

LIVING AUTHENTIC MUSIC

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The issue of living authentic music is in the focus of interest in Hungary as well. I would like to begin with a specific example of the Kaláka Ensemble: I am a proud member of it. At the beginning, when the band was established, we sang our own musical interpretations of folk songs and love ditties. We set folk-inspired poems to music and accompanied playful rhyming on the guitar, violoncello, recorder, clarinet, and crock drum.

Hungarian Radio used to organise folk music meetings. In the first half of the meetings, different ensembles, groups, performers, soloists, and zither ensembles appeared. By the end of the program, young people took their turn on the stage - among them our ensemble as well - performing traditional songs in different ways. Since we were raised in the city and received specific musical education, we played in parts, sometimes applying modulations with the mettle of the youth. From time to time we added more instruments to the new songs, like the zither, mandolin, panpipe, cattle bell, rattler, and lion's roar (bear's growl). We have learnt the method of playing these instruments quite quickly, due to the fact that all of us had already learnt how to play wind and stringed instruments. So we had only to widen our knowledge of instruments, and did not have to start over from scratch. A transformation was created, in a sense that folk music stepped out of the written score and found its place on the stage and in the youth clubs.

In a short time we were invited abroad to festivals. We have also prepared numerous recordings for Prague Radio. By participating in these festivals, we brought musical styles as well as musicians into contact, and facilitated a friendship. We also had the opportunity to borrow from and lend instruments to other ensembles, to try out other

styles in the dressing rooms and corridors. In this way, a Hungarian fiddle player managed to integrate himself very well into an Irish band. The Irish drum also made Hungarian rhythms more colorful. In addition, a zither-guitar-mandolin instrumental “duel” took place.

Admittedly, the music has taken a spontaneous turn. Consequently, it cannot be called folk music anymore. At that time, our model was a Chilean ensemble, named Quilapayun, and the settings of their folk songs, which they called *nueva canción*, rather than folk music. Folk music had been influenced by different styles, and now integrated musical styles like blues, jazz, and elements of classical music. In time, this style of music came to be called world music. The existence of world music was due to the openness of musicians. Actually, we can say that each ensemble has its own style without a recipe. That is the great thing about it. Looking over a short period in the history of our culture, I notice that we are now in a period in which we have forgotten how to sing, and have even forgotten what it means to sing. The majority of students are averse to solmisation, to music theory, to learning how to play an instrument. Singing lessons and music-focused primary schools are more rare than they used to be. Higher education emphasises theory, and the experts lose their contact with the roots.

In this respect I consider myself lucky because, like the other members of the Kaláka Ensemble, I attended a music-focused primary school in which we had a singing lesson every day and weekly choral exercises with students from the upper classes. Learning folk dances was part of the compulsory education. At the age of 9 or 10 we chose instruments to play, and gradually we joined the school symphonic orchestra. This music-focused primary school was founded by Zoltán Kodály¹, who visited the school once a year. He also brought famous musicians with him to the school, who played concerts in Hungary, like Pablo Casals or Yehudi Menuhin. The Kodály method taught us the pentatonic music that has been recorded in Hungary and among the Mari and the Chuvash people. Kodály immersed us in the best sources. He laid

down the basis of our knowledge of music with music reading practices, with the help of *bicíniums* and *tricíniums*. He developed our musical talents by means of folk songs, Hungarian folk music, and folk and classical compositions.

I think that music's prestige as a career choice is problematic. Because the choice of profession - a crucial event - takes place very early and requires lifelong self-education, it is simply not attractive to young people. That is why the sports and business careers overshadow the music career. In spite of this, we wanted to establish a band during our secondary school studies. In the end, Kaláka was founded in 1969. Our first musical settings were uncompromising, rough, pioneering pieces of work. Now a question might be raised: Which Hungarian instruments have been revived and are often heard in world music? Without aiming to give an exhaustive list, I would like to present to you some of the instruments that can be heard in the works of the Kaláka Ensemble:

Tarogato: originally an oboe-like battle-pipe. Its present form reminds us of the clarinet.

Koboz or Moldavian lute: dates back to the 14th century. It is an old Hungarian stringed instrument. Because of its bent neck, it is similar to the lute.

Kontra or viola: its function is keeping the melody.

Flute: it is also called shepherd's pipe (recorder).

Bagpipe: consists of a blow pipe and an air pipe. It is a bellows-blown instrument of Asian origin.

Hurdy-gurdy: organistrum. The best-known instrument in the Middle Ages.

Gardon: a violoncello-sized string instrument that we use to accompany tapping by a stick. In my opinion, adhering to traditional folk music is of great importance. The principles of theoretical interpretation, when applied to traditional folk music, result in further transformation. The synthesis of these elements creates a mature kind of world music. Clearly, to contrive a new musical style, a musician cannot simply apply

new instruments to an established musical style. Rather, he or she must also learn the craft of music, which means having knowledge, a sense of responsibility, a kind of carefulness, and respect. A musician should perform the original theme clearly; in this way world music can indeed transmit folk music to present-day listeners.

A transformation similar to that in the fine arts has taken place in the different artistic branches of folk roots. Simple fired crockery became pottery of artistic value. By now, ancient folk motifs painted on pottery, e.g., the tree of life, are very popular, and are now known as symbols in different parts of the world as well. (Isn't it possible that graffiti is the latest manifestation of these ancient drawings?) In addition, this transformation resembles a 19th century play about peasants with popular art music that can be performed in adapted form at a 'world theatre' festival.

Back to music: the Dubliners are a good example of the passing of Irish musical customs from one generation to the next. The *Riverdance* performance, and other adaptations of Irish music that apply electronic instruments (like synthesizer or electric guitar), are the best-known examples of the transformation into world music. The *Deep Forest* CD and performances of ensembles such as Muzsikás or Ghymes present remarkable examples of the style of world music.

Frankly, similar musical transformations have already taken place. For example, the world has for some time been acquainted with *Greek Syrtaki* by Mikis Theodorakis. The following non-European examples should also be mentioned: spirituals interpreted by the Golden Gate Group, [e.g., "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" or "Jesus on the Waterside"], folk ballad "The House of the Rising Sun", or the tune of Native American origin, "El condor pasa." Other examples from Europe include the tarantella dance of South-Italian origin which "granted civil rights" in concert music in the interpretation of Mendelssohn, Chopin, Ferencz Liszt and Czaikowski. Ravi Shankar introduced the world to Indian music through his sitar playing. The Beatles were influenced by

him, and George Harrison called Shankar the godfather of world music. Perhaps it is less accurate to say that world music was 'invented' than to say that that a popular new authentic music style was given a name. But it is important to remember that the composition should not become *autotelic*. The composition's existence is justified only if it expresses something totally new, and only if it must become widely known for precisely that reason. Consequently, world music is a proper term to the extent that it expresses the possibility that a song of ancient origin can become world famous. Nevertheless, as a building can be considered a part of World Heritage - the historic castle of Visegrád, for instance - world music can in the same way be considered a part of the Spiritual World Heritage.

The Kaláka Ensemble is often invited to world music festivals, or to the stages of world music, or just to the pavilion of other more open festivals such as Roskilde in Denmark or the Sziget Fesztivál (Island Festival) in Budapest. As far as the Kaláka Ensemble is concerned, we still apply elements of traditional folk music to our works. We also create musical settings for dance tunes, wedding dances, bachelor dances, and recruiting dances to the tune of flute, mandolin, Moldavian lute, zither, with accompaniment by contrabass, guitar, and rhythm instruments.

Our musical settings of classical and contemporary literature, not to mention poems of the world, are welcomed to the 'poetry and music' festivals in the Netherlands, Germany, and Finland. On these occasions, you may find among our instruments, collected in different parts of the world, the panpipe, charango, cuatro, ukulele, cantele, and kalimba.

Let me give you a typical example from the works of Kaláka, in order to make the expressions world music and 'poetry and music' reasonable. Our CD titled *May We Come in with the Christmas Crib* and our theatrical performance based on the CD revive the folk customs of the nativity play, in which young people playing instruments and singing went from house to house at Advent time to bring the Good Word. The program begins by traditional customary songs, collected by Zoltán

Kodály in 1916. Spanish, Czech and Swedish Christmas songs and carols follow, including the world-famous Austrian *Stille Nacht*. Then we perform our adaptations of the Hungarian and foreign Christmas poems. In conclusion we return to the final melody of the original Kodály collection. We have learnt through experience that this work helps not only to revitalise this folk custom, but manages to keep it alive. While we transmit culture, we make an effort at the same time to transmit musical knowledge.

We have to learn the proper form of expression; maybe I can say that we act in favor of changing our musical mother tongue to multilingual one. We have already played for Japanese and Chinese audiences. We have incorporated some traditional melodies into our arrangement and instrumentation. Believe or not, we have had a great success with it. For example, we once presented a Japanese fisherman's song with four stanzas, arranged with correct pronunciation that had never been heard before. The Japanese told us: "You are the only speakers who know all the four stanzas of this song!"

The existence of folk songs has been wrought by the forces of nature; a new musical phenomenon is struggling for survival. It is the musicians' duty to assist it. Hopefully, we and our music will be better understood in the concert halls, on stages, and at the festivals. We should work toward this, not later, not someday, but now.

Notes:

1. Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967), Hungarian composer, folklorist and pedagogue. A large part of his folklore research was done with another Hungarian composer, Béla Bartók.