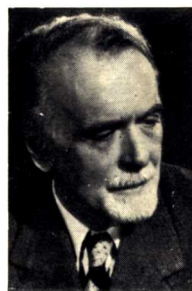
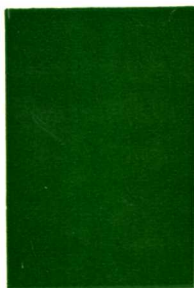
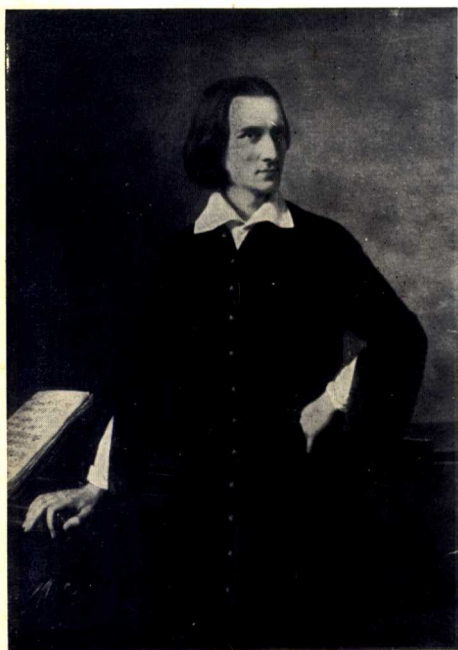


A CONCISE HISTORY OF HUNGARIAN MUSIC

Bence Szabolcsi



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A CONCISE HISTORY OF HUNGARIAN MUSIC

CHAPTER ON MODERN MUSIC
BY
GYÖRGY KROÓ



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I

Introduction. The Specific Conditions of Hungarian Musical Development

It was at the end of the ninth century that the Hungarian people came to settle down on the territory of the Hungary of today. The country of origin of the Hungarian people is supposed by historians and linguists to have been in the regions of the Ural mountains, and it is maintained that the Magyar people originated from the intermingling of Finno-Ugrian and East Turkish elements in the period between the fifth and the eighth centuries in Eastern Europe.

Hungarian musicology, almost from the very beginning, but especially in the course of the twentieth century, was much interested in the problem of whether or not traces of the Eastern origin of the Hungarian people could be found in Hungarian folk music. When the Magyars appeared on the scene of European history they had a tribal constitution. From this time various popular traditions were preserved for a long time while the language was being united and class differentiations took place.

The picture of the musical "country of origin" is of course far from clear. It seems that the Turkish-Mongolian on the one hand, and the Finno-Ugrian traditions on the other, are preserved in the most ancient Hungarian folk music (pentatonic and pentachord styles), but these elements, for the time being, cannot be attached to certain definite national or linguistic groups. The five-tone scale, and a certain principle of construction consisting in repeating a given phrase a fifth lower, and, in addition, some melodic, rhythmical and ornamental peculiarities, clearly show on the map of Eurasia the movements of Turkish peoples from the East to the West at the time of the migration of the peoples in the fourth century. This is the specific, the Central Asian pentatonic style,

always and everywhere following all great ancient cultures. There are melodies, the variations of which are traceable with equal authenticity to villages of Transdanubia, Northern Hungary and Transylvania, of the Cheremis (Mari) along the Volga and of the Chuvash peoples, the West-Asian Kalmyks and the Mongols of Inner Asia, and even among some peoples of China. A dirge, that is sung by the Hungarian people almost in the same form as by the Siberian Ostyaks and Voguls (Chantis and Manyshis), the common types of Nogai Tatarian, Anatolian Turkish and Bashkirian melodies, are evidence that Asian memories slumber in the depths of Hungarian folk music and that this folk music is the last Western link in the chain of ancient Eastern cultural relations. The old Magyars, at the time of the original settlement, had already reached the phase of disintegration of the ancient tribal constitution and of the beginning of class society; but even in this condition they were characterized by a roughly homogeneous popular culture, brought along from the times of primitive community. This culture, just as the melodic world that had preserved it, remained for a long time apart from the forms of European life. One of the most valuable treasures left to us from this very period—ancient Hungarian folk music—is indeed the basic and vital element in the course of the whole development of Hungarian music, constituting at the same time a constantly developing and formative tradition. Every experiment, made from Hungarian antecedents and on Hungarian soil, to create a conscious musical culture (music written by composers, as different from folk music), had instinctively or consciously striven to develop widely and universally the musical world of the folk song. Folk poetry and folk music were deeply imbedded in the collective Hungarian people's culture, and this unity did not cease to be effective even when it was given form and expression by individual creative artists, performers and poets.

In the developing class society the continuity of this tradition was not always smooth. The upper classes had more contact with Western culture, learned more from it, and in their lives had assigned an ever growing part to European forms, loosening continually what survived of their connections with the people, that was at the same time the memory of their life of old. The majority of the people, however, living in a more oppressed and isolated condi-

tion, preserved, and even developed (in the new folk song) the ancient Hungarian melodic world. They absorbed and transformed according to this tradition everything that was undertaken around them in the way of "composed music" or literary experiments. This is how the Magyars of the villages, the peasant class, have preserved up to today the most important musical treasures of ancient Hungarian culture. To disentangle and to free Hungarian folk music from these forced class restrictions, to return it to the community, to the people representing the nation: such has been the epoch-making mission of the twentieth-century masters of Hungarian music.

The history of Hungarian "composed music" mirrors, as mentioned above, two always recurring processes. The one, the attempt to fight with and to be reconciled to Western forms; and the other to free itself from the music-making of the people and thus to create an individualistic art, even though with certain ties to the people's music. This double tendency may be recognized also in the musical history of other nations, but the importance of "composed music" tradition was never as accentuated in Hungary as it was in the West. There court and minstrel poetry could hand down its tradition to bourgeois musical culture, to the musicians of the towns, to the church musicians, guilds and chapters—whereas folk poetry could bequeath its riches in the course of natural development to the representatives of the rising musical culture. "Schools", groups, circles and trends were soon formed there with different tendencies, around a cathedral or a princely court, around a master, an academy or urban institution. A new music of national character developed out of liturgical music (descant, motet), and the popular secular song found more qualified adapters. Mutually elaborated and achieved results, forms, and technical novelties were taken over by one group after another. Art in the West soon became the "business of the public"—the problem, honour and pride of towns, schools, cathedrals and residences. Although there was a specific urban culture beginning to be formed in Hungary in the Middle Ages, this development came to a stop because of the Turkish occupation, declining feudalism and the semi-colonial state of the country—and in consequence of the increasingly oppressive and close connection of Hungary

since the sixteenth century with the Habsburg monarchy. Thus urban culture, with a few exceptions (Transylvania, Transdanubia), assumed a foreign character. The border towns copied the musical life of German centres, the residences of Hungarian aristocracy imported their musicians from abroad, and the Hungarian country towns did not bother at all with the problems of music. They regarded the clumsy, unrefined music-making of peasants, appearing at times within their walls, with complete indifference, and rather hindered than assisted or maintained it. This state of affairs which lasted until the nineteenth century succeeded in breaking through the age-old dividing walls and in engulfing the towns of German cultural aspirations in the stream of the new, rising and swelling Hungarian musical life. This was a typical expression of the so-called reform period (1825-1840), a movement for bourgeois liberty and national independence.

As long as there was no bourgeois culture strong enough for the development of an uninterrupted, intensive musical cultural tradition, people's culture had to undertake the part of uniting and preserving: it stood visibly and invisibly behind every great artistic effort. It vitalized the music of *Tinódi* in the sixteenth, and the songs of the "Kuruc" insurrectionists against Habsburg oppression in the eighteenth centuries, the choir movement in the colleges, and the developing "verbunkos" (recruiting dances), and was strong enough in the nineteenth century to inspire our national romanticism, and finally in the twentieth century, to renew and recreate our entire musical culture in all its richness, as demonstrated by our great masters.

II

The Middle Ages. Church Music and Minstrel Music

We have mentioned the results of research into melody. A chain of a peculiar musical style, extending over thousands of miles from the Danube to the Yellow Sea, demonstrates that the Magyar people, originating from two or three different peoples' elements, brought along, probably through the intermediation of Mongolian-

Turkish peoples (their close relatives), an ancient Central Asian melodic style from the borders of Asia. We can only guess who were the intermediaries of the ancient Central Asian style: Huns, Turks, or Bulgarians from the Volga? The more recent musical style however, the music of the Islam, adopted by the Western and Southern Turkish peoples some centuries after the migration, was at any rate fundamentally different from this Old Turkish or "Ugrian" style, and possibly distinguished already the Petchenegs, Cumanians and Bussurmans from the conquering Hungarians.

But in addition to these results recent research offers other data concerning the musical life of the peoples related to the Magyars. Namely the ethnic group from which the Magyars broke away in the first centuries of our era lived partly in its ancient condition on the Western borders of Asia and the Eastern borderlands of Europe up to the present day, and undoubtedly has preserved some of the ancient traditions that inspired its primitive life. Even if these customs have changed since the time the Magyar people left the ancient nomadic community, and even if the traditions known today did not rule among all members of the ethnic group, we can assume that some of their cultural forms, surviving almost to the present day, more or less reflect in an unchanged way the conditions at the time of the migration. Nearly all research workers draw attention to the heroic songs of Finno-Ugrian and Turkish-Mongolian peoples, performed by special minstrels or shamans, and accompanied partly by string instruments. It was noted of them that they sang of the deeds of ancient heroes, impersonated in their dances the deeds of their forefathers, or represented well-known events. Their dirges and other ceremonial songs were recorded, their string and wind instruments and magic drums described. Hungarian musical research could easily attach to these facts concerning Ostyaks, Voguls (Chantis, Manyshis), Buryats, Tatars and Kirghiz peoples the corresponding Hungarian melodies, as well as our people's customs mentioned again and again since the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries. On the basis of the above we can assume that the Hungarian people of the Middle Ages had preserved several peculiarities brought along from the East—preserved them so firmly that they survived in their memory even through all the changes of the next centuries, of the settling in

the new country and the entrance into the European Christian community. For the pagan Magyars, who—as recorded by the Byzantine historian Theophylactos in the seventh century—“honoured the soil with songs” not so long ago, and who, as noted by the chronicles of Sankt Gallen, “cried to their Gods” in a peculiar way (926), soon learned hymns of other kinds and adapted their singing to other melodies. The final settling down in the new country, on the territory of the present-day Hungary, was necessarily followed by the dissolution of the tribal structure, by the organization of the state, the conversion to Western Christianity and the development of the new class society, the birth of feudal Hungary. All these furthered closer contact with Europe. Since then Western elements have been constantly streaming into the Hungarian melodic world, partly through the borders of the new country and partly through the non-Hungarian population.

Let us say a few words here of the history of this territory, and of the musical culture of the country before the conquest of the Hungarians. The territory of present-day Hungary, that is its Western part, belonged to the Roman empire in the first centuries of our era under the name of Pannonia and today it still cherishes many relics of Roman culture. After the withdrawal of the Roman legions, it was occupied for longer or shorter periods by different peoples, by Turkish-Mongolian peoples among others, such as the Huns and Avars. Slavic and German tribes often made their appearance here also and round about the year 800 the army of the Frankish empire had also reached it. What was the musical culture brought along by all these peoples? We can only hazard a guess. A Roman water organ, however, dating from the third century and discovered in 1931, together with two double pipes, dating from the eighth century, Avar, Byzantine or Arabian in character, unearthed in 1933 and 1936, prove that this territory was part of the highway taken by late antique and Eastern musical culture. Specialists succeeded in making these instruments sound, which are noteworthy also for the fact that they belong to the most intact, and for that reason to the most important specimens surviving of their kind.* The population itself, living on this ter-

* Cp. Lajos Nagy: *The Organ from Aquincum* (1934, Hungarian); and Dénes Bartha: *The Avar Double Pipe from Jánoshida* (1934, Hungarian).

ritory at the time of the settlement of Magyars, preserved apparently in a most colourful jumble the melodic world of Western, Eastern and Southern Europe of that time.

It is possible that the Magyars of the eighth to ninth centuries made the acquaintance of Christian church music earlier, in their settlements on the Caucasus and on the coasts of the Black Sea; for these melodies may have been sung there already by the intermediation of Byzantine and Nestorian priests. Thus the ecclesiastical diatony, with its characteristic modes was not new on the territory of present-day Hungary. But the decisive role of the Gregorian chant begins of course only with the eleventh century, with the first christianized Hungarian kings. With it the musical culture of Western Christianity makes its appearance in Hungary. In monastic, cathedral and collegiate church schools the Gregorian chant, the Choral, was taught regularly in the eleventh to twelfth centuries. Esztergom, Nyitra, Nagyvárád, Pannonhalma, Veszprém, Vác and Csanád were among the most important centres of musical instruction. In canonical schools (Veszprém, etc.) singing was taught also later on as the most important subject of instruction, and charters of the collegiate churches refer to "succentors" ever since 1223. Latin hymns were spread in Hungary by such schools and monasteries, and they had a decisive influence on the development of ancient Hungarian verse metres as well. Of the method of musical instruction used by schools we have information concerning a later period only, thanks to the Notebook of László Szalkai, but Jacobus de Liège's *Speculum musicae* (written around 1330-40) undoubtedly refers to it, mentioning Hungary among the countries using Guido's solmization in practice. The Gregorian chant had taken quite deep root in Hungary. This is proved by the monuments of neumes, missals, fragments of antiphonaries and breviaries (Debrecen, Eperjes, Kolozsvár, Szeged, Zirc, Esztergom, etc.), and especially the three earliest: the *Sacramentarium of Zagreb* written according to Frankish examples, the so-called *Codex of Hahót*, the *Agenda pontificalis* of Hartvig, bishop of Győr (both from the end of the eleventh century), and the so-called *Codex Albensis* (formerly named *Antiphonary of Graz*)*

* Published 1963 in facsimile by Zoltán Faley and László Mezei. Its musical notation is of S. Gallen origin.

from the twelfth century. Soon it inspired the independent creation of melodies as well. It is therefore absorbingly interesting to follow the traces of increasing adaptations and transformations to Hungarian demands, or even Magyarizations of the Chorals. The liturgical melodies of the sacramentarium known as the *Pray Codex* (parts of missals, antiphons, psalms, hymns, tropes) were written down by eight monks, mostly of Italian-French culture, in neumatic notation in the Benedictine monasteries of Boldva and of Somogyvár between the years of 1192 and 1216. The codex itself (named after a well-known Hungarian researcher George Pray [1723–1801])—containing among other things the earliest written record extant of the Hungarian language, the *Funeral Oration*—also contains, here and there, independent forms of notation and even independent melodies (*Hymn to Mary*). At that time, the beginning of the thirteenth century, the monks of monasteries, whose job it was to write, apparently began to take notice that poets and scholars first began to use the Hungarian language; but Hungarian music had to wait three hundred more years until a writing monk took notice of it. Towards the middle of the thirteenth century an anonymous Hungarian poet-student or monk, living in Italy, translated into Hungarian, probably for a religious assembly outside the monastery, the *Complaint of the Blessed Virgin* of Geoffroi de Breteuil, adapting his Hungarian version to the French sequence-melody of the Latin original. This is the earliest written Hungarian poem, and at the same time, the first encounter with the more secular melodic world of Western Middle Ages: *The Old Hungarian Lament of Mary*. It is noteworthy however that already in 1114 the synod of Esztergom was compelled to take a stand against the songs “not approved”, undoubtedly originated locally: “*nihil legatur vel cantetur in Ecclesia, nisi quod fuerit in Synodo collaudatum.*” Apparently it is this development, the last results of which may still be found today in the popular Hungarian variants of some Choral melodies, such as in the collections of our folklorists, recently examined and published by Benjámín Rajeczky and Zoltán Falvy. In two songs of the *Nádor Codex* (1508) the first Gregorian melodies with Hungarian texts make their appearance. What the development of the practice of Gregorian chant looked like in Hungary can be seen in a considerable number of graduals found

character in Hungary. It is interesting to note the fact, among others, that a foundation was made in 1419 in Pozsony for a morning mass to be sung with four singers; while at Nagyvárad about the same time, during the reign of Sigismund, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Hungary, psalmodizing practice was regularized by royal order.

Monasterial singing was taught at the time, at least in certain schools, undoubtedly on a high European level. This is established also by the Hungarian Compendium written by László Szalkay (later on Archbishop of Esztergom), round about 1490 in the monastic school of the Augustins at Sárospatak; this is a work which can hold its own with other contemporary European compendia in its liturgical material and theoretical methodology. (Published in 1934 by Dénes Bartha.) This is the same period that brought forth (as shown by B. Rajeczky's research) the first organa for two and three voices in Western and Northern Hungary. But in addition to solemn vocal culture there was, especially towards the close of the fifteenth century, a certain secularization gaining ground in monasteries. Preachers complained either about the secularization of monastic singing, the spreading of "theatrical songs" (*cantus theatrales*), or angrily condemned the many carnival songs (*cantilena carnalis*). The Dominican writer of the *Sándor Codex* from the beginning of the sixteenth century also described the paradisaical rejoicing of the saints in a conspicuously secular spirit, envisaging that it was accompanied by the music of fiddle, lute, drum and cimbalom (*dulcimer*) players, by dance and by "the tenor, discant and contratenor" singers,—that means it was a piece in the style of the Western motet.

Where was this secular music-making mood hiding during the centuries of the Middle Ages? At present we cannot fully answer this question. In the centuries after the introduction of Christianity, ancient, pagan minstrel singing partly sank into insignificance and partly assumed new shapes. Ever since the twelfth century minstrels are repeatedly mentioned in chronicles and elsewhere in Hungary. Sometimes they are mentioned together with tribal leaders of the original settlement, and sometimes with Hungarian warriors who survived great battles, and it is also said that in some places the minstrels were put under the control