

KŐSZEG SOUNDING CITY *Inner Soundwalk*

Hundred years old music from composers in Kőszeg. New music inspired by the heritage of Kőszeg from Zoltán Mizsei, research fellow at iASK.

English booklet available at:



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This CD is a summary of the first years that have elapsed since the Sounding City concept was first formulated. Sounding City is a development project that promotes culture in a small town, harmonizes musical, cultural and built heritage with new performing and creative genres in music and attempting to reflect on the visible and auditive details of the local environment in every possible way. The head of the project, Zoltán Mizsei, has published different studies about the project in a volume issued by the Institute of Advanced Studies of Kőszeg (iASK) entitled *Talking Cities – Stories of Kőszeg*. Some of the tracks of this CD function as a sounding appendix to the relevant chapters in the volume. These include the works of Péter Dohnál, Franz Liszt and Zoltán Kodály, and a piece of music written to the sound of the bells of Kőszeg. The compositions cover a broad range of genres from grandiose dance arrangements for symphony orchestra composed in the style of Strauss from Vienna, to table music performed on a single Viennese zither. The collection also includes sound images for voice and piano, as well as music from Kőszeg modulated by live electronics. The anthology on the one hand takes us back to a period of about 100 years ago and offers an insight into Kőszeg's secular and church music and, on the

other hand, functions as a 'sounding travel diary', a sort of logbook documenting the musical walks that the author had taken in Kőszeg.

1. ***Ante invocationem*** • 3:23

Zoltán Mizsei's improvisation on the organ of the Parish Church of the Sacred Heart in Kőszeg. All the organ improvisations were recorded as a "relaxing" late night session after an exhausted day of research in the church archives. The pieces are attempts to become acquainted with the instrument rather than dramatic performances meant for an audience.

2. **Péter Dohnál: Alma redemptoris mater** • 1:38

A four-part choral work written for the Marian antiphone text in Advent time. Dohnál is regarded as one of Kőszeg's most prolific composers: he was a choir master of the Catholic church from 1833, a composer, a music teacher at the Military School and a honorable citizen of the city. This choral work was the first composition that the author came across when looking through the sheet music archives at the Parish Church of the Sacred Heart. The main concept of this CD is to approach the music on a personal level. Therefore, the choral works are performed by only four voices: Renáta Darázs – soprano, Zsuzsanna Mizsei-Takács – alto, Balázs Somogyi – tenor, Zoltán Mizsei – bass.

3. **Johannes Nepomuk Nykodem: Ave maris stella** • 2:23

A four-part choral piece for the hymn of the Marian vespers. The composer was the last tower master (that is the leader of the brass band) in the city. He was born in Kőszeg and following in his father's footsteps John soon became the head not only of the city brass band but also the of the town's Catholic church music. He composed in the style of the late Viennese classics and in the manner of his own late Romantic style. His choral works use a popular but artfully crafted tone. These pieces were performed on the balcony of the Church of St Jacob where several initials were scratched into the front railing of the gallery bearing witness to local citizens who sang in the choir or played in the orchestra. This lovely and gallant choir movement must have been a pleasure to perform upstairs, and a delight to listen to downstairs.

4. **Alfréd Szupper: Dexter a Domini** • 1:56

A four-part choral piece composed for the text of the offertory of Maundy Thursday. The composer had worked in his early years in Kőszeg as a conductor before going to study in Vienna and eventually settling down in Csorna to become the music director of the Premonstratensian Abbey. He is regarded as a defining figure in reforming Hungarian church music in the first quarter of the 20th century. His short motet is part of a large collection of offertories composed for major church feasts and its style is in line with the reform expectations of the period. This work, like all the other choral compositions on

the album, is performed in four solo voices expressing the compilers' wish to bring the works as close to the listener as possible and “dispense with the traditional choir sound”, at least, to the tune of this album.

5. **Péter Dohnál: Ave Maria** • 3:20

Dohnál composed several adaptations to the text of the most popular praise of Mary, of which we have now recorded a version written for voice, organ (or piano) and violin. As for its genre it is a church aria and in terms of style, it is a theatrical song embellished with virtuoso instrumental interludes. The composer's experience as a church conductor, an organ player and a violin teacher is amply demonstrated here but the question still remains: when he performed the piece back then, which of the three instruments did he play? In this recording – as in the other Dohnál song – the singer is Zsuzsanna Mizsei-Takács, accompanied on the piano by Elemér Balázs. The virtuoso violin part is performed by Zoltán Schwartz.

6. **Franz Liszt: Gray Clouds** • 3:07

This short piano piece pays tribute to Liszt's last period when the composer had already withdrawn from virtuoso playing and was seeking for new ways to create purer musical forms. This composition is a neat example of Liszt's quest for a new expression: an astoundingly dejected and ascetic piece. The recording is also a unique one; it was made using the ancient sound samples of a clavier

dating back to Liszt's time and kept in Kőszeg's museum and assumed to be the one Liszt himself played on at his concert in Kőszeg. The instrument has grown too old and battered to be played on, and although it still has most its strings and hammers, it is no longer suitable for music-making. Nevertheless, we sounded the strings that could still produce a sound, and these truly tattered sounds were reused in a digitalised form to represent an instrument that still exists but is unable to generate music. We played the 'Clouds' on this (almost) virtual instrument as a memento of a glorious past and the inescapable passage of time.

7. *Preparatio* • 1:31

In olden times, composers either played or conducted their own compositions. In those times composers – as they had learned their craft in the traditional way – improvised at concerts with two aims: partly to impress the audience, and partly to prove their competence and demonstrate how successfully they had acquired the language of music and how creatively they can speak that language. Pianist Elemér Balázs improvised a piano prelude on this recording followed by the next piece *attacca*, that is, without a pause.

8. **Péter Dohnál: O salutaris hostia** • 2:10

This is a church aria in praise of the eucharist performed by voice and piano. In the church music of the turn of the 19th and 20th century a major role was given

– besides holy masses and vespers – to other occasions including the eucharistic prayer. It is no wonder that composers tended to write a great amount of music in honour of the eucharist. Among the many choral arrangements, we can find some pieces written for solo voice, which are assumed to have been composed for local talents to demonstrate their singing skills. Being a church composition, *O salutaris hostia* is usually accompanied with an organ although Dohnál also indicated the possibility of a piano as it is the case with *Ave Maria* featuring on this album. To achieve a homogenous sound profile, this piece was also recorded with piano accompaniment.

9. *Pneuma* • 3:40

(organ improvisation)

10. **Zoltán Kodály - Dániel Berzsenyi: To the Hungarians** • 3:51

For many generations, raised in the spirit of the “choir movement”, this song may sound the most familiar Kodály work despite the movement's continually declining popularity. This monumental piece was the obligatory 'finale' to be performed by all the choirs attending any choir festival; many of us can still recall both the melody and words. With the united choirs of the city and with the presence of Kodály this song was also performed in Kőszeg in 1937, but the largest number of singers appeared in 1982 at the Budapest Sports Hall to sing the piece to the baton of József Maklári, where the author of these lines also

happened to be among the singers as a child. The silver thread of this album can be defined as a direct experience of music, a sort of sounding micro-history, and a personal reminiscing. That is why the current piece starts with the sound of the 1982 mass event than transforms into a one-person performance, as if it were perceived by an inner ear. Furthermore, Maklári was the author's teacher at the Academy of Music where singing choral works with our own piano accompaniment was a routine, compulsory exercise to be performed on a daily routine. This recording is therefore an homage to the masters and in the same time a deconstructive approach to music, feeding from but also abandoning the choir movement and the monotonous school tasks.

11. Zoltán Mizsei: Farewell to Kőszeg's bells • 4:45

This piece is written for solo voice and electronics and relying on the sounds of Kőszeg's former bells and their harmonics. In a book entitled *Stories from Kőszeg*, we can read that Kőszeg's bells had been all prepared to make sounds that add up to a C minor triad. The bells were destroyed in the war, so the same harmony is difficult to accomplish as the new bell in the tower has a different size. This recording attempts to reconstruct the intricate and rich system of overtones by readjusting the pitch of the bell in the Church of the Sacred Heart and this way re-establishing the "original" harmonic sound profile. The sound thus produced has a unique scale, the same as in a Hungarian folk song depicting another aspect of tragic farewell. Farewell to love.

12. *Reflectans reflectavi* • 2:11

(organ improvisation)

13. Johann Nepomuk Nykodem: Melancholie • 2:47

Balls and feasts were important events in the life of a town where music societies, orchestras, or soloists could put their skills on display. For these events they needed music and musicians that entertained the guests and one such composer for this task was a local composer, Johannes Nykodem. This melancholic mazurka is conducted by Uwe Scheer on this album, the conductor of the town's current string orchestra who is also assumed to be a follower of Nykodems who had settled in Kőszeg and had had a family. Another curiosity, maybe not a great one though, is how confidently the Savaria Symphony Orchestra plays this piece, a prime example of a classic Viennese, almost floating waltz.

14. Zoltán Mizsei: Royal town • 6:47

The piece retells the Kőszeg-based anecdotes by István Bechtold relying on the author's compositional solmization technique developed in the musical workshop of iASK. This technique is based on the idea, originating from Guido of Arezzo and becoming quite widespread in Renaissance music, that the vowels of the Latin alphabet (a, e, i, o, u) coincide with the sol-fa vowels (ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la, according to their mediaeval names). This means that every syllable of a given text entails the solmization e.g.: o-i-a-i-o = sol-mi-fa-mi-sol),

consequently, every text has its own melody. The motto to this piece is “Kőszeg, Royal Town” and taking the vowels of the Hungarian text „Kőszeg, királyi város”, the music goes like “so-re, fa-la mi-la-mi la-so. Length:

15. Chernel István: Goldhähnchen • 2:21

István Dezső Ákos Elek Chernelházi Chernel was born in Kőszeg and earned reputation and national recognition as an ornithologist, and as head of the Royal Hungarian Institute of Ornithology. His sheet music has been preserved at the local museum into which he recorded his works composed for the Viennese zither. These songs were light compositions, contemporary Austrian dances in line with the requirements of the instrument and the period. As Chernel made it to the list of celebrities because of his work as an ornithologist, we have selected a song that fits best this character. The little bird referred to in the title, the common firecrest, and its song is evoked by the repetitive melody in the second verse played after a minute and a half.

16. István Chernel – Bálint Bolcsó: Goldhähnchen in motion • 4:37

This is the most daring four minutes of the album, an attempt to merge the sound of a 100-year-old zither with contemporary electronic devices. What you can hear is the improvised reworking of the previous track with motion-controlled electronics, i.e. musical electronics modulated along the parameters defined by the spatial movements of the performer's hands.

17. Aurea sunt caeli • 3:37

(organ improvisation)

18. Zoltán Mizsei: City Well • 4:54

One illustrative example of the Sounding Houses concept is the electronic music composed for the building specified in the title and arranged to match the proportion of the edifice in question. The order of the musical motifs follows the order of the elements on the city well including its ornaments, stuccos, columns, vaults and roof elements. The repetitive character of the piece reflects the circular shape of the well's façade, and the perpetual trickling of water evokes the feeling of eternity. Below the dome of the town well, embellished with the stucco ornaments, one can hear the melody of the Gregorian antiphon, Salve Regina, composed to evoke the glockenspiel of the Sounding Town Well. Not so far from here there stands the statue of the Immaculate Virgin.

19. Geminae stellas • 3:47

(organ improvisation)

20. Zoltán Mizsei: Salve regina • 3:19

A Gregorian Marian antiphon written for a single voice supported by live electronics. The melody is played every day from the steeple of the Church of the Sacred Heart and is performed in an oddly nostalgic but somewhat unmusical manner. The recording has been made as the “rehumanisation” of this tune.