

ASO Program Notes

Dances of Galanta

Zoltan Kodaly (1882 – 1967)

Zoltan Kodaly was best known as a composer of vocal music, and as a music educator, having written a large body of educational music for use in schools. Both parents were amateur musicians and his early introduction to music was incidental. He learned to play piano and many string instruments without formal instruction. He was born in the town of Kecskemet, but Galanta is the name of the town in Hungary where Zoltan Kodaly lived for seven years of his childhood, where he went to school, and where he was exposed at every turn to Hungarian gypsy folk music. He began his music education in 1900, devoting several years to visiting remote Hungarian villages and collecting songs, and ultimately earned degrees in composition, teaching and a PhD in musicology.

The work was premiered in Budapest, Hungary in 1933 and dedicated to the Budapest Philharmonic Society on its 80th birthday. The *Dances*, along with other works based on Hungarian folk music, were not immediately embraced by the Hungarian upper class. They preferred the Viennese classical music popular at the time, and considered folk music to be uncultured and unrefined. Kodaly was determined to be taken seriously, however, and collaborated with another Hungarian musical giant, Bela Bartok, to publish two significant texts on the subject of Hungarian folk music. The works were scholarly and of such high quality that principals in the field of ethnomusicology were forced to receive them. The result was worldwide recognition for both men. The two also published several collections of folk music together, and much of Bartok's work shows the folk music influence. Bartok said, "If I were to name the composer whose works are the most perfect embodiment of the Hungarian spirit, I would answer, Kodaly."

Kodaly believed that the folksong was what connected his country's past with its future. The *Dances of Galanta* are romantic in style and, unlike much of the music composed during the 1930s, are fairly straightforward and relatively free of dissonance. Many of the tunes which are woven into the fabric of the *Dances* were used for the recruitment of soldiers during the imperial wars, and the resulting work combines brilliant orchestral blends with the gypsy melodies on which it is based.

Kodaly's legacy continues through Kodaly institutes established worldwide. The International Kodaly Society was founded in 1975 to promote the Kodaly Method, and his former home is now a museum and center for Kodaly research.

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