

Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967) Duo for violin and cello Op 7 (1914)

Allegro serioso, non troppo

Adagio: Andante

Maestoso e largamente, ma non troppo lento: Presto: Meno mosso: Presto

The son of a rural Hungarian station-master, who played the violin, and a pianist mother, the young Kodály learned violin, viola, cello (self-taught) and piano, and also composed and performed chamber music. He left home to read Hungarian and German at Budapest University, and also to study composition and pedagogy at the Academy of Music.

He began touring the Hungarian countryside collecting folk music in 1905 in his early 20s while studying for his doctorate. He exposed the inadequacy of earlier publications of Hungarian folk music, which robbed them of their essential character, a character which was evident in the Ethnographic Museum's wax cylinder recordings. Around this time, he also started a lifelong friendship with his fellow student Bela Bartók. They decided to devote their lives to a shared vision of '*an educated Hungary, reborn from the people*'. The first fruits of this project were a jointly-published volume of Hungarian folksongs in 1906. Both composers incorporated folk music into their own developing unique styles. Much of this folk music is pentatonic (playable on the black keys).

Thanks to a small travel grant from the Academy of Music Kodály travelled to Berlin and then to Paris where he was deeply influenced by the music of Debussy, which he later introduced to Bartók. On his return he took up a teaching post at the Academy whose faculty were dominated by adherents to the German late-romanticism of Brahms and Richard Strauss. By 1910, despite acid criticism from his conservative Academy colleagues, Kodály's now confidently distinctive Hungarian music was beginning to be performed not only in Budapest but more widely in Paris and Zürich. His folksong-collecting trips with Bartók were interrupted by the outbreak of war, but tonight's Duo was composed shortly after one of these trips. It springs from Kodály's conviction that "*The works of art that exert the most powerful influence... are those that express most fully the national characteristics of the artist.*" The work uses rich folk-based ideas within the formal structures of classical western music.

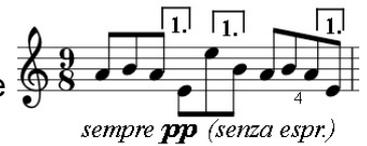
The first movement is dominated by a single idea. It opens with a bold *risoluto* theme on the cello against the violin's chordal flourishes. This theme passes, *piano*, to the violin and then transforms into a gentler

tranquillo version (illustrated) with a *pizzicato* accompaniment. Notice the falling fourth (under 1.) which is a characteristic not only of this movement but of all three, along with the rising second (whole tone) that often precedes it. This theme and the related opening idea appear many times, in a variety of guises and against different accompaniments, such as this triplet-based motif (again with a falling fourth) that first appears on the violin and is used to build to a powerful climax.

Musical notation for the first movement of Kodály's Duo for violin and cello. The top staff is for the violin and the bottom staff is for the cello. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The violin part starts with a whole note chord, followed by a melodic line starting with a rising second (whole tone) and then a falling fourth. The cello part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth notes. Dynamics include p (piano) and pp (pianissimo). The tempo/mood is marked 'pizz.' and 'tranquillo, non espressivo'.

Musical notation for a triplet-based motif. The staff is for the violin. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The motif consists of a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note, with a falling fourth interval. Dynamics include pp (pianissimo).

The *Adagio* second movement is intensely rhapsodic, with the two instruments again alternating material, much of which is related to that of the first movement. Rising seconds and falling fourths figure prominently, as in the violin's initial entry (illustrated). The free, complex rhythms evoke the wild and poignant moods of the Hungarian folk fiddle.



The slow introduction to the last movement refers directly back to the opening of the first movement. The violin peters out, but is woken by a lively *Presto*, with a theme that is yet again closely related to the first movement. The wild dancing is interrupted by a slower (*meno mosso*) section where the violin slides around like an exhausted drunk, before being dragged to his feet for a rousing and even faster finish.



Programme notes by Chris Darwin