

FROM CAFÉ TO STAGE TO MUSEUM: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE GYPSY MUSIC INDUSTRY IN 20TH-CENTURY HUNGARY

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With a few exceptions, the scholarly literature on Hungary's Gypsy music remains frozen in an increasingly remote past, in what Budapest journalist Imre Déri in 1912 called "the old patriarchal relationship between the Gypsies and the gentlemen-merry-makers." Yet Gypsy musicians thrived in the twentieth century, through dramatic social and economic changes, adapting to new institutional frameworks and audience expectations. In the early days of the Hungarian Radio, culture brokers attempted to regularize sound production to fit the technical demands of this new medium, in the process asserting new controls over the musicians; their proposed changes led to a public conflict with the musicians, the "Gypsy war" of 1934. Under socialism the state initially strove to break the "feudalist-capitalist" framework of the previous system by closing restaurants, but then reopened them as sites for workers' entertainment and tourist revenue; additionally, Hungary's professional folk ensembles (created there and throughout the East bloc after the model of Igor Moiseyev's ensemble in the USSR) filled the ranks of their orchestras with Gypsy musicians almost exclusively until the 1980s. Using oral history interviews and journalistic and archival sources, this essay shows how these artists sought both economic stability and recognition as they negotiated changing conditions.

Keywords: Hungary, Gypsy music, economic history, Communism, Roma, music, magyar nóta

They pulled up chairs around the now devastated supper table and called for more champagne. This was the moment when Laji Pongrácz came into his own and he played with renewed fervor, wittily titillating his hearers by subtly juxtaposing the tunes of all those he knew to be involved in courtship or dispute. Laji never forgot anyone's special tune, nor who was or had been in love with which girl and who no longer spoke to who. ... the tunes he played chronicled the loves and hates of more than a quarter of a century. With a roguish look in his eye he would gaze pointedly at the man to whose past the music referred. Sometimes he would step close to someone, his violin barely audible, just breathing an old tune in their ears and sometimes, with a wild flourish he would

make everyone laugh as they recalled a forgotten scandal. ... Most of the company were pretty drunk... (Bánffy 2009, 227–229)

With a few exceptions, the literature on Hungary's Gypsy music (see note at end of article about use of this term) remains frozen in an increasingly remote past. The assumption that this genre is part of the past goes back at least to 1912, when Budapest journalist Imre Déri defined it as emerging from the (already declining) "old patriarchal relationship between the Gypsies and the gentlemen-merry-makers" (cited in Sárosi 2012, 104). That relationship, and the social functions of this genre more generally, is at the core of the scene from the first volume of Count Miklós Bánffy's *Transylvanian Trilogy* that appears as the epigraph. This passage happens around dawn at the "last ball of the Carnival season," after the ladies have retired and the men are all sitting together, taking "their last chance for some months of seeing each other all together" (Bánffy 2009, 227); it features a specific historical musician, Lajos Pongrácz (1844–1915), a Gypsy violinist from Kolozsvár/Cluj, who was known as the favorite Gypsy bandleader of Archduke Rudolf (see Sárosi 2012, 148–150). Despite its specificity, both narrative and historical, it could apply to much of Hungary's urban Gypsy music performance tradition at a time when, as Judit Frigyesi wrote, many believed that "the Hungarian soul... express[ed] itself in [G]ypsy music" (1998, 55).

The novel shares this emphasis on "pastness" with much scholarship on Hungarian Gypsy music—though instead of relying on a discourse of nostalgia, as Bánffy often does in his novel, scholars and critics tend to look at this music through a lens of "tradition," whether explicitly or implicitly. But this focus on the pastness in the literature on Gypsy music obscures the ways that it changed as "the modes of cultural reproduction change"—"as traditions become mass-produced, as cultural artifacts become commodified, as intimate performances become available to large audiences" (Appadurai, Korom, and Mills 1991, 21–22).

According to some tradition-based narratives, these changes constitute decline. And yet by many measures Gypsy music thrived in the twentieth century, until its post-socialist collapse. This brief essay offers a preliminary sketch of how Gypsy musicians adapted to new institutional frameworks and audience expectations in the twentieth century.

Recording, Radio, and Restaurants: Changing Contexts, Changing Aesthetics

To refer once again to the epigraph, Bánffy's description not only elegantly captures the interaction between Transylvanian high society and Pongrácz's band; it could also apply to much of Hungary's urban Gypsy music tradition. Particularly significant is the way Bánffy illustrates those elements of these musicians' per-

formance that are beyond technical aspects or specific repertoire: how it produced “a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion—even a sense of connectedness or community... what is essential to it, its in-person aspect, is really the creation and manipulation of affects” (Hardt 1999, 96). But the advent of recording and radio reshaped music audiences and models of music consumption in profound ways. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of these new technologies in transforming popular music from a kind of affective labor, a service profession that relied on the managing of emotions, in this case through music, to a commodity, whether packaged in consumable units—first cylinders, then discs—or as a stream, through broadcast.

That commodity was used not only to earn money but to spread “culture.” In the classical music realm, Mark Katz has documented the way in which the phonograph was used to propagate so-called “good music” throughout the United States, to provide cheap access to the “highest class” of musical material (2010, 83). The dominant recording format in the first half of the twentieth century was the 78RPM record, a 10- to 12-inch disc with a duration of 3 or 4 minutes per side. This limitation presented challenges to all who used it, but different solutions were favored in different genres. For classical works, that meant recording a work on multiple discs, since a recording could not be considered Beethoven’s Symphony no. 5 unless it included all the notes of Beethoven’s Symphony no. 5. For jazz or Hungarian Gypsy music, however, the musical texts are only a starting point, a tune and perhaps words, often appearing in different versions, and the number of verses, choruses, or solos could be—and were—altered to fit the format. In the words of one jazz critic, “for a musician with a lot to say it was like telling Dostoevsky to do *The Brothers Karamazov* as a short story” (cited in Katz 2010, 83). A brief reflection indicates that the listener’s experience of Hungarian Gypsy music on a three- to four-minute recording would be completely different from the type of free-wheeling medley of songs described in Bánffy’s text.

In part, it seems, because of the limitations of contemporary recording formats, the Hungarian Radio in its early period frequently relied on live broadcasts—including live broadcasts of Gypsy bands from the restaurants where they customarily played, despite whatever chaos (from singing and talking patrons to clanking dishes) that might ensue. Gypsy music was a cornerstone of interwar Hungarian radio programming, appearing almost every night; according to polling of radio subscribers in 1927, 1933, and 1941, it was the most popular genre (Legrády 2011, section 5.1; Tiszay and Falk 1944, 325–326). But it also seems that the terms granted by the radio to Gypsy musicians in general were less than ideal, and this new context highlighted once again the sharp divide between Gypsy musicians and classical musicians. In September 1929, a cover article in the trade publication *A Magyarország rádiója* [Hungary’s radio] discussing the contentious negotiations working to broadcast from the Opera House stated that

The Opera and the artists of the Opera may not put themselves in the position that the Gypsy bands have occupied working in the cafés, that in return for broadcasting Gypsy music from the café for free, the Radio hires them to appear from time to time for pay in the studio as well. (“Az Operaház és a radio harca” 1929, 19–20)

This comment—clearly secondary to the author’s topic—appears to indicate that the Gypsy musicians did not get paid for many, perhaps most, of these early broadcasts, except through the restaurants that hosted those broadcasts and their patrons. Meanwhile, the unpredictability of live broadcasts from restaurants surely violated the aesthetic ideals of many at the studio; a 1929 letter from the director of the Radio, Miklós Kozma, indicates that they “gradually want[ed] to stop broadcasting from cafés” (MOL K429).

As the listenership of the Radio grew, this arrangement became more problematic. In late February 1934, a dispute that came to be called the “Gypsy War” broke out when the Radio attempted to institute a so-called “Gypsy voivode” or “Gypsy censor,” a non-Roma lawyer named Endre Spur, who had become one of the Radio’s experts on Gypsy music, to approve programs ahead of time. The bands were to appear at the radio building an hour before their studio broadcast—time that the musicians earlier would have had free, or might have used for rehearsal—and play their entire program for this non-musician “monitor.” Many of the musicians objected, however, and when the radio did not back down immediately, the Gypsy musicians went on strike. Spokesmen for the radio appealed to the press, attacking both the technical skill and the artistic judgment of the Gypsy musicians: saying that the bands did not play enough of the good old Hungarian repertoire, relying too much on “fashionable” “modern” hits; that they repeated items too often; and that the overall quality of performance was uneven. A piece in *Rádió Élet* [Radio Life], the magazine put out by the Radio itself, averred that

even the undersigned primásés [that is, leaders of the strike] could not deny that the music brought in front of the microphone by Gypsy orchestras does not always hit the measure that the radio audience may expect, and that is worthy of representing our national interests for the radio’s public beyond the national borders. (“A rádió álláspontja,” 1934, 15, cited by Légrády 2011)

In another column in *Rádió Élet*, Endre Spur, the new monitor, presented his role in this process as “the audience’s representative”: “we will talk everything out in a friendly manner, out of which [process] there will arise increased enjoyment for the listeners, and ethical utility for [the musicians]” (“Beszélgetés a nótáról” 1934, 5). But for the musicians, having this non-Roma non-musician act

as the judge did not sit well; they were the experts, and some deference was due their expertise. The musicians' statement that appeared in the newspaper *Pesti napló* made that claim clear:

We have been playing for three hundred years, and now he [Endre Spur] comes and wants to teach us how to play. Let him stand in front of the microphone if he knows better than we do, who have spread the fame of Hungarian folk music all over the world. (cited in Sárosi 2012, 334)

Part of this conflict clearly reflects the power differential between classes and races. The Hungarian radio authorities viewed the Roma performers as “mere... tradition bearers” (Bohlman 1988, 71); as radio director Miklós Kozma put it, the matter at hand in the “Gypsy war” was “not actually about the Gypsies’ question [or the ‘Gypsy question’] but rather about developing Hungarian folk-style music, *for which the Gypsy is only a performance implement*, to a higher level” ([Kozma] 1934, 15; emphasis added). (A survey of *Rádió Élet*’s coverage of the so-called “Gypsy War” indicates that the radio still used the terms *népdal* [folk-song], *népzene* [folk music], *népies zene* [folk-like music], *magyar nóta* [Hungarian song], and *cigányzene* [Gypsy music] more or less interchangeably in the mid-1930s, despite the ongoing efforts of Bartók and Kodály.) There was also a crucial financial aspect to this dispute, as the Radio had been undercompensating the musicians for much of their time.

But these were far from the only issues here: the broadcast medium demanded a different sound than the café or restaurant. Even absent the time limitations posed by the 78 RPM recording format, the broadcast, in rendering the performers and audience invisible to each other, tended to prefer a more rehearsed, less improvisatory, “cleaner” sound. In Kozma’s words, “the radio want[ed] to ... exert its influence to [shape] how Gypsy music comes before the public via the microphone... The Gypsy, like every other orchestra, must be schooled and monitored for technical reasons [related to the] microphone.” ([Kozma] 1934, 15–16)

Gypsy Music Under State Socialism: Breaks and Continuities with the Past

Whereas the interwar period was rife with nostalgia for the past, including the Gypsy musicians’ “old patriarchal relationship [with] gentlemen-merry-makers,” the state-socialist period worked to break with that past. As the government prepared in late 1949 to nationalize the Hungarian Radio, the music department of the Radio prepared a plan for reforming the “pseudo-romantic, rootless music of feudal-capitalism, namely the rubato-filled ‘magyar nóta’

singing and the headlong-accelerating fast *csárdás* of Gypsy music-making” (“*Javaslat a szórakoztatató muzsika kérdésében*”). This was not just a matter for the Radio but for society at large, as in the words of well-known *primás* Sándor Déki Lakatos:

... in the 1950s they closed the cafés, they threw the Gypsy musician out the window along with the billiard table... They closed the cafés, there wasn't music in the restaurants, and then the Roma moved into those big orchestras (interview with author, March 2012)

Déki Lakatos indicated some of the many ways in which Budapest's urban Gypsy music industry was transformed at this time. Other scholars' studies of Budapest's hospitality industry have confirmed how drastically it shrank during World War II, from 167 cafés in the capital in 1938 to 90 by 1947, among which 20 more closed in a “short time”—bringing the total down to less than half of what it had been before the war (Csapó 2004, 204). At the end of the forties, there were 1,200 hospitality establishments altogether, compared to 3,500 in 1938. Leading up to and in the period following the nationalization of the hospitality industry in January 1949, the numbers of establishments shrank everywhere; in one central Pest district, the Seventh, there was a reduction from 140 establishments before nationalization to forty afterward (Bodor 2004, 292–293). Their styles also transformed, as the richly decorated “silver-mirrored café” (in the words of the song) – a place for leisurely discussion and socializing, often accompanied by Gypsy music – gave way to the “*eszpresszó*”—usually a more modest establishment where workers could eat and get out. The drop in quantity and the shift in the quality of establishments yielded a crash in employment for Gypsy musicians, in a context where there had long been more musicians than positions to start with.

At the same time, “according to the principle of socialist distribution” all the social and economic benefits of citizenship were to be linked to citizens' contributions, in the words of Hungary's 1951 Labor Code, “according to the quantity and quality of their labor” (Pittaway 2012, 116). Many Hungarian Roma had long filled important roles in rural economies—as smiths, horse-dealers, basket-weavers, pot-menders, trench carvers, and agricultural day-laborers, as well as entertainers—but these roles were almost all outside of conventional wage labor, and many of them were in sectors that the Communists' planned industrialization would soon abolish. The national drive to transform all of Hungary's adult citizens into laborers implied an obligation on behalf of officialdom to apply this principle to the Roma minority as well as the non-Roma majority, and as the most linguistically and culturally integrated portion of the Roma population, the restaurant musicians might have been considered the easiest group to work with. Compelling those musicians to operate “on the books” seems like an obvious

goal in this time when the party was working furiously (if not always effectively) to optimize the productivity of the nation's workforce.

Therefore various corners of the newly nationalized music industry set about reshaping Gypsy music in their own image. The most public element of this reshaping was the state-sponsored folk ensembles: the Honvéd (Army) Ensemble, founded in 1949; the Radio Folk Ensemble, founded in 1950; the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble, founded in 1951; and the Rajkó Ensemble—the Gypsy Orchestra of the Communist Youth League—founded in 1952, among others. These “folk orchestras” in Hungary were part of a boom in folk music and dance ensembles throughout the East Bloc, following the Soviet model led by the State Academic Ensemble of Folk Dances of the Peoples of the USSR (still in operation and now known as the Moiseyev Dance Company), to perform the music and dance of the people for the people. In the words of Igor Moiseyev, the founding director of this company, these performances of “folk art, the art of the people,” were “a splendid means of educating the masses, for [they] can speak their own language, simple, colourful, and replete with wisdom” (quoted in Shay 2002, 74). Professional folk ensembles were the embodiment of Zhdanov's dictum: their use of folk music sources and costumes were “national in form,” but “socialist in content” (Frolova-Walker 1998, 331, quoting Stalin 1934), highlighting the optimism and accessibility the cultural authorities sought in folk art while leaving behind the “backwardness” of their peasant associations.

In some countries, notably Bulgaria, folk orchestras deliberately homogenized their representation of their country's music culture, either disguising Roma musicians as non-Roma (personal communication, Shaun Williams) or trying to keep traces of the substantial contribution of Roma to that culture off the stage entirely (Buchanan 2005, 265–266). In Hungary, the idea of representing Hungarian national “folk” music without Romani musicians—at least to a popular audience—was almost unthinkable; on the other hand, this fact had long been a point of tension (see Hooker 2013). So the fact that the majority of professional “folk musicians” in the state-socialist period ensembles were Roma was minimized. Officially, Hungary's state-run folk ensembles were all called “Folk Orchestras” for the bulk of the state socialist period. Although Lakatos' group for the Hungarian Radio was created as a “Gypsy orchestra,” by January 1951, *Magyar Rádió*, the Radio's house periodical, without fanfare, dropped that name in favor of the label “Radio Folk Orchestra” (“Egy nap a rádióban” 1951, 3).

More important than the name of such ensembles was the change in mission, and with it something of a change in repertoire. This “Folk Orchestra,” led by Lakatos, was created to lead in

[...] the battle against the ‘café’ style, in order to lead Gypsy music back to where it started: to *folk music* [...] Uncle Zsiga Rác [an older primás

and supervisor at the radio] says, “finally we have arrived where we can play what we want to play: we give the songs of the people, the music of the people, back to them on our instruments.” (“Bemutatjuk a Rádió Cigányzenekart” 1950, 8)

Another article from *Magyar Rádió* from 1952, announcing an award won by a recording in which the Radio Folk Orchestra appeared, celebrated the liberation of music once tainted by “the tattered genteel ranks of mindless revelry and café folksong-forgeries” and its (supposed) new-found reach, via radio and recording, to broader and deeper publics:

Folk [or people’s] music [népzene] has been purified ... it has reached the hearts that can delight in the message of crystal-clear art. They listen to it in the village, where listeners gathered for a rest around the culture house’s loudspeakers, the [radio] gear of the cooperatives, the folk radios of the small houses, and the ‘line’ [radio] box recognize their own songs—they listen to it in the city, where many now get to know the true folk music; they listen to it beyond the borders, where this music speaks of a friendly people... (B. J. 1952, 5)

To re-state in a less propagandistic mode: broadcast and stage performances, organized in the capital and spread far and wide via radio and recordings, could promote repertoire that was considered more appropriate—the “true folk music,” following the principles of Bartók and Kodály—in a socialist-approved format, with the performers on a stage and none of the messy interaction with the audience that recalled the old “feudalist-capitalist” context from which Gypsy music emerged.

Yet at the same time, the old style of Hungarian reveling to the accompaniment of Gypsy music did not go away; a sort of “feudal-capitalist” environment for playing magyar nóta persisted in weddings and other private parties, and to some degree in restaurants. In these settings musicians could play “what they wanted” (interview with Sándor Déki Lakatos, March 2012) and what their patrons wanted. Even apparatchiks might have some attachment to politically incorrect repertoire in private. In the industrial town of Ózd, several hospitality establishments featuring Gypsy music came into being as the iron and steel works developed at the beginning of the twentieth century; the managers and the workers of these factories patronized these musicians just as the aristocrats did in Bánffy’s novels, but unlike Bánffy’s milieu, the social outlets around the factories, and the musicians who served them, continued to thrive through the socialist period (Dobosy and Farkas 2004, 1). Even in the dark days of the early 1950s, people wanted Gypsy music at their weddings and parties. Several musicians I have interviewed who played public roles in state-sponsored ensembles also continued to be in demand in the private sphere.

Indeed, despite the challenge of negotiating with those in power, the Kádár era was good to Gypsy musicians at almost every level in Hungary, not just stars like Lakatos or members of major state-sponsored ensembles. In the capital of Budapest, Gypsy music sounded all around the *körút*, from the Petőfi Bridge all the way back to Krisztinaváros. One musician interviewed claimed that Gypsy bands played at “every gas station” (interview with Sándor Kecskés, 2012). Building on—and coopting—the musicians’ labor organizations from earlier in the century, the official Gypsy musicians’ union, the National Center for Entertainment Musicians—the Országos Szórakoztató Zenészek Központ (or OSZK)—assisted musicians with job placement and licensed musicians according to their skill level: only “category A” musicians could lead a band at top establishments or on a tour abroad (see Fátyol 1986, Kállai 2002b for more on this system). Gypsy musicians represented Hungary for tourists in the country and on stages and in restaurants abroad; in return, the musicians had the freedom to travel accessible to few and coveted by many at that time.

In recent years only a handful of restaurants feature Gypsy music regularly, those do so with fewer and fewer musicians. Where in 1912 musicians might assert that the standard ensemble size was fourteen (Sárosi 2012, 108) and Bálint Sárosi states that the “classic” size is six (personal communication, April 2012), to this author’s knowledge no restaurant is fielding a band that large any longer on a regular basis—now four is considered a good size. As a result, in Ernő Kállai’s words, playing this genre in restaurants “as a way of making a living is almost extinct” (2002b, 75).

Though the recent decline has been steep, it has been a great surprise. Pressure has come from two directions. Probably the most abrupt in its impact was the change of regime and related changes in economic regulations, which simultaneously ended requirements that restaurants of a certain class employ musicians and subsidies for the musicians; as a result, in the words of one musician, many restaurateurs “threw them out even if they were under contract” (Kállai 2002b, 94). In the estimation of several people with whom I have spoken, formally and informally, musicians and non-musicians, most Hungarians no longer could afford to patronize restaurants that could afford to hire musicians. The “businessmen” who could afford them were not there to “celebrate while weeping” in the traditional Hungarian way, but to work out their business deals, and live music only interfered.

The second was a change of taste long in the making. “Gypsy music,” in particular the *magyar nóta*, was considered sentimental music of the past—and not even the good, “authentic” part of the past, going back at least to the beginning of the twentieth century, when Béla Bartók in a 1904 letter dismissed the genre as inauthentic “slop” (*slendrián*) (1976, 83), and his colleague and friend Zoltán Kodály condemned it as the “products of domestic folksong factories” in the 1906 forward

to their joint publication *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs* (1974, 10), and they argued for both the Hungarian and international music publics to leave behind the “fake” composed folksongs played by Gypsy bands for the more “genuine” (and genuinely Hungarian) musical expression of the rural peasantry. Even in the late 1950s, a time when Hungary’s cultural apparatus frequently featured ensembles of Romani musicians from the restaurant tradition on radio and in stage performances, an official from the Hungarian Radio followed Bartók and Kodály in distinguishing strongly between what was genuine and the music played by “Gypsy bands,” emphasizing at a conference of the International Folk Music Council

that most of the repertoire of these gypsy bands is composed of popular music rather than real folk music. Generally the gypsy bands cannot play the traditional folk songs. In order not to distort the folk music, composers are asked to harmonise and sometimes to score it for gypsy orchestras. But in many cases this is not enough to give the folk music piece its special flavour. (Grabócz 1959, 82)

This critique of the “unreal” nature of Gypsy music goes back at least as far as Bartók and Kodály, whose writings stressed how inauthentic the repertoire of these bands – particularly magyar nóta – is in contrast to the repertoire of “traditional folk songs” that arose among the rural peasantry. Lessons about the genre’s inauthenticity are to be found not only in the school curriculum but also in the táncház (dance house) movement, a “form of recreation in which folk music and folk dance appear in their original forms and functions as the ‘native language’ – musical language and body language – of those taking part” (Halmos 2000, 29); this movement began in the early 1970s, and a number of its founders have risen to become respected scholars and influential cultural administrators in today’s Hungary (see Quigley 2014).

The rise of the táncház movement came with a decline not only of Gypsy music but of employment for the musicians. Sándor Timár, director of the (amateur) Béla Bartók Dance Ensemble for twenty-two years and one of the pioneering dance teachers and choreographers of the movement, considered finding appropriate musical accompanists for the kind of dance he wanted to cultivate to be a continual problem; the urban Gypsy musicians “played Hungarian folk music in the Gypsy manner” (cigányosan), that is in the style of the urban restaurant tradition, and it was only when his ensemble started working with (non-Roma revivalist musicians) Ferenc Sebő and Béla Halmos around 1970 that he felt he had found people who could play the Transylvanian rural style in the appropriate manner (Abkarovits 2002, 136–137). By the late 1970s, journalist László Siklós observed Sebő working to teach urban restaurant musicians the rougher village style, but it was a challenge (2006 [1977], 35–36); overall, few musicians from the urban Gypsy music tradition fully invested themselves in the folk revival.

(The *táncház* movement since its beginning has relied heavily on village musicians, most of them Roma, but they have generally retained their village residences, even as they travel frequently to Budapest and other cities, in Hungary and abroad, as bearers of Hungarian village traditions (Quigley 2013; Hooker 2006, 54–56, 64).) When Timár took over as the artistic director of the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble in 1981 (Overholser 2010, ch. 2), he changed the ensemble's approach to music as well as dance, and that meant using non-Roma revivalists more than urban Roma musicians from the restaurant tradition. This shift eventually echoed through most of the major state-supported ensembles.

A Post-Socialist Museum for Gypsy Music

One question that several musicians have posed in interviews I have conducted is why the government does not respect and support urban Gypsy music as a tradition in itself, since it had such a great historical role in spreading Hungarian culture to the world. Some called it a *Hungaricum*—a term that has come into vogue in recent years to refer to “special items from Hungary, that characterise the Hungarians by their uniqueness and high quality” (Hungarian Tourism Ltd.)—for example *gulyás* soup, the *Hortobágy*, and *paprika*. Claiming that Gypsy music is itself a legitimate aspect of Hungarian heritage flies in the face of long-standing critiques of “so-called Gypsy music,” but as the genre has declined, more people have expressed regret about its impending extinction. From 1989 until 2012, almost no state resources went toward the promotion or preservation of Gypsy music, but that changed in 2012 with the formation of the Roma *Hungaricum* *Állami Művészgyűjtés*—the Roma *Hungaricum* State Artists' Ensemble—a group that operates alongside the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble and others, supported by the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice and operated by the Forum *Hungaricum* Public Ltd., working to “preserve” and “renew” the “Hungarian cultural treasure” of urban Hungarian Gypsy music. For a time the group rehearsed in the headquarters of the Balassi Institute (a Hungarian government-funded non-profit that institute promotes Hungarian culture worldwide), though it has recently relocated. Even so, the ensemble through its website (<http://romahungaricum.hu/en/>) continues to stress the inauthenticity of the genre, stating that is “not identical with gypsy folklore.”

While the fact that the state has stepped in to preserve this “*Hungaricum*” not only as a symbol but as a way to make a living has been positive, at least for the musicians employed by the Roma *Hungaricum* State Artists' Ensemble, it is not enough to rescue Hungary's participatory tradition of celebrating the manipulation of affects by playing and singing *magyar nóta* in restaurants and cafés. It is likely not even enough to rescue the *magyar nóta* repertoire itself, as that

repertoire apparently plays only a small part in the ensemble's life; of four concert programs posted on their website, it is featured in one, the "Evergreens," while the other three are light-classical, featuring mainly "Hungarian," "Hungarian-style," or "Gypsy-style" – notably including Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies, Brahms' Hungarian Dances, Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen*, certain works of Bartók and Kodály, and Hungarian dance composers of the *verbunkos* period (in the early-to-mid nineteenth century) – or operetta excerpts arranged for Gypsy bands.

Western classical repertoire has served to legitimize Gypsy bands going back to early in the twentieth century, since this repertoire has historically been more prestigious than either popular or folk music, and even as folk music has carved out substantial institutional spaces in the Hungarian cultural landscape, Gypsy music and musicians have only infrequently gained access to those spaces. On the other hand, Gypsy bands playing arranged classical music are not fully accepted as classical musicians. More and more Hungarian Roma are becoming successful as classical musicians in recent years, but to do so, they must generally become classical musicians first and foremost, with "Gypsy music" becoming a colorful part of their background rather than a key component of their job.

This article began by critiquing as somewhat excessive the emphasis on "pastness" in scholarly discourse on Hungary's Gypsy music. So it may seem a bit disingenuous to end this story with a "decline of time" narrative, but the current state of the genre—and of many of the musicians who formerly performed it—make it difficult to avoid such an end. Even so, showing how that genre and its musicians evolved over the course of the twentieth century, through alterations in the technological and political frames in which they operate, offers a much more nuanced view of the meaning of that genre. Further research will continue to illustrate the complicated ways in which Roma musicians have participated in Hungarian musical life, and have changed and been changed by it.

About terminology: The word Roma, the adjectival form of which is "Romani," means "man" in the Indic language spoken by many Roma across Europe; the word "Gypsy" and its equivalents—"cigány" in Hungarian, "Zigeuner" in German, etc.—is based historically on the mistaken notion that these people are from Egypt. The word "Gypsy" is often used pejoratively, and for this reason, some have advocated for its abolition in academic and official discourse. There is an argument for talking about "Gypsy music," or "Romani music," in an inclusive way: any music that Roma musicians perform. Though I generally agree with this practice, I use it in a narrower sense here: the term "[Hungarian] Gypsy music" is used to refer to entertainment music performed in Hungary (or Hungarian spaces outside of the country), almost exclusively by Roma musicians, mainly at restaurants, cafés, and private events, both from a podium and circulating among tables, as well as in more concert-like settings or in theaters.

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