

A Short Review of Bellman's

The Style Hongrois in the Music of Western Europe, Boston 1993.

The only comprehensive study on style hongrois published in English is Jonathan Bellman's book *The Style Hongrois in the Music of Western Europe*. It is about the nature, origin and use of style hongrois in the 18th and 19th century music of Western Europe. Bellman's work is the first and only sustained study on this topic, and is well-known and often-cited in the English language literature. Hungarian musicologists became familiar with it soon after its publication, however, the most competent specialists in this field have not written any reviews on Bellman's book, not even in Hungarian.

In order to give a short review of the book one might observe that Bellman placed his study in a context demonstrating adequate knowledge of the subject at hand. The citations from 17th and 18th century portrayals of Hungary and Hungarians by foreigners are remarkable as they reveal the general distrust of Western contemporaries towards Hungarians. Hungarians were not seen as protectors of Christianity but as a suspicious nation under the influence of the Ottoman Empire belonging to a civilization dissimilar and inferior, or at least Oriental and exotic compared to their own.¹ This is not surprising if you take a look at the history of Hungary in the 16th and 17th centuries which was characterized by constant multilateral wars. Bellman draws a parallel between the distrust of the West towards Hungarians and the general distrust towards Gypsy communities in most societies.² Naturally,

¹ „The Hungarian lands at this time [17th century] were characterized by a lack of centralized power, stability, or even culture. Furthermore, this succession of rulers and political circumstances had left Hungary a country very much outside western orbits. The idea of a nobility proudly independent of central authority was alien to western Europeans. Even stranger was a peasantry clearly indifferent to whether it was ruled by Turks or Christians. These extraordinary cultural features left Hungary very much a question mark in the European mind.” Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 26–27.

„Even as fellow of Christendom and as brethren suffering under the Turkish yoke, Magyars themselves were viewed with distrust by Hapsburgs and other western Europeans.” Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 29. Quotation from the book Thomas Barker: *Double Eagle and Crescent: Vienna's Second Turkish Siege and Its Historical Setting*, Albany 1967 (16–17.): “[...] for many other foreigners and certain natives have also maintained that the Magyars are among the world's more ungovernable peoples.” Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 30.

“Furthermore, by the time the Turks marched toward Vienna in the summer of 1683, Imre Thököly had already concluded a treaty with them, which he honored only insofar as it meant he did not ally with the Hapsburgs. Rather than helping the Turks, he ended up withholding military support at a crucial point in the struggle, thereby sealing the ultimate doom of their effort. Nonetheless, his “treaty” only cemented the image of the Magyar as somehow not-quite-Christian, answerable to alien, eastern loyalties and quite probably untrustworthy.” Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 30.

² „[...] in the seventeenth century we can see the Gypsy already being connected, in the European mind, with the East in general and suspected of readiness to ally with Heathen against the Christian world (as, for example, the Hungarians were seen to do).” Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 28.

“In fact, Magyars were assumed to have precisely those qualities that later would be attributed to the Romani Gypsies who came westward from their country, playing their music. The distrust already felt for the Magyars

the image created and confirmed by Bellman through historical facts and documents are meant to support his conception of Turkish-Hungarian-Gypsy music, so that it may be uniformly associated with the exotic, (or musical exoticism). His evidence from cultural history would obviously have been undermined if he had written about religious antagonism in Hungary, especially between Catholic and Protestant noblemen, the international anti-Turkish alliance in 1663-1664, the successful campaigns, or the Peace of Vasvár made unexpectedly and unreasonably by the Hapsburg Emperor Leopold with the Turks, causing national outrage.³

Some of Bellman's governing principles are disputable from a musical aspect as well. For instance, he does not discuss how the style, instrumental techniques and harmonization practices of Gypsy bands developed over a period of a hundred years, nor does he consider borrowings from abroad -- bands performing in Vienna were greatly influenced by the art music played there. Bellman does not illuminate the fact that the performing style of the Gypsy band heard by Haydn was very different from that heard by Brahms. The source of *style hongrois* – the impulse originating in Gypsy bands fermenting art music – changed over the years as much as the style of Western, Viennese art music itself, not only one of them was influenced by the other, borrowings were reciprocal. This becomes most apparent when one studies or is familiar with instrumental folk traditions: the instrumental accompaniment related to dance traditions vary from one location to the other with respect to performing style, ornamentation as well as harmonization.⁴ It is barely sufficient to state that *ongharese* in the 18th century merely referred to a theme of unique character in a piece, whereas in the 19th century *style hongrois* meant an independent musical style.⁵ Similarly, whether a certain musician is referred to as a Gypsy or as a Hungarian – which Bellman is so concerned with throughout his book – is irrelevant. What matters is the location of a given band and its

would come to be associated with anything emerging from the east, Hungarian or otherwise.” Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 30.

³ Taking not into consideration the national outrage of the Magyars Leopold I. strengthened the contract of the Peace Vasvár with the Turks. The ambivalency of the politic of Leopold led to the first national uprising of the Hungarians against the Hapsburgs. *Magyarország Történeti Kronológiája II. 1526–1848* [Chronology of the Hungarian History II. 1526–1848] (főszerk.: Benda Kálmán), Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982, 483–490.

⁴ Pávai István: *Az erdélyi és a moldvai magyarság népi tánczenéje* [The Folk Dance Music of the Transylvanian and Moldavian Hungarians], Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 1993; Pávai István: „Interethnische Beziehungen in der volkstümlichen Tanzmusik Siebenbürgens”, *Regionale Volkskulturen im überregionalen Vergleich: Ungarn – Österreich*, Graz, 1998, 23–34; Pávai István: „Sajátos szempontok az erdélyi hangszeres népi harmónia vizsgálatában” [Special Aspects in the Investigation of Harmonization of Transylvanian Instrumental Folk Music], *Zenatudományi Dolgozatok 1999*, Budapest: MTA Zenatudományi Intézet, 1999, 53–74.

⁵ „In the eighteenth century, in other words, an *ongharese* was merely a topic; the nineteenth century *style hongrois* was a discrete musical language.” Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 65.

performances in time and space – their coordinates within the time range of one and a half centuries extending from the mid 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, it is a major shortcoming of Bellman’s study that it lacks an in-depth knowledge of folk traditions and historical sources. This is reflected even in his bibliography which does not include some of the most fundamental publications which were available at the time the study was made.⁶ It must be admitted that Bellman might have had difficulty in familiarizing himself with a great majority of these publications for linguistic reasons – an almost complete disregard for them, however, suggests either ignorance or false hypotheses. This might be the reason why one finds uncertainty, severe mistakes and misinterpretations in individual chapters of the book as his hypotheses unfold. I would now like to present you an incomplete list of the most serious mistakes and misinterpretations in Bellman’s book.

Since Bellman lacks a thorough understanding of the roots of *style hongrois* in folk music, his use of the Hungarian terms *nóta*, *hallgató*, *cifra*, *lassú* and *friss* are arbitrary.⁷

⁶ Major Ervin: *Bihari János*, Budapest 1928 (With the Catalogue of Bihari’s Works); Major, Ervin: ‘Ungarische Tanzmelodien in Haydns Bearbeitung’, *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, XI (1928–9), 601–604; Major Ervin: ‘Liszt Ferenc magyar rapszódái’ [Hungarian Rhapsodies of Ferenc Liszt], *Muzsika*, I/1–2 (1929), 47–54; Major Ervin: *A népies magyar műzene és a népzene kapcsolatai* [Relationships of Folklike Hungarian Art Music and Folk Music] (diss., Szegedi Egyetem 1930) in: *Fejezetek a magyar zene történetéből* (szerk.: Bónis Ferenc) Budapest 1967, 158–180; Major Ervin: ‘A galántai cigányok’ [Gypsies of Galanta], *Magyar Zene* I/1–6 (1960–1961), 243–248; Domokos Pál Péter: ‘Magyar táncdallamok a XVIII. századból’ [Hungarian Dance Melodies from the 18th Century], *Zenatudományi tanulmányok*, IX (1961), 269–294; Domokos, Pál Péter: ‘Beziehungen der Musik des 18. Jahrhunderts in Ungarn zur ungarischen Volksmusik von heute’, *Studia Musicologica*, VI (1964), 25–37; Domokos Pál Péter: ‘Der Moriskentanz in Europa und in der ungarischen Tradition’ *Studia Musicologica*, X (1968), 229–311; Domokos Pál Péter: *Hangszeres magyar tánczene a XVIII. században* [Instrumental Dance Music in 18th Century], Budapest 1978; Papp Géza: *Hungarian Dances 1784-1810*. Musicalia Danubiana 7, Budapest 1987; Bónis Ferenc: ‘Magyar táncgyűjtemény az 1820-as évekből’ [Hungarian Dance Collection from the Years of 1820], *Zenatudományi Tanulmányok*, I. (1953), 697–732; Bónis Ferenc: ‘Die ungarischen Tänze der Handschrift von Appony (Oponice)’, *Studia Musicologica*, VI. (1964), 9–23; Bónis Ferenc: ‘Ungarische Musik im XVII.–XVIII. Jahrhundert’, *Musica antiqua Europae orientalis I: Bydgoszcz and Toruń 1966*, 258–273; Domokos Mária: ‘Die Tänze der Barkóczy-Handschrift (18. Jh.)’, *Studia Musicologica* 215–247; Tari Lujza: *Lisznyay Julianna hangszeres gyűjteménye 1800* [Instrumental Music Collection of Julianna Lisznyay 1800]. In: *Műhelytanulmányok a magyar zenetörténethez* 12. Budapest: MTA Zenatudományi Intézet, 1990; Martin, György: ‘Der siebenbürgische Haiduckentanz’, *Studia musicologica*, XI (1969), 301–321; Martin, György: ‘Weapon Dance Melodies and Rhythmic Multiplicity’, *Studia musicologica*, XXI (1979), 79–112; Martin György: ‘Die Kennzeichen und Entwicklung des neuen ungarischen Tanzstiles’, *Acta ethnographica*, XXVIII (1979), 155–175; Martin György: ‘Peasant Dance Traditions and National Dance Types in East-Central Europe in the 16th–19th Centuries’, *Ethnologia Europea*, xv (1985), 117–128.

⁷ ‘This music was performed in two general styles, slow and fast. The slow variety is called *hallgató*, which in Hungarian means ‘to be listened to’ (as opposed to being danced to). It is free and rhapsodic and, although its basis was a song literature, became wholly improvisatory, often in direct contradiction to the spirit of the lyrics. The other type of music is fast (*cifra* in Hungarian meaning ‘flashy’) and is intended for dancing.’ Jonathan Bellman: *The ‘Style hongrois’...*, 17.

‘The dance seems to have produced a great dramatic effect, beginning slowly with measured, dignified steps from the commanding officer and becoming wilder and more joyous as men from further down the military hierarchy began to join in. General characteristics of *verbunkos* include duple meter, the gradual increase in tempo from very slow to very fast, and a great deal of instrumental ornamentation.’ Jonathan Bellman: *The ‘Style hongrois’...* i. m.: 17–18. ‘The *czardas* is a traditional Hungarian national dance that survives to this day and may simply be a later form of *verbunkos*. It has two primary sections: *lassu* or *lassan* (slow) and *friss* or *friska* (from the German *frisch*, fresh or fast). The slow section is in a heavy, deliberate 4/4 meter and is more a

Bellman's book does not make it clear to the reader what the exact meanings of these terms are. His most serious mistake in this respect is that he identifies the *nóta* songs with the Bartókian new style folk music, and to make matters worse he claims that the genre of *nóta* songs rapidly gained popularity in the 18th century and superseded old Hungarian folk music – the very music that Bartók and Kodály later collected.⁸ Ornamentation and grace notes in Hungarian-Gypsy fiddle techniques are not remnants of some Turkish style.⁹ In fact, Bellman's claim is uninterpretable because fiddle techniques varied through time, space and era in the Hungarian instrumental tradition, including Gypsy bands. His remark about the pizzicato technique of violinists as one of the commonest features of *style hongrois* is also difficult to fathom. Bellman cites a stanza by József Gvadányi from a book by Sárosi titled *Gypsy Music*. However, the stanza he quotes refers not to the performance of Hungarian dances but that of Polish dances.¹⁰ His claim that the bagpipe was a popular instrument in the Gypsy tradition before the emerging of Gypsy bands and that the bagpipe was used as a solo instrument or as accompaniment to fiddles is another mistake. According to Bellman bagpiping in its original form disappeared in Hungary but some of its key features such as melodies within the range of an octave and drone fifths lived on.¹¹ It is a well-known fact that bagpipe playing did not disappear from the folk tradition – it is apparent from Bartók's collections in Ipolyság/Sahy, in southern Slovakia – in fact, it was a favoured folk instrument outside the Gypsy tradition. Historical sources dating from the end of the 17th century and early 18th century refer to Gypsies as fiddlers but not as fifers/pipers or bagpipers. Bellman's book contains several inaccuracies as concerns historical facts, as well. During the Turkish

presentation step than a dance. The fast section can be either one or several different dancing songs, which in their abandon hint at a total loss of emotional control. In the present day, a *czardas* performance can be simply a series of tunes ranging from very slow to fast. It is with this dance, or series of characteristic song and dance types, that the Gypsy musicians, as representatives of Hungary's westward-migrating musical caste, are most closely associated in the popular mind." Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 21.

⁸ „*Verbunkos* was not the only source music at the Gypsies' disposal, however. They also drew on an active vocal repertoire, the *nóta* (literally, 'melody,') songs, a genre Bartók called the 'new style of peasant music.' These songs were composed largely by minor nobles, people for whom professional musical performance and involvement would have been unthinkable, and were often sentimental in nature. They represented a Hungarian response to the German *Volksthümlieder*, [...]. The Hungarian derivative quickly gained popularity in the eighteenth century and was fast eclipsing the old Hungarian folk music later to be collected by Bartók and Kodály." Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 20–21.

⁹ „There are several fiddle techniques that are specifically associated with Hungarian-Gypsy playing. Small, jangling ornaments and grace notes constitute one category: these might be holdover from the Turkish Style, but regardless of origin they are ubiquitous." Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 97.

¹⁰ Sárosi Bálint: *Cigányzene...*, Gondolat, Budapest 1971, 67. (Sárosi, Bálint: *Gypsy Music*, Budapest 1978, 73.)

¹¹ „Bagpipes were favored by Gypsy musicians in the era before the Gypsy bands, either played solo or perhaps accompanying a fiddle, but the instrument never became a necessary part of the larger Gypsy ensemble. Bagpipe playing has now all but died out in its original Hungarian context, but certain characteristics of the bagpipers' style live on: melodies within the range of an octave, for example, and drone fifths." Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 106.

invasion the central part of Hungary was under Ottoman rule, whereas the Western part of the country and Transylvania were controlled by the Hapsburgs.¹² Bellman makes no mention of the Grand Duchy of Transylvania. Moreover, he claims that the Hapsburgs made German and Slavonic languages the official languages, thus excluding Hungarian. It is not clear from his writing which century he is referring to, but based on the context he is likely to mean the end of the 17th century.¹³ However, there are no historical facts to support his argument.

Chapters which are purely about music are less superficial, but Bellman is unable to come up with novel ideas, largely due to his conscious choice of analyzing the works of only the greatest of composers. Before discussing the works of 19th century composers he sums up the musical elements of the style and contributes a whole chapter to contemporary stereotypes against Gypsies in literature and society which creates a musical and intellectual hinterland or point of reference for his analyses. With the Gypsies he associates the ideal of liberty as well as various stereotypical charges such as larceny, violence, murder, casting spells or incest and the oriental, unchristian, somewhat demonic and exotic cultural context outlined in the introductory chapters, and through the Gypsies he associates them with *style hongrois*.¹⁴ He uses his analyses to support this hypothesis, thus the reader often has the feeling that Bellman's arguments are not based on the compositions but are governed by the "results" he intended to verify/confirm. This is the reason that parallel thirds and sixths induce him to believe he has found a pair of *lassú/slow* and *friss/fast czardas* in numbers 13-14 in Brahms's *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Händel* op. 24, and that the atmosphere of Kaspar's song in *Der Freischütz* – who has allied himself with dark, devilish powers – is reminiscent of what Bellman speculates to be the stylistic elements of the Gypsy tradition, and finally, that he associates Schubert's seclusion from society due to his alleged sexual orientation with the notion of the Gypsies being on the periphery of society.¹⁵

¹² „In general, Transylvania (in the east) and the western lands were Hapsburg controlled, and the Turks held sway over the central section.” Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 26.

¹³ „[...] Hungarian culture itself was repressed and persecuted in favor of the ruling German one. The Hapsburgs had designated German and Slavonic the national languages, for example, excluding Hungarian.” Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 27.

¹⁴ Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 69–76.

¹⁵ Jonathan Bellman: *The 'Style hongrois'...*, 208–210; 144–146.

„[...] it seems no great speculation to suggest that Schubert gave voice to these feelings with the musical language and gestures of the Gypsies, a people who (like homosexuals) were held to value freedom above all, who were wrongfully accused of every imaginable vice and moral failing, who nonetheless lived resolutely in defiance of established mores, and who were regularly made to suffer for it. [...] The traditional idea that Schubert's pieces in the *style hongrois* are merely light, popular, occasional, or even trivial ignores his knowledge of Weber, his undoubted awareness of contemporary Gypsy stereotypes, and the fact that he composed these pieces when he was the least suited emotionally to write harmless occasional music. Rather, the reverse of that assumption turns out to be the least speculative of all: at his points of lowest psychological ebb, bereft of physical health and emotional support, Schubert's inspiration found voice in the music of a group

All in all, it may be concluded that Bellman's monograph was inadequate for a complex and professional analysis of *style hongrois* even at the time of its publication and its being a standard work on the subject for musicologists internationally, is totally unacceptable. A study of *style hongrois* must be based on an extended study of the field which includes the latest results of research and publications.