

TÁNC HÁZ

HALF A CENTURY OF THE
HUNGARIAN TÁNC HÁZ
MOVEMENT



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IDEOLOGICAL
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URBAN AND RURAL CONCEPTS OF *TÁNCHÁZ* IN HUNGARIAN CULTURAL HISTORY AND ADAPTATIONS IN THE REVIVAL



István Pávai

In the past, rural Hungarians living traditional community lifestyles used a number of different terms across various ethnographic regions to describe a place used for dancing. In this article, I will be taking a closer look at one of these terms: *tánc ház*, a compound word formed from *tánc* (dance) and *ház* (house). Usually, this word has evoked a broader meaning, signifying not only the place where dances were held, but also the form of entertainment: a *dance event* which included music, dance, and song, was organized by village youth one or more times per week, and played an important role in courtship and marriage.

THE USE AND MEANINGS OF THE TERM *TÁNC HÁZ* DURING THE 19TH CENTURY

Use of the word has not, however, been limited to rural communities, and can also be found in older texts in reference to the upper echelons of society, usually as a synonym for *ballroom*. A Hungarian newspaper in 1811, for example, reported on the opulent ball held by the French ambassador to Vienna, who it claimed had turned his palace courtyard into a “*tánc ház*” with a roof (Kultsár 1811:317). In 1842, a Kolozsvár periodical informed its readers that “the first Hungarian industrial exposition in Pest [had] been opened in the hall of the city *tánc ház*” ([N.N.] 1842:436). In a third example from 1846, a journalist argued for the construction of a theatre in Debrecen in the following terms: “*Tánc ház*, casino, theatre! It is these that hold the urban population together; that close the gaps, like buttons on a coat” ([N.N.] 1846). In a fourth occurrence taken from a 1900 press release, we read:

How proud the residents of Buda of their resplendent new entertainment hall, which will be inaugurated by way of an elite ball. Indeed, in Buda they hardly recall their former meeting place, and those who last danced the *langaus* within its walls are now turned to dust, though a renowned building that *tánczház* once was (Vay 1900).

There are numerous other 19th-century sources which support the use of the word in the meaning of an aristocratic ballroom.¹ In the urban setting, however, the term was applied not only to ballrooms, but also to the places where theatrical dance performances were held. In 1857, for example, we have a critic's complaint that the National Theatre of Pest almost never gave a production which didn't include dance: "if this goes on much longer, we will have to change its name from theatre to *tánczház*" ([N.N.] 1857). A second critical voice, this time from 1897, uses the term in the same way: "Though in the recent past the Hungarian Royal Opera House has been more of a *tánczház* than a musical theatre, it still has not produced a true, artistically first-rate ballet."²

Although we cannot know how long the word *tánczház* has been used in rural circles with the meaning of 'place of dance' and/or 'dance event', sources from the 19th century do suggest that village intellectuals sometimes pushed for the construction of buildings resembling the type of urban ballrooms developed expressly for the purposes of dance. In 1829, János Udvardy, one of the first Hungarian folk song collectors to transcribe melodies in addition to lyrics, proposed that every village have a "*tánczház*" where village youth could gather on Sundays and holidays. One purpose of this was so that they might "take pride in Hungarian dance, song, and language" (1829:268). What Udvardy was urging was the propagation of aristocratic ballrooms to rural areas for the purpose of holding dance events. Statements in other sources express similar intent: in 1842, for example, László Kővári thought it necessary that a building be constructed specifically for the youth of Homoródalmás to hold their Sunday dances (1842:99).

In the decades around the turn of the 20th century, we find numerous sources employing the term *tánczház* with the meaning of 'dance place' or 'dance event' in villages across the Hungarian language area, as well

1 One early and one late example from the 19th century: Hübner 1816:293; 1817:273; *Fővárosi Lapok*, 21 June 1873. 612.

2 *Zenelap*, 1897/28:2.

as among other ethnicities of the Kingdom of Hungary. The following are just a few examples:

In 1882, Pál Jedlicska wrote of the Slovaks living in the Little Carpathians that on the final three days of Carnival, young men would rent a house they called a “tánczház” in order to hold entertainments. He then added that the Slovak name was an exact rendering of this, and that he believed both to be loan translations of the German *Tanzhaus* (1882:335). This latter word, which referred to a building where dances are held but not to the event itself, can be traced back to the 15th century in German-speaking territories.³

In an instance from Bihar County in 1897, “Péter G., resident of Nagyürögd, persuaded the young man András D. by the recompense of 2 forints to walk from the tánczház naked for the length of the street.”⁴ In a writing published in 1899, we are told that at daybreak on Shrove Tuesday along the banks of the Nyárád River in Székelyföld, “the gates were opened, as was the door of the tánczház, and the people made merry until morning of the next day” (Kovács 1899:29).

From an order issued by the high sheriff of Mohács on 9 February 1900, we know that *poklade*, a Carnival custom of the local Croatian (Šokci) population, frequently included “improvised tánczházak” where “every masked reveller [*bušari*] might enter without a ticket.”⁵

A passage from M. István Richter’s 1904 description of the wedding traditions of the Nyitra County Germans notes:

When they leave church, they make directly for the wedding house, generally to musical accompaniment; except in Gajdel, where they proceed to what is called a “tánczház” (a large room rented somewhere so that they can dance comfortably the entire day for the duration of the wedding festivities); there, for a time they make toasts, after which the youth break into dance until, with a great ruckus and to the accompaniment of music, they “swing” over to the wedding house (1904:427).

In yet another source, referring to Marosvásárhely in 1905, we find that “the pub owned by M. Hőning on Teleki street [...] served simultaneously

3 *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, digital edition in *Wörterbuchnetz des Trier Center for Digital Humanities*, version 01/23, <<https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB>>, last accessed 20/09/2023. My thanks to Dániel Lipták for this source.

4 *Igazságügyi Közlöny* [Judicial Gazette], 1897/7. 352.

5 *Mohács és Vidéke* [Mohács and Environs], 25 February 1900. [4.]

as a *táncház*.” Here, in other words, the term *táncház* was used to refer not to a separate building, but to a space or room.

Hungarian writers and translators have also used the word *táncház* to denote a place where dancing occurs when describing the customs of people in other parts of the world. In 1860, for example, in a writing compiled from a wealth of foreign literature, János Hunfalvy noted: “Among the Western Eskimos, one rarely finds a village in which there is no *táncház*” (1860:156). Another example comes from a Hungarian translation of the 17th-century travelogue by Ottoman writer Evliya Çelebi, published in 1904. There, a translator’s note uses the word *tánczház* as the Hungarian equivalent for *semahhane*, the room of the Mevlevi “dancing dervishes” (1904:200). In reality, *semahhane* means ‘house of rest’, as in its original context, the dervishes’ whirling motion, accompanied by the music of a *ney* flute, was not regarded as a dance in the European sense.⁶

Reflecting on the above, we might think that the use of a well-known urban term like *táncház* by external observers of village phenomena need not imply that the word was also used locally. It will be noted, however, that the authors of these quotes often placed the word in quotation marks or italics, indicating that they viewed it as a local name. In addition to the above examples, a 1942 description of the Carnival customs in the village of Menaság in Székelyföld also includes the word *táncház* in quotation marks.⁷ There can be no doubt that the word was widespread in rural areas, even where the geographical distances between them were great.

The question remains: did various dialects borrow the word from urban usage, or did it develop independently in rural and urban settings? We know that in cities it generally referred to a building constructed specifically for the purpose, while in the rural context it denoted a room set up within a dwelling. In Hungarian dialects, the word *ház* can mean not only ‘residential building’, but also ‘room’. Thus, in rural communities’ usage, *táncház* denotes any room within a local home that has been arranged to accommodate a dance event. This meaning of *ház*, found in written sources since 1395, is common in popular parlance over a very large geographic area, even if the synonym *szoba* ‘room’ has existed in written form since as early as 1300 (Filep 1979).

6 My thanks to János Sipos for his clarification of the meaning of the word *semahhane*.

7 *Székely Szó*, 19 February 1942. 7.

In numerous larger municipalities, primarily during the 20th century, community buildings constructed for theatrical productions among other purposes generally took over as the venue for youth dance events. Thus it sometimes happened that such a building was referred to as a *táncház* though it served roughly the same purposes as the village community centre would later. In Koronka in the Marosszék region, “a *táncolóház* [‘dancing house’] was constructed in 1894, which substituted for a *kulturotthon* [‘culture house’].”⁸ In Küsmöd in the Udvarhelyszék region, the “*táncház*, furnished with even a stage,” known later as the Sándor Petőfi Community Centre, occupied a separate building as far back as the early 1900s (Piroska 2002:79).

RECORDS OF TRADITIONAL VILLAGE TÁNCHÁZ IN THE HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE AREA

By the end of the 20th century, there were only a few places left where the word *táncház*, beyond a mere designation, referred to a self-organized local youth dance event where relationships were formed and life outcomes shaped. One such municipality was Szék in the north-western part of the Transylvanian region of Mezőség, where the traditional *táncház* was still regularly held until as late as the very end of the century. Szék native Mrs. István Filep née Klára Győri (born 1899), remembered the mid-20th-century events held in her home in the following terms:

...it occurred to the local lads to try and find out whether my husband, Pista Filep, would rent our house out to the *Felszeg* [‘upper village quarter’] youth. They thought it beautiful and excellent for holding dances, as it was on the main road and had a well in the yard. Three or four of them came ready with a good bottle of brandy, offered him some, got him drunk, and told him they wanted to rent the house for a *táncház* and would give him good money. The old man agreed and the deal was done. He was happy with it, too, as every time the lads got together, there was always brandy, which they offered their host here and there. I was pretty glad myself, because I always loved music, though my life was really very hard [...] They used to gather on Sundays and holiday afternoons starting at two o’clock: first the lads, then, right on their heels, the

8 *Romániai Magyar Szó*, 24 July 1952. 3.

girls would wander in. In our house there were three rooms, all quite large. In front was the first *ház*, which was where we lived: they couldn't dance there, because there was a cellar underneath it and the floor would have vibrated. In the centre was the entranceway, which in Szék we called the *pitar*. In there, there was only a bread oven surrounded by good seating: benches dug into the ground to secure them and keep people from moving them or throwing them around. There, too, they could sit well when they wanted to rest. But it was the third room that we leased for dancing. There, there was only a brick oven for winter heating and an immovable bench for the musicians—this was high, so that the three musicians were not bothered by people bumping into them. The place where we [my husband and I] lived, the first *ház*, worked well for the lads as a place to drink. Ten or fifteen of them or so, they'd say, 'come on, let's throw some money together!' Then they'd each contribute equally and drink out of the bottle. You could only enter the first *ház* if you paid your share; they'd sing, and even take the musicians in and offer them drinks. Then they'd go out into the dance room [*táncsterem*], and another group would come in. In summer, there was a nice big barn in the yard where you could dance in the fresh air as late as three or four in the morning without any supervision (Győri 1975:141-142).⁹

Figure 1. Klára Győri
with interviewer
Olga Nagy.⁹



9 *Dolgozó Nő*, 1970/6:19.

The urban táncház movement in Hungary was initiated in the 1970s as one of several forms of folk revival. Among participants, it was generally thought that the word used to describe the movement had originated from the village of Szék, as both the term and the form of entertainment form had been borrowed from there. We will soon learn that both of these things lived on into the 20th century in many villages in Transylvania and Hungary. The custom disappeared or was transformed under the pressures of modernisation, and use of the word then faded in its wake, though only gradually and at different paces in different regions.

In 1942, Balázs Csete penned an intriguing description of a Christmas dance held in the village of Nyárszó in Kalotaszeg, Transylvania. Mentioned in the piece are several event officers, whose jobs are defined in detail, along with other key elements of the dance: the *legínyes* (the local men's dance), the *pár* (the dance cycle), the *próbatánc* (the trial dance, which the musicians played for free), and the táncház, where the dance was held (Kaposi and Maác 1958:231). Mária Kresz, by contrast, used the word *táncolóház* to describe the Nyárszó youth Christmas dance (1944:145–146).

In a 1951 account of the Carnival customs of Sajónémeti in northern Hungary, Zoltán Ujváry includes some information on how a táncház was organized, some of which overlaps extant descriptions of the táncház of Szék:

During the week preceding Carnival Sunday, a number of lads go to the village to rent a *táncház*. Usually, they find a room with one of the poorer widows. Having removed the furniture, with the exception of at most a table and bench, they advertise the location of the upcoming dance in the village. Carnival festivities begin in the afternoon of Carnival Sunday, when the faithful emerge from church and proceed to the táncház, where they dance, without any particular ceremony or theatrics, until Monday morning (Ujváry 1957:146).

The process, as described by István Horváth regarding the village of Magyarózd in central Transylvania, occurred in much the same way: “For the improvised táncház, they used someone’s home, paid for by the youth who were organising the event. Participants danced in the middle of the house, which was of the old, large (one-room) style. All one had to do was shove the table to one side” (1971:109).

The text of one of the transcribed folk songs of the western Hungarian village of Hegykő indicates that it was not the girls, but the boys who paid for the musicians:

A táncházban ráfúttak a bandára,
Oda gyönnek a legények sorjába.
Oda gyön az én babám is megvenni,
Ezüst pénzzel fog én értem fizetni.

At the táncház, the band is playing,
The boys are coming one by one.
My sweetheart is also coming to pay [my fee],
With silver coins will he pay for me.

The writer who describes the carnival dance of Hegykő uses the word *táncosház* ('house of dance').¹⁰ In other places, the word *táncolóház* ('dancing house') was used, as we have already seen in relation to Koronka and Nyárszó (Piroska 2002:79; Kresz 1944:145–146). In fact, a "Tánczó ház" is recorded as having taken place in Déva as early as 1802 (Szabó T. and Kósa 2005:880). Other villages for which we have such information include Barcaújfalu, Homoródalmás, Magyarszovát, Kalotaszentkirály, Zentelke, Inaktelke, and the villages of the Udvarhelyszék section of the Nagy-Küküllő River region (Komlósi 1979:97; Kardalus 1985:29; Szabó 1990:3; Tamás 1991:36; Karácsony 1995:156, 158; Vasas and Salamon 1986:71; Kardalus 1982:35). With further research, the list could certainly be expanded. According to sources from Transylvania dating to the 18th and 19th centuries, the participle *táncoló* ('dancing') could be applied not only to an individual, but also to an occasion. In other words, the compound word *táncolóház* may have been a synonym for *táncház* (Szabó T. and Kósa 2005:880).

In Székelyföld, we encounter further 20th-century sources that support the double meaning of 'dance place' and 'dance event' for the word *táncház*. In 1958, Csíkrákos native Sándor Péter, who was 58 years old at the time, is known to have sung the first line of a well-known folk song using the following phrasing: "Nyitva van a csíkrákosi táncházajtó" ('The door to the Csíkrákos táncház is open'). A similar line was recorded Gyergyó, with the local place name replacing Csíkrákos.¹¹ During the first half of the 20th century, the Székely people of Csík County continued

¹⁰ *Kisalföld*, 17 January 1961:6.

¹¹ Folk Music Archive of the Institute for Musicology, Budapest, AP 2985e.

to use the word *tánc ház* to designate a place where dances were held. According to a contemporary writing by Mária Bándy and Géza Vámszer, there, just as in Szék, a *tánc ház* was an empty room furnished with a few wall benches and a corner platform large enough for a three-piece band of fiddle, *kontra* (second fiddle), and *gardon* (1937:9–11).¹² On a trip to Csík County in the summer of 1942, Oszkár Dincser documented dances organized not in residential rooms, but in barns, as was the summer custom in Szék, as well. Though Dincser did not encounter the word *tánc ház*, the accommodations for musicians, which he not only described but also photographed (Figure 2), were arranged in the same way as the *tánc ház* in Szék noted above:



Figure 2. Fiddler Lajos Duduj and his *gardon*-playing wife performing in a barn. Csíkszentdomokos, 1942. Photograph by Oszkár Dincser (Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, F 154212).

A dance for young men is called *fogadott tánc* [‘hired dance’] or *legéntánc* [‘lads’ dance’], while a dance for married people is a *bál* [...]. The *fogadott tánc* took place in one of the farmers’ barns [...], which in Csík were usually furnished with wooden floors. At this point, the musicians played from some higher-up place, like a tabletop or, in some cases, on a separate platform made specifically for the purpose [...] In winter or bad weather, some largish room, or even the *kultúrterem* [‘culture hall’] was used (Dincser 1943:62–63).

Thus, in Csík County, as in Szék, the word *tánc ház* was formerly applied to the place where weekly dance entertainment was held by village youth, whose furnishings, too, resembled those of the Szék *tánc ház*: an empty room with a rough-hewn wooden platform. The status and roles of the band members at these events were also identical, and the names of the instruments and their players often analogous (*muzsikás*–*mozsikás*, *kontra*–*kontora*, *gardon*–*gardon*, etc.). The only seeming difference between them was that in Szék, boys and girls were left alone during their merry-making, while the Székely youth danced under the passive supervision of their elders.

¹² The *gardon*, or *ütőgardon*, is an instrument resembling the cello, played by striking and strumming. See Pávai 2020[2012]:162–165.

These parallels, among other things, refute the myth that the revivalist *táncház* owes its origins solely to the traditions of Szék. Rather, during the 1970s, at the time the first urban *táncházak* were organized, the custom was still in practice in Szék, making it a convenient model for the movement to follow. From the perspective of dance education, too, the Szék set of dances was the best possible choice. In the words of György Martin in 1981:

It was precisely the music and dance culture of Szék, with its remarkable complexity in terms of genres, styles, and historical strata, that best demonstrated the applicability of a surviving communal peasant culture in both social and aesthetic terms [...] Until recent years, Szék, with its separate *táncház* for each *szeg* ['village quarter'], its almost entirely locally-based pool of musicians, its archaic and almost perfectly preserved dance cycle, its diversity of dance types, and its organized, traditional dance culture, could be considered something of a living museum of the dance history of the Carpathian Basin. By comparison to dance cultures of the majority of Hungarian villages, which by the turn of the

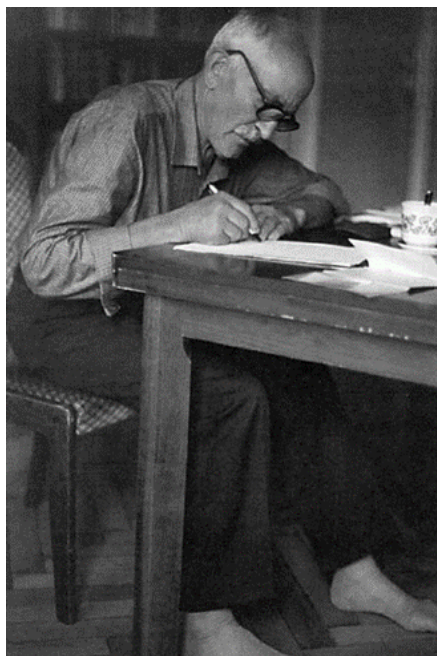
century had already begun to fray until they consisted primarily of new-style dances, in Szék, the organized dance life of times past was still a flourishing phenomenon in the mid-20th century, with a repertoire of dances dominated by archaic and transitional types and only minimal encroachment by the newer style [...] As an island where the Carpathian Basin dance culture had stalled at an early phase of development, Szék has preserved the former fashions of dance history in full, quasi-condensed form up to the present day (Martin 1981:247–249).¹³

Martin's interpretation suggests, among other things, that at the time the urban *Táncház* movement emerged, the dance customs one could still observe in Szék were not exclusively of local origin, but represented traditions that had previously been practiced in other parts of Transylvania as well.

Figure 3. The cover of Klára Győri's memoirs "The green tree of my joy has withered" (Győri 1975).



¹³ See also: Pávai 1978:20.



Figures 4–5. The cover of Csorba’s “At least its memory should live on,” with the subtitle “Memories of the customs, clothing, lifestyle, amusements, and sorrows of my native community, written by me, János Csorba, based on what I heard from my parents and other elders, begun in 1978, finished in 2000” (Csorba 2006).

János Csorba in 2000 (Csorba 2006:8).

TÁNCHÁZ CUSTOMS IN SZÉK AND THEIR ADAPTATION IN THE REVIVAL

János Csorba, a Hungarian villager from Szék who made conscious use of his memoirs to record the traditions of his home village, discusses how dance events were organised and executed there:

Until around the first quarter of the 20th century, the work of organizing dances fell, as ever it had, to the youth. First, four of the cleverer boys would hire some Romani musicians for a period of ten Sundays.¹⁴ They divided this up evenly, and when the first *csárdás* was danced, the assembled youth were alerted via shouted proclamation that the ten Sundays had begun, so that every lass and lad would know when the period would end.

¹⁴ Here, the musicians were indeed of Romani ethnicity; however, in rural parlance, the word *cigány* ‘Gypsy/Rom’ was used as a synonym for musician, regardless of the ethnicity of the person to whom it referred.

The payment of the musicians was the responsibility of the boys, and the provision of food that of the girls. When five Sundays had passed, the *zenészfogadó* [a boy responsible for hiring the musicians] again stopped the music in the middle of the *csárdás* to proclaim that the time had passed and called upon every lad to provide the required *cigánypénz* [money for the musicians]; this was patiently collected until the next five Sundays had also passed. At this point they would cry out: “today the ten Sundays have passed; whoever has not given their *cigánypénz*, do so now, as next Sunday will be the first of the next ten.”

...when in the afternoon the crowd had gathered for the dance, the young men formed a group, and the girls waited for the boys to call or send for them. In general, the youngest boys were sent for this purpose, and they went willingly, as this meant they would do the first *csárdás* with the girl in question—a good way for them to learn to dance. The other advantage was that young adolescent boys danced more boldly, as they felt they had earned it, and the bigger boys tolerated this, even where it did not benefit the elegantly paced dance [...] Young children began attending the dance rather early, and not only at the dances of their older peers: on Sundays and holidays, they would sometimes hold an *aprók tánca* [children’s dance]. Only when they were ten to fifteen years old and had undergone confirmation could they attend the older youth’s dance [...]

As in general, dances held on holidays began with a *csárdás*. From the *csárdás* they proceeded into the *magyar*. Danced by two boys and two girls, the *magyar* was rather long; they enjoyed it, as it was suitable for singing. The best dancers might dance a *tempó* [men’s dance] when the *magyar* was finished, after which there was a break. The girls retired to the *pítar*, where they chatted with their female friends. The boys, too, went out to rest a bit; alternately, one might call for a *tempó* for himself, which others would join. The musicians were glad when this happened, as it was more likely to earn them a tip.

After this, the musicians knew what they had to do: after a cigarette, they started up a *lassú* [‘slow’ dance], and the lads all stood up at once, as if by command. One by one they began to walk in a circle, in an almost perfect line, and sang to the music. When they had sung a song or two, they all stopped and stood in a circle, facing inward. On the side where the door of the *pítar* was, they left a gap in the circle, and the girls took advantage: each went through the gap to her own partner, that is, the one she danced the *lassú* with. The sight was such a beautiful, well-ordered one that professional actors might not have performed that

ancient custom, passed down from parent to child, with any more grace. The girls all stood inside the circle, their backs to one another, while the boys remained on the outside, facing each other. At this point, each took two well-executed, uniform steps backward, and with that, deftly spun the girl leaning toward his left shoulder out of the circle, then with two steps, spun her right back in again in time to the music.

The *lassú* continued for quite a long time. The musicians would play three or four *lassú* tunes, all at the same tempo. The young men held their arms about the girls' waists; the girls kept theirs on their partners' two shoulders. The girls' embrace, however, was incomplete, as each held wound about her left hand a little handkerchief, the dangling end of which she grasped with her right hand, and in this way she encircled the boy's shoulders with her arms. If the fiddler was in such a mood that the fiddle wept in his hands, and a lad sang a song to the music that hit close to, or even wounded, his partner's heart, she would lay her head on his left shoulder and shed tears that would patter, like everything else, in time to the music.

Once the fiddle had cried itself out and the lads sung themselves to their fullest, the company executed a little *szapora lassú* ['swift *lassú*'], after which there was a beautiful transition into the *csárdás*. For this, there was no singing, just at most a rhyming shout or two. Though the *csárdás* generally began with a little shuffling about, the affair soon regained its former precision: here, each couple went in due order before the musicians, and in turn, they played each young gent's own favourite tune. Once each boy had done a round before the musicians three or four times, he turned the space over to the next, while he himself pulled aside and spun his girl about two or three more times. This accomplished, he returned to the line to take his turn before the band yet again. The *csárdás* was followed in turn by the *porka* and the *hétlépés*, at which point the *pár* ['dance cycle'] was finished.

When the band struck up the next *magyar*, the boys all stood up in pairs, again calling their partners by name. Recognising the boys' voices, the lasses in question joined the lads, who were singing and walking in a circle, and so began the next *pár*.

Sunday dances began at two o'clock in the afternoon. For those, there was no need to invite the girls, because they came anyway, without an invitation, and took, in proper order, lunch and dinner for the musicians. The dancing lasted until nightfall, when boys and girls alike went home to eat. Only the musicians stayed to eat their suppers. Afterwards, the company gathered again, this time to dance until midnight.

Figure 6. *Táncház* with the band of István Szabó “Kávés”. Szék, 1973. Photograph by Péter Korniss.



Because the village was a large one, there were three separate dances, one in each of the three village quarters. A lad who went to another village to get a girl was ridiculed for not being able to find one at home. It never happened that a girl married someone from somewhere else; she would sooner become a spinster instead.

It *was* traditional, though, for boys to attend dances in other quarters of the village. Four to six boys from Felszeg might attend the dance in Csipkeszeg, for example. Whether they were welcomed there was a matter of friendship. In such cases guests could only dance if the boys there provided them with partners. As there was always a reason one attended a dance on another street, the lads tended to resolve such issues so as not to jeopardize their friendships, and so that the outsider, too, could court the girl he desired (Csorba 2001:37–40).

In Szék, the dance cycle, meaning the traditional, repeated order of the dances as they were played between breaks, was called the *pár* ('pair' or 'couple'). The *pár* consisted of two parts, each called a *félpár* ('half pair') in local parlance. According to the research of György Martin, during the first half of the 20th century, the first of these included, in order, the *sűrű tempó*, *ritka tempó*, and *magyar*, while the second consisted of the *lassú*, followed by the *csárdás*. The divergent cycles cited



Figure 7. Magyar at the tánccház with the band of Károly Dobos. Szék, 1970. Photograph by Péter Korniss.

by later documentation cannot be regarded as belonging to local tradition as passed down through multiple generations, as they were mostly casual in nature and frequently differed even from each other. In fact, divergence of this kind from the traditional cycle signalled the beginning of its gradual dissolution. First, the men's dances (the *sűrű tempó* and *ritka tempó*) were moved to the pause between cycles, where they were only danced if the boys specifically requested them. In doing so, they joined the third men's dance, the *verbunk*, which, having never been part of the Szék dance cycle, had always been relegated to this role. This was better for the musicians, as dances played on request had to be paid for separately. Later, the *lassú*, too, was gradually abandoned.

The *magyar*, as its name suggests, was related to a men's dance known as the *lassú magyar* that belonged to the dance cycle of the Kis-Szamos River region. The *lassú magyar* was accompanied by a women's circle dance that was sometimes joined by men not participating in the men's dance. In Szék, on the other hand, the *magyar* was danced in multiple circles of two couples each. After changing directions three times, participants let go of holding each other's hands to walk in a circle while the men danced the steps and performed the boot-slapping motifs of the *ritka tempó* to the *magyar* music (Martin 1981:251-253; Novák 2000:54, 67). Thus, it was natural that in the traditional Szék

dance cycle the *magyar* belonged to the same *félpár* as the men's dances, as it was related to them. The words *pár* and *félpár* refer to the way couples were paired: although the *magyar* was always followed by a short break, during which the circles were sometimes dissolved, during the second *félpár*, every man returned to dancing with the woman who had been his partner before.¹⁵

Here, it is worth returning to János Csorba's description of the start of the Szék dance cycle, with the parenthetical information added by Ferenc Sebő, Csorba's publisher, included: "As in general [meaning dance events in general, not the dance cycle!], dances held on holidays began with a *csárdás*" (Csorba 2001:37). Thus, when Csorba says that the "dance" begins with a *csárdás*, he is referring not to the order of the dances in the cycle, but to the entire occasion. As the event got underway and the crowd began to gather at the appointed site, the musicians played a *csárdás*. The same observation has been made by Béla Halmos: "In the opening cycle of the *táncház*, a *csárdás* was played before the *magyar*" ([1982]2000a:341). Thus, in Halmos's understanding, there was an opening dance cycle played at the beginning of each *táncház*, which began with a *csárdás* and continued with the dances of the traditional cycle. However, since the opening *csárdás* was not repeated in the cycle for the duration of the event, this sequence cannot be regarded as a cycle itself, even if the opening *csárdás* was followed, without any pause, by the *magyar*, the first dance of the actual cycle. Nor is it usual in Transylvanian Hungarian dance cycles for a single cycle to feature the same dance twice. The opening *csárdás* having an independent function distinct from the dance cycle is indicated by, among other things, the observation that the musicians paused the music for the *kezesek* (the young men who had organized the dance) to declare that they had hired the musicians for ten Sundays for a given sum of money, then resumed the *csárdás* afterwards (Csorba 2001:37; Novák [1965]2000:34).¹⁶

One source of misunderstandings related to the order of the dances may have been poor communications between village culture bearers and collectors, as cultural differences between the two could make

15 Previously, the *magyar* dance in Szék featured a custom now usually associated with the *csárdás*: one at a time, each of the four-person circles strove to position itself in front of the musicians, where it performed a cycle of spins. In such cases, the musicians tried to play the favourite tune of whoever was currently dancing before them (Martin 1979:216).

16 The custom of starting dance events with a pre-cycle *csárdás* existed elsewhere, too. The Gyimes region is one example.

decoding the received information difficult.¹⁷ For example, if the collector asked the interviewee what the first dance at an event was, the answer might have been “the *csárdás*,” which the collector might easily have understood to mean the first dance in the cycle. Then, to the question, “what came next,” the response might have been “the *magyar*,” as that was the actual first dance in the cycle, at least during the period after the men’s dances had been omitted. This supposition is supported by Martin’s statement that the *magyar* was “the starting dance of the modern Szék dance cycle, taking up the entirety of the first félpár” (1981:251). In 1998, János Csorba—whose memoirs also pertain to the time when the Szék dance cycle no longer necessarily opened with the men’s dances—proclaimed the following regarding the Szék pár: “There was the *magyar*—it started with that—then the *lassú*, the *csárdás*, and then another pár, and on it went that way, in that order” (interview, 15 December 1998).

It is worth remembering this when evaluating the chapter on “The composition of the average dance cycle” in Ferenc Novák’s study “The dances and dance culture of Szék”, where the order of dances is listed as “the *csárdás*, the *magyar*..., the *lassú*, the *porka*, and the *hétlépés*”. It is difficult to imagine that the *porka* would have followed the *lassú*, as no other source makes such a claim. In all likelihood, the first *csárdás* here was the starting dance not of the cycle, but of the event. In the same paragraph, Novák gives the cycle from the 1960s onward as “*magyar*, *lassú*, *csárdás*, *porka*, *hétlépés*”. Then he quotes a musician with regard to the period following the omission of the *lassú*: “For both the lads, and for us it went so that we jumped right from the *magyar* into the *csárdás*” ([1965]2000:66).¹⁸ The reversed progression from the *csárdás* into the *magyar* would have been much less natural. An interesting case in point was observed by Béla Halmos in a recording taken at a Szék tánccház: after the *csárdás*, “the band swings right into the *magyar*, but the crowd waves them to stop, asking that the *csárdás* be continued; the dancers cry out: ‘Pista, stop, stop... *csárdás*, *csárdás*!’” ([1982]2000a:340). Thus, the *csárdás*-*magyar* ordering seen so frequently with the Szék cycle danced at urban events is either a misunderstanding, or derives from the period when the tradition had begun to wane, producing deviations.

¹⁷ For more on the problems of communication between informant and collector, see Pávai [2012]2020:328–331.

¹⁸ The author mentions a “pár-initiating *négyes* [i.e. *magyar*]” on p. 69.

In Martin's description, in Szék, the *lassú* was danced "at the beginning of the second félpár, after the process of the *magyar* had been interrupted by a little rest, and was followed *attacca* by the whirling couples' dance known as the *csárdás*" (1981:253). In local parlance this was described as *összerázás* ('shaking together') of the *lassú* with the *csárdás*. Following the 1940 Second Vienna Award, which rejoined Northern Transylvania to Hungary, migrating intellectuals and officials spread the new-style *lassú csárdás* from Hungary to Szék, where it became known as the *szapora lassú*. According to Martin, this latter dance was "never fully and permanently incorporated into the dance cycle, but danced only occasionally, as a brief transition between the *lassú* and fast-whirling *csárdás*" (1981:253–254). In other words, exceptionally, the *lassú* might be "shaken together" with the *szapora lassú*, rather than the *csárdás*, in which case the true Szék *csárdás* would be played only afterwards.¹⁹ The dance's adventive nature is indicated by the name itself ('swift *lassú*'), as well as by the array of tunes it encompassed, which consisted primarily of well-known 19th-century urban, composed folk-style songs (Martin 1981:253–254).²⁰ Although the *szapora lassú* featured in the Szék dance cycle on an occasional basis only, in many places its presence in the urban *táncház* dance cycle became permanent.

From time to time, the traditional Szék dance cycle, which ended with the *csárdás*, was followed by another pair of latecomer dances known as the *porka* and *hétlépés*. The word *porka* was simply a local pronunciation of *polka*, a dance which, according to Martin, arrived in Szék in the 1940s. Novák, on the other hand, claims that the *porka* had been brought to Transylvania by dance teachers and had been present in Szék since the turn of the century. The Szék population most frequently referred to the *hétlépés* ('seven step') as the *septyépás*, a magyarized pronunciation of the Romanian *șapte pași*, itself a literal translation of the German *Siebenschritt*. The use of the Romanian name for the dance by Hungarians in Szék suggests that the *hétlépés* likely reached the

19 That the *lassú* could be "shaken together" with two other separate dances (the *csárdás* or the *szapora lassú*) indicates, among other things, that the Hungarian word *összerázás* does not refer to a particular type of dance, but the process of dissolving a relatively slow dance into a faster one. Given this observation, it is worth reconsidering the meaning of the word as it was used in Magyarszovát, as the village's *lassú cigánytánc* could similarly be "shaken together" with either the *ritka szökös*, or, occasionally, the *ritka csárdás*.

20 The most frequently played tune was first published in 1856 in Ignác Szabadi Frank's *Margit csárdás* (Kerényi 1961:63; 214–215).

village via Romanians. Both the dance itself and the first tune played for it are of German origin (Martin 1981:255–256; Novák [1965]2000:71–72).

Because local musicians typically did not know enough tunes to accompany dances introduced so recently, they were forced to adapt melodies of different origins to the required rhythm. Szék fiddler István “Icsán” Ádám said of some of these: “These are porkák; I did all of them. I heard the Hungarians playing them when they were here in ‘41.” In other words, his sources for the tunes were either Hungarian military bands or Hungarians who had moved to Szék from Hungary in the wake of the Second Vienna Award. Of another such tune, Ádám noted: “This one’s a Romanian *szirba* [*sârba*, a chain dance]...; the schoolmistresses here in Szék used to sing it...; they were the ones who taught it, then we turned it into a porka for the boys to dance to” (Halmos [1980]2000b:417).

Born in 1925, János Csorba stated that when he was a child, “not every pár was followed by a porka” (interview, 19 December 1998). This can be interpreted to mean that even when it did happen, it was not actually part of the pár, but “came after.” While conducting field research in the 1970s and 1980s, I myself experienced on several occasions that in Szék, these two non-traditional dances had never been incorporated into the dance cycle, nor had any urban dances been worked into the local repertoire in the neighbouring parts of Mezőség. Indeed, in areas where larger numbers of such dances did appear, they frequently formed separate cycles with their own names, e.g. the *hétféle* in Felcsík, the *ceppel* in Gyergyó (Bándy and Vámszer 1937:21–54), the *aprók* in Gyimes (Kallós and Martin 1970:224), and the Romanian *ștraiere* in the Toplița area.²¹ Such



Figure 8. Urban youth dancing a Szék dance at the first Budapest tánccház, 6 May 1972. Photograph by Zoltán Szalay (fortepan.hu, no. 138787).

²¹ See magnetophone tape PI_Mg_121a, from 00:09:50 to 00:17:52, in the private collection of István Pávai. The recording was made in Marosoroszfalu on 16 October 1987.

groupings were danced only once or twice at longer events, by contrast to the cycle of older, traditional dances that was repeated many more times. The urban *táncházak*, on the other hand, were to fully incorporate the *porka-hétlépés* pairing into their cycle of Szék dances.

The declared aim of the urban *táncház* movement was to learn specific rural dance cycles so that they might be taught to urban communities as a form of entertainment. In its nascent years during the 1970s, the movement maintained close ties to scholarly folklore studies, primarily by way of György Martin, who conducted folk dance and folk music research for the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Institute for Musicology. After Martin's death in 1983, these ties became increasingly relaxed. As time went on, fewer and fewer of those organising urban dance events possessed the background knowledge necessary for reconstructing the Szék dance cycle as discussed above. In the meantime, as traditional communities disintegrated, it was becoming increasingly difficult to collect anything but fragments of their culture. To interpret these would have required serious expertise and the application of comparative methods, but opportunities to do so grew ever rarer. Indeed, many more recent revivalists have based their assertions on but a single recording, without striving to compare to other collected material or the relevant literature, or to clarify how the traditions in question were present at previous points in time. Often, reconstruction is not even an objective: instead, they develop a repertoire for their urban *táncházak* on the basis of fleeting field experiences, thinking them typical of the region in which they occurred. Clearly, reconstruction is no easy task, but with the appropriate scholarly literature and careful scrutiny of a wide range of archival records, much is still possible.

Some of the more interesting *táncház* movement interpretations arose as a result of specific official cultural endeavours, measures that would lead to the dissolution of the way village dance events were conducted. During the communist period (1945–1989), municipalities across Eastern Europe constructed community centres (“culture houses”) that boasted stages with public seating. In addition to theatrical performances and other officially organized cultural events, these facilities were also used for dances, balls, and wedding parties. As they had no rooms exclusively for the purposes of dance events, the communities in question no longer had any use for the word *táncház*, which fell out of use in due course. As time went on, its prevalence would be limited to the odd municipalities where groups continued to rent rooms in local homes for hosting dance events.

One of several aspects of Transylvanian rural life affected by the state-run community centres under communist rule was the instrumentation of the traditional dance band. Where the economic circumstances permitted, factory-made instruments were purchased to serve what amounted to the officially sanctioned socialist art forms. To perform well in cultural competitions, cultural organizers strove to build orchestras with as many members as possible. For these, they recruited virtually anyone who played an instrument, including members of the bands who worked at local dance events. In some cases, a given centre might even have funds for accordions and saxophones, an inclusion that led to a fundamental transformation of local ensemble instrumentation. It was in this way that for the purposes of dance events, the home-made “little cimbalom,” previously used to carry the melody, was gradually replaced by the factory-made pedal cimbalom. That the latter could play progressions of broken chords was a feature that radically changed the way music was made in general. In addition to the cimbalom, the traditional, home-made, two-to-three catgut-stringed, short-bowed bass was also replaced by the factory-made type with four metal strings and a more flexible bow, again with the result of an overall change in sound. Naturally, the smaller villages where budgets did not allow for such investments continued to host music played by bands of the traditional composition.

Hungarian revivalists often collected folk music from these new, non-traditional ensembles, and as they were unfamiliar with the above-described transformative processes, many of them came away with the belief that the music of these regions had always been played on pedal cimbaloms, metal-stringed basses, accordions, or saxophones. As a result, they incorporated these practices into their stage performances and urban dance events. Of course, when the musicians themselves were asked, it was discovered that in their childhoods, let alone the time of their fathers and grandfathers, there actually were no such instruments, meaning that their use was anything but traditional.

Another divergence from tradition associated with the *táncházak* of the late 20th and early 21st centuries—in this case with regard not only to the Szék cycle, but also, for example, to that of Kalotaszeg—was the shifting of the quick-paced men’s dance to immediately after the couples’ dances, so that the cycle ended not with the latter (originally the fastest piece), but with the former. Besides posing a serious test of strength for the men, this practice was contrary to the original sense of the ordering, which placed the men’s dance first for a specific cultural reason. For

people who lived in this tradition, the “message” of the men’s dance was that the girls should pay attention, as its execution placed the dancers’ masculinity, agility, and suitability as partners on clear display ahead of their pairing up for the couples’ dances. Uncoincidentally, many dance cycles of the Carpathian Basin—be they Hungarian, Romanian, or Slovak—were constructed in this same general way, with an opening men’s dance leading into a series of couples’ dances. As for the above-mentioned non-traditional ordering, revivalists likely borrowed them from choreographies designed for greater audience appeal, as frequently, the same musicians were involved in both activities, while a significant proportion of the *táncház* attendees, too, were amateur or professional stage dancers.

The 1970s Hungarian *táncház* movement initiated a process that, in its inaugural decades, radically altered the character of stage folk dance performances. At this time, Hungarian dance ensembles began to feature choreographies that attempted to reproduce the dances of various rural regions in their original forms. From the turn of the century onward, however, the process was reversed, and divergent theatrical practices began to have their effect on the original sense of the revival movement. In this writing, I would not like to characterize this cultural trend as positive or negative; rather, I have attempted to outline the most important differences between the *táncház* phenomenon’s two—i.e. rural survival and urban revival—incarnations. One of these is that in the traditional setting, dance events were organized by the youth of a particular village quarter, while the establishment of an urban *táncház* was frequently initiated by dance instructors or revival bands and conducted by various cultural players. The young people who attended the village dances formed a community: a group that worked and spent leisure time together on other ordinary and special occasions. The participants of the urban *táncház* generally gathered for the time of the dance event only. The dances performed at a rural *táncház* belonged to the community’s specific local tradition. The organizers of the urban *táncház* rarely satisfied themselves with the dances of just one region and frequently introduced the dance cycles of multiple regions at a single event.

The above notwithstanding, from a historical perspective, it is significant that for a few decades, some fraction of Hungary’s city-dwelling population attempted to follow the traditional rural cultural model in at least one of its modest aspects. For millennia, the opposite has been true, with rural populations seeking rather to imitate the model

set for them by urbanites. In the past, self-sufficient rural societies managed to create cultures of local character even with elements borrowed from urban models by gradually adapting them to traditional village life. In today's globalized social space with the accelerated pace of social change, this is no longer possible. It is for this reason that the rural táncház has disappeared even in such intensely traditional communities as was once found in Szék.

(Translated by Rachel Maltese)

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SCHOLARLY AND ARTISTIC DISCOURSE ON THE VALUES AND AESTHETICS OF FOLK MUSIC IN 20TH-CENTURY HUNGARY



Pál Richter

In current concert life in Hungary, programs based exclusively on authentic folk musical sources have become increasingly rare. However, in the early days of the *táncház* movement, Béla Halmos and Ferenc Sebő were primarily concerned with the idea that folk music should offer an aesthetic experience for modern audiences; in fact, they based their entire lifework on this very idea. Through restoring and re-learning rural folklore, they sought to present the very same aesthetic values of Hungarian and European folk music to society as Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály had done in their own art. They all pointed out that the aesthetic qualities represented by folk music were utterly different from the ones inherent in the repertoire of *magyar népies műzene* (Hungarian folksy or folk-inspired composed music, also known as *magyar nóta*), or in the practice of urban Romani musicians who cultivated it. A number of reasons account for the differences, the most important being that folk music is essentially determined on a local and micro-regional level, being used, shaped, and controlled by the oral tradition of an autochthonous community. Therefore, it shows remarkable richness in its repertoire and performing style. Bartók and Kodály, as well as others who followed in their footsteps as composers or folk music researchers, referred to these features as aesthetic values.

Exploring the aesthetic values of folk music, they examined three basic factors: (1) its musical content, including a comparative approach to musical characteristics and styles, (2) its performance style, and (3) its formative processes, cultural context, and function. In this paper, I will examine how the musicians and composers who conducted folk music research—and later, as the *táncház* movement took off, ethnographers and sociologists—commented on the three factors above, which served as the intellectual basis for the *táncház* movement.

MUSICAL CONTENT

Folk music researcher and composer Pál Járdányi, a student of Kodály's, wrote the following words about the rural-urban dichotomy as well as the relationship between music and the society of his time in 1963:

The transformation of peasant life, the dissolution of its closed character, and its increasing urbanization: this is an inevitable process. [...] For this is the way to an easier, more comfortable, more hygienic, wealthier, and more humane life; and if valuable old culture is lost in the process, so be it! If village life alters, culture will necessarily alter with it. It is a futile and idle dream to preserve the old peasant culture. On the other hand, it is true that those [ethnographers and sociologists] who have heard and hear the old folk songs in their original, true form, as well as those who felt the devotion in a village community's life, know that with the disappearance of the old culture, precious treasures fall through the sieve of time. This is why they would have preferred for the urbanizing villagers or villagers-turned-city dwellers to have gotten new treasures to replace the old ones. If they could have risen from the depths to the heights in one step.

That is not what happened. Whether it was inevitable or not, we do not know, but the musical tastes and desires (or lack thereof) of the average city dweller has spread and is spreading like an epidemic, not only among industrial workers and those who moved from the villages to the cities, but among those who have stayed in the village as well (Járdányi [1963]2000:376, translated for this article).

Therefore, the transition itself from village culture to urban culture involves tension, and according to Járdányi, results in a sort of qualitative deterioration. In addition, the two musical cultures are markedly different, since the “old folk songs” used by the village community included precious treasures, while the urban counterpart is an undemanding commodity spreading contagiously. Járdányi, like his predecessors and contemporaries, drew on ancient Greek musical aesthetics, which held that music had a social significance, as the “ethos” it conveyed had an influence on people and the right choice of music could shape personality. In this conception—notably, Plato's *kalokagathia*—musical beauty is in harmony with musical goodness, and musical practices can be divided into useful and harmful ones, according to ethical criteria. It was in the spirit of this very idea or ideal that Bartók argued against Western “trash” music—operetta hits, light music performed by salon

orchestras, Viennese *Schrammelmusik*, and jazz. So did Járdányi, too, as he consistently spoke out against the unscrupulous spread of the so-called light music of his time, which he believed served bad tendencies. Bartók wrote about this issue in 1931:

The music that is nowadays played “for money” by urban gipsy bands is nothing but [Hungarian] popular art music [*magyar népies műzene*] of recent origin. The role of this popular art music is to furnish entertainment and to satisfy the musical needs of those whose artistic sensibilities are of a low order. [It serves the same role as couplets, operetta hits, the repertoire of *Schrammel* and similar orchestras in Western European countries. We are happy to point out t]hat this Hungarian popular art music, incorrectly called gipsy music, has more value than the above-mentioned foreign trash [...], but when it is held up as something superior to so-called “light music”, when it is represented as being something more than music of a lower order destined to [amuse the tasteless, cliché-loving masses], we must raise our voices in solemn protest. [...] It is a matter for rejoicing that our light music is provided, for the most part, by this Hungarian specialty that we call popular art music [*magyar népies műzene*], and nothing is farther from our mind than to condemn gipsy musicians, the purveyors of this mass article. On the contrary, we wish them to hold fast to their position against the onslaught of the jazz and [Schrammel] orchestras; we wish that they may continue to cling to their old repertory with its original colouring and physiognomy, without the admixture of waltzes, [couplets, jazz], and what not. [...] The half-educated multitude of urban and semi-rural populations wants mass products; let us be pleased that in music at least they are partial to domestic factory articles (Bartók [1931]1976a:206–207, with corrections in brackets based on the Hungarian original).

Járdányi struck a similarly tone in the 13 April 1947 issue of daily paper *Szabad Szó*, as he criticized the position of Tibor Polgár, the Head of the Hungarian Radio’s popular music department:

According to Polgár, there is no light music and serious music, only *good* music and *bad* music. The lighter genre can produce tasteful, sophisticated works, just as the more serious genre can produce shoddy, worthless works.

We cannot accept Tibor Polgár's position. This position is not only his, but that of many others. The reason why we are taking issue with Polgár is that of all the defenders of the so-called light music, he is one of the most cultured and tasteful. We do agree with Polgár as far as we should distinguish only between good music and bad music. However, we have a significant difference of opinion as to what is good and what is bad. [...] We think, for example, that most of the music broadcast by the Hungarian Radio under the title "light music" is bad music. Most of the time it is bad even if it is elegant, imaginative, and inventive. Yes, we think it is *bad*, not because it is light and easy to grasp, but because it's determined by the soil from which it has grown. Salon music, jazz, hit songs, and (to some extent) Gypsy music, as *genres*, serve the wrong tendencies, being sensory-addicting and mind-intoxicating. [...]

We have explained more than once how the lives of the 20th-century urban population—dissolute and empty, rendered meaningless and purposeless, or becoming apathetic due to inhuman drudgery—are faithfully reflected in this sensory-addicting and mind-intoxicating pseudo-art. We read and hear of the worldwide transformations in the way of life, and when such a change occurs, it will inevitably be followed and accompanied by a transformation in the content of art. [...] And *music* has recently proved—in Hungary of all places—that it can lead the way in social development.

[...] We see the dangers of today's fashionable popular music not in its *accessibility*, but in its *shallowness*—in its being a servant to the soul's "bad tendencies" [...] (Járdányi [1947]2000:364, translated for this article).

Kodály, too, advocated Platonic principles about the quality of music and its impact:

Good music has a general educational effect on people, because it radiates a sense of responsibility and moral seriousness. Bad music lacks all this, and its destructive effect can go so far as to undermine faith in the moral law (Kodály [1956]2007:306, translated for this article).

László Dobszay, who summarized his experiences in music education in five lectures in the early 1990s, was of the same opinion.

Only by accepting lasting values shall we be liberated from our limited selves. As Kodály put it: without contact with the masterpieces "the soul languishes and shrinks." Learning is undoubtedly a cringing, a hum-

ble opening to and an assimilation of values. This requires repeated imitation and a diligence in acquiring knowledge. He who has experienced it knows very well that passive acquisition does not exist. On the contrary, the greatest activity is needed for absorbing genuine knowledge perfectly. Absorbed values in the long run will shape a really valuable personality in us and our pupils. This implies that we must accept the principle that pedagogy is above all about teaching children to acquire traditional values, in the interests of the future (Dobszay [1992]2009:21).

Values can obviously only be transmitted through valuable music. In this respect, Dobszay makes his position clear by citing an example:

A colleague of mine has recently published an article with the title: “Music is indivisible.” In it he expressed the view that the term music implied all kinds of music and that we must not discriminate against different sorts of music. We must appreciate if a pupil starts taking interest in music, irrespective of its type, as in this way he enters the realm of music. When he finds some chords on his guitar this represents a certain kind and degree of music culture. This conception reminds me of an earlier view which held that if the audience grows fond of dance music, it will lead it to operetta; if the audience listens to operetta, it will also grow fond of opera, then of symphony, string quartet, etc. Well, this “optimistic” hope has never been realized. And my colleague’s opinion goes beyond it only to the extent that he asserts: It does not matter if this hope does not come true. Dance music is also music. Well, this is the deepest pessimism in my eyes (Dobszay [1992]2009:22).

Given the quality of music’s impact on society, it follows directly that music education is of paramount importance. Kodály wrote about the purpose of teaching music:

the bulk of what we hear every day around the world—the music of everyday life, the music of human frailties—it does not even deserve to be called music. The purpose of teaching ourselves and others music cannot be other than to seek the path toward better and better music (Kodály [1944]2007: 157, translated for this article).

Based on this very idea, Dobszay sums up the essence of music pedagogy as follows:

Music education is a road to the masterpieces and the only means applied to reach it is meeting with the masterpieces. The aesthetic qualities of masterpieces may be contained in a simple children's game, a folksong, a comic opera, an oratorio or the Adagio of a string quartet. But *certain* characteristics must be present, and these must make the child awed, more aware, humble and respectful of reality. It is not the programme and the "mood" of the music that produces this effect but simply its being music in the real sense of the word. (Dobszay [1992]2009:22).

Following in the tradition of his predecessors, Dobszay also includes Hungarian folk music within the scope of value-centered assessment, for precisely these values make Hungarian folk music suitable for music education, in accordance with Kodály's concept.

The value-centered assessment of music, including folk music, can be observed throughout the 20th century among Hungarian folk music researchers. As most of them were composers and musicians with formal musical training, it was natural that they mainly focused on the nature of the music, musical characteristics, and musical interrelationships. However, besides those things, they made serious efforts to observe and describe the function of music in the community, the musical instruments, the customs, and the emic concepts. Undoubtedly it was through music-based systematization and comparative historical and ethnic studies that Hungarian research became one of the leading centers of international ethnomusicology in the late 1950s and the 1960s. Yet it is partly for the same reasons that its weight, importance, and presence on the discipline's international stage declined during the last third of the century. As the dominant anthropological approach refused to deal with the content of music, any reference to quality, let alone artistic value, became obsolete, superfluous, and—in some settings—undesirable.

Dobszay asks and answers the question, albeit a little shyly, of what it was about folk music that captivated Kodály. At the same time, citing his great predecessors, Dobszay immediately emphasizes that folk music is not uniform in terms of artistic and musical value:

[Kodály] was captivated with one single quality that shines through every utterance he made about folksongs and this is—however banal it may sound—their beauty. But is every folksong beautiful merely on the basis of its being a folk tune, or its being sung by the people? Not at all. Both Kodály and his great contemporary, Bartók were stunned to find

that a very great percentage of what the people sang was worthless music (Dobszay [1992]2009:13).

Kodály himself saw a connection between old Hungarian melodies and the survival of the nation. In contrast to the culture of “weeping merriment” (*sírva vigadás*), expressing the frustrations of the Hungarian upper classes since the 1850s through the sentimentalism connected with enjoying the music of urban Romani bands, the folk song meant for him life, energy, and a compositional project:

If we want to assume a common destiny with our people—as we must do, if we want to live as a nation—then we must get to know and sing the whole village song repertoire which is still alive today, including the oldest to the newest. This is not a sacrifice but only a gain, as there are beautiful ones among them. [...] To sustain the unbroken, ancient Hungarian spirit as expressed in the old melodies, and to rejuvenate it when it has languished: the whole task of the survival of Hungarians can be condensed into this (Kodály [1935]2007:54–55, translated for this article).

In another article, Kodály wrote about the artistic value of folk song:

As far as monophonic music is concerned, Hungarian folk song is among the finest examples. [...] A Hungarian folk song and a Beethovenian theme are brothers worthy of each other. The unknown composers of the folk song were also geniuses; the entire life’s work of some of them may consist of a single song. [...] Hungarian folk song is Hungarian classical music par excellence (Kodály [1929]2007:34–35).

Bartók formulated his aesthetic credo concerning folk music in the narrow sense (melodies that belong to a specific folk style, both old and new) in strikingly similar terms:

According to the way I feel, a genuine peasant melody of our land is a musical example of a perfected art. I consider it quite as much a masterpiece, for instance, in miniature, as a Bach fugue or a Mozart sonata movement is a masterpiece in larger form. A melody of this kind is a classic example of the expression of a musical thought in its most conceivably concise form, with the avoidance of all that is superfluous [...] all that is incidental is entirely missing—we have only what is fundamentally essential. [...] from this music we have learned how best

to employ terseness of expression, the utmost excision of all that is non-essential—and it was this very thing, after the excessive grandiloquence of the Romantic Period, which we thirsted to learn (Bartók [1928]1976:333).

In a lecture Bartók read in 1931, he stated in a similar fashion:

The right type of peasant music is most varied and perfect in its forms. Its expressive power is amazing, and at the same time it is devoid of all sentimentality and superfluous ornaments. It is simple, sometimes primitive, but never silly (Bartók [1931]1976b:341).

In other words, folk music provided a remarkably concise and unpretentious musical expression, which was completely different from the aesthetic of the Romantic period. The opinion that “all that is incidental is entirely missing” is, of course, somewhat contradicted by the rich ornamentation found in the folk music of certain regions, but the structure, the melodic strophes usually consisting of four lines, are indeed of miniature scale when compared to the great forms of Western music.

In the 19th century, the communal creative force embodied in folk music could still find its expression in “new style” Hungarian folk songs, which are of comparable value to those of the old style, as László Lajtha emphasized:

As the days of folk music were fading for good in the West, as there was nothing worthwhile left in that respect, then the Hungarian people, melding, as it had always done, all the different influences, created a new style of music. This is a shining and unprecedented testimony of their artistic creativity. New style Hungarian folk music is equally beautiful, true, and Hungarian (Lajtha [1927]2021:50, translated for this article).

Bartók considered each of the large blocks of Hungarian folk music—which he called the old style and the new style, respectively—to be unified styles. The old style layer is defined by the pentatonic scale and descending melodic contours, the second half of a strophe often a fifth lower than the first half, while new style melodies have a vaulted contour, and the first and last lines are musically identical. However, the melodies of these uniform styles are not formulaic: each has a multitude of tune types, which are in turn often richly varied. In contrast, *magyar népies műzene* consists of individual, composed melodies, created by

amateur, or at best somewhat skilled, middle-class musicians. Even if they tried to reproduce certain characteristics of folk music, they primarily worked with the clichés of Western art music, and consequently, the results in most cases were unsuitable for variation in the traditional folk practice; they were performed in essentially the same way throughout the Hungarian language area, a uniformity often strengthened by the standard performing style of the urban Romani musicians. For Bartók, the superiority of folk music is inherent in the diversity within its unified styles:

the significance and importance of Hungarian peasant song [in the narrow sense] within the body of Hungarian folk music [in a wider sense] is considerably greater than those of popular art song, not only from the numerical point of view—there are some 10,000 collected peasant songs as against about 1,500 urban popular songs—but even more because of its content. The ten thousand peasant songs are divided into about 2,600 groups of variants, whereas the 1,500 urban songs do not show variants of any importance. The intrinsic value of the peasant songs, whether from the point of view of aesthetics or from that of national significance, is incomparably superior to the intrinsic value of the popular art song. [...]

It is disconcerting [...] to observe how musical artists and writers in high positions endeavour to endow this popular music with the attributes of a serious and superior art. In so doing they value it [...] above really serious Hungarian music of a higher order. We refer to Hungarian peasant music. [...]

As a matter of fact, we [i.e. Hungarian scholars of musical folklore] consider ourselves scientists not unlike the researchers in the natural sciences, for we choose for our subject of investigation a certain product of nature, peasant music. [...] They [i.e. the cultural products of the peasant class] can be considered products of nature because their most characteristic trait, the formation of pregnantly unified styles, can be explained solely by the instinctive faculty of variation in a like manner of large masses living in a spiritual kinship. This faculty for variation is nothing short of a natural force. When we speak of peasant music in the more restricted sense of the word, we are thinking precisely of the components of these unified styles. And this—a certain unified style—is the very quality that is missing from Hungarian popular art music; it is by the lack of this quality that popular art music can be differentiated from peasant music (Bartók [1931]1976b: 208, 207, 221).

Lajtha also stressed the less valuable nature of *magyar népies műzene*:

nowadays commonly referred to as *magyar nóta*, it became popular among the upper social classes by the mid-19th century. The value of such pieces of music depends on the musicality and talent of their composers. A great many of them were song inserts in folk plays [*népszínmű, Volksschauspiel*]. The decadence of this genre became undeniable at the end of the 19th century. In general, it can be said that the closer such a song is to Hungarian peasant music, to genuine folk music, the better it is (Lajtha [1962]2021:421, translated for this article).

Kodály carefully examined the issue of *magyar népies műzene* versus Hungarian folk music. In the foreword to the German edition of his definitive study on Hungarian folk music (1956), he wrote:

It is completely wrong [...] to call the music the Gypsy musicians have played since around 1850 simply “Gypsy music”. The authors of most of these pieces are demonstrably not Gypsies, but Hungarians; and the small number of Gypsy composers have adapted perfectly to the style created by Hungarians. This music, which you can find in printed form, is by its origin and nature urban art music; it has nothing to do with the “ancient tradition” and the like. However, there is no doubt that it was spread by oral tradition: the Gypsies, who played it without sheet music, as well as the musically illiterate masses who sang it, made this music the common knowledge of the average Hungarians. Especially in the cities—although much of it found its way into the villages as well. Thus, superficial observers could easily mistake it for folk songs. [...]

Thus, the style of the well-known Hungarian popular music was essentially formed in the middle of the 19th century. Its rhythmic characteristics can be derived from speech and dance. Its melodic material is a new formation, sprouted from old roots with certain Western European influences. It has only one characteristic feature which points to a South-Eastern (Arabic) origin: the so-called Gypsy scale, which may or may not have reached Hungary via Gypsy transmission. The Gypsies “color” the folk songs with the augmented seconds of this scale (because they do play actual folk songs sometimes), but these melodies are always sung by the folk without these alterations. In this respect, these songs are falsified by the way the Gypsies perform them (Kodály [1956]2007:393, translated for this article).

He also kept in mind how *magyar népies műzene* was rooted in the *verbunkos*, a Hungarian musical style (*style hongrois*) which had emerged at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, and, being inspired by Western art music, won the approval of its contemporaries, and became a decisive factor in the sense of identity of the community that considered itself Hungarian. He commented on the 19th-century popular art songs, which were born out of this musicality, as follows:

There is no doubt: this was the first mass appearance of a clearly Hungarian popular music, which is perceived as such up until our days (Kodály [1939]2007:242).

At the same time, Kodály spoke out regularly to ensure that the difference between folk music and *magyar népies műzene*—that they are two different genres in terms of their musical content and history—was as widely known as possible, both in Hungary and abroad:

For many people even today, “Hungarian folk song” and “Gypsy music” are one and the same; the concept of folk-inspired composed song [*népies műdal*] is confused with that of [village] folk song. Yet all the music presented to radio listeners as “Hungarian folk songs” or (since Sarasate) “Gypsy songs” as performed by Gypsy bands or in other popular arrangements—this has been the basis of the public perception of “Hungarian music” for over a century by now—has little or nothing to do with actual Hungarian folk music (Kodály [1956]2007:392).

However, many melodies of art music origin—for example, most tunes of the *verbunk* and other men’s dances, or songs connected to specific folk customs—found their way into folk tradition and took root in it. Some appeared in the repertoire of both urban Romani bands and village bands at the same time. The musical features of these melodies fundamentally differ from those of the autochthonous Hungarian styles; consequently, their aesthetic evaluation should take into account the particular period of the art music from which they originated. Of course, we must bear in mind that these tunes were *folklorized*, meaning they were transmitted orally within a given community for a sufficiently long period (at least two or three generations), and thus have acculturated into that musical tradition and musically and practically became part of the community musical culture. During this process of organic integration into the folk music tradition, the melodies inevitably undergo

minor or major changes. In most cases, the outcome, meaning the folklorized version, will be aesthetically enriched compared to the original form.

PERFORMANCE STYLE

Performance style plays a crucial role in the aesthetic perception of folk music, as László Lajtha describes best:

It is clear [...] that the role of the village culture bearer is great and meaningful. It is true that he/she is never the composer of the melody; on the other hand, he/she is always re-creating it. [...]

The extraordinary importance of the performer thus entails that the performance style is an almost more important component of the folk song than its actual melody. Someone who has never heard a folk song sung in a village cannot imagine from the transcription what it really sounds like. [...]

The distinctive character of the ancient performing style—including the free speech rhythm, the older intonation, the rich ornamentation, etc.—can be applied by a good folk singer to a melody insignificant from a folklore perspective, or even a composed song. In those cases, it is not the melody that is valuable, but its performance. From an ethnographic point of view, the most desirable case is when a valuable melody comes with an equally valuable performance. However, these two elements are not always in perfect balance nor are they present to the same degree in a peasant singer or musician's performance. Therefore, each of these elements must be subjected to separate scholarly examination (Lajtha [1938]2021:160, translated for this article).

Similarly to Lajtha, Kodály also emphasizes the richness of vocal performance when speaking about the impoverishment of ornamentation due to the influence of *népies műzene*:

We are forced to the conclusion that vocal standards of folk singing have greatly declined: a hundred years ago it would have been usual to hear beautifully ornamented, melismatic singing, not only from individuals, but from groups as well; by 1910, it had become rare to hear such singing, even from old people. The taste for simplification revolted against the more complex style of performance, and singing sank to a more

primitive level. [...] Another difference is that performance has lost something of its emotional power and lyric warmth. In the tame syllabic songs of today, scarcely differing in tone from ordinary conversation, there is far less lyrical fervour than, for instance, in the highly-ornamented, melismatic outpourings of an old Székely's complaint. Particularly in Transylvania, the old people sang with much variety of vocal timbre, under the pressure of emotions both solemn and gay, using a different tone from that of everyday conversation, and a different position of the larynx (Kodály [1937]1971:75).

Fortunately, more emotionally-charged and ornamented singing has not been completely lost from the tradition, as attested by the post-World War II collections which are of better quality than earlier ones. Excellent singers and instrumentalists not only from Transylvania but also from other parts of the Hungarian language area came to the attention of collectors. After World War II, research into vocal and instrumental performance practices began, as Lajtha had already articulated in his 1938 article quoted above. By the end of the beginning of the 21st century, in addition to the classification of song types and musical layers, a comprehensive overview of the performance styles had also been carried out. The latter was greatly assisted and inspired by the *táncház* movement after 1972.

Kodály emphasizes the richness in vocal timbre, the unique vocal technique, and the use of ornaments preserved in Transylvanian folk singing. Subsequent research has demonstrated similar phenomena in all parts of the Hungarian language area. Katalin Paksa, who has done extensive research on Hungarian folk song ornamentation, writes.—in connection with one singer from the Northern Great Plain.—about herdsmen in general:

They tend to vary their songs more frequently and more boldly, they freely ornament in regions where the villagers no longer do, and their tone is open and full of emotion. Their characteristic “toolbox”—which includes changes in the volume, dynamics, sudden accents, short pauses, and sometimes hiccup-like effects—enables them to directly express their individual emotions (Paksa 2014:112, translated for this article).

In the case of a Transdanubian herdsman, Paksa gives a detailed description of the ornamentation:

The unusually large volume changes in [István Csirke's] singing could only be captured by our simple magnetic tape recorder in a distorted way. The most distinctive features of his delivery are the dynamic changes, the crescendos and decrescendos which largely follow the melodic line, with higher notes sung *forte* and lower ones *piano*. His ornaments at the beginning of the melodic lines, often ascending above the core melody note, match or even exceed the dynamic intensity of the main notes. Thus, the ornaments, which are usually softer than the main notes, gain a greater importance in his performance, adding personality and dramatic power (Paksa 2014:112, translated for this article).

The richness of variations and improvisational elements is also one of the most important differences between the playing style of urban and rural Romani string bands:

There is a big difference between the Gypsies playing in big city restaurants, most of whom can read music, and the small village bands who can't read music and play for peasants living in villages far from cities, who could barely read and write until recently. That is why today's urban Gypsy bands must be separated from the rural ones. Many of the former play stereotypical works of sappy sentimentalism by amateur composers. Most of the "*lassú*" pieces are of this kind. Their "*csárdás*" pieces imitate the new style of Hungarian folk music. Like all imitations, these too lack the freshness, inventiveness, and rich variety of the original (Lajtha [1962]2021:420–421, translated for this article).

Lajtha's statement is entirely consistent with Bartók's and Kodály's views on Romani musicians. As early as 1931, Bartók mentioned different characters in connection with Gypsy performances:

Even the much vaunted performance of the gypsies is lacking in uniform character. The simple rural gypsy plays in a manner entirely different from his urban cousin's. To mention a few examples, in the poor Rumanian villages of the County of Maramureş music-making has passed from the hands of the native peasant bagpipers into those of the gypsies. Most of these gypsies fiddle the repertory they inherited from the pipers in a genuine peasant style, and one would look here in vain for augmented seconds [...] or distorted rhythms. In the County of Bihor the gypsy fiddlers play with the same simplicity as their Rumanian peasant

colleagues, and the same is true of the gypsies who live in the villages of the Hungarian backwoods (Bartók [1931]1976a:222).

Kodály also draws attention to the rhythmic profile as well as to the possibly archaic nature of ornamentation, within the instrumental performances:

Even the best Gypsy is a half-artist, being really in his element when he plays half-art. One can hardly perform Hungarian dance music better than he does. The rhythmic tradition of the Hungarian performing style is in full bloom here. However, the same no longer applies to the slow, emotional songs [...]. There are very few fiddlers today who can produce the noble, heroic tone for a *lassú* [slow piece] for which Bihari [famous Romani fiddler and composer in the early 19th century] was praised by his contemporaries (Kodály [1939]2007:257, translated for this article).

The gypsies' flourishes, so often reviled, are to some extent the remains of this ancient ornamental art [i.e. the richly ornamented vocal performance style]. More useful than the current criticism, or past enthusiasm, would have been to transcribe accurately tunes precisely as played by eminent gypsies (Kodály [1925]1974:26).

Recent research has also pointed out differences in the use of ornamentation and improvised elements in urban and rural string performance, respectively:

The playing of the urban fiddlers may be more refined and sophisticated, their bowing technique more virtuosic, but they know very little of the archaic and richly ornamented style of their rural colleagues. Although they consciously elaborate figured variations for a tune, their ability of variation lags behind rural fiddlers' spontaneous figurations, which result in ever different variations for each repetition. In general, the improvisation skill of urban Romani musicians is lower than that of the rural ones. Since the tunes received from "above," e.g. from operettas or urban dance music, tend to be relatively uniform, as they are spread through sheet music or recordings, the mere intention to reproduce them exactly, even if unsuccessful, will narrow the opportunity for improvisation. Of course, it is still present in the playing of the urban musicians to some extent (Pávai [2012]2020:79).

As in repertoire, in performance practice there was also an overlap and crossover between the two groups of musicians, both of whom were considered to be professional:

In reality, the divide between urban and rural musicians is not [...] sharp. In Transylvanian towns, there were Romani musical dynasties whose members would frequently be hired, even far back in time, to play in villages, knowing the local customs; at the same time, they could satisfy the taste of the townsfolk in restaurants. [...] Such musicians usually knew both styles, though not at the same level in most cases (Pávai [2012]2020:80).

Bartók and Kodály were familiar with the performance styles of both urban and rural Romani bands, and their experience of both performance styles proved to be decisive for the composition of their works based on folk music or *népies műzene*: these compositions evoke the same gestures, accents, breaths, and moods. As the Hungarian folk music repertoire borrowed many melodies from art music in different periods, performance style seems to be the decisive component in the aesthetics of folk music. It is no coincidence that at the beginning of the *táncház* movement it was precisely the performance style that raised the doubts of renowned folk music researchers: can those who were not born into the tradition perform folk music in an authentic manner? From the very beginning, Bálint Sárosi was severely critical of the urban youths who became folk musicians, and as someone who had grown up himself in a Transylvanian village, he instinctively abhorred “faux-peasantry.” With his outspoken style, Sárosi did much to help the movement as it became increasingly widespread over the decades. Thanks to his background, he knew exactly the meaning of community singing, the technique and performance skills required for folk singing, and the importance of talent:

Singing folk songs only requires a small amount of knowledge, but that little that represents the bare minimum of acceptability must be known and felt in a nuanced way by anyone who wants to perform in front of an audience. What goes above and beyond that is always the work of the few: the talented. Fortunately, some such individuals exist (Sárosi 2015:138–139, translated for this article).

CONTEXT AND FUNCTION

Both Kodály and Bartók considered direct personal contact and experience of the community tradition on an emotional and social level of paramount importance for an ideal immersion in folk music aesthetics. They repeatedly emphasized that they considered it indispensable for the assessment of the artistic value of the folk songs, for the creation of folk song arrangements, and for scientific research:

The effects of peasant music cannot be deep and permanent unless this music is studied in the country as part of a life shared with the peasants (Bartók [1931]1976b:341).

In order to really feel the vitality of this music, one must have lived it, so to speak—and this is only possible when one comes to know it through direct contact with the peasants. In order to be taken by the full power of this music, [...] it is not enough to merely learn the melodies. It is just as important, [...] to see and get to know the environment in which these melodies live. One must have witnessed the peasants' facial expressions as they sing, one must have partaken in their dance parties, their weddings and Christmas festivities, and their funerals [...] Our job was to feel the spirit of this hitherto unknown music and to make that spirit—so difficult to describe in words—the basis of our works (Bartók [1928]1976:332–333).

A scholarly, data-gathering approach to “getting to know” this material isn't enough [...] One must become personally involved with the tradition and thus with the emotional life of a group of people. Only in this way can we gain access to what cannot be transmitted in any other way than person-to-person, face-to-face. [...] the Hungarian music historian must first be a folklorist. He cannot examine our written sources, if he does not have personal experience with the folk music tradition. One cannot acquire such knowledge without living in a village for shorter or a longer period of time (Kodály [1933]2007:232, translated for this article).

The simultaneously artistic and socio-cultural experience that Kodály, Bartók, and the later collectors had in the village environment is focused on “the spontaneous and instinctive expression” (Lajtha [1938]2021:159) of the individuals perfectly and harmoniously manifesting themselves in the community creation. This has such a powerful impact that the existential function of belonging to a community and the identity of

the individual embodied in the community become indisputable. This impact may have led Kodály to elevate folk music beyond its obvious musical values to a defining identity factor in Hungarian society, and to declare it as a fundamental element of Hungarian education and urban culture:

Let us show singing, ringing Hungary to urban children! They hardly know that they live here. Let them feel that the “motherland” is not the few, inane platitudes they are made to sing but buoyant life, healing warmth, a colourful virgin forest to which they can cling with a thousand feelers. Then they will be really at home. What rural children have preserved of ancient traditions should be the urban children’s encouragement and model. As we have seen, they can find themselves in this element at once. On the lips of Budapest children Hungarian songs resound with the same victorious assurance as in villages (Kodály [1929]1974:126).

Interestingly, it was not within the public education system or the officially supervised cultural environment that Kodály’s initiative really came to fruition, but rather in the *táncház* movement, a grassroots counterculture. Although the one-party dictatorship of the 1970s did not support civic initiatives, in this case a ban did not come about, because the party’s cultural politicians as well as representatives of folk music research and ethnography fought their battles over the *táncház*. The journal *Tiszatáj*, held under constant surveillance and considered a hotbed of nationalist opposition, became one of the locations of these battles. Ethnomusicologist Lajos Vargyas, ethnographer and cultural historian László Kósa, as well as sociologist and politician Iván Vitányi, member of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party and director of the Institute for Public Education (Népművelési Intézet) took up their pens and repeatedly made their voices heard in favor of the *táncház* as a new form of public education for the youth. In September 1974, Vargyas wrote in *Tiszatáj*:

Young people suddenly realized that everything they liked about modern dances—the primal power of the rhythmic movement [...]—could be found in folk dance, but in more aesthetic, elevated, refined forms. That is, it suddenly became clear that folk music and folk dance is “modern” and capable of expressing the feelings of today’s youth (Vargyas 1974:46, translated for this article).

In response to the resistance and fears expressed by some, he continued:

Our contemporaries who are still prone to suspicion think they detect the specter of nationalism as soon as a national trait comes into discussion. As if there is a straight line from folk song to fascism [...] Yet, back then, the devotees of folk song did not increase the fascist camp, but the opposition to fascism. [...] But the present day also disproves these concerns: today's young enthusiasts of folk song and folk dance come from various ethnic and class backgrounds. [...] They find joy in it, because it enriches their human individuality. And perhaps it's not chauvinism, but rather natural, that young Hungarians are happy if something nice, something they like, happens to be Hungarian? (Vargyas 1974:48, translated for this article).

In the same issue of *Tiszatáj*, László Kósa placed *táncház* in a broader socio-cultural context as the latest manifestation of folklorism. He offers a long analysis of social trends, sudden industrialization, and the characteristics and consequences of the rural population moving to the cities. He emphatically addresses the concerns about nationalism, seeking to dampen the impact of this culture on community identity.

Some sceptics are troubled by the current interest in folklore [i.e. *táncház*] because they are afraid that it might revive nationalism. [...] The love of folk culture is not nationalism. The folk trend is a European phenomenon that in Hungary and in every other country is primarily linked to its own past and its own folklore as defined by its native tongue. At the same time, it is open toward other peoples. [...] Young people do not prefer the *táncház* because they want to worship Hungarian peasant dances out of some kind of national exuberance or nostalgia, but because these dances [...] entertain and move, like any Western ballroom dance does. In addition to the *lassú*, *négyes*, and *csárdás* dances [of Szék], Greek, Romanian, and Bulgarian dances are danced, too. [...] It is natural that the primary attraction of Hungarians to the treasures of the Hungarian folk tradition, which is just like the attachment to the mother tongue, is not an offence against anyone (Kósa 1974:42-43, translated for this article).

In addition, Kósa perfectly formulated the idea that the *táncház* movement engaged in folk culture with a new approach and fresh energy,

which brought the artistic and aesthetic values of folk music and folk dance to the fore:

[The *táncház* movement] has undoubtedly refreshed [urban practices of] folk singing with its fashion of archaic Hungarian musical dialects like Transdanubia, *Mezőség*, and the *Csángó* regions, which were previously little known to the wider audiences. With its young performers, the movement promises the emergence of a new performing style. It adheres more closely to the practices found in folk culture than earlier [revival] efforts did, but not rigidly so. It strives for a natural performance style, but without a conservative inclination—it considers folklore not as an archival but rather as a living material that can be cultivated and made to flourish according to its own laws. It focuses on the aspect of oral tradition that it lives in variants, that it is not a closed entity, but an open one, capable of further development. For example, [...] folk dances are not staged with strict choreography and precisely determined steps, but in a looser way, leaving room for variation and improvisation. [...]

These attempts are a radical departure from the earlier attempts to keep folk culture alive in the 1930s or 1950s by sticking to the traditional frameworks and forms, but also from those present-day [1970s] interpretation of folklore which we might describe as traditional, as they present folk art only in [stage] productions for a passive audience. In the avant-garde initiatives, however, the aim is to develop a new, interactive form of public culture in music, dance, song, and crafts, encouraging people to truly participate. As one of the entertainment options for young people, the *táncház* has achieved this goal (Kósa 1974:41–42, translated for this article).

Iván Vitányi gave lectures at the *Sebő* ensemble's evenings held at the *Kassák* club. Vitányi justified the *raison d'être* of *táncház* using a dialectical reasoning common in the Marxist discourse of the period, according to which the more revolutionary a phenomenon is, the more it is rooted in the distant past:

The wonderful thing about looking for something new is that one can never invent something new. So if you are looking for something new in physics, mathematics, or anything, you will always need a catalyst. And in general, the catalyst can only be taken from the old. [...] When Bartók wanted to transcend the major-minor music inherited from his predecessors, he wanted to do something new. To be able to do so, he

had to go back to the old, because the old was the catalyst out of which he was able to create something new. [...] A greater past means a greater future. We can only go farther forward if we reach back deeper. [...] Therefore when we turn not just to folk art, but to the old style of folk art in particular, I think that really meets the public demand. The point of this is not to turn to the past peasant culture, but that this is artistic raw material which has proven in ten thousand years that it can belong to everyone. [...] Folk art must be used in a different function today than it was used by the peasants; their world is gone for good. But I can still sing a folk song, just as I can read Homer and I may like it [...] I can do anything, so I can build on folk art just like on anything else (quoted by Siklós [1977]2006:115–116, translated for this article).

A similar opinion was expressed by Dénes Zoltai, head of the Department for Aesthetics at Budapest University, who commented on the discussion “Workers’ Song, Mass Song, and Táncház,” published in 1975:

small, closed collectives exist today, and may also be formed in the future, which revive ancient elements for the internally meaningful self-expression of their own members and integrate these ancient elements spontaneously into our contemporary artistic consciousness. This is not to deny that spontaneity can always lead to a dead end of gloomy pseudo-communities where nationalist overtones can be heard [...]. I would just like to point out: I know several táncház clubs, and wherever I’ve gone, even if I strained my ears, I did not perceive such overtones (Juhász 1975:5, translated for this article).

On the surface, the sociological, aesthetic, and technical analyses and conclusions of the theoreticians were in perfect harmony with the contemporary and retrospective statements of the musicians, dancers, and visitors of the táncházak. Namely, the participants of the táncház movement turned to this particular culture because they felt the sounds, rhythms, and dances to be exciting, dynamic, powerful, and archaic—and yet novel to them, rather than experiencing it as some kind of affirmation of national identity. What the analysts omitted was that the movement did create an urban subculture identity based on folk culture. Even in a different social and cultural environment, the folk dances and music had a community-organizing effect, with a very strong sense of solidarity with the Hungarians living in Transylvania and beyond the borders of Hungary in general, and an underlying sense of ethnic unity

behind it. Of course, the above-quoted researchers and folklorists as well as the participants in the movement themselves were wise enough to keep silent about this aspect.

However, a few years after the beginning of the movement, there was not yet data or experience with the long-term adoption and use of folk culture in a context other than its own. From an aesthetic point of view, the nature of folk music's existence and its role in the community represent an utterly complex issue; even now we cannot attempt to model it with complete certainty and responsibility. What we do know for sure is that both the creation and the active use of this culture in its original context took place under the "supervision" of the community concerned. László Kósa rightly mentions the existence of variations and constant changes as the essence of this culture; but all this happened with the approval and constant confirmation of the socio-cultural community of traditional peasant societies. In an urban environment, the changes in the cultural elements, the innovations, and often even the variants, can be attributed to particular persons—and those changes are not approved by anyone, as the kind of homogenous community that existed in the autochthonous village environment cannot emerge in an urban environment characterized by diversity and turbulent fashion waves.

CONCLUSION

Owing to the *táncház* movement and the folk music research of the last 120 years, we now know and use a culture, but in the absence of the oral tradition and the communal "quality control", we are unable to sustain it organically at its previous level. We can probably only keep it alive in a similar manner to how we handle art music of earlier times, which as Sárosi put it, is a major creative task:

it is only through a creative approach that one can properly reproduce—perform—the sounds of music, the words of a poem, or a dramatic work. The performer must have a talent similar to that of the composer in order to make the work sound as the composer intended (Sárosi 2012:8, translated for this article).

In fact, any space that is involved in the teaching and dissemination of folk music today should aim at mastering this creative performance practice at the highest level, since it is not possible to recreate the type

of creative community that produced, used, and sustained folk music, ensuring the appearance of variations and innovations.¹ Traditional folk music is similar to biodiversity and, in this sense, any kind of uniform music-making based on templates and clichéd stylistic features (often by amateurs) or conforming to rapidly changing fashions inherently is a monoculture. The same applies to folk crossover, which in most cases does not even attempt to match various musical aesthetics in order to create a style, but simply throws them together and mixes them into a stereotypical musical “sauce”. This is certainly not a development of folk culture, as described by Kósa, and according to Bartók’s view, it is fundamentally contrary with art itself:

In conclusion, let me add that internationalism is not only unthinkable, but also detrimental to music and all other arts. Music and its sister arts must always reflect the character of their respective regions and environments. This is the source of diversity, both in art and in life (Bartók [1928]1989:137, critical note 9, translated for this article).

Of course, one cannot raise any objections against individual musical creation and composition, but one can be concerned about the underlying ideology as well as the lack of training and background in the field. The final product, like all compositions in general, is of course highly dependent on musical talent, because folk music materials provide only a possibility for performance and composition. It is not a trademark of quality, whether the given piece is labeled as world music, fusion music, Balkan magic, and so forth. Here again, we must rely on Bartók’s wisdom:

In the hands of incompetent composers neither folk music nor any other musical material will ever attain significance. If a composer has no talent, it will be of no use to him to base his music on folk music or any other music. The result will in every case be nothing (Bartók [1931]1976c:347).

1 This is also true of the Liszt Academy of Music, the highest level of music education in Hungary, where the folk music degree program was launched in 2007. The latest efforts there are unfortunately geared towards individual fulfilment under the guise of catchy and fashionable slogans (creative musical workshop, etc.).

In other words, musicians must remain within the prevailing boundaries of musical good taste, bearing in mind the aesthetics of folk music. Feeling and knowing what good taste is in a given context partly depends on education, but more so on talent.

(Translated by István-Csaba Németh)

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TRADITIONAL CULTURE AS PERSONAL INSPIRATION FOR THE TÁNCHÁZ MOVEMENT



Anna Székely

Throughout history, societies have placed folk culture at the center of interest in various movements and ideologies (Kósa 1974:38). In Hungary, three major waves of folk art revival occurred in the 1930s, 1950s, and 1970s (Diószegi 2008). During the mid-20th century, many young people moved from rural areas to urban-industrial centers for work or study, which contributed to the erosion of traditional village culture. By the 1970s, Hungarian society had undergone significant transformations due to processes of modernization and urbanization (Balogh-Fülemile 2008:47). Village dance traditions survived only in a few places, and the urban youth, distanced from rural life, began reconnecting with its values (Martin 1980:109). A pivotal moment was when a group of young urban intellectuals, members of Budapest folk dance ensembles, visited Szék (Sic, Romania), experiencing the living folk culture of the *táncház*.¹ This encounter inspired the 1970s *táncház* movement, a new wave of urban folk art revival.

This paper introduces the direct antecedents of the *táncház* revival, focusing on personal experiences of its pioneers with traditional culture and how these encounters influenced the urban folk art movement.² I discuss the first Budapest *táncház* event and the role of village tradition bearers, often referred to as *adatközlők* (lit. “informants”, as they provided the information for the collectors) in the movement.

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- 1 On the use of the term “*táncház*” in traditional folk culture, see István Pávai’s study in this volume.
 - 2 This study was also published in Hungarian (Székely 2024). This English version contains its essential results. The research was carried out in the framework of the OTKA (SNN_21) project “In New Disguise: Changes in the Traditional Music and Dance Culture in Hungary and Around”. The study was funded by the Ryochi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund.

The research methods include source analysis and a personal interview. In addition to academic literature on the folk art revival, numerous newspaper articles and interview volumes document the *táncház* movement's history, ideology, and participants' perspectives on traditional folk culture. Complementing the discourse analysis, I conducted an in-depth interview with Lajos Lelkes, exploring his memories as one of the organizers of the first Budapest *táncház*, and the significance of experiencing living traditions firsthand.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE TÁNCHÁZ MOVEMENT

The direct antecedent of the first urban *táncház* was the *Néptáncosok Klubja* (Folk Dancers' Club), founded in 1964, with members of the larger Budapest folk dance ensembles. The club was located in the city center and was active for approximately one year. According to Lajos Lelkes, one of the organizers, it was a casual get-together for folk dancers and a way to spend time together outside of rehearsals and stage performances. They invited researchers such as György Martin to give lectures about ethnography and folk dances, and to show samples of their fieldwork collections, at their events. As Lelkes recollects, the participants were not drawn by the academic lectures as much as by dancing and spending time together:

But the folk dancers weren't interested in that.... we had a party, they came to Akácfa Street [the group's rehearsal venue], they brought some beer, and then rock and roll and dancing the twist started" (Lajos Lelkes, interview, 13 June 2022).³

Later, in 1971, a few members of the Bartók Dance Ensemble traveled to Transylvania for a trip with their choreographer Ferenc Novák—widely known by his nickname “Tata”, meaning “Dad” or “Old Man”—where they participated in a traditionally organized *táncház* in Szék, which left a lasting impression on them (Molnár 2005; Jávorszky 2013; Novák 2016). According to Lelkes, the revival dancers were surprised to see that the villagers still wore traditional clothing, and that the *táncház* was attended by young people freely dancing their traditional dances. Another interesting phenomenon that the revivalists observed was that

3 The quotes from the interviewees and used sources are translations by the author.

the young people of Szék attended the dance as a fun pastime. By joining them, the urban dancers had a new experience with dance.

This was the first time we had tried this. We didn't have to dance to choreography, we didn't have to dance on stage, we didn't have to dress up, we didn't have to smile during dance like at a show (Lajos Lelkes, interview, 13 June 2022).

Upon returning to Hungary, the ensemble dancers decided to organize their own private event for the Budapest dance ensembles similar to the one they had attended in Transylvania (Molnár 2005). Based on their experiences, they came up with the idea of adopting the táncház model in the city (see also Taylor 2021:126), with the initial goal of passing on the experience they had had to the members of the urban folk ensembles. Three revival dancers took on organizing it, and they distributed the tasks among themselves. The event required live music and sufficient dance knowledge so that the participants could dance in an improvised, spontaneous manner. For the music, Jolán Foltin invited Béla Halmos and Ferenc Sebő, university students who had played folk music on the televised folk music competition “Röpülj páva” (Fly, Peacock), and who had been playing at the rehearsals for the Bartók Folk Dance Ensemble. Another organizer, Antal Stoller “Huba” was in charge of teaching the couple's and men's dances of Szék. The complete or partial adaptation of the various elements and length of the dance cycle was an essential issue. At that time, the urban folklore ensembles only presented choreographies arranging a folk custom or a single dance on stage. However, the dancers agreed to break with this practice, and they included the entire village dance cycle in the city táncház. Finally, the location also had to be secured. The organizers did not want to hold the event in a rehearsal hall or cultural center. They managed to rent a club room and obtained the necessary permits required under the political circumstances. After all the preparations, the first, but not yet public, urban táncház was held on 6 May 1972 for the dancers of the larger ensembles in Budapest (Jávorszky 2013:52–55).

According to the text of the event's invitation, the occasion provided an opportunity to practice the “original social dance” character of folk dancing, in other words, to bring the dance off the stage (Sándor 2006; Jávorszky 2013; Taylor 2021:111). The organizers wanted to recreate the atmosphere they had experienced in Szék, so they displayed enlarged photos taken by Péter Korniss in the village. The dancers dressed in

traditional clothing and welcomed attendees with *pálinka* (fruit brandy), just as had happened with them in the village. The first urban *tánc ház* in May was followed by two other private occasions in June and October. In the early period, the *tánc ház* was primarily a place of entertainment for members of various folk dance groups (Sági 1977; 1978). Seeing the event's success, the organizers wanted to make it accessible to a wider audience, but there was no consensus among the leading dance groups on the idea. Therefore, two main types of *tánc ház* emerged: a short-lived "dancers-only" *tánc ház*, and a club-style *tánc ház*, which was open to the general public, and became the form which spread nation- and world-wide (Szecsődi 2020:207). In the meantime, the dancers invited some young people from Szék who were working in Budapest, so that they too could participate and show their dances to the others.

ENGAGEMENT WITH TRADITIONAL CULTURE

The "informants" became part of the regular *tánc ház* program, arriving as special guests to show their traditions. They are also known as *tradition bearers*: those who are recognized as authentic sources due to their knowledge of a given traditional practice (such as folk music, folk dance, or folk tales). Many of these village dancers, musicians, or storytellers, considered representatives of their given regions, have become well-known and appreciated in the *tánc ház* movement and are frequent guests at urban *tánc ház* events, festivals and camps (Székely 2021). In addition to learning folk dances from tradition bearers documented on archival films (taken during field collections in their respective villages), acquiring the dances through in-person observation and imitation played a crucial role. During this direct cultural transmission, the participants experienced joy and competence through personal contact and active participation. Participatory learning of instrumental music, songs, and handicrafts occurred in parallel, cultivating a feeling of community and experiential engagement (Sándor 2006:31-36). The urban folk dancers, who largely did not inherit this knowledge from their family members, appreciated the opportunity to view the informants' dance styles both in person and in the archival recordings (Héra 1997:7).

With the spread of urban *tánc ház*, the first generation of the movement tried to get in contact with village dancers and musicians to acquire traditional music and dance knowledge (Frigyesi 1996; Taylor 2021). We can read accounts of their interactions with traditional culture

in numerous publications and interviews. The revivalists described their relationship with folk dance, music, and tradition bearers, alongside their field experiences in Transylvania, the primary destination. Several of them commented on the importance of personal experience in learning folk singing and instrumental music. According to professionals, folk songs and folk music can be mastered by learning “through experience” during fieldwork, gatherings, or, as one musician put it, “study trips” (Abkarovits 2002:36; 93). As Dániel Hamar of the revival band Muzsikás puts it,

We listened much more to the musicians we valued, and especially to those tunes that were a special musical experience for us... we were primarily interested in technical things: not only what the musician plays, but also how (Abkarovits 2002:125).

This type of amateur or voluntary collecting work aims at the identification, recording, and transmission of traditional values. The amateur collectors are motivated by their love and respect for folk culture, but they rarely engage in scientific processing and interpretation. The main motivations are appreciation and attraction towards folk culture, and “owning”, learning, and passing on the collected material (Mohay 1990).

From a touristic approach, these trips can be understood as part of the folk tourism, or in particular, táncház tourism phenomenon (Varga 2016). According to Zoltán Szabó, we can distinguish several types, such as táncház musicians and dancers going to collect and learn music and dances, as compared to the trips of táncház-goers and folk fans (Szabó 1998). Initially, Transylvania—and Szék in particular—was the first destination for the leading revivalists, who, besides roaming and exploring, aimed to collect music or dance firsthand from the local elderly people. Szabó mentions that the majority of táncház attendees had a desire to see, experience, and participate in a traditional táncház, wedding, or other local custom live and in person. The second group was also motivated to become more familiar with folk dance and music through a shared and adventurous excursion. The choice of destination was also to participate in local dance events. Meeting and spending time with the older generation of dancers, singers, and musicians became important in the acquisition of practical knowledge based on direct experience, and the people and situations experienced also served as a model for lifestyle and behavior for the revivalist group (Szabó 1998).

Due to these travels for such purposes, cultural heritage becomes an attraction, a sight, and an aesthetic entity. Mária Husz argues that there is a parallel between the behavior of tourists and the receptive attitude of those engaging with art (Husz 2009:277). The experience of tradition occurs through a particular process of interpretation, which is also shaped by the individual's socialization. Husz also states that the act of adaptation and reception is given meaning through the experience of authenticity (Husz 2009:278). The demand for authenticity is a part of the search for identity, allowing individuals to distinguish themselves from others and giving them something unique, new, and original, which they can share with others. During the abovementioned cultural tourism trips, the goal is to get the maximum experience within the specified time frame, which requires organization and even institutionalization. Becoming acquainted with the locality and the local characters is listed as an attraction. Meeting “the past”, “the other”, the exotic takes place in a limited time, without the opportunity for deeper knowledge, but the given cultural phenomenon can be seen, experienced, photographed, and taken home (Husz 2009:277–281). Nowadays, it can even be recorded with a mobile phone or shared on social media.⁴ According to Zoltán Szabó, one can get to know the “real” folklore in its original environment through direct, on-site experiences (2006:180). However, individuals can only make sense of their experiences through the lens of their own socio-cultural environment. For the revival folk dancers socialized within the *táncház* movement (Pál-Kovács 2021:82–87), the “authenticity” of folklore is provided by the experiences connected to the locality and the views according to the group's particular attitude toward traditional culture.

THE TÁNCHÁZ MOVEMENT AS A COMMUNITY OF EXPERIENCE

Experiences are part of human life, and they influence our perceptions, worldviews, and memories, especially if they happen in a collective manner. The concept of *community of experience* is established primarily in sociological and social psychological research. In social science approaches, we find the term in the examination of collective memory

⁴ The latter—sharing a village dancer's or musician's performance online—can also raise moral questions.

and the concept of *experience society*. In his study on the concept of community, Péter Tóth G. connects it to memory studies as follows:

Each event, action, or activity—organized in the ‘here and now’ situation—always creates a community of experience, which may later develop into one or more memory communities through its active or passive members (Tóth G. 2002:29).

In an ethnographic and anthropological approach, this notion is related to the concept of *folklorism*, which places folk traditions in a new and foreign environment where they acquire new functions and meanings. Due to this process, the culture of a traditional rural society was selectively recontextualized in an urban environment. Transylvanian ethnographer Vilmos Keszeg defines community of experience in relation to folklorism as follows:

Folklorism is an organized form of tradition, or the exploration, revitalization, reinterpretation, and reclamation of a culture fallen out of use and relegated to memory. Unlike tradition, the elements and practices of folklorism create occasional, rather than primary, *communities of experience*. They do not operate as social memory, and as they are present in the life of the individual only on a temporary and occasional basis, they do not have a biographical function, and they do not create a solidary relationship between generations. In the new environment, elements of a culture come into contact with elements of other cultures and are used together (Keszeg 2018:34).

The concept of *experientiality* is also connected to the revitalization of folklore. Károly Marót, in his article published in 1945, draws attention to a similar phenomenon when explaining the ethnographic concepts of survival and revival (Marót 1945). According to him, revival takes place if survival phenomena become “experiential” again, even if in a small circle, or an “artificial” environment (Marót 1945:4).

In the *tánccház* movement, several generations have been socialized through the values and practices of the urban folk revival. Since its inception, revivalists have formed a distinct community, which, in its organization and functioning, diverges from the mainstream and embraces its own values, aesthetics, and practices (Székely 2021). This community is varying in size and membership over time, consisting of a network of smaller units, including rural, urban and metropolitan

groups. The *táncház* movement can be understood as a community of experience, in which participants engage in a variety of shared activities, such as dance rehearsals, festivals, folk dance competitions, and trips to Transylvania to connect with traditional culture. These experiences may occur periodically and be contemporary in nature, yet reinforce a sense of community, and a sense of continuity of the traditions the movement seeks to preserve (Taylor 2021:159).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The *táncház* movement always had a strong connection to, and a desire to establish a good relationship with, the bearers of folk dance and music traditions. The roots of the urban *táncház* are rural, but over the decades the idea spread across the world. Practicing traditional dances led to the formation of communities shaped by ideologies related to folk culture (e.g. male and female roles). Their interpretations also influence what is considered folk dance, how it should be performed, and what counts as an authentic way of doing it. The search for authentic experiences characterizes the group's operation and organization. Personal experiences with folk traditions strengthen revival activities. Further investigation is needed to understand how the younger generation operates within the revival movement. How do they engage with the "original" sources? In what ways do they utilize audio and video recordings to access and learn about traditional culture? What forms of collecting, documentation, or field exploration do they pursue? Have the pioneers of the movement—leading teachers, musicians, choreographers, and tutors—come to function as secondary experts, or even as "revival informants", mediating folk culture for the next generation? What kinds of experiences shape the identity and practices of young revivalists today?

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WHAT IS AUTHENTIC PERFORMANCE? PRINCIPLES AND CONSIDERATIONS OF THE HUNGARIAN REVIVAL OF THE VILLAGE STRING BAND TRADITION



Péter Árendás

Scholarly folk music research in Hungary goes back almost 120 years, and both vocal and instrumental collections were made from the very beginning. The folk music material on these recordings began to be disseminated to wider audiences soon thereafter, mainly in the form of arrangements suited to the tastes of the period. The resulting compositions were not performed by village singers and musicians, but mostly by those who had studied classical music, understandably in the style and manner they had acquired during their classical training. Whether in Bartók's or Kodály's stage productions or in choral or orchestral folk song arrangements, folk music primarily appeared in the melodic material of these works. The idea of performing on traditional instruments in a village style didn't occur, nor were the adequate performance skills available at the time.

One of the greatest achievements of the now 50-year-old *táncház* movement has been that young folk musicians with urban backgrounds began to master the musical practices and playing techniques of village musicians in an unprecedented way, reaching an almost native level. Across Hungary and neighboring countries, they systematically sought out village musicians who were still living, and aimed to learn their musical practices by ear, whether first-hand or with the help of the recordings they made on the spot.

AUTHENTIC PERFORMANCE PRACTICE IN THE TÁNCCHÁZ MOVEMENT

Before going into the distinctive elements of this new performance style, it is worth separating the folk instruments into two groups according

to whether or not they previously had a widespread, accepted instrumental practice in Hungarian musical life. Some of these instruments—including the bagpipe, hurdy-gurdy, *koboz* (cobză), *gardon* (percussive cello), and the various shepherd’s flutes—were not yet present in the performance practice and therefore had no accepted performance style. In these cases, young people who encountered living folk traditions had a “clean slate” as they learned the positioning of the instruments, the sound production techniques, the rhythms and ornamentation—in short, the entire performance style.

However, it was an entirely different situation with the bowed string instruments, which were very popular and almost ubiquitous across the Carpathian Basin. The violin, viola, and double bass have been in use for many generations in European classical music, among urban Romani bands playing popular Hungarian music, as well as in jazz, and consequently, the musicians who play them are informed by centuries-old performance and training traditions. The string musicians active in the villages, however, used a performance style that was different in many respects—a style which was novel to the *táncház* musicians and quickly became the example to be followed. From the very beginning of the *táncház* movement, the focus was on mastering both the folk music repertoire and its inseparable authentic performance style. Let us examine some elements of this new way of performing village string music.

(1) *Positioning of the instrument.* Village fiddlers typically gripped the neck of their instrument, bending their wrists, and playing the instrument without a shoulder rest or chinrest. The *kontra*, which is a violin or viola used for rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment, and often modified for the purpose, was held upright, propped vertically against their chest. Village musicians gripped the neck of the bass, too, since the basic function of the bass in folk music is to provide the rhythm, and fast, flashy runs are not typical.

(2) *Stringing and tuning.* This includes using violin, *kontra*, and bass tunings which are different from the classical tunings, as well as the use of gut strings for the *kontra* and bass. In some cases, the fiddler used a specially-tuned violin: examples of this include the five-string violin (with an additional sympathetic string) in Transylvania’s Gyimes region, fiddle practices in Magyarbece, or specific folk melodies which call for non-standard tuning. We must mention the three-string *kontra* with a flattened bridge and g-d¹-a or g-d-a tuning, which is mainly used in

central Transylvania, as well as the various tunings of the two- and three-string double basses. It was also common that the entire string band tuned their instruments higher than the normal pitch, thus producing a more powerful, dynamic sound.

(3) *Bowing and accentuation.* The main function of village string bands was to provide dance music, which required a very rhythmic and dynamic style of playing. The fiddlers played the melody with internal accents that matched the pulsation of the *kontra* accompaniment. Franz Liszt noticed these accents produced by the dynamic bow movement, and called them “saber blows” (*coups de sabre*, Liszt 1966:183). It was often more important for accompanying instruments to provide a steady pulse and rhythm than to produce the correct pitches. This required vigorous bowing. For the bass, striking the strings or instrument with the hand or bow is common, as is plucking the string such that it snaps back onto the fingerboard.

(4) *Home-made bows.* The bows used by the *kontra* and bass players of Transylvanian string bands playing old-style instrumental music were made individually and are shorter and heavier than classical bows, making them particularly well-suited to dynamic dance music. Revival musicians refer to these as *parasztvonó*, or “peasant bows.”

(5) *Ornamentation style.* Music history research has shown that characteristic ornamentation of the Baroque period—the use of upper and lower mordents, turns, etc.—has been preserved and lives on in this folk music performance practice (Jánosi 2014). Fiddlers’ ornamentation can vary considerably from one micro-region to another, and it is an important element of their playing style. In the hands of village musicians, ornaments became an important tool for shaping melodies, not only aesthetically, but in terms of accentuation and emphasis as well.

The urban *táncház* bands established in the 1970s clearly used the string bands from Szék and other central Transylvanian localities as their model, since at that time it was easiest to find the folk music tradition still living in these areas. The performance characteristics listed above were so transformative for the revivalists of the period that initially they played the folk music of other regions, like Transdanubia or the Great Plain, in a similar way to that of the Transylvanian *Mezőség*, with a three-string *kontra* and three-string bass. By doing so, they sought to

emphasize the difference between the well-known sound of urban Romani bands and the sound of the authentic village string bands. It is important to note that the urban *táncház* musicians tried to master the performance style which was new to them by using new methods of knowledge transfer. They did not learn it from sheet music, but rather first-hand, directly from the villagers, through listening and observation. They could not have done otherwise, since there was hardly any literature available on the performance of rural instrumental music. Another decisive factor was that they experienced dance music practice in its actual dance function, so they could readily perceive and understand the tempi or the pulsation of the accompaniment. How thrilling it would be if a classical music student, for example, could experience the same when learning a Baroque suite.

Over the course of the collections, the personal interactions with village musicians led to the development of friendships, and the participants were enriched by the shared experiences. They became familiar with the human side of their “music informants,” receiving wise advice on music making as well as the villagers’ worldview, and those conversations and the thoughts that were expressed all helped the revival musicians to perform authentically. Another important element of the learning process—similar to the transfer of knowledge customary in the villages—was playing together with the village masters who had decades of experience, including making music together all night long. In contrast, one of the shortcomings of singing education in schools during the previous decades was that despite the carefully selected folk songs in the textbooks, most singing teachers didn’t have the personal involvement in the style to be able to elevate the material from curriculum to a real experience.

Based on the above, some may mistakenly think that they will become authentic folk musicians if they copy the musical elements and performance techniques that they experience personally or hear and see in the folk music collections as accurately as possible. This has been a recurring question over the last fifty years: what is the right way to perform folk music authentically? Is it to copy, or to re-create or reinterpret the learned musical materials?

Copying involves nothing more than mechanical, perhaps even uninterpreted learning from a single audio/video recording or musical transcription. In this case, there will be no changes from performance to performance; instead, the musicians will repeat the same fixed rendition each time. Given that folk music has been constantly changing

over time, with each performer shaping it bit by bit, we can safely say that the unchanged, robotic repetition of a single rendition found on one given recording is far from being folk music. We do not know of any traditional village musician who mechanically copied someone else's playing.

However, for authentic folk music performance, *re-creating* involves coming to an understanding of the musical syntax and “rules” as found on many audio/video recordings, mastering the stylistic elements, and formulating new musical expressions based on them. In this way—partly through improvisation but always in strict compliance with the stylistic constraints—we are capable of reproducing the rural instrumental tradition in a stylistically faithful way. This is an important feature of folk music, and it is how the village musicians acquired this musical vernacular from their parents, grandparents, and other members of the older generation.

To explore this further, the next question follows: what are the musical principles and stylistic elements that we must understand and apply, if we want our performance to be authentic? What should we pay attention to when attempting to re-create folk music, and how can a young city-born *táncház* musician become an authentic practitioner, able to hold his or her own even in a village ensemble?

GUIDELINES FOR THE STUDY OF AUTHENTIC PERFORMANCE

(1) It is valuable to listen to several different recordings of the same tune, executed by different performers from the same village, in order to become acquainted with the subtle variations and individual renditions. We are then able to use and interchange these elements freely. We should identify the typical figures and phrases that fiddlers apply at the end of melodic lines, as well as the typical harmonic patterns and progressions used by *kontra* and bass players.

(2) When we examine the fiddle playing, we must look beyond the notes of the melody to the accentuation, the rhythmic play, the specific ornamentation, the fingering, the bowing directions, and the legatos.

(3) Mastering the musical repertoire of a micro-region does not automatically mean that we are able to build a sound musical sequence from it. It is necessary to study the structure of the dance music se-

quences to see how the tunes follow each other, for example whether key changes are used, or whether interludes are inserted between melodies. In some regions, the same tune may be played in several different keys, so the entire musical sequence can be performed, for example, in A, D, or G. In other regions, however, local musicians generally played a given tune in a particular key, and they then used melodies which lead from one key to another in order to create seamless key changes.

(4) The adaptability of the accompanying instrumentalists is essential in folk music. As the musical sequences are not agreed upon in advance by the band members, but rather evolve as the music is being played, the ability to quickly recognize the start of a new melody is just as important as the ability to immediately react to a tempo or key change. In dance music, one must adapt to the figures, accents, and cadences of the dancers as well.

(5) Harmonization styles may vary considerably from one micro-region to another, from the simplest accompaniment consisting of a few major chords to rich functional harmony (Pávai [2012]2020:332–347). Often, there are considerable differences even between the bands in neighboring villages within the same micro-region. An accurate understanding and application of these musical practices is essential for achieving an authentic string band sound, and furthermore can allow for the harmonization of melodies which were only recorded with a single instrument or voice.

(6) In folk music, the bass is essentially a rhythm instrument, so collections often feature village bass players who, although they play in a steady, strong rhythm, hit what would be considered “wrong notes” in the classical sense. That doesn’t mean there aren’t examples of bass players with a good ear who play their basslines deliberately. Careful study of a large number of recordings is the only method for evaluating, and when necessary correcting, these bass parts. We can often observe a bassist’s intention to imitate the melody—we see examples of this in micro-regions far apart from one another. Exclusively playing the fundamental notes of the kontra’s chords is typical only of lower-level urban *táncház* bands, while attentive village bass players had a much more nuanced system in mind.

Based on all of this, an urban *táncház* musician who wants to play authentically should listen to as many source recordings as possible and study them in depth. Which brings us to the next question: are all recordings equally suited to the study of folk music, and is each element heard on them equally authentic? The answer is of course no.

APPROPRIATE SOURCE CRITICISM

Some folk music collections present very well-integrated and well-practiced bands, with many old, valuable tunes in their repertoire. Such are the Transylvanian bands, often made up of close family members, who played together for decades and were active in a region where, at the time of collection, there was still a regular demand for the traditional folk music they played. In these cases, the cohesion of the band is evident: the band members blend together well in both pitch and rhythm, and each of them play their respective parts with confidence. Such recordings contain hardly any errors or uncertainty, and each band member provides a complete rendition from which we can accurately discern all of the stylistic characteristics.

Most of the source recordings, however, do not capture such ideal conditions. Sometimes, the band is missing members, or it is a group who only play together occasionally. If there is no longer regular local demand for the band, the lack of practice may result in a haphazard performance, more mistakes, or the accompanist not being able to follow the band leader as well anymore. In less isolated areas, tunes from other regions or urban composed music become part of the string repertoire and thus are often included on the recordings as well. In such cases, appropriate source criticism should be applied to determine the reliability of each relevant piece of information. In summary, we should neither automatically accept and copy everything we hear on the recordings, nor lose essential stylistic features by “over-correcting” elements we consider faulty. Again, only the appropriate knowledge and expertise can help us, which we must ground on the most authentic village bands available.

In his research of the Hungarian folk dance music in Transylvania, István Pávai examines the authenticity of folk music recordings in detail, providing criteria for their assessment. Based on his work, we can consider a band or recording ideally authentic if

(1) the musicians were born into the given cultural environment or lived in it from an early age, their knowledge was acquired in the oral tradition, and they served the musical needs of the local people for many years, knowing their customs and dances;

(2) the members of the band have played together long enough to blend together well and be in sync rhythmically;

(3) the collection was not negatively impacted by adverse circumstances; and

(4) the collector was well-prepared, familiar with the band, and did not aim to influence their repertoire or playing style, but rather elicit and document their existing knowledge (Pávai [2012]2020:322–331).

Of course, there is hardly any case in practice where this checklist would be complete. Its function is, much rather, to help critical reflection about the sources we use.

TRANSMISSION OF THE MUSICAL TRADITION

In most places, the dissolution of closed village communities and the disappearance of traditions led to traditional community music-making coming to an end as well. That is not to say that the musical culture was lost to oblivion, as there are many forms of its continuation, both in villages and in cities. Some village musicians reacted to the societal changes by no longer raising their children to be musicians, in the hopes of them earning a better living in another line of work, while others who stayed with music became oriented towards more modern instruments and musical styles. Today, in place of the folk musical repertoire, bands with saxophonists, guitarists, keyboard players, and drummers play national and international hits learned from radio, television, or the internet.

The results and achievements of the *táncház* movement have set in motion irreversible cultural processes in Hungary and around the world in the last fifty years. One interesting dimension is the revaluation and re-learning of traditional culture in villages where folk music transmission had already been lost. It is interesting to see young people starting to relearn their grandparents' dances and songs. Traditional culture

bearers from certain areas of Transylvania who were still alive during the last 10-20 years were able to experience the recognition of their skills through performances, folk music festivals and camps organized by the *tánc ház* movement—some were even invited guests on tours across Europe or overseas. As a result, their descendants see the transmission of traditional folk music as a form of livelihood, recognizing that the musical knowledge they inherited from their ancestors is in great demand in the *tánc ház* movement. A good example of this are young Transylvanian musicians from Magyarpalatka, Szászcsávás, and Kalotaszeg, who are regularly invited to participate in folk music events and considered among the current stars of the scene. These bands maintain their traditional musical style and repertoire in order to satisfy the demands of the *tánc ház* movement—no longer serving the needs of their own village, but rather those of a distant community. A few years ago I asked a Transylvanian musician whether his band was still invited to play at weddings in his own village or the surrounding areas, and he replied that only electronic music was played at the weddings—but it’s something that “cleaves the ears and stabs the soul”. Most people involved in the continuation and promotion of traditional folk music belong, of course, to the group of revival musicians who consider authentic performance fundamental, following the principles mentioned above, and they are still actively playing at *tánc ház* today.

It is also instructive to observe the changes in the forms of expression of today’s folk music ensembles. In the early days, urban *tánc ház* bands provided music for dance accompaniment, whether at the *tánc ház*, or for rehearsals or public appearances of dance ensembles. However, with the rise of the folk music scene, the increased number of concerts without dancing, and the subsequent expansion of the world music scene, some bands have moved away from dance accompaniment to appearing exclusively in stage productions. Since folk musicians nowadays no longer only serve the needs of the *tánc ház*, new forms of folk music revival have emerged. However, it’s worth recalling the words of Béla Halmos, one of the founders and first musicians of the *tánc ház* movement, who often pointed out that many hours of practice accompanying dancers at the *tánc ház* (as he worded it, “lineal meters of music-making”) are indispensable for authentic folk music performance. From the market perspective, of course, many kinds of musical activities can be justified, but from the viewpoint of the authentic folk music performance, some may entail dangers.

(1) For *concert musicians performing in stage productions*, the focus shifts to shaping the melodies, the instrumentation, and creating arrangements, while—due to the detachment from dance—the dynamism of dance music may be lost, the original tempos may change, and theatrical musical elements (impressive line-ups, instrumental solos, etc.) may come to the fore.

(2) For *world music performers playing folk music arrangements*—for whom folk music is only raw material, a starting point—stylistic elements may easily be lost or mixed up, due to the lack of sufficient information. Thus the folk music no longer lives on in its authentic form. It is indisputable that in the past century many excellent pieces have been created through sophisticated adaptation of folk music materials, but in all cases those compositions were informed by a solid background in music theory, composition, and orchestration. We must carefully avoid being set back fifty years to once again have the dominant trend be playing folk melodies without their authentic performance style.

(3) *Folk music teachers and researchers* play a very important role in the transmission of folk music today, and it is gratifying to see that more and more young, active folk musicians choose education and folk music research as their professional career. However, if their engagement with folk music is limited to classes, transcriptions, or archival research, the active repertoire and physical condition necessary for playing improvised dance music sets can easily be eroded.

Fortunately, there are many opportunities today for those who are interested in instrumental folk music and want to master it at a high level. Primary and secondary music education institutions across the country welcome students, and a university-level training in authentic folk music has been available at the Liszt Academy of Music for the last decade and a half. Almost every weekend somewhere in Hungary there will be an instrumental folk music course, or a master class for the more advanced. During the summer months, there are numerous 4-8 day folk music camps where the most skilled folk musicians teach and participants can have the experience of a lifetime playing together. In addition, over the past decades, a large wealth of literature has been produced and made easily accessible. Nowadays those interested can choose among dozens of scholarly textbooks analyzing the various fields of folklore, monographs presenting the performance style of individual

regions or musicians, song collections, educational aids, or online folk music databases in order to facilitate the acquisition and transfer of this musical knowledge.

CONCLUSION

I firmly believe that the heritage of Hungarian folk culture holds a unique musical treasure. Over the past fifty years, Hungarian folk songs and instrumental music—recognized by such musical greats as Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, and László Lajtha—have helped tens of thousands of young people both in Hungary and across the world to find their identity. This music has been a successful representative of Carpathian Basin culture the world over and can also be an effective tool for building a national image—of course, only if it preserves its unique character and style. If, however, it is adapted to global musical fashions and current international cultural trends, it may lose its unique idiom, centuries-old melodies and performance practices, and dissolve into a common sea in which it is no longer visible. Just as a Baroque cantata or a classical string quartet cannot be authentically performed on electronic instruments, a folk art object cannot be authentically produced from injection-molded plastic. Thus it is in our interest to learn and pass on this village music tradition in the unmistakable form that previous generations developed and shaped. Thanks to its geographic and political situation, the Hungarian *táncház* movement has been personally inspired by culture bearers almost up to the present day: villagers singing centuries-old melodies in the traditional manner, ageing musicians who have learnt everything through oral tradition, and people who can still dance the figures learnt from their parents or grandparents. Fortunately, the audio and video recordings preserve much of their knowledge, even if the number of those who can play in the authentic performance style, who still know the meaning of folk song texts, or who instinctively feel the unity of dance and music, is rapidly dwindling. The time is approaching when the members of the *táncház* movement will be the only living bearers of this treasure, and that imposes a great responsibility on us. As Béla Halmos repeatedly said towards the end of his life, “We have to cultivate folk music with the awareness that we will soon become the source musicians.”

(Translated by István-Csaba Németh)

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INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AS A VEHICLE OF TRANSNATIONAL NATION- BUILDING: THE TÁNCHÁZ METHOD IN THE HUNGARIAN DIASPORA IN ARGENTINA



Nóra Kovács

This study focuses on the role of *táncház* as cultural heritage in the evolving relationship between the Hungarian state and its overseas diaspora communities, and in particular, looks at the changing role of folk dance in a specific community in South America. It intends to assess how *táncház* as a method of education and knowledge transfer (UNESCO 2011) has become a fundamental tool of the Hungarian conservative administrations to actively engage in diasporic networked nation-building (Waterbury 2014). But how does folk dancing connect to the dynamics of migration-related social processes? How does it represent transnational migration and simultaneous belonging to more than one place? How can folk dance movements, widely observed among ethnic diasporas, be understood and interpreted? Is ethnic belonging constructed through dancing?

Taking Hungarian *táncház* heritage as a point of departure, I concentrate on the societal aspects of ethnic folk dancing in the diaspora, seeing it as a *social practice* in Pierre Bourdieu's sense of the term, which emphasizes the interplay between individual action and social structures (Bourdieu 1977). Using the example of the Hungarian diaspora community in Argentina, this study aims to show both how Hungarian folk dancing has become a wide-spread, prominent, multigenerational cultural activity in the Hungarian world in Argentina as well as how it strengthens ties between the sending state and its third and fourth generation diaspora community.

This topic was inspired by doctoral research on second generation Hungarian identity construction in Buenos Aires conducted more than

twenty years ago (Kovács 2009). In recent years, my academic interests have shifted toward the study of the sociality of community dance practices. Regularly revisiting the theme of diaspora, an intriguing process of change has become visible in the transnational online community of Argentinean Hungarians. The visibility of Hungarian folk dancing has recently increased, turning into a central activity in the Argentinean Hungarian diaspora as a social practice of a multi-generational community. At the turn of the millennium, the Regös Hungarian folk dance group¹ incorporated young diaspora members in Buenos Aires and held weekly rehearsals in the Hungarian community center in the north of the metropolitan area. Its participants were few—in large part teenagers from the Hungarian diaspora community—and their public performances were limited mostly to intragroup social events. During the last two decades, the number of folk dance groups has multiplied, incorporating middle-aged and elderly diaspora Hungarians as well. New Hungarian folk dance groups were established in rural areas in Argentina where institutional diasporic community life had practically ceased to exist. *Táncház*-related activities intensified the cultural exchange and also the spatial mobility between homeland and diaspora.

To assess the complex transnational cultural processes occurring between the Hungarian government and Hungarian diasporas outside of Europe, particularly in Latin America, several topics must be briefly addressed. The following sections will discuss what dance anthropology has contributed to our understanding of the different functions dancing serves in the lives of ethnic diaspora populations, briefly outline the changes in the diaspora policies of four consecutive conservative Hungarian administrations, and summarize the standing of Hungarian folk dancing and the *táncház* phenomenon in contemporary Hungary. It provides a brief historical overview of the Hungarian population in Argentina, paying special attention to its relationship with Hungarian folk dancing. It discusses the fundamental role of the *Kőrösi Csoma* Program, a government initiative which operationalizes *táncház* as a method of knowledge transfer. The methodology section sheds light on this paper's data and scope.

1 Throughout this paper, I use the name of this ensemble as Regös, with the spelling I learned to be correct, and not Regős, the form used by several of the online sources.

FRAMEWORK: FOLK DANCING AS AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE NATION STATE AND ITS DIASPORA

(1) Transnational practices between homeland and diaspora

The interactions between ethnic diasporas and the societies of their countries of origin have been studied extensively, focusing on various aspects, including sending state diaspora legislation, policies and programs, processes of diasporic return, remittances, identity formation, and culture politics (Kovács 2009; Tsuda 2009, 2019; Waterbury 2014; Wong 2015; Gzásó 2018, 2022; Kovács 2019; Krawatzek 2019). Transnationalism, a research approach in migration-related studies, has shifted the focus of attention from unidirectional migratory processes to the creation of social fields that connect migrants to their home and host countries simultaneously (Glick Schiller 1992). These social fields become operational through transnational networks and via economic, political, or cultural activities (Glick Schiller 2004). The notion of long-distance nationalism of diasporic populations, especially those in exile, helps to conceptualize diasporic communities' transnational practices and efforts to influence cultural, political, or social processes occurring in their countries of origin (Anderson 1998, Glick Schiller et. al. 1992; Skribs 1999). The idea of long-distance nationalism may also expand our understanding of the underlying agendas of the diaspora policies of sending states. Diaspora groups of the former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe have impacted fundamental aspects of the post-socialist transition or inspired specific political groups through qualities associated with diaspora ethnic identity. Discussing migration-driven forms of cultural diffusion, Levitt (1998) drew attention to the ideas and identities that flow between sending and receiving countries and communities. She put forward the idea of social remittances, the non-material exchange of normative structures, systems of practice, and social capital that may influence several areas of social life. These multidirectional and dynamic transnational social processes may have cultural as well as political undertones (Krawatzek 2019), and may be interpreted from the perspective of the sending states (Kovács 2019).

(2) Dance heritage and diasporas

Folk dancing and social structures which cultivate it (such as dance groups and music ensembles) occupy an important place in the institutional systems of ethnic diasporas all over the world. The literature discusses

them extensively in relation to several sending countries, including the Baltic states, Eastern Europe, and the successor states of Yugoslavia. In the early 2000s, a survey explored the institutions and associations of the Hungarian diaspora in the United States (Papp 2008). Of those who participated in Hungarian organizations and community, a high proportion were in folk dance associations. Based on the personal and detailed accounts, folk dance activities were very intense experiences requiring a wide range of skills as well as a strong personal commitment (Papp 2008).

Literature on dance phenomena in ethnic diasporas has yielded numerous insights and this section highlights some of the findings of a literature review on the subject (Kovács 2023). Studies on the ethnic dance practices of diaspora populations explore the role that the dance heritage of the sending countries may play in the lives and workings of diaspora communities, especially in their relationships with their sending state, their host society, and other immigrant groups. Diaspora dance practices are presented both to the diaspora community and to the host society, while they may also position the diaspora group in competition with other immigrant communities. Literature at the intersection of dance anthropology and migration studies indicates that diaspora folk dance events are often sites for the ethnicization of the dance (Kovács 2010). Music and dance are sometimes the last remaining or consciously acquired elements of ethnic identity for participants, especially in the absence of language skills.

Ethnic identity is formed and built through dance. For members of an ethnic group, folk dancing develops a sense of belonging which is expressed performatively through the body. It offers a gateway to personally experience a connection to one's ethnic roots (Kovács 2009:146), it provides opportunities for self-expression and leisure (Rüütel et al. 2013), and it creates a space for intraethnic partner choice. As the practice appeals to young people, it also has the potential to engage and incorporate younger generations of immigrants.

In diasporas, performative identity through community dance is of particular importance, while at the same time it establishes emotional attachment to both the diaspora community and to the motherland (cf. Liddle 2016). The cultivation and promotion of diasporic dance may be driven by long-distance nationalism, and diasporic dance processes may be linked to the transnational aspirations and diaspora culture politics of the sending state.

In public discourse, dance is often associated with emotion, with particular focus on its practitioners' personal experiences and on stage

dance performances, mostly in the sense that dance expresses and displays emotion. Drid Williams, a researcher dealing with fundamental theoretical issues of dance anthropology, has raised the possibility that emotions are awakened during dance through the movements of the body (Williams 1991:34–35; cf. Christensen et al. 2016). For the purposes of this article, I find it important to emphasize the emotional and corporeal identification through active participation in folk dancing in a multigenerational diaspora community.

(3) Diaspora cultural activities reflect societal changes

A study by Sau Ling Wong (2010) analyzed the activities of a Chinese folk dance association in the U.S. She scrutinized its decades-long history, its changing repertoire, and its relationship with the People’s Republic of China. Wong emphasized the complexity and diversity of cultural practices in ethnic diasporas and stressed that these cultural activities may change over time. Some cultural activities lose their dominance while others become important. Depending on societal transformation in the sending state or changes in its diaspora policies, the relationship of a diaspora community or a diaspora institution to its country of origin may change. Differences can also be observed in the activities through which the subsequent immigrant generations experience or express their ties to their ancestors’ homeland.

FOLK DANCING AND THE TÁNCHÁZ METHOD IN HUNGARY

There is a vast, growing body of literature on Hungarian folk dancing, including works on the táncház movement initiated more than half a century ago. The cultural field of folk dancing in Hungary is extensive and highly complex. It includes an array of dance and music ensembles, regular participatory dance events, festivals, and stage performances (Halmos et al. 2012). Hungarian folk dance classes are frequently integrated into primary and secondary school academic curricula (Kormányrendelet 2012), and one can major in folk dance at the university level (Dragony 2022; Richter 2012). An increasing proportion of the national network of music schools offer folk music training at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (Dragony 2022). This cultural field encompasses long-established research institutions and dance archives, folk dance theoreticians, and governmental institutions and programs

for the promotion of folk dance within and outside the borders of Hungary (see e.g. I Dance Hungary s. a.). Here I will share just a few key observations on Hungarian folk dancing in contemporary Hungary as relevant to its growth and increasing popularity among Hungarian diaspora communities, particularly those overseas.

Folk dance teaching methodology in Hungary has become highly elaborate. This process has been accompanied by an increasing level of dance technique and movement quality, especially on behalf of semi-professional and professional dance ensembles. There is a dense social network of Hungarian folk dance associations spanning across Hungary and the neighboring countries, including minority Hungarian ensembles from the Carpathian Basin. The original *táncház* repertoire was composed primarily of Hungarian village dances from Transylvania, Romania. There have also been grassroots initiatives and personal projects (e.g. Hungarian FolkEmbassy) that envision Hungarian folk music and folk dance as a bridge that can connect Hungary with other countries.

Folk dance research institutions as well as individual dancers and musicians have made fundamental contributions to the complex transmission methodology that qualified for UNESCO's Register of Good Safeguarding Practices in 2011 as the "Táncház Method: A Hungarian Model for the Transmission of Intangible Cultural Heritage" (UNESCO 2011; Csonka-Takács 2011). A year later, it received the official Hungarian title of *Hungarikum*, a cherished Hungarian national treasure.²

CHANGING TRENDS IN HUNGARIAN DIASPORA POLITICS

The Hungarian governments of the Cold War era considered Hungarians living in the Western world potential saboteurs of the communist regime, and they used the World Federation of Hungarians (*Magyarok Világszövetsége*, MVSZ) to gather information about them.³ The first five

² For more information on these, see: <https://hungarikum.kormany.hu/hungarikumok-gyujtemenye> (Accessed 10. 11. 2024.)

³ The World Federation of Hungarians (MVSZ) is a national Hungarian organization founded in 1938. Its mission is to unite Hungarians all over the world and to preserve and promote their values and culture. Between the two world wars, the MVSZ mainly supported right-wing political circles. During the Cold War years, the MVSZ was under the influence of the communist government and operated as a secret intelligence organization. Link: https://mvsz.info/?page_id=651 (20.07.2024.)

governments after the regime change showed no explicit interest in Hungarian diasporas in the West. My field research in Buenos Aires between 1999 and 2002 correspondingly indicated the scarcity of resources directed towards diaspora communities by the sending state, a situation regarded as regrettable by some of my interviewees (Kovács 2009).

The Hungarian government's consideration of Hungarian diaspora communities (as well as Hungarian ethnic minorities in the neighboring countries) changed substantially with the victory of the conservative political party Fidesz in 2010 (Kovács 2019), and the Prime Minister's mandate of Fidesz President Viktor Orbán. That year, a state secretariat was created in charge of policies for Hungarian communities abroad. In the subsequent years, the Orbán administration took fundamental measures that targeted long-established Hungarian diaspora communities in Western Europe and overseas. This marked a new phase of Hungary's kin-state and diaspora politics, including both important economic investments as well as concrete and symbolic ties between these communities and Hungary. The opportunity for Hungarian descendants living worldwide to obtain citizenship, diaspora scholarship programs, and governmental support for diaspora institutions all marked how the Hungarian government intensified its relationship with its diaspora (Kovács 2019). In 2016, the Office of the Prime Minister issued a document outlining the principles and strategic direction of Hungarian diaspora politics (Miniszterelnöki Hivatal 2016). Dániel Gázsó's 2022 monograph on the relationship between the Hungarian government and Hungarian minorities outside Hungary points out the increased attention governments pay to their diasporas worldwide, suggesting new, transnational forms of operation by nation states through diaspora policies (Gázsó 2022). The author also remarks that the increasing volume of sending states' support directed towards their diasporas is a clear reflection of nationalistic incentives on a global scale in the 21st century, and that Hungary has become the country with the most extensive diaspora policy in East-Central Europe (Gázsó 2022).

The Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program (KCSP), initiated in 2013, financed and managed by the State Secretariat for National Policies of Hungary, is fundamental to the changing role of Hungarian folk dancing in the diaspora.⁴ The explicit goal of the program is to strengthen diaspora

4 KCSP fellows typically spend nine months in a Hungarian diaspora community, where they are involved in language teaching, tradition preservation, folk dance education, and other forms of community building. In 2023, the scholarship amounted to around €1800 and almost 100 scholarships were open for application. Link: <https://korosiprogram.hu> (20. 07. 2024.)

communities' Hungarian identity, cultural knowledge, and language proficiency, as well as their connection with Hungary. The program's website provides a comprehensive and colorful picture of the participating fellows and their activities. Dániel Gázsó analyzed the workings of the program and the activities of the KCSP fellows, and noted that in Latin America, and particularly in Argentina, folk dance education has been one of the most prominent activities (Gázsó 2018).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

While exploring the increasing presence and visibility of Hungarian folk dancing in Buenos Aires, I used qualitative data from several sources I revisited the previously mentioned fieldwork data as a point of departure and consulted the print and digital Hungarian and Spanish language media produced by the Hungarian community in Argentina to map the history of Hungarian folk dancing. Changes in the folk dancing practices of the Hungarian community of Olivos in Buenos Aires were traced in online space at internet sites, video sharing platforms (mostly YouTube), and social media. Official Hungarian websites (the websites of the State Secretariat for National Policy, the Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program, and I Dance Hungary) and the websites and public social media profiles of Hungarian organizations in Argentina (EMESE, Ars Hungarica, Hungária Association, Regös Folk Dance Ensemble, the South American Hungarian Folk Dance Meeting) proved informative. The website of the Kőrösi Csoma Program exhibits an abundance of qualitative data in the forms of field reports, interviews, photos, and videos from Buenos Aires prepared by the KCSP fellows as part of their official tasks. The online fieldwork, including viewing short documentaries, interviews, personal accounts, and YouTube videos, provided a multidimensional representation of the transnational world of Hungarian folk dance in Buenos Aires. For the purposes of this paper, I used publicly available information and secondary sources published online.

Based on the above information I assessed phenomena and processes related to Hungarian folk dancing specifically in the Olivos community in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and in the transnational social field that stretches between the sending state and its overseas diaspora. This field has connected generations of participants of this diasporic cultural scene to Hungary, but also to other overseas diaspora communities, and to dancers and ensembles from all over the Carpathian Basin.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HUNGARIAN COMMUNITY OF OLIVOS

To argue the changing role of Hungarian folk dancing as cultural heritage, I would like to briefly highlight some of the core historical, social, and cultural characteristics of the Hungarian diaspora community in Buenos Aires.

The Hungarian population in Argentina is the result of several waves of immigration. During the 20th century, a total of about 40,000 ethnic Hungarian immigrants reached Argentina (Kovács 2009). The largest, most homogeneous, and culturally the most influential of these was the one that arrived shortly after World War II and comprised 5000–6000 people. The last and least numerous influx of Hungarians (about 2000 people) arrived after the 1956 revolution. Around 7000–8000 Hungarians were part of these last two waves of immigration, and it was them and their descendants who defined the character of Argentina's active diaspora communities until the 2000s.

During the 20th century, many Hungarian associations were established in the capital and in the countryside, reflecting the social, cultural, class, and ideological diversity of the Hungarian immigrants (see Kurucz 1999 for more detail on this). Several Hungarian associations in the Buenos Aires area and in the countryside still existed formally during my fieldwork, however, their occasional social events, mostly Hungarian dinners, attracted first generation and elderly diaspora members. I conducted fieldwork in the community of the *Hungária* Association in the Olivos suburb of Buenos Aires. The first generation was composed of middle-class city dwellers from Hungary as well as minority Hungarians from Romania and then Czechoslovakia, who, thanks to their cultural capital and upper middle class habitus combined with the specific socio-economic conditions in Argentina in the 1940s, gradually achieved a relatively good social position. There has been an intense community life in the Olivos area ever since, with Hungarian families residing there and in adjacent residential neighbourhoods. By the time of my fieldwork, numerous second and third generation members of the community were already linked to each other through a dense network of social ties, including intra-group marriages and kinship ties. The Olivos community consisted of less than 500 active members at the time.

The previously dominant Hungarian-language churches and religious practice had lost their fundamental cohesive role by then. One of the defining characteristics of the 1948 Hungarian community, as they referred to it, formed around the *Hungária* Association, was passionate

anti-communism. Its members expressed a general sense of identification and solidarity with Hungarians living as minorities in the Carpathian Basin (see Kovács 2009). Community efforts aimed at building and maintaining Hungarian identity through systematic Hungarian language and culture education in Sunday schools and in the Hungarian Scout Movement. Besides the commemoration of Hungarian national holidays and social evenings with Hungarian meals at the Hungária Association's restaurant, the dominant activities of the diaspora community during the period of my fieldwork were formal youth education in the Hungarian Sunday School, Scouting, participation in the newly-formed Hungarian choir, and rehearsals and performances of the Regös folk dance ensemble (comprising mostly of third generation teenagers and a few young adults). As a result of Hungarian Sunday School attendance and the language strategies of first generation parents, active adult members of the second generation demonstrated fluency in Hungarian. Several third generation youth spoke Hungarian as a strong second language at the turn of the millennium.

At the time of my field research, several influential, mostly first and second generation members of the Olivos community saw the transmission of the Hungarian language to the third and fourth generations as a fundamental prerequisite to keeping up their Hungarian diaspora community. They thought it best to tie membership in Hungarian youth education institutions such as the Sunday School and Scouting to Hungarian language proficiency. Others considered it more important to integrate everyone of Hungarian ancestry interested in participating, regardless of their Hungarian knowledge. Some of my interviewees referred to this situation as the 'quality or quantity dilemma' the second and third generation community of Olivos had to face. In this context, joining Regös folk dance ensemble was regarded by some as a possible gateway to integrate diaspora youth with no or very little language knowledge (Kovács 2009:146).

Also relevant to the changing role of folk dance in this community is that the Hungarian diaspora communities in Western Europe and overseas, which were critical and suspicious of the communist governments and their institutions in Hungary before 1990, established and operated informal transnational social networks with Hungary during the Cold War era. These networks became operational through several channels. The most important was the Hungarian Scout Association in Exteris (<https://kmcssz.org/>), which both connected young Hungarian diaspora members worldwide and also integrated them on a continen-

tal level within South America. Following the model of international Scout gatherings, called jamborees, South American Hungarian folk dance gatherings (Dél-Amerikai Magyar Néptáncfalalkozó, DAMN) have been organized biannually since 1986 in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Venezuela, with an increasing number of countries participating in recent years.⁵ The birth and role of the DAMN is discussed in greater detail later in this article.

(1) Music and dance preferences: Observations from the field (1999–2001)

Social events, Hungarian dinners, and cultural evenings in the diaspora institutions of the 1948 community in Olivos were more markedly characterized by singing than by dancing during my research period. Members of the first and the second generation enjoyed singing *magyar nóta* (folksy composed songs)—of which they exhibited a wide repertoire—and preferred urban ballroom dances (see Kovács 2009). Hungarian village folk songs were not frequently sung at the events I attended. I did not witness any participatory social dancing except for at the Olivos community’s largest annual fundraising event, the Hungarian Scouts’ Ball. This ball was not characterized by peasant culture elements during the time of my fieldwork at the turn of the millennium. The customary elements of the dance program were the Viennese waltz, the *Palotás*,⁶ and the *Fejedelmi tánc*, a Renaissance court dance; while the obligatory costumes were the historicising aristocratic *díszmagyar* and the *Bocskai*,⁷ as well as elegant suits and long evening dresses.

(2) The beginnings of Hungarian folk dancing in the 1948 community of Buenos Aires as represented in the local Hungarian media⁸

To obtain an impression of the standing and timeline of Hungarian folk dancing in the Olivos community, I turned to the diaspora press and

5 See DAMN, 2024: https://www.facebook.com/delamerikaimagyarneptanc/?locale=hu_HU.

6 *Palotás* is a Hungarian dance with an aristocratic and historical character, created in the 19th century.

7 *Díszmagyar* is the national festive costume of the 19th century. *Bocskai-ruha* is a markedly Hungarian festive costume created between the two world wars.

8 Diasporic folk dancing was not the direct focus of my doctoral research in Buenos Aires. I gathered information about its workings but it did not seem to play a central part in diaspora community life then.

searched for dance-related entries.⁹ The press in the Hungarian diaspora in Argentina has undergone major transformations since 1990. The pace of change has accelerated over the last two decades due to the digital revolution and the emergence of social media, and eventually led to the disappearance of the print press in 2014. Its functions have been taken over by a multitude of electronic and social media platforms. The individual interests and personal priorities of the successive editors and contributors over the years and decades left their mark on the content of the weekly and monthly papers. During the Cold War period, news of dance activities was rare, and in most cases, it did not refer to Hungarian folk dancing. Dancing in the Cold War era as a news item seemed irrelevant. Most of the references to dancing as a communal activity can be found in the miscellaneous news columns.

Field research in Argentina at the turn of the millennia revealed that the young, second-generation diaspora members' desire for "some kind of Hungarian folk dancing" in Buenos Aires arose during the 1950s. One of my interviewees related that as a teenager in the 1950s, he and his peers wanted to learn traditional Hungarian folk dances, but no one in the 1948 community knew them. They approached an elderly member of a Hungarian association of peasant origin from the south of Buenos Aires for help. He showed them steps and they tried to reproduce them, and that was how the Regös folk dance ensemble was conceived (Kovács 2009:145). Details of the beginnings of the Regös folk dance ensemble in 1958 were made public in an interview with another original member (Knapecz 2020d and 2020e). The birth of the Hungarian folk dance movement in Argentina shows similarities to its beginnings in Hungary in the 1950s as described by Zsuzsa and Sarolta Kővágó, when they refer to the *öntevékeny néptáncmozgalom* (self-taught or self-motivated folk dance movement) in their work on the antecedents of the move-

9 I browsed for information on Hungarian folk dance related events in the following periodicals: (1) *Magyar Hírlap: A délamerikai magyarok független hetilapja* (1971-1995), editor-in-chief: Adorján Czanyó (1975-); (2) *Délamerikai Magyar Hírlap* (Buenos Aires, 1996 -2004), editor-in-chief: Adorján Czanyó; (3) *HungAr-geNews: Az argentinai magyar kolónia havi ingyenes, elektronikus hírlevele* (2000-2004), bilingual electronic edition, editors: Constantino Miguel Alitisz and Matias Lomniczy; (4) *Argentínai Magyar Hírlap* (2005-2014), editor-in-chief: Haynalné Kesserű Zsuzsanna (including HUFÍ, a bilingual youth section edited by Kati Zólyomi); (5) *Buenos Aires-i Hírmondó* (2014-2016, monthly electronic edition; altogether 5 issues), editor: Lisa Gröber; (6) *Rólunk Szól* (2020, monthly electronic edition in continuation of *Argentínai Magyar Hírlap*, 8 issues), editor: Anna Vágási-Kovács, KCSP fellow from Hungary.

ment in Hungary (Kővágó and Kővágó 2015:14). The Regös folk dance ensemble celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2018 (Teszár 2018).

A breakthrough of folk dancing in the diaspora press arrived in 2005 with the monthly *Argentínai Magyar Hírlap* that addressed both Hungarian- and Spanish-speaking readers. They started to publish a Youth Supplement edited and in large part written by a second-generation Hungarian folk dance aficionado Kati Zólyomi, which reported enthusiastically on all folk dance-related events, from rehearsals, performances, and the arrival of guest teachers to her own experiences with folk dancing during her trips to Hungary and Transylvania. They testify to how the editor took the cultivation, promotion, and staging of Hungarian folk dance in the Olivos diaspora community as her personal matter (see also Knapecz 2020a and 2020c).

The data available online suggest that specific diaspora individuals played decisive roles in raising, channelling, and sustaining interest in Hungarian folk dancing in Buenos Aires since the inception of the folk dance movement in the 1950s. The first leader of the Regös ensemble, Dénes Vass, was unquestionably one of them (Knapecz 2020d). Kati Zólyomi, leader of the Regös for nearly two decades, played a significant role in Hungarian folk dancing in the Latin American diaspora more broadly as well (Knapecz 2020a and 2020c).

Kati Zólyomi's artistic vision of Hungarian folk dancing was strongly influenced by Hungarian folk dance scholar, dancer, and choreographer Károly Falvay (Knapecz 2020c). Falvay visited the Hungarian diaspora community in Argentina in 1980 as a folk dance master and transmitted his method that combined Hungarian folk dances and staged choreographies with a story line.

It was Kati Zólyomi who came up with the idea of the biannual South American Hungarian Folk Dance Meetings (Dél-Amerikai Magyar NéptáncTalálkozó, DAMN), following the model of the international Hungarian Scout meetings. The event series was actively supported and promoted by the Hungarian diaspora community in Brazil, in particular by second-generation Hungarian Scout leader, folk dance aficionado and former leader of the Brazilian Zrínyi Ensemble Gábor Gyuricza.¹⁰ An account of the specificities, such as the names of the participating guest dance masters, and the dance repertoires taught during the fourteen

¹⁰ For Károly Falvay's active role and contribution to the early phase of the DAMNs, see two of his choreographies performed by the Hungarian Zrínyi Ensemble from São Paulo, Brazil in 1988. The video was shared by Gábor Gyuricza, then artistic leader of the Zrínyi Ensemble (DAMN 1988a and 1988b).

DAMNs was published by one of the recurrent guest dance masters from Hungary, Mariann Truppel (2018). In principle, the event has been organized every two years since 1986 in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, or Venezuela, with the participation of dance groups from those countries. During the first encounters, only a few ensembles participated. The event series including the costs related with having guest dance masters, as supported by the World Federation of Hungarians, private donations, and the participants themselves. Due to the economic crises that hit Argentina and Brazil, the event was not held between 1997 and 2004. In recent years, the number of participating countries, dance ensembles, and folk music bands has been increasing steadily, including delegations from Hungary and Romania. So far, Argentina has hosted five, Brazil and Uruguay four, and Venezuela only one South American Hungarian Folk Dance meeting, while the one in 2020 was held online.

(3) The folk dance movement and táncház in Argentina: recent developments

Online sources, public social media profiles and comment flows, videos shared on YouTube, and suggest that several important developments have occurred in the Hungarian folk dance scene since my anthropological fieldwork in Buenos Aires nearly a quarter of a century ago. Some of these developments are clearly part of an organic process. For example, one of the central pillars of the Regös folk dance ensemble in Buenos Aires, third-generation Edi Bonapartian, comes from a family whose members have been very active contributors of the Hungarian institutions in Olivos for generations. Even as a teenager in the early 2000s, he was already actively involved in both scouting and folk dancing.

A founding father of the Táncház Method, Sándor Timár was among the first folk dance educators to give a full immersion in authentic folk dances to the South American Hungarian diaspora youth at the 2nd DAMN in 1988. Timár and his students at the Hungarian State Institute for Ballet, themselves great dance masters and choreographers (such as Tibor Makovinyi, Sándor Román, and Gyöngyvér Hortobágyi, to mention just a few), spent recurrent teaching periods in Buenos Aires supported financially mostly by the World Federation of Hungarians. Mariann Truppel highlights the steps of change of the gradual development process in the world of Hungarian folk dance in Argentina: choreographies were first learned from old black and white videos and then from master dancers in person, diaspora dancers then learned the basic

elements and rules of improvisation of a wider range of regional dances so they could design their own choreographies, and then they occasionally had live music and music recorded specifically for their own purposes by Hungarian folk music bands (Truppel 2018).

The introduction of the Kőrösi Csoma Program in 2013 and the permanent presence of KCSP fellows in Argentina and across Latin America changed the landscape of Hungarian folk dancing in the diaspora in several ways. Many fellows specialized in folk dancing, and their work helped enlarge the local dance repertoire to include dances of more regions.¹¹ The KCSP fellows contributed to the reframing of the folk dance gatherings as *táncház*, a term that was not part of the local Hungarian usage 25 years ago yet it has become a widely used term for the last decade. At the DAMNs, KCSP fellows and guest dance masters present, teach, and help practice *táncház* as a highly developed, elaborate methodology. This has included the knowledge transfer of music making, which resulted in the formation of local folk music bands Mákos and Cefre in 2012 (Truppel 2018:35), and regular *táncház* with live music in Buenos Aires. As recent photos and videos posted by the KCSP fellows, organizers of the DAMN, and the Regös Ensemble suggest, attire worn by the dancers show a wider variety, including pieces of traditional village clothing, whether originally from the village or created by professionals catering to the Hungarian folk dance scene (cf. Fülöp 2014).

Compared to the time of my fieldwork, the number of Hungarian folk dance groups and their active membership have increased in Argentina. In addition to Regös, the Tilinkó children's ensemble was founded to nurture the next generation of Regös dancers. The Oleander ensemble was formed in 2007 comprising of 20–22 adult women, some of whom had been active Regös dancers in the past. Kati Zólyomi is associated with two recent Hungarian folk dance ensembles, Zséje and Kolomp. The latter is composed of adult dancers and made its first public appearance at the 2012 DAMN (Truppel 2018). As mentioned before, two instrumental music groups have also been formed, so the monthly dance workshops and *táncház* in Buenos Aires are accompanied by live music. Hungarian folk dance activities were also launched in the Argentinean countryside. The Liliom children's folk dance group in Chaco in the North of Argentina was initiated with assistance from

11 Fourteen dances from the last ten years: dances from Bogyiszló, Bonchida, Dunántúl, Felcsík, Galga mente, Gömör, Kalotaszeg, Magyarbőd, Mezőség, Nagykálló, Rábaköz, Szászcsávás, Szék, and Vajdaszentivány (source: EMESE s. a.).

a member of the Regös Ensemble (EMESE, s.a.). KCSP fellows have also facilitated the establishment of new Hungarian folk dance groups, as was the case of the Paprika children's group in Bariloche, in Southern Argentina. Online video recordings of the commemoration of national holidays and festive occasions in the Hungária Association of the Olivos community show that Hungarian folk dancing has become the indispensable framework of celebrations (Regös 2023). Folk dancing and *táncház* have become a permanent feature at social events of the Olivos community where they had no central role at the turn of the millennium. The traditional annual Hungarian Scouts' Ball has featured Hungarian *táncház* with live music in recent years (Teszáry 2019). KCSP fellows have not only boosted and expanded Hungarian folk dance-related activities, but equally importantly, they increased their visibility by documenting them and sharing them via social media platforms and the online platforms of the Hungarian state administration. Since the introduction of the Kőrösi Csoma Program, the role, importance, and prestige of authentic Hungarian folk dancing in Buenos Aires have increased and the *táncház* phenomenon has become part of the institutionalized cultural life of Hungarians in Argentina.

CONCLUSIONS

I attempted to trace a complex process of change centered around Hungarian folk dancing and the *Táncház* Method of education and knowledge transfer in the Hungarian diaspora of Argentina. It aimed to show how a traditional dance culture and the intangible heritage of the *Táncház* Method were instrumentalized in the relationship between the homeland administration and a diaspora community. This process of change is conspicuous and subtle at the same time.

Let us review the factors and dynamics that have fed into the expansion of the Hungarian folk dancing as a social practice in Argentina since its inception. Age group membership played a simple but important role: the people who formed the Regös folk ensemble in the late 1950s were second-generation Hungarian youths eager to dance and have fun. The increasing popularity of folk dancing in Buenos Aires after the turn of the millennium was linked precisely to the generation of their children, the third generation, who were in their early teens at the time of my fieldwork. Connecting with each other and with people elsewhere through Hungarian folk dancing may build ties and arouse

emotions (see Papp 2008) in young third and fourth generation participants and can be a defining experience for diaspora members both at an individual and at a community level. The role of folk dance practice in the diaspora may be connected to the dynamics of the relations of diaspora and sending state; dancing may build ethnic identification on a personal, bodily level, and emotions are not only associated but can be awakened by it.

The solidarity with minority Hungarians living in Hungary's neighboring countries, especially in Transylvania, had always been an emotionally framed theme in the Olivos community, and the Transylvanian dances of the *táncház* repertoire lent the activity an attractive color. The strong anti-communism of the North Buenos Aires community and the initial subversive overtones of the *táncház* movement in Hungary before the regime change (see Balogh and Fülemlé 2008) may have had a positive influence on its reception, especially in the eyes of those individuals who visited Hungary and promoted folk dancing in Buenos Aires and Brasil (see Truppel 2018). The increasing ethnicization of Hungarian folk dancing and the *táncház* (Taylor 2021; Richter 2015) has contributed to the popularity of the activity. Community life in the middle and upper middle class Olivos community at the turn of the millennium was not characterized by elements of village or "peasant" culture. Similarly to the process described by Tamás Hofer (1991), it was the homeland ethnicization of a branch of peasant culture, peasant dances and the *táncház*, that played a part in the Olivos community's emotional attachment to it.

The effect of the above-mentioned factors has been enhanced by the increasing support system provided by four subsequent Hungarian conservative administrations to Hungarian diasporas worldwide since 2010. The preexisting Hungarian folk dance activities in Buenos Aires and transnational diasporic folk dance connections have been given a fundamental boost. As we have seen, the Kőrösi Csoma Program has contributed to the expansion of diaspora dance groups and ensured a continuous presence of Hungarian folk dance teachers in Buenos Aires since 2013. Online data suggest their positive reception by diaspora institutions. Synergies between KCSP ellows from Hungary and the Olivos community seem particularly intense in a YouTube video documenting the 2023 commemoration of the Trianon Peace Treaty.¹² The long-term social impact of this steady form of home state support on

12 Regös 2023. 2023-as Trianon megemlékezés Hungáriában. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axVpfukU2js&t=1421s> (07. 11. 2024.)

the diaspora community, as well as the consequences of a potential withdrawal of the latter, are yet to be seen.

Seen from a broader academic perspective, this article has tackled the politics of dance and has intended to expand our knowledge of the role of dance in migration processes especially in relations of sending state and diaspora. Folk dancing and *táncház* heritage is only one of several areas in diaspora lives supported by the sending state. Nevertheless, it is conspicuous and due to its embeddedness in the dancers' bodies and to their lived experiences of the joy of movement, it is perhaps the most efficient in creating attachment to the dancers' community, to the diaspora community, and to the entire nation. Right wing regimes' extension of citizenship to non-resident ethnic groups is a symbolic recognition of transborder relationships with ethnic kin communities (Waterbury 2014). Since the 2010s, there has been a shift in the Hungarian state's diaspora policy away from the divided nation concept towards the idea of a global network nation. The *Táncház* Method as a cultural heritage has been a crucial transnational instrument for the construction of a networked diaspora nation (Waterbury 2014) in recent decades. Hungarian folk dancing has come to fulfill a more central role than before, with the emphasis shifting from folk dancing to *táncház*. *Táncház* as heritage has become an elaborate product, which can be exported to other diaspora members as well as those who do not have Hungarian ancestry.

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APPLYING THE TÁNCHÁZ METHOD TO INTERNATIONAL HUNGARIAN FOLK SINGING TEACHING: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES FOR TRANSMISSION IN ENGLISH



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If I stood at the door of a táncház¹ and admitted only two of every three visitors, I imagine every reader would immediately feel it was antithetical to the táncház movement, with its goal to bring the music of the people back to the people, rebuilding a bridge which had been broken, and creating an inclusive, multi-generational space where learning can take place at all levels simultaneously. What if a third of the people in our village didn't even know the village táncház was happening, or what if some did, but no road led from their house to the party? Today I invite you to read the story of those on the outside, and the gentle yet rigorous, loving and serious, logical yet innovative methods we are using to welcome them inside.

THE CURRENT SITUATION: THE PEOPLE WHO ARE HUNGRY AND THE FEAST IN THE NEXT ROOM

Right now, about a third of the Hungarians and people of Hungarian descent on the planet live outside of Hungary, with about 3 million outside of the Carpathian Basin region in the diaspora. First, second, third, or later generation diaspora Hungarians have diverse relationships with Hungarian culture, in terms of exposure or lack thereof to the language or foods at home, occasional engagement in Hungarian cultural events such as local annual Hungarian festivals, or more regular

1 Táncház: traditional village community dance with live music and open dancing, which was then replicated in cities as part of the folk music and dance revival movement, known as the táncház movement.

involvement in Hungarian folk dance groups, churches, Scouts, or weekend language schools. These diaspora Hungarians are born into a given situation, similar to a Hungarian born in Slovakia or Romania, and the opportunities around them determine their maintenance of language and other elements of culture. Almost 1.4 million people in the U.S. identify as Hungarian (U.S. Census Bureau 2024), and only about 5.7% of them speak the language (U.S. Census Bureau 2025). A significant proportion seek greater connection with their family's heritage, but in many cases they don't know where to turn for good information and real connection. Some are able to periodically visit Hungary, whether that involves visiting friends and relatives while speaking Hungarian, or trying to reconnect with a familial homeland while struggling to navigate the now-foreign language. Some return for longer visits, such as a semester abroad or a scholarship for language study, while others move back fully—we refer to ourselves, diaspora Hungarians living in Hungary, as *visszidensek*.²

In addition, many people without Hungarian ancestry are interested in learning about Hungarian culture or folk music specifically. They are people both in Hungary and around the world who married a Hungarian or a person of Hungarian descent, and who want to get to know their spouse's culture or be able to pass it to their children. They are members of Hungarian folk dance groups and participants in folk music and dance camps in various countries, which include a true mix of Hungarians and non-Hungarians. Many who don't speak the language want to be able to participate in the singing with everyone else. They are amateur and professional musicians, ethnomusicologists, music educators, choral directors, and chorus members who may have come to Hungarian folk music by way of classical music or other folk music traditions. They are linguists, historians, folk arts specialists, graduate students in cultural studies, and others who are curious and eager to deepen their understanding of culture from a new angle. Additionally, many non-Hungarians live in Hungary for unrelated personal or professional reasons, and those expats often want to get to know the local culture where they live. This is one side of the current situation: a large population of people who are interested or potentially would be interested in Hungarian folk singing but don't necessarily speak Hungarian or speak it fluently.

2 *Vissza + disszidens = visszidens*, meaning 'returned defectors', known in English as return migrants, and in this usage includes descendants of those who left Hungary (for any reason).

On the other side, we have the absolute treasure that is apparent to those deeply engaged with the *táncház* movement in Hungary: the massive folk music archives representing 125 years of research work with hundreds of thousands of recordings available in multiple reputable free online databases,³ 50 years of a flourishing folk music revival movement, numerous institutions dedicated to the preservation and continuation of this music, an abundance of ways for someone to become aware of and involved in this music in Hungary—through *táncház*, concerts, camps, festivals, competitions, TV programs, etc.—and a wide variety of educational programs and publications for those interested in delving deeper into the style.⁴ In fact, several of the significant scholarly publications which present thousands of the best of the archival recordings have been translated into English, or could be readily used by English speakers with simple instructions (e.g. Richter 2012, Paksa [2001]2020, Sebő 2010, Vargyas [1981]2005, Dobszay and Szendrei [1998] 1992, Bodza and Paksa 1992, 1994, Bodza and Vakler 1999, 2005, 2010).

How can we bridge the two, and connect these populations with these songs and resources? This is my area of focus: awareness, access, dissemination, transmission, active use, and living practice—not just for researchers and folk musicians, but for any interested individuals or communities. In 2010, I founded the Hungarian Folk Singing Circle (*Népdalkör*), in which I've been teaching Hungarian folk singing classes held primarily in English for almost 15 years, teaching exclusively from source recordings of village culture bearers, even in settings where that is not the common practice.⁵ Originally based in the U.S. and now based in Hungary, we added online classes in 2020, which resulted in ongoing participation from North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and elsewhere. Our current in-person and online classes include hundreds of participants each year from over 50 countries, including over 25 different U.S. states and Canadian provinces. We have several different

3 Such as MTA - ELTE HTK Institute for Musicology, Folk Music and Folk Dance Archives (<https://zti.hungaricana.hu/en> and <http://db.zti.hu/folklor.htm>); Hungarian Heritage House, Folklore Documentation Library and Archives (<https://folkloradatbazis.hu/en/>); Museum of Ethnography, Audio Archives (<https://neprajz.hu/en>).

4 Such as at Óbuda Folk Music School; Folk Music Department at the Liszt Academy of Music; Hungarian Heritage House (<https://hagyományokhaza.hu/en/>); Fonó Budai Zeneház (<https://www.fono.hu/en/>); House of Music Hungary (<https://zenehaza.hu/en/>).

5 Photos and videos of the *Népdalkör* can be viewed at www.zinabozzay.com.

group classes every week, with hundreds of classes per year, as well as private lessons and professional coaching. Besides classes open to the general public, we regularly hold lectures and song teaching for a range of specific communities and institutions, such as schools and universities in Hungary as well as festivals and folk dance groups in the diaspora. In honoring the specific transmission methodologies that contributed to the successes of the *táncház* movement, I'm going to outline the methods we are using in the Hungarian Folk Singing Circle to bring traditional folk songs to the English-speaking world.

The thousands of people who have attended my classes over the years exactly match the demographics described above. If I take a snapshot of the participants in classes open to the general public, between 40–50% are diaspora Hungarians (first, second, or third generation, currently living in or outside of Hungary), another 40–50% have no Hungarian ancestry (about 15% are expats, non-Hungarians living in Hungary, and the rest live elsewhere), and the remaining 5–10% are Hungarians born and raised in Hungary (either still living in Hungary or having moved abroad as adults). About 25–35% are members of Hungarian folk dance groups in the diaspora, and a similar number are hobby or professional musicians or music scholars. In terms of Hungarian language knowledge, 10% are native speakers, 10% advanced speakers, 70% beginning to intermediate (many in the process of learning or re-learning), and another 10% have no knowledge of Hungarian.⁶ In surveying what led them to the classes, the most common reasons for joining are wanting to learn more about Hungarian heritage, wanting to improve Hungarian language skills, having become interested in the songs via folk dancing, and/or having a general interest in singing, folk singing, or traditional culture (often with previous experience in other folk music styles). In my experience, there is a strong desire for high-quality, accessible, English-language education suitable to these groups, but it is surprisingly rare and hard to find.

The majority of those who join my classes have not heard authentic Hungarian folk songs before joining, though not for lack of interest or searching. Even those who have been involved in the *táncház* movement in North America for decades have never heard a village source recording and are unaware of the archives and publications—even the ones

6 Although these demographics are inherently impacted by our promotion strategies and the way awareness of the classes spreads through word of mouth, the consistency over the years is a reflection of the seriously interested parties.

that would be very practical for them to use. They typically have a handful of well-known revival CDs (if involved in folk dance) or have heard or played a Bartók or Kodály composition based on a folk song (if they have a background in classical music), and have very little information beyond that. In 14 years of asking thousands of new participants about this, only two knew about the archives. How can this be, when they are massive, digitized, and online, free for anyone to use, from anywhere in the world? How have the many songbooks and anthologies meticulously publishing the best quality recordings not reached these communities? A Google search of “Hungarian folk songs” will lead to Queen’s version of “Tavaszi szél” on YouTube, but not to the Institute for Musicology or the Hungarian Heritage House. The current English-language Wikipedia pages on Hungarian folk music in no way reflect or summarize the current knowledge on the subject. In practice, it is not just about these populations not speaking Hungarian (and in fact, a significant portion do), it’s also about not knowing where to turn to learn about the style and not encountering the existing high-quality materials even when they search. For me, true accessibility is not only that these materials exist, but that the relevant populations who would benefit from them can easily find and use them.

HUNGARIAN FOLK SINGING IN THE VILLAGE AND IN THE REVIVAL: BEST TRANSMISSION (FOOD DELIVERY) PRACTICES

In order to describe the methodologies I use in the classes, the starting place is the context of folk singing in the living oral tradition in the villages. People sang a wide range of songs for a wide range of occasions: in everyday group settings such as evening spinning rooms and weekly community dances, alone as they reflected, and at numerous holidays and special occasions throughout the year. Folk singing served myriad practical, social, and emotional functions—for communication, courtship, emotional processing, partying, catharsis, and more. This varied repertoire is well-documented, rich in song types, scales, tunings, tempos, meters, ornaments, vocal timbres, and accompaniment, and therefore as an educator I want to pass on the breadth of that expression. Villagers actively created music as opposed to passively consuming it, and it was not an activity reserved for the best singer or two, but something the majority participated in. Songs were passed down orally over the generations and across the community, with a typical villager know-

ing dozens or hundreds of songs by heart, ready at their disposal for those solitary and social occasions. Viewing singing as a natural, everyday, non-performative activity that everyone can engage in is a very different way of thinking about music-making than many have now, and it provides the basis for holding folk singing classes which are open to all. Explaining these concepts resets participant expectations which have been shaped by modern commercial music recordings, empowering them to participate even if they don't have musical training or a "star-worthy" voice. It teaches them not just about the specific context from which these songs came, but the contexts in which they themselves could sing as well.

One of the most significant aspects of the urban *táncház* movement, as it created inclusive, interactive settings for transmission to address that which had been disrupted in the village, was direct contact with the source. In order to bring the traditions to a completely different social context, certain individuals served as intermediaries or cultural translators between the village culture bearers and the *táncház* participants, many of whom had no previous experience with this music or the village life it came from. They saw that to respect the elders, as well as the knowledge that they had inherited, cultivated, and now graciously shared, is to learn from them directly, rather than second or third hand, losing important details of the tradition. The urban *táncház* events were built on active participation as opposed to performance or passive consumption: having fun and learning together, absorbing not only the music and dances but also other aspects of the culture, ways of thinking, values, and history. Through decades of organic learning from those villagers, facilitating transmission, and building community, those in that liaison or teaching function who became the prominent musicians of the folk music revival built their knowledge and honed their craft, developing teaching methods and standards. This *táncház* method—not the activity or the movement, but the transmission methodology—was recognized by UNESCO as a best safeguarding practice for intangible cultural heritage, a model for others to follow across the globe (UNESCO 2011). Through the institutionalization of folk music education over recent decades, what I see as a "gold standard" for folk song teaching has emerged in the dedicated folk singing classes in Hungary (Székely 2019:12–46). The renowned and long-established Óbuda Folk Music School (*Óbudai Népzenei Iskola*) in Budapest exemplifies this model (Grozdits 2016).

One of the most fundamental elements among these best teaching practices is teaching orally directly from the source, whether that is a living villager who learned in the unbroken oral tradition or a recording of one, utilizing the outstanding archives and publications. Songs are repeated back one line at a time from that source, sometimes breaking down specific smaller figures. Participants write out the song words themselves, which is preferable for deeper learning and memorization, or they are given copies to take home. Teachers sometimes use their hands to show melodic contour, while musical transcriptions are rarely referenced (and even then, only as a supplement to the primarily aural learning). Teachers aim to cultivate their students' abilities to hear and emulate not only the core melody but the tuning, ornamentation, pacing, vocal technique, and all other stylistic elements. Attention is placed on variation through the verses, whether in melody, speech rhythm, or ornamentation, as opposed to only listening to one verse and doing a copy-paste for additional verses. Several different source recordings, including perhaps lesser-known melodic variants and assorted verses of text, are gathered when learning a given melody. Students make note of the source data: the village and region, the source singer's name and birth year, the collector and collection year, and when available, perhaps a little information about the singer's life (for example, if they were a shepherd, or who they learned the songs from, etc.). Because the most prominent teachers of the older generations are longtime contributors to the *táncház* movement and typically have done collecting work themselves, they are frequently able to talk about the source singers based on their own personal relationships with them. Classes focus on a given region's repertoire for a fixed period of time, whether that be a semester course or a weeklong summer camp, and some amount of background information about that region is provided. A variety of song types are taught—slow and fast, simple and complex, old style and new style, well-known and obscure, and including dance songs, grieving songs, shepherd songs, match-making songs, wedding songs, seasonal songs, lullabies, ballads, and so on—capturing the breadth of a region's characteristic repertoire and songs from the full life cycle as it has been documented. The teaching methods include a considerable amount of repetition, encouraging deep learning, stylistic singing, cohesion in the group, and memorization of the words. Often the teacher provides a digital transfer of the source recordings used in the class, or the student may record the guest village singer or download the recordings from publications or archives themselves, as individual practice with the

source recordings is strongly encouraged. Naturally, not every teacher in Hungary follows all of these practices, but overall, they represent high-quality transmission in folk singing teaching in the revival.

This transmission methodology differs from the singing that may occur at a *táncház* or folk festival in Hungary today. At those events, besides spontaneous singing by those who know the songs and sing along as the band plays, there are often brief 15–30-minute song-teaching sessions led by a revival singer to introduce a few verses of relevant dance songs (or occasionally slower non-dance or seasonal songs) during a break between dancing or other events on the program. As a streamlined version of the methodology described above designed for these large-group settings, source recordings are not typically included, musical details may be simplified or passed over, and background information (about the region, original context, song type, and so on) is not part of the teaching. While ongoing *táncház* participants who speak Hungarian can sing back the words and understand their meaning, as well as inquire about resources or opportunities for further learning if interested, non-Hungarians and diaspora Hungarians with varying language skills who attend these events are often not oriented to what they are hearing and learning, aren't able to pick up the words by ear, and don't know where to turn for further exploration. Since source recordings aren't referenced, many attendees may not realize they exist. Participants instead sometimes record the singing as it occurs at the event, of the teacher or of the whole group learning. In cases where the words are projected on a screen or handed out, they might take a photo or bring home the word sheets. I share these observations of common practices both to highlight these specific attendees' experiences and also to contextualize the methodologies I will be describing below.

Similar practices are common in the U.S. at *táncház*, folk music and dance camps, folk dance ensemble rehearsals, and other events hosted by the local Hungarian communities, mirroring the brief teaching I've just described, but held in English. A revival singer leads a couple of verses of a song, repeating it a few times, either teaching by ear or providing written song words, and sharing either a mirror translation of the verses or a summary of the topic. Typically this does not include an explanation of Hungarian pronunciation, listening to source recordings, background context, or further resources. Certain albums produced by revival bands in Hungary have become well-known in these communities, and those tracks are used not only to accompany dancing but also often as the reference material for song teaching like this as well

(in the way source recordings are used in Hungary), and that forms the shared, familiar repertoire in these circles. Whether led by U.S.-based singers or visiting teachers from Hungary, relatively simple songs are usually chosen for these teaching sessions—typically dance songs that have become well-known in the *táncház* movement—and whole categories of song types aren't presented at all. Sometimes these sessions function more like sing-alongs than structured lessons, which can be enjoyable for longtimers, but not inclusive for newcomers. According to the surveys I have conducted with my class participants, they were typically not able to learn the songs well in these settings, especially if they don't speak Hungarian and the songs were taught orally, or if there were only a few repetitions at a one-time event. They went home with sheets of song words (if provided) without any identifying information (such as the village or region, publication, teacher, etc.) and no recording to remind them of the melody once forgotten (which is to be expected after a single exposure). Some piece together information from revival CDs and YouTube on their own, listening to modern renditions or arrangements of varying quality, without knowing how well-documented these songs are and the tremendous existing resources. Unfortunately, low expectations for non-native and non-fluent speakers and criticism around pronunciation, language abilities, and singing abilities also play a role in these practices.

Hungarian festivals and other cultural programs in the diaspora may include a mix of village folk songs, folk song arrangements, *nóta*, folky-sounding composed songs, classical music or popular music sung in Hungarian, and other genres, and the distinctions between these genres are not clear to many, if not most, attendees. The vast majority of Hungarian-Americans do not attend such events, and have not had any exposure to Hungarian folk music. In other contexts where English speakers encounter Hungarian folk songs, for example in Hungarian language classes, it is often more of a demonstration intended to provide exposure than designed for students to learn to sing the songs well themselves. Occasionally, people encounter a book or website with simple musical transcriptions of popular folk songs, but without recordings attached, they are unable to learn the songs stylistically from sheet music alone. Non-Hungarian choruses that include Hungarian songs in their repertoire likewise either use revival CDs as their reference material or learn classical arrangements of the folk songs, typically without the guidance of a native speaker or folk singing mentor.

BRINGING EVERYONE TO THE TABLE: FOLK SINGING CLASSES FOR PEOPLE OF ALL BACKGROUNDS

In my teaching, I maintain the same fundamental methodology as the previously described “best practices” in folk singing classes in Hungary. I teach exclusively from source recordings, providing full source information for each recording (village, region, singer, collector, etc.), singing back from the recordings phrase by phrase with the students, and incorporating ample repetition. I present various recordings of multiple culture bearers singing the same melody when available, pointing out variations in melody, ornamentation, text, tempo, key, vocal timbre, and more. I teach a wide variety of song types, including both well-known and obscure, dance songs and non-dance songs, simple and complex. Building on these methods, I’ve made several adaptations in order to adequately mirror the *táncház* method in creating transmission opportunities for English speakers of all skill levels. Some of these methods are also practiced in Hungary—the implication is not that every element mentioned here is unique to our work, but rather, they are all included for the sake of thoroughness, because in this context they occur both in English and as a structured, intentional, consistent part of the curriculum. Aspects of my methodology I will cover here include class size and format, class length and pacing, pronunciation teaching, provision of song words and source recordings, song translation, background information, accessible terminology, visual aids and alternative notation, song choice, thematic lectures and supplementary classes, provision of further resources, outreach, cultural expectations, and online teaching.

Class size and format

To accommodate the greater need for individual attention due to the larger cultural gap, I hold the ongoing classes in small groups (typically 5–20 people) and in an interactive format, building in time for answering questions and giving individual feedback into the curriculum. I organize most of our ongoing weekly classes into six-week class series specifically so that there are frequent comfortable starting dates for newcomers to join. The series are focused on a specific region, including an orientation to that region and a representative group of songs that we will start and finish work on together during that fixed period of time—a model serving both newcomers and longtime participants who have attended for years. The multi-week period is enough time for par-

ticipants to learn a few songs well (including pronunciation, translation, context, and adequate listening, practice, and repetition), while not requiring too long a commitment from first-time participants who may be signing up to try something new and potentially a bit intimidating. This strikes a balance between the advantages and disadvantages of a one-time class (low commitment, but also lower-level learning and retention) and a longer semester- or year-long course (deeper learning, perhaps too long a commitment for some, and long periods of time during which it is more challenging or awkward for a newcomer to join). This also provides a clear structure in which a defined checklist of background information is consistently addressed within each class series: the region's location, basic history, ethnic and linguistic composition, characteristic instruments, local song and dance types, recommended musicians or publications for further listening, and so on. These cannot all be covered in a one-time workshop due to time constraints, nor repeated every week in a drop-in model class, and often come up at random in long-term, ongoing singing groups, which can result in some participants missing information as basic as what country a given cultural region is in. This model aims to avoid those problems.

Pronunciation classes

Before the six-week series begins, I teach a separate Hungarian pronunciation class in which we spend a full hour focused solely on each of the Hungarian letter sounds. I have created a detailed pronunciation guide with all of the Hungarian letters, English equivalents, IPA, example words, and descriptions, which participants use in class and keep for future reference. This gives new students adequate time to learn all of the letters properly and systematically, while also not wasting singing class time for those who already know it. The pronunciation class is optional, and it is notable that alongside complete newcomers, a large number of participants have years of Hungarian language classes or Hungarian folk singing experience behind them. The most common feedback they give is that the pronunciation itself, in isolation, had never been clearly explained to them, and being able to clarify sounds and spellings that they have misunderstood for years provides them relief at no longer guessing. This is important not only practically for everyone to pronounce the words well, but also emotionally and psychologically, as we begin to undo burdensome associations of Hungarian being a difficult language, and for many participants, start to heal inter-

generational trauma related to family language loss. This first encounter, with clear information and no judgment, lays the groundwork for feeling welcomed, respected, and able to fully engage with the materials. Later, in the singing classes, we pronounce through the words of every new song, helping beginners to reinforce these letter sounds and more advanced speakers to refine their pronunciation, while also addressing dialect pronunciations, nuances, and questions as they arise.

Individual copies of song words

In the singing classes, I provide participants with individual copies of the complete song words of the given source recordings, since writing them out would be very time-consuming for most, and the song word sheet includes all the source data of the recording or recordings, mirroring the standard practice for scholarly publications and archives in Hungary. It includes the village (if outside of Hungary, also the village name in that country's language, so they can easily locate it on a map), the smaller and larger cultural region it belongs to, the singer's full name and date of birth, the collector and the year of collection, publications where that recording appears, and my name and the date taught, so that the source of the song sheet itself is also clearly known. After listening to the recording(s) a couple of times, our first step is to pronounce and repeat back the song words, one or two words at a time, breaking longer words into syllables as needed. Depending on the song, we may additionally speak the words together in the rhythm as they occur in the song, or for fast songs, speak them more slowly and gradually work up to tempo. We then talk through the full meaning of the song words line by line, and I intentionally leave adequate space on the page for participants to write out the translation beside the Hungarian words.

As a visual manifestation of a specific audio file, the song word sheet makes the intangible tangible, creating a stand-alone document with all the oral data and source data of a specific recording or multiple recordings of the same song. This provides participants not only that information, but also a place where they can individually take notes on the further details that they learn about the song in accordance with their own backgrounds and levels of engagement. Some draw melodic contours and ornaments, some write in solfège syllables or scale degrees, and others retain the melody in their minds. One participant might mark basic pronunciation reminders while another marks dialect nuances, and a Hungarian speaker might only note down unfamiliar words

while another captures every word of the translation. A history-oriented student is engaged in transcribing facts shared in class about the source singer or the village, while a dancer always marks down the dances that correspond with the song.

Translations

I talk through the translations with the students verbally rather than including them printed on the sheet. In this way, I can adequately provide explanations and various synonyms for words without an exact English equivalent, clarify common misinterpretations of the mirror translation, answer their translation questions as they arise in real time, and explain the implied meanings, symbolism, metaphors, and cultural or historical references. We often discuss parallel English expressions to bring the texts to life. These songs are filled with dialect and old-fashioned words, and the Hungarian speakers also have questions about their meanings. I incorporate discussions of relevant customs, traditional clothing, objects, and aspects of village life as they arise from the song words themselves, or to explain the context in which those words were sung, such as during flirtation in the evening spinning room. I often show relevant photos and video clips from archives, documentaries, and my own village collecting work of what we are discussing. Leaving participants to rely on translation programs inevitably results in them not fully understanding the texts and therefore having less connection with the material, negatively impacting transmission. The risk of misinterpretation and the need for cross-cultural explanation is so great that I consider engaging in these longer, detailed translation conversations a crucial part of this work. In situations where time is extremely limited (e.g. a short, one-time festival class), I include the complete translation printed alongside the song words, but I still speak through it to ensure comprehension, and in those cases exclusively choose songs with texts that don't require further explanation or contextualization.

Background information

Background information more broadly is a major component of the classes. It is not simply that we are holding the class in English and translating the song words—it is truly bridging the gaps in knowledge to orient participants to the style. This includes starting with what folk singing is and exactly how it was part of daily life, looking at maps of

the cultural regions and subregions, sharing history and photos of the region we're learning from, or describing the dance or traditional instruments that accompany a given song. With the full spectrum of backgrounds, the information must be both understandable to newcomers as well as enriching for seasoned folk dancers or ethnomusicologists. If I use musical or ethnographic terminology, I make sure to describe it in everyday words as well, and I clarify the meanings of terms we keep in Hungarian. Inevitably false assumptions and stereotypes arise ("Hungarian folk songs are all depressing" is a classic example of this), and my responses often require explaining the facts as well as new ways of thinking about those facts. I aim to have the conversations in a way that does not assume prior knowledge, offers a succinct yet well-rounded picture, and is sensitive to the fact that some participants are learning new things about a culture they may feel they should already know because of their family history or their own activities.

I ask for questions and emphasize that all types are welcome—especially the so-called "stupid questions" they might feel embarrassed to ask. I don't criticize them for not knowing something but rather delight in the opportunity to educate, as I'm well aware from my own personal lived experience that U.S. schools don't teach Carpathian Basin geography, and I understand why they might think a guitar is a folk instrument in Hungary too. A Californian not knowing the difference between Kalotaszeg and Gyimes is no different than a Hungarian not knowing the significant geographic and cultural differences between Los Angeles and San Francisco. As newcomers join and similar questions arise repeatedly, I ask returning students if they can answer, to see how confident they are now in their knowledge. Participants are well-educated and curious, and they simply haven't had access to good information on this subject. It provides a beautiful clean slate to fill with accurate, colorful details and potentially the opportunity to change the way they see things.

Holistic curriculums incorporating the geography, history, and context of the songs, shared in a clear, patient, non-condescending manner while actively including the space for participant questions, are a key part of an international pedagogical approach. Participant feedback consistently indicates this is one of the most meaningful and eye-opening parts of the classes, and something that many longtime members of the international *táncház* movement have been missing for decades. This background information—understanding that the songs came from a living oral tradition, that because they aren't composed and titled

they are referred to by their first line, that regions and their repertoires differ significantly, that decades of fieldwork made these recordings possible, that revival renditions span the spectrum from traditional to fusion styles, and so on—also gives participants the tools to navigate archives and publications on their own, and helps them better understand what they encounter at *táncház*, camps, festivals, and other settings outside of class.

Vocal development and class dynamic

We work on folk singing vocal technique to warm up our voices, loosen our bodies, and sing in a healthy and stylistic manner. Participants often need to give extra attention to connecting to their natural chest voices and using appropriate vocal technique for folk singing, whether they have limited previous singing experience or their previous experience is in other styles. They also inherently compare their voices to those they hear on studio albums of the various styles around them, created with autotune, reverb, and endless editing. Showing them a wide range of village singers with various voice types recorded on a simple device in a kitchen or a meadow is important for shifting their mentalities and their ears. Over time, they come to better accept both the village singers' voices and their own. This allows them to not only listen to but also deeply value and learn from the source recordings, as they come to hear the treasures behind the scratchy audio and unfamiliar vocal qualities. They hear that every small child and every old granny in the village sang, and therefore they can too. Both the concrete vocal exercises and the acceptance of everyone's unique voices create the conditions for improved singing abilities and confidence.

Foundational to all of this is my primary mentor Éva Fábíán's pedagogical approach, which includes self-deprecating humor and a relaxed and playful energy to create a class dynamic in which the most difficult songs can be learned. Through cultivating the sense that we are all on a treasure hunt together, poring through these amazing collections, listening again and again, figuring it out with our voices together one step at a time until we've got it so well that we can sing it on our own and later pass it on, her classes are simultaneously casual and fun while exacting and uncompromising on stylistic detail. There is no intention to have participants be impressed by, much less intimidated by, the teacher's incredible singing—the focus is on the beauty of the songs, and the joy of singing them together.

Providing recordings directly

The specific source recordings we are using are shared directly with participants, along with the song word sheets that include full citation details. They don't have to search for the recordings themselves, and they can practice along with them at home from the very start of learning each song.

Learning orally

Song words in hand, the songs themselves are taught entirely orally, never from musical transcriptions or scores. After reviewing pronunciation and translation, from that point forward we can use the exact same teaching methods typically used in Hungary with Hungarian speakers: repeating back phrase by phrase from the recording, focusing on specific musical details as needed, and observing variations between verses and recordings. More repetition is needed because most participants are simultaneously focusing on melody and pronunciation, and also because the overall style of music is newer to them, for example a given scale or pulse sounding relatively "foreign." The latter can also be true for native Hungarian speakers who haven't had much previous exposure to certain types of folk music. Both for the sake of variety and to include all participants, these repetitions may be done more slowly for those who are struggling, or in higher or lower keys to accommodate different vocal ranges, with periodic checks to see if anyone has questions or is encountering difficulties.

Pacing and accomplishment

Because the goal is true acquisition and not just exposure, the materials must be realistically paced for the amount of class time such that most participants leave feeling confident singing the songs independently and understanding what they are singing. Unlike ongoing members of the *táncház* community in Hungary, many of these participants will not hear the songs reinforced again in other settings, and if they do, they will only be able to engage and participate if they've already become confident with both the words and melody. In a six-week class series with 9–12 hours total class we typically cover five to seven songs, depending on the song difficulty and participants' previous experience. Over many years of teaching these demographic groups, a clear average of 1.5–2 total hours per song has emerged, which reflects an average of

45 minutes of initial introduction followed by additional repetition and details in subsequent weeks. Thus in a one-time workshop, participants gain much more by learning one song well than by being briefly introduced to several. Even with shorter and simpler songs, or more experienced singers, it is worth planning sufficient time for pronunciation, translation, listening to recordings, background information, repetition, singing back independently, and answering questions. Repetition over a several-week series is clearly advantageous to one-time workshops in terms of long-term song retention, although providing the song words and recordings does at least offer motivated participants the opportunity to do further work on their own afterward. By comparison, a typical *táncház*, folk music summer camp, or heritage festival folk song teaching session might cover three to five songs in just 30 minutes, without providing materials for later self-study. While it may be effective with experienced native speakers, that pacing is not well-suited for this community.

Visual aids

I frequently use my hands to show the melodic contours as they first acquire a new melody, as is commonly practiced in Hungary, similar to the upward-downward movement when using Kodály hand signs. Occasionally I will draw the contour of a single more elaborate ornament or explain its shape verbally by giving the scale degrees (for example “43432121”), since the numbers are understandable even to those without a music background. I likewise encourage participants to draw melodic contours above the song words, or to mark the syllable where a leap or ornament occurs. For particularly challenging songs, I use a similar style of alternative notation for the full melody—using lines instead of note heads to represent pitches, proportional spacing instead of classical rhythmic notation (no stems)—which I briefly show them to complement and reinforce our aural learning. Although these are easy to follow for those who do or don’t read music, it is important that it is only visually simpler than Western classical notation, without loss of musical detail relevant to the style. Besides highly ornamented songs, another song type for which I’ve used visual aids are the fleeting harmonies from *Magyarbőd*. I create a composite transcription from multiple source recordings (all I can find for the given melody), which I then color-code so they can visualize the harmonic possibilities. I can then instruct them to all sing the red path, the blue path, divide

into two groups, and so on. This is again intelligible to those who don't read music, but also consistent with standard music notation for those who do. When there are many different melodic variants, it's a way of ensuring that those variations aren't lost to a homogenous standardized version, or that new harmonies aren't added unintentionally. Since these songs were traditionally passed down orally, I don't feel these visual aids are fundamentally necessary. In our context it does make the learning process both more efficient and less daunting for these specific song types, and participants are grateful that it brings these songs into their reach in their full original detail. As a general rule, if those who read music request sheet music I explain why we primarily learn aurally and encourage them to make their own transcriptions if they are motivated to do so, which I gladly review in private lessons for missing details. I only use visual aids in class for roughly 1 in 100 songs.

Incorporating challenging songs and recordings

In addition to drawing contours, I use other pedagogical techniques to render especially challenging songs more accessible, such as slowing down the recording without changing pitch. By listening to it at, for example, 80% speed, we can get fast words under our tongues or more easily break down complex ornaments. If a given source recording is too high or low for most of the class to sing back, I sometimes use software to shift the key by a few steps—it doesn't change anything else about the recording, but it removes the hurdle of vocal register, when there are already so many hurdles for them. If a rhythm or meter is new to them, for example with the *lassú magyaros* dance tunes of Gyimes, then we spend time doing separate rhythm exercises, and then return to the song.

Making fast, wide-ranging, harmonized, or complex songs more approachable and digestible with these tools is preferable to not teaching them. I would rather take these extra steps than to either simplify the songs or present only simpler songs, both of which have negative consequences for the *táncház* movement on a whole. Between these various strategies and lots of patience and love, there are no song types I feel we can't take on. Some participants have amazed me and the rest of the class in their renditions of songs considered among the most challenging in the repertoire.

Song choice

Song choice is extremely important in this work, and differently so than when serving Hungarians in Hungary. For the diaspora Hungarians and non-Hungarians who have had exposure to Hungarian folk music, it has typically been a much more limited scope: more *csárdás* than slow dances, string bands but not long shepherd's flutes, children's tunes but not ballads, and so on. I treasure the diverse range of the traditional repertoire and its reflection of the full spectrum of the human experience, and thus aim to bring a representative sample of songs to these communities, an undertaking that requires conscious and thoughtful effort, and in fact works against existing expectations or stereotypes in certain settings. I no more want to see the gorgeous ornamentation, unusual tunings, asymmetric rhythms, or strident vocal timbres fall out of use than assume that Hungarian-Americans, for instance, aren't capable of learning complex material.

Experience over the years has led me to develop relatively strict song choice guidelines, dependent in part on the specific class's demographics and previous (and expected future) experience in the style. In other words, relatively few songs are good choices for a very first introduction to Hungarian folk singing (especially in a one-time class which may be a given group's only exposure to the style) as compared to the greater number of potential songs for ongoing participants or community members who have the luxury of placing those songs in the context of dozens of others. Given that less material can be covered in an English-language class—let us compare to Andrea Navratil's Hungarian-language *Dúdoló* classes for adults in which an average of 10–15 songs are taught in a 1.5 hour class—if each song will be one of five rather than one of thirty from a given region, it is more difficult to justify including songs that are less characteristic of the style, are an obscure variant of a well-known song, only have a recording of a single verse, are about domestic violence, etc. Understandably, participants can and often do reach conclusions after even just a few songs (“oh, so all Hungarian songs sound like this”, “they're all about heartbreak”, etc.), which is why giving attention to diversity of tempos, scales, meters, musical complexity, subject matter, and so on in every single course is so important to not furthering existing stereotypes or creating new ones. This can also be addressed in advance through dialogue in class, and ideally playing a few contrasting recordings, even if other songs aren't being learned at the time.

It is indispensable for those who don't speak Hungarian and for those less familiar with the style to have a high-quality recording to learn from, imitate, and practice with outside of class. This may rule out teaching a wonderful song for which no good source recording exists. Careful song choice includes choosing a representative group of songs for each workshop or series in terms of song types, tempos, topics, popularity, difficulty, and more. For example, a balance of easier and more challenging material is important to be accessible to those without singing backgrounds while also engaging more advanced singers, and also for combating existing impressions that all Hungarian folk songs are simple. What is easier or more difficult for non-speakers is also not necessarily the same as it would be for Hungarian speakers; for example, a relatively simple up-tempo song can be a tongue-twister and take much more time to learn than a slower more musically complex song. Ideally there is also a balance between well-known songs—and in those cases, teaching the most well-known variant and verses, so they can sing it later with others—and lesser-known songs, to deliberately expand the limited repertoire currently in circulation.

Factors in choosing songs include:

- › teaching time (e.g. 1 short easy song in 30 minutes, 1 longer or more complex song in 1 hour, etc.);
- › relative difficulty (considering singing level, language knowledge, and amount of time);
- › single song or multiple contrasting songs;
- › source recordings available (recording quality, singing quality, suitable key for repeating back, melodic variant, verses on the recording, etc.);
- › meaning of the song words (the need to translate word for word, how the overall meaning will come across cross-culturally, having adequate time for any longer explanations needed);
- › representation and balance (representing Hungarian culture both musically and in the messages conveyed in the song words, the songs being representative or characteristic of the region being studied, how the song fits into or complements participants' existing repertoire, and the balance and variety of song types, tempos, topics, difficulty, etc.);
- › participant goals (one may explicitly want to learn well-known songs they can sing with relatives, while another seeks lesser-known, not-overdone songs to perform with their band);

- › stereotypes participants might have about Hungarian folk music (for example teaching a complex, highly ornamented song to experienced Balkan singers who think Hungarian music is simple, or teaching a very simple, slower song to non-speakers overwhelmed and intimidated by the idea of singing in Hungarian).

Appropriate song choice is a complex and time-consuming issue, a major factor in the success of a teaching occasion, and in my view, comes with a significant burden of responsibility in this cross-cultural context. The chosen songs will be the first and only Hungarian folk songs some participants know, while for others they both sustain and expand the repertoire in use in their respective communities, having an impact for years to come.

Language development

Singing is an incredible tool for pronunciation practice because of the listening and repetition, with the syllables occurring more slowly than in speech. New vocabulary can be acquired as individual words and idiomatic phrases, with built-in rhythm and accentuation, just as a child naturally acquires language. Songs are also an ideal way to improve language skills and cultural connection because they are each a tangible, bite-size unit: one can learn those specific words and that specific melody, and have a clear sense of accomplishment. The majority of class participants are Hungarian learners, and Hungarian being a relatively difficult, often overwhelming, language for English speakers, learning folk songs is a tremendous supplement to language classes and offers a different path to language acquisition.

Supplementary classes

The singing classes are complemented by separate 90-minute lectures and workshops on various topics, such as an overview of Hungarian folk music (including regions of the Hungarian language area, definition of folk music, history of folk music collections, and the *táncház* movement), the folk instruments, vocal technique for folk singing, song collecting methodology, using the publicly accessible online archives, folk music resources, and more. Over time, I have come to see these as an essential part of the curriculum. While most folk dancers are aware of some cultural regions, they typically haven't been shown the bigger

picture of the whole language area or had the opportunity to ask questions. Everyone has questions about the instruments, and that subject is still difficult to research online in English. Questions about chest voice, head voice, and how to sing stylistically are frequent, as participants struggle to move away from classical and popular vocal technique. Many have heard of Bartók and Kodály or about the term “táncház” for years, but haven’t had the chance to hear the whole history summarized to really understand the roots and birth of the current revival. Even fluent Hungarian speakers struggle to navigate the archives, and it is very common that a diaspora Hungarian would like to search for songs from their parents’ or grandparents’ villages. As with the pronunciation classes, separating these big-picture topics from the ongoing singing classes means that each one can be thoroughly and properly addressed for those interested. Otherwise, these topics arise at random in the course of singing classes, and are only partially addressed due to time constraints and avoiding repeating the same information again and again for ongoing participants.

Sharing further resources

Our classes serve as a bridge to other existing resources. We cannot assume any particular awareness among international participants, and I myself spent years in folk music circles before learning about certain major events, institutions, and publications simply because they didn’t happen to come up in conversation. Rather than leaving it to chance, resources are deliberately integrated into the curriculum, included briefly in any one-time overview lecture or singing workshop as well as in detail as a separate lecture. I provide a list of the major institutions related to Hungarian folk music and the services they offer, folk music concert venues and event calendars, the most user-friendly scholarly publications available and where to purchase them, online resources for further listening, recommended musicians, and more. Resources are also woven into the ongoing weekly classes, whether sharing a book our current song was published in, films about the region we are studying, or a specific upcoming event. This may lead to helping them to navigate a Hungarian webshop and international shipping, or a class discussion about culturally appropriate behavior and how welcome they may be in certain spaces. Participants’ questions provide the opportunity to support them individually and also to continuously adjust what I share based on the needs and interests they express. There is

tremendous value in facilitating these connections, as currently none of the major folk song publications are in regular use in the diaspora, very high-quality listening can be done online from anywhere with some guidance, and many students have engaged in events that they learned about in class. This information can ultimately have a larger ripple effect in their communities.

Teaching online

Taking the group singing classes online in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic led to yet another layer of adaptations. It initially seemed impossible to hold fulfilling online group singing given the audio delays, and we assumed we might do it temporarily simply out of necessity. Instead, we found it to be both productive and practical, and as more and more people joined from around the world, it blossomed into something beautiful. The classes are held live and interactively on Zoom, with video cameras turned on and everyone as engaged as if we were together in person. With PDFs and MP3s sent ahead of class, we follow all of the exact same class content as described thus far: listening to source recordings, pronouncing the words, discussing translations, showing maps and images, singing back from the recordings line by line, and so forth. During the initial learning of a song, the participants are muted unless engaging in the conversation. After several repetitions, those who feel comfortable volunteer to sing a line or verse for the group. Solo singing wasn't and isn't standard practice during in-person group classes, but it is unavoidable in this setting. The participants have not only adapted to it in terms of the necessary confidence, we have also come to appreciate the benefits of hearing each other sing and receive feedback. Being muted most of the time also has unexpected benefits, such as that each student is always singing in duo with the recording or teacher and not hearing others in the process of learning, and less confident singers who would hesitate to join in person can comfortably join online and not be heard until they are ready. The decade of previous experience teaching these same populations before going online is a core reason for its success, already having a sense of pacing and the number of repetitions needed, and anticipating what will be hard for them. Unlike obligatory online meetings, every person present is there because they want to be, so the class energy is one of genuine interest and enthusiasm. Being on Zoom may seem like the farthest possible setting from the original context of these songs, but

for someone in Seattle, rural Canada, or New Zealand, it's a window into another world, a lifeline of information that they are deeply interested in and don't have access to locally. This is why the online classes continue to thrive years after the return of in-person activities. We have formed supportive communities even among those who live far apart but often have much in common, building a real sense of comradery. Participants in the online classes also sing the songs together in person outside of class—with each other (for those in the same area), with their families, with their folk dance groups, or when they meet each other at annual camps. Participants also go seamlessly back and forth between the in-person and online groups, which work on the same material in parallel: for example, if they are traveling to Hungary for a few weeks then they have the chance to attend in person, or if they live in Budapest and are at home sick then they can join online instead.

Private lessons

Students' development is also supported through one-on-one work in private lessons, online and in person. Currently, English-language teaching, whether in Hungary, the diaspora, or international communities, is almost exclusively in large-group settings. Creating a space for not only small group classes but also individual guidance promotes significant growth and helps clarify areas of focus for that person during the group classes or their own practice time. While weekly private lessons may be prohibitive for many due to time and financial constraints, we have found a balance by having a one-hour individual lesson at least once or twice per semester for many ongoing participants, giving them a boost in development by challenging them at their own level, while also fostering closer personal relationships. Professional musicians are also coached individually as they prepare songs for performance or recording.

Recitals

In recent years we have held class recitals twice a year. These do not re-orient the classes toward a performance focus, but rather provide a space for everyone to share and celebrate what they have learned with their fellow classmates. Over time students build up a binder of songs, singing most songs more confidently with others. The recitals provide motivation for each student to choose a couple of songs each semester

to learn thoroughly enough to sing solo in full for the class. The songs are then at their disposal to sing anytime, anywhere—just as they were for singers in the village. Hearing each individual from all around the world, with all of their personal stories, sing these songs is incredibly moving, and each person is applauded for their efforts and accomplishments at their own level.

Outreach and infrastructure

These groups cannot be served if they don't know the opportunity exists, so time must be spent on outreach and promotion, contacting communities and institutions to spread the word about the classes. Many Hungarian folk musicians and events don't have an online presence and are more oriented toward their existing communities than toward reaching new audiences. This work has a different aim, and in this case international expectations include having online infrastructure to learn about, register for, and pay for the classes. Meeting their cultural expectations also includes pre-planning highly structured, productive, punctual classes, especially when held online, where everyone wants their screen time to be well-used. This is a contrast with *táncház* settings where social time and relaxation are part of the event, and also with more casually-run folk singing classes in Hungary which grew out of that same community and kept those habits as part of community building. In this context, it would feel like wasted time during a paid class, so it is a point of accessibility to meet those expectations and to build community in different ways.

Background support for the classes

As I reflect on first seeking out these songs as a diaspora Hungarian myself, and on my early years of teaching, the classes have evolved tremendously in response to the needs of the participants and my desire to always improve how I serve them. Week by week, I encounter new questions on our journey together, and I turn with some of them to my own mentors and to the village culture bearers, leading to many fascinating conversations which wouldn't have arisen otherwise. I especially thank Éva Fábrián, Andrea Navratil, and Gergely Agócs for their patience with these countless questions and for their ongoing support of this work.

IN CONCLUSION: QUALITY MATERIALS PLUS A WELCOMING ATTITUDE ALLOWS EVERYONE TO BE WELL-NOURISHED BY BEAUTIFUL TRADITIONAL SONGS

To summarize, there are two major components to bringing these songs in their traditional form to English speakers: first, the quality of class content and materials presented to students, and second, a welcoming, supportive, and respectful attitude. The mentality described toward both the collections and the participants is as important as the materials. Approaching Hungarian as learnable and not strange, approaching scratchy recordings of untrained singers as gorgeous and valuable, and approaching every participant as welcome and legitimate cultivates a positive class atmosphere necessary for a successful adaptation of the *táncház* movement to an international context. I have found the methods described here to be productive in facilitating their learning. I hope that over time some of them will become standard practice when serving diaspora Hungarian and non-Hungarian communities, and I hope that the institutions developed over the past 50 years of the *táncház* movement will increasingly take these individuals and communities into consideration in their work. The successes we have had so far in the Hungarian Folk Singing Circle are just the tip of the iceberg, and with a few relatively simple changes at institutional levels, we could open the doors to the tremendous work which has already been done to even broader audiences.

The *táncház* movement has seen success in Hungary in increased familiarity with cultural heritage, the integration into participants' everyday lives, and the building of cultural self-esteem—and the same is true when this material is shared as richly with diaspora Hungarians, knowing that the gap in cultural knowledge to re-learn may be greater, but the rewards therefore all the sweeter. Recognizing the loss of language, knowledge, life skills, and more which occurred in just a couple of generations can weigh heavily, and not just for those of Hungarian descent. For many participants, it can be an empowering process to heal a sense of disconnect, becoming less so victims of history and instead reclaiming it and taking an active role in their own learning. Participants share the songs with their families, friends, and folk dance groups, and some perform the material publicly, contributing to their respective local communities. Some have reached advanced levels of Hungarian knowledge or have traveled to Hungary, some have regained citizenship, and a few have even moved back. Some mothers sing these songs to their babies, and others finally learn about the culture of their

parents and grandparents, healing a break in generational transmission and helping them connect with their past. Others better understand the Bartók pieces they play on piano, connect with their Hungarian spouse's family in new ways, see fascinating similarities with their own culture in another part of Europe, or learn from song collecting methodologies to apply to their own research work. With all their different backgrounds, they often report that this is one of the most rewarding and meaningful activities they are involved in. Meeting participants where they are and removing unnecessary barriers (whether practical or psychological) in order to make the songs accessible to them isn't about simplifying the tradition for mass consumption—it's about creating a true staircase so they can climb all the way to the top, where we can welcome them to the feast inside.

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EUROPEAN FOLK
REVIVALS AND
CONNECTIONS
WITH THE TÁNCHÁZ
MOVEMENT



THE *DOM TAŃCA* MOVEMENT IN POLAND: USE OF ARCHIVAL SOURCES FOR RESEARCH AND CONTEMPORARY MUSICAL PRACTICE



Weronika Grozdew-Kołacińska and Jacek Jackowski

STAGED FOLKLORE IN 20TH-CENTURY POLAND

The revival of Polish traditional rural music was born from dissent from scenic folklorism as practiced by the national music and dance ensembles (*zespoły pieśni i tańca*). After World War II, when totalitarian communist rule began in Poland, folk culture became a tool of propaganda. As such, it wasn't about showing the real world of rural traditions, with its deep symbolism, dance trance,¹ richness and variety of rituals, and regional diversity of musical styles. Instead, large folk ensembles, modeled on Mitrofan Pyatnitsky's national Soviet choir and ballet founded in 1911, presented an overregional, stylized, "powdered", national and socialist version of folklore.

However, the idea of folk ensembles dates back to the 1930s. School curricula introduced folk and national dances and songs into public education, and folklore was commonly put on stage through the theatricalization of rites (especially wedding ceremonies), peasant orchestras (starting in 1881), state harvest festivals (such as *Dożynki*), and song festivals (as a precedent of folklore festivals) (Sobieska 2006: 171; Dahlig 1998: 55-70; 210-216; 386-406; 478-480). Two main components overlapped within the development of the folklore movement: the artistic aspirations of peasants and the cultural policy of the Polish state. During the interwar period, state policies referred to folklore as a uniting element of the nation previously broken by the partitions (Prussian, Russian, and Austrian), while in the Polish People's Republic period,

1 One of the most characteristic features of Polish folk dances, such as the *oberek* or the *mazurka*, is their trance-like nature, which is achieved by repeating the same musical motif many times, each time inflected by the use of ornamentation.

they tried to use rural folklore to confirm the ideological superiority of “the people” (peasantry) over other social classes.

The first state folk ensemble with a pan-rural or national character was “Mazowsze” (*Państwowy Zespół Ludowy Pieśni i Tańca „Mazowsze”*, lit. “Mazowsze” State Folk Ensemble of Song and Dance), founded by the composer and conductor Tadeusz Sygietyński and the actress Mira Zimińska-Sygietyńska in 1948.² The second one was “Śląsk”, established in 1953 on the initiative of the composer and musicologist Stanisław Hadyna and the choreographer Elwira Kamińska.³ Both groups became reference points for regional folk ensembles, of which there were thousands in Poland during the 1950s, at workplaces, schools, universities, community centers, and other locations.

A village with its own local ensemble had a higher status in the eyes of society. According to the ideas of “progress” under socialism, peasant society was to recant traditional rustic “backwardness”, so the aim was to “embellish” the raw rural music and to match the models set by the professional state song and dance ensembles. Establishing a large ensemble in a village involved purchasing costumes and instruments as well as hiring choreographers and singing and dance instructors. This influenced the perception of the village’s economic status: while a traditional band with only a fiddler and drummer was a sign of poverty, a wedding with a pedal accordion (*harmonia pedałowa*), or large instrumental band showcased social and economic advancement. All of this, in addition to radio broadcasting and the electrification of rural areas, not only accelerated the disappearance of old, spontaneous forms of folklore, but also pushed aside traditional rural musicians and their music. Thus, traditional folk music never enjoyed special respect or appreciation in Poland, nor did it achieve a national status, even though the authorities of the Polish People’s Republic tried to nationalize it arbitrarily. Folk culture was commonly and widely associated with stylized dance and choral productions inspired by Polish folklore, not with the real artistic traditions of Polish villages.

2 The current official name of the ensemble is “Mazowsze” State Folk Ensemble of Song and Dance named after Tadeusz Sygietyński, see <https://mazowsze.waw.pl>.

3 Today it is called “Śląsk” Polish National Song and Dance Ensemble in memory of Stanisław Hadyna, see <https://www.zespolslask.pl>.

THE ROOTS OF A NEW FOLK REVIVAL

In the 1980s, following the political transformation in Poland, musical groups associated with alternative culture began to appear. People listened to punk and improvised music, wrote and sang poems, and took part in drama groups inspired by Jerzy Grotowski's ideas.⁴ The "Gardzienice" Centre for Theatre Practices had a great impact on the revival movement, especially in their beginnings (1977–1983), when reaching for traditional Polish rituals and songs were particularly important (Rokosz 2009:98–120). The ideas of Gardzienice were expanded by Teatr Węgałty, which used Polish traditional rituals and music.⁵ Their practices included caroling and trips to villages where old Polish traditions were still alive.

The Polish revival movement had a dualistic approach to traditional musical folklore. On the one hand, the members arranged folk tunes, adapting them to different styles and genres, mostly popular ones. The term *folk* acquired a specific meaning in Polish, distinguishing folklore-based urban youth music (*muzyka folkowa*) from actual folk music played by rural musicians (*muzyka ludowa*) (Dahlig-Turek 2012:315).⁶ On the other hand, revivalists rediscovered and reconstructed non-stylized forms of traditional music (Grozdew 2006:383–391; Rokosz 2009:77–94; Grozdew-Kołacińska 2023:119–129). It should be emphasized that the "folk stream" (*nurt folkowy*) in Poland incorporates two main approaches to traditional folk music: various forms and styles of music inspired only by rural music, and music played as faithfully as possible among musicians from an urban environment. The music of traditional rural musicians does not belong to this trend.

It was in Teatr Węgałty that musician Witold Broda and his friends met painter and folklore collector Andrzej Bieńkowski and heard his field recordings for the first time.⁷ In 1992, Anna and Witold Broda, Alicja and Jacek Hałas, Agata Harz, Remigiusz Mazur-Hanaj, Janusz

4 A number of academic and journalistic papers deal with the theater and its creator. See the Jerzy Grotowski Institute's official website: <https://grotowski.net/encyklopedia/grotowski-jerzy> as well as the theater's official website: <https://gardzienice.org>.

5 See <https://teatrwegajty.eu>.

6 The term *folk* was first used in 1977 on PR 2 of the Polish Radio by Maria Baliszewska during a broadcast on the Hungarian band Délibáb reconstructing traditional music. This term was intended to distinguish the new phenomenon of revival from traditional music played by rural musicians (Wróbel 2001:30).

7 Małogrzata and Andrzej Bieńkowski's archive is available on the website <https://www.muzykaodnaleziona.pl>.

Prusinowski, and Adam Strug formed the band Bractwo Ubogich ('The Brotherhood of the Poor'), which came to have great influence on the subsequent Polish revival. The Brotherhood performed for about three years before it broke up, after which each of its members took their own paths, all aiming to look deeper into Polish village traditions. They met tradition bearers and studied archival audio recordings and documentaries showing the music *in crudo*, as well as ethnographer and composer Oskar Kolberg's (1814–1890) musical transcriptions. The term *in crudo* was first used in 1949 by Marian Sobieski in connection with the first All-Polish Folk Music Festival,⁸ referring to the novelty of "pure" musical folklore "of an original sound and way of performing" presented on stage (Sobieski [1949]1973:536). More than forty years later, it was Remigiusz Mazur-Hanaj who popularized the term, meaning un-stylized, unchanged village music.

VILLAGE MUSIC REVIVAL MEETS COMMUNITY DANCING: THE DOM TAŃCA

Another catchword came with the Hungarian example of joining authentic music-making with authentic community dancing, and the concept of *táncház* was translated into Polish as Dom Tańca. As Mazur-Hanaj, one of the most influential proponents of the new wave, remembers it,

The inspiration came from Hungary, but it was initially more theoretical. None of us had ever been there, though a "strong" Hungarian band [Csaba Ökrös and his ensemble] had been to Poland. They came to the Pogranicze Centre in Sejny. Some of us were present. An aftermath of that event was an inspiring text by Béla Halmos about the Hungarian *táncház* [1993]. We also stumbled upon an impressive book on the *táncház* movement titled *Nomadic Generation* [Bodor 1981]. The other connection was Robert Lakatos, a Hungarian from Transylvania, movie director and dancer. He could play the Transylvanian *furulya* [shepherd's flute]. He started Hungarian dance workshops in the Hungarian Institute [in Warsaw]. At the same time Dorota and Marcin Żytomirski [current

8 Organized by the Ministry of Culture and Art and the Polish Radio, the event took place in Warsaw on May 8–29, 1949. Substantive evaluation was done by Jadwiga Sobieska (1909–1995) and Marian Sobieski (1908–1967). A result of the event's success was the All-Polish Musical Folklore Collection (*Ogólnopolska Akcja Zbierania Folkloru Muzycznego*), initiated in 1950 and led by Marian Sobieski.

hosts of the Warsaw Dom Tańca] visited a Hungarian dance camp, and soon found their way into our community.⁹

The official Dom Tańca Association was established on August 18, 1995. But before that, Mazur-Hanaj, Piotr Zgorzelski, and Antoni Beksiak had organized the “Korzenie” (‘Roots’) concert series, which operated from autumn 1994 to summer 1996 at the Remont student club in Warsaw.¹⁰ Initially, performances included both village music and contemporary muzyka folkowa. After a year, the policy changed, and the events welcomed village performers exclusively.

A band of the then not yet formal Dom Tańca also performed at the Remont a few times. The first club called Dom Tańca was run alongside “Korzenie” from 1995 to 1997 by Katarzyna Leżańska and Janusz Prusinowski at the Capital Centre of Cultural Education in Warsaw. In 1997 the two teams joined forces to carry out dance parties, workshops, and concerts at the Warsaw Centre of Culture.¹¹ Substantive support came from Piotr Dahlig, Andrzej Bieńkowski, and Grażyna Dąbrowska. The events were audiovisually documented, and a news-sheet titled *Korzenie* was edited by Katarzyna Andrzejowska (de Latour). Hungarian dance group Bogács from Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) appeared on Remont’s stage on May 14, 1996,¹² and András Berecz with the Ökrös En-

9 Other people engaged in forming the first Polish dance house was: Katarzyna Leżańska, Piotr Zgorzelski, Antoni Beksiak, Janusz Prusinowski, Agata Krawczyk, Katarzyna Andrzejowska (de Latour).

10 Performers at Remont included Marian Pełka’s band from Kłudno in Radomskie (8.11.1994) as the first traditional band; the bagpipe band from Bukówiec Górny in Greater Poland (15.11.1994); Teresa Mirga and Kałe Bała band, representatives of Bergitka Roma from Czarna Góra in Spisz (29.11.1994); Stanisław Stępnik’s band from Wieniawa in Radomskie 13.12.1994); Bronisław Dudka’s band from Zdziłowice in Lubelszczyzna (10.01.1995); Władysław Pogoda’s band from Kolbuszowa in Rzeszowskie (18.04.1995); Meto band from Glina in Rawskie (10. and 25.10.1995); Stanisław Głaza’s band from Dzwola and the singers’ group Jarzębina from Kocudza in Lubelskie (21.10.1995); and singers from Nowa Ruda in Kurpie (12.12.1995). A full list of both traditional and revival performers who have performed at the Dom Tańca is available on the website <https://domtanca.art.pl> in Kalendarium.

11 Katarzyna Dołęgowska-Ulrich, Kasia Dąbek, Agata Pękalska (Krawczyk), Katarzyna Andrzejowska (de Latour), Piotr Piszczatowski, and Ryszard Kawalec have also supported the Warsaw Dom Tańca.

12 The ensemble came at the invitation of the Hungarian Institute in Warsaw. They had visited Poland earlier, in 1992 at the invitation of the “Pogranicze” Foundation in Sejny.

semble performed there on July 5, 1997. For Polish audiences interested in traditional music, it was important to see that larger folk bands could present unstylized rural music on stage, which was a novelty in Poland at that time. The environment of the Dom Tańca was in strong opposition to the environment of the song and dance ensembles (unlike the situation in Hungary).

The fascination with Polish *in crudo* music led to a new way of learning instrumental music, dancing, and singing: straight from the village masters, and from archival recordings gathered in the Phonographic Collection at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (*Zbiory Fonograficzne Instytutu Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk – IS PAN*). Dom Tańca, which didn't have its location in Warsaw until 2015,¹³ came to be the space for such practices. Initially they included learning from the recordings, listening to them together and following them. As Mazur-Hanaj remembers,

I used to spend many hours at the Institute of Art's archives, led by Piotr Dahlig. We would drink coffee and listen to the recordings. Piotr would comment, telling me about the people in the recordings, which were mostly made by himself or Jadwiga and Marian Sobieski. [...] Piotr would also help us to get in touch with some bands. [...] We would often visit the musicians beforehand to get to know them and talk about their repertoire. We must have looked weird to them, with our pierced ears. We wanted them to get used to us, and to Remont's underground atmosphere, its mirrors and black walls. We made sure that the meetings in Warsaw would start at the table with food and beer, to make our guests feel at home in that dreary scenery, which was so different from a village wedding. In 1994 in Remont, at the Social High School No. 2 [2 *Spółeczne Liceum Ogólnokształcące*] the workshops started along with the hoedown.

Later, we listened to the archive recordings in the Brotherhood [of the Poor], and learned from them. [...] I had always had a sentiment for the Roztocze region and we ended up there eventually to get to know it in person, still having the recordings from PAN with us. I visited IS

13 This is important as all song and dance ensembles had (and still have) their headquarters at various institutions, and the main ones, such as “Mazowsze” and “Śląsk”, have autonomous and extensive training and cultural centers. The Dom Tańca clubs are still located in informal premises and are not subsidized by state institutions, but rather are supported solely by grants. The primary location of the Warsaw Dom Tańca today is the “Traditional Music Embassy” (*Ambasada Muzyki Tradycyjnej*) in Jazdów.



Figure 1. Józef Góra and Wojciech Gzik. Remont Club, Warsaw, 25.04.1995.



Figure 2. Tadeusz Zygańdo and Stefan Trzpił. Remont Club, Warsaw, 16.05.1995.



Figure 3. Village band from Dobrzelin. Remont Club, Warsaw, 16.04.1996.



Figure 5. András Berecz and Ökrös Band from Budapest. Remont Club, Warsaw, 05.06.1997.



Figure 4. Bogánc Hungarian folk dance group from Kolozsvár. Remont Club, Warsaw, 14.05.1996.

PAN a couple times over the course of the next ten years, though the visits haven't been as intense. Often, because of the events at the Dom Tańca, I travelled to the Kurpie Białe region listening to PAN recordings in order to organize camps. So we used the recordings as a kind of educational aid, to learn the music, and/or as reference points to add further layers to our own ethnomusicological map, which we kept developing for operational use while we were reading Kolberg and Kotula,¹⁴ visiting villages, organizing events from the Remont concerts to summer camps, or meeting with Bienkowski. [...] PAN recordings have been of great use [but hardly available]. [The few copies that circulated in the community were] sometimes obtained not entirely legally [e.g. copied during lectures],¹⁵ but, following my steps, others from our communities have started visiting the archive.

The idea of Dom Tańca spread to other Polish towns, where similar clubs started to appear: Kraków (led by Joanna and Jan Słowiński) and Poznań (led by Alicja and Jacek Hałas) in 1999, and later Olsztyn, Suwałki, Wrocław, Lublin, Gdańsk, Toruń, and Szczecin. Some of them have taken on different names, but the idea behind them remains unchanged. It is important to underline that the Dom Tańca movement focuses mainly on traditions of the lower parts of Poland. By contrast, in the Podhale highlands, traditional musical culture is still transmitted by families and numerous regional bands.

The year's work in the Dom Tańca movement culminate in the annual camps (*tabory*), week-long gatherings that include workshops for traditional singing, dancing, and instrumental music.¹⁶ The first camp took place in 2002 in Chlewiska in the Radomsko-Opoczyńskie area, though unofficially it had also been organized before, in 1998 in Małomierzycze near Ilża (Świętokrzyskie district). These regions are widely known for their traditions of village instrumental music and the coexistence of Polish and Jewish music. Many outstanding traditional musicians (*muzykanci*) in the Polish lowlands come from here. As the

¹⁴ Franciszek Kotula (1900–1983), ethnographer, historian, folklore collector, and educator.

¹⁵ In the late 1990s, the IS PAN Phonogram Collection was still not known on a large scale. There were no published recordings, no digitization, no databases, not even analog user copies for many original carriers. Consequently, access to source recordings was difficult, especially for non-academic users.

¹⁶ Program details for each camp are available on the website of the Warsaw Dom Tańca.

popularity of the camp's parties and workshops grew, they became more frequent as well as theme- and region-specific.¹⁷ The best source of knowledge of the music and dance practices have been village masters. Many people involved in the music revival, especially instrumentalists (mainly fiddlers, drummers, less often squeezebox players) tend to imitate the style of a particular tradition bearer.

As the generation of “the last traditional musicians” (to quote the title of Bieńkowski 2001) are passing away, they are more often replaced by urban adepts of the traditional way of playing, singing, and dancing. In the words of Marcin Żytomirski, chair of the Dom Tańca Association since 2016,

We urban people have been practicing this music more and more methodically for over a quarter of a century now. Although in some aspects the transfer of technical skills has really advanced, we don't play it exactly the same way. That's inevitable—we live in a different physical, social, and cultural space, we are surrounded by different music, we have our own way of working. Traditional artists are the sources of unknown mounts of musical repertoire and memories of times when their music was an integral part of the social ecosystem. That's why we think that meeting them in person is a crucial benchmark for all those who learn traditional music (Murzynowska and Żytomirski, 2020).

Meeting with a traditional village musician or dancer *in situ* is a perfect scenario for learning the repertoire and the playing style. While the actual use of the dance and the music can only be documented at a wedding or party, meeting at their home or other local setting can provide the opportunity to talk with them directly and develop a closer personal bond, or to more intimately observe their posture or technical aspects of their playing or dancing.¹⁸ In cases where an in-person meeting isn't possible, the most important source of knowledge are sound recordings and films, which have been vital for the Dom Tańca movement in Poland.

Archival recordings are, next to the last generations of authentic traditional singers and musicians, the basic sources of inspiration and transmission. The crucial role of source recordings is typical for traditional dance and music revivals, and in the past few decades, most

¹⁷ See e.g. <http://taborwielkopolski.pl>, <https://www.taborkielecki.pl>

¹⁸ A person who gained the status of an iconic master amongst the urban continuators of traditional music was Jan Gaca (1933–2013), a fiddler from the Kajockie microregion in Radomszczyzna: <https://muzykatradycyjna.pl/ludzie/jan-gaca>.

recordings of Polish rural music were made for the purpose of learning and practicing it in cities. While the creators of the early phonogram collections could not have anticipated such a trend, they were aware that the recordings they made mainly as sources for scholarly research would also provide important material for the artistic and amateur movements of their age, folk ensembles, folk bands, choirs etc. To understand the relationship of the Dom Tańca revival to the archival sources, we should also review the relationship of their early creators to the idea of amateur artistic application.

EARLY POLISH FOLK MUSIC RECORDINGS AND THEIR APPLICATION FOR AMATEUR ARTISTIC PURPOSES

Just before the beginning of World War II, the first Polish phonograph collection was created as a private initiative by Juliusz Zborowski (1888–1965), intended as the basis of a future Polish Sound Archive (*Polskie Archiwum Dźwiękowe*) (Jackowski 2014:66–89). Those plans were interrupted by the war, but fortunately, most of the recordings survived.¹⁹ Zborowski, while developing the plans for the archive, also suggested that local and regional centers be built in addition to the central one. In his concept, the Polish Sound Archive was not intended to be a typical scholarly institution. What he had in mind was saving cultural heritage which had value for both scholarship and practice (Jackowski 2014:128).

The idea of creating a phonograph archive in Poland was formed at the beginning of the 20th century, but the first such official institutions were established only after the country regained independence. Polish researchers of traditional music were aware that the phonograph recordings they had been gathering and processing, while intended for scholarly purposes, should also be popularized on a larger scale. Although the methodology for creating scholarly collections requires an exhaustive amount of material (including the full repertoire of a locality, with variants of each tune, documenting as many active performers as possible), editors have been choosing the most representative examples, thought to be characteristic of a certain region, for popular purposes. Both the earlier publications of music and text transcriptions as well as the contemporary publications including sound samples on CDs and in digital repositories provide a reliable model repertoire.

19 The early recordings were published on CD in 2015 (Jackowski 2015).

The foundation of the first archive was followed by an intensive discussion on the significance of sound recordings for science (Dahlig 1998; 2001; 2002). Łucjan Kamiński, the creator of the Regional Phonogram Archive (*Regionalne Archiwum Fonograficzne*) at Poznań University, emphasized that a phonogram archive is a symbol and a determinant of modern comparative musicology (Kamiński 1934; Jackowski 2014:123-125). However, the activities of the two archives founded in the interwar period weren't limited to scholarly research. Kamiński used the recordings as the basis for scientifically and analytically well-grounded transcriptions (Kamiński 1936a), which meant a major advance in transcription accuracy, as earlier "musical ethnography" was based on

13. Młynarczyk idzie w świat

[RAF. nr. 1303 (Pm. ch. 7 b)]

Naśpiewał: **MARGIN LIPSKI** (lat 75)

Woj ke-di ja bę-da z Po-zna-ńa wą-dro-wac,
 woj bę-dę młę bę-dę pa-ni-ki za-to-wac. Bę-dó młę za-
 to-wac, co ze mną tań-eże-ć, i nie-je-dę
 wje-czeń i nie-je-dę wje-czeń w roz-mo-wach spa-
 dzi-ć. A ei bra-cisz-ko-wje, a ci kam-ra-
 to-wje, com to z ni-mi pi-jat, już nie bę-da
 wje-cę, już nie bę-da wje-cę z ni-mi prze-bi-wat.
 J bę-da są smu-cie naj-bar-żej bez dru-ha,
 ien eo młę nie zdra-dził a bęł mę-quo du-cha.

Figure 6. Detailed transcription for scholarly publication by Łucjan Kamiński (1936a).

19th-century field notes written by ear. Reviewers of Kamieński's work noticed its scientific value but considered it not straightforward enough for music lovers and musicians (Pulikowski 1936:172), which is why Kamieński decided to publish the repertoire in two ways: for academic purposes, and to popularize it for a wider audience, e.g. bands, choirs, or local associations.

As noted in the latter publication,

The songs gathered here are intended to regenerate contemporary repertoire and singing for further generations, and to give opportunity for scholars to transcribe them with scientific precision [...]. My task was to transcribe songs recorded on sound plate and edit them for practical use. While for scholarly purposes, a song should be transcribed in full fidelity to the recording and in full detail (including all freedom of performance and even the singer's mistakes), a practical songbook will give only what should be sung. Consequently, I had to revise the strictly scholarly transcriptions and normalize the lyrics and melodies (Kamieński 1936b:6-7).

Similar notes were formulated by Kamieński in the preface to his *Śpiewnik pomorski*:

While *Pieśni ludu pomorskiego* served only scholarly purposes and the songs in that anthology were transcribed in full detail according to the phonograms (with all the mistakes, mannerisms, and subjective musical features of amateur performers), the originals had to be considerably reedited for a practical school songbook. In this case the revision was a little different as for *Kaszebskie nuty*, which was dedicated for other [more artistic] practical use (Kamieński 1938:X).

In the songbooks prepared for the amateur and artistic movement (*Śpiewnik wielkopolski* in 1936 and *Śpiewnik pomorski* in 1938), Kamieński used normalized transcriptions based on a comparison of several recorded variants. In the preface, Kamieński stressed that the original recorded material is more complex and shows the vitality of the traditional songs in their evolution and "biology" (Kamieński 1936a:4; Muszkalska 2011).

At the time the Regional Phonogram Archive was founded, the documentation of vanishing repertoires was already an important aim, also intended for use by revival ensembles, clubs, etc. As Bolesław Pleśniarski, a teacher and later professor of Toruń University, wrote,



38a. WSIADANY DO ŚLUBU
Motyw taneczny i parady (na dwa głosy)
 Od Szarżel

♩ = 126

[G] 1. Przy-je-cha-ło tu, sto dwa-na-ście fur, sto lu-dów, sto lu-dów,
 przy-je-cha-ło tu, sto dwa-na-ście fur, sto lu-dów, sto lu-dów,
 ci, za-bie-raj się, na-sza mło-da pan-no, do ślu-bu, do ślu-bu.

2.
 [: O jużem się, moi mili goście,
 zabrała, zabrała :]
 [: a jeno mi jeszcze moja rodzinieczka
 błogosławieństwa nie dała :]

3.
 [: O, jeno bez prózek, nasza młoda panno,
 bez prózek, bez prózek :]
 [: a upadnijże ty swemu ojcu, matce,
 do nóżek, do nóżek :]

Figures 7–8. The cover and a normalized transcription for popular publication, with a second voice added by the editor (Kamiński 1936b).

We must help the lovers of traditional songs to preserve and popularize peasant tunes and texts, lest the folk songs of Greater Poland should be locked forever in the basement of Poznań University, where Professor Kamiński saved the remains of traditional songs on wax cylinders (Pleśniarski 1936:518).

Pleśniarski's arrangements for voice and piano are also important examples of contemporary music revival practices (Figure 9).

The second archive, the Central Phonogram Archive founded within the National Library in Warsaw, worked in a slightly different way. The Centre's activities focused on working with local intellectuals, such as teachers, church organists, or priests. The recordings were gathered in Warsaw with their help, and sometimes planned to be copied for regional centers and museums in order to make the repertoire available for the amateur artistic movement, but this idea was never implemented. Julian Pulikowski, creator of the Central Phonogram Archive, con-

Allegretto amabile

CANTO

PIANO

p dolce

cresc.

1. Kul-aż ja mił le-aż do-aż wj-ank, kul-aż ja gwo gwo sta-bi,
 2. Moe-ja mat-ko, moe-ja mat-ko mat-ko, gwo gwo sta-bi, gwo gwo sta-bi!

1. kul-aż ja gwo moe-ji mat-ko do-aż, kul-aż ja gwo gwo sta-bi, kul-aż ja gwo
 2. No przijim - na, moe-ja mat-ko mat-ko, moe-ji mat-ko do-aż, gwo gwo sta-bi, do przijim - na.

Figure 9. Arrangement for voice and piano based on a phonogram transcription (Kamieński 1936c).

ducted courses on working with the phonograph for teachers, such as a summer course in 1934 in Krzemieniec (Dahlig 1993), in order to recruit future field workers. One of them was Janusz Kosicki, who took part in expeditions to Polesia in 1936 and 1937. He was also interested in revival performance, and regarded sound recordings as a key link in the direct transfer of repertoire and style.

Authentic performance of folk music in the village style is an indispensable condition of its correct use. So for any researcher or lover of Polesian singing it is essential to collect audio recordings of original music in this land of marshes and swamps (Kosicki 1939).

Kosicki also made interesting comments about learning the traditional way of singing. He stressed that it is very difficult to adapt the richly ornamented and refined singing style of Polesia to popularization in a new environment (Kosicki 1939).

As the archives of Polish traditional music were almost completely destroyed during World War II, Jadwiga and Marian Sobieski strove to make up for that loss after the war (Jackowski and Kierzkowski 2007, 2009). The most important post-war action of documentation was the All-Polish Musical Folklore Collection (*Ogólnopolska Akcja Zbierania Folkloru Muzycznego*). They published the gathered material in multi-volume anthologies according to academic norms, intended for ethnomusicologists, ethnographers, and composers (e.g. Krzyżaniak, Pawlak, and Lisakowski 1974–1975), and they also published popular songbooks for the amateur artistic movement and folk ensembles (e.g. Bielawski 1955, Sobieski 1955).



ETHNOMUSICOLOGY AND REVIVAL: A FRUITFUL COOPERATION

Today, the IS PAN Phonogram Collection's activities also take into account a popularization of the material apart from their primarily scholarly goals. This is due to the growing popularity of the collections among non-academic circles. The monumental series *Polish Folk Song and Music: Sources and Materials* has been edited since the 1970s (Krzyżaniak, Pawlak, and Lisakowski 1974–1975; Bielawski and Mioduchowska 1997–1998; Krzyżaniak and Pawlak 2002; Bartmiński et al. 2011; Szymańska 2021–2022). The regional anthologies published in this series are excellent sources of repertoire for artistic and revival activities. However, technology nowadays (CD, streaming etc.) allows us to publish not only the transcriptions but also the sound sources themselves, which is of great significance for performance practice. (Figures 10–11.) Contemporary publications of archival recordings include three different CD series edited by the Institute of Art: the IS PAN Folk Music Collection series presenting regional monographs (17 CDs), *The Oldest Sound Documents of Polish Traditional Music* series containing the pre-war recordings (2 CDs), and the IS PAN *Contemporary Field Recordings* series (2 CDs). The albums are also available online and they are very popular among many groups of listeners.²⁰

The latest tool to study, edit, and share documents in a controlled way is the digital repository *Etnofon*.²¹ It is a digital version of the Polish heritage of folk music recordings on analog tapes, plates, cylinders, etc.

²⁰ See <https://etnofon.pl/publikacje/plyty/>.

²¹ See <https://etnofon.ispan.pl>.

<p>21 Przy onej dolinie paśliśmy owce A 1. Szemud gm. Szemud 1952</p>  <p>Przy onej dolinie w judzkiej krajynie, pašel-śm-i owce w gjęstej krzewinie, aż tu naraz anjełowie krz-iczą, bjezną pastuszkowie do Betlejem.</p> <p>Jo sedźoł na budze z wjełkiego strachu, [zlecałem na zemie] z samego dachu, którzy byli tam anjeł-i, oni się ze mnie naśmjeł-i do rozpęku.</p> <p>2.2 miejsce na taśmie trudne do wysłuchania.</p> <p>1.A AFT 1025/10, Szemud gm. Szemud 1952, Gertruda Kuzel ur. 1907. 2. Stelmachowska 1933a: 81. Kożyczkowo gm. Chmielno; zob. war. A zwr. 2. 3-4. Kolberg <i>DW 16 Lubelskie I</i> (1883): 106-108 nr 3, 5, ods. bibl. 5. Kolberg <i>DW 26 Mazowsze Leśne III</i> (1887): 61-62 nr 11, ods. bibl. 6. Kolberg <i>DW 49 Sanockie-Krosnieńskie I</i> 1974: 167 nr 77 (zapis 1861-1885). 7. Krzywaniak 1980-90-92 nr 125 (XVIII w.).</p>	<p>22 Nawiedzmy, ubodzy ludzie, Dzieciątko A 1. Borsk gm. Karsin 1932</p> 
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Figures 10–11. Polish Folk Song and Music: Sources and Materials series (5 regional anthologies, 20 volumes)

Today over 30 collections (from the biggest museum archives to private collections) are aggregated in the repository. The vast majority of the resources (about 78%) are from the Phonogram Collection of the Institute of Art, which is the oldest and the biggest in Poland. The material gathered in the repository is mainly used for scholarly purposes, but particular parts of the collections are also shared for other users, such as singers, musicians, and dancers of the Dom Tańca movement who are also engaged in projects at the Institute (Jackowski 2022; Jackowski and Dahlig-Turek 2022).

Musicians and dancers connected with the Dom Tańca movement have worked with the Institute of Art on several scholarly projects. One of them was a three-stage project titled *Glossing over rhythmic style and musical identity*, carried out in 2003–2005, and presented at the European Seminars in Ethnomusicology (Aksdal, Dahlig-Turek, Lundberg, and Sager 2003; Dahlig-Turek 2005). Conducted with the participation of traditional fiddlers from Sweden, Norway, and Poland (including Bartosz Niedźwiedzki, associated with the Dom Tańca movement at that time), it aimed to study the cultural determinants of the interpretation of dance melodies from the three countries. It focused on Polish

triple-meter melodies and Scandinavian “Polish dances” (Norwegian *pols* and Swedish *polska*), whose common denominator is the presence of mazurka and polonaise rhythms. The aim of the research was to try to reconstruct the various principles of the formation of local musical identity by studying not only musical performance, but also the preferences and evaluation criteria used by traditional musicians.



Figures 12–13. Recording session in the *Glossing over rhythmic style and musical identity* project. From left to right: Jacek Jackowski (collector), Bartosz Niedźwiedzki (fiddle), Emilia Okońtowicz (side-drum), Agata Abramowicz and Grzegorz Ajdacki (dance). *IS PAN*, Warsaw, 2005.

Another project was *Past and contemporary musical folklore documentation* in 2013 (Jackowski 2011, 2019), which included the digitization of 8mm films of traditional dance recorded in the 1960s without audio. One of the important elements of the project was to add music performed by Bartosz Niedźwiedzki’s band, played live, synchronized based on the registered movement and on analyzing archival recordings. Such a reconstructed presentation accompanied Jacek Jackowski’s paper “Historical outline of phonographic, visual, and audiovisual documentation of Polish musical traditions” presented on October 22, 2013, at the 5th All-Polish Conference of Sound Libraries in Bydgoszcz.

Musicians and dance teachers who were active in the Dom Tańca movement were also invited to meetings organized after scholarly



Figures 14–15. Silent archival footage showing a traditional oberek dance. Fiddler Bartosz Niedźwiedzki playing with a village musician

events such as conferences. Scholars from many European countries took part in the Warsaw meeting of the DISMARC – Discovering Music Archives project in February 2008, and danced to the music of Witold Broda’s band with dance teacher Piotr Zgorzelski.²² It’s worth adding that some unique sound recordings made in the 1990s by the Dom Tańca movement, such as the registration of events organized at the Remont student club, are deposited in the Phonogram Collection of the Institute of Art.

The number of people passionate about the traditional way of playing, singing, and dancing has been growing since the 1990s. They have formed new associations and foundations engaged in the increasingly popular informal education of traditional culture (Grochowska and Mazur-Hanaj 2014). The culmination of that movement was the Year of Oskar Kolberg in 2014—commemorating the 200 anniversary of the birth of the renowned ethnographer and composer—when government grants for education, festivals, and so on were more promising. Alongside the Institute of Music and Dance (IMIT), the Traditional Music Laboratory was established in 2014 to coordinate and finance programs for local communities, primarily focused on events related to the Dom Tańca movement (Grozdew-Kołacińska 2016:140–150).

Today, members of movement are engaged in the most important traditional music events of the revival: festivals, camps, summer schools,

²² For a movie documenting the event, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjJwI8tEZVM>.

local traditional music centers,²³ and individual educational practices, both formal²⁴ and, more and more frequently, informal. In parallel, the tradition-inspired music composition trend is also thriving, thanks to the urban continuators of the village musical traditions in which the sounds of traditional instruments and singing are used as an element of the work. The IS PAN's archival recordings still play a major role in all of these practices.

To sum up, we should like to arrive at the idea of performance (instrumental, vocal, and dance) in the Dom Tańca movement. Initially, they tended to simply imitate the performance style of specific sources, including such elements as intonation errors, technically imperfect vocals, or an elderly person's dance posture. In the early days, the learning process relied on archival footage and recordings or an observation of performers who had often been encouraged to perform by urban folk music enthusiasts after not playing for a long time. In Polish music education, there hadn't been any program that would include teaching folk instruments or traditional songs, and staged folklore had mostly been stylized, as described above with reference to the song and dance ensembles.

The next generation became more and more aware of performing styles and techniques. Young people born in the 1990s and later were joining the movement and taking part in the increasingly popular workshops and camps without being burdened by memories of the Polish People's Republic and ideologized folklore. With more open 21st-century minds, as well as technology which allowed them to experience even the most exotic kinds of music, they were inspired to search for their own roots, which were often just as exotic. This wouldn't have happened without the cooperation between urban folk music continuators, researchers and academic centers (collective seminars, fieldwork, post-graduate studies in ethnomusicology),²⁵ and media promotion of

23 Funding for such projects is available through the National Institute's Music and Dance program.

24 Two-year graduate programs were established at the Academy of Music in Katowice in 2016, and there is a World Music profile at the Fryderyk Chopin Academy of Music in Warsaw, within the Faculty of Jazz and Stage Music, since 2017.

25 Since 2012, an ethnomusicology conference has been held in Warsaw every year, organized by the Polish Ethnomusicological Seminar, which is a platform for dialogue and discourse between the scholarly community and the community of musicians and animators gathered around the movement of continuing traditional music. In 2017, the Postgraduate Study of Traditional Music was

the musicians involved in the Dom Tańca movement (most importantly on Polskie Radio and TVP Kultura).²⁶ In recent years, folk and traditional music festivals such as “Wszystkie Mazurki Świata” (‘All Mazurkas of the World’) have welcomed groups formed in the Dom Tańca movement. Through these new developments, together with the steady popularity of community dancing, traditional music performance has reached—paradoxical as it may seem—a professional level.

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established at the Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice, where some classes are held by people from the Dom Tańca movement.

²⁶ The Polish Radio Center for Folk Culture supports various initiatives related to recording and promoting the music of bands associated with the Dom Tańca, and regularly organizes concerts and broadcasts on PR 2 of Polish Radio.

- logia u progu trzeciego tysiąclecia* [Musicology on the eve of the 3rd millennium], ed. Ludwik Bielawski, J. Katarzyna Dadak-Kozicka, Agnieszka Leszczyńska, 155–174. Warszawa: IS PAN.
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Ethnographic Interview

- Mazur-Hanaj, Remigiusz. Interview via Messenger by Weronika Grozdew-Kołacińska. March 2023.

THE EARLY PERIOD OF THE FOLK MUSIC REVIVAL IN SLOVENIA



Drago Kunej

Folk music revival movements are complex and diverse phenomena that occur in different periods and encompass various forms of musical practices based on a traditional culture.¹ Especially in Eastern and East-Central Europe, a typical form of the folk music revival mostly involved performers who were “urban intellectuals and musicians or musicologists with liberal and/or nationalist backgrounds” (Morgenstern 2017:274) whose repertoires and performing styles were largely based on (old) local musical traditions and practices.

In Slovenia, the first such folk music revival appeared in the late 1970s, and a significant increase in folk music revival performers occurred in the early 1990s. Most musicians were inspired by or largely based their repertoires on Slovenian traditional music practices, many ensemble members had previous experience playing in folk dance ensembles, and many also collected or researched the folk music themselves and incorporated the material into their repertoires. A large number of them had also received formal musical education and had a wealth of experience in other musical genres. In their musical activities, they often followed the example of revival ensembles abroad, with Hungary and the *táncház* movement serving an important role.

The Slovenian folk music revival has yet to be thoroughly researched. Although some authors have examined this kind of music from different angles, it has often been studied partially, with a focus on the presentation of individual performers, the review of performances or audio

¹ The article was written as part of the research project *In New Disguise: Changes in the Traditional Music and Dance Culture in Hungary, Slovenia and Around*, No. N6-0231, and the research program *Research on Slovenian Folk Culture in Folklore Studies and Ethnology*, No. P6-0111, both funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

releases, the commemoration of various jubilees and other anniversaries, etc. In rare instances, the topic has been explored more thoroughly (e.g. Juvančič 2002, 2005), however, that has mostly been in terms of what Ronström described as the

focus upon the question of authenticity [...] to show that things are not what people think they are, that what is thought to be old is in fact new, that the revived forms, styles, objects are in some way or another false, inauthentic, some even implying that they are unworthy, immoral” (Ronström 1996:1).

In fact, there are no detailed analyses of the circumstances in which the folk music revival in Slovenia emerged, nor any studies on the connections between the folk music revival and that of folk dance (both traditional folk dance practice of rural origin as well as folk dance ensemble presentations), similar to those on the Hungarian *táncház* movement (e.g. Martin 2001; Diószegi 2008; Richter 2015; Taylor 2021). There are, however, a few short and fairly general studies (e.g. Pettan 2008, 2010; Kunej 2023).

This article examines the period between the 1970s, when the folk music revival emerged, and the 1990s, when a growing interest in this musical genre led to more performers joining and becoming active within an institutional framework. At the same time, folk music revival forms began emerging that were strongly intertwined with other musical genres². The research presented here is based on the existing literature as well as various collected sources: written documents, magazine and newspaper articles, and digital ethnography. It is also rooted in personal relationships with revival musicians and firsthand experience as an ensemble member in the movement. It focuses on researching the circumstances under which the folk music revival formed and developed in Slovenia, as well as the foundations for its activities. It also aims to answer questions about various connections with the

2 In the late 1990s, the Slovenian music scene saw the appearance of folk music revival performers who had a very free and creative approach to traditional Slovenian music. This new approach gave rise to new folk fusion genres which incorporated elements of jazz, pop, rock, funk, and other contemporary styles, with improvised and composed components. Some of the best-known music ensembles of this type in the late 1990s were Fake orchestra (established in 1998), Terrafolk (1999), Brina Vogelnik and Ansambel Brina (1999), as well as Katalena (2001). The activities of these ensembles are not included in the research presented in this article.

Slovenian folk music tradition and to present the most important examples and influences from other countries.

MUSIC IN FOLK DANCE ENSEMBLES

The music environment that many members of the Slovenian folk music revival movement were familiar with were folk dance ensembles, where many musicians had played at the beginning of their careers. For instance, Mira Omerzel-Terlep and Matija Terlep (members of the Trutamora Slovenica ensemble) were first musicians in a folk dance ensemble and then later started presenting folk music independently. The same is true for Tomaž Rauch (member of the Trinajsto prase ensemble), who was part of a folk dance ensemble during his childhood, mainly as an accordion player. Peter Kunej and Drago Kunej, members of the Kurja koža trio, likewise participated in folk dance ensembles from an early age and played various (folk) musical instruments. All four members of the Marko banda musical ensemble had initially worked exclusively with a local folk dance ensemble, and all the original members of the Katice vocal ensemble had started out in a folk dance ensemble as well. Some members of the Tolovaj Mataj and Volk Folk musical ensembles were also involved in folk dance ensembles as musicians.

The tradition of folk dance ensembles (*folklorne skupine*, literally “folklore groups”) in Slovenia stretches back over a hundred years, and is part of a broader framework of “folklore activities” representing tradition-based music, dance, clothing, rituals, and customs. These cultural elements are most comprehensively encompassed in the activities of folk dance ensembles, where they are combined, integrated, and presented to the public. From the very beginning, the activities of folk dance ensembles have been carried out on an amateur basis. To date, there have been approximately 500 folk dance ensembles in Slovenia.

Folk dance ensembles were widespread and received well by audiences in both former Yugoslavia and Slovenia after its declaration of independence in 1991. They participated in various significant folk dance festivals and gatherings, often with international musicians as participants, held across Yugoslavia and elsewhere. Folk dance ensembles also performed at other events, ranging from smaller cultural and tourist events to concerts and annual productions. Some ensembles had several dozen performances per year, which is a relatively large number for amateur cultural activities.

Early activities of folk dance ensembles were related to the presentation of music and dance of mostly living traditions, and focused on those of Slovenian origins only. In the late 1960s and 1970s, many folk dance ensembles were established, some of whom would later become well-known, such as KUD Študent in Maribor (1964), Emona in Ljubljana (1967), Koleda in Velenje (1971), Celje Folk Dance Ensemble (1973), Stu Ledi in Trieste (1973), and Kres in Novo Mesto (1975). The ensembles were categorized into two groups: *izvirne folklorne skupine* (source folk dance ensembles) and *poustvarjalne folklorne skupine* (reproduction folk dance ensembles). The former presented still-living music and dance traditions from a given locality on stage, had smaller memberships, and were usually active in rural areas. The latter presented newly learned repertoire drawn mainly from written records from various Slovenian regions (prior to Slovenia's declaration of independence, they included traditions from other parts of Yugoslavia as well), had larger memberships, and were mainly active in urban areas (Kranjec 2001; Kunej 2020). This categorization persisted for quite a while.

The activities of folk dance ensembles—consistently a pillar of educational and cultural amateur happenings—were always under the supervision of state cultural policy or the relevant institution. Their activities were regularly overseen and guided by various external expert bodies, which, alongside monitoring the ensembles' work, also designed educational activities for them and advised on the organization of gatherings and public presentations. It is important to note that there have never been any professional national or local folk dance ensembles in Slovenia (not even during the Yugoslavia era). This is one of the reasons why folk dance ensembles were less rigidly subject to popular Soviet-model canons that were common in other socialist countries (cf. Petkovski 2016; Kunej 2018).³ Consequently, the activities of folk dance ensembles were often focused on tradition and on encouraging direct contact with folk culture, which at that time (in the 1970s and 1980s) still existed in some rural areas to a certain extent.

3 As Rebeka Kunej has noted, France Marolt, then head of the Institute of Ethnomusicology in Ljubljana, strongly opposed the idea of establishing a national folk dance ensemble modeled after its counterpart in the Soviet Union, arguing that “an ensemble based on the Soviet model might misrepresent the Slovenian dance tradition. In his opinion, a folk dance ensemble which was adapted to the needs and opportunities in the Slovenian (cultural) space should present an ‘authentic’ tradition without any changes or corrections. [...] For this reason, Marolt sought to set up an ensemble that operated under the auspices of the Institute” (Kunej 2018:259).

Although the work of folk dance ensembles is generally a complex activity, where various tradition-based elements are intertwined and combined, the dominant role is occupied by dance. Music is usually subordinated to dance and its presentation on the stage, but it nevertheless plays an important role. Dance music's role in folk dance ensembles originates in folk tradition. In Slovenia, generally speaking, people always used to dance to instrumental music. It is therefore not surprising that live music continues to be customary in folk dance ensembles' performances. In general, folk dance ensembles engage amateur musicians who have no direct contact with culture bearers. They may be self-taught or have received a basic music education in the school system, where traditional music is not part of the curriculum. Since the vast majority of folk dance ensembles feature musicians who do not have direct experience with traditional dance music, the music is arranged for each particular ensemble. Various approaches can be observed in these arrangements, depending on the practices of each individual ensemble and the participating musicians. The musical arrangement is often created by a musically educated individual who is familiar with folk music characteristics as well as the fundamentals of music. The arrangements are most often written down as sheet music, learned by the musicians at rehearsals with the dancers, and then played by memory.

For years, records of guidelines and teaching related to the arrangements of traditional music in folk dance ensembles revealed an orientation towards "genuine" folk tradition and customs (cf. Strajnar 1986; Volk 2008; Rauch 2010), following aspirations whose seeds were planted in the 1970s with the start of the systematic and institutionalized education in the field of amateur cultural activities. That orientation, incorporating historical and geographical features based on ethnographic data, corresponds to the concept of passive adaptation to the stage, i.e. the stage presentation of traditional music and dance closely following the original and including all of the characteristic traditional elements (Kunej 2023). In addition to performing on stage, many of the revival performers who were active in folk dance ensembles also shaped the music of those ensembles and arranged traditional music for various other musical ensembles.

ACOUSTIC MUSIC: THE HERALD OF THE FOLK MUSIC REVIVAL

From the 1970s onwards, the genre known as “acoustic music” was mostly performed by students who didn’t identify with the hard edge electric punk rock and rock music (which during this period mainly had a rebellious tone), or with Slovenian pop and folk-pop music, which was and still is very popular in Slovenia. The acoustic music of that period, based mostly on newly composed music and lyrics, was inspired by the aesthetic of singing traditional ballads, and influenced by both Anglo-American folk music and by Slovenian folk music heritage in general, as well as elements of the art music from various historical periods (cf. Juvančič, 2016). One of the first ensembles to appear in the mid-1970s was the experimental acoustic music ensemble Salamander, which was soon followed by Sedmina (1977), Kladio, konj in voda (1978), Slovenska gruda (late 1970s), and many other ensembles. Salamander and Sedmina warrant special attention here because they influenced many revival performers who emerged later, some of whom had been part of the aforementioned acoustic ensembles.

Salamander was formed in the mid-1970s, and almost a dozen musicians were members for shorter or longer periods. The core of the ensemble consisted of several musicians who later became prominent musicians and artists, namely Lado Jakša, Jerko Novak, and Bogdana Herman, as well as two key members who were the driving force of the ensemble and the songwriters of most of the songs, Tomaž Pengov and Milan Dekleva. Their joint musical creation was characterized by a fusion of sung poetry, composed original music, and group and individual improvisation. They used various acoustic instruments (guitars, violins, wind instruments, and piano) and vocals, and most of the musical and poetic ideas for their songs were contributed by Pengov.⁴

According to the ensemble’s singer, Bogdana Herman, they composed original music and lyrics and did not focus much on folk songs at the

4 Tomaž Pengov (1949–2014) was a singer-songwriter and instrumentalist, playing 12-string acoustic guitar and lute. During his first performances in the late 1960s, he performed songs by Bob Dylan and Donovan. Later, he translated their songs into Slovenian and also wrote his own music as a solo artist. He released four albums with his own songs, and his first album, released in 1973, was the first singer-songwriter and independent record released in Slovenia and the former Yugoslavia. He was part of a circle of artists who used to meet in the legendary bar Šumi in Ljubljana in the 1970s, which is where he pursued his creative and conceptual endeavors in the company of like-minded colleagues. Tomaž Pengov’s solo career included some arrangements of Slovenian folk songs, which he had been a fan of from the very beginnings of his musical career.

time. But at least some of the members, especially Pengov, were very familiar with folk songs. As Herman points out, the individual members of the ensemble had always carried the “noble heritage” of folk songs in their hearts and it certainly influenced all their music, even though they did not particularly focus on it (Klobčar 2019). During their relatively short active period, Salamander gave a few performances, which attracted quite a lot of attention. In the late 1970s, the ensemble broke up, and as their respective creative paths took the members in different directions, some of them focused on the folk tradition.⁵

The beginnings of *Sedmina* go back to the founding members’ student days. It was founded in 1977 by Venó Dolenc, who later became a painter, poet, and musician, along with the singer Melita Osojnik (whose surname was Dolenc at the time). The ensemble’s repertoire and musical expression was inspired by Slovenian traditional ballads and Anglo-American folk music and consisted mostly of their own composed music and lyrics. In addition to Venó Dolenc and Melita Osojnik, the ensemble’s concerts and records featured many musicians from the Slovenian “acoustic scene” of the period, including Lado Jakša, a member of Salamander, as well as musicians who were later prominent figures in the folk music revival movement, such as Mira Omerzel-Terlep, Matija Terlep, and Karlo Ahačič. The ensemble was characterized by a “medieval sound” (Mehle 2020), their composed troubadour-style acoustic arrangements and lyrics by Venó Dolenc (which followed traditional folk ballad structure and content), and the unique and recognizable interpretation of poetry set to music and performed by singer Melita Osojnik. They played various acoustic instruments, including the lute, flute, and accordion, which was a rarity for such ensembles at the time. They gave numerous performances both in Slovenia and abroad. The ensemble, whose members changed over time, was active until 1982, when Venó and Melita divorced and the ensemble broke up.⁶

In the late 1970s, performances of acoustic music took place on a more organized basis, including being presented to Slovenian audiences at a special festival. At the initiative of Srečko Lavbič and Dani Bedrač,

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- 5 In 2019, some members of the ensemble resumed their get-togethers and after a four-decade break they performed together again. Their first post-break performance was at a concert on the 70th anniversary of the birth of the late ensemble member Tomaž Pengov.
 - 6 After the breakup, they both pursued solo music careers. Venó Dolenc also collaborated with the singer Klarisa Jovanović and in 1997, he used the name *Sedmina* for some other musical projects.

members of the well-known ensemble *Kladivo, konj in voda*, the Žalec-based Association of Socialist Youth of Slovenia organized the first Acoustic Music Festival, which grew into an annual event. The idea for the festival emerged from the fact that in Slovenia at the time, “acoustic ensembles” and singer-songwriters did not have their own central event where they could perform, socialize, and share experiences. The very first festival was a complete success; there was talk of a “new alternative,” which, in addition to punk rock, represented a healthy antithesis to pop songs, rock, and other mainstream music of that time. The festival remained very popular through the mid-1980s, when then it gradually started to decline. Despite attempts to revive it, it never again reached its former popularity and large attendance (cf. N.N. 2012).

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF REVIVAL PERFORMERS

In Slovenia, the first revival performers appeared on the music scene in the late 1970s. In the pre-1990 period, the three most notable ensembles were the one established by Mira Omerzel-Terlep and Matija Terlep (later named *Trutamora Slovenica*), as well as *Istranova* and *Trinajsto prase*.

Mira and Matija founded their first ensemble in 1978—at the time it did not yet have a name—to be able to present the findings of their ethnomusicological field research on stage. That same year, they were joined by the singer Bogdana Herman, a former member of *Salamander*, and the three performers played as a trio for a number of years. The aim of their first concerts, which were held under the title *Slovenska ljudska glasbila in pesmi* (Slovenian Folk Instruments and Songs), was to present “folk music in a form as close to the original as possible” (Omerzel-Mirit 2013:8). The ensemble performed numerous concerts in Slovenia and abroad, presenting Slovenian folk music by means of “original folk instruments and reconstructions” (Omerzel-Mirit 2013:8). Later the trio was named *Trutamora Slovenica*, and the singer Bogdana Herman was replaced by Mojka Žagar. The ensemble also held several educational concerts and workshops, and was part of the school curriculum. Some experts believe that the ensemble’s musical practices were too academically oriented and based on a Western “classical” presentation style, and hence do not consider the ensemble among the first real revival performers in Slovenia (cf. Kranjac 2014). The ensemble was focused on Slovenian traditional music until 1999, after which it changed its name

to Vedun and gradually shifted its focus to sound therapy: “old meditative music and the revival of spiritual healing sounds of the cultures of the world” (N.N. s.a.1).

Some experts consider the Istranova music ensemble, founded in 1980, to be the very first revival performers in Slovenia (cf. Kranjac 2014; Juvančič 2005:213). The ensemble consisted of students who were inspired by the folk music revival in other parts of the world and searched for unconventional musical practices. The core of the ensemble consisted of Dario Marušić (a driving force of the ensemble), Franko Juri, Luciano Kleva, and Vanda Škrk, with many other musicians joining them from time to time. The ensemble began exploring and re-creating Istrian folk music, which at the time was completely marginalized and almost entirely unknown. The ensemble, which consisted of a different number of members at different times, used a variety of new musical elements and instruments and incorporated them into traditional music, building a repertoire that many performers draw on even today (cf. Juvančič 2013). With their repertoire focused on highlighting the multiculturalism of the Istrian peninsula, Istranova put on numerous performances and concerts, which greatly increased the ensemble’s visibility and popularity. The ensemble split in 1988.

The Trinajsto prase ensemble began performing in late 1987, in part as a result of relationships with Dario Marušić and Istranova. Its members were Roman Ravnič (the ensemble’s founder and leader), Tomaž Rauch, and Karlo Ahačič.⁷ All three had received formal music education at the Academy of Music in Ljubljana. The ensemble’s repertoire consisted mostly of revived traditional dance music, and was characterized by the use of simple folk instruments and traditional playing styles, resulting in a recognizable sound akin to the sound of traditional musicians. The ensemble performed a lot both in Slovenia and abroad, and did many recordings for radio and TV programs. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was one of the most popular folk music revival ensembles in Slovenia. They split in 1993.

Ljoba Jenče focused on singing Slovenian folk songs after 1983, when she first attended a concert by Matija Terlep and Mira Omerzel-Terlep’s trio and became fascinated by the Slovenian musical tradition. At the invitation of Jasna Vidakovič in 1988, she recorded eighteen folk ballads for Radio Ljubljana with guitar accompaniment. During the same year,

7 During the ensemble’s final year, Karlo Ahačič was replaced by musicologist Igor Cvetko.

she devoted herself entirely to collecting, researching, and reviving the local tradition as a freelance culture professional. Since then, she has been first and foremost a singer, storyteller, and collector of folk songs. She has primarily learned these songs directly from culture bearers, with whom she has organized various joint performances, and she has also helped them release their own recordings. Another important part of her work is her teaching, holding singing and storytelling workshops. She often gives solo performances and collaborates with other musicians and ensembles.

The early 1990s saw a significant increase in revival performers in Slovenia. Some ensembles performed only for a short period, while others are still active. Some musicians were part of several different music ensembles, and some established a new one after the previous one they were a member of stopped performing.

The music ensemble Marko banda was formed in 1990 as a youth section and continuation of the famous traditional music ensemble Kociper-Baranja band (later known also as Beltinška banda) from Beltinci in the Slovenian region of Prekmurje. The original members of the ensemble were Samo Budna (violin), Boštjan Rous (clarinet), Andi Sobočan (cimbalom), and Slavek Petek (double bass). Using characteristic regional instruments, the ensemble continued the Slovenian Pannonian folk music tradition. At first, the ensemble performed music for a folk dance ensemble from Beltinci, but soon they also started performing on their own and became well-known for performing the folk music of Prekmurje. In fact, the ensemble's entire recorded repertoire presents the traditional music of this region.

In the same year, the ensemble Piščaci was founded by Marino Kranjac and Emil Zonta, who were occasionally joined by Dario Marušić. They mainly performed dance music from the northern part of Istria, and their repertoire consisted of tunes that Kranjac and Marušić had collected from folk musicians in the field. They performed mainly in their local region, but also throughout Slovenia and abroad. The ensemble broke up in 1993. In 1994, Emil Zonta founded a new ensemble, which was called Muzikanti Istriani and later renamed Lazonta with a minor change in the ensemble members. During this period, other well-known performers in Slovenian Istria included Šavrinske pupe en ragoni (starting in 1992) and Kantadore (starting in 1995).

The ensemble Kurja koža, whose beginnings date back to 1992, focuses solely on instrumental music, mostly performed on some of the almost forgotten folk instruments typical of the Štajerska region (Slo-

venian Styria). The founding members are the brothers Drago and Peter Kunej, and Nenad Firšt. As Drago Kunej learned how to make some of these musical instruments from traditional folk musicians, the ensemble also preserves instrument-making traditions. Their entire recorded repertoire represents the traditional music of Štajerska, and they find the materials through their field research as well as in archives and other sources.

The female vocal ensemble Katice is composed of former members of the France Marolt Students' Folk Dance Ensemble. Katice started performing independently in 1993 and sings folk songs from various regions of the Slovenian ethnic territory. The ensemble is characterized by a traditional singing style and repertoire, as well as their arrangements of folk songs, often performed in collaboration with renowned Slovenian pop musicians and contemporary folk music revival ensembles.

The ensemble Tolovaj Mataj was founded in 1994 by three experienced members of former folk music revival ensembles: Roman Ravnič (as the leader), Marino Kranjac, and Dario Marušič. The ensemble's repertoire mainly consisted of dance tunes from the entire Slovenian ethnic territory, as well as vocal music. After a few years, Marino Kranjac and Dario Marušič left the ensemble, while Jernej Pečak and Peter Kus joined it. The ensemble broke up circa 2008.

After leaving Matija Terlep and Mira Omerzel-Terlep's trio in the 1990s, Bogdana Herman embarked on a solo career as a singer. She focuses especially on old, lesser-known Slovenian folk songs and ballads with the aim of making them known to a wider circle of people. She devotes a lot of attention to folk songs from Resia and the Prekmurje region. During the early period of her solo career, she mostly sang a cappella without instrumental accompaniment, but later she collaborated with individual instrumentalists and instrumental ensembles.

The family ensemble Volk Folk has been active since 1996, and consists of father Romeo, daughter Nina, and son Gregor Volk. Their repertoire focuses mainly on the instrumental tradition of dance music from their local area in Primorska region, but they occasionally also present the polyphonic vocal tradition. They aim to present the musical heritage in a fairly traditional form, as a conscious departure from the modern, more or less uniform sound. They perform at various events and have participated at several music festivals in Slovenia and elsewhere.

DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE LIVING TRADITION

Many revival musicians drew inspiration from the local folk music tradition for their repertoire. They often had direct contact with traditional practitioners and studied the music and instruments with them. A notable example of such an approach is the work of Mira Omerzel-Terlep, whose ethnomusicological field research and collections led to, and were a basis for, the folk music revival. Having learned to play classical guitar, she was interested in Slovenian folk music and musical instruments even as a teenager. Like many others, she knew very little about it and wanted to research it, so she studied musicology and ethnology, while simultaneously starting intensive field research and collection work with Matija Terlep. They focused primarily on instrumental folk music and musicians. They also studied and collected old (or reconstructed) instruments themselves, their collection eventually amounting to over 200 instruments (Omerzel-Mirit 2013:1). Both were very active as members of Emona, a well-known folk dance ensemble, mostly as musicians. Their engagement in (folk) music practice, field work, and ethnomusicological research led to forming a musical ensemble that, from 1978 onwards, was the first in Slovenia to revive folk music:

The results of our ethnomusicological research had to be put on stage. The old musical instruments from bygone days spoke with a unique sound language, one that was unlike anything known. In fact, the spoken and written word is unable to describe music comprehensively. Music needs to be heard and resonate in the souls and hearts of both those who perform it and those who listen to it (Omerzel-Mirit 2013:2).

The ensemble started presenting folk music in a new way that was entirely different from the norm at the time, especially compared to folk dance ensembles. They wanted to

present the Slovenian musical tradition in an undistorted form, without any popular and fashionable distractions; the songs and a colorful range of unusual and long-forgotten musical instruments helped them get in touch with themselves and their own existence (N.N. 2019).

They had a clear vision: “a concert-based revival path (research, restoration, revival, presentation at concerts, raising awareness and exposing our true and undistorted musical heritage)” and “to introduce into

the Slovenian area creativity that was previously non-existent” (Omerzel-Mirit 2013:1).

Similarly, the members of Istranova drew on their own direct experiences with culture bearers. At first, they got to know local music within their own community through their relatives. Dario Marušić became acquainted with local traditional music during his childhood, and in secondary school he started studying and collecting it more extensively. As a college student, he performed local traditional music with his guitar while living on campus. Together with some others, including Franko Juri, he came up with the idea to form Istranova. They became aware of the wealth of their own folk tradition, and they started collecting it, discovering it, and coming into direct contact with the living folk music practice. Juri recalls this as follows:

Another important thing was being in touch with the real Istria. Istrians, who still sang or played old Istrian songs, inspired us. In addition to music, we also loved listening to their stories, drinking their wine, eating their prosciutto. Among other things, we showed our gratitude by including these musicians in various events and projects, we became friends. We got to meet the most original musicians... (Juvančič 2013).

They went around the Istrian villages and collected and documented traditional music in a systematic and studious way. They also went there to play music. They would often show up unannounced in villages where they had previously documented folk music, and would hold free concerts, where they played together with the village musicians (Juvančič 2013).

Many other revival musicians were in direct contact with the traditional music practice in the field. For instance, especially when they were just starting out, the Trinajsto prase ensemble travelled to the Prekmurje region several times to meet the local traditional musicians and play music with them. Their close attachment to the Prekmurje tradition was mainly due to ensemble member Roman Ravnič, who was originally from the region and had heard local music since his childhood. Moreover, the traditional music practice was still very much alive there, and many musicians’ repertoires included various dance tunes, which people still danced to at parties. Trinajsto prase’s initial repertoire was based on the Prekmurje tradition (Tomaž Rauch, interview, 20 July 2020), and they later took a similar approach to reviving folk music from the Primorska region.

Kurja koža similarly drew on the local folk tradition in the Štajerska region, where its members were from. The ensemble's repertoire was based on their field research, focused on local instruments and the musicians who still played and in some cases made the instruments. The ensemble's strong connection to the source is reflected in how they named the songs in their repertoire, such as *Laporškova* (Laporšek's Song) or *Anzov valček* (Anza's Waltz), after the musicians they learned the songs from, or *Prepoljska* (The Prepolje Tune), which is how it was referred to by the rural musicians. An even more direct connection with the living local tradition can be found with Marko banda, as its members learned how to play folk music directly from the local ensemble Kociper-Baranja banda. Singers Bogdana Herman and Ljoba Jenče also had a very close connection with culture bearers.

In addition to this first-hand learning, performers also used publications and collections to gather their materials. These were mainly published by the Institute of Ethnomusicology, based on its fieldwork collection, research, and sound documentation. Over time, written publications were supplemented by increasingly frequent publications of the sound material.

INSPIRATION FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

Folk revival movements around the world were an important factor in the emergence and development of folk music revival in Slovenia. Many musicians in Slovenia were familiar with the folk music revivals, and were fascinated and inspired by them. In fact, some Slovenian revival performers started their respective musical journeys by performing Anglo-American folk music. For example, Bogdana Herman started out in the 1960s singing protest songs and American ballads with guitar accompaniment. While working as a journalist at Radio Študent during her studies, she sang live on air in addition to her other duties. After experimenting with sound as a member of Salamander in the 1970s, she did not really focus on the Slovenian tradition until she joined Matija Terlep and Mira Omerzel-Terlep's trio. Similarly, as a student Ljoba Jenče sang English ballads while playing guitar, and she did not decide to research, collect, or sing Slovenian folk songs until later, when she got to know the Slovenian folk music revival.

In much the same way, Dario Marušič's fascination with what was happening abroad made him interested in local traditional music, and

made him want to perform it. He described this as follows: “If I hadn’t learned about the British and French (in the beginning, mostly Breton) folk revival, I might never have found such strong love for my native folk music” (Juvančič 2013). His knowledge of what was happening in other countries and his enthusiasm for revival music rubbed off on all the other Istranova members, who started learning about it as much as they could, as recalled by Juri: “we began studying like crazy, the folk revival, everything that was happening worldwide” (Juvančič 2005:213). In addition to the folk music played in the Anglo-Celtic scene, they also followed what was happening in France and Italy, where they later toured frequently. The members of Trinajsto prase were also very familiar with what was going on abroad, and Roman Ravnič in particular closely followed all things related to music festivals, where he got to know the performing ensembles and selected them for the Druga Godba festival in Ljubljana.

In the period before the folk music revival in Slovenia and during its early stages, there was an increasing number of presentations, concerts, and articles presenting the musical traditions of other cultures, as well as various folk music revival efforts around the world. Such articles were often authored by musicians who later played an active role in acoustic music and folk music revival in Slovenia.

For instance, there were relatively frequent performances of Indian music, in line with the interest in Indian music and the sitar in the Western world. In 1972, in one of the first issues of the magazine *Glasbena mladina* (“Musical Youth”), Milan Dekleva, who later became one of the most important members of Salamander, published a lengthy text announcing a concert of Indian music organized by the Student Cultural Centre, performed by musician Ram Chandra on the sitar in the Slovenian Philharmonic Building in Ljubljana (Dekleva 1972). Dekleva had made arrangements with Chandra for the concert in Ljubljana at a festival he had attended abroad. In addition to announcing the concert, the article also presented the characteristics of Indian music and the fundamental differences between Indian and Western (European) music. The following year, the magazine published a long interview with Ravi Shankar about Indian music, his musical creativity, ragas, jazz, and the musics of the East and the West (Jakše and Valentinčič 1972). A few years later, Lado Jakša, at the time a member of Salamander, described the characteristics of Indian music at length (Jakša 1977), while also presenting typical musical instruments and announcing a Radio Ljubljana show which would be devoted to Indian

music. There were a fair number of articles and concerts dedicated to Indian music in the following years as well.

Even a cursory look at the *Glasbena mladina* magazine reveals that it presented music from all kinds of different cultures. For instance, in its second year, the magazine featured a series of articles dedicated to a presentation of “the music of other nations (and ethnic groups)”, starting with the music of Japan (Kralj 1972). The later volumes of the magazine carried articles that presented the music of Cambodia, Laos, and Oceania, as well as the musical creativity of Black Americans, American folk music, British folk music, etc. Some members of the folk music revival movement in Slovenia contributed to the articles; for example, Mira Omerzel-Terlep wrote about the traditional music of Iran, Dario Marušić about the folk music of Wales, and Roman Ravnič about the traditional music in Hungary and Sweden.

Not long after, presentations, comments, impressions, and criticism of various folk festivals that were held in Europe and attended by Slovenian enthusiasts started appearing in the press. Drago Vovk repeatedly wrote about folk festivals, for example in a 1981 article where he noted that during the preceding few years, both in Western and Eastern European countries, there had been a significant increase in people’s interest in “folklore music” and that performers often tried to imitate the popular Anglo-American musicians as little as possible, doing their best to search for and create music based on their own traditions (Vovk 1981). In doing so, they devoted increasing attention to the musical instruments, characteristics, origins, and messages of the music of the area they came from. In the article, Vovk also mentioned the most important folk ensembles in the Netherlands, France, Germany, Austria, Spain, Poland, Hungary, etc. Mira Omerzel-Terlep and Tomaž Rauch also shared their impressions about foreign folk festivals and reflections on the music they had heard.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, various concerts of foreign “folk ensembles” were organized in Slovenia, representing different approaches to the folk music revival. At first, these concerts primarily featured performers of Anglo-American folk music. Their concerts were very well received and the concert halls were packed (cf. Boh 1981). Soon after, they were followed by revival performers from other areas, including performers from Hungary, who performed in Slovenia several times.⁸

8 The announcement of a concert by Muzsikás in Ljubljana in 1988 mentioned that the performance would be dedicated to “the excellent Hungarian folk mu-

The Slovenian public soon became aware of what was happening in Hungary and learned about the *táncház* movement. In fact, the aforementioned article by Drago Vovk in 1981 and the included overview of the foreign folk music revivals highlighted the case of Hungary, where, in addition to the successful performances in their home country, some performers—the listed ones included Kolinda, Muzsikás, Vízöntő, Iván Lantos, Unikum, and Mákvirág—also went on a lot of tours abroad, where the opportunities for performances, festivals, media coverage (radio, TV), and attention were greater. In conclusion, the author mentioned that the gramophone records of the listed performers were not available in Slovenia (Vovk 1981).

Roman Ravnič, a member of the Slovenian Musical Youth Association (*Zveza glasbene mladine Slovenije*; hereinafter GMS Association) and one of the key figures of the folk music revival movement in Slovenia, also started collecting information about traditional music in Hungary and about the *táncház* movement. In the autumn of 1987, when the Trinajsto prase ensemble was about to be formed, he translated and adapted a Hungarian article about Hungarian traditional music and gramophone record releases for the *Glasbena mladina* magazine (Ravnič 1987). Most of the article was dedicated to the *táncház* movement, which was presented as a special type of folk music revival in which “original rural music” is performed by “young educated urban residents.” The article presented the early beginnings of Béla Halmos and Ferenc Sebő in the 1970s, the key connection with a similar revival of the dance tradition, and the development of *táncház*. It mentioned that in Hungary at the time there were already around 100 such revival ensembles, both amateur and professional. Muzsikás, Mákvirág, Jánosi, Vízöntő, Zsarátnok, Téka, Újstílus, and Vujicsics are listed as the best-known ones. The author noted that organized training, courses, and festivals were also part of the movement; the festivals were very well attended, the central *Táncház* Festival in 1986 boasting as many as 32,000 participants. The movement received support from some important institutions, and both the Hungarian radio and the Hungaroton gramophone company contributed significantly to its promotion and spread. At the end of the article, however, Ravnič wondered about the situation of the folk revival movement in Slovenia.

sic ensemble Muzsikás, which performs authentic folk music of the Hungarian countryside, the kind of music that has nothing to do with gypsy music played in Hungarian restaurants and cafés” (Ravnič 1988a).

In the next few years, various Hungarian ensembles performed in Slovenia. For instance, the second *Druga Godba* in 1986 featured György Szabados and the MAKUZ Orchestra, which included elements of traditional music in their jazz music, and in the following years, *Muzsikás* (1988), *Vízöntő* (1989), and *Vujicsics* (1990) were among the performing ensembles. Hungarian folk revival ensembles also occasionally performed at other events in Slovenia, e.g. *Muzsikás* in the town of Murska Sobota (Ravnič 1988b). The success and praise for Hungarian revival ensembles is evident from the reports written for the Slovenian public about the festivals that took place elsewhere in Europe. For example, in the article about the 1988 “Folkest” festival in Italy, *Vízöntő*’s performance garnered special praise.

Without a doubt, the Hungarian ensemble *Vízöntő* (Aquarius) was unlike any other. Presenting the music from their latest album *Electric Fence*, they made the audience literally delirious with their breath-taking songs. Their “crazy” music, which they refer to as “folk-temporary,” unmistakably draws from tradition. On stage, their rhythmically charged music—the recorded version features electronic instruments, among others—was performed with pure acoustics, with some specially adapted instruments, which produced some incredible sounds. The music sounded part crazy, part mystically serene, and the effect was incredible. Amazing! They played encores that lasted more than half of the regular part. Too much music for one evening! Thanks to them, the highlight came at the very end, and so the party went on until late into the night (N.N. 1988).

Some Slovenian revival musicians socialized and played music with the members of Hungarian ensembles. An interesting example are the members of *Trinajsto prase*, who, when they were just starting out as an ensemble, organized a joint picnic with the Hungarian band *Muzsikás*, who were in Slovenia to perform. “We played together for the whole afternoon, including tunes we had not been familiar with before: someone would start a song, and the others would join in” (Tomaž Rauch, interview, 20 July 2020). In this way, they got to know the musical practices of revival ensembles directly. By participating in various festivals (such as the aforementioned *Folkest* in Italy), they became acquainted with members of other Hungarian bands and they often saw them as role models, especially in terms of their approach to the folk music revival.

THE INFLUENCE AND IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONS

The development and promotion of the folk music revival movement in Slovenia was greatly facilitated by the work carried out by various institutions and organizations, most notably the GMS Association, the Druga Godba music festival, Radio Študent and Radio Ljubljana, and later by organized folk revival movement activities carried out as part of the Folk Slovenia Cultural Society.

The GMS Association was founded in late 1969, and in 1992 became an independent member of the Jeunesses Musicales International organization. From the very beginning, its primary aim was to make young people in particular aware of the diverse world of music. They used various approaches to accomplish this, such as symphonic matinees, concerts with commentary, music workshops, magazine publications, etc., while also providing them with opportunities for their very first appearances on concert stages in Slovenia and abroad. GMS Association's wide range of activities devoted special attention to preserving and popularizing the folk music tradition (N.N. [2020]:1).

As part of its diverse activities, the association presented Slovenian and foreign traditional music to younger and older audiences alike. But the association also always followed and encouraged the folk music revival movement in Slovenia. For instance, as part of their concerts-with-commentary programming, they presented various Slovenian folk revival music from the time it first appeared: in the late 1970s (not long after they had started out) Mira Omerzel-Terlep and Matija Terlep with Bogdana Herman, and then in the 1980s and 1990s, other performers, including Istranova, Trinajsto prase, Ljuba Jenče, Marino Kranjac, Kurja koža, Musicanti Istriani, Tolovaj Mataj, Katice, Marko banda, and Volk Folk. In fact, there were no prominent Slovenian revival ensembles that never participated in this program. "Acoustic music" performers were also presented, such as Sedmina and Tomaž Pengov. With some of their concerts-with-commentary programs, the GMS Association also participated in international exchanges. For example, in 1986, Mira Omerzel-Terlep and Matija Terlep performed thirty concerts with commentary at schools in Belgium featuring their *Slovenian Folk Instruments and Sound Tools* program. In 1993, Trinajsto prase also toured in Belgium, holding twenty school concerts with commentary and two public concerts, with a program titled *Musicians' Tunes* (cf. N.N. [2020]:3; Ograjenšek and Šivic 1995:23).

From 1970 onwards, the GMS Association also published a magazine, which was initially titled *Glasbena mladina* (Musical Youth) and later

renamed *GM*, *Muska* (Music) and *Glasna* (Loud). From its beginnings, the magazine covered a wide variety of musical topics related to musical life both in Slovenia and abroad. Various authors shared not only their wealth of knowledge but also plentiful critical thinking and even provocative observations directed at all music genres, ranging from classical, rock, pop, and ethno to contemporary and avant-garde. Featuring interdisciplinary content, impressions from concert and festival venues in Slovenia and abroad, and selected music publications and releases, the magazine kept abreast of everything that went on in the field of music in Slovenia and commented on it. From the first years onwards, it carried feuilletons, series of articles and themed features written by various authors from different perspectives, and within that presented Slovenian traditional music, in particular folk instruments and the way they were played. Many of the featured contributions also presented the emergence and development of the folk revival movement in Slovenia and elsewhere.

Slovenian and foreign festivals also played an important role in popularizing the Slovenian folk music revival. In Slovenia, the two most notable ones were *Druga Godba* and *Okarina*, where most of the Slovenian revival musicians have presented their music at one time or another. *Druga Godba* in particular contributed to the visibility and popularity of many Slovenian folk music revival ensembles.

Druga Godba—whose intriguing name could be translated as “that other music”—was established in 1985 as an alternative and complement to other Ljubljana-based music festivals that did not present more radical and “different” music practices.⁹ At the outset, its program was primarily concerned with different kinds of “otherness in music”: alternative rock, “rock in opposition”, adventurous new jazz, improvised music, and experimental music, as well as rediscovered Slovenian (and other) traditional music and folk music revival.

The GMS Association played a key role in festival organization and programming, primarily organizing folk music performances. During the first few years, some active traditional local musicians and ensembles were presented on stage. For instance, the 1986 festival featured *Beltinška banda* with Miško Baranja as the cimbalom player, with other inter-

9 Since its inception, *Druga Godba* has developed into one of the most significant European festivals of its type, establishing collaborations with many other important festivals and becoming a member of the European Forum of Worldwide Music Festivals. *Druga Godba* is currently a major international world music festival in Slovenia (N.N. S.a.2).

esting traditional ensembles from all over Slovenia in the following years. After that, it focused mainly on revival performers, such as Trinajsto prase (1990), the Kurja koža trio (1992), Marko banda (1992), the Piščaci duo (1992), Tolovaj Mataj (1994), Šavrinske púpe en ragacóni (1995), Bogdana Herman (1996), Tolovaj Mataj in Katice (1997), and others.

As part of *Druga Godba*, and with the cooperation of the GMS Association, a music publishing company was founded in 1987. Its focus was on publishing recordings of performances from the festival. The majority of released materials featured performers of Slovenian traditional music and folk music revival ensembles. These audio publications made it possible for this genre to reach the widest circle of listeners and were very well received by the general public and experts alike (cf. Barbo 1987).

Radio stations also played an important role in spreading and popularizing folk revival music, especially Radio Študent, which was founded in 1969 by the Union of Slovenian Student Communities and is considered the first student radio station in Europe. Radio Študent started playing traditional and folk revival music early on, and presented it mainly to the younger population.¹⁰ It offered an alternative to institutionalized radio station programs. As part of a special radio show called *Serving the People*, it focused on “ethnic”, i.e. “authentic folk music” (Kravos 1981:20). Although the share of this music was very small compared to other genres played on Radio Študent, the efforts to include traditional music in its program were supported by the belief that “generally, this music has sufficient confessional, aesthetic, and other artistic values to meet the needs of more discerning listeners” (Kravos 1981:20). It was indeed received with significant interest.

Later, revival performers were presented, played, and recorded at another radio station, the national broadcaster Radio Ljubljana (renamed Radio Slovenia after the country gained independence). It followed the folk music revival activities mainly as part of its folk music section, which was headed by editor Jasna Vidakovič at the time. On her initiative, numerous recordings of revival performers (both studio recordings and documentary recordings from concerts and festivals) were made

¹⁰ For example, the first recordings of Trinajsto prase (before they even had the name) were made and broadcast on Radio Študent (cf. Tomaž Rauch, interview, 20 July 2020). In fact, the music of some performers of “acoustic” and “progressive” music was first recorded and played on this radio. In 1970, one of the first issues of the *Glasbena mladina* magazine pointed out that Tomaž Pengov had already recorded his music on “five recordings on Radio Študent” (Pengov 1970).

for the radio archives. Some of them were later released in various formats.

In 1996, most members of the folk music revival movement in Slovenia joined forces to found the Folk Slovenia Cultural Society (later renamed the Folk Slovenia Cultural and Ethnomusicological Society), and from then on their activities were carried out in an organized manner. The main aim of the society's activities was to assist in Slovenian traditional and folk revival music achieving greater prominence and to enable an easier exchange of experiences and more coordinated activities for the performers. It also aimed to organize various trainings, workshops, and seminars for its members and for the general public, and to present folk revival music at various concerts. Inspired by the *táncház* movement in Hungary, the society also tried to set up a Slovenian dance house.¹¹

CONCLUSION

Research into the emergence and development of the folk music revival in Slovenia shows that the beginnings of this movement might have been even more complex and diverse than initially expected and that it was influenced by many factors. On the one hand, folk music revival in Slovenia has similar characteristics and circumstances surrounding its emergence as the movements in other countries, but on the other hand, it also has certain specific features. One of them is that between the 1970s and 1990s, the activities of folk dance ensembles in Slovenia were directed towards folk tradition and less so towards strong stylization of folk culture on stage in the form of national and professional ensembles. Many revival performers actively participated in folk dance ensembles and built their further musical creations on those experiences, which was reflected in their music and approach. At the same time, these experiences were often supplemented and enhanced through the performers' own research into the living folk music practices and their direct contact with local traditional folk musicians and singers.

The emergence of the folk music revival in Slovenia was facilitated by the "acoustic scene", which had established itself in the 1970s. By turning away from various mainstream music currents and focusing

11 For more information on the society's activities and the dance house in Slovenia, see the papers by Mojca Kovačič and Rebeka Kunej in this volume.

on local tradition and its own compositions, it represented the alternative music option for some youth, especially those from urban environments. By this time, the scene had already moved away from the initial stage during which the focus was on imitating foreign musical patterns and adapting Anglo-American singer-songwriters' music, protest songs, and foreign "folk" music, which had reached Slovenia in the late 1960s (cf. Juvančič 2003). "Acoustic music" flirted with the elements of folk tradition and this made Slovenian performers think about presenting their own traditional music in a different, unique way.

There is no doubt that the musicians in Slovenia were strongly influenced by the folk music revival movements in other countries, and by various other musical cultures and practices that they discovered and learned about. These practices were often characterized by a departure from the Western perception of music. The influences from abroad were especially obvious and important in the initial period, when that kind of folk music revival scene did not yet exist in Slovenia. Performers in the 1990s, however, were increasingly inspired by the earliest Slovenian folk music revival ensembles. A very important mark was left by Mira Omerzel-Terlep and Trutamora Slovenica, both of which were widely known due to their plentiful work, numerous public performances, and educational activities. With its repertoire and the way it presented traditional instruments, the ensemble directly or indirectly influenced many revival performers. The same can be said about Trinajsto prase and Istranova, which inspired many a musician.

Hungarian folk music revival ensembles also contributed significantly to the Slovenian scene, i.e. the special approach to the presentation of folk music and the *táncház* phenomenon served as a model to the Slovenian revival movement. After 1996, when Slovenian revival musicians began to work in an organized way, they tried, among other activities, to set up a dance house based on the model of their Hungarian colleagues.

In Slovenia, folk music revival developed with the help of various forms of institutional support, which helped it become more widely known, even if it had not attracted widespread public interest or achieved massive popularity. In addition to writing about revival performances and events in various articles and publications, participating in Slovenian and foreign festivals, appearing on the radio and in the media, releasing recordings, etc., ensembles and individuals also collaborated with professionals from this field or were even among their ranks. Some members of the folk music revival movement were also

active in the media, on radio and TV, while others co-organized music festivals and were prominent cultural figures, which also contributed to the development and presentation of the folk music revival.

From the very beginning, various revival performers, from individuals to ensembles, approached the folk music tradition and its stage presentation in very different ways, further enriching the revival scene in Slovenia. By combining and interweaving repertoires and musical practices of Slovenian traditional music with influences from revival movements in other countries, and with the help of institutional support, the Slovenian folk music revival movement emerged in a specific, diverse and unique way. Despite its richness, it remains relatively unknown among researchers, musicians, and the general public.

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THE FOLK MUSIC REVIVAL IN SLOVENIA: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE FOLK SLOVENIA CULTURAL AND ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Mojca Kovačič

In Slovenia, musicians who perform folk music and dance on stage can be broadly divided into several groups: (a) musicians participating in staged choreographies of folk dance ensembles; (b) singers and instrumentalists performing folk music independently, yet still within folk dance associations; (c) formally organized performers outside choreographed contexts, who often maintain local or family-based musical traditions; (d) musicians integrating folk elements into popular genres, such as jazz, rock, or pop; and (e) folk revivalists, who engage with traditional music through research, reinterpretation, and contemporary aesthetics.

This article focuses on the final group of musicians. While I am aware of the problematic nature of rigid genre demarcations, in this article I follow the categorization used by the musicians themselves, as they articulate and position their work within the folk music revival movement. This approach allows for a grounded understanding of genre boundaries as lived and negotiated constructs rather than externally imposed frameworks. In this paper, I focus on the Folk Slovenia Cultural and Ethnomusicological Society (Kulturno in etnomuzikološko društvo Folk Slovenija, hereinafter referred to as Folk Slovenia), which has acted as an umbrella organization for decades, bringing together various individuals and musical groups comprising the folk music revival movement. Although many Slovenian folk music scholars have been associated with the folk revival movement in different (active) ways, research into this musical style has not been undertaken until recently. As such,

the research project which has given, rise to this article, provides an opportunity to research and self-reflect on the trajectory, functioning, and outcomes of the folk music revival movement in Slovenia.¹

Methodologically, the research is based both on autoethnography and my own participant observation, having been a member of Folk Slovenia since 2001. I later became a member of the board and vice president of the society, and thus have been involved in many of its organizational activities and conceptual initiatives. In addition, I studied the archives of Folk Slovenia (including correspondence, concert lists, meeting minutes, event reports, etc.) and interviewed some of the founding members as well as the former and current presidents.

I have organized the information here into four thematic sections. In the first section, I briefly introduce the Slovenian folk revival movement within a European context, and summarize the findings of several scholars on revival movements internationally. In the following three sections, I provide a chronological overview of the most important events and modus operandi of Folk Slovenia. In the almost thirty years it has been active, we can observe—through documents, audio releases, member interviews, and self-reflection—the operational aspects of the society and the many changes that have taken place in its activities. These have influenced the adoption of new guidelines in the society's statutes as well as changes in the society's membership, musical production (CDs and concerts), and the content shared with the general public. Against this backdrop, this article demonstrates the conceptual framework of the folk music revival movement in Slovenia as it has taken shape within Folk Slovenia.

FOLK REVIVAL MOVEMENTS IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT AND THE BEGINNINGS IN SLOVENIA

Reading about folk revival movements in an international context, one realizes that the time periods, initiatives, aims and purposes, their meanings for wider society, and the terminology used (including translations into English) are very different.

1 This project, *In New Disguise: Changes in Traditional Music and Dance Culture in Hungary, Slovenia and Around* (N6-0231), as well as the research and writing of this article, was supported by the Slovenian Research Agency and carried out within the project *Folklore and Ethnological Research on Slovenian Folk Culture* (P6-0111).

While the term *folk revival* is sometimes associated with phenomena of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when European intellectuals and urban elites began showing interest in selected musical practices of rural and village populations (Bithell and Hill 2014:5-6; Cohen 2002), most scholars situate the folk music revival movement in the second half of the 20th century. During this period, predominantly urban musicians—often without backgrounds in communal and intergenerational folk music traditions—revived an interest in the folk music of earlier generations.

Scholarly engagement with folk revival movements reflects an implicit recognition of their role in preserving (albeit selectively) cultural memory and heritage. This is a special contribution to a field of research that previously focused more on the past practices of folk music. Yet, folk revival represents only one among many modes through which folk music is sustained and transformed in contemporary culture. As Bithell and Hill argue, folk revival entails “the deliberate act of reviving, recovering, and re-imagining the past for the purposes of the present” (2014:4), offering insight into how tradition is continually reshaped to meet present-day needs.

As folk music revival has different histories in different contexts, artists, scholars, and other enthusiasts have attempted to revive and reinterpret folk music with different motivations: some have associated it with political and social activism—such as the grassroots revivals in North America or the Native flute revival (see Conlon 2014:442–465)—and others with the simpler idea of preserving folk music and popularizing it with a wider public. Some national or regional folk revival movements have even gone on to contribute to the international popularization of folk music and dance (e.g. Hungarian *táncház*, see Kürti 2019:169–193), while the revival has, in certain contexts, become a branded component of transcultural and world music markets (e.g. Celtic music, see Harvey et al. 2002; Campos Calvo-Sotelo 2016:369–389). Tamara E. Livingston has characterized musical revival as “a product of both specific historical circumstances as well as general intellectual and social trends” (Livingston 1999:81). Max Peter Baumann extends the implications of musical revival to the political sphere and calls it “musical-political behavior.” He points out that musicians, even if they claim to be apolitical, are often unaware of the importance of music for socio-political purposes. He adds that this kind of revivalist behavior has often entered into alliances with various political or social movements

or has unintentionally become a tool of such movements, especially those that invoke nationalisms (Baumann 1996:72).

This might lead us to reflect on the (a)politicization of the folk music revival scene in Slovenia. Although the participants in this study of Slovenian folk music revival do not discuss direct links between the folk music revival movement, the formation of the Folk Slovenia society, and the socio-political situation in the 1990s, it is obvious that this movement gained momentum after Slovenia's independence from Yugoslavia, when the concept of nationality in cultural contexts moved away from the Yugoslav one. In the first decades, the society focused exclusively on Slovenian cultural identity, and musicians performed selected musical examples from Slovenian musical tradition and even rejected initiatives of musical representation of multicultural Slovenia.

Many later revival bands cited Istranova, a folk revival band founded in 1980, as a key influence in their own engagement with folk music reconstruction. While Istranova drew inspiration from Western revival movements, its members distanced themselves from nationalistic or socio-political motivations, instead embracing musical transnationalism and transculturalism as their guiding principles (Juvančič 2005:213).² At the same time, the group's popularity proved that there were opportunities to popularize revived folk music on the Slovenian music market. In addition to Istranova, we can also mention Mira and Matija Trlep's ensemble, later called Trutamora Slovenica, founded two years earlier in 1978, which, unlike Istranova, focused its articulation on a traditionalist approach to the preservation of musical heritage. That is to say, their approach to revival was grounded in the concept of authenticity—particularly in relation to folklore and its re-creative forms—even if their actual sound departed from traditional stylistic norms. The ensemble (which was also a founding member of Folk Slovenia) also played a strong role in educational work. It was the first to present folk music programs for schools, record programs for RTV Slovenia, publish audio publications, and organize concerts for a wider audience.

2 The idea of transnationalism and transculturalism stems from the musicians' regional and cultural localization, as they come from Istria, where there has always been a strong exchange of Croatian, Slovenian, and Italian music traditions, regardless of national borders. As Dario Marušič has also pointed out in his scholarly writings, the members have criticized the erroneous uninational representation of Istria in the national discourses of the individual countries (Marušič 1996:107-112).

THE FIRST DECADE (1995–2005): FROM CONCEPTION TO FOUNDATION

In 1995, three active musicians realized an idea that had already been in the making: musicians who wanted to revive folk music should come together in a joint association. As some of the interviewees (Ravnič 2023 and Kunej 2023) reported, the three musicians contacted other musicians pursuing similar approaches to folk music and invited them to a first joint meeting. Thus, in December 1995, seventeen musicians in the town of Celje agreed to establish an umbrella organization for “creators and restorers of folk music and others interested in the preservation, study, teaching, or popularization of the folk music heritage in the Slovenian cultural area”³ (Archive 20230526104756). The association was formally founded in Piran in 1996, where the leadership was elected, statutes were drawn up, and the first concert was organized, with many of the society’s founding members performing.

According to the founding members, the original intention was to bring performers together with similar approaches to folk music—some of whom did not yet know each other—to get to know each other, to collaborate musically, and to give greater exposure to the musical activities of its members among public (Ravnič 2023, Kunej 2023, and Kranjac 2023). Formalizing their activities also helped them to apply for public funding for their programs. In its first statutes, the society defined its activities, which included the conceptual principles shared by the majority of members: to work to improve the quality of musicianship, as well as increase the number of musicians working in the genre, to consolidate and expand the use of resources for folk revival activities, to educate and train members and the wider community, to collect sound material, to exchange opinions, and to maintain what they called an “intact relationship with folk cultural heritage” (Archive 20230526104756). In practice most of their activities included (and still include to a large extent) organizing concerts by members, holding singing and instrumental workshops as well as dance workshops, organizing roundtable discussions, publishing audio releases, participating in international symposia, and organizing lectures by foreign experts in music and/or dance.

3 The term *Slovenian cultural area* refers to folk music practices within the national borders of Slovenia as well as among Slovenian communities in cross-border regions.

In the society's early intentions, we find many of the ideologies associated with folk music regarding the legitimacy and authenticity of sources for re-creation, as well as dicta framing music revival as a practice that regards sources with care and respect. In fact, the musicians often went to traditional musicians or singers, learned from them and sang and played with them, and even invited them to the concert stage (e.g. the first concert in Piran, *Druga godba*). This attitude toward folk music as a source material also led to inactive musicians, ethnomusicologists and ethnochoreologists (many of them from the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU), and music anthropologists being members of the society. Active members of folk dance groups had less of a presence, although that segment of the population represented the largest audience interested in folk music and dance reinterpretations and re-creations. Some musicians emphasized that they were not interested in the folk dance groups' creative processes or that they tried to distance themselves from it (Ravnič 2023 and Kranjac 2023), while other members come from a background in folk dance ensembles (Kunej 2023). Such distancing from folk dance groups was also reflected in the society's educational activities, where they sought to reach out and engage the general public who were not already involved in folk dance groups. In the report on the first folk dance workshop, for example, we read that although the society was satisfied with the participation (32 participants), it was less satisfied with the profile of the participants, as 26 of them were members of folk dance groups (Archive 20230526110746).⁴

The reports on activities in the early years show that many of the society's active musicians organized singing, instrumental, and later dance workshops, which were primarily aimed at members of the society, but to which external participants were also invited. The aim was to familiarize the musicians with the various performance practices, approaches to the restoration of sources, and musical traditions of the various Slovenian regions to which the musicians devoted themselves. Working with ethnomusicologists and anthropologists, the musicians began exploring the contemporary issues and questions in connection with the revival music movement early on.

In its early years, the society organized roundtables on copyright, public performance, awareness and responsible use of cultural heritage,

⁴ The society made particular efforts to popularize and revive folk dance by incorporating it into the social life of the population, following the example of the *táncház* in Hungary (Kunej R. 2023:43-52; Pettan 2010:128-135).

terminological issues (related to terms such as folk, ethnic, popular, and folklore), and the relationship between folk, popular, and revival music, among other topics. It organized these discussion evenings for the general public, always with the participation of society members and some invited guests. A more detailed insight into what occurred at the roundtables would certainly be welcome, but as they were not recorded, we can only draw conclusions based on the printed invitations (which included the discussion points) and the profiles of the invited members: that the society defined itself in many ways in relation to folk music, with quite diverse views. This is certainly due to the fact that the members belonged to different professions, including musicians (and also some researchers) with a preservationist view of the relationship between folk music and musical revitalization,⁵ and notably researchers with an academically critical view of this relationship – for instance Svanibor Pettan and Rajko Muršič, who were members of the society and worked in collaboration with external experts such as a music sociologist, a director of a world music festival, etc. Society members were also involved in various activities. At a roundtable in 2000, for example, they analyzed the relationship between folk and popular music and came to the conclusion that “the revival of a musical tradition that cannot be authentic, no matter how rigorous its practitioners are, cannot be positioned anywhere other than contemporary popular music production” (Archive 20230614102759).

Significant changes in Folk Slovenia’s activities are noticeable as the leadership of the society changed. In 2001, Svanibor Pettan, already a world-renowned ethnomusicologist, took over the leadership of the society. Immediately after taking over, he asked the board members to consider a name change and the inclusion of performers of “foreign” music in Slovenia, but the majority of the board did not agree with the proposal at the time (these initiatives were only implemented after 2009, after he was re-elected for two more terms). Pettan also began integrating his professional work with the activities of the society, a practice that was later adopted by several other members as well (particularly those who served as music editors at the national radio program RTV

5 These views and the dual positions of performers in different contexts have been discussed in more detail by former society member, musician, and anthropologist Katarina Juvančič in her BA dissertation (2002) and by music event organizer and musician Anej Ivanuša in his master’s thesis (2016). Both works are based on extensive interviews with revival movement musicians and confirm many of the conceptualizations of the revival mentioned in passing in this article.

Slovenia and researchers at the Institute of Ethnomusicology, ZRC SAZU). For the first time, the society co-organized the international symposium United Europe - United Music in 2001. They also organized dance workshops, which were mainly attended by students from the Academy of Music, the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, and later the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana, where Pettan lectured.

In the period from 2003–2006, the society was also co-organizer of the Etno Histeria international youth music camp, where the approach to folk music renditions was based on a much wider scope, both culturally and conceptually. The majority of society members did not take part in organizing this event, with only two actively doing so, but the other members were supportive.

THE SECOND DECADE (2005–2015): CONCEPTUAL SHIFTS

The main directions of research into the revival of folk musics in the European context include critical review and expansion of existing theories and developing new ways of understanding revitalization processes. These include, for example, the study of transformation and innovation taking place within revival movements, such as the emergence of new musical styles, modes of transmission and performance, and the creation of new musical subcultures (Bithell and Hill 2014:3–42). As I cannot cover all of the vast and varied activities of the society in this article, in this section I focus on the more prominent conceptual shifts that have taken place over the following decades. These changes are noticeable at several levels. The first change is reflected in the society's name: the Folk Slovenia Cultural Society was renamed the Folk Slovenia Cultural and Ethnomusicological Society in 2011, officially adding the academic element and thus bringing together “science and culture, theory and practice” (Archive 2023061403010).

During this period, new members from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds as well as performers of non-Slovenian musical practices also joined the society, and controversies arose about the appropriateness of including their music in the society's concerts. This indicates a conceptualization of revival based on “distancing from, or othering of, foreign ethnic or cultural elements” (Bithell and Hill 2014:11), something that is prevalent worldwide. Therefore, we note the attempts at bringing these “others” closer to the core orientation of the society through



Figure 1: The CD *Contemporary Traditional Music in Slovenia III*, released by the society in 2016

concert performances in which they presented their own or learned musical culture (e.g. combining performances of classical Indian, Irish, Latin American, Macedonian, or Sri Lankan music with Slovenian folk music). Members have also brought about changes in the sphere of genre by blending folk music with popular or art music. However, most of these members did not remain in the society for long. But such change is also reflected in the society's audio releases. The first two CDs, released in 1999 and 2001, were followed by a CD titled *Contemporary Traditional Music in Slovenia III* (Pettan and Vidakovič 2016).⁶

This publication marks a conceptual shift from the previous two, which combined recordings by some society members with more traditionalist approaches to Slovenian folk music, based not on an official consensus, but on a shared, implicitly understood conception of the genre among the members at the time. The change, which reflects the society's integration with Western ethnomusicological thinking (to which Pettan also belonged), is also reflected in the renaming of 'folk music' to 'traditional music' in the CD title (from *Modern Folk Music in Slovenia I and II* to *Contemporary Traditional Music in Slovenia III*). During this period, Folk Slovenia also became the Slovenian National Committee of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), now the International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance (ICTMD). It be-

6 A conceptual shift is also represented by the society's publication of a CD of lullabies collected by students of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, in which the sound samples "reflect the multiculturalism of the contemporary Slovenian space" (Juvančič 2006).

came increasingly involved in the co-organization of events, with some members undertaking that role alongside their professional obligations related to music and dance research (e.g. lectures for students, co-organization of scientific symposia, and concert events).

Towards the end of its second decade, the society perceived transience in membership and the inactivity of individual members as a crisis and in 2013 decided to review and re-evaluate its activities and look for possible new directions moving forward. The targeted survey originally planned was replaced by interviews on a variety of topics related to the society, which were published in the national journal *FolklorNIK*. In this text, we find reflections from former and current members of Folk Slovenia on the position and relationship to folk music in Slovenian society in general at that time, as well as the role of Folk Slovenia, its past and contemporary activities, and so on. The responses also show the members' differing positions with regard to the revival of folk music. Some members emphasized that folk music should be revitalized "respectfully and without unnecessary manipulation," or expressed concern that the society's musical practices were too distant from tradition bearers and their performance contexts. Others viewed the society as a form of cultural resistance—a counterweight to what they perceived as an oligarchic effort to dismantle "the already laid foundations of the culture and art of the Slovenian nation". On the other side, some criticized references to the authenticity of past folk music practices, saying, "I live in the modern age and tradition lives in the modern age. If not, it is not a tradition, but only a past tradition," or "We live in a global village, the age of isolation is long gone" (Vidakovič and Knific 2013:105). These responses are certainly helpful in understanding that while the society had undergone an outward conceptual shift in terms of openness to new approaches to folk music, the members' understanding of the society's mission still varied.

THE THIRD DECADE (2015–): FINDING THE WAY

When reviewing and comparing the archived documents, I realized that in terms of networking and membership, the society had been most active in the first decade. Today, many members are inactive, and some are only active at the annual concert. Additionally, many events are presented as being organized by the society (e.g. by adding the society's logo), although they are in fact mainly managed by others and often

involve only individual members. Over the last decade, however, several members have tried to integrate the society into Ljubljana's public musical life. While it was the dance workshops that gave the society the idea of making its activities and passion for the revival of folk music and dance accessible to the general public in the first decade, the society then revitalized this desire with the idea of group singing in a relaxed environment. From 2016 to 2020 (when the COVID-19 pandemic put an end to this type of activity), regular monthly singing workshops were held in Ljubljana, attended by an average of 15–20 singers from a wide range of backgrounds and age groups. These workshops, titled “Zapojmo skupaj” [Let's Sing Together], were aimed at anyone who liked to sing and offered an opportunity and space to sing (N. N. 2016).

The society tried to engage audiences outside their usual sphere with a series of concert-with-conversation evenings called Trad Etno, where presenters discussed creative impulses with musicians. Of the six evenings, half were hosted by society members as representatives of the folk music revival, and the other half with bands that were not revival groups in terms of genre and concept but brought interactions with folk music into their creative work. The series was well attended and appealed to a wider audience, but both economic and pandemic-related reasons prevented it from continuing.

The society has further reduced its regular activities.⁷ Many members of the older generation are no longer actively involved in organizing events, while the society fails to attract younger members. One of the recent positive activities that took place during the writing and publication of this article is that Folk Slovenia has revived its monthly workshops for the general public. On a voluntary basis (i.e. without financial support from state institutions), musicians present various topics in the field of folk music or conduct a singing or instrumental workshop.

7 For example, dance house events are no longer organized, no doubt because the active members of Folk Slovenia are more interested in music than dance revival. The dance houses also did not develop as the members would have wished. Here, too, opinions about revitalization have differed. Some claim that they failed because they were run in the same way as the folk dance organizations, others that the premises were inadequate and the events should be held in public spaces, modelled on the revival of other dances such as swing, and yet others that the dances should be presented in their authentic form rather than in a reworked form (Vidakovič and Knific 2013:104–120).



Figure 2: Workshop by Marin Kranjac: presentation of Istrian folk instruments in Ljubljana, photo: Mojca Kovačič, Ljubljana, 8. 4. 2024

The activity of Folk Slovenia is currently maintained by members who combine the society's activities with their professional work, but otherwise the initial enthusiasm and commitment of volunteer time to the society is in decline. I do not have an answer to the question of the society's survival, as I have not spoken to younger members who have left the society, nor to those who could potentially join the society because of their connections to folk music. The current state of affairs leads me to offer answers based on my own observations, not based on a thorough analysis of the members positions. As a non-profit association, the society does not compensate its members for their artistic or organizational work. This structural condition poses challenges, particularly for self-employed musicians, who often need to prioritize paid engagements in order to sustain their livelihoods. As a result, many of them pursue musical projects outside the society, often following market opportunities. Meanwhile, the academic members of the society are typically overburdened with professional responsibilities, and younger musicians often do not require or seek an organizational framework for their creative direction. Amateur singing and instrumental music groups are also active in other associations and carry out activities outside Folk Slovenia. It can be concluded that the main problem for these groups and individuals is how to maintain the activities of the society and the time that is invested in them.

Public interest in the society's events persists, yet participation does not necessarily translate into active or ongoing membership. These changes indicate two things above all: first, that associations are often driven by enthusiastic individuals, and second, that the collective dies if its ideas are not taken up by younger generations. For Folk Slovenia, individuals are often inactive or have only been members of the organization for a short time. Although the society has opened up conceptual frameworks for different creative approaches, genres, and cultures, it seems that these frameworks are either unattractive or unnecessary for music-making by the younger generations, or such structures are completely unnecessary in contemporary music production more generally.

CONCLUSION

Documenting the twenty-seven-year journey of Folk Slovenia paints a picture of the society's activities, the profile of its members, and its orientations, ideas, and intentions under the common label of folk music revival in Slovenia. The society's activities also reflect the socio-political situation that music played a part in at the time. Revivalists often position themselves in "opposition to aspects of the contemporary cultural mainstream, align themselves with a particular historical lineage, and offer a cultural alternative in which legitimacy is grounded in reference to authenticity and historical fidelity" (Livingston 1999:68). Paradoxically, they have only been able to escape their marginalized position by using the means employed by mainstream music culture, i.e. performing on stage and entering the music market. Thus, even if the ideologies of revivalist musicians follow the ideas of reconstructions of traditionalist performances of past rural practices, these reconstructions still adapt to the laws of the current models of the music market. On the other hand, a certain segment of musicians in Folk Slovenia also consciously adapt their musical style more freely to their own and their audience's aesthetic tastes and preferences.

Folk Slovenia members hardly discussed the appropriateness of specific performances by other members in group discussions such as board meetings and general meetings. However, both in interviews and informally, the interlocutors disclosed several examples of strong criticism of certain performances in the past. These reflect either the musical or stylistic framing of the revival approach (e.g. the inappropriateness of rhythmic accompaniment alongside a ballad, of guitar being

used as non-folk instrument, or of overly high intonation while singing) or framing in terms of a purist understanding of Slovenian culture as a mono-national cultural space (e.g. initial refusal of performances of music from other cultures, or of a song in Italian performed by a musician who musically identifies with the multicultural Istria region) (Petan 2023). These examples reflect an exclusionary understanding of Slovenian cultural identity, which stands in contrast to more inclusive or transcultural approaches to folk music. From a critical perspective, such attitudes raise important questions about cultural gatekeeping and the limits of pluralism within revival movements.

It seems that it was only the professional field itself—once disciplines like ethnomusicology, ethnochoreology, and music anthropology in Slovenia became more open to diverse musical approaches—that truly opened the “social doorway” for critical reflections on authenticity, genre boundaries, and the contemporary needs of society or multiculturalism. However, only a few musicians emerging from these diverse practices have entered or remained within the society. Recent concerts organized by the society have presented more diverse approaches to folk music, including significant departures from the approaches of the pioneers of folk revival in Slovenia. Musicians have primarily incorporated folk melodies into arrangements that reflect hybrid genres and diverse musical soundscapes. In this conceptual field, these musicians do not deal with more or less faithful reconstructions of the chosen past, and they do not frame it in concepts of authenticity and folk-ness. While they also turn to the first folk music revival groups’ adaptations in their search for sources, in the production of new sounds, new textures, and new repertoires, revival has served as a catalyst (Livingston 1999:81, Bithell and Hill 2014:29). Their creative impulses are guided by other motivations, such as ideas of musical universalism—as in the case of the Istranova group—which can certainly be seen as a confluence of musical aesthetic, economic, and other reasons influencing musical productions today. While I do not address these in this paper, they are certainly of interest to better understand contemporary musical approaches to folk music. Alternatively, rather than viewing the revival as a dynamic framework, one might also consider it as a closed phenomenon tied to a specific temporal and socio-historical context, which can hardly account for new developments. This is one possible reading, as suggested by Slobin: “what happens to the term [folk revival]? I imagine we appreciate its long years of service, and we move on” (2014:670). Whether or not folk music revival remains a relevant concept,

the diverse musical practices emerging today demand renewed critical engagement with what folk music can mean—and become—in contemporary society.

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THE ECHO OF THE TÁNCHÁZ MOVEMENT IN SLOVENIA



Rebeka Kunej

Despite the geographical proximity and the relatively similar socio-political orientation of the two countries at the time when the táncház movement emerged in Hungary, the phenomenon did not have an immediate effect resulting in comparable music and dance practices in Slovenia. It was not until much later, in the post-socialist era at the turn of the millennium, that it got its equivalent in Slovenian society as *plesna hiša*, which is a literal translation of the Hungarian “táncház.” In the following text, “dance house” refers to the general concept of the táncház-inspired dance movement in Slovenia. However, when referring to specific projects and implementations, I speak of three. One is the nationally oriented project called Slovenian Dance House, while the other two, the Bela Krajina Dance House and the Resian Dance House, are regionally oriented.

The táncház movement has a rich half-century history in Hungary, and in comparison, the implementation of ideas stemming from táncház in Slovenia, which has been going on for half that amount of time, appears modest, different, and somewhat idiosyncratic. It seems important to ask whether general discussions about the initiatives that came with this new wave of Hungarian folk revival have stimulated similar revival practices in the vicinity, and to what extent. The international project “In New Disguise: Changes in Traditional Music and Dance Culture in Hungary, Slovenia and Around,” carried out by the Institute for Musicology HUN-REN RCH in Hungary and the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU in Slovenia, is an excellent opportunity to identify and critically evaluate the attempts at introducing this model in Slovenia—in this article, from an ethnochoreological perspective.¹

1 The article was written as part of the research projects “In New Disguise: Changes in Traditional Music and Dance Culture in Hungary, Slovenia and Around”

The *tánc ház* movement in Hungary and across the Hungarian diaspora around the world has been studied primarily by ethnomusicologists, both domestic and foreign (e.g. Ronström 1998; Balogh and Fülemlé 2008; Richter 2015; Taylor 2021), but less so by ethnochoreologists (e.g. Quigley 2014; Varga 2016). The Slovenian press wrote about the Hungarian *tánc ház* even before the Folk Slovenia Cultural Society (*Kulturno društvo Folk Slovenija*), at that time a society for folk music tradition in the Slovene ethnic region, organized its first ever dance house, which was the source and inspiration for all further attempts and new Slovenian versions. An article by Lujza Tari on published recordings of Hungarian folk music, which originally came out in *Hungarian Music News* (Tari 1987), was translated into Slovene and published in 1987. Roman Ravnič, the translator, added a postscript to the article, asking “What about here?” (Tari and Széll 1987/1988:18). It took 17 years before he finally got an answer to this question—an answer he in fact co-created himself (more on this below and in the article of Drago Kunej in this volume).

To date, neither ethnomusicology nor ethnochoreology have holistically and critically examined dance houses in Slovenia. Svanibor Pettan has so far written about the project Slovenian Dance House (*Slovenska plesna hiša*) from the ethnomusicological perspective (2004, 2008, 2010). During his time as the president of the Folk Slovenia Cultural and Ethnomusicological Society (renamed in 2010 on his initiative), his articles documented the experience of implementing the Hungarian model in Slovenia within the society’s framework in a rather one-sided, even positivistic way. He used the introduction of *tánc ház* as a way to criticize the society’s members who were reluctant to accept other (non-Slovene) musical traditions, with the belief that they were not in line with the society’s original purpose. In the introduction to his first article, he wrote that the project “could in many ways be referred to as ‘a success story’, but I would rather present it as an ‘ongoing project’” (Pettan 2004:91). In all three of his publications, Pettan dwelt on “the society’s experience” as reflected through his own perspective, rather than including the experiences and opinions of other, perhaps even more actively involved, members of the society. Regarding the analytical overview of dance house events in Slovenia, the three publications do not differ or build on each other in terms of content. It is evident

(N6-0231), “Folklore Revival in Post-Socialist Countries: Politics, Memory, Heritization and Sustainability” (N6-0259), and the research program “Research on Slovenian Folk Culture in Folklore Studies and Ethnology” (P6-0111), all funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

that the first two articles were aimed at Slovenian readers—both the professional public (2004) and amateurs, primarily those who re-interpret folk tradition by participating in the so-called folklore activities and folklore dance ensembles (2008). The third one, published in English in 2010, was the only one that differed slightly content-wise, as it was intended for the international academia. This was also due to the modified outline of the article, where an extended introductory section on folk music in European settings was added, in which the author emphasized the differences between state folklore and folk music revival, and Hungarian *táncház*.

The dance house phenomenon has been almost completely overlooked and unnoticed from a Slovenian ethnochoreological perspective. One exception is a short chapter in my book about the *štajeriš* (or Steirisch) dance (Kunej 2012:180–182), in which I discuss the execution of a particular dance in the dance house context. The other is my article “Spaces of folk dancing beyond the (Slovene) folklore ensemble stage” (Kunej 2023), in which the dance house is presented as one of those spaces. Nevertheless, there has been no article dealing with dance houses in Slovenia in more detail thus far.

This article is partly an autoethnographic study: as a student, I participated in the founding of the Folk Slovenia Cultural Society, which at first mainly united performers of the Slovene folk music revival scene. Among the initial membership, only a few of us were not performers of this music genre. At the time, I was still active as a dancer in a folklore dance ensemble and only a lover of revival folk music. Yet it was because of my connection to dance, which later guided my research career in ethnochoreology and folklore studies, that I became a dance teacher in the beginnings of the Slovenian Dance House. The objectivity of this autoethnographic text is based on reflexivity by involving other sources and marking sociocultural context (Anderson 2006), as well as using an ethnographic method to study dance events in the recent period (those beyond the activities of Folk Slovenia).

The aim of this paper is therefore to examine the *táncház* movement’s impact in Slovenia and to critically review it from an ethnochoreological perspective. In doing so, I will analyze the efforts in introducing this model of dance events into the Slovenian dance space and critically evaluate the role of individuals and institutions in the transmission of this dance practice. Furthermore, this study explores and questions the globalization of the dance practice, the success and diversification of its implementation, and the sustainability of dance house in Slovenia.

BEGINNINGS OF THE SLOVENIAN DANCE HOUSE (SLOVENSKA PLESNA HIŠA)

With the new millennium came an attempt to introduce a new form of folk dancing into the Slovenian context. The first workshop drawing inspiration from the Hungarian *táncház* took place in the village of Rim near Adlešiči (Jankoviči), far from the urban center of Ljubljana, in December 2000. One could say it was rather late given Slovenia's proximity to Hungary; however, similar events were happening in many post-socialist countries at the time. The workshop was organized by members of the Folk Slovenia Cultural Society.

Roman Ravnič, who helped to found the society and translated an article on the Hungarian *táncház* (as noted above), was the main initiator and the heart and soul of the first Slovenian versions in the early years. As he was originally from Prekmurje, a multi-ethnic region with ethnic Hungarians, and worked as a concert organizer, Ravnič knew the Hungarian scene and culture better than the majority of those involved in the first Slovenian attempts. Furthermore, he was a member of Tolovaj Mataj, a folk music revival band that was vital in these events. His idea gained the necessary support of other members, who were already familiar with the Hungarian *táncház* movement through personal experience.

The organization of the first folk dance workshop modelled after *táncház* was entrusted to Nataša Kosmač, Rajko Muršič, Roman Ravnič, and me, all members of the society. The project was called "Entrance to the Slovenian Dance House" (*Vstop v slovensko plesno hišo*) and was financed by the then Republic of Slovenia Fund for Amateur Cultural Activities. Initially, members of Tolovaj Mataj—Roman Ravnič, Jernej Pečak, and Peter Kus—formed the band, but they were later joined on the spot by other members of the society. The dance part was assigned to those of us who already had some knowledge and experience with folk dancing, either as teachers or as active members of folklore dance ensembles. To make dance teaching easier, Nataša Kosmač, Marino Kranjac and I were joined by Andrej Kos, an instructor of the France Marolt Student Folk Dance Group (*Akademska folklorna skupina France Marolt*).

The first trial dance house events were held at the society's meeting at the end of the year 2000 and Folk Slovenia's Slovenian Dance House project officially launched in 2001. As written in the invitation to the first workshop, it was aimed at "all those who wish to learn the practical steps to some folk dances that have been or are still danced in

Slovenia or in the Slovene ethnic region,”² regardless of age and prior dance knowledge. Enclosed in the letter was also an explanation by Rajko Muršič, in which he stated the society’s aims with such activities. He started with the fact that instrumental folk music was mainly intended to accompany dance, and therefore, a true revival of this music should go together with the revival of the dance. Muršič continued, “It is not enough that members of folklore dance ensembles, presenting dance in its performative function, have become the only keepers of the dance tradition. In Slovenia, as elsewhere in Europe, we need clubs where young people can dance traditional dances in the same way they dance to electronic or electrically amplified music” (Muršič 2000).

Slovenian Dance House was far from being a spontaneous movement. In the following years, it was a deliberate project planned within Folk Slovenia and financially supported either by the Republic of Slovenia Fund for (Amateur) Cultural Activities, or by the Ministry of Culture. The number of times the events took place depended on the approval or rejection of the proposed plans, which were sent via application forms to the mentioned institutions. Individual events of this project are usually referred to as dance workshops within the society. Based on the records, there were 6 of them in 2001, and the report of the society’s president at the time even mentions 8 workshops of the “Entrance to the Slovenian Dance House” project in total. Rather than being an alternative dance party, these workshops turned into educational events.

Even though Svanibor Pettan raised the possibility that the Slovenian Dance House was a success story of the society, I tend to be more critical of the project. The society’s archived reports state that “the conversations held with mentors and musicians show that the workshops did not go quite as well and were not as we had planned them.”³ The project was discussed again at the members’ meeting in 2005, where a similar opinion was expressed: the project was never really implemented the way members had hoped it would be.

The report on the workshops of the “Entrance to the Slovenian Dance House” project in 2001 states that attendance was above expectations (32 participants), yet it was not as successful in terms of the target audience: most participants came from folklore dance ensembles, particularly when the events were held on their premises, and there were

2 Archives of Folk Slovenia, Invitation: first dance workshop, Jankoviči, 8th and 9th December 2000, dated 15 November 2000.

3 Archives of Folk Slovenia, The minutes of meeting n.7 of UO KDFS (Administrative Board of Folk Slovenia), dated 10 October 2001.

few other interested individuals and students. Later, the ratio shifted significantly in favor of the student population. University students—for whom the events were a practical (and often even obligatory) addition to their classes in ethnomusicology—contributed significantly to the project’s success. The third category of dancers were the few individuals who recognized the value of engaging in these social and educational activities but were not part of the above-mentioned groups. But not all dance house events had good turnout: meeting minutes note that an event will not take place if less than 5 couples, that is 10 people, register.⁴ On the whole, the Slovenian Dance House has never reached the point where the majority of its participants would regard it as a form of social dancing, a kind of subculture, or an autonomous club event. Instead, it has always been considered more or less as a “cultural event” with an educational purpose, financially supported as such by state cultural funds.

Pettan divides dance house participants in three groups: the musicians, the dance instructors, and the dancers (2010:133). I consider the structure only dual: the organizers and the attendees (dancers). The organizers played a more significant role in co-creating these events than the attendees, as they set the program and led the event. The organizers were usually two dance instructors (not necessarily Folk Slovenia members) and a revival band (Folk Slovenia members), which later also included ad-hoc groups of the society’s musician members. The outline of every dance house event was largely dependent on the organizers, their preferences, and their knowledge of dance and music traditions, as they adapted the program to the individual dance instructors and musicians. Initially, the tendency was to base the workshop’s program on the repertoire of the folk music revival band, to which dance instructors adapted accordingly. When that role was served by ad-hoc groups of musicians, the repertoire became more often defined and guided by the dance instructors.

Who were these active organizers? Among the musicians, they included the bands Tolovaj Mataj, Kurja Koža, Volk Folk, Vruja, Črna Kuhna, Srakova Banda, and Zingelci, as well as members of those bands as individual participants, and a few independent musicians, such as Mile Trampuš, Katarina Šetinc, Tomaž Rauch, and others. Dance instructors had previous experience teaching in folklore dance ensembles, and

4 Archives of Folk Slovenia, The minutes of meeting no. 5 of the Administrative Board of Folk Slovenia, 6 September 2001.

though they were enthusiastic, they used pedagogical methods from that setting. Therefore, the project Slovenian Dance House was not able to develop its own concept of dance teaching, and instead mirrored the one developed within folklore dance ensembles, which is ultimately oriented toward stage performance. Considering all of this from an analytical perspective, I now believe this was more of a hindrance than an advantage: the concept of learning a dance in a folklore dance ensemble was used too much on the Slovenian Dance House dance floors.

In addition to the variants recorded locally by folklorists and published in book collections, the repertoire of certain dance house workshops sometimes also included versions or dances that had been previously choreographed for a stage production of folklore dance ensembles, and were in fact non-traditional arrangements. Since most folk dances had already been forgotten in their primary environment, members of contemporary folklore dance ensembles did not have adequate knowledge of traditional dance practices; sometimes they were not even aware that these arrangements were not traditional.

The beginnings of the Slovenian Dance House were not supported by the discipline of ethnochoreology to such an extent as the Hungarian táncház movement, which marks an important difference between the two. As Colin Quigley (2014) notes, ethnochoreologist György Martin played a key role in Hungary by sharing his analytical insights into dance, which was closely linked to that of their accompanying music. “The teaching methods [...] were carefully designed in collaboration with Martin to transmit the knowledge needed by dancers to perform competently, even at an elementary level, in the improvisatory social manner” (Quigley 2014: 193). According to Quigley, this was one of the key elements that characterized the táncház movement: as the idiom (the dance) was transferred to a new environment, the traditional processes of transmission within a community ceased to operate, and new approaches had to be found. He concludes: “Dance house, beginning with a sophisticated approach to the transmission of music/dance as social practice, was particularly successful at training the ‘disciples’ who went on to recreate the practice elsewhere” (Ibid.). This was further supported in 2011, when the Táncház Method was included on the UNESCO Register of Good Safeguarding Practices (UNESCO 2011).

In Slovenia, there were no direct links with the profession, at least not to such an extent, as the leading ethnochoreologist at the time, Mirko Ramovš, did not participate in the first dance house events, nor in developing a teaching method that would serve the purpose. He did,

however, participate as a dance instructor a few times later on. On these occasions, Ramovš applied a similar teaching method to the one he used with members of folklore dance ensembles. The teaching of dance at workshops was largely a transfer of the didactics that had been developed for teaching in the folklore activity environment. The organizers were at least partly aware of this hindrance, as in 2007, they held a one-day seminar for dance instructors titled “Dance House: Modernizing the Folk Dance Tradition” (*Plesna hiša: aktualizacija ljudskega plesnega izročila*). Yet considering that the lecturers came from the folklore ensemble scene, I conclude that there was no significant breakthrough. After twenty years and with considerably more ethnochoreological knowledge, I would argue that this was one of the fundamental shortcomings of the Slovenian Dance House, resulting in the decline and downfall of this experiment by the Folk Slovenia Cultural and Ethnomusicological Society.

The Slovenian Dance House project was never a club or a social activity per se, nor did it grow into a subculture, but was rather seen (and funded by the state) as a “cultural event” for the general public. Held for almost two decades, Slovenian Dance House took on other, different names: “Entrance to the Slovenian Dance House” (2000, 2014, 2015), “Dance and Music of the Past Live in the Present” (*Ples in glasba preteklosti živita v sedanjosti*, 2005), “Dance House: Modernizing the Folk Dance Tradition” (2007), “Slovenian Dances in Modern Disguise” (*Slovenski plesi v novi preobleki*, 2017). Overall, Slovenian Dance House was characterized not only by the discontinuities in its name, but also by its temporal and spatial inconsistency.

The first trial dance house took place in a village, far from the capital. The year 2001 marks the more serious launch of the project, when most dance house events were held in Ljubljana, the preferred setting in the years to come. However, the Slovenian Dance House was not completely urban: apart from the cities (including Maribor and Krško), workshops were also organized in the countryside (Adlešiči, Lokavec pri Novi Gorici, Podčetrtek, and Rogatec) and even beyond Slovenia’s borders (Gersdorf, Austria). In Ljubljana, the locations of the events often included the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, various facilities of the University of Ljubljana, and the rehearsal rooms of two of Ljubljana’s folklore dance ensembles, and they were also held at other venues, such as the Zlati zob Ethno Club, the Jazzbina Club, Trubar Literature House, and the atrium of ZRC SAZU. Across Slovenia, they were often organized on the premises of cultural or educational institutions. This shows that

the project never found its own “home,” but rather repeatedly sought out suitable and (where possible) no-cost venues that could accommodate this kind of social dancing.

The frequency of the workshops was just as ever-changing as the location. The initial idea was to hold them monthly (ideally, even more frequently), yet there were only eight workshops in 2001, seven in 2002, and the number continued to decline over the years, usually with two till five per year. When Folk Slovenia celebrated its 10th anniversary, it was mentioned that 33 workshops had been organized between December 2000 and September 2006.⁵ The decreasing willingness and interest among the members as well as limited success in receiving state funds contributed to the decrease in the number of organized workshops. In the society’s 2019 annual work report, no dance house or similar project is mentioned.⁶ Following the pandemic era, which did not favor socializing around dance, the post-COVID period indicates that this project has come to a close.

Rather than functioning primarily as social gatherings or leisure activities, Slovenian Dance House increasingly assumed the form of structured dance workshops or classes, often scheduled within highly constrained timeframes. The educational aspect began to dominate over the social function—illustrated, for example, by scheduling a dance house at 9 a.m. in a university setting, which clearly reflects a shift toward didactic purpose. Furthermore, the project occasionally acquired a degree of exclusivity, being featured at international academic conferences as a form of cultural representation. As Pettan observes, it was presented as a “representative gift that KDFS [Folk Slovenia] brings to the venues of various intercultural dialogues” (2008:91), thus highlighting its performative and diplomatic roles within the framework of cultural exchange.

Despite the initial cultural capital within the society’s membership, the project never really bloomed. There were no cultural-political ideas driving the attempt to implement dance house in Slovenia, as was the case with *táncház* in Hungary. The Slovenian Dance House was never deemed a valid alternative to folklore dance ensembles, and it never had the air of a subculture. It was simply an attempt at applying a

5 Archives of Folk Slovenia, minutes of the annual membership meeting, 24 February 2007.

6 Archives of Folk Slovenia, minutes of the annual membership meeting, 24 January 2020.

Hungarian concept into a Slovenian environment—even to the extent that it was regularly discussed in the society’s meetings that members should participate in and experience Hungarian *táncház*. After postponing for several years, some of the members finally visited a *táncház* in Budapest in 2004. Before that, only a few of us had experienced it.

Although the idea of going beyond the (dance and music) aesthetic of folklore dance ensembles was present at first, it gradually disappeared because of the specifics of the current cultural space and the protagonists who more often than not had musical and dance experience from folklore ensembles’ context or Western classical music education. In the period of the Slovenian Dance House project some folk music revival bands stopped performing. Those groups sought both authenticity and their own expression within folk tradition, and distanced themselves from folk music interpretations that existed (and still exist) in folklore dance ensembles (for more on this, see Drago Kunej’s study in this volume). They often participated in the first dance house (e.g., Tolovaj Mataj, Kurja Koža, and Vruja), as they recognized the events as a new possibility for musicking, participatory collaboration with the dancers and co-creation of dance music rooted in folk tradition.

An almost 20-year effort to form a dance house scene in Slovenia was not as fruitful as we had envisioned, but the implementation of Slovenian Dance House by Folk Slovenia nevertheless left an impact. Now, in 2024, I think of the Slovenian Dance House project as a finished story, only partly successful in achieving its goals. It did not transform into a folk dance revival movement but rather stayed project-oriented within its formal framework throughout. Nevertheless, its greatest contribution is the influence on the emergence of two regional dance houses, discussed below.

ON THE MARGIN: BELA KRAJINA DANCE HOUSE

About a decade after the first experimental Slovenian Dance House held in the remote village of Rim near Adlešiči, less than a kilometer from the Slovenian-Croatian state border, a new dance-related story began in the region. The organizers named it the “Bela Krajina Dance House” (*Belokranjska plesna hiša*), and the name itself reflected the regional character. The Črnomelj Institute for Education and Culture (*Zavod za izobraževanje in kulturo Črnomelj*, hereinafter the Črnomelj Institute) has been holding it every December since 2011.

The main leader is Tadej Fink, who works at the Črnomelj Institute. As a member of the Dragatuš Folklore Dance Ensemble, he accepted the invitation to attend the first trial dance house organized by Folk Slovenia, which was held near his home. The event seemed like a novelty to him, a nice opportunity to meet and socialize, and slightly different from those directly related to engagement in a folklore dance ensemble (Tadej Fink, pers. comm., 22 January 2022). As he told me, “I then somehow carried this dance house with me,” and when the idea and opportunity to implement it arose within his work, he designed the Bela Krajina Dance House. He founded it by combining his professional and leisure activities: he is currently a coordinator and organizer of cultural events at the Črnomelj Institute and he has also been an active member of the Dragatuš Folklore Dance Ensemble since his youth. He informed himself about the concept of the dance house online, and visited the Slovenian Dance House events held in Ljubljana, to once again see how it was done, before starting his own dance house in that same year.

The Bela Krajina Dance House has some features which are different from the one organized by Folk Slovenia that it was modeled after. Dance houses have been continuously organized every year from the beginning, besides during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ Until 2020, they were all located in the town of Črnomelj, and since 2021, they are also held in two other nearby villages (Stari trg and Vinica). Fink points out that so far, the venue has most often been the stage of a cultural center, and that the idea of using a venue more typical for socializing (e.g. a pub) remains to be implemented. The Bela Krajina Dance House is characterized by a large intergenerational attendance, with as many as three generations among the participants: school children, the middle-aged, and the elderly. On average, there are 20 people at a dance house. The Bela Krajina Dance House is not project-funded from the local or state budget but is maintained by the altruism of involved volunteers (musicians and dance leader). Fink usually collaborates with musicians who are also part of a local folklore dance ensemble. Dancers of folklore dance ensembles are frequent attendees, but they are not the only ones—according to Fink, they represent about half of all participants. Moreover,

⁷ Only a lecture on folklore and dance heritage was held via Zoom in the first year of COVID restrictions. The following year, they organized only a live lecture in the auditorium, as restrictions were always imposed on dance events and prevented close contact among the participants. Since 2021, they have continued with the original concept, i.e. dancing.

about 60% of attendees are regular and they come from the nearby area, from within about 25 km.

Above all, the Bela Krajina Dance House is specific in its concept, as it focuses only on the region in which the events are organized. Fink points out that he places great emphasis on the dance repertoire. He wants to stand out from folklore dance ensembles, where stage presentations usually emphasize the specifics of the Bela Krajina dance heritage (various types of the circle dance *kolo*) and reproduce stereotypical images, while neglecting the rest of the dance types and the image that is related to the Central Slovenian Region (e.g. waltz, polka, and Steirisch). Thus, the Bela Krajina Dance House is becoming one of the spaces of modifying the narratives about the past dance tradition in this region. Dance learning is complemented by explanations and Fink confirms that he is aware that the dance house has more of a workshop orientation. Although it is always called the Bela Krajina Dance House, they promote the event online as a dance workshop. This “social gathering to learn the folk dances of Bela Krajina” is always free and inclusive (open to participants of all ages and dance backgrounds). In addition to the social function, the educational role is ultimately quite apparent and is intended for the locals—the organizers believe that December is an ideal time to gather and learn about the dance heritage of Bela Krajina. Despite the interest shown in extending the events throughout the year, its organizers remain focused only on December.

The Bela Krajina Dance House is intended for the local population in the region of around 27,000 people, and even its repertoire (content) refers only to the region in which it is held. The dance house is self-sufficient in several aspects. It draws on the past dance tradition of its own region and offers a participatory dance experience outside the framework of established presentations within folklore activity. It cooperates with local folklore dance ensembles that have a long and rich tradition in this region (more on this in Kunej 2004) and have in the past significantly co-created the image of the region’s dance heritage, but it seeks its own identity and is an alternative to the established authorized heritage discourse of Bela Krajina’s dance tradition.

ON THE OUTSKIRTS: RESIAN DANCE HOUSE

For more than 10 years, the Orfej Club, located only 18 kilometers from the city center of Ljubljana, has been a venue for events that could be

defined as a dance house, even though the founders did not name it that way. Over the years, the organizers have called these dance evenings by many different names, such as “Resian Evening” (*Rezijanski večer*), “Rezi Dance” (*Rezi ples*), and “This Resian Dance” (*Ta rezijanski ples*). When referring to these kind of dance events at the club hereafter, I will use the generic term Resian Dance House, as the concept of the events has remained the same throughout—first learning Resian folk dances, then engaging in a social dance evening. This dance house was not directly inspired by the Slovenian Dance House, although some of the participants were also present there, but is mainly the result of genuine enthusiasm for the archaic nature of Resian dance or enthusiasm for (neo) traditional dances in general. Resians, the people of the Resia Valley in Italy on the border with Slovenia, have preserved and developed their own cultural elements throughout their history due to their isolation. Today, they are known for their distinctive culture, especially their dialect (derived from Alpine Old Slavic), folk music, and dance.

The man behind the idea of the Resian Dance House and its leader is Klemen Frank, the owner of the venue in which the events are held. He was fascinated by the archaic Resian dance and music culture, its primal rhythms and archaic nature, which he often emphasizes when teaching Resian dance. His connection to Resian dance is not the result of his activity in one of the Slovenian folklore dance ensembles, where many Slovenians experience Resian dance for the first time, but the result of his interest in ancient, particularly pre-Christian, traditions. His fascination with Resian music is reflected in his own words—he feels that the dance chose him and not the opposite, and that he wants to familiarize as many people as possible with this music and dance. Frank not only organizes a dance house at his property, but he has also repeatedly organized small group visits to Resia and seizes every opportunity to learn the dance tradition directly from Resians.

The connection with the vibrant dance tradition on which this dance house is based is its greatest strength and most defining feature. From time to time, Frank has organized a dance event that also includes tradition bearers, i.e. musicians from Resia. In the past, Slovenian researchers Mirko Ramovš and Julijan Strajnar, who conducted ethnochoreological and ethnomusicological research in Resia (e.g. Ramovš 1971, 1999:214–251; Strajnar 1988) were invited to the event and shared their knowledge and memories of this part of their career with the participants. Especially in the first years, the dance house was characterized by live music by Slovenian musicians, and participants rarely

danced to recorded music. Lately (especially after COVID), they more often use recorded music and only exceptionally live performances. A big fan of Resian music, Frank owns a *bunkula* (a small three-string double-bass), which is one of the two instruments used in the Resian tradition. When the opportunity arises and a violinist attends the dance house, Frank likes to join her/him to play live dance accompaniment. He also has an extensive collection of audio publications with archival recordings of Resian music (cassettes and CDs recorded and released by researchers or a folklore group from Resia), which are then often used for dancing. In 2024, participants thus often danced to music recorded in the 1960s or later, and only exceptionally to live music. Based on the conversations with the participants, they did not seem to mind this way of providing music for dance.

The participants in this dance house come from diverse backgrounds. Although it is located only 18 kilometres from Ljubljana, the people from the city (the urban population) do not constitute a majority. Some of the more regular attendees are supporters of the Orfej Club, also attend other events at the venue, and come from the local area in the immediate vicinity of the club. Others are enthusiasts of neotraditional dances.⁸ There are also active or former members of folklore dance ensembles, who had previously encountered Resian dance,⁹ but they do not represent a significant portion of the participants. Consistently over time, the bulk of the attendance are people with affinities for ancient traditions, pre-Christian and pre-modern cultural elements, and sustainable living, followers of the so-called Ancient Faith (*staroverci*), and religious naturalists (*naravoverci*). The first part of the events, devoted to dance learning, is followed by a more relaxed, social part. A partial commodification of Resian dance is noted, although only in the form of voluntary contributions to the organizer. The organizer does not want to be project-based in the implementation of the dance house. He says that

8 This is also named the Balfolk scene, which is not as developed in Slovenia as in some countries to the west. Therefore, the Resian Dance House is partly a substitute for related Balfolk events.

9 Among Slovenian folklore dance ensembles, the stage presentation of Resian dance has the attribute of prestige. Firstly, because it was limited only to performances in a small number of major Slovenian folklore dance ensembles, all choreographed by Mirko Ramovš, and secondly, because within these ensembles, the performance of choreography was usually entrusted only to the best dancers due to the difficulty and peculiarity of the dance steps, which required good, skilled dancers.

funding from the cultural budget also implies certain obligations that limit what and how you want to work. It can be argued that the Resian Dance House, situated in the club as such, acts as a subculture and not only as a cultural event. One could even speak of the emergence of a kind of heritage community on the suburban outskirts of the Slovenian capital, expanding beyond the location of the dance heritage and giving meaning to the Resian Dance House.

EPILOGUE: TÁNCHÁZ MOVEMENT IN SLOVENIA?

Is there a *táncház* movement in Slovenia? Yes and no. In the past two years, I have visited many different forms of dance houses in Slovenia and elsewhere as part of my research.¹⁰ I conclude with the one that I have not yet mentioned. In 2023, I attended the Evening of Hungarian Folk Dance (*Večer madžarskega ljudskega plesa*), a recurring participatory dance event organized by the Liszt Institute Hungarian Cultural Center in Ljubljana. As written on their Facebook page, “If you would like to learn some Hungarian dance steps, taste the Hungarian dance-house culture, or listen to live Hungarian folk music, this is a great opportunity” (accessed 20 May 2023). The Hungarian *táncház* has been part of the Hungarian cultural diplomacy in Ljubljana since at least 2018, based on their Facebook posts. They host several events a year, inviting dance teachers and musicians who are active members of the “dance-house industry”, as Kürti wrote in his article on dance populism in Hungary (2019:180). I would add, from my own ethnographic experience, that the ambiance and the way these events are organized more closely resembles a Slovenian dance house than a Hungarian *táncház*. The former was always more, if not only, a cultural event rather than an independent club scene. The amateur enthusiasm, which was the driving force behind the first Slovenian Dance House events and especially the folk music revival bands at the time, turned into project-oriented work. When the Slovenian cultural authorities no longer saw potential

¹⁰ I am also involved in the project “Dance as ICH: New Models of Facilitating Participatory Dance Events.” In 2023, four workshops were organized in different parts of Europe, where participants learned about various participatory forms of (folk) dance and good practices related to intangible cultural heritage. One of the workshops was dedicated to the Hungarian *táncház* (<https://www.dancing-livingheritage.eu/events/workshop-2-hungarian-open-air-museum>).

in the dance house, they stopped supporting it, thus causing the decline of activities within Folk Slovenia.

I believe that the Slovenian versions of dance houses do not rely on the idea of rescue “at the final hour” (Kürti 2019:181), as they are all characteristically post-socialist, with the traditional (peasant) dance folklore often being merely a document in the ethnomusicological archive. However, the Bela Krajina Dance House is an attempt at formulating a different heritage discourse than that found either within the activities of folklore dance ensembles in the region (and beyond) or in the records of the region’s dance heritage in institutional ethnological and folklore archives.

Paradoxically, the most characteristics of the original *táncház* can be found in the Resian Dance House, which has never identified itself with it, nor is it called a dance house by the organizers. The Resian Dance House enthusiasts come from different parts of Slovenia, especially the western part where the Ancient Faith has a stronger presence. They see in Resia something like what many Hungarians see in Transylvania: a “traveling back in time in remote places” where isolation, poverty, political repression, and disconnection with the Slovenian centers preserved an ancient local culture (as part of Slovenian culture) that cannot be found elsewhere in Slovenia. For them, Resian dance offers connection to a remote, primordial culture, which is their main motivation for attending the Resian Dance House. In this case, it is not part of the dance-house industry, but part of the religious naturalism industry as well as of the individual’s choice as an identifier of a sustainable way of living.

With their own frequency and resonance in post-socialism, the dance houses in Slovenia remain niche cultural events. They are only a faint echo of the Hungarian *táncház* movement, and one could hardly argue that they are an established form of entertainment. Nevertheless, Slovenian dance houses are tools in the identity processes of a particular society, as they facilitate new discourses on the dance heritage of a region or help to shape the identity of an individual who is aware of the importance of (natural and cultural) sustainability in today’s globalized world.

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THE COUNTRY WITHOUT TÁNCHÁZ: ON THE MONOPOLY OF FOLK ENSEMBLES IN ROMANIA



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The táncház movement emerged in Hungary in the 1970s as a response to state-controlled folk dance and folk music performances. It aimed to present dance events instead of stage performances, drawing inspiration from traditional events that were still held in many Transylvanian villages inhabited by Hungarians at that time (Martin 1981). Besides creating a new, participatory form of folk dance revival, this experience also revolutionized the already existing culture of staged folk dance in Hungary. Following the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, táncház gained international recognition as a method of teaching traditional dances (UNESCO 2011). This was mainly because it encouraged presenting traditional music and dance through events as similar as possible to the original ones, as well as conducting detailed field research to learn how to do so (Fábián 2016:24–25; Halmos 2006:16–21; Richter 2015).

Although the táncház movement in Hungary drew its primary inspiration from Transylvania, it had almost no influence on Romanian culture. During the communist period, the Romanian authorities used the so-called folk ensembles (*ansambluri populare*) to control the “folk music” (*muzică populară*) scene.¹ This somewhat distorted way of presenting traditional music and dance also had clear propagandistic purposes (Rogoz 2011:221–223). Interestingly, after the fall of communism

1 Although *muzică populară* may seem similar to the term “popular music,” it carries a different meaning in Romanian. It is derived from the word *popor*, meaning ‘folk,’ and evokes a style of music created by and for the people and accessible to everyone. Therefore, in the context of Romanian culture, *muzică populară* is distinct from traditional music and genuine folklore, even though it is rooted in these styles to some extent.

in Romania, this legacy continued. There were no significant attempts to create alternative ways of presenting traditional music and dance. Therefore, this article aims to answer two questions: (1) Why did a movement similar to the Hungarian *táncház* movement never appear in communist and postcommunist Romania? (2) What are the reasons behind such different views on presenting traditional music and dance in Hungary and Romania during the 20th and 21st centuries?

ROMANTIC NATIONALISM AND THE MONOPOLY OF THE STATE FOLK ENSEMBLES: A BRAND OF (POST)COMMUNIST ROMANIA?

Romania has a long history of prioritizing folklore, especially since it is predominantly an agricultural nation (Radu 2023:124). The depiction of Romanian peasants in most of the sources as the keepers of traditional customs and beliefs was part of the nation-building project (Turliuc 2011:80–81). This dates back to the very foundation of the Romanian state, primarily due to the small Romanian elite in the Old Kingdom (Tănase 2006:7–8). The same is true in the other areas where ethnic Romanians lived before the border changes in the 1920s, such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire or the Russian Empire. Thus, this romanticized representation of traditional music and dance has been common in the Romanian national discourse for centuries. However, the use of folklore on a large scale to justify political actions in the form of staged performances for major events began only after the creation of Greater Romania (*România Mare*) in the 1920s. The Romanian elite and state representatives carried out a modernization process that paradoxically intensively utilized the peasant and agrarian components of the national discourse (Tănase 2006:10–12). For instance, during the interwar period, it was common to use folklore for Romanian kings' visits to cities of Transylvania, various jubilees, or right-wing legionary events. The numerous photographs of these events that have survived until today are evidence of this (Blasen 2024).

The biggest change regarding the use of traditional music and dance in staged performances occurred during the communist period. Communism in Romania had three distinct, and to some extent contradictory, periods (Crampton 1994:311–314). The regime of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1947–1965) started with a period that imposed the Stalinist model and ended with a period of liberalization. The approach to folklore in Romania during the 1950s and 1960s was the same as that of the

Stalinist Soviet communist ideology, in that it represented the “free creativity of the people” (Zemtsovsky and Kunanbaeva 1997:3). The communist authorities used this revision of folklore to impose careful selection and strict censorship in all stages of the performances with the help of professional performers: “in truth the creativity it supported and propagandized came from individuals who were controlled and organized to the highest degree” (Zemtsovsky and Kunanbaeva 1997:3).

Communist countries in Eastern Europe began promoting the so-called “new folklore” as early as the 1950s. This included songs with fabricated lyrics presented as traditional ones with clear propagandistic goals, supposedly reflecting the “new realities of the working class” (Rogoz 2011:221–223). The choreographies of Igor Moiseyev (1906–2007) also heavily influenced how traditional dances were presented on the stage, resulting in a professional dance style that integrated theatrical elements, similar to ballet, aiming to suit the tastes of the urban public. The state authorities carried out all these changes mostly through the foundation of the so-called folk ensembles, which became standard in almost all communist countries in Eastern Europe (Popova 2013:356).

Nicolae Ceaușescu’s “national communist” regime (1965–1989) reintroduced many elements from the Romanian nationalist discourse, even from the right-wing ideology of the interwar period (Tănase 2009:149). The nationalistic elements within Ceaușescu’s regime were part of his anti-Soviet position, which he expressed openly when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968. Folk music and dance gained even more importance in official propaganda during this time (Merișanu and Taloș 2009:74–75). Through the 1970s, Ceaușescu’s personality cult emerged, and the authorities had to organize grandiose festivals in honor of the “most beloved son of the country” (Tismăneanu 2003:23–24). The highest peak of these state-controlled stage performances was the festival *Cântarea României* (‘A Song [of Praise] for Romania’) inaugurated in 1971 (Rogoz 2011; Cioltan-Drăghiciu 2019:33). Beyond the propagandistic aims, another reason for establishing this festival was to promote “folk” artists. These were mostly people with a rural background who attended secondary education during the communist period and were ready to perform in the state-controlled ensembles. Sometimes, local groups composed of peasants, which were carefully organized and supervised by communist activists, managed to participate in this festival. Another goal of these actions was to replace high culture with folk art: in Ceaușescu’s view, this was the only type of art that the state should support (Petrescu 2007:48–49).

In the 1980s, a generation of Romanian *muzică populară* stars emerged because of their promotion on national television. They were mostly singers and a few instrumentalists who were almost without exception loyal to the communist authorities. While there is little research on this topic, most of them were likely even active collaborators of the secret service, *Securitate*. The musicians and singers who worked for these folk ensembles were a privileged group compared to other citizens of communist Romania. They were able to obtain various advantages from the communist authorities in exchange for their loyalty (Merișanu and Taloș 2009:11-12). Those who were loyal enough could even travel abroad with the folk ensembles, which was something extraordinary during Ceaușescu's regime.

Although folk ensembles dominated the cultural landscape of communist Romania by the 1980s, there were still many traditional musicians in the rural areas at the time. They managed to survive in a marginal position, playing exclusively in the rural environment. They were not involved in stage performances in urban areas or at events organized by the central authorities. Consequently, the "professional" folk musicians considered the traditional village musicians and dancers inferior. Even after the fall of communism in Romania, the folk ensembles continued to occupy a central role. There were almost no attempts to discuss the communist heritage, which had presented traditional music and dance in a highly stylized, distorted way. With the exception of singers Grigore Leșe and Ioan Bocșa, no one else managed to incorporate more authentic elements into their performances, or even raise such a question. Paradoxically, even 35 years after the fall of the communist regime, the so-called folk ensembles still occupy a central role in Romania. The state continues to financially sustain these folk ensembles, which allows them to be politically controlled. Meanwhile, the rural traditional communities started to disintegrate after the 1990s, and as a result, the last traditional players and singers from the rural areas vanished quickly.

WHY DID ROMANIA NEVER EXPERIENCE A MOVEMENT SIMILAR TO TÁNCHÁZ?

In postcommunist Romania, there has been very little research on folk music and on its political, cultural, and social implications. This article aims to identify some factors that led to the enforcement of the official model and the absence of an alternative like the *táncház* movement in Hungary, with a focus on three main factors.

(1) Ceaușescu's national communism versus Kádár's Goulash Communism.

The differences between the communist regimes in Romania and Hungary led to a different evolution of traditional music and dance in both countries. Hungary had more freedom regarding both speech restrictions and the standard of living than other countries in the Eastern Bloc. Despite still being an authoritarian regime, Hungary was considered one of the best places to live in Eastern Europe during the Cold War (Tănase 2009:120–122). The term “the happiest of the barracks” was coined in the 1970s to describe Hungary during János Kádár’s regime (Tănase 2009:123). Kádár remained loyal to the Soviet Union when it came to foreign policy. At the same time, he was able to establish a national consensus around domestic policies (Tănase 2009:120–121; Gough 2006).

Meanwhile, Ceaușescu’s regime was one of the most restrictive and repressive among the communist countries in the Eastern Bloc. By the 1970s, Ceaușescu had established a personality cult, resulting in even more rigid control in all the spheres of public life. As ethnologist Viorel Rogoz has demonstrated, it was almost impossible to avoid including praises for Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu even at smaller local cultural events (Rogoz 2011:221–223), which was part of the second period of the Stalinization of culture in communist Romania (Merișanu and Taloș 2009:6). By the 1980s, Romania’s economic situation had worsened considerably compared to other communist countries. Ceaușescu took draconian measures to reduce energy and food consumption, which led to general dissatisfaction (Tănase 2009:158).

(2) Different cultural scenes and cultural dynamics.

Apart from these differences between the communist regimes on the macro level, there were also particularities on the micro level. The two communist countries had different cultural scenes and cultural dynamics (Tănase 2009:120–121). In Hungary, the echoes of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 created a productive ground for problematizing aspects related to culture but avoided an open confrontation (Matus 2024:62). The Kádár regime also encouraged private initiatives for cultural events, which helped sustain the country’s economy. In the 1970s and 1980s, the youth in the urban areas of Romania and Hungary also had different cultural experiences.

On the other hand, in Romania, the authorities strictly controlled cultural activities, which underwent censorship. The “cultural centers”

(*case de cultură*, lit. “houses of culture”), modeled after Soviet-style “palaces of culture” played a crucial role in this regard (Habeck 2014:77–78). As cultural centers were exclusively sustained by the state, and sometimes even subsidized by the local communist authorities, they held a monopoly over cultural scenes in communist Romania. Young artists had to choose between becoming officially recognized “professional artists” and entering the official networks or performing at an informal level in the private sphere. Due to forced industrialization, most of the younger Romanian urban population consisted, even more so than in Hungary, of people whose parents had moved in from the rural areas. This first generation of city dwellers did not usually have a position of authority on cultural issues in stage performances.





Figures 1–5. A communist folklore festival during the 1980s in Satu Mare, personal photos of Mihai Mareş

(3) A different evolution of ethnomusicology.

In the Hungarian case, ethnomusicology has a strong tradition dating back to the early 20th century. Composers such as Béla Bartók (1881–1945), Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967), and László Lajtha (1892–1963) showed a great interest in traditional music and dance, in the village sense. Their theoretical approaches and field recordings created the foundation for a movement that sought an alternative to ideologized folk music and dance, such as the *táncház* movement. In the 1970s, the Hungarian urban public had a great interest in Hungarian folklore outside of Hungary. The material collected by Bartók and Kodály, mostly during the Austro-Hungarian period, responded to the need to know more about traditional music in regions where Hungarians became a minority after World War I.

In Romania, apart from Constantin Brăiloiu (1893–1958) and some other members of the Sociological School of Dimitrie Gusti (Ispas and Coatu 2007:82–85), the development of the field of ethnomusicology wasn't as robust. Even though some of Brăiloiu's disciples, such as Tiberiu Alexandru (1914–1997) and Emilia Comișel (1913–2010), were active during the communist period, they mainly focused on field research, and they were relatively marginalized when it came to stage performances. Most Romanian ethnographers in the early 20th century were amateurs, such as lawyers, priests, or urban elites. The lack of solid knowledge about traditional music and dance played an important role in how research was conducted. In the 19th and 20th centuries, many Romanian artists used village practice to inspire their works, but they did not deeply engage with the ethnomusicological approach. This cultural orientation was reinforced by Nicolae Ceaușescu's "July Thesis" in 1971, which called for all creations to be inspired by Romanian national folklore (Cioroianu 2005:489). As a result, there was an increase in state-controlled performances and artworks. The folk-rock promoted by the Phoenix group emerged as one of the few unexpected outcomes of this cultural directive. This was one of the rare instances during the communist period where a group introduced musical structures typical of Romanian folklore without any pressure from the state authorities. Furthermore, Phoenix primarily utilized field recordings of traditional music that date back to the early 20th century.

CONCLUSIONS

The Hungarian tánccház movement was one of the few responses to the state-controlled performances of folk dance and music in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe. Its success during the communist and postcommunist periods depended on the specific cultural, social, and political context of Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, the different ways in which other countries from the Eastern Bloc related to the Soviet model shaped how traditional music and dance were presented through events and used for propaganda purposes.

During the communist era in Romania, there were two distinct periods of influence on traditional dance and music. In the 1950s and 1960s, representations of traditional dance and music were heavily influenced by the Soviet model. Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, they were more closely related to national communism, which incorporated nationalist ideas from the interwar period, and emphasized the personal cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu.

The Romanian public and cultural elite were unable to initiate a movement similar to tánccház during the communist and postcommunist periods, mostly due to the different socio-cultural structures. There was also a less critical view towards stage performances, and traditional dance and music were considered inferior to other musical genres, such as classical music. Such an attitude paved the way for the monopoly of the state folk ensembles in communist and postcommunist Romania.

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THE CAMELIA & ION MOTOC SCHOOL OF ROMANIAN TRADITIONAL DANCE IN CLUJ-NAPOCA: A MODEL FOR PRESERVATION AND TRANSMISSION



Alina Stan

The Camelia & Ion Motoc School of Romanian Traditional Dance in Cluj-Napoca was among the first in Romania to change the approach to folk dances as practiced by professional or amateur ensembles. Most folk dance schools tend to teach stylized forms of dances with carefully staged and choreographed steps and skills. By contrast, the Motoc School treat both the dances and the accompanying music in an authentic manner, as they used to be performed by locals in the villages where the dances come from. The school is also among the first to offer lessons for adult enthusiasts, purely for leisure, instead of focusing on professional or semiprofessional ensembles only.

THE BEGINNINGS

Camelia and Ion Motoc started dancing as members of the Student Folklore Ensemble *Mărțișorul* of the Students' Culture House in Cluj-Napoca (1984-1992). After completing graduate studies in Economy, they went on to study Performing Arts at the "Gheorghe Dima" National Music Academy in Cluj, graduating in 2010 with a major in Dance Pedagogy. Today, with 40 years of experience, they are



Figure 1. Camelia and Ion Motoc, 2018. (Figures 1–6 are taken from the Motocs' photo archive with their kind permission.)

among the few choreographers in Cluj-Napoca teaching traditional Romanian folk dances. This article will trace the history and trajectory of their work.

Both Camelia and Ion had a passion for dancing stemming from their childhoods, as they had the chance to experience authentic music and dances specific to their regions first hand. Camelia was born in Cluj-Napoca in 1964, and holidays spent at her grandparents' home in the nearby village of Cornești offered her the opportunity to attend the community dances, where the local band played traditional music. Ion, born in Făgăraș in 1967, grew up in the village of Hurez in Brașov County, and was fascinated, as a child, by the local music and dances. Both joined the *Mărțișorul* Ensemble in Cluj-Napoca, which, like most folk dance ensembles of the time, followed a model familiar to all countries under Soviet influence, characterized by large groups of dancers performing identical and perfectly synchronized steps and skills, according to a well-staged choreography, essentially turning folk dances into a show. Camelia and Ion soon realized that this model had very little in common with what they had experienced in their home villages. Attending various cultural events, such as the nationwide *Cântarea României* contest, where the local rounds brought together traditional dance groups from various parts of Cluj County, they were impressed by the naturalness of the village people's dancing, the complexity and variety of their dance figures, and by the music provided by instrumental bands typical for that area. This inspired them to search for a more traditional, authentic path than the one typically offered by professional folk dance ensembles of the time.

In 1994 they established a children's traditional dance group, *Doina*. In their music and dance repertoire, they broke away from the stylization common with other ensembles, toward respecting the music and dance as performed in the villages of origin. *Doina* quickly became one of the most accomplished young groups nationwide. Since most children in the ensemble's early years wished to continue dancing as they grew older, they went on to establish in 2006 the *Tradiții* Students' Ensemble at the University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine in Cluj. While they had to make occasional compromises—most often for financial reasons—with regard to costumes or the lineup of accompanying bands, the authenticity and value of the selected repertoire, the accurate interpretation of the dance figures, and the staging by the two choreographers and teachers led to national and international recognition of the two ensembles, which soon became true ambassadors of traditional Roma-



Figure 2.
A rehearsal of the
*Doina Children's
Folklore Ensemble*,
2023.

nian culture. Starting in 1995, the two groups gave hundreds of recitals and took part in prestigious contests and festivals all over the world, including Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, Cyprus, Sardinia, Corsica, Portugal, Great Britain, Switzerland, Spain, Germany, Italy, France, Czechia, Hungary, Slovakia, Israel, Belgium, Poland, the United States of America, China, Japan, and South Korea. The choreographers also received numerous prizes, especially with the *Doina* children's ensemble.

THE DANCE SCHOOL IN CLUJ-NAPOCA

The Camelia and Ion Motoc Traditional Romanian Dance School (*Școala de dans tradițional românesc Camelia și Ion Motoc*) was founded in 2008 in Cluj-Napoca, and is active to this day. Compared to other dance ensembles, classes offered by the school give the students the opportunity to learn authentic dances, steps and figures the way they were practiced in the traditional village context. Besides the regular activity with the above-mentioned children's group and youth group, the school offers adult classes, involving people with a passion for authentic Romanian folklore who work in a wide range of professions unrelated to dance. The classes mainly focus on suites of couples' dances specific to the Transylvanian Plain—starting with slow dances, continuing with faster ones, and culminating with the highly energetic *hărtaș*—as well as *fecioreasca*, which is reserved to men only. In addition, dances from the wider Transylvanian area—the regions of Banat, Crișana, or Maramureș—

Figure 3.
A rehearsal
of the adult group
at the School
of Romanian
Traditional Dance,
2010.



are also taught, The participants learn the dances without the constraint of a particular stage choreography. Rehearsals take place weekly and are structured according to the attendants' level: beginner, intermediate, advanced, and performance.

DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

Ion Motoc worked as an expert of the Cluj County Centre for Conservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture (*Centrul Județean pentru Conservarea și Promovarea Culturii Tradiționale Cluj – CJCPCT*) between 1993 and 2013.¹ During these two decades, he recorded traditional dances in every corner of the county, even the remotest places. These video recordings of elderly village people who still knew and occasionally practiced the local dances are the main reference materials for the school in Cluj. Many of the people in those recordings used to attend various folklore festivals, especially events dedicated to local dance groups of tradition bearers, such as *Jocul din bătrâni* in Târgu Mureș, or *Jocul codrenesc* in Oțeloiaia, Satu Mare. The video archive of the school includes dances recorded both in the field and during such events.

Regarding the existing academic publications on Romanian folk dance, they have their due place in the Motocs' library, but Ion tends

1 CJCPCT is a specialized scientific institution engaged in folklore research, education and promotion, preservation, and creation. Their focus is the cultural heritage and traditional arts of the Cluj County region.

to see them as less reliable sources of information. As he stated in an undocumented conversation with the author, researchers in the last decades of the 20th century, when most of those books were published, tended to write “a lot, fast, and from their desk,” lacking adequate field documentation. Thus, the dance school in Cluj tends to rely on its extensive video archive rather than on books.

ROMANIAN DANCE HOUSE (CASA DANSULUI ROMÂNESC)

For the Hungarian community in Cluj, *táncház* has been a household term for over thirty years. Camelia and Ion, due to their good relationship with their ethnic minorities expert colleague József Both, attended many *táncház* events organized by the Téka Foundation in the 1990s in several communities of the Cluj area, including Răscruți (Válaszút), Sâncrai (Kalotaszentkirály), or Gherla (Szamosújvár).



Figure 4.
Romanian Dance
House, 2014.

Since local traditional music is no longer typically played at private or public events such as weddings, christenings, or fairs, being gradually replaced by modern commercial folklore, Camelia and Ion organized a recurring event titled *Casa dansului românesc* (Romanian Dance House), as an occasion to dance in an urban, contemporary setting that imitates that of traditional village parties. The first event took place in 2011, and many more followed over the next years. Romanian Dance House events were intended as an opportunity for the students of the dance school to practice what they learned in class. Participants wear traditional clothing (some of them even old original pieces), and listen, sing, and dance to authentic music played live by bands with the traditional setup of fiddle (*cetera*), viola (*contra*), and double bass (*gorduna*).

WHO PLAYS THE MUSIC?

At every Romanian Dance House event, the music is provided by one or more instrumental bands, ideally consisting of local musicians, tradition bearers from the living village practice, showcasing the authentic music of their native area. For dancers, the experience of live fiddlers paying attention to the vibe and constantly adapting their playing “to the dancer’s foot”, as the saying goes, is a totally different experience than dancing to prerecorded music. Over the years, many traditional bands from various areas of Cluj County (Dealurile Clujului, Palatca, Mociu, and other villages) were invited to play during these events, led by such famous fiddlers as Șandorică Rizea, Emil Mihaiu, Alexandru Ciurcui „Șandorică din Sopor”, Ovidiu Popa, or Liviu Buțiu. Other notable musicians included violists Zenu Zanc, Ovidiu Szilaghi, Tudor Motoc, Kálmán Urszui, Renato A. Pusztai, Sergiu Bica, and Viorel Negrea, and bassists Ioan Baci, Zenu Zanc, Aladár Pusztai, Ionuț Băbuț, and Cristian Goia. Notable guests from the wider Transylvanian area included the Vincu brothers from Banat and the traditional band from Rupea, Brașov, led by Cosmin Hristea.

Since Romanian Dance House events only take place a few times a year rather than on a regular basis, they tend to cover dances and music from more than one area. Thus, besides the live music played by the invited village band, who play their local dialect only, attendants also dance to prerecorded music from other regions, mainly from Transylvania (Maramureș, Bihor, Zarand, Banat, Southern Transylvania), but also from other regions in Romania, such as Moldavia or Oltenia, with their totally different styles of dance music.

A setback to organizing such events more often is the fact that there are very few young musicians in Cluj who can play traditional music, especially as regards the *contra* and the bass. Ovidiu Barteș, researcher and teacher of folk fiddling, highlighted the significant differences in the style of traditional, usually self-taught, fiddlers, in comparison to violinists with a formal musical education playing folklore. He also described traditional accompaniment types, which are not typically taught in music schools (Barteș 2022). The “Gheorghe Dima” National Music Academy in Cluj offers since 2017 a full training module in Romanian Traditional Instrumental Music, consisting of theoretical and practical courses. This gives young musicians the chance to learn this style of playing, combining the advanced technique provided by classical training with a profound understanding of the specificities of traditional instrumental dance music.



*Figure 5.
Romanian Dance
House, 2013.
Alexandru Ciurcui,
Aladar Pusztai,
Zenu Zanc.*

This work could potentially be supported and expanded if other institutions—such as the Music Academy, the Students’ Culture House, CJCPCCT, cultural foundations, or restaurants—created their own occasions for people to practice traditional dances. Both musicians and dancers would be motivated if such events would become occurrences of some regularity.

THE ROMANIAN DANCE HOUSE FOR FOREIGNERS

Since 2013, the Romanian Dance House events have been complemented by weeklong workshops designed specifically for foreigners (*Casa*



*Figure 6.
Romanian
Dance House for
Foreigners, 2022.*

dansului pentru străini). Tourists interested in traditional Romanian dances and culture are invited to spend time in a Romanian village, share to some extent the life of locals, eat local dishes, try specific crafts, learn about and try on traditional clothing, and learn traditional dances. Their visit culminates, on the last evening, with a Romanian Dance House party, where attendants have fun and showcase what they have learned. Over the last twelve years, hundreds of visitors from all over the world have participated in this program.

RESTITUTION MODELS

Camelia and Ion Motoc also work to systematically recreate and revive traditional dances in areas where the local traditions have been lost. One of their projects, initiated together with the CJCPCT, aims to revive traditional dances in the commune of Mărișel, Cluj County. Camelia and Ion noticed that the dances performed by the local children's and youth ensembles, as well as the costumes used, strikingly deviated from the local traditions. They documented local practices by interviewing and recording village elders in their seventies and eighties. Based on their research, a project funded by the Administration of the National Cultural Fund now organizes monthly courses for the children and young people in the area to learn and practice traditional dances.

Figure 7.
Traditional dance workshop, Artistic Crafts Olympiad, 2022. Photo credit: Tradiții Clujene, CJCPCT Cluj.



During the last few years, the CJPCT also facilitates the access to regular courses on local folk traditions, craftsmanship, and dances for students in many grade schools in Cluj-Napoca, in an effort to get the younger generation acquainted with the ethnographic specificities of their native area.

Although the Camelia and Ion Motoc Traditional Romanian Dance School in Cluj-Napoca was among the first of its kind nationwide, other traditional dance schools focusing on authentic music and dances have been established since, in an attempt to help keeping musical and choreographic folklore alive and to pass it on to future generations. The passionate engagement of Camelia and Ion Motoc with this project is best expressed by their own words uttered during a public occasion: “Just as everybody comes into this world with a purpose, we believe that ours is to do everything in our power to preserve Romanian traditions. If we succeed, we feel that we have done our duty towards our families and our country.”

Note: Camelia Motoc sadly passed away, unexpectedly, in March 2025. Her invaluable legacy of knowledge, dedication, and kindness has been acknowledged by peers and students alike, including the author of this paper.

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FOLK DANCE REVIVAL MOVEMENTS IN HUNGARY AND GALICIA (SPAIN): REFLECTIONS OF AN OUTSIDER BECOMING AN INSIDER



Sergio de la Ossa

This paper examines several questions related to the Hungarian folk dance revival movement, selected based on personal experience. Does the revival have an influence on the interest of *táncász*-goers towards other peoples' folk dances and music? What is the role and meaning of Hungarian dances abroad, for dancers of other cultures, in the absence of Hungarians? How much is known in Galicia about the Hungarian revival?¹ What could the role of *táncász* be in shaping the recent Galician folk dance revival? What do we mean by authenticity in music and dance outside of their original rural context? And finally, what relationships between dance and music research and practice can we witness in Galicia and Hungary?

BACKGROUND

In the following paragraphs, I will describe some of the events that have marked my own relationship with dance, so as to contextualize the main points of this writing. Between my experiences with the *táncász* movement and the application of the Hungarian school of ethnomusicology abroad, in some respects, they show the effects of the *táncász* movement on a Galician outsider.

I come from a Castilian family that moved to Galicia when I was four years old. As a young guitarist, I performed in folk-rock bands and played in spontaneous gatherings with traditional musicians but I never expe-

1 I am referring to the region in the northwestern corner of the Iberian Peninsula. Galicia is a historic nationality and one of Spain's seventeen autonomous communities.

rienced traditional dance. In the 1990s in Galicia, one could find stage productions and courses held by folklore groups,² but not participatory dance events. For me the spark was ignited in Hungary. I first visited the Kodály Institute with a group from Galicia for short-term study in 1999,³ and we attended the Országos Táncszínház Találkozó (National Táncszínház Festival & Fair) in Budapest. During my studies over the following years, I participated in táncszínház events in Kecskemét. I found the occasions that took place at the Cultural Center too infrequent, so a fellow Kodály Institute student and I searched for additional dance lessons. We were invited by teachers Rita Szabó and József Bedőcs to join a group of schoolchildren who were learning dances from Szék. During that same time, I came across dance notation by chance, while searching for books on dance at the library of the Institute. My interest in dance remained primarily practical, but I started to learn dance notation from books. I thought that it should be introduced in Galicia and used in dance research, where it might prove to be as useful as it had been in music research.

After returning to Galicia in 2005, I enrolled in a couple of folk dance courses, but what I learned there was not enough for me to be able to take part in the few participatory dance events that were held at that time, because of the complex figures and the expertise of the dancers who attended.

Folk music and dance collector Juan Parga and I then developed a project that resulted in *Así fan os bailadores...* (de la Ossa et al. 2009), an educational publication of songs for games and simple dances accompanied by audio and video recordings. Besides the games and dances, it presented two features which were uncommon in publications on dance in the Iberian Peninsula: an open approach to dancing, with an introductory presentation of dance motifs to be combined and varied; and the use of Laban kinetography (the first time that type of dance notation appeared in print in Spain, to my knowledge). Dance teacher and collector Xabier Iglesias devised an introduction to improvised folk dancing, and Hungarian ethnochoreologist János Fügedi was responsible for the dance notation and introduction to the notation system. In the spring of that same year, Fügedi had held a course on dance notation in Santiago de Compostela, organized by the folk music and dance school aCentral Folque.

2 These groups generally collect traditional music, dance, and clothing, and draw from those materials for their activities.

3 The Kodály Institute of the Liszt Academy of Music, located in Kecskemét, offers English-language programs in music pedagogy according to the Kodály concept.



Figures 1-2. János Fügedi's course on dance notation, Santiago de Compostela, 2009. Photos by Mauro Sanín.

MOLDAVIAN CSÁNGÓ DANCES IN GALICIA

The following part of the story intertwines with that of my now wife, Veronika Gergely, a keen participant in Moldavian *táncház* since 2008.⁴ I joined her at those events after we moved to Budapest a couple of years later, and upon moving back to Galicia in 2015, we began organizing similar events there. There were several reasons we did this: to relieve Veronika's homesickness and our common longing for *táncház*, to share the joy of dance and our enthusiasm for that dance and music, and to introduce people to a kind of folk dancing that brings immediate rewards, as it is generally easier than most Galician dances. I believed that it might lead to an interest in Galician folk dance as well, as a side effect. We also founded the Gergelyes band with some friends who shared our enthusiasm for the music, in order to provide the live accompaniment for the dances.



Figure 3. Gergelyes at the Festival Danzas sin Fronteras, Toledo, 2018. From left to right: María G. Blanco, Olivier Cano, Xesús Méndez, Sergio de la Ossa, Marcos Mato. Photo: Clara Mosquera.

4 “Moldavian” here refers to the dances and tunes of the ethnic Hungarians living in Western Moldavia (one of the regions in Romania), who have preserved old songs, distinctive dances, and an old variant of the Hungarian language. They are commonly referred to as Hungarian Moldavians, *csángók*, or *ceangăi*.

Teaching dance made it imperative to learn about the music and dances more deeply. Veronika had already had Moldavian dance and singing lessons previously, but after moving to Galicia, her learning was restricted to shorter visits to Hungary during holidays.⁵ We attended the summer folk dance camp in Lábnyik, Moldavia, in 2018, with dance teacher Elemér Kádár and dancers from several villages, and Veronika organized an advanced Moldavian dance course with collectors and teachers Eszter Zoltán, Attila Fülöp, and Előd Molnár in 2019.⁶

We searched for reliable literature on Moldavian music and dance, and watched assorted videos, including authentic music and dance field recordings, revival *táncház*, and performances by bands from the revival movement. Our band's instrumentation followed the then standard Moldavian *táncház* ensemble of two flutes, fiddle, *koboz*, and drum, plus singing.⁷ Our approach is inclusive: we have adopted practices of the revival movement, while learning to distinguish between traditional practices and revival ones.

ISSUES REGARDING THE PERFORMANCE OF DANCE AND MUSIC

Folk music and folk dance performance involves a certain amount of spontaneity, resulting in variation. The community in which we show the dances is not always aware of this. The traditional music revival in Galicia has seldom paid attention to spontaneity, variation, or improvisation, and the folk dance revival, partly through informal gatherings, has only recently started taking into account the creation and variation of dance motifs, processes which are usually present in village settings. However slowly, the belief that there is a fixed set of steps and melodies that should always be performed in the same way is wearing away.

The dance events we organized needed to be both participatory and built on spontaneity, if we wanted to pass on essential components of

5 Dance studies were with folk song and dance collector Judit Ábrahám; vocal studies with Majda Mária “Mesi” Guessous.

6 The occasions took place at the Marczibányi Téri Művelődési Központ in Budapest. We received further dance lessons from Gergő Porvai, Előd Molnár, and Júlia Skopp. Veronika took further singing lessons from Dorottya Tóth. Both Xesús Méndez and I received further guidance and teaching from musicians from the revival movement, collectors themselves as well.

7 Traditional instrumentations are *koboz*-fiddle, *koboz*-voice, and flute or flutes alone.

folk dance and music. I decided to introduce variation, common in both cultures but by far more actively practiced in the Hungarian revival, as a way to contribute to the more recent participatory revival movement in Galicia.

A key step in building spontaneity and transmitting a creative approach to folk dancing is to show equivalent figures which can be chosen at will—or within certain limits—during the dance. Little by little, we decided to reduce the number of dances at each occasion, so we could spend a longer time with two or three of them, offering variants for the participants to assimilate and then perform freely.



Figure 4: Divergent variants of the same tune section in András Hodorog's playing of the dance tune *botosánka* on the flute. Transcribed by the author.⁸

I applied a similar concept for the music within the band. The background of the musicians proved to be a challenge, since revival Galician folk musicians usually do not vary or improvise. The great majority learn more or less ornamented tunes and strive to perform them the same way every time. Variations, if found, are small and involuntary. Olivier, a classically trained flute player specialized in jazz and modern popular music, was the only one of the melody players for whom improvisation was natural, although the melodic (or melodic-harmonic) turns familiar to him came from different traditions. For musicians who focus on “performing the tunes,” learning some equivalent musical motifs in dance tunes, and then playing one or the other, is an intermediate step towards variation/improvisation from a stock of motifs and formulae.

8 “Botosánka. Hodorog András az Akvárium Táncházban.” Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcKzgjG52nQ>. András Hodorog (flute) and László Németh (koboz) on 15 February 2012. Recorded and uploaded to YouTube by Lajos Zagyi, accessed 29 November 2023.

RECEPTION

We have brought Moldavian dances into primary schools, cultural centers, private dance schools, and other places. One such setting is the *danzas do mundo* ('dances of the world') community in Spain, in which people are interested in learning dances from various folk cultures. The associations organize courses and hold, once or several times a year, bigger meetings or festivals where dances from different parts of the world are performed one after the other. The same band may play tunes from very different origins.



Figure 5: Veronika Gergely (between the two children) leads open dance in the street, Santiago de Compostela, 2015. Photographer unknown.

One of the problems I have witnessed on several occasions is that musicians in this field (of course with exceptions) typically have a limited knowledge of the different styles of playing, and rely too heavily on scores. Regarding the dance, there is little room to acquire knowledge of the various performance styles, and a fixed set of steps is being taught and performed throughout. This is in a clear contrast with our approach to music and dance, which is sometimes difficult to make understood. People may think, "What am I being asked to do? And why, what for?"

Certain members of these communities already know some of the easiest, most popular Moldavian dances, which are known and performed in festivals around Europe. On the other hand, some of the organizers of these events have participated in dance festivals abroad dedicated to single practices (one style, region, etc.), and they strive for deeper understanding of music and dance of given cultures.

Another group of practitioners of *danzas do mundo*, among which Moldavian dances are found as well, are physical education and music teachers. They learn some steps and choreographies, and dance to recordings—some being quite low quality and far from any definition of *authenticity*. Needless to say, the dances are presented in this context in a sterile fashion, with the only focus on the steps themselves.

Among practitioners of Galician folk dances, the reception of Moldavian dances is twofold: some of them immediately embrace and value them, while others see them as children’s games, too simple and boring compared to their own folk dances.⁹

SOME REFLECTIONS

Our expectations around the reception of Moldavian dances in Galicia turned out not to be realistic, or at least insufficiently weighed. Besides enthusiasm—restricted to people meeting specific profiles—several of our experiences led to the reflections detailed below. At this stage, they are just personal impressions, but I believe some of them could and should be tested through formal research.

(1) *The táncház movement’s influence on interest in other styles*

In Budapest there are not only Hungarian *táncházak*, but Balkan, Irish, Scottish, French, and Greek dance events as well. They are each devoted to a single tradition, and are held with live music. I can’t imagine that so many people would have been interested in these different traditions without the success of the Hungarian revival movement, and, needless to say, without the foundations laid previously by Kodály, Bartók, and others. If folk music is held in great esteem in Hungary, it is mainly because of them.

Interest in folk music and dance—and folk culture generally—is clearly lower in Spain than in Hungary.¹⁰ In my opinion, the above-mentioned “dances of the world” groups with their melting-pot of choreographies speaks to this, as greater interest would lead to more focus on single traditions and a desire to acquire more meaningful knowledge of them.

⁹ This perception of Moldavian dances is shared by many practitioners of Transylvanian and other folk dances in Hungary.

¹⁰ This interest, however, is unequally developed in different regions, and it is relatively high and alive in Galicia.

As far as I know, there are no sociological studies related to the “dances of the world” movement in Spain.¹¹ My impression is that the interest in foreign cultures’ music and dances would benefit from a local participatory movement like the Hungarian *táncház* movement, because it treats folk culture as a living and open category, without the barriers of stage, costumes, and ideology, which have alienated it from many segments of our society.

(2) The role and meaning of Hungarian/Moldavian dances in a foreign context, in the absence of Hungarians

This point relates to our difficulties in engaging people to experience Moldavian dances. First, we must acknowledge the lack of a pre-existing impulse—that of reinforcing the common identity of a group of participants.¹² Next, I would underscore issues such as the lack of previous awareness or interest in Hungarian music and dance in general, or Moldavian in particular;¹³ the lack of a strong local folk dance revival movement; the difficulty of creating a thrilling experience with just one dancer who knows the style;¹⁴ and the absence of *ihogtatás* or *csujogatás* (rhythmic shouting calls used during dancing), which is a practice that helps create a common experience, uplifting the mood of the participants through surprise and making them smile or laugh.

11 In this case, as in the new folk dance revival in Galicia, a sociological survey of the kind we read of in Sági 2007[1977] could bring interesting insights.

12 By this I mean locals; there has not been a community of Hungarians in Galicia.

13 As opposed to what could be the case with fashionable Celtic (Breton–Irish–Scottish) dances and music or Latin American dances (countries with some cultural contact with Galicia). In that case the presence of Galician bands in the *Festival Interceltique de Lorient* (Brittany) and the cultural relations between Brittany and Galicia need to be especially highlighted. Even the recent trend of dancing *lindy hop*, as part of popular culture, should be counted as relating to most people’s former experiences.

14 In Hungary, various participants may add colorful gestures and actions that will enrich the situation. Differences between Moldavian *táncházak* in Hungary can be made as well, depending on who attends them, and how many foreigners or newcomers are expected to show up. Many of the dances require good abilities, and some of them will not work well unless the dancers know how to adapt and synchronize with each other.

(3) *Authenticity in music and dance outside of the original rural context*

Authenticity is not a rigid, static category: folk practices differ from village to village, differ over time within a village, interact with practices from different strata of society, and adapt in response to folklorization processes. Thus, I don't think we can expect traditions to freeze in time and forever maintain the form that was captured at the time of a collection.

Furthermore, I believe that the practices of the revival movement are authentic in another sense: they fulfill different needs, they are founded upon distinct ideological grounds, and they apply to people of quite different origins and different social customs. The revival practices constitute a different reality to that of the rural world that they frequently assume as their own. Sometimes it is challenging to name these new practices, since re-using terms from rural life may result in confusion. Are we advertising a centuries-old practice and offering recent constructions of it instead? As expressed by people who adhere to the narrowest sense of authenticity (those who expect musicians and dancers to confine themselves to a close reproduction of what has been previously collected from the folklore bearers), there is a sense that the members of the urban revival—sometimes referred to as “the ones from Budapest” in a disdainful tone—appropriate and distort the tradition.

Precision in labelling could partially solve that otherwise legitimate feeling of cultural appropriation.¹⁵ In respect to music, terms like *world music* would indicate that departure from the rural tradition. I think that there is a right to build on tradition as a foundation, since tradition, as recently collected, is just the static image of a process that has evolved through time and contact with different sources. It is natural that urban dancers and musicians with broad backgrounds alter that tradition. The point at which that tradition becomes essentially altered or unrecognizable is another matter, which cannot be addressed in this paper.

15 Labels need to be short and simple if we want them to be effective. The complex ethnic, linguistic, and administrative reality of the Hungarians living in Moldavia aggravates the problem. Labels are ineffective if we lack previous knowledge about the thing we are speaking of. Applying this to my experience, if I say *Csángó dances* in Galicia, it communicates nothing. *Moldavian dances*? *Hungarian dances*? They are misleading, if used separately. *Hungarian Moldavian dances*? It communicates more. The longer the labels are, the closer they are to reality, but labels like *Hungarian dances from the Moldavia region of Romania*, or *Hungarian Moldavian Csángó dances from Romania, in revival style* would sound rather hilarious and inappropriate.

I find some parallels between the relationship of authentic folklore to revival and that of high art to midcult and kitsch as addressed by Umberto Eco in *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964). The problem with midcult and kitsch is the difference between what they promise and what they actually provide. If the audience of midcult is, as expounded by Eco, eager for qualified experiences, it is not hard to recognize in our field an audience eager for rurality, purity, and closeness to nature, ideals that may not even be found in village music, not to speak about certain products of urban revivals.

It would perhaps seem that we have to choose between keeping tradition in an ideal, pure state, or renewing it without knowing exactly what we are renewing. But I don't think such a dilemma really exists. Whatever I do, it must be well-informed, whether it refers to social functions, to melodic embellishments, or to the way we hold arms during dance. I need to be well-informed in order to make the right decisions, and understand traits like spontaneity and variation. I find some of the revival's innovations valuable and attractive, while I find some "authentic" traditional music and dance unattractive and valueless. The values to be preserved, practiced and cherished do not belong to certain peoples and repertoires, but may be found in unexpected places and contexts.

(4) Knowledge of the táncház movement in Galicia, and the role the Hungarian revival could play in Galicia

People in Galicia who are familiar with Moldavian dances and the táncház movement are exceptions: dancers and dance teachers who, besides learning Galician dance, were interested in other people's dances and attended festivals abroad. This should not be a surprise, as general interest and knowledge about Central and East European cultures is not common in Spain.

But who ought to be familiar with táncház in Galicia? In my opinion, at least experts involved in the discourse of intangible cultural heritage. It seems odd that a former consultant for UNESCO knows the UNESCO declaration on the Breton *fest-noz* from 2012, but not the one on the Hungarian táncház from 2011.¹⁶ In a recent proposal to list Galician re-

¹⁶ Here it must be noted that these declarations belong to different categories: Brittany's *fest-noz* to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and táncház, as a method, to the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices.

vival folk dance gatherings among Spanish intangible heritage,¹⁷ the *fest-noz* is mentioned besides flamenco, *samba de roda* from Brazil, and *candombé* from Uruguay, with no mention of the Hungarian revival. The reason for this may be our geographical, cultural, and—last, but not least—linguistic distance.

The experiences of the *táncház* movement could be utilized in Galicia in many ways, such as in developing training in folk dance pedagogy and formal folk dance research,¹⁸ in fostering feedback between research and practice, in including other folk arts and adding activities and dances for children, and in regards to the reflection and discussion on methods, models, and the social role of dance and music in contemporary society.

(5) The relationship between dance and music research and practice as witnessed in Galicia and Hungary

The situation Hungary had in the 1970s—when folk music and dance practitioners were supported by the Institute for Musicology’s researchers and resources—is far from our reality. (And not just because there is no such institute in Galicia.) There is a general distrust in anything that comes from researchers, and a confidence, or even overconfidence, in what collectors without formal training and knowledge of ethnography understand and interpret from what they encounter in the field.

The influence of folk music research on folk music practice in Galicia is scarce. Generally speaking, musicians are not very interested in what researchers may add to their abilities and understanding. With few exceptions, musician-collectors don’t make the effort to read about musical genres or processes of variation. The playing of bagpipers, who display a strongly improvisative style, is reproduced without variations, and singers discard heterophony and strophic variation, although these features are consistently present in field recordings. One doesn’t see pride in local researchers comparable to the role of Zoltán Kodály, Béla Bartók, László Lajtha, or György Martin in Hungary.

17 *As bien de interés cultural* (BIC, literally, ‘good of cultural interest’). In Busto Miramontes et al. 2022.

18 There are no folk dance teachers trained in Spain, formal folk dance research is almost non-existent (the term *ethnochoreology* still sounds awkward even to people trained in ethnomusicology), and notation systems have not been generally adopted.

One explanation for this may be that the generally cultured background of Hungarian society is not present in Galicia. Industrialization and the sciences spread in Hungary much earlier than in Galicia, which was a predominantly rural region until the 1960s. If Hungary's wealth of traditions is usually explained with its backwardness compared to the developed West, what can we say about Galicia, at the extreme west of Europe? Hungarian folk music and folk dance researchers have expressed to me that the rural tradition is much more alive in Galicia than in Hungary, according to recordings made in the 1990s and later.

Whatever the reasons are, we need a fruitful exchange of ideas between practice and research. Building on Hungary's long history of earlier research, the *táncház* movement's 50 years of experience, with the social, political, and organizational issues that needed to be overcome, is an example which would undoubtedly benefit us in Galicia, as many of the processes and discussions going on in both places are, in one way or another, common.

It may seem odd, after all that has been said, to think of these activities and reflections as coming from an outsider. No matter how welcome I have felt in certain moments and in certain communities (while on other occasions I was reminded that I do not belong to them), I have lived these experiences most of the time as an outsider. I was born neither in Galicia, nor in Hungary or Moldavia, and I often feel I do not have a heritage of my own, while at the same time I do not doubt that these fields of heritage belong to us all, and so to me, when I take part in life as a shared experience.

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INDEX OF HUNGARIAN GEOGRAPHIC NAMES OUTSIDE HUNGARY

- Barcaújfalu – Satu Nou, Braşov,
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- Bihar (region/county) – Bihor,
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Romania
- Magyarszovát – Suatu, Cluj, Romania
- Marosoroszfalu – Ruşii-Munţi,
Mureş, Romania
- Marosszék (region) – Scaunul Mureş,
Mureş, Romania
- Marosvásárhely – Târgu Mureş
Mureş, Romania
- Menaság, Csikméναςág – Armăşeni,
Harghita, Romania
- Mezőség (region) – Câmpia Transil-
vaniei, Romania
- Nagy-Küküllő (river) – Târnava Mare,
Romania
- Nagyürögd – Nojorid, Bihor, Romania
- Nyárád (river) – Niraj, Romania
- Nyárszó – Nearşova, Cluj, Romania
- Nyitra (county) – Nitra, Slovakia
- Szászcsávás – Ceuaş, Mureş,
Romania
- Szék – Sic, Cluj, Romania
- Székelyföld (region) – Ținutul
Secuiesc, Romania
- Udvarhelyszék (region) – Scaunul
Odorhei, Romania
- Zentelke – Zam, Cluj, Romania

