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## Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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**Saturday, April 7th, 2012, 5:00-6:00 p.m.**

**Zoltán Kodály** (1882-1967). [Summer Evening](#) (1906). Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. Deutsche Gramophon 447109. 16:26

**Kodály**. [Marosszek Dances](#) (1923/29). Czecho-Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Adrian Leaper. Naxos 550520. 13:20

**Kodály**. [Háry János Suite](#) (1926/27). Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Solti. London/Decca 443444, 22:48



In 1944 the German *Wehrmacht* was in control of Budapest, but the Soviet Red Army had laid a siege around it. Among the citizens trapped there was a world-famous composer, writing a *Missa Brevis* in the basement of a convent.

“The composer whose works are the most perfect embodiment of the Hungarian spirit”—according to no less an authority than Béla Bartók—is Zoltán Kodály, Bartók’s colleague in research, education, composing, and his lifelong friend. Kodály’s music “is rooted only in Hungarian soil,” he said, “but the deep inner reason is his unshakable faith and trust in the constructive power and future of his people.”

Long before Venezuela’s El Sistema took the world by storm, Kodály tackled many of the same issues in children’s musical education. He developed methods of pitch and rhythm memorization, but beyond that, believed that two factors were indispensable to teaching it: real folk music and excellent new music. So throughout his life he collected one and wrote the other.

The debut of his student work *Summer Evening* was in a 1906 concert by the Royal Hungarian Opera orchestra. He later revised it for a 1930 performance by Arturo Toscanini and the New York Philharmonic, for by then his reputation was established. His *Marosszek Dances* premiered that same year in Dresden, and his most famous work, the *Háry János Suite* taken from his *Singspiel* (that is, an opera with lots of talking), had already premiered three years earlier, also with the New York Philharmonic.

Each of these pieces exemplifies, to one degree or another, the combination of folk and original genius that permeates his music. They sound as fresh today as they ever did, in large part because of what Bartók, again, called Kodály’s “striking individuality; he works in a concentrated fashion and despises any sensation, false brilliance, any extraneous effect.”

Kodály helped people to escape the war, hid in that convent with his wife, and then after the war continued to compose. He became the international statesman for folk music research, and the series he and Bartók inaugurated eventually published more than 100,000 folk songs. Hungary instituted his music education method, it has been used around the world, and his music is as popular as ever, continuing to breathe with vital energy.

With Germans and Russians swirling around Budapest, Kodály’s *Missa Brevis* premiered in 1945, in the home of the same opera orchestra that had premiered his student piece almost 40 years earlier. If his “faith and trust” in Hungary were ever to be shaken, it would be now, but perhaps a smile crossed his face as he remembered the connection to *Summer Evening*, and as he gazed at these musicians. For they weren’t in the concert hall—that was far too dangerous. The world premiere of the Zoltán Kodály *Missa Brevis* was in the Opera House cloakroom.

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Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), former Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, at the Parkway Central Library of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).