Sonatina for Cello and Piano by Zoltan Kodaly in the Light of Stile Evolution

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The works of Zoltan Kodai constantly attract the attention of listeners, performers and musicologists. Over time, we rethink his legacy, and in this process, the most valuable and artistically significant elements of the composer's work again convince us of the significance that Kodai's work has not only for Hungarian, but also for world musical culture. The master of Hungarian music has received widespread recognition as the creator of vocal, stage, choral works, as well as his pedagogical system, which significantly transformed the entire system of musical education in his homeland and was enthusiastically received by other countries. Such masterpieces as the opera "Hari Janos", symphonic "Dances from Galanta" and "Dances from Maroshsek", piano pieces, "Hungarian Psalm" became Kodai's trademark.

However, it can be noted that the composer's chamber-instrumental work has not yet attracted close attention from researchers. It is not very extensive, but it is interesting both for its artistic merits and those features that later determined the originality and identity of the composer's mature style. This article refers to one of the little-performed and little-known works - Sonatina for cello and piano. Having considered the history of the origin of this work, we want to dwell on such issues as:

- The figurative world of Sonatina;
- Its structural features;
- Stylistic features of the work in the aspect of the formation of the original Kodai language;
- The role and place of Sonatina in the chamber-instrumental work of the composer (in particular, among his cello works) and in his creative heritage in general.

The best works of Kodai are marked, in general, by a wealth of melodic ingenuity, an ideal sense of form, and at the same time, they are characterized by a certain tendency towards melancholy and inner emotional instability. He is alien to the Dionysian intoxication - rather strives for inner contemplation. His music does not belong to the sphere that in our time, and even during the life of Kodai, was defined as "modern". It has nothing to do with atonal and polytonal music -
everything in it is based on the principle of tonal determination. Although Kodai does not declare innovations, nevertheless, he says things that have never been said before, and thus demonstrates that the tonal principle has not lost its meaning of existence until now.

Speaking about the work of his colleague and colleague in ethnomusicological research, Bartok noted that Kodai « is a great master of form and has a bright personality; he works in a rich, meaningful way and despises any sensations, false shine, any extraneous effects. »

In general, one can note the composer's particular commitment to vocal music of various genres, from small sketches for didactic purposes to large-scale choral frescoes. Kodai's instrumental style first was developed in solo and chamber compositions, in stringed chamber works that constituted the bulk of his non-vocal compositions until 1920. Two string quartets, op. 2 and op.10 represent an example of the early style; in both, the melodic material and instrumental accompaniment bring out folk influences. At the same time, the structure of Op.10 looks very perfect and complete, it should be noted its complex form, anticipating the completely original design of the choral Te Deum. Cello Sonatas Op. 4 (with piano accompaniment) and Op. 8 (solo), Duet op. 7 for violin and cello, and Serenade op. 12 for two violins and viola, all of which testify to the rich melodic nature of Kodai's work and his excellent sense of balance and proportion, as well as his ability to achieve a startlingly new sounding fresh and unshaded virtuosity through simple means.

Music training began for Kodai in a family where both mother and father set an example of love for music making. He learned to play the piano and the violin. Thus, it can be judged that from childhood a culture of string ensemble performance was laid in him, from early steps he absorbed the basics of sound production on string instruments. Later, already in the gymnasium, he did not give up his passion for string instruments. He played not only the violin, but also the viola and cello, and he mastered the latter on his own, at his will. Zoltan became an active participant in home concerts, which were still held in his father's house. When the need arose for
a cellist to play quartets, he independently studied this instrument and was soon able to confidently lead his part in the ensemble. Once he had to write the lost part of one of the quartets, and he coped well with this task.

The preference for the cello is felt when we see the list of his chamber works. After all, most of them were created either for the cello, or with the inclusion of this instrument in an ensemble with others.

Having entered the conservatory, Kodai worked very hard, diligently fulfilled his study assignments and, at the same time, managed to write a number of works - Sonata for violin and piano. Trio, Quartet and others. The truth is that in style and language they were not independent enough. Moreover, it is remarkable, because it was with his appeal to the creative and performing resources of the cello that Kodai managed to find the way to a distinctive author's instrumental style. Kodai’s legacy can be accurately distinguished by genre and chronological criteria. Chamber music attracted the composer during the period of the formation of the style, performing in full splendor in the following decades. At the same time, the early works of Kodai are immeasurably more than the test of a young author's pen: they have artistic merit that does not fade in our time. After all, Kodai began to create his chamber works, perfectly prepared by the practice of youthful music making and years of academic study, the hand of the master is already visible in them.

It is difficult to say why Kodai subsequently moved away from the genre that he cultivated with such love and talent. Perhaps, over time, he sensed that the main sphere of his work was large forms of oratorio and symphonic music. Maybe there were other reasons as well. In any case, the work on chamber scores was of great importance for further creative development.

Here the composer mastered new intonation material, which is noticeable already in the first string quartet. Here, the laconicism and strict consistency of presentation characteristic of Kodai were developed, the skill of finishing the details and the architectonic gift, an impeccable sense of proportions. Chamber music became for him, as well as for Bartok, a field for establishing the principles of new art in difficult times, about which the composer himself so mercilessly responded:
“Drinking to the accompaniment of a gypsy orchestra is still a typical form of our musical life. For the majority of representatives of our middle class, music has not yet become a spiritual food, which can be taken only with the material” (see [1, 33]). It was this indifference to art that stood in the way of young musicians, who boldly aspired to the future with creative dreams. Let us recall the almost complete absence of chamber ensembles in the Hungarian musical work of the last century. Opera and piano music reached a high prosperity, as for the chamber ensemble repertoire, foreign works predominated in it, and not always first-class ones. That is why work in this area was of particular importance for Kodaly and Bartok, not to mention the fact that it was easier for them to organize the performance of a quartet than an orchestral piece. Therefore, they persistently introduced chamber music into concert life, despite all the prejudices of an unprepared audience. “Of course, it is no coincidence that so much chamber music has been written in our country, although at times it seems to some undesirable” [1, 35], Kodai wrote, responding to critics who spoke with hostility about the works of the new Hungarian school.

Considering Sonatina, surrounded by numerous cello works by Kodai, it is necessary to highlight among them the Sonata for Cello and Piano (1909-1910) - one of the best early works of Kodai, often found even now in concert programs. After all, Sonatina was originally conceived as a part complementing the initially two-part structure of the Sonata. Written in a concert style, the Sonata is effective and grateful for the performer; its music is figurative, plastic in form and marked by that liveliness of inspiration that always captivates the audience.

The sonata is reminiscent in construction of Liszt's rhapsodies: the first movement is an epic-narrative fantasy; the second is “Allegro con spirito”, ending with a short quote from the first. The development of musical thoughts (especially the first movement) is largely improvisational, but it does not violate the overall structure, as it always does in Kodai's thoughtful and logical. Music grows out of folk intonations, implemented freely, not too stressed, but always determining the course of development.
"Fantasy" begins with a wide cello melody, rising from the depths of the bass and returning to the low register again.

The tone of the story is immediately established - epically unhurried and inspirational. It is preserved throughout the first part, as if poured out of the mouth of the rhapsode. Almost all of "Fantasy" is a dialogue between the cello and the piano. In the middle episode, the piano part acquires an excited character, which is also transmitted to the cello; the dialogical call of two instruments leads to a tense sound of the climax. In a varied reprise, the epic mood returns, and "Fantasy" ends in an enlightened, sublime tone. Epic-dignified slow episodes have not been new in Hungarian music since the advent of Liszt's rhapsodies. However, unlike Liszt, Kodai creates a work of the chamber-ensemble genre, which determined in this work a different nature of solving the artistic problem. The poetic music of "Fantasy" is deeply national in its language and character.

In the second part, brilliantly designed dance tunes come to the fore. The originality of the main theme is the abundance of modulation shifts, which play an important role in the music of the finale.

The second theme is rhythmically very active. The juxtaposition of the two themes is colorful, the development is witty, full of unexpected virtuoso effects and timbre combinations, but dynamic line is not interrupted even for a moment in a motley series of thematic interceptions. Everything is full of life and humor, setting off the severity of the epic chant of the first part.

Her theme returns again in the code, and in the intensely dramatic sound of the climactic episode. This emotional arch holds the overall structure together and brings the necessary unity.

Two parts of the sonata, different in character and tonally contrasting (g-minor and Fis-major), create images of strict epic meditation and a cheerful festive round dance. The music is fresh in color, marked by the originality of the composer's style, which continues to attract the attention of performers and audiences to it in our time.

A few years after the end of the Sonata for Cello and Piano, the composer returned to it again: "The two-part sonata," wrote Kodai, "I wanted to supplement
with a third movement, but this did not succeed. My style changed so much that I could not get into the mood of 1909” (quoted from [2, 5]). Unsatisfied with the original first movement of the previously written Cello Sonata, Kodai left it unfinished, returning to him again twelve years later in 1922 to replace the discarded first movement. Feeling that the result obtained had significant differences in style than the original version of the sonata, Kodai decided that it would be more logical to leave this work in itself as a perfect and self-sufficient one-movement work, calling it Sonatina for cello and piano. While some scholars characterize it as definitely Hungarian in melodiousness, there is much to suggest about contemporary Kodai French music, which made such an impression on both Kodai and Bartok at the turn of the century. We can see the combination of impressionistic tendencies with the widespread use of pentatonic scale, coming from the most archaic, primordial layers of Hungarian folk music, which Kodai and Bartok identified in the process of ethno musical research in Transylvania at about the same time.

For the first time this work was published in Budapest in a collection published for the 75th anniversary of the composer, and then, under his proposed title Sonatina, and in Moscow. By the nature of the music, it is rather a lyric poem that combines a wide chant with transparent sounds of piano accompaniment. Comparing the Sonatina with the two parts of the previously written Sonata, one can really see the difference in style that Kodai later wrote about, who refused to combine the two works.

In Sonatina, written in sonata form without elaboration, three main musical ideas can be distinguished: the introduction, the main part and the side part. Although they are different, they do not come into conflict with each other. These are different facets of one complex and multifaceted image.
Looking ahead, we note that this is explained by the inner integrity of Kodai's worldview, his almost classical completeness and poise. At the same time, the imaginative world of Sonatina has many faces. These are angry recitative episodes (introduction) colored with high oratorical pathos, and rebellious and agitated impulses of the main part, and pacification and heartfelt elegiacity of an emphasized song character associated with the sphere of the side part. So, even in such a small and modest work, one can see almost Bach's scope and depth (it is appropriate to recall that even in his gymnasium years in Nagysombat he got acquainted with the music of Bach - he especially carefully studied "Well-Tempered Harpsichord") in the fusion of epic, dramatic and lyrical began. But this unity does not create a feeling of variegation or far-fetchedness, largely due to the melodic integrity of the thematism, based on folk song intonations. The theme of the main part is plastic and expressive, replete with meter changes, avoidance of accents on the downbeat, ligated and simply sustained notes.
In its free and free flow, one can hear the original nature of folk improvisational performance. I would like to compare the development of the main part of Kodai's Sonatina with the main part of S. V. Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto, where the Russian composer tried to reproduce the free song manner inherent in national characteristics. Here, the Hungarian master is already trying to make the most of the cantilevered possibilities of the cello. The melody rotates between two foundations: g and d. The most energetic beginning of the "soft syncope" theme is based on an ascending fifth-step from g to d. Further, the line of wide chanting passages for large intervals is preserved, especially pure consonances: part 4 and part 5. All this creates a feeling of "air", spaciousness, wide, free breathing. The cello theme occupies a significant range of two octaves, it seems to float against the quivering background of the piano part's quintal figurations. They smooth out the regularity of large durations and sustained notes of the theme. In this, one can also see the Bach influence - the principle of "one-time contrast". So, if in the main theme the Hungarian national origin is gradually felt, for example, in the aforementioned soft syncopations, coming from the peculiarities of the Hungarian
language, then in the accompaniment one can hear the influence of impressionism, flowing like “blurry” sonorities with “stuck” dissonances so characteristic of the Debussy style. In tonal terms, the tonic of G is clearly felt here. However, there is one flat in the key, so the tonality here is clearly Dorian G. The soft and elegiac diatonic coloring of this mode emphasizes the national origins of the thematism. Along with the two above-mentioned foundations, the tone C is also emphasized. This creates a plugal sensation, with little to no gravitation. After a ligament in which the piano and the cello seem to enter into a dialogue: the piano has thematic elements, interrupted by cascades of dissonant sounding chords clearly articulated with a dotted rhythm,

![Pic. 3. Bundle.](image)

while the cello has a soothing figuration that was previously played in the piano part. All this, coupled with a drop in dynamics to pp, an “empty” texture, and its change from figurative to chordal, arpeggiated, finally with a tonal renewal, expressed by the removal of the key B sign, marks the beginning of a new stage - a side part.
It is transparent and sounds soothing, soothing, somewhat reminiscent of a
lullaby. However, in it one can feel a radical relationship with the main one: softly
dissonant chords on the piano sliding along semitones, the final intonation of perfect
forth down + major second up. This is a kind of appeal to the primordially romantic
intonation of the question, perhaps even a reaction to this question, or an attempt to
find an answer to the challenges of the surrounding reality. Thus, both the main and
secondary parties are organically interconnected with each other. In tonal terms,
there is a constant shimmering, "transfusion of colors" of two tonalities: C-Lydian
and E-Dorian. They are united by the fis tone. It constantly resounds in both the
figurative movement and the theme. Immediately after the extinction of the side part,
a reprise begins, in which the main theme is played by the cello without changes.
The accompaniment shape changes. It is built on ascending, sea-like waves rising
from the lower register of triplet passages. This brings in a moment of dramatization
of the image. The secondary in the reprise sounds in the key in a big third below.
This echoes the treble flicker of the tonalities in the exposure. This play of tonalities
is also preserved here, only this time between the tonics C and As. As before, at the
moment of the reprise, the beginning of the coda is set off by the confusedly agitated
sonority of the intro, with its recitative structure and chord exclamations. Thus, the thematism of the introduction sets off, delimits the facets of the form, emphasizing them. Creating a sense of clarity and dimension so characteristic of Kodai's musical thinking. The Sonatina ends with dissolution, erosion of the thematism that fills with peace and enlightenment. The piece ends in the tonic G. But this time it has a clearly major mood. The constantly arising tone des, perhaps, it would be more correct to notate as cis. After all, this is the same Lydian quart that sounded in the side one in the exhibition. Sonatina ends with such soft sonorities, complemented by minimal dynamics and roll-overs between the piano and the cello, creating a sense of peace and, if not solving urgent, urgent problems, then at least removing them and leaving for the world of contemplation and peace.

Summarizing what has been said, it should be noted that the stylistic originality of Sonatina is determined by the interaction of many elements. In general, the free use of dissonant accords, "cobwebs" of figurations, tonal "flickering" between several equally pronounced centers leaves no doubt about the impressionistic belonging of the work, about the great influence of the music of Claude Debussy. However, this influence is not implemented in a slavish and eclectic epigone manner, but is passed through the truly popular national spirit of Kodai himself, through his thinking, formed in many respects by love for Hungarian and Szekean folklore, and a careful and creative attitude towards him. The composer is no stranger to the verbunkos, but he tries not to follow Liszt's interpretation of the verbunkos, which was later picked up by many imitators, who replaced the lively improvisational spirit with his salon and cheap melodramatic reproduction. Turning to this less archaic, ancient layer of Hungarian music, Kodai is trying to reveal its strongest sides: rebellious, sometimes even revolutionary pathos, freedom of development, epic, sublimely majestic and at the same time hymn-solemn. The organic interpenetration of such elements is the originality of Kodai's creative manner, which later brilliantly manifested itself in the composer's major stage and choral works.
Sonatina represents, despite its seeming modesty, an important stage in the composer's work - the stage when the comprehension of his maturity comes, and the desire to try his hand in other areas of music, in addition to chamber music, mean, as already mentioned above, the main interests of the composer have been concentrated for. Perhaps in some way it is inferior to other cello works by Kodai, in terms of the external concert brilliance of the Sonata for cello and piano or the psychological depth of the Sonata for solo cello. However, is the fact, that Kodai himself felt a stylistic gap between the Sonata, written in 1909 and the Sonatina, created twelve years later, speaks of the author's significant creative evolution.

One more interesting feature of the Sonatina can be noted. A conversation about the work of Kodai is rarely complete without comparing him with Bartok. This is absolutely natural and justified. It is often noted that Bartok's thinking is more instrumental, while Kodai's is more vocal. This is confirmed by the most genre preferences of both geniuses of the Hungarian school of composition. Therefore, speaking about the sphere of instrumental music in Kodai's work, it is interesting to note even introverted, if I may say so, features: avoidance of external brilliance and showiness, focus on internal meaningful development, the vocal nature of thematism. All these features are inherent in Sonatina. It is also interesting to note the preference shown by Kodai for the cello, although he initially learned to play the violin. In our opinion, this is also manifested by the cello's ability to cantilevered intonation, especially close to the vocal element. Hence the interpretation of the cello precisely as a carrier of a plastic and flexible melodic thematic of a vocal character, and not virtuoso or massive sonorities. He does not seek to reveal absolutely all the technical possibilities of the instrument, at least in the analyzed piece, but reveals to the maximum the expressive possibilities of the cello in the cantilena.
References


