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**TRANSMISSION AND LOSS OF TRADITION
IN THE 'VERBUNK' TUNES OF THE NORTHERN
DIALECT OF HUNGARIAN FOLK MUSIC**

PhD Theses
English Summary

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I. Antecedents of the Research

Instrumental folk music traditions in a broader sense have attracted the interest of Hungarian ethnomusicologists from the beginning of modern research. Gypsy musicians were already playing tunes not necessarily belonging to peasant music in the strictest sense on the recordings of Béla Vikár. János Seprődi intended to get to know the village music tradition in its entirety, including peasant and gypsy performers. Zoltán Kodály's similar interest is reflected in his fieldwork in Nagykálló in 1926 and 1928 with a Gypsy band that also played 'verbunkos' melodies. One of Kodály's most important followers in this respect was László Lajtha, who collected music both from village musicians and urban Gypsies working in restaurants. Bálint Sárosi has published studies on folk and urban Gypsy music, the history of Gypsy bands, and their contemporary status since the 1960s. Giving a panoramic overview of the history, style and ethnographic features of Hungarian instrumental folk music in general, Sárosi also analyses the connections between the urban and folk strata of musical tradition.

Different layers of the instrumental folk tradition and their connections can be explored in many aspects through 'verbunk' tunes; that is, the tunes relating to the 'verbunk' dance of the Northern dialect of Hungarian folk music, the second one of those defined by Béla Bartók. After Kodály and Bartók, both of whom were interested in this dialect, a number of field recordings, including of instrumental tunes, were made by János Manga and Tibor Ág. Folk dance collectors and researchers, such as György Martin, Ernő Pesovár, András Takács, and János Fügedi, have investigated the 'verbunk' tunes of this area, and have published dances and tune transcriptions in several books and other publications, mostly intended for a wider audience. Lujza Tari provides an overview of the research history, regions, and folk music styles of the dialect in the *Anthology of Hungarian Folk Music*. In her own monograph she introduced the vocal and instrumental music tradition of Hungarians living now in Slovakia on the basis of her fieldworks, incorporating recordings both from village musicians and from Gypsy bands in restaurants in small towns serving as micro-regional centres. Gergely Agócs made further recordings and in his dissertation he discusses the instrumental folk music life of the area, including bands, careers of musicians, and the historical and social background of the local music culture.

II. Sources and Methods

'Verbunk' tunes of the Northern dialect are discussed in this thesis primarily from a musical point of view, while ethnographic background,

examined in detail in the above-mentioned works, is taken into consideration only in connection with the role of the tunes in local traditions. The current research is based on the collection of the Archives for Folk Music and Folk Dance Research of the Institute for Musicology (Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences). Because of the peculiarities of the topic, most of the relevant sources are violin or string-band recordings; however, vocal performances or ‘verbunk’ tunes played on other instruments, for example on zither or bagpipe, could also be significant. Alongside recordings, transcriptions have also been analysed and completed by further ones. Detailed fieldwork manuscripts and record cards (‘támlap’) have also been used as sources of information about fieldworks, often from an early period, during which recordings were not made. Folk-dance films that are partly connected to musical fieldwork offer further data about the dance accompaniment function of tunes, the cycles, and the peculiarities of performance. In the Institute’s huge collection of archives, catalogues compiled on fieldwork reports helped the researcher to find instrumental recordings of ‘verbunk’ tunes. However, in order to gather the most complete set of data possible and to analyse the context, I aimed to comprehensively survey many fieldwork studies, reports, and dance films relevant to the Northern dialect area. The research has been increasingly facilitated by the digitalisation of sources over time, but it has been necessary to reconcile different media and reports, and insufficient or antinomic data often needed clarification. It is hoped that the results of this research will also enrich the materials of the Archive by including or refining data.

Most of the relevant fieldworks were conducted in the second half of the twentieth century. The quality of earlier instrumental recordings had been restricted by technical conditions, and although music was also collected from Gypsy musicians, it seemed more urgent to eternise archaic layers of the still-living tradition, until the use of tape recorders beginning in the 1950s, offering new possibilities. In contrast, while fieldworks carried out at the turn of the millennium provide valuable later data, due to the dissolution of traditional culture they are often unreliable. Studying the transmission of ‘verbunk’ tunes from a historical point of view, the nineteenth-century written sources of the Kodály-System played an essential role. Further sources have also been surveyed, primarily from the Music Collection of the National Széchényi Library, and a new type of source is also considered, namely commercial discs as valuable documents of the urban Gypsy music tradition.

In discussing the ways of transmission and loss of tradition, this thesis focuses on certain tunes. The methods employed include source research, historical comparison, study of ethnographic context, and comparative analysis of melody variants and of interpretation. Depending

on the characteristics of the distinct tunes, different viewpoints have come to the fore, resulting in chapters dealing with diverse aspects of transmission in detail. However, the discussion also touches on other characteristics of tunes and other phenomena observed within them, as the research purpose is not necessarily to study different problems of transmission separately, but to present the life of ‘verbunk’ tunes in its full diversity.

III. Findings

One of the results of the research is an expansion of the range of historic sources of certain ‘verbunk’ tunes. The occurrence of the ‘Ritka búza’ tune and the so-called ‘Martinovics song’ in nineteenth-century folk plays are particularly important new sources, which seem to play a key role in the history of these tunes. Data about ‘Ritka búza’ in the Kodály System has been supplemented with further noted sources, primarily from the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, and five new manuscript sources have been included in the research on the Martinovics song. Contrary to Ervin Major, this research dates one of the most important sources, the ‘Debrecen manuscript’, to the middle of the nineteenth century, which also implies that noted sources of the tune come only from the second third of the century, and the piece by János Liszt published in the collection titled ‘Magyar Nóták Veszprém Vármegyéből’ can be regarded as an early source.

Based on the examination of noted sources, variants, new text sources, and previously known scores, I have tried to review the nineteenth-century history of the tunes in detail. Both the ‘Ritka búza’ and the Martinovics song were probably rooted in folk music, as they occurred in many variants in early written sources that reflect their common music tradition, while their later appearance in folk plays equally facilitated their popularity and the consolidation of particular variants. Text sources of the Martinovics song offer further information about the extent to which the nineteenth-century popular or common music tradition of the tune might have relied on the living folk practice. On the basis of several data source this thesis suggests a hypothesis, rejected by Ervin Major, that the title ‘Martinovics’ might have originated, not in the name of the Hungarian Jacobin Ignác Martinovics, but that of the violinist Péter Martinovics. Furthermore, by examining text sources and manuscript provenances, among other documents, the connections of the tune to north-eastern Hungary have been revealed, referring not only to the twentieth but also to the nineteenth century.

To the few historic sources of ‘Sárga szöget veretek a csizmamba’, a tune of the folk dance called ‘vasvári’, has been added a song type that was popular in the nineteenth century. It can be regarded as

a further parallel of the ‘verbunk’, but its several noted sources in the Kodály System reveal the deep roots of the ‘Sárga szöget...’ tune in nineteenth-century popular music. Another ‘friss’ tune of the ‘vasvári’ is also newly connected with a popular art song, widespread in the nineteenth century, whose instrumental variant also occurred in a folk play; a ‘verbunkos’-style melody known only from a few sources of folk data with a piece that had been published in the *Magyar Nóták Veszprém Vármegyéből* as a composition of Márk Rózsavölgyi; and a further ‘verbunk’ tune recorded among others in Somorja, Pozsony county, with another piece related to Rózsavölgyi. An item of Lajtha’s field recordings in Balassagyarmat whose problematic character had already been indicated by Benjamin Rajeczky has been identified as a Hungarian dance by a nineteenth-century amateur composer, Kázmér Sárközy. The research has also linked the ‘verbunk’ tune of Szilice to a melody type that occurred in Hungarian dances in different variants from the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Based on the relatively early sources available and the decreasing popularity of the melody type in later decades, the ‘verbunk’ tune might have been preserved only in folk tradition for a long time, and its separateness in folk music suggests that the local dramatic custom of humorous recruiting had a fundamental role in its survival in Szilice. In the case of certain ‘verbunk’ tunes with fewer written sources, I tried to compare the style or the structure with different music strata.

Twentieth-century Gypsy music discs reveal how nineteenth-century music tradition is known from noted sources that survived in urban Gypsy music, preserving certain melody variants that often come from folk plays. This tradition has also been compared with folk data in this research, pointing out the relationship between the two layers in many cases; for example, that of certain ‘verbunkos’ melodies studied in the first chapter (e.g. Bihari’s ‘Mikor a pénze elfogyott’, pieces of Márk Rózsavölgyi). The interrelations between urban and folk music might have originated in a common instrumental heritage or in the impact of popular ‘verbunkos’ pieces often played on the radio. On the other hand, the lack of urban recordings of the ‘verbunk’ of Szilice, the ‘Sárga szöget...’ tune or the ‘Bertóké’ from the Csallóköz, reflects the fact that these tunes survived primarily in folk music in the twentieth century. In this regard, Gypsy musicians were special actors of village tradition, as they were interested in different musical strata. In this thesis’ discussion of the relationship between rural and urban musiciansbiographies of musicians and conversations with musicians and collectors have also been presented, which show for instance that folk musicians also distinguish between ‘verbunk’ and ‘verbunkos’ themselves.

Tune naming, dance data, and text reports from twentieth-century fieldworks have been analysed with regard to the question of the

extent to which distinct ‘verbunk’ tunes can be considered as part of the local tradition. The connection of several tunes with ‘verbunk’ dance is unambiguous. Such tunes include the ‘Sárga szöget...’ and other tunes of ‘vasvári’, in some settlements the ‘Ritka búza’, the verbunk of Szilice, and the two-part and swineherd-dance type ‘verbunk’ tunes of the Csallóköz. Although we also have data for ‘verbunk’ dance accompanied by the Martinovics song, this tune shows especially well that a melody transmitted and was varied in a certain area as a folk tune might have survived without dance accompaniment function. In contrast, the ‘verbunkos’ pieces mentioned before can rather be regarded as part of an instrumental tradition in a broader sense. Nevertheless, these tunes could also be heard as a ‘hallgató’ (‘to listen’), or as a representative piece in a rural environment.

The comparative analysis of folk and historical melody variants may reveal the ways in which these tunes have been transmitted. Besides the limited number of folk occurrences, the sporadicness, and the lack of data referring to the folk dance accompaniment function, the strong similarities between the rural and urban variants of the ‘verbunkos’ recordings introduced in the first chapter suggest that the melodies might relate rather to the urban tradition. On the other hand, although the ‘Ritka búza’ had a folk dance accompaniment function, its folk recordings preserve a certain variant that was solidified by the end of the nineteenth century and was popular in twentieth-century urban Gypsy music. The correspondence between the layers of tradition might be caused by the comparatively late transfer of the tune or by the unifying effect of its urban popularity. In the case of the Martinovics tune, some of the folk data probably relate to the urban music, while others reflect a living folk tradition. This dichotomy is equally supported by melody variants, by the characteristics of provenance and performers, by connections between the settlements outlining a small area and by the ethnographic context, reflecting that different aspects of the topic should be considered in the research. In contrast, the specifically folk tradition of other ‘vasvári’ tunes or the ‘verbunk’ of Szilice is affirmed not only by various data about dance accompaniment function, but also the richness of the melody variants. Taking tune variants, regional correlations, and dance data into consideration, I have specified different variant groups of the ‘Sárga szöget...’ tune, which was vividly living in the folk tradition.

Folk recordings have also been examined from the viewpoint of the cycle, trying to distinguish occasional succession or structures possibly influenced by the collector from the typical forms of local tradition, and also examining the specifics of tunes relating to their place in the cycle. The research has considered the overall peculiarities of instrumental folk music of a distinct area. The ‘verbunk’ tunes of the Csallóköz and Szigetköz have been studied expressly in this respect,

emphasising the close relationship between 'verbunks' and the local tradition of 'ugrós' dances.

The problem of the authenticity of fieldwork data arose in many cases. The impact of collectors, the occasional solutions, and the fragmental character of data resulting from the dissolution of tradition were all encountered on numerous occasions. In some cases, for instance, a lack of musicians forced dance-film collectors to provide the musical accompaniment using a tape recorder or an outsider's help, or to play it themselves. Based on a detailed comparison with earlier recordings, the post-1990 'vasvári' performances clearly show the results of forgetting, the attempts of musicians to meet the presumed or actual wishes of the collector, and the impact of their folklore movement experiences. For instance, the problematic character of the slow-fast type cycles of 'Sárگا szöget...' tune, mainly known from newer fieldwork studies, has been pointed out. Studying the 'Ritka búza', a tune considered as a well-known popular song, I have especially focused on the question of how the field data might have been affected by the attitudes of the collectors, which could also have been communicated to the ethnographic informants. The tune was sometimes obviously not registered, and it was explicitly overshadowed both in the field recordings and in some publications.

From the lack of earlier local data, the character of the musicians' repertoire, and the programmes of folklore festivities, it can be assumed that certain 'verbunk' tunes were learned from the folk movement. To reveal these processes, I have examined, alongside early fieldwork studies, how local groups were organised for folk traditions and how they joined the folk music movement. I have discussed the work of village folk-dance groups, local efforts to preserve the traditions that were already being seen between the two world wars, and the influence of the folklore movement on, among others, Jóka, Halászi, and Mikófalva, and in separate chapters, its influence on the humorous recruiting of Szilice and on the 'verbunk' of Domaháza. Since the newly organised folklore groups participate in folklore festivities, not only the discovery phase, but also those of relearning and performing, can be examined through fieldwork. This thesis also studies to what extent the traditions have changed in the course of staging due to the demands of stage performance, as well as to the instructions of folk music researchers or folk activists.

IV. Publications related to the topic of the dissertation

„Népzene és közzene kapcsolata a Martinovics-nóta 19. századi forrásai alapján” [Interrelations between Folk and Popular Music: Historical Sources of the Martinovics Song], in Gilányi Gabriella–Kiss Gábor (ed.), *Zenatudományi dolgozatok 2015–2016: In memoriam Kiss Gábor* (Budapest: MTA BTK Zenatudományi Intézet, in press).

„»Kiigazított« hagyomány? Gyűjtői szempontok a Ritka búza népzenei adataiban” [‘Corrected’ Tradition? Collector’s Aspects in the Folk Data of ‘Ritka búza’ Song], *Gramofon* 23/2 (Summer 2018), 24–29.

„Cigányzene városon és falun. Kapcsolatok a hagyomány különböző rétegei között” [Gypsy Music of Towns and Villages. Relationship between Different Strata of Tradition], in Liszka József (ed.), *Acta Ethnologica Danubiana 18–19*. (Komárom, Somorja: Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2017), 73–88.

„»Eredeti magyar nemzeti táncok« a 19. század elejéről” [‘Originelle Ungarische Nationaltänze’ from the Early Nineteenth Century], *Magyar Zene* 55/2 (May 2017), 131–157.

„A folklórmozgalmak szerepe a szilicei tréfás verbuválás hagyományában” [The Impact of Folk Movements on the Tradition of Funny Recruiting in Szilice], *Ethnographia* 128/1 (2017), 74–91.

„Towards Multipart Music: Historical Parallels of Multipart Techniques in Hungary”, in Richter Pál–Tari Lujza (ed.), *Multipart Music: Personalities and Educated Musicians in Traditional Practices. Third Symposium of the ICTM Study Group for Multipart Music. 12–16 September 2013 Budapest, Hungary* (Budapest: MTA BTK Zenatudományi Intézet, 2015), 507–525.

„A cigányzenei előadásmód változásai egy étterem–monográfia alapján” [Changes of Gypsy Music Performance Based on a Restaurant Monography], in Ignác Ádám (ed.), *Műfajok, stílusok, szubkultúrák: tanulmányok a magyar populáris zenéről* (Budapest: Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 2015), 57–73.

„Városi cigányzenekarok hangfelvételei a 20. század elejéről” [Hungarian Gypsy Musical Recordings from the Early 20th Century], *Magyar Zene* 52/1 (February 2014), 28–42.