

Theses of the DLA Doctoral Dissertation

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The Traditional Dance Accompaniment Practice
of a Folk Instrument, the Koboz, in the Dance
Music of the Hungarians in Moldavia

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I. Background of the research

The origin of the koboz dates back to ancient times and points towards Asia. However, the presence of the koboz as we know it today in Hungarian and Romanian folk music can only be documented from the last century and a half. In the first half of the 20th century, Romanian researchers made audio recordings with village koboz players, and from 1950 onwards Hungarians also took part in the fieldwork. Meanwhile, the general popularity of the koboz gradually declined from the period between the two world wars onwards. It was replaced in village bands by the small cimbalom, then the accordion, and finally the synthesizer. By the time Hungarian folk musicians felt the need to learn to play the instrument, the old koboz practice had essentially died out in Moldavia.

The most comprehensive summary work in Romanian instrument research literature on the subject to date was published in 1956. Alexandru Tiberiu's monograph summarizes in detail the research results related to the koboz and also publishes transcriptions. From the Hungarian side, it is worth mentioning the relevant writings of Gyula Hankóczi, Bálint Sárosi, and

István Pávai, which also deal with the historical and ethnographic data found in the literature. However, data on playing technique are generally only touched upon. In the last two decades, dissertations and publications dealing with the practice of the koboz have given new impetus to the revival and informed understanding of traditional koboz music.

II. Sources

For the musical analyses of my research, the most important source was the early field recordings that best documented the traditional playing style. The most complete repertoire can be attributed to György Gyöngyös, a koboz player from Luizi-Călugăra, whose 1950, 1958, and 1965 recordings formed the basis for the examination of playing technique. In addition, the core material also included the melodies recorded with György Butak, as well as Gyula Hankóczy's collection with János Gyöngyös. In addition to the other musicians from the Bacău area, I expanded the scope of sources with recordings of koboz players from more distant Romanian regions.

Most of the audio and video recordings are now publicly available in online databases (The Folk Music Collection of the Institute for Musicology, Folklore Database of the Hungarian Heritage House). However, a smaller part is only restrictedly accessible, often unprocessed material.

In the chapter on the construction of the instrument, I was able to rely on the available instrument descriptions, as well as authentic visual documentation and archival photos.

III. Methodology

First, I examined the effect of the instrument's physical parameters on the traditional playing style. I filtered out those playing technique factors that can be associated with certain instrument construction features and instrument types. Subsequently, I examined the rhythmic solutions, grouped according to the four basic dance music accompaniment rhythms used in Moldavia. Then, the examination of melodic elements followed. Here, I was able to distinguish between the factors characteristic of melody playing or vocal accompaniment. Finally, I focused on the harmonic analysis of the figurations and

chord breakings used in dance accompaniment. The analysis concludes with a description of the related playing styles of some other dance accompaniment instruments.

The focus of my current work was the analysis of playing technique, so the interpretation of audio and video recordings was the primary source processing, which was contextualized by the literature and musical transcriptions. Experiential information from performance and teaching practice is also essential for understanding the musical mindset. The purpose of comparing with other instruments is to provide a more general interpretation of the musical phenomena encountered in the context of the koboz.

IV. Results

During my investigations, the main physical characteristics of traditional village instruments and their correlations with playing styles came to light. It was possible to determine the ideal Moldavian koboz tuning, as well as the appropriate order of octave strings. The examination of re-entrant tuning was also expanded with new perspectives.

The analysis of rhythms revealed that essentially two types of figuration can be distinguished. One is used for the "öves" rhythm and the odd-numbered rhythms, while the second type of figuration is characteristic of the "kezes" rhythm and syncopated rhythm dance accompaniment.

A clear novelty in the description of melody playing is the presentation of the re-entrant technique. Along with this, the general role of melody playing and vocal accompaniment in the koboz repertoire has also been clarified.

In dance accompaniment, koboz players used various figurations depending on the tonalities and rhythms. The most typical solutions were transcribed with musical notation and tablature. The general playing technique elements associated with each tonality, as well as the related melody repertoire, were determined. It can be stated that among the musicians examined, the playing technique of György Gyöngyös, János Gyöngyös, and György Butak from Luizi-Călugăra can be considered uniform in terms of figurations.

The priorities of the koboz playing style were also confirmed by the examination of other accompanying instruments associated with it. The guitar, cimbalom, and accordion, which can be considered successors of the koboz, have preserved certain stylistic features of koboz playing to varying degrees, while, of course, the playing style has been expanded with instrument-specific solutions.

V. Documentation of activities related to the subject of the thesis

Publications, recordings, concerts, folk music collections:

Fieldwork in Transylvania 2024. (Gârcini, 08.06.2024.)

Zalán Csenki and his Musician Friends:

Kobozreneszánsz. (Akusztikus-autentikus concert series, Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, 06.03.2024.)

Korinda Band: *Faluról falura.* (Budapest: Dialekton Folk Music Publisher, 2023. BS-CD38.)

Luca Csenki-Túri, Zalán Csenki: *A barcasági borica tánc zenéje. Hegedű- és kobozpéldatár.* Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, 2022.

Fieldwork in Transylvania and Moldavia 2021.

(Biharfalu, Csíkszereda, Sepsiszentgyörgy, Brassó, Diószeg, Lészeped, Somoska, Lujzikalagor, Tamás, Redojé, Diószén, 2021.09.27–10.05.)

Mátyás Bolya, Zalán Csenki, László Szlama:
„Fogalomtár” In: László Szlama: *Păun Vasile, a kobzos*.
Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, 2020. 19–20.

Korinda Band: *Rögtől szívig*. (Budapest: Dialekton Folk
Music Publisher, 2019. BS-CD31.)

Zalán Csenki: *Kobzás. Hagyományos népzene kobozzal*.
(Budapest: Dialekton Folk Music Publisher, 2018. BS-
CD26.)

Presentations:

Zalán Csenki: *Gondolkodásmód és alapelvek a
hagyományos moldvai kobozjátékban*. (Training of the
Association of Moldavian Csango Hungarians, Miercurea
Ciuc, 07.06.2024.)

Luca Csenki-Túri, Zalán Csenki: *A barcasági borica tánc
zenéje. Zenés könyvbemutató*. (Folklore Collectors Forum
series, Budapest, The Hungarian Heritage House,
21.09.2023.)

Zalán Csenki: *A borica tánc zenéje. Előzetes
könyvbemutató*. (5. koboz players' day, Sfântu Gheorghe,
Unitarian Parish, 2021.)

Zalán Csenki: *A népzenei rekonstrukció lehetőségei a
kobozzenében* (4. koboz players' day, Budapest, Liszt
Academy, 2020.)

Zalán Csenki: *A koboz mint tánckísérő hangszer a
moldvai magyarok hagyományos tánczenéjében* (3. koboz
players' day, Budapest, Liszt Academy, 2020.)