

Kodály's Legacy in the Service of Dakota Song. **Lynn Whidden**

Endword **Beatrix Finta**

Although Aboriginal elder Mike Hotain and Hungarian musician Zoltán Kodály seem worlds apart, I will show some significant commonalities that may help music educators to better use humankind's rich inheritance of oral traditions. Kodály's work, as we know it, stands on its own and indeed has endured the test of time. But from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, we can see that Kodály, while he didn't use contemporary terminology, was also an advocate of diversity, cultural as well as sonic¹. Kodály's work as an educator and composer was founded in the belief of the importance of all folk singing traditions. He believed them to be important for the health of individuals as well as communities and ultimately for the entire society. We can safely assume that Kodály would be delighted to include Mike Hotain's Dakota songs, recorded in 1993 in Sioux Valley, Manitoba, in his approach to learning music just as he incorporated motifs from the Ainu of Japan into his Choral Method (Kodály, 1967).

Kodály, who was born in 1882 in Hungary, could not help but be politically sensitized because of his country's long history of subjugation by other nations. The historical background of Hungary as it relates to music has been well described by scholars such as Percy M. Young (1964). Kodály, and his colleague, Béla Bartók, were musical innovators, if not anomalies, in early twentieth century Europe. By this time, Darwin's theory of evolution (1857) had pervaded the mental life of Europe. Unfortunately, Darwin's successors applied, in a wholesale way, his idea of biological change through time to social and cultural spheres and it became embodied in the idea of progress. As a result, Victorian scholars collected, preserved and studied song and stories from around the world—we are indebted to them—but for the most part viewed them as antiquities, as curiosities that would vanish in the face of "improved" (meaning written down) creations. For example, Native songs were described with words such as howling and hideous bawling. Until recently Native visual art was placed in museums and not regarded as art that stood on its own merits. In contrast, Kodály urged recognition of folksong as a valid artistic expression. Not until the new disciplines of ethnomusicology and folklore began in universities in the 1950's were folk idioms officially recognized as art forms. As such, like all art they can be judged as good or bad, keeping in mind that folksong is strongly rooted in a particular environment and therefore susceptible to misunderstanding by those outside of the culture.

¹ At present, there is considerable discussion about the loss of diversity, particularly biological, that may affect cultural diversity. As more and more species disappear, the human environment becomes increasingly barren. This includes the sound environment that situates us in nature, and which, I suspect, provides us with the materials for our songs. Where will future generations obtain the optimum variety of sounds humankind needs to connect them to the natural world, to their human community and for the emotional substance, often in the form of song, that individuals need to be truly alive and fecund?

There can be no extensive comparison of musics such as Dakota and Hungarian. They are just different and thus lead to endless contrasts. In this case, the only commonality is that they are sung largely unaccompanied, although whenever possible, the Dakota like to use a drum. Yet their socio-political contexts offer considerable food for comparison and give us concrete examples to help us understand why Kodály seized upon oral expression as essential for individual and societal health.

Like Hungarians, the Dakota, one of the many North American Plains groups who speak the Siouan language, have been a subjugated people in historical times. They resisted valiantly; the victory over General Custer at the Battle of Little Bighorn is well known, but ultimately the Dakota could not overcome the greater military might and numbers of the Americans. After the 1862 uprising in Minnesota, Mike Hotain's ancestors fled to Canada, called "Grandmother's land" for Queen Victoria (Elias). Destitute, hungry, and feared by the Red River (now Winnipeg) settlers, they were finally granted seven reserves where they have lived to the present. During this time they have lived under the aegis of The Indian Act, passed in 1876 to both protect and assimilate the Indians. These objectives have proven to be contradictory. Despite government efforts to assimilate the Dakota through, for example, residential schools and banning of Sun Dances, the exclusion of the Dakota from mainstream society on reserves (for their protection) has led to considerable cultural retention. In like fashion, rural Hungarian peoples were isolated from mainstream European culture and maintained their folk traditions, including the folksongs. In both cases, their songs and stories were viewed condescendingly and as of little practical value to the larger society. Moreover, Dakota song, like Hungarian, is difficult for someone outside the tradition to perform and appreciate, a further hindrance to respect for the art form.

The Dakota reacted by hiding their sacred rituals and oral expressions. Too often this means that fewer and fewer young people can perform the old songs and speak the Siouan language, although nearly all believe in the power of the old ways. Elder Mike Hotain has courageously shared his songs and narrative with us, yet unlike Zoltán Kodály, who ultimately was able to revolutionize the Hungarian approach to school music education, Mike's position as an educator has remained ambiguous, largely because of his lack of non-Native education. Although he was educated in the Dakota language and traditions by his grandparents, his formal western education, in both Roman Catholic and residential schools, lasted only until he was 13. As an adult, he developed a school-based drum group that helped youths to achieve in school. But because of his lack of formal education, Mike's efforts to teach Dakota song in school were not fully supported by some in his own community, and of course, not validated by non-Native society. However, in his role as master of ceremonies (MC) at powwows he has educated thousands with his commentaries about the meaning and performance of the dances and songs.

The Dakota political situation has parallels with the Hungarian situation of Kodály's time. Like the Dakotas, the Hungarians were ruled from without, and in that case, the middle class supported the foreign, imposed Austro-German traditions, including music.

Kodály's research of Hungarian song, and the performance of his arrangements of old songs, were seen as political treachery. In 1925, Kodály replied in this way,

What right have you to forbid us the use of our own musical idiom? To prevent us from teaching this idiom also in our schools, modestly, alongside the universal language of music? We allow freedom to every taste within the limits of art. But for how long do you expect us to put up with your attempts to dictate to us the foreign tastes of your foreign soul? To your conservatism, rooted in small-town Germany or international platitudes, I oppose a Hungarian conservatism, nominated by a universal culture. We want to stand on our own feet.... We refuse to be a musical colony any longer.... We have our own musical message, and the world is beginning to listen to it attentively. It is not we who have invented Hungarian music. It has existed for 1,000 years. We only wish to preserve and foster this ancient treasure; and, if sometimes the opportunity should be granted to us, to add to it. (Young 1964, 82).

More and more the Dakota are voicing the concerns that Kodály expressed almost a century ago. Kodály saw the oral tradition of folk music as "a guarantee of personal dignity" (Young 1964, 91). "All affronts to human identity to (Kodály) were anathema: most of all affronts to those less able to take care of themselves, children, peasants, and among nations, the small ones" (91). He believed the vitality of a people is embodied in their language (105), a sentiment strongly held by the Dakota. Kodály thought that people should have access to Western art music as well, but that the everyday music of the Hungarian people is where community health is situated, more specifically in choral singing, it's "realistic—by people, with people, and from people" (96). By 1945 Kodály had planned a method that made folksong the foundation for Hungarian music education. His approach has been adopted internationally by those willing to undertake the rigors of the training, for it requires skill in both oral and visual memory.

Much of Kodály's work to establish traditional song as the basis of music education was done in the 1930's and his approach continues to flourish in the twenty-first century. Why has Kodály's approach proved so enduring? I would like to suggest that song might be an essential for human survival. Darwin thought the origin of music might be found in mating calls. In line with theories of mate selection, Geoffrey Miller (2001) has proposed that musical ability, like broad shoulders or showy plumes, may serve to demonstrate fitness to a potential mate. My own work with northern Cree hunters shows that their hunting songs were an invaluable part of the hunting process (Whidden, 2007). Ethnomusicologist Steven Feld, in his work among the Kaluli people of New Guinea found that sound, especially song, is a way "of reckoning time, space, season, and weather" (Feld 1990, 84). Summing up, song helps humans to understand and therefore successfully exploit their particular ecological niche.

But if song is a means for successful living in our world, why do not all individuals participate? Ethnomusicologist John Blacking (1995) noted that in some societies such as the Venda of the Northern Transvaal, South Africa, all individuals do sing, and they do it with a group: song is a social fact. Kodály's colleague, Béla Bartók (1881-1945), said

that music making is more natural than listening. He noted (1947) that in rural areas, there was no division of people into audience and performers; everyone was simultaneously a member of the audience and a performer. Why, in the industrialized world, do so many individuals have little opportunity to engage in group singing, and why do they often feel themselves incapable of singing?

One answer is to be found partly in Western music history, and the short version is as follows: the early Christian church, while it built upon the non-Christian sounds of the Greeks and Near East, rejected folk song as an art for enjoyment or as an essential part of common education. Church leaders were focussed on spreading “The Word” and were afraid of the sensuous and emotional qualities of music. Indeed, St. Augustine wrote that pagan music had “diabolical choruses” and “pernicious songs” (Grout 1988, 32). As science began to usurp religion as the dominant thought paradigm, music was made one of the maths disciplines of the “quadrivium” (31-32) along with arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, and its ascetic quality was emphasized. Since the seventh century AD we have seen increasing attempts to standardize and to fix sound in writing, the elaboration of which continued through the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, and Romantic periods to modern times. It is no accident that the history of music theory shares with the history of science increasing organization, objectification, and resulting standardization. Thus the modern belief that musicians and scientists have similar abilities is a result of an overlapping history.

Moreover, science knowledge has led to modern technology and music, like the rest of life, has become technologized. We no longer have to perform our own songs; we can hear songs from any where in the world at any time. Our songs may be far removed from our personal environment, and also removed from everyday renditions by editing in a recording studio. Kodály’s emphasis on performing our own songs needs to be reaffirmed for, while we have good recorded music, we also have much that is comparable to junk food, i.e. too much and of poor quality.

I think that Kodály would be in agreement with the following statement of biologist Edward O. Wilson:

People can grow up with the outward appearance of normality in an environment largely stripped of plants and animals, in the same way that passable looking monkeys can be raised in laboratory cages and cattle fattened in feeding bins. Asked if they were happy, these people would probably say yes. Yet something vitally important would be missing, not merely the knowledge and pleasure that can be imagined and might have been, but a wide array of experiences that the human brain is peculiarly equipped to receive. Of that much I feel certain, and I will offer it in the form of a practical recommendation: on Earth no less than in space, lawn grass, potted plants, caged parakeets, puppies, and rubber snakes are not enough (Wilson, 1984, 18).

To this, I would like to add, “canned” music is not enough.

Despite contemporary preoccupation with recorded music, new treasures from the oral tradition are constantly surfacing from persons such as Mike Hotain. We are pleased to include an end word with two songs for immediate use. The transcriptions and instructions are prepared by Kodály instructor, Beatrix Finta, with their meaning as explained by the singer and composer Mike Hotain.

Lynn Whidden

Ethnomusicologist Lynn Whidden has been researching and teaching Native music for the past several decades. During this time, Dakota musician Mike Hotain has contributed to her classes at Brandon University and also collaborated with Whidden on the making of a video, "Do You Hear That?", the recording listed below, and other CBC radio broadcasts.

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Recording:

Hotain, Mike. Schafer, R. Murray. Whidden, Lynn. Every Song Comes with the Wind: Dakota Songs and Notes for Use. hotaincd@armchair.mb.ca

ENDWORD

In the summer of 2002, when I taught at the Brandon University Kodály Course, I stayed at Professor Lynn Whidden's home. She showed me some songs from her vast amount of recordings of First Nations' music. When I expressed interest in her research field, she was very kind to take me to a Sioux powwow – a memorable event for me. There I heard quite a few groups of men drumming and singing. After a steady drumbeat was established, one of the singers started on a high pitch and sang a pentatonic melody slowly descending. Others joined in with a softer tone. When the voices reached the low register, the same man or another started descending again from high. Each song lasted for a few minutes. The signal of the end was a slowdown created by the augmentation of the melody's rhythmic values and some accented drumbeats. For me it was obvious that I had experienced a strong message from generations past preserved by these men.

When I acquired Mike Hotain's recorded songs, I volunteered to notate two songs of his collection. He is a very good singer, and in my assessment his songs were representatives of the same style that I had heard at that powwow. There is a question whether these are traditional folk songs or his own compositions. The only truly satisfying answer to this would be a thorough analysis of the recorded Dakota songs and comparative studies of other tribes. Following this, an extensive comparative research of the First Nations' song material would be desirable. Finally, universal folk song research could analyze and show aspects of kinship and differences in these materials.

With the technological revolution in our lifetime, it is a wonder that some of these songs survived and are still sung.

In Hungary, the systematic collection of folk songs began one hundred years ago. Already at that time Kodály urged many other colleagues to engage in folk song research. Over the decades that followed, more than one million folk songs were collected and later published. (Magyar népzene tára) By the number and the location of variants, the popularity of the songs was determined. The songs were categorized. The oldest songs have been preserved for over a thousand years. These were smaller in numbers and, in a

few cases, no variations were found. This means that these songs would have ultimately been lost, had the musicologists not preserved them. These songs have been compared with songs from the region in Asia from where the nomadic Magyar tribes originated over 1100 years ago. Similar pentatonic structures were found, and some of the melodic turns were variants of the old style Hungarian songs.

Extensive research made it possible for many of the folk songs to survive the changing times. The populace became reacquainted with the forgotten songs. This was possible because of Kodály's leading role in both research and education. Every person in Hungary knows some of these songs because they have been standard in the school curriculum. These folk songs also influenced many composers who incorporated them into their music. Thus the world became acquainted with the soul of the Hungarian people.

In listening to the Dakota songs (live and on CD), it struck me that these songs are clearly pentatonic. As Kodály pointed out, "Since 1907, when Béla Bartók first found several examples of it among the songs of the Székely region of Transylvania, we have known that the pentatonic scale – the basis of the music of so many ancient peoples, perhaps even all peoples – is alive and flourishing here, too" (The Pentatonic Scale in Hungarian Folk Music, 1917, 29).

Though the Dakota and the old style Hungarian songs sound very different, two similarities can be noted. The first and foremost is the use of pentatonics. The Hungarian folk songs are mainly *la* pentatonic (pentatonic minor) with smaller range than Mike Hotain's songs. The "scale belongs to what could be called 'anahemitonic'-type pentatony" (Kodály). It means that this type of pentatony does not contain semitones. The second similarity is the descending melody line. These similarities seem entirely accidental, but let me note that the Dakota Indian tribes have been nomadic and migrated from Asia (Indigenous Peoples' Literature – Welker's Bookmarks, *im passim*).

Analysis: COUNTRY, by Mike Hotain

Mike Hotain's explanation: It is a song of general good feeling. Sing it especially when you are walking or traveling. "Here I am today and I never know where I am gonna be tomorrow."

Footnote: *d* – tonic note; *d'* – tonic note an octave higher; *s'* – fifth note above the upper tonic; *s*, - lower fifth note below the tonic

Structure:

A (measures 1 -16)
 $s' - d$
(with a tail down to s ,)
16 measures

a $s' - d'$ (ending with a short tail winding down to s) 5 measures	b $r' - s$ (starting with an upbeat s) 5 measures	c $s - d$ (starting with an upbeat - l and ending with a tail winding down to s ,) 6 measures
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A variant (measures 17 - 32)
 $s' - d'$
(mainly rhythmic, some note variations plus added repeated notes)
16 measures

a variant 5 measures	b variant 5 measures	c variant 6 measures
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B (measures 33 - 44)
 $d' - d$
(A short note precedes the emphasized d' note. It ends with a tail to s ,)
12 measures

A variant (measures 45 - 59)
(mainly rhythmic variation, 1 note difference)
15 measures

a variant 4 measures	b variant 5 measures	c variant 6 measures
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B variant (measures 60 - 72)
(mainly rhythmic variation, 1 note difference, added repeated notes, no tail)
12 measures

Key: d pentatonic (Pentatonic major); notated on $A=d$

Range: 2 octaves (so'—so,)

Meter: 4/4; 2/4; 3/4

Tempo: *Allegro*

Characteristic traits: syncopated rhythms throughout, descending melody lines

Accompaniment: steady drumbeat. Marking the end (last 3 measures) – accented beats on the 2nd and 4th beats.

GRANDMOTHER'S

Mike Hotain's explanation: My grandfather sang songs in appreciation of my grandmother. These were handed over and became family songs. "Just remembering her – you never know whether she'll be with you tomorrow. "

Footnotes: l – tonic note; l' – upper tonic note; r' and m' – fourth and fifth notes above the upper tonic note; m , - lower fifth note)

Structure:

A (measures 1 - 12) ($r' - l$) (+ small tail down to $mi,$) 12 measures a + (b +c) 5 + (4+ 3 measures)	B (measures 13 - 26) ($r'-l$) (+ small tail down to $mi,$) 14 measures d + (b var.+ e) 5 + (4+5 measures)	C (measures 27 - 46) ($m' - l$) (short re' precedes mi') 20 measures f + (b var.+c var.) 6 + (8 +6 measures)
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(The variants show similar melodic structure but different notes get repeated, there are also rhythmic variations)

Key: La –pentatonic (pentatonic minor); notated on A= l

Range: 2 octaves ($mi' - mi,$)

Meter: 6/8

Tempo: allegro

Characteristic traits: Syncopated rhythms throughout; descending melody lines.

Accompaniment: steady drumbeat with strong emphasis on the 1st and 4th beats.

I tried to notate Mike Hotain's performance as authentically as possible. Most singers present slight variations when repeating a song. This is natural. The other fact that he repeats many syllables gives him a somewhat greater freedom of variation.

I am a music teacher with more than three decades of teaching experience. I knew Kodály, and I too carry in me the love of folk music. In Hungary, there is a relatively homogenous culture. Here in Canada we teach in a multicultural society, and our teaching material reflects this fact. Without a thorough grounding in the style, these songs may be too complicated for school use (full of syncopations and a wide range of two octaves), although children with significant Kodaly experience can often handle these aspects and oral transmission well. I certainly recommend their use at the university level.

These songs constitute part of Canada's cultural heritage for which we are truly grateful.

Beatrix Finta

Beatrix Finta is a graduate of the Liszt Ferenc University of Music in Budapest and an honorary member of the Kodály Society of Canada. She was in the first graduating class of the internationally recognized Music Primary school of Budapest, the work of which was overseen by Zoltán Kodály. After having taught for several years in Hungary she immigrated with her family to Canada's capital city. Here she has taught music at all levels, from kindergarten to university.

References:

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In a box, using larger print: As a powerful adjunct to this article, readers are encouraged to hear the above musical examples performed, by visiting the KSC website at www.kodalysofcanada.ca