

Theses of the doctoral (PhD) dissertation

The versatility of Gypsy musicians' in Magyarpalatka

Adaptation in a macro society

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I. Aims and Topic

My dissertation aims at analysing Magyarpalatka's mixed society focusing on a unique group of people: the local Gypsy musicians. Gypsy musicians are influential in their village as well as in the wider locality. They have an important role in connecting people of different ethnicities; and their importance in society is centred on their inherited profession of music. By investigating the life and work of Gypsy musicians: cultural intermediaries of their time, we may gain information on how different ethnic groups influenced and modified one another. Due to global changes in the 20th and 21st centuries, the Gypsy musician's status went through major changes.

In scientific terms this work is a diachronic analysis using folklore and folklore-society-related information. My examination distinguishes three historical periods in relation to how political and economic changes modified the Gypsy musicians' role and identity.

We may perceive a continuous extension of the social environment in which musicians operate in different periods of time and cultural phases – determined by the community ordering their service. This is due to the musicians' professional reputation on the one hand and to cultural opening in society as well as changes in the functionality of the craft on the other. More and more villages requested musical services thanks to the growing reputation of the Gypsy musicians, their growth in number and a growing interest in folk music and dance in villages; some musicians were even prompted to relocate with their families to other villages. Later - parallel to a continuous decrease of interest in the villages - a new "market" was established with the birth of the *táncház*-movement (literally translated as *dance-house*; a place where traditional folk dances are taught and danced – not as a stage show but for the dancers' own entertainment), initiating a significant process of re-folklorisation. This, at the same time, resulted in the extension of the "market" where musicians operate, to even further regions - often crossing borders as well.

An important factor worth mentioning is the music repertoire which developed alongside changes in time and space. Musicians are forced to expand their collection of songs and tunes with an equally expanding scale of musical genres used. (This is generally observed in the case of a good number of Transylvanian bands; *csávás* bands for instance no longer play in a traditional 20th century Transylvanian three-set-construction. (violin-violoncello-doublebass) Their repertoire has changed as well. For years, they have only played traditional folk music in their

traditional strings' setup in Hungary and other places abroad; they serve contemporary musical requests with a more modern setup back home.

The three-member string band of Magyarpalatka (or *Palatka*, as the village is commonly called) is occasionally completed by an accordion back home. Its repertoire accommodates more foreign songs, top hits and their adaptations, and less traditional dance music. There is also an increasing number of Romanian style marks in the Hungarian repertoire. Parts of their traditional music and dance repertoire are only played among artificial circumstances (events with the conscious aim of presenting an insight to their traditional culture): on stage, recording studios, revival events and the *táncház*.

And all this brings about changes in behaviour as well. Gypsy musicians of Palatka no longer exhibit a solid national belonging; they have resigned the use of their traditional language, religious practice, and their clothing. Their professional position is many-faced as well: each request for services requires a different personal perspective. They behave different back home in an environment prompting modernisation, and at an event of cultural revival. While they are honoured as artists of their craft at the latter, they are no more than Gypsy musicians back home.

II. Methods Applied

My first meetings with musicians from Palatka are dated back to the second half of the 1990s. I have been in contact with them ever since; studying their methods and music. My thesis completed in 2000 was a study of the village's folklore.

My present study is based on field work conducted during traditional events or organised study tours at Palatka, as well as at concert venues and summer camps in Hungary: years of collecting material by recording music and making notes of lyrics and style.

The population studied is the Hungarian, Rumanian and Gypsy musicians of Magyarpalatka and Visa. (A village often ordering music from musicians of Palatka) I took care to involve individuals who are well informed, taking an active part in the cultural life of the village; important and representative members of the community structure. I also selected people from different age groups - in view of the different periods studied - and from each of the three ethnic groups. We may find leaders (violin players) and subordinate members (viola and doublebass players) among those interviewed, as well as musicians of informal authority or in

a marginal position; their importance lays in view of the social, professional inner and outer contact network within the musician society.

Selection of those to be interviewed was made – besides personal experience – based on advice from other researchers familiar with the field, as well as members of the community, and the Hungarian parson serving at the parish between August 1st, 1992 and May 1st, 1999. The parson and his successor were of great help by supplying me with information on the village in general and its infrastructure. I interviewed Rumanian informants with the help of a native Hungarian of Rumanian schooling. We discussed questions and the topic of my thesis before the interviews; translations were sometimes made on sight and in other cases following the interviews.

Questionnaires presented to members of different ethnic groups and male and female representatives of different social classes were generally the same; this served my aim of presenting facts as precisely as possible. The different questionnaires were of the following topics: life story, trade, the village's cultural life, influences of politics. I did everything I could to exclude gender aspects during my interviews; more dependable answers could be expected from the musicians based on friendship and working relations.

I returned to a few Gypsy musicians proving to be the most representative a number of times. An important aspect of the profession is movement within the community served: tasks, everyday activities. Thus I made a point of conducting a deeper study of the individual; at the same time analysing his interactions in the course of serving the majority society.

Individuals involved in the study are anonymous; their identity is only marked by initials of their names. I mention their nationality, birth dates and occasionally their status in cases where this information is a determining aspect of their point of view and opinion.

III. Listing Conclusions of the Thesis

1. *Functionality* is a basic aspect of adaptation among Gypsy musicians, since village folklore is an aesthetic way of expression based on functionality. Consequently, their instrumental musical material is an ever changing product based on a twofold interaction. As a result of a fundamental change of the entertainment and celebrating customs of the younger generation during the 20th century, music-playing occasions gradually ceased to exist. Traditions are not only nurtured by the contributing force of

the community; practicing traditions in turn has a reflective force in strengthening a cohesive consciousness among the members. Thus, lack of traditions results in a loss of this consciousness. This loss primarily affected the life of village Gypsy musicians: no traditional folklore exists in villages today.

2. Another basic aspect of adaptation is the *younger generation*. The majority of the folklore material used is determined by the needs of the younger generation - spokesmen of modernisation - whose number is constantly decreasing in villages today. Children are also missing and older generations are not very likely to take part in musical events, let alone make requests there. They may be present at certain occasions (e.g. weddings) but have no say in preparations. Traditional recipient audiences ceased to exist: the musical taste of the younger generation is very far from what traditional bands have to offer. Consequently, musicians either started playing modern musical instruments or went in search of another market.
3. The third aspect is the *adaptation ability* of the serving body, its *market sensitivity* and *mobility*. Gypsy musicians developed a long term survival strategy with their craft, hoping there would always be a need for them – with occasional changes in the intensity of the need or in the requirements of the receiving community, concerning genre and style.
4. Gypsy musicians have failed to establish a national, political, economic or cultural unity for thousands of years. Their individualism is rooted in their professional status determining their cultural identity. From an ethnic aspect they are not only Gypsies but Gypsy musicians: individuals of outstanding social rank with a unique contact network; but consequently of unbalanced identity. Their adaptation and mobility is always unconditional, and extremely fast. Social status, ethnicity, identity, locality, language, religion, personal conscience or traditional clothing are not relevant. Their flexibility, however, may only be defined within their profession and as a tool of its preservation: only a few people are willing to start a completely new profession.
5. Their bodily and mental characteristics: inherited and learned motor abilities; their excellent musical memory and knowledge of the human nature; outstanding communication and artistic abilities, are indispensable for their social success. As a

result of all this the profession has become one worth passing on to younger generations. This brought about their economic strategy of renewal and adapting to contemporary market requirements.

6. Flourishing village folklore served as a dependable source of income in the 20th century. As a result more and more musicians passed their craft to their children: more and more musicians served the needs of a growing audience. A considerable welfare provided an outstanding social and economic status for musicians within the Gypsy community. Their ethnic attachment was loosened; traditional wear was changed to city clothing, which in turn failed to demonstrate their national and social belonging.
7. The Ceaușescu era's influence on village culture had a positive effect on the success of the musician's profession: Palatka had the largest number of musicians in the area at the time. Thanks to their professional knowledge, a continuously growing repertoire and an outstanding musical fertility (an ability to adapt to modernisation) they travelled to play within a huge area: they were invited to play at more and more places and some of them even moved to another village. As a result of forced assimilation they started to use Rumanian besides their native Gypsy language in the 1940s. By the 1990s only a few Gypsy musicians spoke Hungarian. However, their Gypsy language persists, strengthening the segregation of the community. By the 1970s their religion was converted to Rumanian Orthodox and their children received Rumanian first names at birth. Those having Hungarian surnames and first names converted them to Rumanian. These attempts of assimilation to the majority society were mainly forced from the outside. Their outstanding status was only ensured by city clothing, the use of the Gypsy language, and a separated living area.
8. However, even they were unable to adapt to rapid cultural changes brought about by the fall of the Communist era quick enough. As a result of the revival movement new possibilities opened to other bands enjoying success in the region. The opening of the borders made it possible for them to travel abroad and make up for an increasing lack of work back home. Not only was this a source of economic but a moral success as well: the name of their village of origin received an additional value. Magyarpalatka became renowned both in Hungary and in other countries as a village of gifted musicians; however this additional value is not felt by the village community itself.

9. The apace process of mechanicalism in the music industry declines people's musical hearing and musical or dance skills to a level even gypsy musicians find hard to relate to. This applies to Magyarpalatka's bands too. They chose an adaptation method that was not modernising; rather, they turned towards preserving traditional values of their music. A smaller group of Palatka musicians moved to the city and tries to entertain in a modern way; however, the majority stayed with the traditional folklore material and style. Only, their audience changed.
10. Culture established by Gypsy musicians of Magyarpalatka stays alive by the culture carriers' switch of channels; in turn, local cultural channels receive new carriers of culture.
11. As a result of the research conducted we may conclude that the hypothesis was partly proved. Adaptation to changes in the musical material is proved, (the use of new musical genres, and instruments) and we witness either a search for new market by obtaining a status of preserving traditional values, or changes of profession: however the latter's level of success is questionable. Musicians were only capable of adapting to modernising requirements of their environment to a certain level. They were unable to bring their repertoire up-to-date, and replaced only some of their musical instruments temporarily: they stayed within the traditional bands' scope. We may say that their profession is no longer passed on – at least not as a way of making a living. The prestige of the musician's craft has changed: it is not necessarily the most attractive profession for Gypsies anymore. Choosing the best way of adaptation largely depends on the individual and his abilities. Different individuals adapt in different ways. Those who stay in the profession are the strongest and most talented - coming from the most renowned musician families.

IV. Conference Lectures in the Topic of the Thesis

- Musical Pedagogy Conference (Debrecen, April, 7th, 2017.)

Title: A vonós magyar népzene oktatásának módszereiről (Hagyományok és alternatívák a zeneoktatásban), (*Methods of Teaching Hungarian Traditional Music Played on Strings (Traditions and Alternatives in Music Teaching)*)



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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (5)

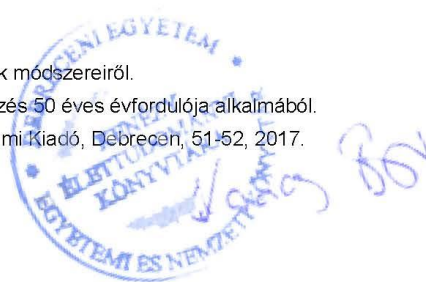
1. **Kompár-Römer, J.:** A magyarpalatkai zenészek társadalmi kapcsolatrendszerének változása.
Ethnographia. "közlésre elfogadva", 2017. ISSN: 0014-1798.
2. **Kompár-Römer, J.:** Hagyományok és hagyományozódás átalakulása Magyarpalatkán.
Folkszemle 2015 (április), 1, 2015.
3. **Kompár-Römer, J.:** A magyarpalatkai cigányzenészek örökítő munkája.
Parlando. 6, [1-24], 2014. ISSN: 0133-2767.
4. **Kompár-Römer, J.:** A magyarpalatkai zenészek szakmai státuszváltása.
Folkmagazin. 21 (6), 32-33, 2014. ISSN: 1218-912X.
5. **Kompár-Römer, J.:** Panczi Gyula, a magyarpéterlaki cigányzenész dinasztia egyik utolsó generációs brácsásegényisége.
Népr. látóhatár. 16 (3-4), 163-174, 2007. ISSN: 1215-8097.

Foreign language scientific articles in international journals (1)

6. **Kompár-Römer, J.:** The roma Musicians of Magyarpalatka as Preservers of traditions.
Stud. Univ. Babeş-Bolyai. Musica. "Accepted by publisher", 2017. ISSN: 1844-4369.

Hungarian abstracts (1)

7. **Kompár-Römer, J.:** A vonós magyar népzene oktatásának módszereiről.
In: Zenepedagógiai konferencia a felsőfokú tanárképzés 50 éves évfordulója alkalmából.
Szerk.: Váradi Judit, Szűcs Tímea, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen, 51-52, 2017.
ISBN: 9789634739555





List of other publications

Other journal articles (1)

8. **Kompár-Rőmer, J.:** Morotva Zenekar: Az eladott lány.
Folkmagazin. 10 (3), 31, 2003. ISSN: 1218-912X.

The Candidate's publication data submitted to the iDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of Web of Science, Scopus and Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) databases.

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