

## Zoltán Kodály: IFMC President, 1961–1967

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The International Folk Music Council elected Zoltán Kodály (16 December 1882 – 6 March 1967) as its third president in 1961, fourteen years after its founding. Although Kodály was involved at the beginning of the Council, warmly welcomed its establishment, and assured it of his support, except for chairing the Council's Hungarian National Committee, he did not take an official role in its workings at an international level until he was elected president. Rather, the member of the Executive Board from Hungary was initially László Lajtha (1947–1962). Kodály did not attend the organization's inaugural London meeting in September 1947, despite repeated invitations from Maud Karpeles, who—as the main organizer of the event and subsequently the first secretary of the Council—wrote soul-stirring letters, imploring him to come (ICTM Archive MS 10017, series 4, folder 122). In a handwritten letter dated 19 September 1947, in which Kodály sent final apologies for his absence, he nevertheless made a proposal about the draft agenda of the inaugural meeting he had received earlier:

I would add nevertheless a suggestion to No. 10(c) Agenda. It seems [to] me most important to work out for each country (i.e., linguistic territory) some guide to facilitate the survey of the whole material. I mean some melodic-rhythmical index, examples of which we find in Finnish publications, including all published (and manuscript) material. (Kodály 2002:322–323; also in ICTM Archive MS 10017, series 4, folder 122)

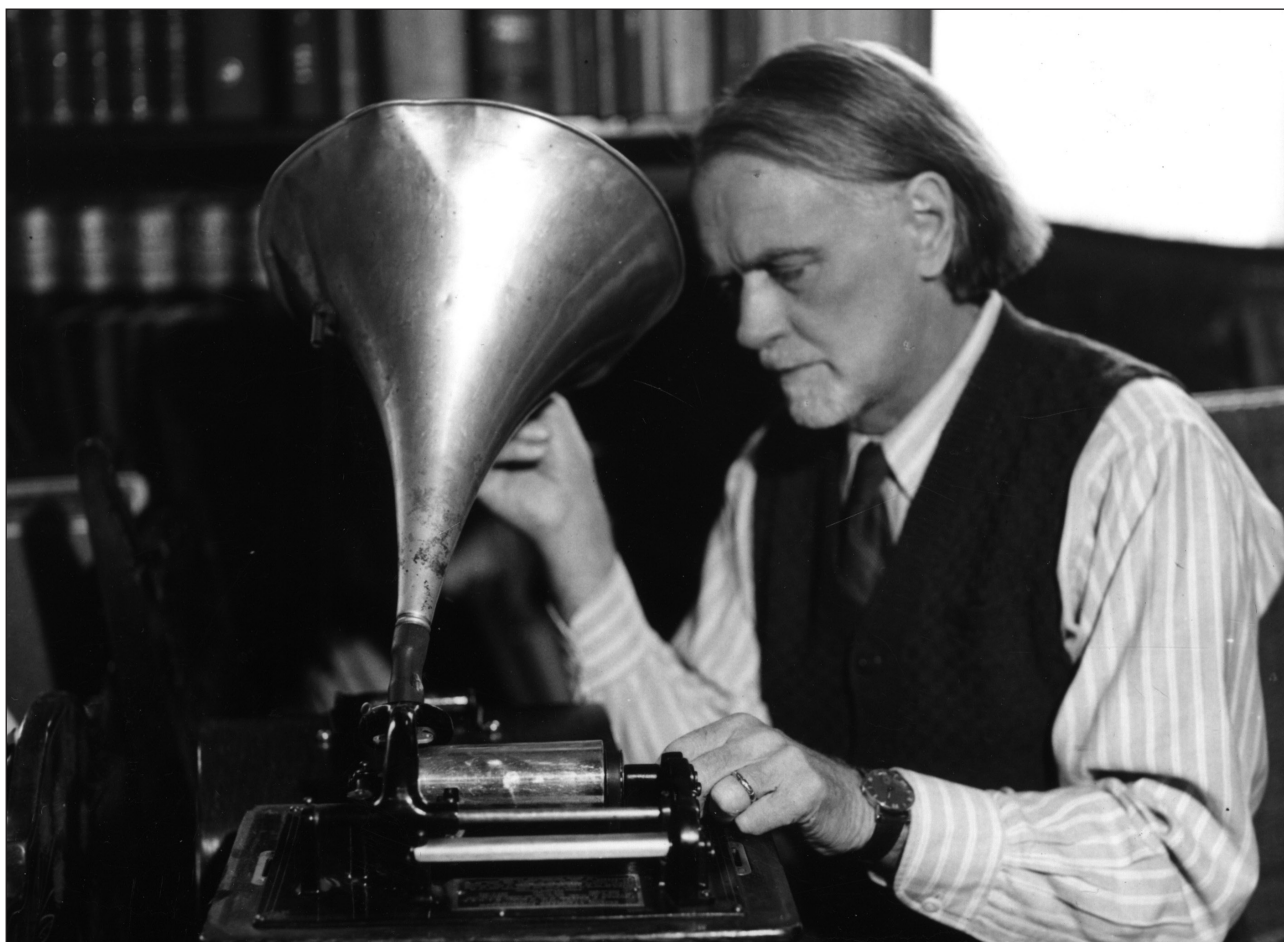
At that time, it is understandable that Kodály did not wish to commit his scholarly and research capabilities to international affairs, regardless of his reputation, renown, and his unparalleled experience and knowledge as a folk-music researcher (figure 1). He held the position of president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences from 1946 until the Communist takeover in 1949 and—following Bartók's death and the terrible devastations of World War II—it was his duty to restart Hungarian folk-music research.

Kodály was finally given the opportunity to take Hungarian folk-music research to a higher level of institutionalization by preserving the results acquired so far,

archiving and processing the huge amount of collected material, bringing together researchers previously active in this field, and involving young people and newcomers. He was able to do all the above in line with his specific social aspirations and educational goals. His primary objective was to launch and assure the continuous publication of the complete edition of Hungarian folk songs in the series *A Magyar Népzene Tára / Corpus Musicae Popularis Hungaricae* (CMPH), the creation of which had been decided decades earlier by Kodály and Bartók. Volume 1 of the series, presenting children's games, appeared in 1951. The Folk Music Research Group then started operating officially in 1953, under Kodály's leadership and within the framework of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

At the same time, the training of ethnomusicologists began at the Liszt Academy of Music. Thus, Kodály first established the institutional base of Hungarian folk-music research, which made possible significant participation in the international scholarly domain. Moreover, he was able to accomplish all this at a time when Hungary was experiencing one of the darkest periods of its history: a Soviet-style Bolshevik dictatorship, accompanied by the personality cult of the Communist leader. Hungarian society was isolated from the outside world and forced to live within its borders, both psychologically and physically. Travel was impossible, even for international celebrities like Kodály. On the other hand, it was precisely his notoriety, authority, and reputation that protected him and his colleagues from the aggressive tendencies of the regime.

As chair of IFMC's Hungarian National Committee, Kodály could constantly monitor IFMC scholarly events, be kept informed about new research programmes and recent publications, and keep in touch with IFMC Secretary Maud Karpeles, to whom he regularly sent the latest publications of the Budapest Folk Music Research Group. His authority, reputation, and esteem are well illustrated by the fact that, following the death of the Council's first president, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Karpeles asked Kodály to write the eulogy on behalf of the organization. Kodály sent a short contribution in



**Figure 1.** Setting-up the phonograph: Zoltán Kodály. Budapest, c. 1957 (photo courtesy of the Kodály Archívum Budapest).

his letter of reply, aware of the fact that his pen was driven more by personal confession than by compliance with the requested genre (Karpeles et al. 1959:4).

When IFMC's second president, Jaap Kunst, passed away in December 1960, Karpeles invited Kodály to be president, but he politely avoided the task, rightly referring to his age and state of health, and spicing his letter with a Hungarian proverb:

I would wish to the IFMC a younger, more active and less moribund president. (If I should be superstitious I must refuse: it is to insure an early death.) ... Now I ask you once more to look around the world for a more suitable person. If you find nobody then let us use a Hungarian proverb: "If lacks a horse an ass [i.e., a donkey] will do it." (Kodály to Karpeles, 10 Jan 1961;<sup>1</sup> Kodály 2002:375; ICTM Archive MS 10017, series 4, folder 122)

However, it seems that by this time, Karpeles had been in informal consultation with the Council's leadership and had already decided to insist on the nomination of Kodály as president:

I found your letter a little cryptic but I believe I am right in thinking that you will accept the Presidency of the IFMC, although you do so reluctantly.

I have already looked around the world and there is not a horse to be found although perhaps in two or three years time some colts may have grown up; so, to continue the metaphor of the proverb, we are asking you to accept the role of the "ass," who is, after all, a very honoured animal. (Karpeles to Kodály, 20 Jan 1961;<sup>2</sup> ICTM Archive MS 10017, series 4, folder 122)

In the end, Kodály accepted the proposal, and his health also improved. During their pre-conference meeting in Québec, the Executive Board noted that Kodály had consented to be nominated as president (EB minutes, 25th meeting, 27–28 Aug 1961:§304). At the General Assembly on 30 August 1961, ratification of his nomination was carried with acclamation (*BIFMC* 20, Jan 1962:8). He would hold the post until his death.

Thus, during the last years of his life and as the head of the most prestigious international and professional forum, Kodály was given the opportunity to look after, promote, and influence the cause of folk song and folk music in a way he viewed as ideal. This was a cause that

1 In the beginning of the typewritten letter with Kodály's signature, the month is incorrectly written as December; it was actually January (cf. Stockmann 1983:8).

2 On the typewritten copy of the letter in the ICTM Archive, the year is incorrectly written as 1960.



**Figure 2.** Interview on Hungarian TV about the IFMC conference in Budapest in 1964. Willard Rhodes (EB member), Viktor Beliaev (ICTM member from the USSR), János Sebestyén (reporter), Kodály, Pál Járdányi (ICTM member from Hungary) (photo by Edit Molnár; courtesy of the Kodály Archívum Budapest).

he personally considered important from an artistic and a scientific perspective, but also from a moral and social standpoint that included its benefits to society.

During his presidency, the history of study groups began (two of them were founded in 1962, and two others in 1964 and 1966),<sup>3</sup> and five IFMC conferences were organized, one every year, except in 1965. It was a great achievement that Hungarian delegate(s) also took part in these events each time, and Kodály himself attended three conferences: Gottwaldov (1962), Jerusalem (1963), and Budapest (1964). The themes of these conferences, the formulation of which the president also played a role, were strongly connected to the main tasks and objectives of Hungarian folk-music research. In Gottwaldov, one of the conference themes was the analysis of vocal and instrumental styles, and for the first time, migration and folk dance, as well as folk dances and their music, appeared among the themes. The Jerusalem conference was organized in connection with

a larger UNESCO programme, featuring the music of the East and the West, and the same issue was discussed in relation to folk music and folk songs. The opening address was given by Kodály (Kodály 1964; see the original, longer version in Percy 1964:199–202).<sup>4</sup> Last but not least, the most important topics at the Budapest conference (figure 2) were musically based systematization, as well as the relationship between folk music and music history (Stockman 1983:10–11; 1985:4–5). Kodály envisioned international folk-music research as a network of individual national research workshops. The basic research work that the members of this network would carry out is shown by his account of the 1962 plans of the Hungarian research group he led (although the same subject was also partly referred to in his letter addressed to Karpeles in 1947 and quoted above):

To summarize the rationale dealing with the research topics: the two main activities the Group [i.e., the Folk Music Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences] are the publication of the volumes in the CMPH series ... and the creation of the European Folk

3 In 1962: the Study Group on Folk Musical Instruments, and the Study Group on Folk Dance Terminology (in the early 1970s, it was renamed as the Study Group on Ethnochoreology); in 1965: the Study Group on Analysis and Systematization of Folk Music; in 1966: the Study Group on Historical Sources (Stockman 1983:9, 11–12; 1985:3–5).

4 During the conference, Kodály's lyrical play *Székegy fonó* (The Transylvanian spinning-room) was also performed in Hebrew.

Song Catalogue.<sup>5</sup> ... these two topics will also provide a basis for the extensive historical research, because only in the possession of our systematized and published folksong-material, of a thoroughly acquired knowledge and classification of the material of others, further, by exploring the written historical [source] material can we undertake the scientific elaboration of the changes, interactions, and history of folk musics and of the interrelationship between folk music and art music. (Archives of the Institute for Musicology, Budapest, RCH: 1962\_13\_23\_NZKCS)

In addition to systematizing, analyzing, and comparing music, as well as conducting historical research, Kodály had another important programme that was in perfect alignment with the plans of the IFMC: the publication of as many high-quality recordings of original folk music as possible. In accordance with this plan, a series of LP recordings was prepared for the 1964 Budapest conference in order to provide an overview of Hungarian folk music (Rajeczky 1964).<sup>6</sup> This work was continued by the UNESCO record series,<sup>7</sup> which was also initiated around the same time.

For Kodály, it was important to publish full-length conference presentations, not only abbreviated summaries, which was then the practice in the Council's *Journal*. In the case of the 1964 Budapest conference, he made sure that the written versions of the papers were published in accordance with the editorial principles of the Budapest-based international specialist journal *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* and published in the 1965 issue of that journal.

It was during Kodály's presidency that the study of the social background of music, including folk music, began to become increasingly important for research, alongside the typical historical and musical approach. This was a development that was to open a new chapter in the history of the discipline, by then already designated as "ethnomusicology."

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5 In fact, preparations for the so-called Europe Catalogue were also encouraged by the IFMC. The plans for the catalogue, as well as the results achieved to date, were presented at the 1964 conference in Budapest. Some working processes were already planned to be carried out by computer, and experiments were conducted in this direction (Archives of the Institute for Musicology, Budapest, RCH: 705\_1963\_09\_20).

6 A film was also made about the Budapest conference, which was broadcast by NDR Television (Hamburg) in November 1964.

7 UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music of the World (1961–2003).

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