



KODÁLY

Concerto for Orchestra

Dances of Galánta • Dances of Marosszék
'The Peacock' Variations

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra
JoAnn Falletta

Zoltan Kodály (1882–1967)

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Zoltán Kodály was born into a working class family. Both parents were amateur musicians – his father a violinist, his mother a pianist and singer. Beyond his home training, young Zoltán revealed a keen aptitude for languages and literature. In turn he studied the germinal links between speech and music, and became a lifelong collector of folk tales, dances and tunes. During his advanced study at the Paris Conservatoire, the budding composer was profoundly influenced by the Impressionist scores of Claude Debussy.

Returning to his own turf, Kodály became an agile tone-painter. His music always tells a story, conjures an image or sketches a scene with *verismo* front and centre.

For reference, the heritage of Hungarian music has been exhaustively researched by two major players in the music of the 20th century: Béla Bartók (1881–1945) and his compatriot and friend Zoltán Kodály. From about 1906 the pair made a collaborative effort to visit every nook and cranny of their native Hungary in order to audition, notate, and index (and sometimes record on an Edison wax roll) every specimen of Hungarian folk music they could find. Fortunately, the bounty from those efforts is now available in published collections.

The reason for all the research was that both composers were acutely aware of the influence of folk tunes on the world's ‘serious’ music. From the Baroque era (Bach often used folk melodies in his chorales) through to the music of the 20th century (Leonard Bernstein and beyond) one will be hard pressed to find a composer whose music was not affected by indigenous musical elements. Even polar opposites like Chopin and Wagner could not resist the lure of folk motifs. But it is fair to say that no culture has been a greater target for the world's tune bandits than the famed *Zigeuner* regions of Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia. Names like Liszt, Brahms and Dvořák come quickly to mind along with Schubert, Beethoven and Schumann, etc. Of course, the real fun in all this is that a gypsy melody set in one style (for example, Schubert) sounds light years away from

20th-century voyagers like Kodály. Of Kodály's music, Bartók observed: ‘...a powerful melodic construction, generous and smooth with a particular penchant for the uncertain, the fragmented and the melancholic ... his true nature is contemplative’.

Situated roughly between Vienna and Budapest, the little Hungarian village of Galánta was the home of Kodály for a period of seven years in his youth. The music of this dance suite – seven dances played without interruption – was inspired by the memory of Bohemian gypsy troupes which took up impromptu residence in the village. However, the actual dance tunes quoted here are from a volume of Hungarian folk music published in Vienna around 1800. The collection contains music entitled *The Bohemians of Galánta*, which Kodály identifies as the principal source for the current work. Those tunes plus a few snippets from the composer's research comprise the flint and spark of the *Dances of Galánta*, scored in 1933. Every bar brims with the swagger of that celebrated tzigane touch – this is rose-in-teeth music, complete with fiery bandanas, spurred boots, and seduction in a glance – a travelogue of gypsy esprit.

As for which dances happen wily when, a travelogue is handy, especially because Kodály could not resist patching in quite a few postcard souvenirs along the way: *Dance No. 1* begins with a steamy F sharp in the solo cellos; in *Dance No. 2* the tune is heard in the long clarinet solo-cadenza; *Dance No. 3* begins quietly in the solo flute, mirrored by the piccolo, then jealously taken up by lush strings – note the oriental mode and intonation; in *Dance No. 4* the happy tune is heard first in the oboe, then answered in the piccolo over delicate chime effects before the strings intrude with a bluster of spice; in *Dance No. 5* feisty off-beat/up-beat strings paint the rhythms – hold your breath for a few hot woodwind ratchets and rude brass; note the coy walking pace set by the horns in *Dance No. 6* – again the solo clarinet picks up the tune, mirrored in the violins – in gradual steps the tempo increases and blends into a summary episode;

in *Dance No. 7* a csárdás circles the camp fire where virtue is madcap virtuosity.

Finally, a nocturne of misty colour stands in as an interlude just before daybreak. Memoirs from past motifs drift in like tuneful reveries. And is that a nightingale in the solo clarinet? But we should not get too comfy... a lightning flash rekindles the csárdás madness to the close. But wait – at the very end – isn't that a snapshot by another famous gypsy? Doubtless – from the *Scherzo* of Beethoven's *Ninth*.

In some respects, Kodály and his compatriot Béla Bartók worked in tandem: each had a lifelong passion to search and collect the folk music of Hungary and its neighbouring regions, and each produced major scores influenced by their research. Likewise, both composers wrote a work entitled *Concerto for Orchestra* (Kodály, 1940; Bartók, 1944) although Bartók's effort is today more widely performed. And each of the scores is inspired by indigenous folk motifs from their collected surveys, including examples often identified with the nomadic gypsies which were ever-present across Central and Eastern Europe.

Yet we should note the controversy which emerged about the distinction between national folk music (i.e. from Hungary, Romania, etc.) and the tunes and dances from diverse gypsy cultures. By late in his career, Bartók emerged as the leading authority on the issue. In fact, after a lifetime of study and analysis, he concluded there was no way to distinguish one from the other. There were simply too many subtle elements borrowed and exchanged between gypsy motifs and a nation's indigenous folk music.

Commissioned by Frederick Stock, the music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Kodály's *Concerto for Orchestra* was composed to commemorate the orchestra's 50th anniversary. With regard to the title, the term ‘concerto’ is applied in the Baroque manner of a concerto grosso – a work with solo roles for several players. In Kodály's setting, every part is variably soloistic or accompanying in character.

The *Concerto for Orchestra* begins with sparkle and verve on the wing. Marked *Allegro risoluto* (‘fast and

determined’), the adventurous journey sets out with a sassy motif that resounds like a 20th-century fanfare crafted over a high-stepping folk dance. The brazen statement serves as a prelude to the enchantment ahead, revealed suddenly by the intimate section marked *Largo*, cast broadly in 3/2 time.

The impromptu change in tenor and tone bears the allure of a Baroque passacaglia. Cryptic harmony is at first chanted by a string quartet (viola, two cellos, contrabass), with a reply from the clarinet. In turn, an additional viola and a solitary violin combine into a string sextet. The harmonic variations evolve with diverse phrases in the flute, oboe and horn, elegantly set over lush chords in the harp. As the development becomes more intricate, generous colouring across the orchestral palette gradually converts into a cathedral organ of a kind, with florid strings, plangent brass, and generous filigree from the woodwinds and percussion. After the perfect storm of high-decibel timbres, the vibrant air settles into a *pianissimo* close.

Continuing without pause and marked *Tempo I (Allegro risoluto)*, Kodály begins the whirligig third section with a tuneful variation on the motif which began the *Concerto*. Every section gets a workout, as the theme is bantered pell-mell across the orchestra. The rhythmic variety is likewise engaging, with off-beat accents in a gambit of brash harmony on the fly. As a passing souvenir, the second section *Largo* is momentarily recalled, with zesty figures in the woodwinds. Then, with a stroke of the baton, the initial energy returns as a snappy coda closes the scene.

As noted earlier, Zoltán Kodály and his compatriot Béla Bartók will be forever linked because of their complementary roles in researching, notating and publishing hundreds of melodies from the trove of Hungarian folk music. One may be sure that the pair was motivated in part by the influence of folk tunes on the world's music, and each was passionately driven to uncover perhaps just a few creative seeds for their own music. Of the two, Bartók is today better known – doubtless because of the greater scope of his scores. But through his relatively few symphonic works, including the

very popular *Háry János Suite* and the *Dances of Galánta*, Kodály likewise reveals the hand of a master. His gift for orchestral colour and nuance is especially apparent in *'The Peacock' Variations* of 1939, a virtuoso showcase of scintillating effects. The principal melody of the work is derived from a legendary folk song, *Felszállott a páva* ('The Peacock'), which Kodály included in his book, *Folk Music in Hungary*. The lyrics of the legend concern an intrepid peacock which soars on high to bring freedom to oppressed villagers.

As for the opening theme, the beguiling tune is not heard in full until the oboe solo near the close of the relatively long opening statement. What follows is a scamper of eight variations – in reality a series of miniatures – lasting barely four minutes in duration. *Variation IX* is marked by roudades in the clarinets and flutes, with the soulful tune chanted in the cellos and violins, followed by the five-tone, oriental sparkle of *Variation X*. The long *Andante espressivo* of *Variation XI* offers a poetic dialogue between a limpid English horn and the other woodwinds, with lush writing for Impressionist strings.

The mood is threaded into the following *Adagio* variation, made urgent with dissonant horns and peals from the trombone and high brass. The tune here is again biased with pentatonic harmonies – also with a distinctly oriental hue. The funeral march variation (*XIII*) is unmistakable in pace, with shimmering low trills under distant bugles, all in honour of the passing deceased. In *Variation XIV*, a virtuoso cadenza for the solo flute converts deftly into a surreal choir of bird calls, followed by the bumptious *Variation XV*, with punchy brass and winds in a quick country dance. *Variation XVI* offers Hollywood-style progressions, again reflecting the oriental motifs heard earlier. Kodály then ties the final ribbon with a dazzling *Vivace*. Marvellous.

Kodály's perpetual tune-sleuthing in East-Central Europe reflected centuries of turmoil throughout the region, including the migrations of ethnic populations which became indelibly mixed with tribes of nomadic gypsies, who survived everywhere by staying nowhere very long. But their alluring music lingered indelibly long.

Originally composed for piano in 1927, the *Dances of Marosszék* were inspired by Kodály's visits to the Marosszék region of neighbouring Romania. For comparison, we should note another set of dances from the same region – Bartók's well-known *Romanian Dances* from about 20 years before, all cast with similar harmonic and rhythmic nuance. Kodály created the orchestral version of the *Dances of Marosszék* in 1929.

The work begins straight away with a haunting tune which lingers lithe and long throughout the piece, like tuneful trail markers between the upbeat folk dances along the way. The theme is mirrored in colourful variations, from high treble down through the fathomed orchestral bass. We note a spate of macabre effects from the crosswinds of the brass and higher woodwinds. In sum, the composer blends in at least five folk-like dances in diverse rhythms, all spinning with sparkle and pizzazz. For tender contrast, an enchanted nightingale is conjured by the oboe, with fluttering grace notes, echoed in the piccolo. After the main theme is treated with richly hued strings and horns, the fourth dance offers a devil-may-care *hora* (a fiery quick-step dance) with out-of-harmony strings to add an earthy touch.

For the finale, coy bassoons introduce a sassy folk dance, featured in the strings. Very much like a jet-stream *scherzo*, tuneful flares are exchanged across the orchestra – great fun to the zesty close in D major.

Edward Yadzinski

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra



Founded in 1935, the GRAMMY® Award-winning Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra (BPO), under music director JoAnn Falletta, is Buffalo's leading cultural ambassador and presents more than 120 classics, pops and youth concerts each year. Since 1940, the orchestra's permanent home has been Kleinhans Music Hall, a National Historic Landmark, designed by Eliel and Eero Saarinen. The BPO has toured the United States and Canada, including several Florida Friends Tours with JoAnn Falletta. In 2013, the BPO made its 24th appearance at Carnegie Hall as a participant in the Spring For Music festival. In 2018, it will become the first American orchestra to perform at the Beethoven Easter Festival in Warsaw, Poland. Over the decades, the BPO has matured in stature under leading conductors, including William Steinberg, Josef Krips, Lukas Foss, Michael Tilson Thomas, Maximiano Valdés, Semyon Bychkov and Julius Rudel. During the tenure of JoAnn Falletta the BPO has rekindled its distinguished history of radio broadcasts and recordings, including the release of 40 new albums of diverse repertoire on the Naxos and Beau Fleuve labels. The Philharmonic's Naxos recording of composer John Corigliano's *Mr. Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan* (8.559331), featuring soprano Hila Plitmann, received GRAMMY® Awards in the Classical Vocal Performance and Classical Contemporary Composition categories.

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JoAnn Falletta

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JoAnn Falletta serves as music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic and Virginia Symphony, and is the principal guest conductor of the Brevard Music Center of North Carolina. She has guest conducted over a hundred orchestras in North America, and many of the most prominent orchestras in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa. She served as principal conductor of the Ulster Orchestra from 2011 to 2014, with whom she made her debut at the BBC Proms in London and recorded works by Gustav Holst, E.J. Moeran and John Knowles Paine. Recipient of the Seaver/National Endowment for the Arts Conductors Award, winner of the Stokowski Competition, and the Toscanini, Ditson and Bruno Walter conducting awards, Falletta became the first female conductor to lead a major American ensemble upon her appointment as music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra in 1999. She has received twelve ASCAP awards, served on the US National Council on the Arts and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. As a champion of American music, she has presented over five hundred works by American composers including well over 100 world premieres. Her Naxos recordings include the double GRAMMY® Award-winning disc of works by John Corigliano and GRAMMY® nominated discs of works by Tyberg, Dohnányi, Fuchs, Schubert, Respighi, Gershwin, Corigliano, Richard Strauss, Hailstork and Holst.

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Zoltán Kodály, like his compatriot Béla Bartók, wrote major orchestral scores that were deeply enriched by his research into Hungarian folk music. The *Dances of Galánta* are full of swagger and vitality, and the *Concerto for Orchestra*, commissioned for the Chicago Symphony's 50th anniversary, is lush, sparkling and vivid. Like the *Variations on a Hungarian Folk Song*, 'The Peacock', a virtuoso showcase of sizzling effects, these scores reveal the brilliance of his orchestral colours and the indelible allure of gypsy themes.

Zoltan
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(1882–1967)

1 Galántai táncok (Dances of Galánta) (1933) 17:18

2 Concerto for Orchestra (1940) 19:22

**Variations on a Hungarian Folk Song,
'Felszállott a páva' ('The Peacock') (1939) 26:37**

3 The Peacock	2:44	12 Variation IX	1:44
4 Variation I	0:59	13 Variation X	0:43
5 Variation II	0:37	14 Variation XI	3:00
6 Variation III	0:17	15 Variation XII	3:14
7 Variation IV	0:24	16 Variation XIII	1:41
8 Variation V	0:52	17 Variation XIV	2:18
9 Variation VI	0:44	18 Variation XV	0:36
10 Variation VII	0:21	19 Variation XVI	1:26
11 Variation VIII	0:42	20 Finale	4:15

21 Marosszéki táncok (Dances of Marosszék) (1929) 13:37

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