's lectures, Budapest, Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, s.a.). These books helped me to understand Bárdos's musical interpretation, his approach and way of thinking, while for analysis from another point of view I used Ernő Lendvai: *Harmonies of Bartók and Kodály* (Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1975), and the above mentioned work of Anna Dalos.

III. The Procedure of the Research

I used Valéria Dienes's writings to get acquainted with the genre of the middle age mystery play, its coming to life and its adaptation in the 20th century. This was important in order to serve as a starting point in the analysis of the relating music. I held it inevitable to collect information about the dances and dancing elements just as well, since in mystery plays motion and live music are born on stage at the same time, one complements and helps the other. These served as the background to my musical research together with the dramaturgical elements, which have a strong connection to Catholic Liturgical Tradition.

I was surprised and fascinated by the great variety of the music³ when I got to look at them more thoroughly, so my approach and the aspects of the analysis had to be changed according to the character of the given material. One part or many parts, Christian musical elements, Latin and Hungarian melodies and elements of folk tradition – I did my best to find and to understand the main concept of how these are connected and attached to each other to form one great work of art. It was also interesting to follow how the composing characteristics changed in the two decades between the very first composed mystery play: *Waiting for Dawn* and the last completed *Alexius Suite*.

I searched and researched how the ex-Kodály-student employed the knowledge he obtained when starting his own path in composing, how he passed on the inspiration he got from his master, and how he could find his own voice in composing. Beside the effect European contemporary music had on Hungarian music the Hungarian musical environment of the 1920-30's was also an important factor in all these.

In Lajos Bárdos's oeuvre no one has so far researched this interesting but rather forgotten area. The mystery plays which at the time were successfully performed and highly valued by many are now left to be seen on some photographs, but no recording was ever made of their music.

³ Variety of melodies, folksongs, hymns, chorals, Gregorian chants, Bárdos compositions, different uses of the choir: male, female and mixed choirs singing one part to seven parts. Dramaturgically the performers can be soloist-soloist, soloist-chorus, chorus-chorus

IV. The Results of the Research

In 1999 I had the privilege to be part of the performance and CD recording of the *Alexius Suite* in Miskolc as conductor. I met Dr. Gedeon Dienes former solo dancer of the mystery plays, personally. These experiences have driven my attention to the joint works of Dienes-Bárdos.

In my paper I present the first steps of the young composer and follow the development of his composing toolbar until his *Suite* written about the story of Saint Alexis in 1946. I shed light on the interaction between the choir conductor and the composer and how the tasks they gave to each other made Bárdos primarily a composer of choir pieces and how he gained the ability of easy to sing composing.

I explore the factors of the 20th century Hungarian revival of a dramatic genre, the mystery play. I demonstrate the presence and justification of traditionalism and modern methods in the interpretation of the accompaniment by Bárdos. Valéria Dienes had definite concepts about mystery plays written, compiled, choreographed with dance and directed by her when ordering the musical parts from Bárdos. In my paper I show how they worked together and how this not solely musical production became an inspiration for Bárdos, and how this gave him a practical routine for composing further choir pieces.

In connection with the many threads of the musical fabric I present his composing toolbar and where he arrived as a mature composer. My paper shows the elements in which Kodály a master and role model for Bárdos left his imprints in his composer student. These affirm the apprehension according to which Bárdos is a pursuer of the route Kodály started.

V. Documentation of the Activities Related to the Subject of the Thesis

In 1999 I participated in the training and rehearsal of the Alexius Suite as conductor. The first opening performance was in the hall of the University of Miskolc followed by the CD recording.

Bartók Béla – Orbán György – Bárdos Lajos. CD Miskolc: Allegro 1999. MZA-043

Successes with the Bartók Leánykar (Bartók Female Choir) singing Bárdos' choral works:

1992 International Choir Competition Ventspils – I. Prize

Magos a rutafa (High is the Rue Tree) – for the performance of which we received the special prize of the best presented piece

1996 International Bartók Béla Choir Competition in Debrecen - II. Prize on the folklore show: *Rika, Rika, Magos a rutafa* (High is the Rue Tree)

Appearances of the Bartók Choir of Miskolc – when Bárdos pieces were sung as well:

2003 September: Pesaro: Urbino: three appearances on the 2nd Choir Festival

2004 June: Choir Festival in Predazzo – two appearances

September: Church Music Choir Festival Olbia – four appearances

July: 7th “Universitat cantat 2005” Poznan, Poland – three appearances

December: 5th Festival of Chamber Choirs in Háromszék

2011. április: Chamber Choir Festival, Miskolc

Bárdos pieces sung: *Libera me*, *Dana-dana*, *Régi táncdal* (Old Dance Song), *Mari-Nárcisz dal* (Mari-Daffodil Song), *Réten, réten* (On the Field)