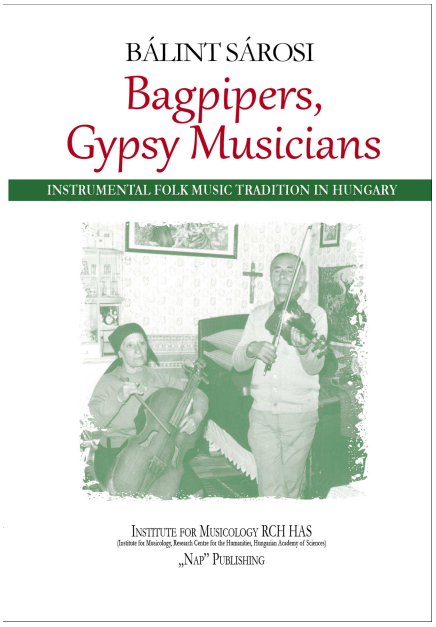
SÁROSI BÁLINT: BAGPIPERS, GYPSY MUSICIANS

Instrumental Folk Music Tradition in Hungary



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„Kik voltak a hangszeres magyar népzene tudói és előadói? Mivel foglalatoskodtak, amikor nem zenéltek? Hogyan tekintett rájuk a társadalom? Milyen összeállítású együttesekbe tömörültek azok a paraszt vagy cigány vagy zsidó zenészek, akik a közösség igényét kielégítették? Mi volt a funkciója e zenének, mely, mint az alcím mondja, »kísérője munkának, gyásznak, szórakozásnak«? Hogyan viszonyult a zenész közönségéhez, és hogyan bánt amaz övelük? Mikor, s hogyan jelentek meg, és kaptak egyre nagyobb szerepet a cigány muzsikusok? Hogyan tanulták meg játszanivalójukat? Mi volt, amist másoktól lestek el, s hogyan képezték magukat egyesek rendszeres tanulás által? E kérdésekre rövid pályarajzokkal, történelmi pillanatfelvételekkel, olykor anekdotákkal válaszol a szerző, és amikor összegezi a tanulságot, úgy érezzük, e példák az olvasót is ugyanezekhez a konklúziókhoz vezették. […]

A könyv a tudós számára egy téma hiteles összegzése; a népzene iránt érdeklődőknek tudósítás a zenészek és a zene életéről; a művelt olvasónak jó alkalom egy kultúránk organikus részét alkotó hagyomány megismerésére."

(Részlet Dobszay László *Hiteles összegzés* című ismertetőjéből.)

Bálint Sárosi: Bagpipers, Gypsy Musicians. Instrumental Folk Music

Tradition in Hungary
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“Who were the repositories and performers of Hungarian instrumental folk music? What were they doing when they did not play music? What was the opinion of society about them? What ensembles did the peasant or Gypsy or Jewish musicians form who satisfied the demand of the community? What was the function of this music which, as a chapter title says, is the »attendant of work, grief and leisure«? What was the musician’s attitude to his public, and how did the public treat him? When and how did Gypsy musicians appear and gain a growing role? How did they learn what they were supposed to play? What did they learn by watching others and how did some of them train themselves through regular learning? The author answers these questions with brief career sketches, historical snapshots, sometimes anecdotes and when he summarizes the material, we feel that the adduced examples have also led the Reader to the same conclusions. […]
For the scholar the book is an authentic summary of a theme; for those interested in folk music, it is information about the life or musicians and music; for the cultured Reader it is a good source to get to know a tradition that constitutes an organic part of a culture.” (Excerpt from László Dobszay’s book review entitled Authentic summary)

Bálint Sárosi

Bagpipers, Gypsy Musicians
Instrumental Folk Music Tradition in Hungary

BÁLINT SÁROSI

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INSTITUTE FOR MUSICOLOGY RCH HAS
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Introduction

About the research

In time-honoured Hungarian folk music research instrumental music came into focus relatively late, yet early enough to have an adequate amount of material accumulated for a summary.

The attitude of Hungarian ethnomusicology to instrumental folk music was determined the first time by the position taken by Bartók and Kodály. Bartók already formulated his view as early as in 1911: "Naturally enough, we are only interested in music performed by peasant musicians on folk instruments."[1] The musical instruments Bartók had in mind are specified in his earliest studies of 1911–12: bagpipe, flute, hurdy-gurdy, swineherd's horn, zither.[2] They emphasized the primacy of vocal music in folk music research, in consensus with all noted representatives of international ethnomusicology. To quote Curt Sachs: "Music began with singing."[3] It is generally presumed that instrumental dance tunes did not evolve in close connection with, but independently of, dancing, and only relatively late did they get coupled with the dances as instrumentalized dance songs.[4] What truly disconcerted Bartók's generation – not only in Hungary but anywhere where there was folk music research was conducted – was not so much the chronology of development but the fact that instrumental music

1 BÖI, 60.

2 At the time of his first collecting fieldwork Bartók could hardly come across a zither. He described it later in the article written for the *Zenei lexikon* [Dictionary of Music] (eds. Aladár Tóth–Bence Szabolcsi, first edition: 1930-1931) with the title *Magyar népi hangszerek* [Hungarian folk musical instruments].

3 Sachs 1943, 21.

4 „Die instrumentale Tanzmelodie ist keine Fortentwicklung instrumentalen Taktspiels, sondern […] die Instrumentalisierung von Tanzgesängen." – Sachs 1933. 127.

was not congruous with the general concept of peasant tradition based on Herder's ideas. How can this music be the authentic representative of traditional music if its practitioners are more or less separated from their environment on account of their social status, occupation, way of life? They play music, not as a spontaneous manifestation or a traditional custom binding for all, but as work for payment. They serve different ethnic groups and social strata, if they get a chance to do so. They are also quick to adapt to fashionable trends coming from the outside.

Among Bartók's collections and notated tunes, as well as in the part of the general collection he systematized there are relatively many instrumental tunes. These, however, are only side products of pre-World War II fieldwork, and not the outcome of systematic collecting and analysing work. At the time of publishing his Máramaros collection (today Maramureş in Romania) in 1923 Bartók still had an unfavourable opinion of of village Gypsy musicians playing similarly to their urban colleagues,[5] but later he acknowledged: "village Gypsies usually play a peasant program, folk music in folk style."[6] Kodály's position was practically identical with Bartók's. Although in his major study *A Magyar népzene* [Folk Music of Hungary] he raised the "disputed question" of "Gypsy music making" – which is the key question of Hungarian instrumental folk music – he could not venture an answer on the basis of the so-far

[5] „Der instrumentale Vortrag der Tanzmusik bietet zur Zeit ein trauriges Bild: mit dem Aussterben der Sackpfeife gelangte die Tanzmusik leider in die Hände der Zigeuner. Der Zigeuner aber spielt bald den Bauern, bald den Herren zum Tanze auf; er streift infolge seines unsteten Temperamentes umher, bringt allerlei fremde Musik heim, und mischt all dieses durcheinander, verziert es mit von Herrschaften abgelauschten, westeuropäischen Schmörkeln und spielt schliesslich eine Tanzmusik, in der sich selbst kenner der Volksmusik schwer zurechtfinden." – Bartók 1923, XXIV.

[6] This statement first appeared in Hungarian in the *Kodály-emlékkönyv* [Studies in honour of Kodály's 60th birthday] in 1943, see BÖI, 845. In the introduction to his collection of Romanian instrumental music he reiterates his stance on the question: „Gypsies living in villages are completely assimilated musically to the type of people among whom they live: therefore there is no reason to exclude them." – Bartók 1967, I. [4.]

explored instrumental music. He defined the folk song repertoire of a Gypsy musician as the index of his ethnographic value: "When he plays the tunes of the peasantry, he belongs to our subject."[7]

Undeservedly overshadowed by the great pioneers of modern Hungarian ethnomusicology, János Seprődi (1874–1923) was the scholar who regarded instrumental folk music played by professional musicians as an organic part of the peasants' musical tradition and studied it accordingly. In his study on the Székely folk dances and in the notes to the instrumental dance tunes he had collected he worded observations about the musicians, dances and dance life of his native village Kibéd in Maros–Torda County. Similar insights to which were not to appear typically in special literature before the second half of the 20th century.[8] "It is also my intention to collect the music of the nationalities living with us for it is my scholarly conviction that without a knowledge of it we will never be able to clarify our music," he wrote in his autobiographic sketch.[9] Apparently, he could put this intention through to his pupils at the Calvinist College of Kolozsvár where he taught. One of them, Lajos Kocsis took part in the annual students' competition also patronized by Seprődi. In his native Felsőtök, a village of mixed Hungarian and Romanian population in Szolnok–Doboka County, Kocsis collected Hungarian and Romanian dance music with great zeal in 1911. In the study he submitted for the competition he gave a correct description of the dances and customs involving dance of the village in addition to the tunes he had notated.[10]

Closer to the middle of the 20th century but still rare and pioneering in the examination of professional musicians and rural dance music is Oszkár Dincsér's study of instrumental music in Csík County. Discuss-

[7] First in 1937; the cited locus: Kodály, 1969, 81.

[8] Seprődi 1974, 143 as well as 399–424. This study written about the Transylvanian dances first appeared in Ethnographia vol. XIV (1909).

[9] Seprődi 1974, 77.

[10] Almási 1980, 271–291.

ing instruments, instrumental playing, dance-related customs from an up-to-date scholarly viewpoint, his *Két csíki hangszer* [Two musical instruments of Csík] published in 1943 is path-breaking and remainsa valuable document of instrumental musical research in Székelyföld to this day.[11]

The early 1940s, when László Lajtha began his systematic research of the repertoire of Gypsy musicians, marks a turning point. It is regrettable but understandable under the circumstances that in the series he launched in 1954 with the presentation of his collections of Szék and Szépkenyerűszentmárton he only provided sheer data, without undertaking to analyse the meticulously prepared instrumental transcriptions and clarifying the theoretical questions of instrumental folk music.[12] That must be the chief reason, apart from the accompanying text being in Hungarian only, that these publications did not elicit the reception in international ethnomusicology that their importance would have deserved.

Let it be distinctly understood, however, that while the generation of Bartók, Kodály and Lajtha was undeniably in the vanguard in folk song research, by international standards they were not no negligent researching instrumental folk music. The systematic investigation of instrumental music was at a delay everywhere. Whenever music played by instruments was taken note of, it was mainly as the accompaniment to vocal music or as part of some organological research. In certain countries which are particularly rich in instrumental music – e.g. Sweden and Norway – a considerable body of instrumental tunes were published earlier,[13] but

[11] Dincsér 1943.

[12] Lajtha 1954/1, 5: „I must repeatedly ask the Reader to regard and read this book as the presentation of scientific raw material. I have refrained from the explanations required by music history and comparative folklore studies." Lajtha 1962, XV: „Everyone should take these books as data supply whose detailed elaboration is awaiting other scholars."

[13] The Swedes published 24 volumes of collected dance music with the title *Svenska Låtar* between 1922 and 1940. The Norwegians have been collecting and transcribing dance music played on the Norwegian version of the fiddle, the hardingfele,

the detailed musical analysis and systematization of the tunes, and the examination of the functions of instrumental music have only recently been done. Among the neighbours of Hungary, larger amounts of instrumental tunes have been published by the Romanians, and high-quality synthetic works have also appeared about their instrumental dance music.[14] An unparalleled, outstanding achievement is the first volume of Bartók's collection *Rumanian Folk Music* published posthumously in 1967, particularly when one realizes how much earlier it was actually written. Bartók did not only present exemplary transcriptions but also set a model for the prospective systematization of tunes.

Research into instrumental music received a decisive boost from folk dance research which evolved into an autonomous discipline after World War II and immediately reached world standards in Hungary. The Hungarian researchers with György Martin as their leader did not only exert a great influence by considerably enlarging the collection but – in line with their goal – they also greatly promoted the clarification of the function of instrumental music. At least along this line folk music research had to acknowledged that the work of professional musicians that contributed to the music life of the peasantry unambiguously belonged to traditional culture.

since 1906. The publication of the thousands of tunes began upon the initiative of D.M. Sandvik with Olav Gurvin editing. The tunes are arranged by dance types and within a dance type by tune types. The contents of the seven volumes published until 1981 – 1988 instrumental pieces – are classified by types.

[14] The instrumental tunes were systematized and edited by C.D. Georgescu. Grouped by three main criteria – rhythm, structure, melody – the musical features of the dance tunes that could be indicated in the notation are symbolized by numbers (in three groups by tune, a total of 35 numbers!). In this way, the system is less suited for a traditional overview of the musical relations than to prepare the material for digitalization (Georgescu 1984). Parallel with Georgescu's collection and in some way complementing it, Speranţa Rădulescu's *Taraful şi acompaniamentul armonic in muzica de joc* [The Gypsy band and the harmonic accompaniment of dance music] (Bucureşti, 1984) is a prestigious work on the polyphonic playing of Romanian ensembles.

An indispensable compass in the world of dance tunes is the exploration of historical antecedents. This is to the credit of Bence Szabolcsi in regard to the collection and publication of the written records first of all of 16–17th century dance tunes. So far most of the known 18th -century dance music was discovered by Pál Péter Domokos, while orientation in verbunkos music was made possible by the investigations of Ervin Major and first of all Géza Papp.[15]

The groundwork for the study of Hungarian instrumental folk music also includes the present author's two synthesizing studies on musical instruments and the role of Gypsy musicians, respectively, a three-disc selection of audio recordings,[16] a series of articles on the Hungarian instrumental folk tunes[17], and the book *A hangszeres magyar népzene* [Hungarian instrumental folk music], the antecedent to the current book.[18]

The *Anthology of Hungarian Folk Music* compiled in the Institute for Musicology of HAS between 1985 and 2004 includes a large number of instrumental pieces.[19] There is now – though only in manuscript form, – a detailed study of an individual Transylvanian village violinist and his band by Béla Halmos.[20]

Since the early seventies, there has been a growing demand among folk revival movements for instrumental folk music collections of reliable academic standards – in addition to scholarship. Such publications

[15] Szabolcsi 1959, 157–208 (*A XVI. század magyar tánczenéje*,[Hungarian dance music of the 16th century] 1954), 209–372 (*A XVII. század magyar főúri zenéje* [The music of the 17th century Hungarian aristocracy], 1928); Major 1928 and 1967, 125–128 (*A galantai cigányok* [The Gypsies of Galánta], 1960); valamint Domokos 1978 and Papp 1986 – as the most frequently consulted works of the latter in instrumental tune research.

[16] Magyar hangszeres népzene [Hungarian instrumental folk music]. The same was released on two CD sin 1998, too; see Sárosi 1980/1.

[17] Magyar Zene, 1987/4; 1988/1, 2, 3, 4; 1989/2, 3; 1991/2, 3, 4; 1992/1, 3.

[18] Sárosi 1996.

[19] For details of the series, see *Antológia* in the *List of references*.

[20] Halmos 1986.

mainly appeared in the series *Népzenei Füzetek* [Folk music booklets] issued by the Hungarian Cultural Institute (today Hungarian Heritage House).[21] In addition to the achievements mentioned, much has been done abroad to clarify theoretical and methodological questions. Within the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM) an organological study group was also active.[22] The researchers in the group are also interested in the music played on the studied instruments. The proceedings of their biannual conferences have been published under the title *Studia instrumentorum musicae popularis* by Musikhistoriska museet in Stockholm.

On the contents of the book

Foreign researchers do not draw such a fast line between professional instrumental music and vocal music as we in Hungary have done so far. In several regions there is closer interplay between instrumental and vocal music than in Hungarian folk music: for example, at some places there are still professional minstrels accompanying their vocal performance on some instrument, at other places the instrumental accompaniment to singing has a stronger tradition among peasants. In Hungary, the sharp differentiation between non-professional and professional music-making is to no little measure attributable to the fact that in the latter the "urban" influence is easier to detect. It suffices to mention, apart from the use of modern instruments and their arrangements, what

[21] Juhász 1990; Juhász 1992/1; Juhász 1992/2; Vavrinecz 1992; Virágvölgyi-Vavrinecz 1992; Nesztor 1993; Virágvölgyi 1993. These publications have audio supplements on cassettes.

[22] The Study Group on Folk Musical Instruments was set up during the Budapest conference of ICTM (then IFMC = International Folk Music Council) with Erich Stockmann from Berlin as chair. One of the main advocates of the new study group was Zoltán Kodály, then chairman of IFMC; see E. Stockmann, *Vorwort*, Stockholm, 1992 (Studia instrumentorum musicae popularis, 10), 9.

the advocates of peasant music regarded as authentic from the beginning of the 20th century are most sensitive to react to: notably, that the great parter of the instrumental dance music repertoire contains tunes "from above", from the middle-class strata of society such as the *verbunkos*, *népies dal* [popular song] and *csárdás* legacy. For lack of adequate knowledge about, this legacy, it is usually labelled as having shallow roots, being more alien to the "folk", the peasantry, than it actually is.

The musical tradition did change before the age of Gypsy bands, too. In fact, it is not the musicians who initiate some trend in the villages: they merely serve it. The Gypsy bands acted in this vein at the onset and during the ascendancy of their professional careers from the late 18th century much more than today. The acceptable part of what satisfied the noblemen and urban strata was welcomed and even demanded by the rural population, for that was what harmonized with their ambitions to rise socially. The bulk of Hungarian instrumental folk music was fashioned under such circumstances into what we know and accept as traditional. There was more ground in the first half of the 19th century to worry about the dilution of this repertoire than in the 20th. A novel process of assimilation has always perturbed those who would rather insist on the immobility of the tradition. Whereas, as we have learnt, as much of the archaic as was possible to preserve against the natural evolution of tradition, did survive until the 20th century. Upon the "archaic" as a firm foundation changing with the leisurely pace of historical development newer and newer strata were settled, partly absorbing it. What the village accepted and preserved (while the city has forgotten!) must be tackled by scholarship as part of the tradition. Such and suchlike considerations contributed to the outlining of the theme of this book.

The first question to answer when instrumental music is the topic is where to draw the line between instrumental and vocal music. A folksong played syllabically like a song on the zither by an amateur player is certainly not instrumental music. By contrast, a tune whistled, hummed or played in an instrumental style, e.g., the vocal imitation of the bagpipe, or a folksong played by a musician of Gyimes as a *lassú magyaros* [*slow Hungarian* dance] or a *lassú* [*slow* dance] played by a musician of Szék, or again, a popular song played as a *csárdás* certainly belong to instrumental music. That is, tunes performed in instrumental style or function are regarded as instrumental tunes. *Dudanóta* [bagpipe song], *kanászznóta* [swineherd's song], *jaj-nóta* [lament] constitute a bridge between instrumental and vocal music, by virtue of their frequent or original instrumental function. Consequently, their vocal forms are also studied by instrumental research. Apart from them, there is a multitude of tunes with texts – old and new folksongs, csárdás tunes with lyrics – in the stock of instrumental dance tunes: they have traditionally constituted the bulk of dance music. The tunes with texts are analysed and systematized by folksong research, so there is no need to go over them in detail in this work.

The Hungarian nationality of tunes becomes in areas in areas with a mixed population. In Transylvania comparatively many instrumental tunes are present among Hungarians and Romanians alike, for in areas of ethnically mixed populations the same musicians serve both ethnicities. The mutually used tunes may be claimed by both ethnic groups as theirs, irrespective of the known or unknown origin of the tunes. The *Compendium of Examples* comprises Hungarian tunes collected among Hungarians except for a tune or two from Romanian collections that are also used by Hungarians, too. Belonging to Romania since 1918, Transylvania, the richest repository of both vocal and instrumental Hungarian folk music will be paid particular attention in this book. Bukovina (Székelys) and Moldavia (Csángó-Hungarians) are also considered, whose territory never belonged to Hungary. In our part of the world laden with national sensitivities it is useful to stress – though it is self-evident – that when we label something "Hungarian", the adjective refers to a segment of the joint culture of ethnicities coexisting in the area, a segment which has (also) been characteristically integrated in the Hungarian tradition, but it is far from being an exclusive term.

My book *A hangszeres magyar népzene* [Hungarian instrumental folk music] published in 1996, obviously constitutes the antecedent to this book.[23] Its contents have been reconfigured and extended by new knowledge and experiences over the past decade. I have thoroughly reworked the most important and most controversial chapter of the previous book – the one on the tune stock – reducing the number of music examples from several to sufficient. I have omitted what was dispensable and made the layout of the text more transparent.

This work is meant to be a synthesis. At the currently level of scholarship and under the given frames it tries to describe what the Hungarian instrumental folk music is like, what function it has, and how it is embedded in the tradition. The examples in the *Compendium* are mostly sketchily notated "dissections" in order to bring the greater, overall connections to bear. The sketchy transcriptions only containing the essential elements of the tunes transposed to *g'* fundamental (or *b flat' do*) are by far not "critical" data presentations. The same tunes (and others omitted from this book) are given in the 1996 in a different – though not radically different – arrangement. It appeared reasonable to replace the earlier grouping by form into pairs of lines or couplets (P) and strophes (S) with classification into – but not sharply separable – older and newer strata in which the organically related two variants of form could remain in one group. The old stratum of this edition contains the memory of bagpipe music in the typical tunes, while the tunes of the newer stratum tailored to the violin reveal the development of the two centuries after the verbunkos period. The music examples in the *Appendix* are essential supplements to the *Compendium*. Most of them are musical illustrations to the subchapter *Melodic plan*. Also, they are a guide and support – as is the whole book – for the exploration and attainment of further knowledge.

[23] It is to be noted that my book essentially on the same theme published in German by Corvina in Budapest in 1999 (*Sackfeifer, Zigeunermusikanten*…) was written on the basis of that first, unrevised version.

The musician and his audience

Kodály and Bartók thought there were only amateur peasant musicians in folk music. That is why Bartók declared in 1911 in his paper on folk musical instruments that "one cannot find absolute, that is, specifically instrumental music among Hungarians".[24] Instrumental music is notably the job of certain people who regard it as their occupation and try to eke out a living from it everywhere, not only in Hungary. In the early 20th century, when Kodály's and Bartók's careers began, it was already a time-tested practice "among the poorer strata, too, to have others play music to them instead of playing with their own hands."[25] The figures and activity of musicians who lived by music making as their occupation could not be reconciled with the dominant views on folk music in the first decades of the 20th century. Now, a century later, we are more clearly aware of their traditional role in folk music. Speaking about it in present tense is possible because in the Hungarian-language territory there are still places where the old music life can be studied or easily reconstructed.

Earlier the people, who satisfied the demand of the peasantry for instrumental music as their profession, weren't acknowledged as authentic representatives of the tradition. Why? It is useful to sbdivide and subdivide the question and but it as follows:

[24] BÖI, 60.

[25] Kodály 1969, 81.