

Lajos Bárdos turns 80

László Lukin

Some of Kodály's most noted pupils, thirteen young composers, were attacked in 1925, along with their master, by a German language Budapest daily when they received their diplomas at the Academy of Music. Kodály sprang to their defense with an article that bore the title „Thirteen young composers”. In his reply Kodály made an intuitive and accurate prediction of their future:

„Of them all ... Lajos Bárdos ... (here three other names followed) have acquired a professional knowledge that far surpasses any academic requirements ... Those who hold first places in professional knowledge, who have been the keenest students of classical masterpieces and became to the highest degree versed in the holy books of music, have at the same time been the ones most influenced by folk music. The better Europeans have also been the best Hungarians.”

Decades later one among those „to the highest degree versed in the holy books of music” himself wrote a book on the harmonies of Palestrina, remarking in the preface: „I must convey my thanks to my former master, Zoltán Kodály, for encouraging me to deal with the sound and the theory of music... I have studied, sung and taught the choral works of the great composers of the past.”

From such precedents, Bárdos developed his individual style of choral composition. On choral folk singing he recalls that „nothing was more distant from the choirs of the 1920s than our own musical native tongue. But naturally we were not content merely with the unison folk singing of our youth; instead we tried to encourage and train both youth and adult choirs to sing Hungarian folksongs, providing a great number of folksong types ranging from the easiest to the most exacting. My colleagues and I, as choirmasters, gained inside knowledge of what choirs are capable. We set out to provide every choir member in every part with scores they could sing easily and with joy. We were well aware, that no outside pressure or any directive was going to instill a love of choir participation. It could only be instilled by selecting music that a singer could gladly sing from the heart.”

This heartfelt joy at making music runs through the whole of Bárdos's colourful collection of works. They include Bárdos' settings of lyrics from poets ranging in time from Paulus Diaconus to László Nagy. In each case the text and music is perfectly matched. They reflect each in their own way the sparkling lights of five continents, the colourful pageants of the whole wide world. They pulsate with ancient dance steps; they blend soft, amorous tones with intimations from the realm of dreams.

Bárdos' works convey life in its entirety. Among them singers of all ages can find material to suit them: children who have singing lessons just twice a week, dedicated secondary schoolchildren or college students fully able to read music, accomplished members of professional adult choirs. The composer has left something for each of them to serve their purpose. In his choral works Bárdos has shown his multifaceted talents.

In his musical style he has never abandoned the ideals he chose for himself. Each of his vocal parts is a tightly constructed and poetically conceived entity despite its mantle of daring harmony. It feels good to sing a vocal part of Bárdos'. His sense of balance gives both performer and listener a feeling of assurance, of having a grasp on form. His musical conceptions bring order to the forms of a world that transposes verse lines into dynamic lines, so that their logic fueled by emotion finds its way straight to

the audience. And his sense of humour enables him to approach his punch lines with the agility of a jester.

His 80th birthday finds Lajos Bárdos in good health and strengthened by his awareness of a life's ambitions come true: the "Singing Youth" movement has grown into a Singing Hungary.

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