

Mihály Ittzés:

„...I have been called up to an intellectual guard...”

## Zoltán Kodály's activities in the years of World War I

### **Prologue**

Kodály went to Bukovina in the spring of 1914 and he found very rich vocal and instrumental folk music there. In June with his wife and Bartók travelled to Paris. On June 28 Duke Franz Ferdinand and his wife was killed in Sarajevo. The Kodály couple went to Switzerland for a holiday. Their stay was interrupted by the declaration of war. On the way home they were stopped at the Swiss–Austrian border. During their enforced stay the vision of a Duo for violin and cello appeared to Kodály, and he started to compose the piece there. As he wrote ten years later to members of the Léner String Quartet, the inspiration came to him from the view of giant hills as well as the uncertain misgivings of the war. Besides the general influence of Hungarian folk music on Kodály's musical thinking, a close connection between the trio-theme and a folk tune from Bukovina can be found in the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement.

### **Kodály's activities during the war time**

In the autumn the academic year started at the Academy of Music. In November Kodály became a member of the voluntary civil guard, and in December he started his service, and he was also enlisted in the army but was not called up, therefore he could continue his work.

In December 1916 he requested his discharge from the Guard. In the letter sent to the captain he wrote: „...I have been called up to an intellectual guard...” where his work is more important than in the service as a sentry of the Civil Guard. He listed the many tasks he had in folk music research, among others collecting folksongs among soldiers together with Bartók, beside his teaching occupation, so his compositional work could only be a subsidiary activity. But finally he was able to compose new chamber works and songs. The war situation is symbolically reflected in some poems which Kodály set to music.

Kodály was active and effective both in collecting folk songs and writing articles on ethnomusicology. In 1917 an incidental music for the theatre was composed, from which an orchestral movement was re-written, and performed under the title *Alte ungarische Volksweisen* (the piece became known later as *Hungarian Rondo*) together with folksong

arrangements at a benefit concert for the war-widows and orphans in Vienna January 1918. In May 1918 the second independent concert of Kodály works (a composer's night) was held where representative works were premiered: Duo, Op.7, Sonata for solo cello, Op.8, Seven songs Op. 6, and String Quartet No. 2. He was also active as a music critic for almost two years, and he gave lectures in cultural associations.

New piano pieces were composed in 1917-18, and some Transylvanian laments reflect the tragedies of the war. In this context No. 3 Székely lament from November 1918 is the most important – it was written when Transylvania was occupied by the Romanian army.

### **Epilogue**

One of the “results” of the world war was that two thirds of the Hungarian Kingdom was given to neighbouring countries in the Trianon treaty, with one third of the Hungarian speaking citizens. This new situation made folk music research impossible in the Hungarian regions outside the new borders although – as Kodály stated – it was the most valuable heritage that still survived in these counties. These circumstances inspired Kodály, together with Bartók, to compile a collection of Transylvanian folk songs, and return to a very important topic found in Bukovina. He wrote further articles on the Transylvanian Hungarian folk music heritage and completed his study about his collection from Nagyszalonta (Salonta) and also arranged many folksongs from these regions.