

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY, SEVEN PIANO PIECES OP. 11¹

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SUMMARY. Zoltán Kodály is mostly known for his pedagogical concept, however he was also a respected composer. The *Seven Piano Pieces* is one of his most popular series amongst piano teachers. The compositions are very colourful following different trends of the early 20th century such as the styles of Debussy and Bartók and take inspiration from Hungarian folk music. This article focuses on the presentation and analysis of each piece and points out the connections between them based on the style in which they were written.

Keywords: Zoltán Kodály, piano pieces, 20th century, Béla Bartók, Hungarian folk music, impressionism

1. Musical Currents of the 20th Century in Europe and Hungary

The turn of the century was an important period in the history of Hungarian culture, as for the first time since the Reform Era, it brought a revival of intellectual life concurrently affecting several branches of the arts both in Budapest and the larger rural towns. At the same time, in Europe as a whole, it was a period in which the moral and ideological message of individual works of art gestured beyond the artwork itself. In Hungary, the art of the turn of the century is significant in two respects: on the one hand, it explored Hungarian folk culture, and on the other, it caught up with the rest of Europe.

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In Europe, Debussy's oeuvre marked the arrival of the twentieth century. Impressionist influences from the fine arts led the French composer into a new realm of possibilities for the musical language. As an advocate of sensualism, "he restores the pure value, light and weight of sound and tone" in his works.³ At the same time, Debussy continued the trends stemming from Romanticism in some respects, as evidenced by the idea of a single main theme (e.g. *The Sea*) and the use of cyclic variation (e.g. *String Quartet*). Alongside France, Germany was the other country that saw the emergence of a prominent new musical current at the beginning of the century, with Richard Strauss at its vanguard. In German territories, it was impossible to fully break away from the more deeply rooted Romantic traditions. Therefore, innovations were very limited there, and even those introduced tended to be rather further improvements on Romantic music.

In Hungarian music, the folksy art song, which flourished in the Romantic period, was ousted from its prominent position. Instead – thanks to Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, primarily – the exploration of the treasure trove represented by the genuine folksong commenced. "Kodály and Bartók recognised that they had acquired a national treasure by discovering authentic peasant music. From that moment on, their entire musical activity served the goal of making this treasure the basis of modern Hungarian musical culture. One aim of this endeavour was the creation of modern national art music, and the other was to put music pedagogy on a new footing, closely linked to the creation of national music."⁴ Through their compositions, they gradually made the national public accept and love folksongs. Beginning from adding piano accompaniment to song material, they went on to integrate folk music into their compositions. With their work, Hungarian music took a completely new direction.

2. Kodály's works for the piano

People immediately associate Zoltán Kodály's name with the Kodály concept, which not only laid a solid foundation for Hungarian music education, but also brought him international fame. In addition to his efforts to develop

³ Szabolcsi, Bence. *A zene története* (The History of Music). Ed. Kossuth, Budapest, 1999, 339.

⁴ Várady, Krisztina. "Dobszay László: *A hangok világa szolfézs könyv-sorozat megjelenésének korabeli időszerűsége* (VI/1) A 'kodályi elvek' megjelenése a korabeli szolfézs kiadványokban." (The Contemporaneous Timeliness of the Publication of László Dobszay's Solfege Book Series *The World of Tones* (VI/1) The Manifestation of the 'Kodály Principles' in Contemporary Solfege Publications). *Parlando* 59, no. 2 (2017): 1.

music education, he was a well-known and respected composer, even if not as prolific as for example his contemporary, Béla Bartók. Kodály is known to have been a vocally inspired composer, but he also wrote piano works, albeit less widely known.

After the piano works of his youth, which were never performed before an audience, his first published compositions were written in 1907. One was his *Méditation sur un Motif de Debussy*, the other his *Valsette*. *Méditation* was created originally and continued to exist as a stand-alone piano piece; both its premiere in 1924 and publication in 1925 were belated. The composer unfolded the opening theme of Debussy's *String Quartet* into a rich fantasia, using a variety of registers. This is the first piece in which Kodály used the whole-tone scale in addition to diatonicism.

Valsette was originally the opening piece of Kodály's *Piano Music* (Zongoramuzsika) cycle. Later Kodály omitted the piece and renamed the cycle *Nine Piano Pieces* (Kilenc zongoradarab) Op. 3. The series was published in 1910, but its exact date of origin is unknown. The date is only given at the end of the final piece, '17 III 1909' (Emma Sándor's birthday), but it is uncertain whether all the works were written in that year. *Piano Music* was first performed exactly one year later, on 17 March 1910 in Béla Bartók's rendition⁵, still including *Valsette*. Each piece in the cycle has a different motivation, and the frequent use of rhythm and harmony ostinato is an indication of a new approach to handling the piano.⁶

Kodály's next piano work was also a cycle, not originally intended as such, but the composer happened to compile six pieces in a series, to which a seventh was added later. *Seven Piano Pieces* (Hét zongoradarab) Op. 11 was composed between 1910 and 1918 and published in 1921.⁷ It was again premiered by Bartók in 1921, but for unknown reasons he omitted the last piece, *Rubato*; later he played the unabridged series at his concerts.

Among the piano pieces, mention also must be made of the rarely played piano version of *Dances of Marosszék* (Marosszéki táncok), which preceded the more popular orchestral version. Its origins are uncertain, but its idea probably dates back to 1923, while its premiere took place in 1927.

After this, there was a pause of many years in the line of Kodály's works for the piano. The last of the *Seven Piano Pieces* was composed in 1918, and other piano works were to follow only in 1945–46. These are *Children's Dances* (Gyermektáncok) and *24 Little Canons on the Black Keys*

⁵ Eősze, László. *Forr a világ (The World in a Commotion)*. Móra Kiadó, Budapest, 1970, 29.

⁶ Eősze, László. *Örökségünk Kodály (Kodály, our Legacy)*. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2000, 55.

⁷ Breuer, János. *Kodály-kalauz (Kodály Companion)*. Zeneműkiadó, Budapest, 1982, 334.

(24 kis kánon a fekete billentyűkön), two series for instructional purposes.⁸ The special feature of both volumes is that they were written for the black keys exclusively, which makes performing some of the pieces a considerable technical challenge. While the works in *Children's Dances* can be found in the music school repertoire, the *24 Little Canons* are very rarely heard. Afterwards, Kodály composed only a few short pieces for beginners for various piano methods and collections, which were compiled for publication in 1973 under the title *12 Little Pieces for Piano* (12 kis darab zongorára).

The influence of both French Impressionism and Hungarian folk music can be felt in Kodály's piano music, as well as impulses from the works of Bartók.

He first heard a work by Debussy in Berlin late in 1906, soon to buy his music in print as well, during the next leg of his study trip in Paris. Kodály described the French composer's importance as follows: "...the most distinctive and influential musician of his, generation... In harmonies he often renounced the advantages of combining chords in a customary way, thereby increasing the expressive force of the chords he used. His melodies move in the fresh currents avoiding chromatics. At this point his music touches both ancient and folk music. But it is the culture of tone colours which owes most to him."⁹

Much has already been said about the folk song collecting work that he did with Bartók. The fundamental difference between them is that while Bartók studied and collected music from many different ethnic groups, Kodály – with few exceptions – adhered to Hungarian folk music all along. Another interesting difference is that, while Bartók usually arranged the folksongs that caught his imagination as a composer very soon after collecting them, and used them in his compositions, Kodály often did the same only years after collection. One example is *Transylvanian Lament* (Székely keserves), which was collected in 1910 and composed in 1918.

Bartók's piano works published in 1908, *14 Bagatelles* and *Ten Easy Pieces for the Piano* (Tíz könnyű zongoradarab), also had a great influence on Kodály with their innovations in form and structure, as well as with their uniquely modern tone and sonority. Kodály's Op. 3 series is reminiscent of these pieces by Bartók in some respects.

The reception of Kodály's piano works was not always positive. Even the renowned music critic and piano educator Sándor Kovács criticised *Piano Music*, writing of the cycle as follows: "...Kodály was wrong to publish this volume. To call it piano music is far from the truth. It is not music. It's not

⁸ Breuer, János. *Idem*. 350.

⁹ Kodály, Zoltán. *Claude Debussy*, in *Nyugat* 11 no. 8 (April 1918).

music yet, it's just music-gimmick, music-possibility, some of which has actually turned into great things: the beautiful string quartet, the wonderfully exquisite cello sonata..."¹⁰

The press response to the cycle is eerily similar to the reception of Bartók's *14 Bagatelles*, since their modernity also received the sharp critique of his contemporaries. The poor reception of Kodály's works in Hungary is best exemplified by the fact that not a single Kodály work was performed in the country between 1912 and 1917.

Seven Piano Pieces found a much more appreciative ear in the ranks of the Budapest public. Favourable reviews ranked it above the foreign novelties of the time. They made special mention of the poignant tragedy of *Epitaph* and the two Transylvanian folksong arrangements.

Kodály's piano works soon became known not only in Hungary, but also abroad, with some of them even published in print. In 1911, the *Allegro giocoso* movement of *Nine Piano Pieces* Op. 3 was published in Paris as an appendix to Sándor Kovács's study "La jeune école hongroise" [The New Hungarian School], alongside Bartók's *Bear Dance* (Medvetánc). Then, in 1921, the fifth of the *Seven Piano Pieces*, *Tranquillo*, was published in print, with a Bartók work again, the 4th movement of *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs* (Improvizációk) Op. 20.

After its premiere in Budapest, *Nine Piano Pieces* Op. 3 were also performed in Paris, and there they met a much more appreciative audience. The Paris premiere took place thanks to pianist Tivadar Szántó, who kept including the cycle or its pieces in his programme later, as well. In 1914, for example, he gave a piano recital of contemporary works, performing *Lento* from Kodály's Op. 3 along with compositions by Debussy, Ravel, Schoenberg, Enescu, Casella, Busoni, Bartók, Weiner and works of his own.¹¹

Even with his success abroad, it should be noted anyhow that Kodály's piano compositions did not become as widely known as his orchestral or chamber works. This was mainly because, unlike their Hungarian confreres, foreign pianists did not often perform his pieces. Although Bartók often played Kodály works abroad, they still did not become known to a wider international audience.

¹⁰ Kovács, Sándor. *Kodály Zoltán: Zongoramuzsika (Kodály Zoltán: Piano Music)*. In: *Renaissance* 1 no. 10, (25th September 1910).

¹¹ Breuer, János. *Kodály-kalauz (Kodály Companion)*. Zeneműkiadó, Budapest, 1982, 338.

3. Seven Piano Pieces, Op. 11

The cycle's significance in music history lies in the fact that its pieces trace the different trends of the early 20th century and their influence on Kodály. These seven pieces of moderate length put the composer's whole palette on display.

Regarding the history of piano literature, this series is outstanding because the pieces can be incorporated into the piano teaching curriculum, although they are of full artistic value. In Hungarian music history, primarily Bartók and Kodály are associated with pieces serving both purposes.

Although *Seven Piano Pieces* was not written as a cycle and does not have the specific formal features of a cycle, it exhibits a very coherent dramaturgy. The seven pieces are arranged concentrically in pairs, thus framing the 4th piece in their axis, which calls for an analysis along the lines of the same system.¹² Since Kodály makes occasional references to the ideological message of each piece, it is worth taking these also into account when scrutinising the works.

The opening piece, *Lento*, is arguably one of Kodály's most modern works with its daring harmonies. At first glance, we see a very airy notation of chords and long note values. It begins with a descending tritone, which returns at the end of the work, but in an upward leap, repeated like a sigh, as if leaving the message open. The characteristic harmonies of the work, such as the D F# Bb C opening chord of the fourth bar, as shown in the musical example, will recur in the final piece of the cycle.

E.g. 1

Extract from *Lento* (bars 7-11)¹³

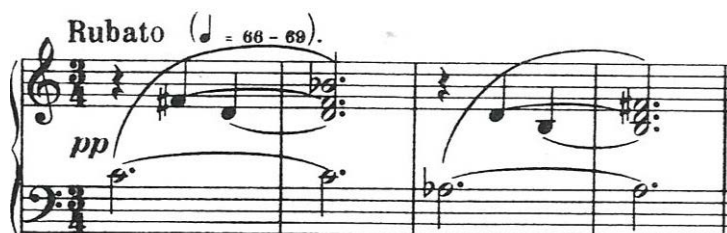
¹² Based on János Breuer's system.

¹³ Source for the examples: Kodály, Zoltán. *Hét zongoradarab (Seven Piano Pieces)*, Op. 11. Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, Budapest, 1955.

On the first encounter already, hidden melodies and melodic fragments emerge, and it is also clear that they are spread out over several voices. The dynamic range in this merely one-page-long work is wide, moving from *ppp* to *f*. The challenge for the performer is to bring together musical arcs moving at a slow tempo, on sustained notes, and to create a colourful world of timbre.

This slow introduction is echoed in the final movement, *Rubato*, which uses harmonies from the first piece (for example, the first C D F# Bb chord), its folk-inspired melody coloured by whole-tone scales and pentatonic elements.

E. g. 2



The beginning of the last piece, *Rubato* (bars 1-4)

The tritone opening and closing can also be found here, but after a calm introduction of 4 bars, musical material of improvisatory spirit follows, which makes the impression of folk tunes. Whole-tone scales, their fragments, and the pentatonic soundscape that blends with them provide a special experience. The melody, alternating between the right and left hand, is full of elements typical of folk instrumental ornamentation and reaches its climax with broad *arpeggio* chords, concluding the first section. Here the composer expands the score to three staves, a sign of Debussy's influence, which remains characteristic throughout the next section, marked *misterioso*.

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is in treble clef and contains a melody marked 'pp misterioso'. The middle and bottom staves are in bass clef and provide harmonic accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and a fermata over a whole note in the top staff.

Three-staff notation in *Rubato* (bars 29-37)

The part shown in Figure 3 begins with a pentatonic melody, where the folk music influence can clearly be felt again. It is played in 4 parallel octaves over sustained octave and chord accompaniment. Then the pentatonic tone-set expands, recalling the initial soundscape of the work. After a whole-beat decay under a fermata, the introductory motifs of the piece follow again, but shortened, with a different continuation, changing the tonic of the improvised melody. This section again ends in the familiar pentatonic melody, although this time the D tonic is replaced by G#. We reach the end of *Rubato* through expanding the registers, finishing with the opening motif with one varied note, in two ascending tritones.

The concluding piece is extremely complex, with an interesting blend of folk influences with Debussy's impressionism and Bartók's soundscape. Together with the opening piece, they provide a quasi-frame for the cycle.

A kinship can also be recognised between the second and the sixth pieces, which are both Transylvanian folksong arrangements. Kodály collected the melody of the second piece, *Transylvanian Lament* in Gyergyószentmiklós (today: Gheorgheni, Romania) in 1910 ("Mourn for me dear mother...").

E. g. 4

Parlando ♩ = 76–72. Muz. Fo. 1272a). Gyergyószentmiklós, (Csík vm.) 1910.K.

Aj, Si-rass él-des-a-nyám, mig e-lőt-ted já-rok,
 Mer az-tán si-rat-hatsz, ha tő-led el-vá-lok. *Aj,*
 A jó is-ten tud-ja, hol tör-tén ha-lá-lom,
 A jó is-ten tud-ja, hol tör-tén ha-lá-lom.

2. Istenem, istenem, hol lészén halálom,
 Erdőn-é, vaj mezőn, vaj pedig tengერen?
 Ha erdőn veszék el, ki temet el engem,
 Ha tengერen veszék, ki sirat még engem.
3. El is eltemetnek az erdei vadak,
 Meg is megsiratnak az égi madarak.
 Tengերnek nagy habja szemfedelém lészén,
 Tengերnek zúgása harangszóm is lészén.

The original folksong¹⁴

Kodály added the first two lines of the folksong's lyrics above the melody at the beginning of the piece. The piano composition covers all three verses of the song, with short transitions in between. In the first verse, mood-depicting sustained piano chords accompany the melody played with the right hand. Its dynamics gradually increase, and its accompaniment becomes denser up until the last melody line.

¹⁴ Example: Kodály, Zoltán. *A magyar népzene (Hungarian Folk Music)*, ed. Lajos Vargyas Editio Musica, Budapest, 1991, 179.

E. g. 5

Rubato, parlando (♩=104-112)

Si - rass éi - dēs a - nyám, míg e - löt - ted já - rok,

The beginning of *Transylvanian Lament* (bars 1-5)

After a syncopated connecting passage, the melody is transferred to the left hand in the second verse, whereas the syncopated accompaniment continues in the right hand, reinforcing the *agitato* character. Thus, the music expresses the message of the verse's lyrics to extreme effect.

E. g. 6

rallent. - *molto* - *Agitato* (♩=126) - *a tempo* - *rit.*

pp *fsubito*

molto espr. e sempre marcato

The appearance of the second stanza in the left hand
(*Transylvanian Lament*, bars 17-21)

After a more tranquil transition, Kodály splendidly symbolizes the message of the last stanza: “*Tengernek zúgása harangszóm is leszen*” [The roar of the sea shall be the bell tolling for me]¹⁵. The melody and accompaniment now appear concurrently in both hands, alternating between the robust accompanying chords and the folk song rendered in four parallel octaves.

¹⁵ Kodály, Zoltán. *A magyar népzene (Hungarian Folk Music)*, ed. Lajos Vargyas. Editio Musica, Budapest, 1991, 179.

E. g. 7

The third stanza in four octaves (*Transylvanian Lament*, bars 31-35)

Kodály concludes the piece with an ascending pentatonic run, which finally finds resolution on the opening G minor chord.

The sixth work, *Székely nóta* [Transylvanian Song], treats the melody of the folk song “Az hol én elmenyek” [Whereabouts I depart], which Kodály collected in 1912 in Kászónimpér (now Imper, Romania).

E. g. 8

2. Hulljatok levelek,
Rejtsetek el ingem,
Mert az én éldéssem
Sirva keres ingem.

3. Sír az út előttem,
Bánkódik az ösveny,
Még az is azt mondja:
Áldjon meg az isten.

4. Áldjon meg az Isten
Minden javaival,
Mint kerti violát
Drága illatokkal.

The original folksong¹⁶

¹⁶ Kodály, Zoltán. *A magyar népzene (Hungarian Folk Music)*, ed. Lajos Vargyas. Editio Musica, Budapest, 1991. 109.

The folksong originally had four verses, but the piano piece contains only three, and like in *Transylvanian Lament*, the musical material is enriched gradually. An interesting feature of the piece is that it incorporates elements of instrumental improvisation from the folk tradition, thus displaying a colourful range of ornamentation. The first stanza is intended to introduce the melody.

E. g. 9

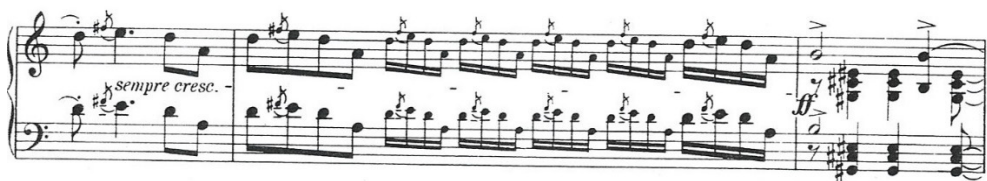


The beginning of the first verse (*Transylvanian Song*, bars 1-5)

At this point, the melody is yet characterised by clean simplicity, with accompaniment only during the resting points at the end of the phrases (e.g. bar 3 in the example). Then, at the end of the verse, an improvisatory repetition of motifs appears.

In the second verse, folk improvisations of highly diverse form begin, with ornamentation not only at the end of phrases, but also incorporated into them. The melody is thus somewhat interrupted but appears in a still recognisable variation. In the following musical example, one of the closing ornaments is shown.

E. g. 10



Closing ornament (*Transylvanian Song*, bars 33-35)

Here again, the final verse widens to four octaves, a process already prepared by the opening ornamentation of the second verse, which widens

into two. The improvisation becomes increasingly rapid, the demisemiquaver runs of the *stringendo* section opening with broad arpeggio chords. After the weighty octaves, the piece finally winds down and ends *pianissimo*, with an embellishment of the final motif.

The symmetrical structure of *Seven Piano Pieces* is realised through yet another parallelism between the third and fifth piano pieces. These two works evidence the influence of Debussy and French Impressionism the most, with such specific musical solutions reminiscent of the latter as the typical harmonies of Impressionism, *arpeggio* accompaniment, three-line notation, the use of music to convey colours and moods, and the blending of harmonies.

The complete title of the third piece, *Esik a szívemben, amint esik a városban* [“il pleut dans mon coeur comme il pleut sur la ville-”/ Tears fall in my heart as rain falls on the town]¹⁷, has been shortened to *Esik a városban...* [Rain falls on the town...] in colloquial usage. The title points to a French origin in several ways. The (mis)quotation itself is from Verlaine, who used a line from a lost Rimbaud poem as an epigraph [“*Il pleut doucement sur la ville*”, / The rain falls gently on the town). Furthermore, Debussy also adapted Verlaine’s poem in his series *Ariettes oubliées*. The third piece was the first to be written in Kodály’s cycle. Its inclusion in *Seven Piano Pieces* is completely justified dramaturgically, although it would also fit into the idiom of Kodály’s Op. 3 series. The composer employs the ostinato technique to create a vivid sense of falling rain. In the right hand, the accompaniment consists of only two chords, which appear in three different forms throughout the piece: played homophonically, arpeggiated and broken into quaver movements. The following three musical examples illustrate this.

E. g. 11

Allegretto malinconico (♩ = 188 - 144)

The musical score shows the first three bars of the piece. The right hand (treble clef) plays a series of chords in 4/4 time, with a dynamic marking of *pp*. The left hand (bass clef) plays a simple bass line, with a dynamic marking of *p* and a fermata over the first two bars. The tempo is marked *Allegretto malinconico* with a quarter note equal to 188-144 beats per minute.

Homophonic accompaniment (*Rain falls on the town...*, bars 1-3)

¹⁷ Kodály, Zoltán. *Hét zongoradarab (Seven Piano Pieces) Op. 11*, Editio Musica, Budapest, 1952.

E.g. 12

Arpeggiated accompaniment (*Rain falls on the town...*, bars 11-14)

E.g. 13

Accompaniment broken into quavers (*Rain falls on the town...*, bars 28-31)

With these accompaniment variations, Kodály gives an excellent sense of the different manifestations and degrees of rain and symbolizes human emotions in a figurative sense, as is apparent from the title borrowed from poetry.

The melody, divided into 4-bar motifs, runs in the left hand all along. At the end of each motif, Kodály directs the performer to slow down, and then at the beginning of the next one, the original tempo returns with a slight *stringendo*. Consequently, a slight undulation can be felt throughout the piece.

E. g. 14

Tempo undulation (*Rain falls on the town...*, bars 4-6)

In the written-out dynamics, we find nothing but *ppp* and *pp*. However, the aforementioned tempo fluctuation is matched with a *crescendo–decrescendo* indication, so we can approach a very subtle *mezzoforte* nuance.

Of the cycle, this piece can be found the most often in music school children's repertoire.

The fifth piece, marked *Tranquillo*, and its symmetrical pair are complete opposites in their means of expression, yet the two are akin in involving the stylistic features of the mature Debussy. Two musical materials, first appearing consecutively, are contrasted throughout the work: a chordal mixture of characteristic rhythm is followed by a pentatonic melody in syncopated parallel octaves.

E. g. 15

Tranquillo (♩ = 54 - 56.)

p espr.

(ppp)

The statement of the two musical materials (*Tranquillo*, bars 1-4)

The tension between these two musical materials is present in the whole work. The influence of Impressionism is also evident in the score, expanding from two staves to three, as justified by the musical material. As is typical of many of his piano works, Kodály uses wide registers of the instrument to express musical ideas.

Only one piece remains to discuss, the fourth composition in the cycle's axis, *Epitaph* (Sírfelirat). Although it is not proven, the material and sonority, as well as its 1918 date of composition suggest that Kodály most probably intended the work as Debussy's epitaph, since this was the year of the French composer's death.

The improvisation entwining the recitative Hebrew funeral hymn that begins in the fourth bar of the example unfolds from a single note.

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system is in 4/4 time and is marked 'Rubato. (♩ = 104-108.)'. It features a treble clef staff with a half note G4, a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note E4. The bass clef staff has a half note C4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note E4. There are dynamic markings 'p cresc.' and 'p'. The score includes triplets and a 5/4 time signature change. The second system is in 9/4 time and is marked 'tempo' and 'accel. appassionato'. It features a treble clef staff with a half note G4, a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note E4. The bass clef staff has a half note C4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note E4. There are dynamic markings 'ff' and 'p'. The score includes triplets and a 5/4 time signature change.

The beginning of *Epitaph* (bars 1-5)

József Ujfalussy's research has revealed the composition's relationship with the second piece of Debussy's first *Images* series, which also pays homage to a composer, namely Rameau.¹⁸ Aladár Tóth, Kodály's contemporary, had little regard for *Epitaph*, as his article in the literary journal *Nyugat* [West] attests: "Work IV is perhaps the least noble of the collection. Its barbaric power is not always convincing and its *meno mosso* mood setting is not entirely sincere. The great rhythm can only warm you up momentarily, and the aesthetic precocity of the whole work only dissolves into a truly profound lyric in the final section: there we have the complete Kodály again."¹⁹ This is the lengthiest piece in the cycle, and it is very colourful both dynamically and in terms of tempo changes. The opening note and the tonic note of the funeral dirge are a tritone apart (Eb–A). The same relation appears at the end of the work, but the sonority is finally tamed to a perfect fifth by momentarily lowering A to Ab. Due to the free structure of the melody, there are frequent changes of metre, especially at the beginning of the work, and in some places the composer indicates the separation of the bars only with a dotted bar-line. Later, Kodály organises this *rubato* melody into a more concrete framework.

¹⁸ Breuer, János. *Kodály-kalauz (Kodály Companion)*, Zeneműkiadó, Budapest, 1982, 349.

¹⁹ Idem.

This is perhaps the most technically challenging of the seven pieces. Kodály frequently uses not only the written-out accelerando but also the diminution of rhythmic values as a means of increasing the tempo, as can be seen in the following musical example.

E. g. 17

Written-out accelerando and diminution (*Epitaph*, bars 93-97)

By the end of the piece, the tension is released with moderation in tempo and dynamics.

Seven Piano Pieces are only rarely performed in their entirety on the concert podium; yet some of the pieces are often performed by Hungarian artists and a few are also included in the music school repertoire (*Rain falls on the town...*, *Transylvanian Lament*). It is part of the history of the cycle that, after its premiere in 1921, Bartók often performed excerpts from it in concerts at home and abroad, to introduce Kodály's works to the public.

4. Conclusion

Kodály's *Seven Piano Pieces* are of music-historical significance, as they form an integral part of Hungarian music's renewal at the turn of the century. The cycle combines the stylistic features of Debussy with the

characteristics of Hungarian folk music, while the influence of the early piano works of Kodály's contemporary, Bartók is also evident. *Seven Piano Pieces* plays an important role in the mission of promoting Hungarian folk music, which Kodály and Bartók considered to be a labour of love. In addition to the music-historical aspects, the applicability of the pieces to piano pedagogy is essential. The pieces in the series allow piano tutors to enrich their students' repertoire with the treasures of national art.

Kodály's style provoked controversy in his lifetime and beyond. His pieces have often been criticised for their lack of originality and for being only compiled of musical elements that had made an impression on him. It is true that the various stylistic features and influences can be traced easily in Kodály's piano works, but his particular national musical language could not have developed without those.

Although the piano was not his main compositional medium, he created valuable and lasting works for the instrument. *Seven Piano Pieces* are an important part of his oeuvre in particular, because all the influences on the composer are reflected in the cycle. It is a compendium of Kodály's stylistic features, his attempts at finding his path, as well as the first tokens of his later accomplishment.

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