

THE INFLUENCE OF HUNGARIAN FOLK MUSIC  
IN HUNGARIAN POPULAR MUSIC

by  
Hannah Baer

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Project Approved:

Supervising Professor: Timothy Watkins, PH.D.

School of Music

Till Meyn, PH.D.

School of Music

Chris Powell

School of Art

## Abstract

The roots of Hungarian culture go back to folk arts. Folk music, tales, dance, and poetry are ancient traditions interwoven into the Hungarian identity. Hungarian culture has globalized and transformed in many ways, but the tradition of folk arts remains at its core. As a musician and Hungarian, I am interested in the ways in which these Hungarian traditions influence contemporary-popular music in Hungary.

## Introduction

Hungarian folk music is a centuries-old tradition molded by a complex history of cultural and ethnic intermingling. In the 1900s, Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, and László Lajtha transcribed and recorded Hungarian folk music, categorizing them as old-style and new-style. The most common genres are songs, instrumental musical, and dance music. Songs are often pentatonic or modal, their form is typically strophic, their texture is monophonic or homophonic, and they are performed in either *rubato* or *giusto* rhythm. Instrumental music is typically distinguished by two categories: solo amateur-peasant and ensemble-professional-“Roma” music. Solo instrumental music is almost entirely based on vocal repertoire, while ensemble pieces are primarily played for dancing. The the core of the ensemble is the string family and the virtuoso instrument is the violin.<sup>1</sup>

For the purposes of this study, I define popular music as music that is mass-mediated, appeals to a wide audience of different social groups and ages, and generates commercial success. Popular music includes hits played on the radio and music performed at live venues with a sub-

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<sup>1</sup> Judit Frigyes. “Hungary,” *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*. (New York: Garland, 2000) 8:736-746.

stantial audience. Popular music can be characterized by a catchy melody, easy to remember words, and a strong rhythm. To understand how popular music is influenced by folk music, I will analyze songs by popular Hungarian bands according to style and text-treatment.

Until recently, folk music in Hungary was an oral tradition, so little to no written records of them existed. Our understanding of folk music is constructed through recordings collected by ethnomusicologists Béla Bartók (1881-1945), Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967), and László Lajtha (1920-1995). Because the large majority of folk music was uncovered at one time rather than preserved through history, it is hard to trace its origin.

In his book *A magyar népdal* (The Hungarian folksong), Bartók Béla classified folk songs as old-style or new-style. Unlike art music, folk music styles in Hungary do not belong to particular periods. New-style and old-style folksongs were interrelated and popular simultaneously; those attached to old-style would continue to play it, while those who pursued newer styles would add elements to the old style. To periodize folk songs, Bartók Béla devised a three-point method to help estimate when they were written or popularized. First, he would do a musical analysis of a song: simple tunes were old-style and more complex tunes were new. Then, he would identify the song's purpose: old-style songs often had subject matters relating to the events they belonged in. Lastly, he would compare Hungarian tunes with tunes from neighboring regions; he identified which were borrowed, old or new, and when these cultures interacted.<sup>2</sup>

## **Hungarian Folk Music**

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<sup>2</sup> Zoltán Kodály. "Folk Music and Art Music in Hungary" *Tempo*, no. 63. (Cambridge University Press, 1963), 28–36.

The Hungarian people come from one of many tribes that inhabited the steps of the Ural Mountains by the Ob river around 800AD. Their tribe, the Magyars, namesake of the Hungarian people for themselves (*magyarok*) and their country (*magyarország*), were a nomadic group that migrated throughout Eastern Europe and Asia feuding with other tribes and ethnic groups (especially Turkish ones), and eventually settling in the Carpathian Basin in present-day Hungary. Around the year 1000, the Hungarians unified as a nation under King Stephen I. In the following millennium, Hungary experienced a dramatic political, economic, social, and religious history undergoing occupation, rebellion, and foreign immigration, all of which resulted in a diverse and rich culture.

The origin of Hungarian music is not well understood, but ethnomusicologist Zoltán Kodály discovered musical similarities between it and folk music of other countries in the Finno-Ugric language family (Finnish and Estonian), suggesting the roots of Hungarian folk music from the time period these ethnicities coexisted. During the first centuries of the Hungarian kingdom, Hungarians came into contact with other European melodic styles. The oldest form of folk song, so-called old-style songs, may have combined Finno-Ugric elements with chant and medieval European styles.<sup>3</sup>

It is unclear how the Ottoman Empire, which ruled Hungary from 1526-1686, influenced Hungarian folk music. However, the Turkish aristocracy may have facilitated the emergence of professional Roma musicians and ensembles—groups that gave Hungary a significant musical identity for centuries to come. This period also brought a wave of monophonic music and vernacular poetry in the Hungarian language, preserved in manuscript and print. Social and political

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<sup>3</sup> Frigyes. “*Hungary*.” 736-739.

upheaval allowed these monophonic genres to spread to the peasantry, where they potentially interacted with folk styles.<sup>4</sup>

During the second half of the eighteenth century, an instrumental dance-music style, known as *verbunkos* or “recruiting dance” developed. This music and dance was played during military recruiting before the Habsburg Emperors, who were also the Kings of Hungary. The *verbunkos* appears to have been known to all strata of society, resulting in its recognition as “national music.” Its origin is uncertain, however, and how much of a role Roma musicians had in its development is an open question. In the nineteenth century, the *verbunkos* reached peak popularity: nearly all styles of instrumental music among Hungarian peasants and Romantic art music used it, including the music of Bartók and Liszt.

*Verbunkos* had both slow (*lassú* or *lassan*) sections and fast (*friss* or *friska*) ones (Ex. 1). These could either form a pair or alternate at greater length. The slow sections often featured a characteristic dotted rhythm and the faster sections had virtuoso running notes.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Frigyes. “Hungary.” 736-739.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathon Bellman. *The 'Style hongrois' in the Music of Western Europe*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993.

Example 1. Slow and fast Verbunkos melodies.

**Ex.1** *Magyar tántzok klávikordiomra valók* [Hungarian dances for clavichord]  
(Vienna, 1790), p.128

I. **Adagio (lassan)**



II. **Allegro (frissen)**



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The nineteenth century brought a wave of new folk compositions. Bartók and Kodály categorized folk music into new-style folk song (*új stílusú népdal*), or music of the peasantry, art song (*műdal*), folklike art song (*népies műdal*), or music of the amateur urban middle class, and Hungarian song (*magyar nóta*).

The rise of verbunkos coincided with the development of instrumental string ensembles and the spread of professional Roma musicians. At first, the aristocracy and lesser nobility employed Roma musicians. Because of the rise in the standard of living in the peasantry, however, more village people began to be able to afford to hire professional ensembles. By the end of the nineteenth century, Roma musicians were the primary professional musicians, patronized by the impoverished middle nobility and the gentry. In the political ideology of the time, the gentry was the embodiment of “real Hungarians,” and because they employed Roma musicians, Roma music

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<sup>6</sup> Béla Bartók. “Magyar tántzok klávikordiomra valók.” *ZTI Népzene gyűjtemény*, 1907.

began to symbolize “the real Hungarian music.” The Roma minority in Hungary was discriminated against, however, dealing with social segregation, poverty, and lack of access to employment, education, and healthcare.<sup>7</sup>

Following World War II, the Communist government encouraged the spread of old-style folk songs as a way to “purify” Hungarian music. The state held programs, festivals, and competitions, and peasant music was included in the school curriculum from elementary school through university. In addition, Roma music continued to be performed during this time, but fell out of popularity because of public preference for popular music.

In the 1960s, after a period of decline in folk music, a group of university students in Budapest in the 1960s successfully revived old-style folk music by composing, teaching, and organizing regular *táncház* (dance house) meetings where they played and danced to folksongs. In contemporary Hungary, peasant music and elements of the traditional way of life thrive in less-industrial areas or places outside of Hungary where Hungarians are a minority, such as Transylvania. Folk music is still enjoyed at national festivals and fairs in Budapest year-round, however, as an homage to folklife history and its traditions. Though fluctuating in popularity, Hungarian folk music has remained a vital force in Hungarian cultural life.

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<sup>7</sup> Frigyes. “Hungary.” 736-739.



## Roma Music

Roma music is sometimes mistaken for Hungarian folk music, though not all Roma are Hungarian and thus Roma music is not exclusively Hungarian. Roma musicians were often employed by Hungarian aristocrats and villages, so their musical style has intermingled with and influenced Hungarian music.

The label Rom (plural Roma) is used rather than “gypsy” because the latter term is usually an outsider’s term with a pejorative connotation, including the incorrect belief that their ancestors came from Egypt.<sup>8</sup>

Roma musicians in Central and Eastern Europe were often professionals who played for non-Rom peasants in taverns and at village events. Often, prejudice against them resulted in a nomadic lifestyle, resulting in their becoming traveling, multimusical, and multilingual performers. Many sedentary Roma played professional urban folk, classical, and/or popular music. In Hungary, Roma music became an emblem of the country’s culture. Roma music is sometimes mistaken for Hungarian folk music, though not all Roma are Hungarian thus their music is not exclusively Hungarian. The music Rom musicians play for themselves may or may not differ from music they play for others.

Prominent Hungarian musicians like Liszt identified Hungarian music and Roma music as the same. Musicologists such as Dr. Molnár Géza, however, point out that the national characteristics of Hungarian music were established long before the Roma immigrated to Hungary, and

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<sup>8</sup> Frigyes. “*Hungary*.” 301-302.

that Roma musicians “have always learned the music of the countries in which they have so-journed.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Hungarian Folk Musical Style**

To determine what Hungarian folk music is one must understand the musical elements and theory that create its distinct sound.

Melody and Harmony. The pentatonic scale is a fundamental part of Hungarian folk music, though variety exists in the form of modes. The most distinctive features of the “old style” is a descending melodic structure, in which the second half of the melody is a transposition (if not always exact) of the first, a 5th lower. The chief characteristic of new style is a repetitive, arched melodic structure. The main types of structure are *AA5A5A*, *ABBA*, *AA5BA* and *AABA* (A5 indicates an upward transposition by a 5th).<sup>10</sup> Melody is the central focus of Hungarian folk music, so harmonic accompaniment does not obscure or re-interpret the characteristics of the melody.<sup>11</sup>

Texture. Hungarian folk music can be monophonic, homophonic, or heterophonic. In monophonic songs or pieces, the melody is the focus. When homophony occurs, it is only to support the melody. Heterophony occurs when multiple instruments play the melody with different improvisatory variations.

Ornamentation. A conspicuous characteristic of slow laments is their rich ornamentation. The ornamental notes and groups are always performed with a soft glissando or portamento. In

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Kilenyi. “The Theory of Hungarian Music” In *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 5, no. 5 (January 1919) 20-39.

<sup>10</sup> Kodály, Zoltán, and Stephen Erdely. “Pentatonicism in Hungarian Folk Music.” *Ethnomusicology* 14, no. 2 (1970): 228–29.

<sup>11</sup> Pávai, István. *Az erdélyi magyar népi tánczene* (Hungarian Folk Dance Music from Transylvania). Kolozsvár: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság, 2012, 344-345.

an ornamental passage occasionally the second, and rarely the sixth degree are sounded for a passing moment, without affecting the pentatonic character of the tunes.<sup>12</sup>

Rhythm. Rhythm is based on dance or the spoken language. Dance-like rhythms emphasize instinctive movements, while rhythms influenced by the spoken language vary in each verse according to the quantity or length of the syllables in the text. The tempo of the melodies either move quickly in an unchanging dance-like rhythm (*tempo giusto*), or are slow paced in *tempo rubato*. Celebratory texts are set to dance melodies, while lamenting songs are slow.<sup>13</sup>

Example 2, “Ha kimegyek arra magas tetőre” (If I go out onto that high roof).

Ex. 2

Gyergyócsomafalva, 1907.  
C: B. Bartók

Tempo giusto 7/8 



Ha kimegyék arr' a magas te-tő-re, Ta-lá-lok én szere-tő-re ket-tő-re

Ej, baj, baj, baj, de nagy baj, Hogy a ba-bám szi-ve o-lyan, mint a vaj.

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Form. Most strophic songs are comprised of four lines with words that are stressed on the first syllable, lending an accented dactylic rhythm to the music. Dance tunes most frequently consist of 11-syllable lines while lament songs are typically eight syllables.

<sup>12</sup> Kodály. “Pentatonicism in Hungarian Music.” 229-231.

<sup>13</sup> Kodály. “Folk Music and Art Music in Hungary.” 33.

<sup>14</sup> Béla Bartók. “Ha kimegyek arra magas tetőre.” *ZTI Népzene gyűjtemény*, 1907.

Scoring. Hungarian folk music includes the voice and instruments of a variety of different types. Chordophones include the violin, viola, cello, bass, *citera* (zither), tambura, and hurdy-gurdy. Struck chordophones included the *cimbalom* and *gardon* (a cello-like percussive instrument). Aerophones include flutes, cow horns, wooden trumpet, and the button accordion. Membranophones include a variety of handmade drums.

The simplest and oldest instruments (flutes, wooden trumpet, cow horn) were handmade and mainly played by shepherds. Peasants and farmhands used the most inexpensive means of music-making, from improvising rhythmic accompaniments (by tapping or rubbing pots or furniture), to playing the zither, flute, or button accordion. More complex folk music is played by instruments in the string family with the violin as the virtuoso instrument. Singing is a quintessential part of all styles of Hungarian folk music.<sup>15</sup>

Poetry. Love poetry, often of a tragic or regretful nature is a typical subject matter of folk songs. Texts about peasant life and stories or folktales are also prominent. Nature imagery is a standard characteristic, especially references to the Danube and other Hungarian rivers, as well as birds and flowers.

The Hungarian verse stanza is constructed on the base of the four-line stanza, and all subsequent narrowing or enlarging comes from this basic formula. Common rhyme schemes of folk-songs are the end-of-the-line rhyme, when the final words of each couplet within the stanza rhyme; the cluster rhyme in which all four lines rhyme (found in mostly historical songs); and double rhymes at the end of lines in which two lines following each other end in similar rhyme.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lujza Tari. "Bartók's Collection of Hungarian Instrumental Folk Music and Its System" In *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Vol. 47, no. 2 (June 2006): 141-166.

<sup>16</sup> Ivan Balassa and Gyula Ortutay. *Hungarian Ethnography and Folklore*. (Portland, OR: Intl Specialized Book Services, 1974).

“Repülj, madár, repülj,” shown in Example 3, is a popular folk song, known by every Hungarian, and a good example of a typical folk song text.

**Ex. 3.**

Repülj, madár, repülj	Fly, bird, fly
Menaságra repülj	Fly to Menaság
Édes galambomnak	Sit on the shoulder
Gyenge vállára ülj!	Of my sweetheart
Vidd el madár vidd el	Take my letter, bird,
Levelemet vidd el	And carry it
Apámnak s anyámnak	To my father and mother
Jegybéli mátkámnak	And to my promised spouse
Ha kérdik hogy vagyok	If they ask you how I am
Mondjad hogy rab vagyok:	Tell them I am a prisoner
Szerelemtömlőben	In the prison of love
Térdig vasban vagyok	I'm knee deep in iron
Rab vagy rózsám rab vagy	You are a prisoner, my rose
Én meg beteg vagyok	I am ill
Mikor eljössz hozzám	When you come to me
Akkor meggyógyulok	I will be healed

### **Hungarian Pop and Rock**

During much of the second half of the twentieth century, despite restrictions by the Communist government, Hungarian popular music was deeply influenced by Western styles. For the forty years of socialist rule from 1949-1989, music was subject to censorship per Soviet ideology and policy. Regardless, many Hungarian popstars such as János Bródy (1946-) and Tamás Cseh (1943-2009) used their music to covertly criticize the government and society.

In the 1930s, European dance music with jazz elements and cabaret songs became popular in nightclubs, exposing Hungary to features of black American styles for the first time. Stalinist cultural policymakers tried to promote “mass song” instead, a genre with fanfare motives, major tonalities, ascending melodic lines, and texts that praised communist heroes and mobilization programs intended to unify the people, or “mass.” For a number of years, dance music and jazz became restricted, and privately owned music venues were closed. By the 1960s, however, dance songs regained popularity because of relaxed censorship.<sup>17</sup>

In 1951, *Hungaraton*, the state-run recording and publishing company, was founded; it issued many music recordings throughout the decade. In the 1960s, the style known as “beat” became popular, enabling the first identifiable Hungarian youth culture. Beat songs, inspired by British rock and roll of the time, featured growling singing a fast tempo, accompanied in straight 4/4 time by amplified guitars, basses, and drum set. János Bródy, Lajos Illés (1942-2007), Lev-ente Szörényi (1945-), János Kóbor (1943-2001), László Benkő (1943-2020), founding members of the groups Illés and Omega, gained prominence that they held through the early 1980s.<sup>18</sup>

After 1970, Hungarian rock music gained public respect and appreciation, and the state guardedly supported it: it gave the Hungarian people an outlet for their frustration that caused relatively little trouble. The Young Communists’ League provided performance venues ranging from camps to arena concerts, with groups such as Locomotiv GT and Omega playing for the largest audiences—Omega even toured Britain. Pop singers utilized a bel canto style with symphonic accompaniment, and some instrumentalists, such as keyboardist Gábor Presser from

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<sup>17</sup> Andrea Pócsik. "Singing the Party Line: The Role of Mass Song in the Construction of Communist Hegemony in Hungary, 1948–1956." *Popular Music and Society* 35, no. 3 (2012): 349-366.

<sup>18</sup> Tamás Szekeres. "Hungaroton: From National Music Publisher to International Music Label." *Popular Music and Society* 34, no. 4 (2011): 481-499.

Omega, introduced jazz-rock and country styles. Many groups, such as General and Bikini, experimented with folk rock alongside the folk music and dance *tánc ház* revival movement.

Punk and avant-garde styles became popular in the 1980s, primarily among the working class. Punk music provoked controversy through rebellious lyrics, sometimes even expressing fascist sentiments. Punk music featured instruments occasionally modified with household objects, such as prepared guitars. Punk music retained a broad audience through the 70s into the 80s, and in 1983 the rock opera *Stephen the King*, composed by Illés founders Levente Szörényi and János Bródy, gained tremendous popularity. The opera is a dramatization of the religious conversion of Hungary's first Christian ruler.

Contemporaneous Hungarian popular music is shaped largely by trends in Western popular music, especially that of the United States and German electronic dance music. Typical pop song elements are amplified guitars and basses, drum set, audio-engineered sounds, and melodic or growling singing. A style of Hungarian hip-hop and rap has also emerged, with songs frequently topping the national charts.<sup>19</sup>

## II. ANALYSIS OF SONGS

### 1) "Másfél Hete" (A Week and a Half)—Punnany Massif

#### **Másfél Hete**

Másfél hete, hogy a babám nem láttam,  
 Másfél hete erdőt-mezőt bejártam.  
 Nem tudom, hogy hová lett a kedvesem,  
 Csak azt tudom, hogy mennyire szeretem!  
 Nem tudom, hogy hová lett a kedvesem,  
 Csak azt tudom, hogy mennyire szeretem!

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<sup>19</sup> Sebok János. *Magyarock 1. 1958-1973*. (Budapest: Zenemunkakiado Budapest, 1983), 71-90.

Másfél hete...

Másfél hete...

Másfél hete gondolatom másra nem képes,  
 Gyűlölöm, hogy a fájásod még ilyenkor is édes.  
 Álomvilág, amit egykoron megkaptam,  
 De most hiányodból éhezőként egy mély verem, egy katlan.  
 Hisz nincs velem pajzsom, pillantásod tükre,  
 Azt, hogy meglássam, hogy a fény ráragyog az életünkre.  
 Ha előkerülsz Istenem, kérlek, ne fogj vissza!  
 Engedd, hogy kitárjam eléd, az én szívem tiszta!  
 Korlátok nélkül, ketten táncolnánk a szabadban,  
 Szép szádból szóló hangod innám szakadatlan.  
 Na, de nélküled nincs fény, ez opál-homály,  
 Színes révünkre pedig marad a kopár táj.  
 Magányos sebekkel hajtom le a fejem,  
 Por vagyok, pedig pár voltunk hajdan ne feledd!  
 Magányos sebekkel hajtom le a fejemet,  
 Por vagyok, pedig pár voltunk hajdan ne feledd

Más...

Másfél hete, hogy töretlenül fájdalom,  
 Kínzó sebek útvesztőjét hordom lábamon.  
 Lecsengő tüzet próbálja, szüzek prózája, kereszt Szakadatlan,  
 Marad mozdulatlan a paplan.  
 Fejemben furcsa dallam, nevetve súgja halkán,  
 Elválaszthat erdő, mező minden úgy lesz majd, mint hajdan.  
 Hiányzó alkatrész, vagy ettől az alkat kész,  
 Figyelem, hogy honnan jöttél, ügyelném, hogy hová mész.  
 Már másfél nap is sok tőled távol,  
 Csodának látlak én téged, azért hiányzol.  
 Azok vagyunk egymásnak, mint völgy a hegynek,  
 Nélküled, mint partra vetett cseppje messzi tengernek.  
 Félgőzzel félig megyek, addig fogom kezéd,  
 Hagyd, ha bolond leszek, csak had legyek veled.  
 Lehetnék bátyád, vagy hömpölygő büszke ár,  
 Őrzője kecses lépteidnek, mi szürkéségből fénné vált!

Hol van már? Madárlátta álompár,  
 Városokra távol hálom egy helyi bár.  
 Hegedűszó feledteti magányos világom,  
 Kövek sivatagában te vagy az én virágom.



Párnád kemény redőivé lett arcom ránca,  
 Hiányodban a Hold is csak kézzel festett tálca.  
 Ha szánsz rám ma holnap minden nap egy percet,  
 Maradok a hű híved, őrizem a szíved.  
 Utam ingoványos hosszú de nincs más célirány,  
 Pórnép között királynő ez a városszéli lány.  
 Utam ingoványos hosszú de nincs más célirány  
 Pórnép között királynő a falubéli lány.

Másfél hete...  
 Másfél hete én már csak ezt fújom,  
 Zene, ital, csillogás követ a siker úton!  
 Örömteli pillanatok a barátokkal egy térben,  
 Mégis egyedül vagyok, mint máshogyan volt nem régen.  
 Mondd meg nekem mit tegyek azért, hogy te is itt legyél,  
 Az egyik énem veled van a másikban meg nincs mérték!  
 Ha nem látsz most belém, nem ismerheted lelkemet,  
 A hiányod az, ami minden nap magamat eltemet.  
 Folyton úton távol tőled erős lesz a magányom,  
 Elveszíteni soha, kapaszkodnék én akárhogy!  
 Csak kérlek kedves, nézd el, a világ megrontott,  
 Nem érzem át, hogy megölnék azok az egy kortyok.  
 Bánatom, hogy nincs helyem, tú vagyok a kazalban,  
 Nem látok kontúrt, mi erdő volt pedig azt most szavanna.  
 Egy emlék leszel, ami egykor elengedett,  
 Arcod fátyolos képpé vált, mert nem fogtam meg a kezéd.

Ha végleg elmész ültetek a sírodra virágot,  
 És gyászolok, míg élek én egy egész világot!  
 Ha végleg elmész ültetek a sírodra virágot,  
 S így gyászolok, míg élek én egy egész világot!

Translation:

### **A Week and a Half**

Since one and a half weeks, I didn't see my babe,  
 Since one and a half weeks, I wandered the forest and the field.  
 I don't know where has my darling gone,  
 I just know how much I love her!  
 I don't know where has my darling gone,  
 I just know how much I love her!

Since one and a half weeks,  
 One and a half weeks ago, I cannot think of anything else,  
 I hate that the pain of you is so sweet.  
 A dream world that once was mine,  
 But now it's a deep pit because I'm starving in your absence, it's a cauldron.  
 I don't have my shield with me, the mirror of your eyes,  
 The ability to see the light shining at our lives.  
 If you appear, my Lord, please don't hold me back!  
 Let me show you that my heart is pure!  
 Without constraints, the two of us would dance in the open air,  
 I would drink your beautiful voice all the time.  
 Oh, but there is no light without you, this opal haze,  
 For our colorful port it remains only a barren landscape.  
 I go to sleep with lonely wounds,  
 I am dust, although we were together some time ago, don't forget!  
 I go to sleep with lonely wounds,  
 I am dust, although we were together some time ago, don't forget!

More ...

One and a half weeks, the pain lasts,  
 I carry a maze of wounds torturing me.  
 Decaying fire, prose of virgins, a cross incessant,  
 The quilt remains still.  
 Strange melody in my head, whispers laughing softly,  
 We can be set apart by the forest, by the field but everything will be as it was before.  
 Missing parts or that makes everything complete  
 I watch where you're coming from, I would watch where you're going to.  
 Already half a day away from you is too much,  
 I think you are a miracle, that's why I miss you.  
 We are to each other as the valley to the mountain  
 Without you, a lost drop far away from the sea.  
 I'm going slowly, I want to hold your hand,  
 If I'll be crazy just let me be with you.  
 I could be your bastion or a proud tumbling creek,  
 Guard of your graceful steps that turns from greyness into light!

Chorus (2x)

Since one and a half weeks, I didn't see my babe,  
 Since one and a half weeks, I wandered the forest and the field.  
 I don't know where has my darling gone,  
 I just know how much I love her!  
 I don't know where has my darling gone,

I just know how much I love her!

Where is she? A dream couple,  
 Far away in a local bar.  
 Violin helps me forget my lonely world,  
 You are my flower among the stones of the desert.  
 The wrinkles of my face became the wrinkles of your pillow,  
 In your absence the moon is just a hand-painted tray.  
 If you give me a minute today, tomorrow, every day,  
 I remain your faithful devotee, guarding your heart.  
 My way is sodden and long but there is no other destination,  
 This girl from the village is a queen among the peasants.  
 My way is sodden and long but there is no other destination,  
 This girl from the village is a queen among the peasants.

Since one and a half weeks that's all I'm talking about,  
 Music, drinks, shine follow me on the way to success!  
 Joyful moments with friends,  
 I'm still alone, even though it was the opposite not long ago.  
 Tell me what to do for you to be here,  
 One part of me is with you, and the other part has no boundaries!  
 If you don't see me now, you cannot understand my soul,  
 Your absence buries me every day.  
 Always traveling, away from you my solitude will be strong,  
 Never to lose, I would hold on to you!  
 Darling just please accept that the world corrupted me,  
 I don't feel if those sips of the drink kill me.  
 My sorrow is that I'm lost, I'm a needle in a haystack,  
 I don't see the contours, what was once a forest is now a savanna.  
 You'll be a memory that once released me,  
 Your face became a misty picture, because I did not grab your hand.

If you leave for ever I'll put flowers on your grave  
 And I'll mourn as long as I live in this world!  
 If you leave for ever I'll put flowers on your grave  
 And I'll mourn as long as I live in this world!

Chorus (2x)

20

Punnany Massif is a Hungarian *társadalomfunk* or “culture funk” band formed by the radio-hosts Máté Felcser and Roland Farkas. Their music involves mostly rapping, some singing, and emphasizes the beat. Their first album, *Körkorkép*, released in 2006, attempts to illustrate the everyday life of a Hungarian person. Their 2011 album *Sun Kick*, from which I have selected a song to analyze, is about similar topics of Hungarian life and identity. In 2009, the band won national music and hip-hop awards for best song, best music video, and best lyrics. They were also nominated for the MTV Europe Music Award for Best Hungarian Act in 2011.

The song *Masfel Hete*, (For A Week and A Half), combines a popular folk dance tune with rap to sing about the loss of love. The original folk song, also titled *Masfél Hete*, is about searching for your love who disappeared a week and a half ago. The song is strophic, following an ABAA rhyme scheme, with eleven syllables per line. The melody is pentatonic, and the melodic contour ascends in the first two lines and descends in the final two lines of each stanza. The tune is originally monophonic, though it would be natural to add accompaniment. The tempo is giusto: dancelike and unchanging. In every way, this tune is a folksong.

The track begins with the sound of crickets and the singers vocalizing the melody of the folk tune. At 0:27, a guitar enters, followed shortly by a *cimbalom* and *citera*. The chordal instruments follow and support the melody, creating a heterophonic texture. At 0:59, words are finally introduced in the form of rapping, “for a week and a half I can think of nothing else.” A strong backbeat groove (“boots and cats”) and aeolian harmonies are introduced. For 42 seconds, the singer raps about his breakup, using imagery like *színes révünkre pedig marad a kopár táj* or “on our colorful harbor a desolate landscape remains,” and *hisz nincs velem pajzsom, pillantásod tükre, azt, hogy meglássam, hogy a fény ráragyog az életünkre* or “I don’t have my shield, the

reflection in your glance, to see that light shines on our lives.” The folk tune in the voices and chordophones accompany the text in intermittent interjections. An instrumental interlude from 1:40-1:52 introduces the violin and reintroduces the *cimbalom* on the melody, with plucked arpeggiated harmonies on guitar.

At 1:52, the rapping returns with a heavier beat groove. A flute, trumpet, whistling, piano, and electro-acoustically engineered sounds are introduced into the texture. From 2:47 to 3:50, the band sings the folk tune with chordal throbbing chordal accompaniment (likely engineered), with a beat added at the second refrain. At 3:51, the rapping, crickets, and non-folk instruments return. The guitar arpeggiates the chordal accompaniment to the folk tune in the background. After the final phrase, *ha végleg elmész ültetek a sírodra virágot, s így gyászolok, míg élek én egy egész világot* or “if you finally leave I will plant flowers on your grave and grieve the whole world for as long as I live,” the sung folk tune returns a final time with traditional instruments, closing with a heavy beat in the final refrain.

*Másfél Hete* combines a traditional folk tune with American popular music (hiphop) style to create a song about the life of a Hungarian in modern Hungary. The influence of folk is clear, as it serves as the basis from which the song is developed: the melody and subject are from a folksong. The original tune is an ideal chorus for a Hungarian pop song because it is already known by all Hungarians and they can immediately sing along. The folksong is also a dance tune, which appeals to club scenes and young people who enjoy energized music. The influence of hiphop is evident in the electronic backing, production-style, and rapping. Hiphop is a style of popular music that consists of stylized rhythmic music (built around drum beats) that commonly accompanies rapping. It is also commonplace for hiphop songs to include sampling of other

songs.<sup>21</sup> In *Másfél Hete*, the equivalent of a “sample” is the use of the original folk tune.

Punanny Massif often uses folksongs as a basis to their music—it is innate to their music making. When the band combines their natural knowledge of folk music with pop music sounds of the West, they create a distinctly folk-pop sound.

2) “Kocsi-út az éjszakában” (Road in the Night) - Misztrál

### **Kocsi-út az éjszakában**

Milyen csonka ma a Hold,  
Az éj milyen sivatag, néma,  
Milyen szomorú vagyok én ma,  
Milyen csonka ma a Hold.

Minden Egész eltörött,  
Minden láng csak részekben lobban,  
Minden szerelem darabokban,  
Minden Egész eltörött.

Fut velem egy rossz szekér,  
Utána mintha jajszó szállna,  
Félig mély csönd és félig lárma,  
Fut velem egy rossz szekér.

### **Road in the Night**

How broken is the Moon,  
How deserted, speechless is the night,  
How sorrowful I am, how finite,  
How broken is the Moon.

Every Whole is broken now,  
Every light is scattered and flashing,  
Every love is splitting and crashing,  
Every Whole is broken now.

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My old horse-cart's running slow,  
 I hear someone moaning far behind,  
 Silence and noise entwined in the mind,  
 My old horse-cart's running slow.

Translation by Szabó Attila Henrik<sup>22</sup>

Misztrál formed in 1977 with band members Miklós Heinczinger who plays recorders, clarinet, *doromb* (jaw's-harp), and sings, Gábor Pusztai who plays percussion, Tamás Tóbisz Tinelli who plays guitars and sings, and Máté Török who plays cello, guitar, mandolin, lute, and sings. Their repertoire consists of primarily Hungarian and foreign poems as folksong-adaptations. Their work stems from tradition of Hungarian folk music, often mixed with certain branches of contemporary world music. They have released 12 albums, established a three-day Misztrál Festival, and have won the Béla Bartók Award in 2006, the Bálint Balassi Medallion in 2008, and the Hungarian Arts Award in 2012. Misztrál performs regularly across Hungary, and has also performed abroad, including in the United States.

Misztrál's song "Kocsi-út az éjszakában" (Road in the Night) is an adaptation of a poem by Ady Endre, one of the greatest Hungarian poets of the 20th century. The poem is three stanzas in an ABBA rhyme scheme with seven syllables in A lines and nine syllables in B lines. The poem depicts heartbreak as a barren night on a road with a wagon that is simultaneously silent and noisy. The song begins with a melody with harmonization in aeolian. At 0:41, a bass drum is introduced to indicate the part of the poem when a bad wagon is "running" with the poet. At 1:02 there is a pause before the word "eltörött" or broken, and then voices drop out and an electric

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<sup>22</sup> Endre Ady, "Kocsi-út az éjszakában (Night Wagon)." Babelmatrix. accessed May 6, 2023. [http://www.babelmatrix.org/works/hu/Ady\\_Endre-1877/Kocsi-%C3%BAt\\_az\\_%C3%A9jszak%C3%A1ban/en/53537-Night\\_Wagon](http://www.babelmatrix.org/works/hu/Ady_Endre-1877/Kocsi-%C3%BAt_az_%C3%A9jszak%C3%A1ban/en/53537-Night_Wagon).

bass begins to play. At 1:10, drumset, guitar, and tambura is introduced, and at 1:28 the doromb increases intensity and drive until the voices return at 1:43. For the remainder of the song the voices, drum set, and bass alternate with the full instrumental ensemble.

Misztrál uses folksongs and folk music as the basis of their music, but adapts them into modern contexts with popular musical and performance style. “Kocsi-út az éjszakában” is modal, the form is strophic, and it is melodically focused, as folksongs often are. Additionally, the rhythm of the song follows the syllables of the poem, with an emphasis on the first syllable of each word. The instrumentation is a combination of folk instruments, such as the tambura and doromb, with instruments used in popular music, such as the guitar, drum set, and electric bass. Misztrál is nationally recognized and performs at popular venues across Hungary. Their show production includes lighting effects and banter between songs—a method used in popular music. Their success and renown has popularized their distinct approach to music-making, which is heavily influenced by folk music. In this way, they have kept the folk sound at the forefront of trends in the modern Hungarian musical landscape.

3) “Ha Én Rózsa Volnék” (If I Were a Rose) - János Bródy

### **Ha Én Rózsa Volnék**

Ha én rózsza volnék, nem csak egyszer nyílnék,  
Minden évben négyszer virágba borulnék,  
Nyílnék a fiúnak nyílnék én a lánynak  
Az igaz szerelemnek és az elmúlásnak.

Ha én kapu volnék, mindig nyitva állnék,  
Akárhonnan jönne, bárkit beengednék,  
Nem kérdezném tőle, hát téged ki küldött,  
Akkor lennék boldog, ha mindenki eljött.

Ha én ablak volnék, akkora nagy lennék,



Hogy az egész világ láthatóvá váljék,  
 Megértő szemekkel átnéznének rajtam,  
 Akkor lennék boldog, ha mindent megmutattam.

Ha én utca volnék, mindig tiszta lennék,  
 Minden áldott este fényben megfürödnék,  
 És ha egyszer rajtam lánckerék taposna,  
 Alattam a föld is sírva beomolna.

Ha én zászló volnék, sohasem lobognék,  
 Mindenféle szélnek haragosa lennék,  
 Akkor lennék boldog, ha kifeszítenének,  
 S nem lennék játéka mindenféle szélnek.

### **If I Were a Rose**

If I were a rose, to hide I'd have no reason,  
 I would bare my flowers each and every season,  
 I'd blossom for the boy, I'd blossom for the girl,  
 I'd blossom for true love, and for the passing world.

If I were a gate, I would always welcome  
 Every traveler, no matter where they came from,  
 I would never ask them, "hey, who sent you here,"  
 I would be delighted, if everyone were near.

If I were a window, wide open and grand,  
 You could gaze right through me, all across the land,  
 I'd reveal the world to understanding eyes  
 Show you every wonder 'neath our starry skies.

If I were a street, I'd always be gleaming,  
 I would bathe in brightness every blessed evening,  
 And if heavy armor tread upon my skin,  
 The very ground below would weep and then cave in.

If I were a banner, rarely would I wave,  
 No wind would dare tell me how I should behave,  
 I would be most joyful, if they stretched me thin,  
 Never be a plaything of any blasting wind.

Translation by József Váradi<sup>23</sup>

János Bródy is a pop singer-songwriter, guitarist, composer, and scriptwriter. He was a member of the bands Illés and Fonográf and he also had a solo career; he was a major figure of the Hungarian music scene in the 60s-90s. In 1982, he composed the cult rock opera “István a Király” (Stephen the King), and has written many other successful theatrical compositions, too. Like Tamás Cseh, he has won both the Kossuth and Liszt Ferenc award.

*Ha Én Rózsa Volnék*, (If I Was a Flower) was written by Bródy and made popular by Zsuzsa Koncz, another Hungarian pop star. The song is covertly anti-Communist; its lyrics are about wishing for better things. In the text, the author describes different scenarios in which she is an object: a rose that blooms every season, a gate that is always open, a window that is open wide, a street that is always clean, and a flag that is stretched tightly. Through these analogies, she conveys a desire for freedom and the promise of living up to its ideal. Much like the aforementioned popsongs and folksongs, this song is organized into four-line stanzas. The rhyme scheme is AABB with twelve syllables per line. The sung melody is and guitar accompaniment is minor and remains the same from stanza to stanza. Because the musical material is unchanging from beginning to end, it is not necessary to discuss it with time stamps. The instrumentation and storytelling suggests the influence of American folk and folk rock music. The singer-songwriter approach is typical of many popular artists in the folk world and otherwise: Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, and Taylor Swift all began writing and playing music by singing with their guitars. Bródy uses the same approach, but retains elements of Hungarian folk music.

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<sup>23</sup> If I was rose (Ha én rózsa volnék)." LyricsTranslate. Accessed May 6, 2023. <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/ha-en-rozsa-volnek-if-i-was-rose.html>.

## **Conclusion**

The influence of Hungarian folk music on the musical attitudes of musicians in Hungary is profound, and this influence is particularly evident in the development of popular music in the country, which has been shaped and filtered through the lens of traditional folk music. Many Hungarian popular songs and styles incorporate elements of traditional folk music, such as the use of traditional instruments like the cimbalom and the violin, and the inclusion of folk melodies and rhythms. Additionally, the unique harmonic structures and modalities of Hungarian folk music have influenced the development of modern Hungarian music, including popular music genres like rock, pop, and electronic dance music. The integration of folk elements into popular music has allowed for a continuation of traditional Hungarian musical traditions while also embracing contemporary musical trends, resulting in a rich and diverse musical landscape in Hungary.

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