

Thesis of DLA Dissertation

CSENGE KONKOLY

Intercomparison Study
of the Parlando–Rubato Interpretation
Based on the Vocal Traditional Folk Music
of the Transylvanian Plain

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I. Prelude to research

The exploration of the folk music of the Transylvanian Plain [=in Hungarian *Mezőség*] has began relatively late. The first person to reresearch the area was László Lajtha, who conducted collections in Szék and Szépkenyerűszentmárton in 1941. His village monographs about his collecting trips were published in 1954.

Following Lajtha's collection, Transylvanian researchers János Jagamas, Piroska Demény, István Almási, Ilona Szenik, and later Zoltán Kallós and István Pávai explored the folk music traditions in this area. From the seventies, among the Hungarian ethnomusicologists Bertalan Andrásfalvy, György Martin, Katalin Paksa, Ferenc Pesovár, Pál Sztanó, and later Béla Halmos, Ferenc Sebő, Sándor Varga, Márta Virágvölgyi and many others researched the vocal and instrumental folk music of the *Mezőség*. Katalin Paksa dealt most extensively with the issue of singing performance, including the use of ornamentation, in her study volume *The Ornamentation of Hungarian Folk Songs*.

These researches finally refined the subdialectological classification of the *Mezőség* based on vocal and instrumental stylistic features. However, the so-called *jaj-songs* common in the

Mezőség have not yet been fully classified into the Szendrei–Dobszay typology system.

II. Resources

I based my research on the collections of László Lajtha,¹ János Jagamas,² Ilona Szenik,³ and Zoltán Kallós⁴ in Mezőség. In addition to the material recorded and mostly published by them, I reviewed the databases of the Institute for Musicology and the Antology of Hungarian Folk Music.⁵ Valuable information was also provided by the collection protocols and the accompanying

¹ László Lajtha: *The Szépkényerűszentmárton Collection*. [=Folk Music Monographs I.] Budapest: Editio Musica, 1954., *The Szék Collection*. [=Folk Music Monographs II.] Budapest: Editio Musica, 1954.

² István Pávai–Erzsébet Zakariás (ed.): *Collection of János Jagamas at the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy*. Budapest: Research Centre for the Humanities Institute for Musicology–House of Traditions, 2014.

³ István Pávai–Zoltán Gergely (ed.): *Szenik Ilona népzenei gyűjteménye*. Cluj-Napoca– Budapest: Institutul „Archiva de Folclor a Academiei Române” – Research Centre for the Humanities Institute for Musicology–House of Traditions, 2019.

⁴ Research Centre for the Humanities Institute for Musicology, Zoltán Kallós Archives.

⁵ Pál Richter (ed.): *Antology of Hungarian Folk Music. Complete Digital Edition. DVD-ROM*. (Budapest: Research Centre for the Humanities Institute for Humanities– FolkEurópa Publisher, 2012.)

booklets of *Új Pátria* series of records published by the House of Traditions.

It was important for me to be able to map the change in performing style and its anthropological and sociological aspects, so my own collections were also included among the sources for the dissertation.

III. Methodology

First, it proved essential to clarify terminological issues and outline how Hungarian folk music studies view the *parlando-rubato* performance style, how it differs from classical music, and what we experience in the performance style designations of individual publications. It was also necessary to determine with what accuracy folk music notations in the historical research antecedents reflect rhythmic and metrical phenomena, and to develop a notation system in which the rubato phenomena of melodies with a loose structure can be detected just as clearly as those in a fixed, metrical framework.

For all of this, I reviewed the listed collections, clarified, revised, and re-noted the completed scores. I examined the singing performance of eighty singers from fifteen villages in total,

individually, in groups, and with instrumental accompaniment. Among the subdialects of Mezőség, I dealt in depth with the villages of Internal-Mezőség, Northern-Mezőség, Lake District, Eastern-Mezőség, and the Small-Szamos riverside. Southern-Mezőség and Mezőség from Marosszék were not included in the dissertation.

I tried to select melody types that can be found in all Mezőség subdialect areas, in numerous variations, thus showing a representative picture so that my measurement meets both quantitative and qualitative criteria.

I also compared the individual elements of the *parlando–rubato* performance style: tone formation, intonation, prosody, ornamentation, tempo choice, and the degree of *rubato*. The latter was induced mainly by the change in metrical pulsation and the departure from the metrical field in the case of asymmetrical slow *giusto* melodies.

I was also interested in tracking the development of variants over time, for which my own collections served as a basis. With my elderly informants, I compared my collections made between 2023–2024 with the material collected between 1940–1980.

IV. Results

I consider the most important result of my dissertation to be that I have thoroughly explored the differences in the performance style of subdialects of the Mezőség, clarified the dialectological differences, and increasing our knowledge about this, and expended the list of studies on this subject.

It has been demonstrated that the singing performance style of the village of Magyarsovát within Internal-Mezőség, and of the village of Szék within Northern-Mezőség, can be interpreted as an independent micro-region.

Another valuable result is that in the case of Transylvanian asymmetric slow *giustos*, I distinguished between the performance within and outside the dance music function, thereby determining the extent of *rubato* phenomena.

By examining the previously unprocessed collections of Ilona Szenik and János Jagamas and placing them in a temporal context, we can better understand the changes in the performance style from the early collections of Lajtha through the collections of Zoltán Kallós to the present day.

In the multi-line development of the previously four-line, isometrically structured melodies, the so-called jaj-songs, some of the root melodies have been deciphered, from which the multi-line *jaj-songs* have developed. Thus, they became possible to be placed in the Szendrei–Dobszay typology system. These provided the opportunity to classify all the Mezőség *jaj-songs* into types.

I used a novel metrical and rhythmic notation to record the asymmetrical slow *giustos*, which I hope will later be useful for domestic and international ethnomusicology.

The identical melody types of the Hungarian-Romanian melody world offer an additional perspective for a more in-depth understanding of interethnic relations in the East-Central European region. This will identify new areas of research in the future.

While writing my dissertation, it became clear to me that due to the little-researched topic, there are still many sources to be explored, which makes it necessary to further research the singing traditions of the Transylvanian Mezőség within the framework of a planned postdoctoral fellowship.

V. Documentation of the activity relating to the subject matter of the dissertation

Concerts

- 02.22.2025. Csángó Ball, Somos Ensemble – Millenáris
01.12.2025. Chinese-Hungarian Concert – The Pesti Vigadó
01.05.2025. New Years's Eve Concert – MŰPA
07.15.2024. Magyarhang Concert – Siófok
05.30.2024. Folk Mass – St. Stephen's Basilica
02.03.2024. Csángó Ball, Somos Ensemble – Millenáris
07.24.2023. Magyarhang Concert – Siófok
09.28.-10.05.2022. Magyarhang Tour – Astana, Almati (KAZ)

Lectures, workshops

- 01.12. 2025. The Performance of Hungarian Folk Songs – The
Pesti Vigadó
02.06.2024. The Performance Style of Hungarian Chorophone
Instruments – Academy of Music
09.15.2023. Hungarian Instrumental Folk Music Performance –
Korean Cultural Centre–House of Traditions

Record releases

- 2018 – Te vagy a Nap, én az Éjjel – Magyarhang Ensemble
2020 – Zeng a lélek, zeng a szó – Boldi Ensemble