

ZENE: Gibbons: Drop, drop slow tears (Banchieri Singers) – 2 versszak (00'59")

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After this short musical introduction of my lecture I'd like to give a brief survey of the chamber singing formations in Hungary in the beginning of the 21st century. Because of the short available time I won't talk about the pleasing new wave of chamber singing in Hungarian folk music and also about gospel and pop vocal groups.

If we want to investigate the process of the formation and development of vocal ensembles in Hungary, we have to begin with an in-depth study of the position of choir-life before the change of regime in 1989. The status of the choirs for long depended totally on a sustainer, for example on a cultural institute or even on a factory. It was unimaginable to work in an independent formation in this period, because of the continuous political supervision. The sustainer expected from the choirs to increase the number of the members in force. In spite of the fact that it was typical of amateur choirs, we could find also high level groups among them. Just an example: Zoltán Kodály dedicated his composition entitled 'The Hungarian Nation' to a choir of a leather factory in 1947.

The repertoire of the choirs was quite miscellaneous: folksong-arrangements, classical or romantic secular pieces, occasionally early music (but with text translated into Hungarian), and not forgetting: semi- or entirely political part-songs.

Let me recall an anecdote from 1959. The Pécs Chamber Choir (directed by Aurél Tillai and László Dobos) for their first anniversary wanted to organize a concert exclusively with a program of madrigals. The director of the cultural centre would have given the permission to give the concert only if they had made another concert with pure communist songs, and if they increase the number of the chorists at least to a triple. The members of the choir decided to say no, and undertook to work the choir without home. It was a really courageous choice.

In this manner the programs of concerts seemed quiet mixed. The choirs could sing sacred pieces but only with political songs in the same program. The sacred music sounded often with a newly written, Hungarian, irreligious text, or later only in Latin language that could understand only a few.

2.

What were the sources of sheet musics like in the field of coral music? The very first book was and is in use up to this day the choir-book entitled 'Ezer év kórusa' (Choral Music of Thousand Years) compiled by Miklós Forrai, edited by the 'Magyar Kórus Kiadó' in 1943, and later by the Editio Musica Budapest in many times from 1956 on. This book contains 143 compositions from an ode of the Hellenic Pyndar and Seikylos' epitaph to pieces of Stravinsky and Bartók.

The other important collection was the 'Öt évszázad kórusa' (The Choral Music of Five Centuries) which was published for the first time in 1956, also by the Editio Musica Budapest. It contains 116 compositions from Josquin up to the late romantic age.

Both of the two books were highly up-to-date in their age, in the same time created the right conditions for singing early music in small vocal ensemble too.

I have to talk about two other editions, two series. The 'Régi mesterek vegyeskarai' (The Old Masters' Mixed Choruses) (the edition began in 1964) and the 'Régi mesterek egyeneműkarai' (The Old Masters' Choruses for Upper Voices) (began in 1965).

As it can be seen on the first page of the chanson written by Le Jeune: the very first editions did not contain the original text, but the translations. [*kottapéllda*]

3.

Considering that the performing of early music – and particularly performing of renaissance compositions – is the most suitable for singing by vocal ensembles. At this point let me take a short digression to the way of performing early music.

The primary goal in the field of performing early music in the 20th century was only to discover and produce those pieces that were not, or only rarely were performed before. But at best, these interpretations were untouched by the new knowledge about the interpretation of early music. I'd like to demonstrate the development of the way of interpretation with some examples from the Monteverdi-oeuvre.

An early performance of Monteverdi's 'Ave maris stella' – performed by the RAI Orchestra and Choir and conducted by Sergiu Celibidache in 1959 shows well the way of thinking on the early music. In the concert-program referred to above: we could find next to each other the 'Magnificat' of Monteverdi and the 'Symphony No. 6.' of Tchaikovsky...

ZENE: Monteverdi – Celibidache (1'12"")

Even if we haven't heard it in the recording of Celibidache, in the solo sections of the 'Ave maris stella' in a strange way sang all the tenor part or soprano part *unisono*. After these, the question seems really interesting, when was the first attempt in the 20th century to sing early music by solo voices. Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979) French composer, conductor, and teacher conducted in her concerts pieces of J.S. Bach and Schütz, in addition she used Monteverdi-madrigals in her lessons in the Paris Conservatoire. (It's also interesting and peculiar link, that professor Erzsébet Szőnyi, our former head of department was also the pupil of Nadia Boulanger and Olivier Messiaen at the Conservatoire between 1947 and 1948.) Boulanger's long-held passion for Monteverdi culminated in recording six discs of madrigals in 1937. This brought her music to a new, wider audience. Though received very well in most quarters, some reviewers took issue with her use of modern instruments. Listen now from her recordings to the madrigal 'Zefiro torna e di soavi accenti' written by Claudio Monteverdi for two voices on the poem of Ottavio Rinuccini.

ZENE: Nadia Boulanger – Monteverdi (1'26"")

4.

Mostly in the libraries of higher education valid sources of sheet musics have been available since the so called 'collected works' of different renaissance composers were edited. The newness was that the compositions could have been read (*red*) in original language, they were free from the editors' performing signs. New knowledge appeared in the higher education about the interpretation of early music. There were favourable conditions for chamber singing. With contribution of students of the Liszt Academy of Music in 1963 the Liszt Ferenc Chamber Choir was founded and it was directed by Professor István Párkai. The repertoire of the chamber choir was quiet wide, but mainly focused on early music and contemporary music. Among them they performed and recorded first time in Hungary two oratorios, 'Jonas' and 'Balthazar' of Giacomo Carissimi in 1991. Another remarkable recording was made in 1990 by the Budapest Monteverdi Choir conducted by prof. Éva Kollár about 'Messa de Madrid' of Domenico Scarlatti. As it can be seen, the political and social situation changed after the change of regime (1989), the choirs have gave up singing semi-political pieces, and could turn to sacred music.

Coming back to chamber singing in the higher education, we could find that also the students of the Liszt Academy of Music themselves formed vocal groups. May I introduce the three

most significant ensembles among them. In this period established the Gesualdo Quintet (worked between 1962 and 1970) with László Tardy – who is now the conductor of the Mathias Church of Buda Castle; the Pro Musica Vocal Group (between 1963 and 1969) with the contribution of Péter Erdei – now he is a professor of the Liszt Academy and the conductor of the New Liszt Ferenc Chamber Choir. Also the students founded in 1969 the Primavera Vocal Ensemble with 5 singers among them Judit Hartyányi who was also professor of the Liszt Academy and the former Vice President of the International Kodály Society; and Mátyás Antal who is now the conductor of the National Choir in Budapest. Probably professor Erzsébet Szőnyi, the head of the Department of Music Teacher and Choral Conducting, gave also impulses to the work of these vocal groups herself, by organising chamber singing competitions for students of the department.

What was the main motivation of the singers to find new formations? Not only the possibility of more singing, since there were a lot of courses and lessons at the academy of music in which they had to sing. But it induced them to look for new sound, new tone, common resonance, new ways in the intonation, and of course a kind of feeling of semi-soloist singing. As we can see, the attitudes of individual mentality in the field of choir-music also changed.

5.

The claim to sing in ensemble became stronger, the way of thinking changed the aesthetic and the social function of common singing step by step. At the same time some excellent vocal groups appeared in Hungary mostly from the English cultural area that influenced chamber-singing with their examples in a fundamental way. Shortly after the American Golden Gate Spiritual Quartet, in the 1970s the King's Singers arrived first time in Budapest. Thank to their concert broadcast from the Hall of the Hotel Astoria, a whole country could get to know their names, a new, characteristic sound of them, and a meaning of a new (at least for us new) voice: the counter-tenor. Later two former King's singers: the counter-tenor Jeremy Jackman and the baritone Simon Carrington accepted an invitation for making masterclass in the Liszt Academy In the chamber singing masterclass of Jeremy Jackman in 1992 appeared two excellent Hungarian vocal ensembles: the Lassus Quartet from Budapest (led by Ákos Erdős and later by prof. István Párkai) and the Banchieri Singers from Nyíregyháza (led by Soma Szabó).

Then the Deller Consort, the Hilliard Ensemble, the Tallis Scholars, the Chanticleer, the Consort of Musicke, and the Sixteen came.

The Hungarian vocal ensembles reached more and more successes in the international choir competitions, and several of them became regular participants in the highest standard festivals in the entire world. The idiom of the vocal ensemble in Hungarian (énekegyüttes) as loan translation came from English too, the definitive specification of the vocal ensembles (the number of members are from 3/4 – up to 8/12) is also replanted from the category-systems of international competitions.

6.

What can we say about the present positions of the chamber singing in Hungary?

Mixed adult choirs	250
Female adult choirs	80
Male adult choirs	5
Mixed youth choirs	50
Equal voice children's and	100

youth choirs	
Girls' choirs	50
Boys' choirs	2
Vocal ensembles / vocal groups	15
Others	50

(Source: KÓTA - Association of Hungarian Choirs, Orchestras and Folk Ensembles. The data are not based on representative samples, show only the membership in the Association.)

If we observe the numbers of choirs and vocal ensembles in Hungary, we can find that the number the vocal ensembles has not grown, but their way of working is far more professional than most of the choirs.

Chime in with the Western European examples, a kind of polarization can be seen among the vocal ensembles referring to their repertoire. Some have become specialized in church music, others in contemporary music, etc. Just a few of them undertake on singing a wide repertoire with different styles from music history. But they have something in common: all of them arrange thematic concert programs or issue thematic CDs.

Just a short musical example from the CD of the Discantus Vocal Ensemble entitled Requiem (2010.)

ZENE: Discantus (1'30")

Let's glance at the working vocal ensembles in alphabetic order, in brackets are the leaders/directors:

- **Ars Renata (László Virágh)**

The Ars Renata vocal ensemble was founded in 1971, and dedicated itself to perform early Hungarian and other European renaissance and baroque pieces.

- **Banchieri Singers (Soma Szabó)**

The members of the Banchieri Singers were all pupils of Zoltán Kodály School in Nyíregyháza. After completing their studies at the school they formed the Banchieri Singers.

- **CantuS CorvinuS – (Géza Klembala)**

Debuted in 1991, their repertoire covers works mostly by composers of the baroque and renaissance eras. They only work specially on projects, they are like a “stagione”-choir.

- **Capella Silentium – (Tamás Várkonyi)**

Its repertoire comprises music from the early renaissance polyphony to contemporary music, and not specialized on one era or style. CS was founded in 2009 by chorus master and musicologist Tamás Várkonyi.

- **Corvina Consort (Zoltán Kalmanovits)**

The repertoire of the Corvina Consort comprises of five centuries of church and secular as well as vocal and instrumental music. Its members are young artists who regularly perform with other significant early music ensembles at home and abroad. They are the participants of several radio, television, and CD recordings.

- **Discantus Vocal Ensemble (Péter Mészáros)**

The Discantus Vocal Ensemble was founded in 1996 in Budapest, the main profile is to perform the church music of the renaissance and early baroque period.

- **Szabad Hangok / Free Tones Ensemble/ (Laura Antal)**

The aim of the ensemble is to perform the works of contemporary composers whose work represent an experimental approach to vocal music. The ensemble has been working since 2003.

- **Gemma Vocal Ensemble – (Márton Tóth)**

The members of the Gemma Vocal Ensemble were all pupils of Zoltán Kodály Hungarian Chorus School in Budapest. Their repertoire contains renaissance masses, motets and cantatas of J.S. Bach.

- **Stella Vocal Ensemble – (Nóra Abaffy)**

Founded in 2004 by the students of Department of Church Music of the Liszt Academy of Music.

- **UniCum Laude Vocal Group (Csaba Kutnyánszky)**

The vocal group called UniCum Laude was formed in 1994 in Pécs. The UniCum Laude was formed in 1994 in Pécs, the repertoire of the group includes renaissance sacred music and the most spectacular pieces of madrigals, as well as of contemporary modern music or arrangements of evergreens.

- **Voces Aequales (Mizsei Zoltán)**

The Voces Aequales was founded in 1993, and has focused its attention on the medieval and renaissance vocal music.

During my lecture I referred to the motivations of forming, and to the goals of activity of vocal ensembles. In conclusion I'd like to cite the 'ars poetica' of the Capella Silentium from their web-site.

Our artistic principles:

- Exciting concert programmes
- Works embedded into a musical historical context
- Performance of unknown pieces
- Symbiosis of theory and practice

Our ars poetica: it is only by hearing the silence that we can grasp the real value of sound.

Finally I'd like to thank you for your flattering attention with a live recording of the UniCum Laude Vocal Group.

ZENE: Rossini: Toast pour le nouvel an (New Year's Greeting) – U.L. (2'06")