

“From Pure Source Only” – Collection of Hungarian folk songs project

Zoltán SZALAY¹

Abstract: *The collection contains a selection of folk songs from the Hungarian population living in Romania. Of the four volumes planned, three have been published so far. The entire collection is expected to span 18 regions and 3 micro-regions, as well as a strip of hundreds of kilometers from Transylvania and other areas outside Transylvania. These include some more developed areas which abandoned their traditions in the first half of the last century, and some more traditional regions. The first three volumes comprise folk songs from 174 localities, collected by 126 collectors, including Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, László Lajtha, János Jagamas and Zoltán Kallós. The collections took place between 1899 and 2017. The melodies have been selected from the archives of Transylvanian and Hungarian institutions, as well as from audio materials accompanying various publications. In this selection I have tried to add as many songs as possible which belong to the old strata of folk songs. I have tried to include as many pentatonic melodies as possible because these strata predominantly feature this scale. Also, in the last century the everyday folk-song repertoire shifted toward a fixed-rhythm performance mode. An ancient form, with its speech-like mode of performance, is now in the process of being lost. Therefore, the number in the published volumes is smaller than that of the folk songs performed in a tight rhythm.*

Key-words: *folk song, collection, old style, pentatonic, mode of performance*

1. Introduction

Recent years and decades have seen a growing interest in the study and singing of folk songs. Certain ages seem to rediscover our traditions over and over again and recognize the soul- and community-forming forces within them. “We only started to notice the Hungarian folk song in the thirties, when Bartók and Kodály published ‘*Hungarians from Transylvania. Folk songs*’ and Béla Bartók’s work ‘*The Hungarian Folk Song*’ had been published for more than ten years.” – writes Jagamas János in

¹ PhD, *Transilvania University of Braşov, Faculty of Music, zszalay@upcmail.ro*

the introduction of his study '*Why Not a Folk Song?*' (Jagamas 1980-1982). The effects of the Peacock Movement initiated by Lajos Vass in 69-70, and the so-called 'Peacock circles', soon manifested themselves in Transylvania as well. The dance-house movement, which began in the late 1970s, gave new impetus to folk dance, music, and songs. The Transylvanian (and later Moldavian) dance camps that started in the early 1990s, the reopened dance-houses, and the emerging professional and amateur folk dance ensembles once again turned the interest of many young people towards Hungarian traditions. Around the turn of the millennium, more and more folk song contests were organized throughout Transylvania and Moldavia. At first, less than a hundred school-age students took part in the "*Only from a Pure Source*" folk song contest dreamed up by my wife, Antal Rozália, in 2000, and now the number is over four hundred. In Újszentes (Dumbrăvița) near Temesvár (Timișoara), the national Hungarian-language folk song competition called *Őszirózsa* for students from classes I-VIII and the final of the Szeklerland Folk Song Contests (which took over the title of *Szeklerland Regional Folk Song Contest – Only from a Pure Source* a few years ago) has also helped to bring more and more teachers and parents back to our traditional culture. Many people are aware of the taste and soul-destroying effects of Western culture, and see in Hungarian traditions a possibility of combating these deleterious effects. At the same time, I must note that, despite constant external influences, village communities in some regions have not lost their internal connection with their own traditions. Elsewhere, under the influence of an enthusiastic professional, they have been rediscovered and have flourished.

The need to expand the repertoire of folk songs and to make the old and new collections more available has already been expressed in several forums. Educators and folk song teachers are either unfamiliar with the databases available on the Internet or find them difficult to manage, so few turn to these resources. In further trainings organized for folk song teachers and trainers (in Csíkszereda – Miercurea Ciuc in 2014, in Székelyudvarhely – Odorheiu Secuiesc in 2017 and in Marosvásárhely – Târgu Mureș in 2019), and also in 2018, a further training course for Hungarian kindergarten teachers in Transylvania, supported by the Hungarian Government and organized by the House of Traditions in Budapest and the Association of Hungarian Teachers in Romania (*Developing Competence through Folk Traditions*), participants clearly articulated their need for published collection volumes from which they could select folk songs from their own regions using audio material.

Sheet music publications are not suitable for this purpose, as no sheet music can authentically reproduce the musical and performance characteristics that vary from region to region. At the same time, this selection is intended for a much wider

target audience than sheet music readers. Therefore, the printed version of our collection contains only the lyrics of the songs. The original audio material on the CD or DVD attachments is much more useful for most young people who want to learn or most adult who want to teach, than a sheet music publication. Not to mention tradition-loving people who just want to listen to our folk songs.

The original request was for a compilation of Hungarian folk songs from Romania². At first we planned to publish the folk songs in one volume, but as I began to study the various collections, such a wealth of material unfolded before me that I soon had to give up on that plan. After several changes, the project eventually evolved into a four-volume set. Of this, three volumes have been published so far (Szalay 2018, Szalay 2019, Szalay 2020). In these the folk songs are categorized according to regions and micro-regions, mostly going from west to east.

2. Ethnographic regions

The first volume included more regions and micro-regions than the others because I mostly picked from areas I found few valuable folk songs. These areas had become modernized earlier in the last century and were less frequently visited by collectors. The volume contains seven ethnographic regions and two micro-regions, as well as a geographical strip of hundreds of kilometers in the southern part of Transylvania, in which the Hungarian population “*live in relatively small numbers, in scattered, [...] in settlements forming ethnic islands*” (Pávai 2006). These are: Bánság (Banat), Bihar (Bihor), Upper Tisza region (Tisa de Sus), Szilágyság (Sălaj), peripheral areas of Kalotaszeg (Călata), Aranyosvidék (Arieș), Upper Szamos region (Someșul de Sus), Central Szamos region (Someșul Central) and a scattered area in Southern Transylvania; the first four of these are outside Transylvania. The volume contains a total of 364 melodies, a selection from 24 micro-regions, including 55 localities.

The second volume covers only four regions: Kalotaszeg (Călata), Mezőség (Câmpia Transilvaniei), Sajó (Șieu) and its environs and the Upper Maros region (Mureșul de Sus). However the number of melodies selected is the same as in the first volume. This mostly suggests that the second volume includes more traditional regions that were more popular among collectors. The number of micro-regions here is 15. The selection contains 364 melodies from 46 settlements.

² Gyula Deák, the then president of the Hungarian Folk Dance Association of Romania, approached me with this request at the end of 2017. The volumes of the collection so far have appeared in the series of educational material of the association.

The third volume is limited to only three regions: the Maros-Küküllők region (Mureş-Târnave), Marosszék (Mureş) and Udvarhelyszék (Odorhei). The first two volumes in their entirety, as well as the first ethnographic region of the third volume, cover the areas of the former Hungarian counties. Marosszék (Mureş) and Udvarhelyszék (Odorhei) are already part of Szeklerland. In this volume, 353 melodies from 13 micro-regions and 73 localities are included.

The fourth volume will include two other regions of Szeklerland, Háromszék (Trei Scaune) and Csíkszék (Ciuc), and two more regions outside Transylvania but with Transylvanian characteristics: Bukovina (Bucovina) and Moldva (Moldova). The latter two will be complemented by a micro-region (Gyimes – Ghimeş). It is expected that it will include melodies from 15 micro-regions.

3. The collections

As the collection is based on audio material found on the enclosed CD (DVD in the case of the second volume), we decided at the outset only to use recordings whose quality is good enough to be enjoyable, where the melody and lyrics are easy to understand and can be learnt from. We therefore mostly avoided folk songs recorded on a phonograph cylinder. Still, in justified cases, we added these to the collection, if they were of good quality (for example, from the collection of Zoltán Kodály from Nagyszalonta). The first volume contains 20 melodies and the third volume 8 songs collected with phonographs. No such recordings were included in the second volume, as this features regions with an extremely rich repertoire. Reviewing the instruments of the recordings in historical order, there are also folk songs recorded on gramophone discs, tape recorders, cassette tapes and various digital media. Most of the audio material selected for our collection was recorded on tape.

The melodies of the first volume were collected between 1899 and 2006, the second between 1938 and 2008, and the third between 1906 and 2017. The earliest recording (1899, Pürkerec – Barcaság; Purcăreni – Țara Bârsei) comes from the collection of Béla Vikár,³ and the latest (2017, Mezőkölpény – Marosszék; Culpiu - Mureş) from Huba Varro and Inagaki Norio. The 1081 melodies of the three volumes published so far have been selected from a total of 126 collectors, including the collections of Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, László Lajtha, János Jagamas and Zoltán Kallós.

³ As part of my presentation at the conference, I played this recording here.

4. The selection

During the selection we browsed the materials of various archives: the Institute Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy – Cluj-Napoca (Institutul Arhiva de Folclor al Academiei Române Cluj-Napoca), the Folklore Database of the House of Traditions (Hagyományok Háza Folklór Adatbázisa), the Institute for Musicology Archive – Reserche Center for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpontja Zenetudományi Intézetének Archívuma), and the folk music collection of the Museum of Ethnography (Magyar Néprajzi Múzeum). We also reviewed the various sources available on the Internet: the online databases of the RCH Institute of Musicology (collections of Zoltán Kallós, Németh 2008-2010, Internet database of published folk music recordings, Németh 2003, 2004, Béla Bartók: Hungarian folk songs. Universal collection, digital publishing, Bartók 2017 and the Sound Archives of the RCH Institute of Musicology. Digital publishing, Bolya 2019). We also selected materials published in certain publications: János Jagamas' folk music collection (Pávai – Zakariás 2014), Ilona Szenik's folk music collection (Pávai – Gergely 2019), István Horváth's collection from Magyarózd (Pávai 2015), István Pávai's "*Folk music of the Sóvidék region*" (Pávai 2016) and Piroska Demény's "*Folk Music of Aranyosszék*" (Demény 1998), *Anthology of Hungarian Folk Music* (Sárosi – Németh 1993, Sárosi – Németh 1995), *Patria. Hungarian folk music recordings from 1936-63* (Sebő 2010) and the sound material of the New Patria CD series.⁴

The plan was to present approx. thirty melodies from each micro-region, which on the one hand are typical of that area, and on the other provide a valuable repertoire for those interested in that region. Unfortunately, this was not always possible: there are micro-regions from which, in the absence of an adequate amount of collection, I could only select a few acceptable melodies. In other cases, most of the existing collections are not yet accessible because they have not yet been digitized in the various archives.

In the areas covered by the first volume we only managed to present the planned thirty folk songs from one micro-region. In other cases we approached this number, but there are further areas for which we were barely able to find a few melodies. In the second volume, on the other hand, we were mostly successful; in fact, the selection from five small regions exceeds the planned thirty melodies. However, the material of three micro-regions is poor here as well. Even in the third volume, far fewer folk songs were performed from only three micro-regions. The

⁴ <http://www.utolsoora.hu/hu/uj-patria-sorozat.html>

selected melodies of the others either approach the intended number amount or exceed it by a few songs (for seven micro-regions).

5. The melodies

In the selection I have tried to include as many songs as possible which belong to the old strata in all its features. If we accept Kodály's statement that "The Hungarian folk song [...] is a mirror of the whole Hungarian soul" (Kodály 1974, 77), then we must see that the great change in the Hungarian folk tradition in the last century is an external projection of the change of the soul.

The first of the three volumes has the fewest old-style melodies (258/364). This is mainly due to the fact that this volume mostly includes micro-regions whose traditions began to change the earliest. In the second volume, the proportion of old-style folk songs is slightly higher (295/364). The selected new style melodies are beautiful and valuable representations of the rich traditions of the regions and micro-regions from which they were selected. The proportion of old-style songs in the third volume is the highest (310/353). This is mainly due to the fact that for this volume I did not want to select the popular new style melodies still known today, and I tried only to include them if the lyrics of the song were significantly different from what lives in the public consciousness. At the same time, those micro-regions with rich collections abounded in old-style folk songs. And the number of new-style songs available from the micro-regions less visited by collectors was also quite low.

In our collection, as in Hungarian folk songs in general, there are two types of musical scales: pentatonic and diatonic. Pentatonic melodies were given an advantage during the selection, as the oldest layer of Hungarian folk songs is best characterized by this scale. The first volume contains the fewest of them (222/364), the second and third volumes contain many more (second: 267/364, third: 258/353). Here I would like to address the fact that I interpreted the pentatonic scale more freely than is customary in folk music research. 'Pien' tones are often added to the five-note framework. The melodic turns characteristic of pure (without pien tones) five-note folk songs, as well as the presence of two types of pien tones filling the larger (minor third) steps of the scale, most often indicate a pentatonic origin. Of course, as in any similar situation, there are borderline cases here, and they can be interpreted anyway. I used a simple method to determine the scale of the melody: if replacing the pien tones with the tones of the pentatonic scale does not change the character of the melody, I interpreted it as pentatonic. In the various versions of folk songs, the transformation and expansion with pien tones of a pentatonic melodic cell can often be observed. Converting these back to

a five-note system, I certainly wasn't much mistaken when I ranked them among the pentatonic melodies.

Another disappearing particularity of old-style melodies is the *parlando* or speech-like, narrative-rhythm performance mode, a version of which is the *parlando-rubato*, that's been a transition between speech-like and free-rhythm performance. The first volume contains only 36 of these (30 *parlando* and 6 *parlando-rubato*), the second 52 (33 and 19), and the third 55 (43 and 12). This is a relatively good ratio compared to the *giusto* (strict, tight rhythm) and *quasi giusto* (almost tight rhythm) melodies. As during the last century the everyday repertoire has shifted more and more towards a fixed-rhythm performance, we should be glad that speech-like and close performances are present in the collection in such a proportion.⁵

In our collection a variety of performances can be encountered: there are folk songs sung individually or in groups, and there are pieces performed a capella or with instrumental accompaniment. Since there are few collections in which certain melodies are sung with orchestral or other instrumental accompaniment, I have tried to select some of these as well. These, in addition to the good mood, add some color to otherwise often monotonous singer performances. The singer/s are sometimes accompanied by an instrument (violin, zither, flute, accordion), and at other times by a string band of two to six members (violin, three-string viola, bass). The first volume contains 18, the second 25, and the third 33 such recordings.⁶

6. Conclusions

The need to expand the repertoire of folk songs and to make the old and new collections more available, has been expressed among educators and folk song teachers for years. The “From Pure Source Only” – Collection of Hungarian Folk Songs Project tries to satisfy this need. The mode of interpretation and it's learn are aided by the audio material on the CD or DVD attachments, on which there are more than 350 folk songs each, in authentic interpretation, coming from original collections.

The first volume includes songs from several regions that became modernized earlier and where few collections took place. Therefore, it lags behind the following two volumes in several aspects: the planned thirty melodies per

⁵ As part of my presentation at the conference, I played an old-style, pentatonic folk song here, in *parlando* performance mode.

⁶ Audio example 3 presented at the conference is performed by singers and instrumental ensemble.

micro-region could only be selected from one, so it includes songs from many more micro-regions. There is a lower proportion of the oldest folk songs, so there are fewer featuring pentatonic melodies and *parlando* and *parlando-rubato* performances. In the second and third volumes, the proportion of all these is much higher because they include more traditional areas that have been more popular among collectors.

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