Kodály

Solo Cello Sonata Op. 8
Duo for Violin and Cello Op. 7

Yuli Turovsky cello
Eleonora Turovsky violin
Whereas vocal compositions occupied Kodály throughout his long career, his entire output of chamber music predates his fortieth birthday. The few orchestral works of this period are student compositions, and of these only Summer Evening is known today. Although written in 1906 it was substantially revised during 1920 and the following year. One, and probably the main, reason why Kodály did not write major orchestral works until well after the first world war was the near-impossibility of getting them performed in Hungary. Bartók’s attempts in this direction met with scant success, and of the two composers he was regarded as the more acceptable. Strange though it may seem today, Kodály was looked upon in Budapest as a modernist who held the rules of composition in contempt. As one critic put it, he was employed by the Academy to teach harmony yet he shunned it in his own music. Not until he had become recognised abroad were Kodály’s compositions taken seriously by more than a few enlightened persons at home. The only exception was the Adagio for viola and piano of 1905. This piece, later arranged for both viola and cello, was composed before Kodály found his true path as a result of his researches into Hungarian folk music; needless to say the Adagio is thoroughly uncharacteristic.

The series of important chamber works begins with the First String quartet, Op. 2 (1906-9) and the Serenade for cello and piano, Op. 4 (1909-10), and ends with the Second String Quartet, Op. 10 (completed in 1918) and the Serenade for two violins and piano, Op. 12 (1919-20). Roughly half way through this period come the Duo for Violin and cello, Op. 7 (1914) and the Sonata for unaccompanied cello, Op. 8 (1915).

Kodály and Bartók soon found that even their chamber music could not obtain performances in Budapest. Because of this they decided early in 1910, by which time both had unperformed string quartets on their hands, to promote a pair of concerts devoted to their own music. Bartók, being a brilliant executant was the automatic choice as pianist but, although Kodály could play the cello, he was far from being up to the standard required. Consequently, four string players were
needed to perform either as a unit or to partner Bartók individually. Four students, whose ages ranged from seventeen to twenty-four, offered their services. Such was their dedication that they held more than a hundred rehearsals. Although expecting no reward for all the trouble they were taking, they were to be amply repaid. By a stroke of good fortune a French impresario, who happened to be in Budapest, attended the concerts. So impressed was he by the achievements of the students that he booked them to play in Paris. Thus began the career of the ensemble, initially known as the Waldauer-Kerpely Quartet, that was to become world famous as the Hungarian String Quartet. Throughout their long career, which ended only when the leader Imre Waldauer and the cellist Jenő Kerpely went to America in 1945, they continued to champion the music of Kodály and Bartók.

But for Jenő Kerpely's Unaccompanied Cello Sonata would almost certainly never have been composed, since it is most unlikely that any other cellist of the time would have been sufficiently dedicated to tackle its altogether exceptional demands. Nothing comparable had been written before for the cello, although a few composers - notably Bernardino Zimmermann - have since demanded even more. As a composer Kodály was not in the least interested in virtuoso display for its own sake, but in this case the medium meant he had to explore technique to the limit if he was to express as much with a single instrument as when using a chamber combination. Some listeners, after hearing a performance over the radio or on a record, have expressed disbelief that only one player was involved, while others have likened the effect of some passages to that of a folk band. Not only is Kodály's Sonata the largest work for unaccompanied cello, or at least the largest to become well known, but it is also the most important since the suites of Bach: in between come Reger's suites, but whereas these echo Bach, Kodály's approach owes virtually nothing to his illustrious predecessor. The source of his inspiration is unmistakably Hungarian folk music.

To achieve his end Kodály resorted to the old device of scordatura, which had been very little used since the early part of the eighteenth century. Instead of being tuned normally the instrument's bottom strings are lowered a semitone, thereby giving the overall tuning B-F-sharp-D-A instead of the normal C-G-D-A. This transforms the instrument by making possible a completely different range of harmonic possibilities. For instance, the three lower strings unstopped together sound the chord of B minor, the key of the work; they can be, and often are, used in combination with stopped notes high up on the first strings. One result of this irregular tuning is that the work becomes extremely difficult to try over on a piano, since those notes given to the two lower strings have to be transposed down a semitone while the others remain at the written pitch.

Whereas the Swirl is of necessity somewhat rhapsodic, the Duo is stricter in form, largely because two stringed instruments allow greater harmonic mobility than one. In some duos - Michael Haydn's for instance - the two performers are not equal partners, the lower part serving an accompanying function. This, needless to say, was not Kodály's approach, even though he did not go to the other extreme by making the parts equal throughout as in a Bach two-part invention. Here again the whole work has its roots in Hungarian folk music, parlando-type melodies being prominent in the first two movements. Dance rhythms take over in the main body of the third, which is preceded by a substantial introduction that ends by referring back to the slow movement's principal theme.

Malcolm Rayment
THE TUROVSKY DUO

A resident of Montreal in Canada where he is a member of the faculty of the Quebec Conservatoire du Musique, Yuli Turovsky is widely known as the cellist of the Borodin Trio. Prior to his emigration from the Soviet Union with his wife Eleonora in 1976 he appeared as soloist in international tours with the Moscow Chamber Orchestra under Rudolf Barshai. He studied with Galina Kozlova at the Moscow Conservatory and in 1969 was prize winner in the 3rd Soviet Cello Competition. In 1970 he was a laureate in the 22nd International Prague Spring Competition. With the Borodin Trio he has recorded for Chandos Piano Trios by Brahms, Schubert and Tchaikovsky, the Piano Trio and Quintet of Shostakovich and also the Cello and Piano Sonatas of Prokofiev and Shostakovich with Luba Edlin.

Eleonora Turovsky studied at the Moscow Central Conservatory where she won a Silver Medal and at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory where she also graduated with the highest honours. This was followed by post-graduate study under Professor Dimitri Tschapov, first violinist of Russia's renowned Beethoven String Quartet. She is now also a member of the Quebec Conservatory faculty and has an independent career as a soloist and chamber music player.

Yuli Turovsky is founding music director and conductor of Canada's new chamber orchestra, I Musici di Montreal. The orchestra has performed Handel's 12 Concerti Grossi Op. 6 in a series of broadcasts for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, with Yuli Turovsky on the podium and Eleonora Turovsky as violin soloist.

Repertoire of the Turovsky Duo includes classic works by Haydn and Beethoven as well as 20th century masterpieces for the combination, such as the Kodaly Duo Sonata on this recording, Ravel's Duo Sonata and works by Prokofiev and Martino.

"It is unlikely that anyone will contradict me if I say that Yuli and Eleonora Turovsky are among the most valuable divulgators Canada has received from the tensions that divide cost and west."

Eric McLean, MONTREAL GAZETTE

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Recording Producer: Brian Coutsos. Sound Engineers: Brian and Ralph Coutsos.

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Front Cover Painting by Eleonora Turovsky.
Zoltán Kodály
(1882-1967)

SONATA for solo cello Op. 8  27:16
1  I – Allegro maestoso ma appassionato  9:48
2  II – Adagio  7:54
3  III – Allegro molto vivace  9:23

DUO for violin and cello Op. 7  31:00
1  I – Allegro serioso, non troppo  9:00
2  II – Adagio  9:46
3  III – Maestoso e largamente, ma non troppo – Presto  12:08

YULI TUROVSKY cello
ELEONORA TUROVSKY violin

TT—58:16