

Interview for Parlando.hu  
Asia Kodály Symposium

**Context**

The Asia Kodály Symposium is a biennial event that travels to a different Asian city organised by the Kodály Academy of Music (Singapore). The event and its related activities have reached out to more than 5000 people worldwide. It has been held in Jakarta, 2014, Kaohsiung 2016, 2018. This year, it was held in Singapore for the first time, and is the 1st Virtual Symposium.

**Vision:**

- Gathering the best of the Arts for the Arts

**Mission:**

- To inspire, promote and bring about better understanding of the arts and culture to the masses through the Kodály Concept.
- To provide an international platform that celebrates the diversity of arts and culture.
- To provide opportunities for learning, understanding and collaboration between composers, artistes and sponsors in spearheading and pioneering Arts in a sustainable manner.

**Theme**

- Digitalisation of Music Education, Composition & Performance.
- 30+ hours of content, 25 speakers, participants from 15 countries & territories. AKS coincides with the celebration of 50 years of diplomatic relations between Hungary & Singapore. Local partner non-profit Choir Collective Schola Cantorum Singapore Ltd. 5th Anniversary.

**What is innovative about AKS?**

**Organisation**

It was organised without the usual single face-to-face (f2f) meeting with entire teams hunkered down in an office - this was no longer possible due to COVID-19. It was challenging without the immediacy of f2f gatherings, but with an arsenal of tools ranging from shared cloud documents and drives, group video conferencing tools (Zoom), cross-platform text messaging tools (WhatsApp, Telegram), shared collaborative To-Do lists (Microsoft To-Do), video recording tools (Loom) to make staff training videos, it was not impossible.

The invitation and acceptance of panelists and speakers could also be done with lightning speed and one of our moderators noted how different countries/territories seem to have preferred communication apps! E.g. Viber (Hungary), Messenger (Philippines), KakaoTalk (Korea), LINE/Google Meet (Taiwan), WeChat (China), WhatsApp/Telegram (Singapore) etc.

Technology was leveraged to ensure security and privacy of participants when accessing paid content. We also learnt to circumvent issues with timezone differences and potentially poor internet connections by using pre-recorded materials, 6 metre long ethernet cables linked to routers really made all the difference to the connection! AKS (and the earlier Studiorum Series that was run as a test-bed), means our content is now made accessible to people all over the world, and we've seen interesting signups from new places for our online events e.g. India, Armenia etc. for the first time! The technology has also allowed us to easily edit and make catch-up videos for delegates.

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## Content

While the concept of the 'flipped classroom' is not entirely new, to have an entire symposium deploy such means of learning was probably unheard of until now. AKS was forward-looking and blended different ways of learning, marrying asynchronous learning with synchronous learning. Professor Rita Cheng's class required participants to watch two 30-minute videos first before an hour-long discussion and Q&A session. Pre-recorded sessions meant 'live' situations in the music classroom can be shown in the lectures. Discussion session was highly effective, focused and the engagement level from participants were very high, reserved Asians notwithstanding!

E-pedagogy tools were in abundance at the AKS. The employment of audio-visual tools was brought to a whole new level seldom seen in traditional lectures - e.g. playing traditional circle/rhyme games using google slides, screen-sharing of mind-maps; 'live' score notation to see how conductors mark their scores; see up close, your conductor/voice teacher's embouchure or the use of audio recordings for dictation (say goodbye to voice fatigue from sing & play repetitions for music dictations) etc.

We can also see how the Kodály Concept was adapted in Singapore by KAM, using fixed rhythm names e.g. semiquavers are simply named 'te' (e.g. 4 semiquavers = te te te te) to allow consistent use even in the naming of complex rhythms. If solfa names can be consistently applied from folk music to 12-tone music, why not have a similar system for rhythm names that allows us to navigate children's material to Indian tala-inspired Messiaen with equal ease?

## Thought-leadership

With potential reduced audience sizes, "live" performances run the risk of being extremely expensive and available only to the elites. How can we leverage on digitalisation and provide access to lower income families? What are some of the threats or opportunities to the Arts and what are the possible innovations of the economic model? How can one leverage on technology to grow the income stream for arts institutions? How has the pandemic led to a change in the way one programmes concerts or upcoming performances? How does one completely rethink the use of tech in art-making? How has the virtual realm made composers rethink metaphysical ideas of space time?

## Tech Tools and Resources

AKS shared several wonderful resources from Hungary! The Kodály Hub, Move Mi, Musicators were featured prominently alongside other tools such as Loom. Logic Pro X, known primarily as a music production software can also be used as a fantastic visualiser tool for teaching of pianists, singers and instrumentalists. How wonderful to have MIDI map out clearly, what expressive playing and pedaling looks like and colour code the velocity of every single note captured. Apart from providing instantaneous playback for students, audio wave form analysis can clearly indicate a stable vibrato or the presence of unstable air flow or undesirable scoops and portamenti, providing an additional visualiser tool for students and teachers alike.

## Digital Performance by Schola Cantorum Singapore Ltd.

As a full-time conductor, I was tired of hearing "out-of-tune" equal-tempered, overly auto-tuned virtual choir performances. I decided to experiment and recreate a digital performance that was closer to a classical performance in a concert hall and get some ear-cleaning in the process - guide tracks were made using instruments programmed to play in just intonation while metronomes were programmed to simulate the spontaneity of nuanced music expression. Premiered during the AKS closing ceremony, check out non-profit choir collective Schola Cantorum Singapore Ltd.'s digital performance of Kodály's Esti Dal on KAM's Facebook Page here <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=4501324769907695&extid=lsQTb94z5paWmHK7> ! As non-native speakers, we hope we've done justice to the work!

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## **Conclusion**

There was great deal of uncertainty due to the pandemic but I was personally really glad for the support from the Kodály Intézet and the Embassy of Hungary in Singapore - we went ahead with it, put together an intense, forward-looking programme in just 8 weeks that has since received excellent feedback from everyone!

Technology is here to stay and we must embrace and explore new ways of thinking, working, teaching, composing and performing! Let us improve our workflow, embrace life-long learning to incorporate new tools... and hopefully bring humanity that much closer to Kodály's ideals of making the best quality music available to everyone!

For enquiries, feel free to get in touch via [enquiries@kam.sg](mailto:enquiries@kam.sg)

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## **Albert Tay**

Director, Kodály Academy of Music (Singapore)

Artistic Director, Schola Cantorum Singapore Ltd.

Asia Kodály Symposium Organising Committee

Composer-conductor Albert Tay is in demand internationally as a musician, educator and adjudicator. Apart from guest conducting, he has delivered keynote lectures and professional development courses for musicians and educators, and has given workshops for choral and instrumental ensembles. His work has taken him to numerous cities in Asia, Europe and USA on invitation by award-winning choirs, as well as various national institutions, associations and foundations for choirs and/or education. Albert's choirs have consistently garnered top reviews and prizes internationally.

As founding director of the Kodaly Academy of Music (Singapore), Albert oversees the arts company that has been spearheading the Asia Kodaly Symposium (AKS) in collaboration with his alma mater, the Kodaly Institute of the Liszt Academy of Music. Albert taught various classes at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) and trained Ministry of Education (MOE) music teachers at the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST).

The NAFA alumnus credits his teachers, Professor Péter Erdei, Leong Yoon Pin, Professor László Nemes, Dr. Kelly Tang, Jennifer Tham and Dr. Zechariah Goh as major influences in his journey as a musician, and is grateful to the International Kodaly Society, National Arts Council (Singapore) and NAFA for scholarships that supported his degree and post-graduate studies. Albert was awarded the professional title of Magister Chori and an honorary membership by The Association of Croatian Choral Directors.

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