

THE INSTRUMENTAL FOLK MUSIC IN SÂNDOMIC CIUC, COUNTY OF HARGHITA

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Abstract: *Upper Ciuc is an ethnic area rich in tradition to the north of Miercurea Ciuc, which consists of six large villages and a town. Throughout the centuries many folklorists have sought out and visited this countryside to experience and enjoy instrumental folk music. The folk band from Felcsik has uniquely preserved a lineup composed of the old traditional instruments through the turn of the 20th century, consisting of violin, viola and 'gardon'. The members of the orchestra are all expert virtuoso musicians. Their playing on the instruments is characterized by the repetition of tunes from which arise many diverse variations and true to the folk tradition, they are masters of the art of ringing the changes. The analysis of the instrumental techniques and the musical examples demonstrate very well these specialities.*

Key words: *instrumental folk music, instrument technique, variations, ornaments.*

1. Introduction

Sândomic Ciuc lies in the eastern part of Transylvania, atop the Ciuc Basin, being surrounded by the Harghita and Ciucului Mountains, and it is part of the ethnographic micro area called the Upper Ciuc. This area extends to the north of Miercurea Ciuc, between the Bogát pass and the town of Bălan, and includes the following localities (from south to north): Mădăraş, Dăneşti, Cârţa, Ineu, Tomeşti, Sândomic Ciuc and the town of Bălan (see Vofkori 1998.11.). Ciuc county was a former favourite ethnographic area of the ethnomusicologists of all times. Starting with Bartók Béla until the present days, very many researchers have sought this land rich in traditions.

Sândomic Ciuc is one of the most populated and poorest communities of the Ciucului Basin. The community in Upper Ciuc can boast of a very rich folklore

tradition. The instrumental band consisting of violin and 'gardon' has been preserved to this day.

The composition of **the band**, from the traditional band to the orchestra with electrical instruments so popular today, has seen many phases of development. Today's older generation still remembers the band consisting of violin and 'gardon'. (Cello sized and shaped percussion instrument, on the straight refined bridge of which there are four equally tuned *D* strings. The strings on it are alternately hit and pinched by right and left hands as well: the instrumental strings are hit by a bow held in the right hand (all four strings at the same time), with left hand the upper string is pinched. This is described by Dincsér Oszkár too, in his study from the middle of the last century, see Dincsér 1943.)

Later on, in the folk music band the contra (the three string viola and the straight bridge

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unknown in this area) was added, then the contrabass, which took over the role of the 'gardon'. When they played for the officials, a dulcimer, a contra or an accordion and a contrabass were also added to the traditional folk band.

With the occasion of the collections initiated during the early '90s, the traditional pair was extended with a contra. Apart from Sinka Sándor and his wife Duduj Rozália, the ones who have kept the traditional band of two musicians to this day among the Seklers of Ciuc, Duduj Ádám was also invited.

From László Elek's account we find that at the end of the nineteenth century this kind of band was already known among the Seklers of Ciuc (László 1896.).

Sinka Sándor was born on the 22nd of March 1936 in Sândominic Ciuc. He attended school until the fourth grade. His father, Demeter Demeter was also a musician and his mother, Sinka Borbála played the 'gardon'. Sinka did not know the how to read music. He himself admits that no one taught him how to play the violin. He learned by ear, especially from his father-in-law, Duduj Lajos, with whom he often played the contra. He later founded his own folk music band. In the beginning, he played in various bands with his wife, with his brothers-in-law Adam and Miklós and then with his son, Sándor. In recent decades he has only played with his wife.

To my question, 'when did they play with a larger band', Sinka said: 'When I played for the officials. They always asked for the dulcimer as well.' The larger band was initiated by Duduj Lajos, who was an educated musician. He attended violin classes in Miercurea Ciuc. Sometimes he and his wife played in the traditional band (violin and cello). They were hired to sing in the Ghimeş valley. They taught the children – five in number – to read sheet music. Two of them studied music and today they are professional musicians.

Sinka and his wife have worked in the local community centre until about 1978, accompanying dance groups (for an hourly

wage), or at the Saturday night dances. Later, they moved to Bălan and played for three years in the local band. After much turmoil (they lived in Gheorgheni, Micfalău, Cârţă), finally, in 1992 they moved back to Sândominic Ciuc. Meanwhile they played in different places. They have been employed everywhere from Bălan to Ciceu, and from time to time even in the villages of the Gheorgheni Depression. During the last period of life – as a result of fewer opportunities for traditional dance and the new customs in the composition of bands – they were employed less and less. They played primarily for local dance groups and during the dance camps in Ghimeş, initiated in 1992. Sinka died in 2001 at the age of 65.

Duduj Ádám was born on the 20th of July 1946, in the village of Sândominic Ciuc. He attended school until the seventh grade. He learned to play the violin and then the contra, from his father, Duduj Lajos. All his relatives were musicians. His mother, Duduj Ilona played the 'gardon'. Most of his father's brothers (thirteen in number) were musicians. During his childhood, he often worked with his grandfather, Duduj János and with his grandmother, Duduj Teréz, as a contra player (in fact, his grandparents used to play as a duo). He later taught himself to play the contrabass. He has also learned the bass clef. As a contrabass player he first played with his brother-in-law Sinka Sándor, after which he was involved in various folk bands (in Bălan and Miercurea Ciuc). Meanwhile he also sang in restaurants (in Praid and Sovata). Since 1990, for different periods, he was the contrabass and the contra player for the Harghita National Sekler People's Assembly in Ciuc. There he learned to play the three strings viola. He died in 2004, at the age of 58.

Duduj Rozália was born on November 27th 1939, in the village of Sândominic Ciuc. She attended school until the sixth grade. Her father taught her how to read

music (which she says she has forgotten), and her mother taught her how to play the 'gardon'. On the dulcimer bought by father, her brother Lajos showed her the first cords. By means of self-education she has become a very good dulcimer player. Although in the 80s she could still be heard playing the dulcimer, today she no longer plays this instrument. With her eminent interpretation on 'gardon' and also due to her ability to provide an atmosphere as relaxed as possible, Duduj Rozália is considered one of the best instrumentalists in the Upper Ciuc. Nowadays she rarely plays except at various festivals and dance camps within the 'folk dance houses' movement, mostly with educated violin players in this movement.

2. The technique of the instrument

Compared with other musicians from Transylvania, Sinka Sándor's **violin technique** is relatively simple. Among the ornaments used, we can especially mention the *appoggiatura* (ascending or descending, stressed or unstressed, made of one or more sounds), the *mordent* and the *trill* (with a higher or lower changing sound, in the case of the higher one at a distance of a tone or a half-tone, in the case of the lower one at a distance of a half-tone), as well as *glissando* (before the main sound being mostly ascending and after it usually descending):



The *figurations* in movement of sixteenth notes are mainly present in the stereotypical cadences, in the length of one or two bars of 4/4:



Especially the latter ones bringing a whole new and unknown tone to the natural melody.

Harmonic intervals are characteristic, which probably come to this area to replace the missing harmonic

accompaniment in the band. They can be free strings played together with the sound of the melody, two free strings and rarely other fifths. The intervals which are most commonly used are the sixths and the thirds:



We can also find more intervals in the cadences of the dance suites, which are present especially after the full

interpretation of the last songs. Rarely do they replace the last bar of the song:



Sinka only plays two tonalities: as a rule *La* (more than two thirds of the songs), rarely *Re*. Most of the songs are in a minor key. On several occasions he happened to interpret different songs in both heights. Responding to my question, he suggested that he could play any song in both tonalities.

Another feature of Sinka's violin technique is the *change in registry*. The possibilities in the ambitus of the violin are



The relatively simpler forms of ornamentation are abundantly rewarded by Sinka's extraordinary ability to vary. In terms of forming the variations, he can be considered a great virtuoso. According to some statistics made on 60 songs, 43% of all measures were varied during rehearsal.

Duduj Ádám's **contra technique** shows two aspects. Being an educated musician, but also being influenced by his position as an urban restaurant musician, he exaggerates

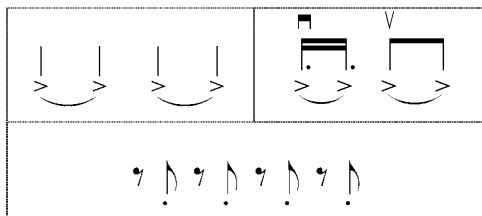
also exploited by him, as well as by the other fiddlers. The figurative stereotypical meters are usually present in the melodies and the interludes played in *La*. They resound for the upper octave to the finalis. We come across other octave leaps in the meters of the melodies played in *La*, usually upwards, and for the melodies played in *Re*, usually downwards:

the functional harmonization (he harmonizes tightly). At the request of the undersigned, he has also accompanied in a simpler, more traditional manner. In presenting his technique, we considered especially the older form. In order to compare the two accompaniment 'styles', we have chosen a dance song called 'féloláhos' (half Romanian), in two versions. In the first version, he performs a traditional accompaniment, where the

harmony is changed 33 times, and in the second one he performs a tight accompaniment, changing 53 times.

Variety is an important style element for him as well. As he performs a contra accompaniment, he uses harmonies made of two sounds, playing only the strings *Sol* and *Re*. They are usually played in several versions. This is the reason why the repetitions are rarely identical. Very interesting is the fact that within the traditional harmonization, he almost never uses minor harmonies. Instead he usually plays empty fifths or fourths. The reduced intervals are quite frequent, which is solved in a manner characteristic to tonal music.

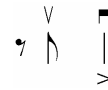
The use of the bow is of three kinds: the so-called slow 'dűvő' (in the Romanian terminology 'lourée martelé' – a term taken from Radulescu 1984, p. 80.), a specific variant for the accompaniment of the *învârtita* (*sprightly dance*) of the dense 'dűvő' bow and the contretemps rhythm:



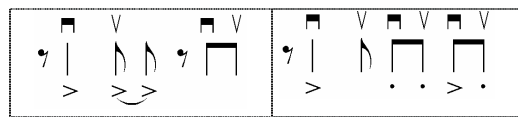
Rhythmic ornamentations are frequent, occurring mostly in dances accompanied with contretemps rhythm. Thus we can notice the syncopated rhythm made up of two quarters (long *estam*), and the eights accompaniment, where, instead of the eight pause, with the bow up, he plays other sounds or intervals (the first beat mostly on the *Sol* string, the second one the same, or on both strings):



Rhythmic cadences often appear, by bringing quarters on the emphasized beats:



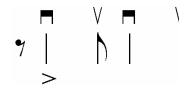
The most varied is the accompaniment for the fast *csárdás* dance. Besides the ornaments mentioned before, we also meet others here. The two-beat syncopated rhythm (long *estam*) combined with the contretemps is completed occasionally with one or two pairs of eights at the end of the 4/4 bar:



The first is also found after the contretemps (short *estam*). Duduj normally used all of these at the end of a melodic line. Another ornament can be the syncopated rhythm, repeated many times. In these cases, on the first eighth of the syncope he plays a sound on the *Sol* string:



The two quarters on time following a contretemps syncope are also used for a rhythmic cadence:



Duduj Rozália's '**gardon**' technique is also very varied. Instead of pinching the string, she taps the strings with her left hand: she taps the keyboard with an old metal cigarette box, filled with coins. At the request of the undersigned, however, especially with the occasion of the collections, she has also pinched the thin string, like the Csángos of the Ghimeş Valley. She stated that this manner of interpretation was also spread earlier in the Upper Ciuc.

Her instrument is bigger than that of Ghimeş. It looks like a violoncello, but the front and back are almost straight. Because of the large size, it cannot be placed under the chin. Therefore, in contrast with the

musicians from Ghimeş, she holds the instrument between her legs. Only if she plays in the street does she place the instrument under her chin. The lively atmosphere of the dance is kept by her shrieks and by her vocal interpretation.

She uses two basic rhythmic formulas. The first is characteristic of the 'fêlolâhos' (half Romanian) dance, and it is a syncopated formula, usually asymmetric. The second one is the eights movement, played alternately with both hands.

The first is related to the rhythmic accompaniment of the Transylvanian dance of Bihor, if we consider only the basic sounds on the right hand:



We often meet an ornamentation in which on both beats of the second bar, the natural order of the hands changes:



This manner of reversed tapping is sometimes extended.

The second basic formula, especially in a slower tempo, brings up a pulse which is a little asymmetrical, as the tapping of the left hand is clearly delayed. This is the rhythm for which Duduj Rozália's virtuosity is known:



The ornamentations by the omission of beats (the introduction of breaks) are common, and they are connected to the even quarters on the right hand:

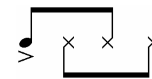


The general quarters movement of the right hand is often segmented by an eights movement. In these cases, tapping or pinching with the left hand may occur, but

they usually have a clear delay:



Then there are cases in which, instead of tapping the unstressed beat, she pinches the thin string with her right hand as well. The rhythm of the tapping (or pinching) on the left hand combined with the pinching on the right hand brings up an interesting effect:



With her right hand she sometimes taps the dactyl formulas, even several times. Rarely do we meet longer breaks. In such cases, within the 4/4 bar, only the first tap on the right hand, and the next tapping (or pinching) on the left hand can be heard.

In conclusion, we can say that the musicians of Sândonic Ciuc meet all the qualities of a musician par excellence: during the rehearsals for various songs or parts they use all kinds of variants, as diverse as possible. Even a composer could be proud of the variation processes they use.

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