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Toward a Lexicon for the *Style hongrois*

JONATHAN BELLMAN

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In the traditional concert repertoire, works with a strong Hungarian-Gypsy flavor have enjoyed a popularity almost unequalled by any other genre. Pieces such as Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* and Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* remain audience favorites because their distinctive rhythm, drive, and tunefulness provide familiarity and accessibility on one hand, and a spicy exoticism on the other. The characteristic musical gestures used in works such as these, far from being unconnected examples of local color, form a unified and coherent dialect running parallel to the normal musical *lingua franca* of the nineteenth century. Since Haydn's time, the gestures of this dialect came increasingly to be used and understood outside the Viennese orbit where their appearance in concert music originated.

The *Style hongrois*, as this style has been called, was effective at different levels of intensity. An inflection or two might add a slight Hungarian tint to an otherwise non-exotic passage, or the gestures could appear in greater concentration to form a contrasting section in a larger work. Of course, the *Style hongrois* could also form an entire musical discourse, as in Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* or Schubert's *Divertissement à l'hongroise*. The very ubiquity of this style, in its various concentrations, in nineteenth-century repertoire is proof of the appeal it held for audiences of the time.

This appeal depended on cultural associations as much as on purely musical ones. What the Gypsies and their music represented to the Romantic sensibility is encapsulated by Liszt's performance instruction at the beginning of the seventh Hungarian Rhapsody, which reads: "To be played in the Gypsy style, defiant, and yet melancholy." To the popular imagination, the Gypsy symbolized freedom, nonconformity, and independence from the constricting mores of society. Liszt was not only a staunch defender of the Gypsies' culture, he was

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a great admirer of their musical style (which, it seems fair to say, he only partially understood). He spent, after all, a substantial amount of time transcribing their music both for piano solo and for orchestra. A book about the Gypsies (rendered in English as *The Gypsy in Music*) even appeared under his name, but as Alan Walker points out, much of the later edition (and some of the former) is the work of Princess Caroline Sayn-Wittgenstein, who was also responsible for much of his verbose biography of Chopin.¹ The book is, put charitably, uneven, but amidst a great deal of irrelevant, inflammatory, and confused material it contains some fascinating descriptions of Gypsy performances and some observations on the nature of the Gypsies per se. As these reflect contemporary perceptions, they merit some attention.

Liszt (or the princess) communicates a boundless respect and an almost childlike idealization of the Gypsy people. For example, the author imputes to them “the superiority of disdain and indifference, which is proper to the Gypsy race,”² and he observes that “having a vague consciousness of their own harmlessness they are content to live in the sun.”³ The single most audacious generalization is “nothing in Gypsy estimation equals the liberty of satisfying even the least of their desires at any moment.”⁴ To the modern reader, a passage like this last may set the teeth on edge, but it addresses the heart of the matter for Liszt. His great fondness for Gypsy music originated in childhood,⁵ but his later fascination with the Gypsy people went well beyond the purely musical. His image of them seems to have been colored, in part, by his image of himself. Liszt described himself as “half-Gypsy, half-Franciscan”; it does not strain the imagination to conclude that he ascribed to the Gypsies his own feelings of rootlessness, sensuality, inner melancholy and longing for an unknown and idealized homeland. Ethnicity was a complicated issue in Liszt’s case, after all; he considered himself a proud Magyar, yet spoke almost no Hungarian. He composed extensively in a pseudo-Hungarian vein, yet understood so little of Hungarian music that he attributed its origins to the Gypsies themselves. Liszt was, in reality, a cosmopolitan who was most comfortable with admirers, students, and the aristocracy; part of the attraction the Gypsies’ music had for him might well have been that it represented a side of his character which never had the opportunity to flower.

¹ Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years* (New York, 1989), 388–89.

² Franz Liszt, *The Gypsy in Music*. Originally published in 1859, in French. Translated by Edwin Evans. (London, 1960), p. 154.

³ Liszt, p. 69.

⁴ Liszt, p. 70.

⁵ Ronald Taylor, *Franz Liszt* (London, 1986), p. 155.

It is worth looking at Liszt in some detail because he is, to a certain extent, emblematic of the views of his time with regard to the Gypsies and their music. In general, European music in the 1820s had reached a point at which the commonly accepted national styles of the eighteenth century had very nearly cross-fertilized each other out of existence. The compositional style of the Paris Conservatory, for example, could reflect Italian, Dutch, or Bohemian influence, depending on whether one followed Cherubini, Fétis, or Reicha. Richard Wagner, before arriving at the Music of the Future and declaring himself “the most German of beings,” could even castigate, in the late 1830s, his fellow Germans for being incapable of composing opera like the Italians!⁶ While national boundaries were becoming less relevant to musical style, however, folk music as source material was increasing in importance as an expression of national identity. Russia was discovering a musical voice at this time, and Polish national spirit pervaded much of what Chopin, to choose one example, wrote. A certain amount of ambivalence is apparent in a European culture which could simultaneously nurture nationalistic sentimentality in the Biedermeier tradition and the theatricality and pretense of Italian opera.

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The parallels in Liszt’s case are obvious: the self-conscious simplicity of his Magyar spirit and pietistic leanings sits in marked contrast to his cosmopolitan pretension and associations with wealth and aristocracy. Liszt was not the only individual with diverse cultural influences, nor was he the only one who faced conflicting societal pressures both to conform and rebel. In drawing on the music of a nation of consummate outsiders (i.e. the Gypsies), he could give voice to ambivalent feelings and also be sure that the cultural associations would be well-understood by his audience.

The repertoire which served as source material for Liszt and other composers presents a complex picture. We must distinguish between the music itself and the stylistic “accent” given to it by the musicians who performed it. Each is important, but they should be understood as separate entities before being viewed as a whole.

The origins of the repertoire itself are varied. One principal ancestor was *verbunkos*, a style of dance music with roots in the late seventeenth century. Following the organization of a permanent Hungarian army in 1715, this music was used as a recruiting tactic for the Hussars. They would pay (or force) Gypsy musicians to play and

⁶ Richard Wagner, “German Music,” [1839] in *Wagner Writes From Paris*, ed. Robert L. Jacobs and Geoffrey Skelton (London, 1973). While Wagner treats his fellow Germans in a somewhat sympathetic fashion, he also depicts them as bumbling, naive provincials.

dance *verbunkos* as part of entertainments dealing with the supposed joys of army life. The purpose was to con village boys into joining up.⁷ Of a later vintage were the *nóta* songs, a popular, folk-influenced genre which exists to this day. While most of these date from the mid-nineteenth century, some are considerably older. The German antecedents of these *nóta* songs are the *volkstümlieder* (which were numbers from *Singspiele*, described by one author as “hackneyed tunes with slobbery texts”). Like the *volkstümlieder*, the *nóta* songs were also folk-like art songs, but they mixed Viennese and *verbunkos* elements; later, Bartók would call this the “new style of Hungarian peasant music.”⁸ After their composition they became subject to the circumstances of real folk music: adaptation to popular taste, recomposition, and introduction of variants. These songs tended to be in slow tempi, and the marked rhythms of Hungarian text gave the melodic figures an unmistakable character.

Lastly, there is the *csardas*. It has been suggested that this is simply a later version of the *verbunkos*, but if so it is one that incorporates elements of the *nóta* song style. A basic *csardas* has two sections, *lassu* (slow) and *friss* (fresh, or fast). In general, the opening section is a slow, measured 4/4 dance, but a metrically free, rhapsodic approach to this section is also common. One or both sections of a *csardas* can contain more than one actual tune, and it is possible for a single *csardas* to become simply a medley of tunes, progressing gradually from slow to fast. This dance remains popular in Hungary to the present day.

While the origins of the *verbunkos-nóta-csardas* complex of repertoire were not, strictly speaking, of a folk nature, the circumstances of its dissemination most certainly were. This music was spread throughout Europe not by Hungarians, but by Hungarian Gypsies. Aspects of their characteristic performance style and instrumentation gradually became associated with, then inseparable from, the music itself. The ensuing controversy over Hungarian versus Gypsy origin for this music (a sore point from Liszt's time through Bartók's) was partially a result of the folk-like circumstances of travelling musicians: a large degree of improvisation, the profusion of variants, and relatively little transcription on paper all helped to obscure the issue. As composers such as Haydn and Schubert took what they heard and incorporated it into their own works, its influence became even more widespread. That the stylistic boundaries within this repertoire became vague is therefore not at all surprising.

⁷ Sárosi, p. 86.

⁸ Benjamin Suchoff, introduction to Béla Bartók, *The Hungarian Folk-Song* [1924]. (Albany, NY, 1981), p. xv.

The Gypsies played music from this complex of Hungarian repertoire, then, and from it their own performance style evolved. The *Style hongrois* had another important precursor, though in a different sense: there already existed a style of musical writing which was widely understood to signify exoticism. The so-called "Turkish" style, supposedly derived from the music of the Janissaries heard at the time of the Siege of Vienna, had become a popular musical topic in opera of the second half of the eighteenth century. This style is most obvious when a battery of cymbals and other percussion effects appears as a sort of orchestrational calling card. Independent of percussion, though, in the Turkish Style a small repertoire of stock musical figures evolved into a widely-accepted sub-dialect. These gestures (which bear scant relation to actual Turkish music) were well known and used in instrumental pieces even into the nineteenth century.

One of the most common features in the Turkish Style is the importance, stress, and repetition of the interval of the third, as in the coda from the third movement of Mozart's Sonata in A, K. 331, the famous *Rondo alla turca*. (It is possible that this fixation with thirds comes from an imitation of the Turkish horns, which were capable of playing only one or two notes, but this is speculative.) Much of the time Turkish music is in minor mode, although this is not always the case. Another feature is upper neighbor notes, which lend a sort of noisy effect to scale passages. Referential in an imitative way is the proliferation of grace notes and ornaments which adorn almost all Turkish passages. In harmonic terms, drone and stasis are the most common characteristics.

What all these units of musical speech have in common is the quality of stylized noisemaking. Prominent percussion, melodic figures of a repetitious, directionless, and motoric nature, and graces imitating cymbals and chimes all suggest a mechanical approach to music-making. To belabor the musical point, repeating melodic thirds and harmonic inactivity imply a lack of musical sophistication, all of which Europeans happily attributed to the Turks. The Turkish style probably had its origin in western contempt for the martial music heard in time of battle. With the passage of time, however, more subtle and sophisticated usages evolved.⁹

In its early stages, the *Style hongrois* was not perceived as wholly discrete from this stylized Turkish music. Both Turks and Gypsies, after all, came from the East, and in the European mind the distinctions between non-European groups were not particularly subtle.

⁹ For this discussion of the Turkish style I am indebted to the doctoral dissertation of Miriam Karpilow Whaples, *Exoticism in Dramatic Music, 1660–1800*, (Bloomington, IN, 1958), in particular pp. 153–59.

Certainly, as it first emerged, the stylized Hungarian-Gypsy musical speech was very different from the mature dialect it would later become. Certain Haydn works, for example, mix Gypsy and Hungarian gestures with stock figures from the Turkish style. Bence Szabolcsi, a Hungarian musicologist who worked long and productively in this area, felt that for Haydn, Slavic, Gypsy, Rumanian, and Turkish music formed a single “mixed but scarcely divisible” complex.¹⁰ Turkish music was already commonly understood to suggest exoticism; Gypsy music was gaining this connotation, and a mixture of the two different styles to signify exoticism would have been understood by Haydn’s audience, who wouldn’t have been troubled by the mixture of musical elements. A clear example is the third movement of the Trio, Hoboken XV: 25 (“In the gipsies’ stile”[sic]): such Turkish gestures as repetitious passagework, descending broken thirds, and a pounding contredanse rhythm give way to Gypsy elements such as a drone bass (actually a feature of both styles), truncated phrases, typical Hungarian dotted rhythms, and pizzicato violin playing. It must also be acknowledged that in Haydn’s string quartets there are examples where the lament of a Gypsy-style fiddle is not mixed with Turkish figures at all.

The solo fiddle quickly became the common denominator in the mature *Style hongrois*, with almost the significance of percussion in the Turkish style. An illustration of the way in which an actual Gypsy performance might be assimilated into a concert work is provided by Liszt. A passage in his book reads as follows:

The true Bohemian masters are those who, having syncopated their theme so as to give it a slight swinging effect, restore it to the normal measure as if preparing to lead a dance; after which it appears, as it were, casting sparks in every direction by clusters of small shakes.¹¹

A section of Liszt’s *Hungarian Fantasia*, the “Allegretto alla Zingarese,” follows this plan precisely. The theme first appears swung, then straight, then (after a flute solo) with a trill-variation (see Example 1; in the full orchestration this last accompanies a fiddle solo). In general, however, gestures of the *Style hongrois* are derived from particular aspects of Gypsy playing, whether performance techniques, instruments, rhythms, or uses of harmony, not an entire series of improvisations. Because they fall into such neat categories, the identification of these conventions suggests some sort of “lexicon,” an organized summary and catalogue of musical gestures which were

¹⁰ Szabolcsi, quoted in Sárosi, p. 112.

¹¹ Liszt, p. 307.

EXAMPLE 1. Liszt, Hungarian Fantasia; mm. 133–36, 141–44, 68–70.

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used all over Europe to signify Gypsies and Gypsydom. It is to this idea that we now turn.

Performance Style. Many of the gestures which make up the *Style hongrois* were derived from the performance style and instrumental traditions of the Gypsy musicians, rather than from the Hungarian music itself. I have already mentioned the premium placed on improvisation; the tradition of the virtuosic, quasi-demonic Gypsy fiddler has its origins here. Slow, rhapsodic playing offered Gypsy fiddlers the clearest opportunity for this kind of display. The general style of slow pieces or sections is called *hallgató* in Hungarian, mean-

ing “to be listened to,” which distinguishes it from the faster dancing-songs. In *hallgató* playing, the melody is treated independently of its original text. Bálint Sárosi, a Hungarian musicologist who has made a lifelong study of Gypsy playing, describes the performance style as follows:

On their instruments they can perform a *hallgató* melody—which normally has a text—much more loosely, like an instrumental fantasy, and working *against* the dictates of the text; with runs, touching, languid pauses, and sustained or snapped off notes, they virtually pull the original structure apart.¹² [my emphasis]

Sárosi points out that the original character of the songs is lost in such performances, and that the rubato-style performances of the Gypsies have so shaped audience taste that any other approach sounds out-of-place. But it is here that the musician’s perspective and impetus come into play in “creating” this rubato style. The motivation of Gypsy music is commercial: the musicians play whatever the customer wants to pay for. In the Gypsy performance tradition, the soloist looks into a customer’s soul, (supposedly) perceives and understands his personal sorrows and concerns, and expresses them on his instrument. When the Gypsy “plays” the customer’s deepest feelings, the customer then feels as if he or she has an integral part in the composition.

This is the essence of *hallgató* playing: an active and involved kind of listening on the part of the customer is implied. It is a direct parallel to the improvisatory aspect of early nineteenth-century Hungarian national dance. A contemporary account describes the dancer as “. . . free master over his own steps and movements, these not being bound to any kind of rule. The dancer’s sole business is to give off his own fire and to invent dance figures.”¹³ The Hungarian songs themselves, then, are only vehicles for communication between the musician and listeners. The original qualities of the songs themselves are, in this tradition, of little concern. An excellent example of a transformed *hallgató* style passage is provided by Brahms in the second movement of the clarinet quintet, op. 115; the middle section is a Gypsy-*hallgató* treatment of the movement’s principle theme (see Example 2).

A complementary gesture is also derived specifically from the performance tradition. This is based in particular on the soloist-ensemble dialogue, in the way in which the band joins its leader, as if

¹² Sárosi, p. 245.

¹³ A. de Gerando, quoted in Sárosi, p. 93.

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EXAMPLE 2. Brahms, Clarinet Quintet, Op. 115/II, middle section.

Più lento

poco f

poco f

poco f

poco f

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dim.

pp

f

dim.

pp

f

dim.

pp

f

dim.

pp

f

by magic, at the end of certain fiorituras or phrases in the *hallgató* style. The whole band plays chords and long notes, while the soloist departs on flights of fancy in between. One of the purplest passages in Liszt's entire book describes this procedure:

The habit of ornamentation . . . elevates the first violin to the position of principal personage in the orchestra . . . it is the first violin

who decides the degree of movement; and, as soon as he has embarked on any special feature, the orchestra waits in silence for the emotion to subside. The extent of his expression depends entirely upon the inspiration of the moment; which also decides the precise form to be given to the cloud of notes. These roll forth in figure after figure, remindful of the entangled tendrils, the tear drops from which in autumn are as the notes of melody falling one by one.

The orchestra is so electrified by the fire, or, it may be, the melancholy of its chief, that, when the latter has come to the end of his explorations—when, having allowed himself sufficiently long to float in air, he gives the sign of being about to fall, they never fail to share his emotion. When, therefore, the moment arrives for receiving him into their arms they do not allow him to reach the earth, but sustain him, aid him to rebound. . . .¹⁴

When skillfully executed, this can produce a stupefied reaction in uninitiated listeners, who see no signals being given to the other musicians. In all probability this is the product of long hours of rehearsal; the other musicians' experience with their leader enables them to read his gestures. Example 3, from Liszt's *Hungarian Fantasia*, imitates this feature of Gypsy performances.

EXAMPLE 3. Liszt, *Hungarian Fantasia*, mm. 117–21.

Moderato. Fest.
quasi Tromba

The musical score consists of six staves. The top staff is the piano part, starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a series of chords and melodic lines. The lower five staves represent the orchestra, with each staff starting with a pizzicato (*pizz.*) dynamic and a series of chords and melodic lines. The score is in a key signature of two sharps (D major) and a 2/4 time signature. The tempo is Moderato. Fest. and the character is quasi Tromba. The score shows a series of chords and melodic lines, with dynamics like *f* and *ten.* (tension) and articulation like *pizz.* (pizzicato) and *arco* (arco).

¹⁴ Liszt, p. 303.

Other stylistic features imitate the instruments the Gypsies used, or a certain technique of playing them. One of these is pizzicato violin playing; the earliest descriptions of a distinctive Gypsy style mention this,¹⁵ and Haydn calls for it in the “gipsy” finale of his Trio, Hoboken XV:25. While this was more often used as a background gesture in the nineteenth century, it was a frequently-used solo technique in the Gypsy evocations of Pablo de Sarasate.

Two more instrumentally-derived gestures harken back to the very roots of the style. The first of these, shown in Examples 4a and 4b, is the Hungarian equivalent of horn fifths: the so-called *Kuruc-fourth* figure. This is a nostalgic reference to martial horn-type calls, which were generally played on a shawm-like instrument called the *tárogató*. This instrument is associated with the Hungarian national hero Imre Thököly, his *Kuruc* [Crusader]-warriors, and his rebellion at the end of the seventeenth century. Hungarians regard his revolt against the Hapsburgs in 1675 as a time of great national pride.

EXAMPLE 4. The *Kuruc-fourth*

a. Liszt, Hungarian Fantasia, *hallgató* section.

Molto Adagio, quasi Fantasia.



b. Schubert, Fantasy in F minor for piano duet, Op. 103, opening theme.

Allegro molto moderato



Examples 5a and 5b show two instances of the second of these instrument-derived gestures: drone fifths in the low strings (Example 5a from the second movement of Haydn’s String Quartet op. 74/3, and Example 5b from the third movement trio of Schubert’s C Major String Quintet). In its earliest stages, Gypsy musicians often played this repertoire on a solo bagpipe, or as a bagpipe and fiddle duet.

¹⁵ Sárosi, p. 73.

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EXAMPLE 5. Drone fifths in bass.

a. Haydn, String Quartet, Op. 74, no. 3/II.

Largo assai

mezza voce *ten.* *ten.*

mezza voce *ten.* *ten.*

mezza voce *ten.* *ten.*

mezza voce *ten.* *ten.*

cresc. *ff*

cresc. *ff*

cresc. *ff*

cresc. *ff*

10 *p* *f* *ff*

p *f* *ff*

p *f* *ff*

p *f* *ff*

b. Schubert, String Quintet, Op. 163/III, Trio.

Trio
Andante sostenuto

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mf *cresc.*

220

f *p*

pp

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This, by the way, is the likely origin for the tendency towards harmonic stasis in the early *Style hongrois*. In Hungary today, the bagpipe tradition seems almost to have disappeared,¹⁶ but the memory of it was strong in the nineteenth century, and this low drone figure would certainly have been recognized and understood. Surprisingly, the traditional Gypsy band, so central to the mature *Style hongrois*, doesn't seem to have had a place for the bagpipe; the bagpipe's importance in this music, therefore, predates the dissemination of the style to other parts of Europe.

The middle-range woodwinds, usually second in importance only to the violin, represent another instrumental reference. The musical and cultural importance of the abovementioned *tárogató* could well have been the origin of the secondary-soloist position sometimes accorded the clarinet or oboe. This strong supporting role was maintained first in Gypsy bands and later in concert evocations of the style. Excerpts shown in Example 6 include the clarinet-piano call and response in the Liszt *Hungarian Fantasia*, in which the piano takes the place of the violin soloist (and the clarinet is answered by the flute), and the clearly Hungarian oboe solo which opens the second movement of Schubert's "Great" C major symphony.

Parallel thirds and, in particular, sixths are descended from varieties of parallel-interval folk singing in eastern Europe. These also have a harmonic function, but their use seems to be more referential and less structural than in traditional eighteenth-century music. The example from the Brahms clarinet quintet cited earlier (Example 2) shows one such usage in the string writing; his Hungarian Dances also make considerable use of it. It is important to remember, as a performance consideration, that sixths in this particular context are not voiced unequally; each voice in this folk-derived style is singing for all it is worth, so neither "melody" takes precedence, as it might in more standard musical usage.

One final instrumental reference is the cimbalom. This instrument is fundamental to Gypsy bands as both accompanist and soloist; originally it didn't have a sustaining pedal, although by the middle-to-late nineteenth century it did. This pedal was nonetheless a crude device, and cimbalom evocations on the piano frequently involve use of the sustaining pedal and even occasional blending of harmony. Liszt provides the best examples of this, three of which are shown in Example 7: the openings of Hungarian Rhapsodies number 11 and 12, and in the *Hungarian Fantasia*. Liszt shows the cimbalom to have

¹⁶ Sárosi, p. 214. Sárosi also points out that in any case, the tonic and fifth drone themselves survive to the present day, played by Hungarian folk instrumentalists on accompanying strings, or the peasant zither.

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EXAMPLE 6. Gypsy woodwind solos.
a. Liszt, Hungarian Fantasia, call and response for piano and winds.

The first system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat major/D minor). It features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over an eighth note, marked with an '8'. The middle staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat, containing a few notes and rests. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one flat, also containing a few notes and rests.

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The second system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat, featuring a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over an eighth note, marked with an '8'. The middle staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat, containing a few notes and rests. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one flat, containing a few notes and rests. The text 'Adagio Cl.' is written above the bottom staff, and 'espress.' is written below it. The text 'Fi' is written above the bottom staff, and 'dolcissimo' is written below it.

The third system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat, featuring a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over an eighth note, marked with an '8'. The middle staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat, containing a few notes and rests. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one flat, containing a few notes and rests. The text 'poco a poco accel.' is written above the top staff.

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b. Schubert, "Great" C major Symphony/II, opening theme.

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been used as a harmonic instrument, as a declamatory instrument, and as an instrument of virtuoso display in *friss* sections.

Rhythm. Another family of gestures in this dialect is rhythmic. As mentioned above, many of these characteristic rhythms come from the Hungarian language, used as text in the *notá* songs; it is at this point in the lexicon of the *Style hongrois* that the metaphor of musical speech seems most appropriate. These rhythms became musical

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EXAMPLE 7. Cimbalom evocations.

a. Liszt, Hungarian Rhapsody no. 11, opening.

Lento a capriccio

quasi zimbalo

una corda

smorz.

b. Liszt, Hungarian Rhapsody no. 12, opening.

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Mesto.

f marcato

p trem.

cresc.

c. Liszt, Hungarian Fantasia, vivace section.

Vivace assai.

rinforz

rinforz

entities in their own right, giving a distinctly Hungarian accent to the music in which they were used. One of the most common of these is the spondee, a metric foot consisting of two accented longs. This has the inevitable effect of punctuating or interrupting a line, as for instance in the Schubert excerpts in Examples 6b and 10b, and in doing so with a rhythm which is relatively rare in western concert music. Another characteristic rhythm is a variant of the choriambus, long-short-short-long, with an accent on the second short. This rhythm serves as the motto of the *Hungarian Fantasia* of Liszt (see Example 8), is common in Bartók, and is almost unheard of in non-Hungarian contexts.

The Hungarian version of the Lombard rhythm, accented short-long, also suggests an immediate context when it appears, as for example in a theme from Brahms' seventeenth Hungarian Dance, shown in Example 9. Again, a rhythm uncommon in western music (accented short syllable) alerts the listener to a kind of musical exoticism, albeit of this commonly understood sort.

One rhythmic feature not peculiar to the *Style hongrois* but certainly a component of it is the dotted rhythm. This was one of the

EXAMPLE 8. Liszt, *Hungarian Fantasia*, principal theme.

Allegro eroico

ff vibrato assai

EXAMPLE 9. Brahms, *Hungarian Dance* no. 17, mm. 61–64 (reduction for two hands).

grazioso

most typical ways for a Gypsy musician to ornament a melody (as shown in Example 1). Instances abound, two more being in Examples 6b and 10b. This gesture, like parallel sixths, is most effective when it is used in conjunction with other gestures. Appearing in isolation, it doesn't call the Gypsy style to mind with the surety the other rhythmic gestures do.

The final rhythmic gesture of my group can be used either as a melodic rhythm, as are the gestures discussed above, or as an underlying dance rhythm. This is the *alla zoppa*, or "limping" rhythm, formed by two quarter notes flanking a half note. Example 10 shows this rhythm in both characteristic uses: the last movement of the Schubert C-major string quintet uses it as the basis for a stylized dancing-song, while it is used melodically in the closing theme from the first movement of the same quintet. Example 10b shows a particularly interesting example because this closing theme makes use of *alla zoppa*, the spondee, and the dotted rhythm in the course of only a few bars. This passage demonstrates that when more than one of the gestures in this dialect is used, the increase in effect is exponential, not additive. Each gesture strengthens the others.

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Harmony. Some of the most striking effects in the entire *Style hongrois* are caused by a characteristic non-functional use of harmony. The Haydn excerpt in Example 5a demonstrates that this was understood to be part of the exotic style early on. As the nineteenth century progressed, this exotic harmonic usage developed and strayed even further from the standard vocabulary. It may be that such harmonic effects were a natural outgrowth of a folk-like repertoire which was primarily modal; after all, where melodies are not strongly functional, there is no reason for the accompaniment to be. Another plausible explanation is ignorance; at least one writer has suggested that because the Gypsy musicians were frequently musically illiterate, such nonfunctional harmonic practice resulted from a lack of training in conventional harmony. One of the original features of the style, we remember, was the harmonic stasis of a bagpipes' drone. Harmonic sophistication in this style has been constantly evolving, since that time, even up to the present.¹⁷ The Liszt book stresses the Gypsies' "habit of passing suddenly to a remote key," and that their ". . . system of modulation seems to be based on a total negation of all pre-determined plan for the purpose in question." Clearly, Gypsy harmony depended on motivations other than "functionality."

¹⁷ Present-day Gypsy-style musicians are completely at home with jazz chords, for instance, which they learn from popular music which is demanded in cafes. In any event, illiteracy among Gypsy musicians probably belongs mostly to history now.

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EXAMPLE 10. *Alla zoppa* rhythm.
a. Schubert, Quintet, Op. 163/IV.

Allegretto

These motivations, color and the element of surprise, were of primary importance in the *Style hongrois*, and given the lack of “German,” or literate, training, a smooth and coherent system of functional harmonic use couldn’t have been particularly relevant. In a letter thanking the Hungarian composer Albert Fuchs for a dedication, Liszt called particular attention to these Hungarian “colors”:

Your Hungarian Suite is an excellent and effective work. While springing from the musical ground of Hungary, it nevertheless remains your own property, as there are no imitations or used-up ornamentations in it, but rather much new employment of harmonies, and always a national coloring.¹⁸

¹⁸ Liszt, *Letters of Franz Liszt*, trans. Constance Bache [1894] (New York, 1969), p. 426.

b. Schubert, Quintet, Op. 163/I, closing theme.

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140

fz pp

fz pp

fz pp

fz pp

fz pp

fz pp

p

p

p

p

p

Here we must examine the so-called Gypsy Scale. Gypsy music was widely assumed to conform to this scale, but almost every student of the subject agrees that it didn't, that major and minor scales also frequently occurred. Indeed, there is some disagreement as to what the scale actually was. James Huneker, one of Liszt's early biographers, describes it as a harmonic minor scale with a raised fourth, but he says that others read it differently by starting on the dominant, which results in a major scale with a flatted second and sixth.¹⁹ Sárosi, a more recent author on the subject, points out that the characteristic

¹⁹ Huneker, pp. 162–63.

augmented second (which appears in both scales) is a virtual requirement of any Gypsy performance, regardless of whether the original melody uses it or not.²⁰ It is more properly a facet of the Gypsy performance “accent,” not the actual repertoire (or a scale on which it was supposedly based) they play.

What we are left with is a highly colored scale with an uncertain tonic. Taking Huneker’s first description, the harmonic minor scale with a raised fourth, both the root and the fifth degree have the same series of intervals, semitone—augmented second—semitone, immediately below them (see Example 11).²¹ This effectively negates the

EXAMPLE 11. “Gypsy” scale with identical modal fourths.



primacy of one or the other as tonic, because the character of each within the scale is almost identical. If we think back to the *Kuruc*-fourth horn-call figure, we notice that the fifth has two seemingly contradictory functions. It is still clearly the fifth degree, harmonically speaking; that is to say, it in no way sounds like the root of the chord or the bass of the accompanying drone. In melodic terms, though, it is almost tonicized; it possesses more repose than the upper octave, which becomes little more than an escape tone. There is, after all, no intrinsic need for a mode to be octave-based. This “bifocal tonic” accounts for a great deal of harmonic unpredictability: the music can proceed along either harmonic axis (that of the root, or that of the fifth) with little preparation. The magnetism of either pitch is strong enough to function persuasively as a harmonic focus. Whether achieved through manipulating the Gypsy Scale, or simply through arbitrary harmonic motion, such effects are unmistakable. A particularly good example is found in the trio to the third movement of Schubert’s C–major quintet, shown in Example 5b. Here, a stylized *hallgató* solo proceeds from a C–major cadence to C minor/F minor (ambiguity regarding first and fifth degrees), and through G-flat to

²⁰ Sárosi, p. 96.

²¹ Of course, both the major and natural minor scales also have identical modal fourths, in the former case below the tonic and fourth scale degree, in the latter below the tonic and fifth. The crucial difference is that the second alternative in both cases is studiously *avoided* as an alternate tonic. In major mode, the subdominant has always been considered to weaken the tonic by confusing it with the dominant, functionally speaking. In minor, the second key area is usually the relative major anyway. The minor dominant did enjoy some popularity in Italy in the eighteenth century as a second key area, but an ambiguity of tonic function doesn’t seem to have been part of the argument.

D-flat major. Whether such effects were a natural outgrowth of a pre-existent modal repertoire, or whether they are idealizations of a style which arose from ignorance and musical auto-didacticism, the appeal they held for such composers as Schubert and Liszt is clear.

Recognition of the *Style hongrois* as a dialect independent from the other musical speech of the time is helpful in two ways. Performances of repertoire in this style benefit from an approach which strives to be faithful to the original context of the gestures used. We have seen that virtually all of these gestures arise from specific situations: the Hungarian language, an instrumental imitation, or the Gypsies' characteristic use of color. This information will affect specific performance decisions, frequently leading a performer to adopt an approach which runs counter to standard instrumental practice. Examples of such cases would be equal voicing in parallel-interval writing (as opposed to bringing out the top voice), depiction of a cimbalom tremolo rather than a full orchestral one (a pianist might strive for more clattering attacks and something less than a full, orchestral tone), and stressing the jagged edges of Hungarian rhythms (as opposed to minimizing them in the interests of surface smoothness and elegance).

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The use and recognition of a specific musical dialect such as this is also significant for the light it casts on a larger issue. When using a vocabulary of limited and instantly-identifiable gestures, a composer's decisions lie far closer to the surface of a composition than they do when he composes in his own style and language. There is a clear and unmistakable implication in each and every gesture in the *Style hongrois*; the Gypsy weeps, the Gypsy is proud, the Gypsy is seductive, full of joyful abandon, or melancholy. Everyday musical words are spoken to the audience, who understands them without ambiguity. The real magic comes in the realization that given a highly-flavored but also limited dialect, the genius of a composer such as Haydn, Schubert, Brahms or Liszt is in no way constrained by these limited means. In the hands of the legions of minor composers who produced Gypsy fantasias and variations, this dialect was far more limited and monochromatic than it needed to be. The master-composers produced a highly-colored, exotic, yet instantly-identifiable sound-realm. The limitation of musical materials and the possibility that compositional choices be perceived as such didn't constrain their inspiration, therefore, it defined it.

The *Style hongrois* remained, however, largely a nineteenth-century musical dialect (more recent exponents such as Franz

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Schmidt notwithstanding); a latter-day example such as Ravel's *Tzigane*, while an evocative and effective showpiece, nonetheless uses it rather as a foreign language. Ravel had had a violinist friend play Gypsy tunes for him, and he was so taken with them that he decided to compose a virtuoso work in that style. In other words, he was forced to take recourse to a "lexicon" of his own. Schubert, Liszt, and Brahms, on the other hand, learned the language from those who spoke it as a mother-tongue.

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