

Two Canons

György Ligeti (1923-2006)

Translation and Pronunciation

[hɒ fo-ʎo:-vi:z vol-ne:k]

1. Ha folyóvíz volnék

Slovakian folk poem

[hɒ fo-ʎo:-vi:z vol-ne:k]

Ha folyóvíz volnék,

[ba:-nɒ-tot nɛm tud-ne:k]

bánatot nem tudnék,

[ba:-nɒ-tot nɛm tud-ne:k]

bánatot nem tudnék.

[hɛ-dzʃɛk kɔst vɔl-dzʃɛk kɔst]

Hegyek, közt, völgyek közt

[se:p tʃɛn-dɛ-ʃɛn foj-ne:k]

szép csendesen folynék,

[tʃɛn-dɛ-ʃɛn foj-ne:k]

csendesesen folynék,

[se:p tʃɛn-dɛ-ʃɛn]

szép csendesen,

[se:p tʃɛn-dɛ-ʃɛn foj-ne:k]

szép csendesen folynék,

[ba:-nɒ-tot hɒj]

bánatot haj

[nɛm tud-ne:k]

nem tudnék

English Translation

If I were running water,

I would not know sorrow,
I would not know sorrow.
Mountains, between valleys,
They were quiet,
Quietly
Quietly
They were quiet,
Sorrow, oh,
I would not know.¹

[pɫɛ-çç-ka:-zo: as:son-jok]

2. Pletykázó asszonyok

Text: Sándor Weöres (1913-1989)

[ju-li ne:-ni kɔ-ti ne:-ni]

Juli néni, Kati néni

[lɛ- ççɛ pɛ- çç ɛ lɛ-pɛ- çç ɛ]

Letye petye lepetye,

[yl-dø-ge:l-nɛk ɔ sɔ-rok-bɔ]

Üldögélnek a sarokba,

[ja:r ɔ jɛl-ɔyk mint ɔ rok:kɔ]

Jár a nyelvük, mint a rokka,

[lɛ- çç ɛ pɛ- çç ɛ lɛ-pɛ- çç ɛ]

Letye petye lepetye!

[hɔl:lot:tɔ ho-dzj lɛ- çç ɛ pɛ- çç ɛ]

Hallotta, hogy letyepetye?

[nɛ mond-jɔ mit sol]

Ne mondja! Mit szol,

[lɛ- çç ɛ pɛ- çç ɛ pɛ- çç ɛ-lɛ- çç ɛ-pɛ- çç ɛ]

letyepetye, petyeletyepetye?

[hɔl:lot-lɔn]

Hallatlan!

¹ This is a rough translation – it is a generalized meaning of the text.

[ba:r-ki in-ge ro-ko-ja:-jɒ]

Bárki inge, rokolyája

[le-çç̣̈ ε pε-çç̣̈ ε le-pε-çç̣̈ ε]

Letye petye lepetye!

[χu-kɒt va:g-nɒk kə-zε-pe:-bε]

Lyukat vágnak közepébe,

[ki-ty-zik ɒ ha:z ε-le:-bε]

Kitűzik a ház elébe,

[jɒj jɒj jɒj jɒj]

Jajj! Jajj! Jajj! Jajj!

[le-çç̣̈ ε pε-çç̣̈ ε le-pε-çç̣̈ ε]

Letye petye lepetye,

[pε-çç̣̈ ε-le-pε-çç̣̈ ε]

petyelepetye.

Text in full

Juli néni, Kati néni

Letye petye lepetye,

Üldögélnek a sarokba,

Jár a nyelvük, mint a rokka,

Letye petye lepetye!

Hallotta, hogy letyepetye?

Ne mondja! Mit szol,

letyepetye, petyeletyepetye?

Hallatlan!

Bárki inge, rokolyája

Letye petye lepetye!

Lyukat vágnak közepébe,

Kitűzik a ház elébe,

Jajj! Jajj! Jajj! Jajj!

Letye petye lepetye,

petyelepetye.

Singing Translation from the Score

From what I was able to translate myself, the English version of this text appears to be a fairly accurate paraphrase of the original Hungarian, with a few changes to maintain the rhyme scheme and rhythmic structure. The overall sense of the English text conveys the general meaning of the Hungarian. "Letyepetye" has no real meaning – it is an onomatopoetic representation of the sound of chatter or gossip.

Auntie Julie, Auntie Cathy,
natter chatter natter chat,
Sit together for a prattle, a
and, my goodness, how they tattle,
natter chatter natter chat!

"Have I told you natter chatter?"
"No not yet" "Oh dear: natter chatter,
natter chatter natter!"
"Is that so?"

Did you see it with your own eyes,
natter chatter natter chat?"
"It was torn right in the middle,
how it happened is a riddle!"
"Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh, natter chatter natter chat,
natter chatter chat."²

Notes on Pronunciation

The IPA transcriptions were created using the following resources, along with the recordings referenced below:

Wikipedia contributors. "Hungarian phonology." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 14 May. 2019. Web. 26 Jun. 2019.
Wikipedia contributors. "Help:IPA/Hungarian." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 14 May. 2019. Web. 26 Jun. 2019.

Program Notes

György Ligeti is perhaps best known for his compositions that have been used for film scores, perhaps most notably for the Stanley Kubrick film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Ligeti did not compose for this film, or any films, but his compositions were used by film makers.

These two canons are not related musically. The first is a setting of a folk poem, the second set to a Hungarian poet. They were composed at different times – the fact

² Clayton, Desmond. *2. Pletykázó asszonyok*. Két kánon. Schott, 1999.

that they both appear in the publication, *Két Kánon*, was purely for publication. *Ha floyóvíz volnék* was composed in 1947, *Pletykázó asszonyok* in 1952.

Recordings

1. Ha floyóvíz volnék

Vass Lajos Kamarakórus, 2010: <https://youtu.be/4axx6Bjajyk>

Tavaszi Kórustalálkozó Győr 2013. március 11. <https://youtu.be/z4L59UsFL2I>

2. Pletykázó asszonyok

Kamerkoor NEXT, 2018: <https://youtu.be/oflP4V1sja0>

Avis Kantrix Choir, Györgyi Rápli, cond., 2009: <https://youtu.be/Ctvij3PIvMM>

Analysis

1. Ha floyóvíz volnék

Tonal center: mainly D. The key signature has two sharps, but Ligeti employs enough chromaticism to blur the tonality.

- In the first phrase, all g's are raised to g#, and the single c# is lowered to c natural.
- In the second phrase, all c#'s are again lowered to c naturals, and no g#'s are sung.
- There are no alterations in the third phrase
- The fourth phrase, all g's are raised to g#, one f# is lowered to f natural (the first appearance of f in this phrase is f#), and the lone c# is lowered to c natural.

The overall effect is both stunning and haunting.

Meter: mixed;

Structure: Canon in 4 phrases for four voices; Each phrase is three measures long.

The first two measures of each phrase are in 4/4 and the last is in 3/4.

2. Pletykázó asszonyok

Mode: Mixolydian, tonal center "C"

Meter: 2/2

Form: 4-voice canon, each voice entering at the interval of one measure

This canon is in three distinct sections:

Section 1: A (5 ms + 1 ms rest)

Section 2: B (5 ms + 1 ms rest)

Section 3: C (10 ms)

The first five measures outline the ascending mixolydian scale, each measure sung on a single scale degree (the fifth measure splits its time between the fifth scale degree and the first). The canonical entrances result in tone clusters throughout this canon.