

# THE RESEARCH HISTORY AND THE CHANGE OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE FOLK MUSIC OF THE GYIMES REGION

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## **Abstract**

Folk music research of the Gyimes-region began almost at the same time as the collection of folk music in other Hungarian language territories. Béla Vikár already researched this region in 1903-1904 and then László Lajtha collected here in 1912. Oszkár Dincser and János Jagamas played an important role during this early period in terms of instrumental folk music collection. Later, the research of instrumental folk music was greatly influenced by the flourishing folk dance research attributed to György Martin and Zoltán Kallós. Their work *A gyimesi csángók táncélete és táncai* [The Dance Life and Dances of the Gyimes Csángos] gave the first insight into the Gyimes folk music and dance life. Today, Gyimes folk music is well-known and quite popular not only among ethnomusicologists but also folk music lovers, thanks to its unusual sound, composition of instruments, rich dance and folk custom material, and the immeasurable amount of sound and imagery collection that remained from the last century. Folk music research in this region can be divided into three periods: before the 1970s it was collected only by ethnomusicologists within the musicians' traditional environment. After the 1970s, thanks to the revival movement, enthusiastic amateurs also went to the region to record folk music, and after the 1990s – once the political situation has allowed – many Gyimes musicians travelled to Hungary and abroad with the help of folk music collectors. Since then the methodology of folk music collection has also changed considerably. The incremental growth in the amount of music that has been recorded is largely due to the technical development of audio and video devices: using modern technology allows for in depth examination of not only the melodies but also the ways of performance, because both video and sound is now available basically in an unlimited amount. In my presentation, after a brief summary of research history, I would like to show how the evolution of collection methodology influenced what we know today about the Gyimes folk music, focusing especially on instrumental music and manner of performance. To represent this progress, I will give a short overview of the studies on the subject enriched with early and late transcriptions and musical recordings, and I would also like to highlight how the popularity of this region may have affected its musicians' way of performance.

Keywords: *folk music research, Gyimes, collection methodology, performance style*

## **1. Introduction**

The beginning of the history of research in Gyimes coincides with the start of folk music collection by phonograph in the Hungarian language area. Today, Gyimes folk music is well-known and especially popular not only among ethnomusicologists but folk music lovers, thanks to its unusual sound, instrumental composition, rich dance and customary material, and the immense amount of sound and image collections that have been preserved from the last century. Between these two periods, the methodology of ethnomusicology has also evolved and changed a great deal: using modern technology allows for in depth examination of not only the melodies but also the ways of performance, because both video and sound is now available basically in an unlimited amount.

In the following pages I would like to show how the evolution of collection methodology influenced what we know today about the Gyimes folk music, focusing especially on instrumental music and manner of performance.

## 2. Research history of the folk music of the Gyimes region

According to the database of the Institute of Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, a total of sixty-four recordings were made in the area before 1912: Béla Vikár made twenty-seven recordings in Nagygyimes in 1903-1904, and László Lajtha collected in the same area and in Gyimesközéplek in 1912. In addition to the vocal material, Béla Vikár's recordings include whistled instrumental dance tunes and songs performed on the shepherd's pipe, while László Lajtha's recordings include hummed instrumental dance tunes. After the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, the redrawn borders made it difficult for Hungarian ethnomusicologists to collect in Gyimes, so for a long time after this period mainly folk music collectors living in Transylvania reached the area. Although he was not of Transylvanian origin, the first to record instrumental folk music from Gyimes was Oszkár Dincser in 1940-1942, only two of his 71 recordings on tape are vocal. Subsequently, he was the first to write a summary of the musical culture of the county of Csík, named *Két Csíki hangszer. Mozsika és gardon*. [*Two instruments of Csík, mozsika and gardon*]. [1] In the study, Dincser also touched on folk harmonisation, describing the use of fingerings for the accompaniment he had set down. In his research, he used methods that would later become standard in American ethnomusicology. [2]

János Jagamas was among the first collectors to go on a collecting trip to Kászon and Alesík in 1942, influenced by his teacher, Zoltán Kodály. [3] The interesting thing about his instrumental recordings from Gyimesbükk of 1949 is that, in contrast to the two-piece orchestra we know today, we can hear a three-piece orchestra with a viola. It is also important to note that Jagamas is the first to mention Gyimes as a separate dialect in folk music research, in his 1956 dialect study. [4]

The next milestone in folk music research in Gyimes was the work of Zoltán Kallós, whose method of collecting music was different from the common practice: he did not just move to the area for a few days or weeks, but observed the community for years, so he could find out what he could ask questions about and what he could hear in different situations. He lived in Gyimes between 1958-66, and as early as 1960 he published a study on the Gyimes lament, in which he writes in detail about the function of the lament, the variation of melodies and texts belonging to the genre, accompanied by notes of nearly sixty melodies. [5]

After the Jagamas collection period, the research of instrumental music was decisively influenced by the rise of folk dance research. György Martin advanced research not only by increasing the collection, but also by clarifying the function of instrumental music. Zoltán Kallós' study entitled *A gyimesi csángók táncélete és táncai* [The Dance Life and Dances of the Gyimes Csángós], written in collaboration with György Martin, is the first summary of Gyimes folk music and dance life. [6] In addition to a description of the different dance forms and dance types, the study also contains important musical information. These include an introduction to the Gyimes orchestra, a mention of the fiddlers who played at that time, a description of the dance cycles, and a description of the basic beats of the various dances (which, by definition, also means the basic beats of the music) and the melodies associated with them. Also from the collections of Kallós and Martin, a publication entitled *Tegnap a Gyimesbe' jártam...* [Yesterday, I went to the Gyimes...] was published, edited by Mária Domokos, with an introductory essay by László Kósa entitled *A gyimesi csángók hagyományos élete* [The Traditional Life of the Gyimes Csángós]. [7]

From the 1970s onwards, with the launch of the revival movement, the number of collections increased dramatically, not only because of scientific interest, but also because of the growing

popularity of folk music, which attracted many folk music enthusiasts. Collecting was given a new impetus in the 1990s thanks to the change in the political situation. In addition to the possibility of collecting in the field, it became possible to travel easily from Hungary to Romania and vice versa, and even to distant countries, and thanks to the spread of digital sound and video recording devices, the making of recordings became accessible to practically anyone.

### **3. Research methodology**

#### *3.1 Research methodology in general*

Many folk music researcher has written about what makes a good researcher and how to collect folk music. Firstly, Béla Bartók, in *Miért és hogyan gyűjtsünk népzeneét?* [Why and How to Collect Folk Music], lays down the basic principles of folk music collecting and outlines the knowledge that a good folk music collector needs to possess. [8] In this paper, he states that folk music collecting requires systematic, scientific research, and the job of the collector is far from easy. In his words, "[...] the ideal folk music collector must be a true polymath." In addition, the location and circumstances of collection can have a significant impact on the musician which István Pávai wrote about at length in his book. [9] It is best if the recording is made at a functional occasion – such as a wedding, christening, dance – which is not created for the sake of the collector, who is only a passive participant in the event. In this case, everything happens according to tradition, in its own way. The next level of ethnographic authenticity is when the musician is in his or her own familiar, traditional environment, and the researcher can interview and record him or her there. The best way to gain the singer's or musician's trust is to spend several days, even weeks, in the village, living with the people and trying to observe tradition in all aspects of life, as Zoltán Kallós did in the 1950s. However, it is not considered an ethnographically authentic recording if the musician is taken out of his or her original environment and performs in a city dance occasion, on stage, or in a performance, often together with other – urban – musicians. People who have left their homes may be so far removed from their musical community that their performance style may be radically altered, and there will be no interaction between the singer and his or her fellow villagers, and the real function of the songs will only be observed in their traditional context, in their communal use. Since the task of a professional musician has traditionally been to serve their audience – by which we also mean knowing melodies that the traditional community has already forgotten and also those they still use – it is also their task to adapt quickly to new needs. For this reason, one cannot ignore the fact that differences in performance style can, and in this case do, change the musical fabric, i.e. in two different performances the notes and their number can vary due to different ornamentation and figuration.

#### *3.2 Research methodology of the Gyimes region*

In the context of our knowledge of the folk music of Gyimes, it is important to mention the methodology and development of collection-methodology. In the early days of folk music collecting, the production of recordings was limited and expensive, it was not possible to collect an unlimited amount of material, so transcriptions were more important. In the case of vocal folk music, transcriptions may be sufficient, but the complex rhythms and ornamentation of the instrumental folk music of the Gyimes make notation alone less suitable for expressing the performance style. With the advent of the tape recorder and later digital technology, longer sound recordings made it possible to record longer melody and dance cycles, allowing the melodies to be recorded in their entirety in their original functions, such as weddings, funerals and other dance occasions.

The possibility of video recording has opened the way to analyse the function of dance music, as well as to the analysis of hitherto unexplored phenomena of instrumental folk music, such as the study of the fingering of each fiddlers and the characteristics of bowing. The analysis of the *lassú magyaros* [slow Hungarian dance] with the help of video has greatly facilitated the interpretation of its complex rhythm, which is a simplified form of the *sánta lassú dúvő* [limping slow dúvő] accompaniment-type – an asymmetric form of rhythm accompaniment – common in Transylvania. [10]

#### 4. Conclusion

The development of ethnomusicology gives us the opportunity to observe many new elements compared to the beginning. At the same time, today's folk music researcher is faced with an even greater task in certain respects: collections must be viewed with a critical eye, and in addition to the musical material, it is also necessary to pay attention to where and under what circumstances the recordings were made, how and to what extent it is documented, and it is also necessary to know what and how the musician was asked questions about the melodies he or she played.

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