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Georges (György) Cziffra (1921-1994), the piano virtuoso of Hungarian gypsy origin, developed bewildering skills of improvisation and technical brilliance at the piano. His deep fascination with Franz Liszt's music influenced his playing style and musical spirit, and his critics, highly speaking of his Romantic pianism and especially emphasizing his virtuosity, often held him as one of the most outstanding Liszt performers of our age. Cziffra's love for Hungarian themes moved him to perform and record numerous improvisations based on Magyar melodies. Later in his life he preserved many of his own extemporized adaptations in notation, including his transcriptions of fifteen of the *Hungarian Dances* by Johannes Brahms.

The focus of the paper is on Georges Cziffra's two piano transcriptions (1957 and 1982-83) of Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance* (1868). The examination and analysis of these two versions in comparison with the original Hungarian sources and Brahms' own arrangement reveal Cziffra's style as a virtuoso improviser and transcriber. Examples from Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* serve to identify the Lisztian features in Cziffra's transcriptions. The characteristic elements of the Hungarian gypsy musicians' improvisatory style, which influenced and inspired both Liszt and Brahms, as well as Cziffra, receive particular attention.

Chapter 2 offers a brief history of the Hungarian gypsy musicians, depicts their life and social status in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, examines the most characteristic elements of their performance technique, and portrays their musical-

stylistic influence on Hungarian music, the stylistic conglomeration of which became the foundation for the renowned *style hongrois*. Chapter 3 examines the acquaintance of Liszt and Brahms with Hungarian music in the gypsy style and reviews basic information about Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* and Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*. Chapter 4 offers biographical information about György Cziffra and investigates his association with the music of Liszt, Brahms, and the Hungarian gypsy musicians. Cziffra's musical and transcribing style and a general discussion of his *Transcriptions: Grandes Etudes de Concert I* (Frankfurt: Peters, 1995) are also included here. Chapter 5 consists of information about the sources of the popular themes that Brahms used for the *Hungarian Dances*. Then the focus of this chapter is on the evolution of the *Fifth Hungarian Dance* from its sources through Brahms to the transcriptions of Cziffra, including the examination of Cziffra's 1957 transcription in comparison to the 1982-83 version. Selected examples of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* are provided to support the identification of Lisztian features in Cziffra's work. The detection of the characteristic elements of the Hungarian gypsies' improvisatory style will receive particular attention.

HUNGARIAN GYPSY STYLE IN THE LISZTIAN SPIRIT:
GEORGES CZIFFRA'S TWO TRANSCRIPTIONS
OF BRAHMS' FIFTH HUNGARIAN DANCE

by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A Virtuoso Improviser from Angyalföld

The name of György Cziffra (1921-1994) became legendary in the piano world, not only as a bravura performer of Liszt's works and his own transcriptions, but also as a peerless improviser. His fiery and breathtaking extemporizations at once astonished Cziffra's audiences in smoky clubs and bars of Budapest's night life, such as the Kedves Espresso¹ and concert halls worldwide. For the period of his life in Hungary as a child and young adult, Georges Cziffra lived in harsh poverty. He was born in 1921, in Budapest's Angyalföld, as the only son of a retired gypsy cimbalom player destitute due to his deportation from Paris.² During the economically difficult years of post-war Hungary, prejudice inherent in the culture worked hand-in-hand with poverty against Romani people (as gypsies were known in Hungary). Only the musicians were still sought, respected, and well-paid.

¹ It was in Kedves Espresso where György Ferenczy, professor of piano at the Liszt Academy of Music, heard Cziffra play in 1953 and recognized his extraordinary talent as a pianist. Ferenczy helped Cziffra to return to classical music and start giving concerts in large concert halls. György Cziffra, *Ágyúk és Virágok* [Cannons and flowers], extended edition, ed. Péter Várnai (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1983), 186-187. Note: the Hungarian (1983) and the English (1996) editions of this book are both used in this document. They will be cited separately.

² Cziffra, "A nyomorúság tutaján" [On the raft of poverty], in *Ágyúk és Virágok*, 11-28.

For a gypsy family, becoming a celebrated, good musician meant much more than money and success. It was the most respected and noble way, perhaps the only way, for moral value among gypsy families. Social studies among musical Romani families demonstrate how their young children, especially their boys, were encouraged to learn to play by ear a vast repertory of popular themes as soon as they were able to hold a violin or sit at a piano. They were motivated to practice a variety of scales and patterns in different combinations of intervals and rhythms, arpeggios in various forms and keys, and harmonic progressions. Basically they were starting to develop the art of improvisation as early as three to five years of age.

The first recordings of Cziffra's most successful improvisations originate from 1955-57, but it was not until almost three decades later that he decided to capture them in notation in order to preserve their innovative ideas for the benefit of curious future pianists.³ The 1995 posthumous publication of Cziffra's transcriptions⁴ consists of music in print that was recorded by him in the 1950s and also his more recent transcriptions of fifteen of the *Hungarian Dances* of Brahms, which date from 1982-83.⁵ This volume of Cziffra's music deserves attention, for it presents us today with the virtuoso pianist's

³ These first Budapest recordings include paraphrases written on Johann Strauss' *Blue Danube Waltz*, *Tritsch-Tratsch Polka*, *Die Fledermaus*, and *Der Zigeunenbaron*; Rimsky Korsakov's *Le Vol du Bourdon* [Flight of the bumblebee], Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance*; and Cziffra's own *Romani* [gypsy] *Fantasy*; as well as an emotionally intense improvisation on Ferenc Vecsey's *A la Valse Triste*.

⁴ Georges Cziffra, *Transcriptions: Grandes Etudes de Concert I pour piano* (Senlis, France: Edition Fondation Cziffra, distributed by Frankfurt: Peters, 1995).

⁵ These fifteen transcriptions of nos. 1-6, 8-10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, and 21 of Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* were recorded by Cziffra during 1982-83 at the Auditorium Franz Liszt de la Fondation Cziffra at Senlis. The CD was made available to the public only as a limited special edition released by EMI Classics on 17 October 2000 and has sadly not available since then.

extensions of the traditions and techniques of improvisation that were everyday custom in the nineteenth century. Cziffra considered himself a teacher who shed light on the foundations of Liszt's fantastic improvisational ability with the hope of opening new doors for future pianists.⁶

The *Fifth Hungarian Dance* was transcribed twice by Cziffra. The first version he recorded in 1957 with the French record company Pathé-Marconi EMI,⁷ but it was published for the first time in the 1995 edition.⁸ This transcription is more improvisatory in character than the later one. The examination of Cziffra's two transcriptions of Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance* is presented to demonstrate the virtuoso Cziffra's improvising style.

Cziffra expressed his artistic goal with his later adaptation of the *Fifteen Hungarian Dances* by Brahms in the introduction to his *Transcriptions: Grandes Etudes de Concert*.⁹ He wrote that, inspired by his genuine love for Hungarian melodies, he intended to combine the legacies of Brahms and Liszt "to bring peace between Brahms and Liszt," thereby respecting the former's "constructive spirit" and the latter's "enthusiasm for improvisation."¹⁰ These Hungarian themes, the character of which in a way binds Brahms, Liszt, and Cziffra together, were not only Hungarian but at least as

⁶ Cziffra, "Introduction to my Transcriptions," *Transcriptions*, 8-11.

⁷ This company was active between 1972 and 1990, after which it became EMI France. <http://www.emimusic.fr/home.html> (accessed 4 March 2007).

⁸ The piece is included in the Appendix of Cziffra's *Transcriptions*, 152-159.

⁹ (Senlis, France: Edition Fondation Cziffra, distributed by Frankfurt: Peters, 1995), 8-11.

¹⁰ Cziffra, "Introduction to my Transcriptions," *Transcriptions*, 9.

much gypsy in their nature. Although most of the melodies were written down and published by Hungarians, it was the gypsy musicians who performed and propagated them. It was they who brought these melodies to life by elevating the emotional contrasts and intensity, enriching the musical colors, and elaborating the melodic lines spontaneously by improvising on the tunes. Had they not added a unique flavor of their own to these Hungarian national folk-like compositions, the *style hongrois*, which inspired music in the Western world to a great extent, would have never existed.

My goal in this document is to find the stylistic sources to Cziffra's *La Cinquième danse hongroise* (1957) and *Danse hongroise no. 5* (1982-83) in the musical tradition of the Hungarian gypsies and the *Hungarian Rhapsodies* of Liszt. The document will also reveal the transformation of the musical material of the *Fifth Hungarian Dance* from its original sources through Brahms to the two adaptations of Cziffra.

Organization of the Text

Chapter 2 offers a brief history of gypsy musicians in Hungary since their first appearance in the country. This chapter depicts their professional life, social status, and reception in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and gives an insight into their everyday life of today. A few outstanding virtuosos such as János Bihari (1784-1827) who was heard by Liszt, are mentioned in greater detail. In general, the most characteristic elements of Hungarian gypsy performance technique are examined as well as the mutual stylistic influence of Hungarian folk-art music and gypsy performance

style. This stylistic conglomeration was inevitable and became the foundation for the renowned *style hongrois*. To draw a clear line between Hungarian folk-art music and the music of Hungarian gypsies is incredibly difficult, if not impossible. Only the authentic folk music of the Hungarian peasants remained more or less intact from the influence of the Romani performance styles.

Chapter 3 examines the acquaintance of Liszt and Brahms with Hungarian music in the gypsy style. This includes a brief historical overview of both composers' experience regarding Hungarian gypsy music and an investigation of their unique ways of incorporating elements of the style into their selected piano works. Some basic information, such as the origins and formal characteristics of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* and Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* is also provided here.

Chapter 4 offers biographical information about Georges (György) Cziffra, including a few corrections of frequent errors about his education. Following the short biography, this section investigates Cziffra's association and extraordinary connection with the music of Liszt, his approach to the music of Brahms, and his relationship to Hungarian gypsy musicians. Cziffra's musical and transcribing style, his *ars poetica* about the purpose and goal of his transcriptions, and a brief general discussion of his *Transcriptions* are also included here.

Chapter 5 consists of information about the sources of the popular themes that Brahms used for the *Hungarian Dances*. This chapter investigates the evolution of the *Fifth Hungarian Dance* from its sources through Brahms to the transcriptions of Cziffra.

The examination includes a comparative formal analysis of the sources, Brahms' arrangement, and Cziffra's transcriptions. Also it shows some of the elements in the writing that recall the performance style and instrumentation of Hungarian gypsy bands as well as of the style of Liszt, and provides a few charts analyzing the harmonic structure of the pieces. A selection of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* is also examined to support the identification of Lisztian features in Cziffra's work. The detection of the characteristic elements of the Hungarian gypsies' improvisatory style will receive particular attention. Cziffra's original harmonic ideas and pianistic solutions are also considered. Cziffra guides the player to a stylistic performance through his meticulous notation, such as the placement of grace notes preceding downbeats, the capture of elusive rhythms in extremely fast passages, and innovative choices of small and large print. Cziffra considered this publication of his improvisations and transcriptions to be a guide for further generations to explore the limitless possibilities of this breathtaking art.

A Survey of Literature

According to the author's research, a number of recent social studies about the Hungarian gypsy musicians are still available only in the Hungarian language. The most thorough scholarly research in this field began during the last three decades of the twentieth century. Bálint Sárosi's indispensable articles on Hungarian gypsies and

nineteenth-century neo-traditional folk-art music of Budapest,¹¹ his books on gypsy music versus Hungarian folk music, and his research on Bihari¹² offer thorough insight into the history and life of Hungarian gypsy musicians. Ágnes Békési's recent volume on the gypsy musicians' life, musical tradition, and social status¹³ focuses on the present and potential future of the Romani musical culture. The essays in the collected work by Zsuzsanna Bódis portray the gypsy musical culture of more specific geographical areas in Hungary,¹⁴ and Katalin Kovalcsik's studies in this field¹⁵ add to a genuine, objective portrayal of the Hungarian Romani people's musicianship and life with more specific observations. The important and thorough research of Jonathan Bellman, who currently stands as one of the authorities in this field of scholarship in English, is highly valued,

¹¹ "Cigányzenészek - Magyar népies zene" [Gypsy musicians: Hungarian neotraditional music], in *Symphonia Hungarorum: Magyarország zenekultúrájának ezer éve* [Thousand years of the musical culture of Hungary] (Budapest: Magyar Zenetudományi és Zenekritikai Társaság, 2001), 151-162; and "Everyday Hungarian Music in Pest-Buda around 1870," *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 40 (1999): 325-352.

¹² Bálint Sárosi, *Cigányzene* [Gypsy music] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1971); and *Folk Music: Hungarian Musical Idiom* (Budapest: Corvina, 1986); and "János Bihari: Zigeunerprimas und Verbunkoskomponist: Zum gegenwärtigen Stand der Forschung" [János Bihari: gypsy bandleader and verbunkos composer: the current state of research], in *Die Musik der Sinti und Roma I*, ed. Anita Awosusi (Heidelberg, 1996), 67-79.

¹³ *Muzsikusok* [Musicians] (Budapest: Pont Kiadó, 2002).

¹⁴ *Tanulmányok a magyarországi cigányzenéről* [Studies on gypsy music in Hungary], Cigány Néprajzi Tanulmányok [Studies in Roma ethnography], ed. Ernő Eperjessy, no. 11 (Budapest: Magyar Néprajzi Társaság, 2002). The following studies are examined from this volume: Lujza Ratkó, "A cigányzene szerepe a nyírségi falvakban" [The role of gypsy music in the villages of Nyírség], 63-83; and Béla Felletár "Makói prímások és cigánydinasztiák" [Leaders of gypsy bands and musician dynasties in Makó], 11-38; and Zoltán Benedek, "Jeles prímások, nótaszerzők Nagykárolyban" [Notable band leaders, popular song composers in Nagykároly], 39-42.

¹⁵ "A magyarországi cigányok népzeneje" [The traditional music of the gypsies of Hungary], in *A magyarországi Romák* [Hungarian Roma people], ed. István Kemény (Budapest: Útmutató, 2000), 41-49; and "Popular Dance Elements in the Folk Music of Gypsies in Hungary," *Popular Music* 6/1 (1987): 45-68.

and his articles *The Style Hongrois in the Music of Western Europe* (1998) and “Toward a Lexicon for the *Style Hongrois*” (1991) are considered in this document.

Concerning the historical view of Hungarian gypsy musicians, the author briefly consulted the first history books written about the development of music in Hungarian life such as the concise history by the noted musicologist and director of the Royal Hungarian Opera, Julius [Gyula] Káldy (1838-1901),¹⁶ selected letters of Liszt and his book on gypsies (*Des Bohémiens*, 1859),¹⁷ and the renowned writings of Béla Bartók on Hungarian folk and Hungarian gypsy music from the 1930s. Sound recordings, such as those of Sándor, Roby, and Sándor Déki Lakatos, today’s great representatives of the Hungarian gypsy violin playing tradition, were also examined for tracing stylistic features.¹⁸

In his *Des Bohémiens* Liszt speaks of the gypsies’ music and virtuosity in the highest terms; however, he also portrays them, mistakenly, as the founders and only repositories of Hungarian folk music from ancient times. Even though Liszt was inaccurate, it was he who first proclaimed that this music should be taken seriously, as

¹⁶ *A History of Hungarian Music*, Studies in Music (London: William Reeves, 1902; reprint, New York: Hastings House, 1969).

¹⁷ *Des Bohémiens et leur musique en Hongrie* [About gypsies and their music in Hungary] (Paris: A. Bourdilliat, 1859; reprint, Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1881); also published in English (London: W. Reeves, 1926) and Hungarian (Pest: Heckenast, 1861).

¹⁸ Among others, recordings such as *The Lakatos Dynasty*, recorded in Budapest, 1993, performed by Sándor Lakatos, his Gypsy Band, Sándor Déki Lakatos, and his Gypsy Band (Hungaroton Classics, 1994, Compact Disc 10252); *Sándor Lakatos: Gypsy Virtuoso*, recorded in Budapest, 1994, performed by Sándor Lakatos (Hungaroton Classics, 1995, Compact Disc 10296); and various recordings on YouTube are consulted.

Max Peter Baumann points out in his “The Reflection of the Roma in European Art Music” (1996).¹⁹

On Liszt’s virtuoso improvising style that corresponded well with that of the gypsy players, Dana Gooley’s *The Virtuoso Liszt*²⁰ is the main source considered, for it is comprehensive and sheds new light on the virtuoso pianistic career of Liszt. Regarding the relationship of Liszt and the Hungarian gypsies, Klára Hamburger’s “Franz Liszt und Zigeunermusik,”²¹ offers additional information; she also presents useful critical writing about the Hungarian reception of Liszt’s famous (and infamous) *Des Bohémiens*.²² The vast number of contemporary criticisms of Liszt are outside of the scope of this document.

Mária Eckhardt’s two-part article “Magyar fantázia, ábránd, rapszódia a XIX. század zongoramuzsikájában” [Hungarian fantasy, fancy, rhapsody in the piano music of the nineteenth century]²³ offers material on the evolution of the rhapsody as a genre beginning with the nineteenth-century Hungarian *fantázia* [fantasy] and *ábránd* [fancy]. These early musical compositions were conceived by the leading Hungarian composers who worked at the same time as Liszt. Liszt adopted the basic elements of the

¹⁹ *World of Music* 38/1 (1996): 95-138.

²⁰ Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

²¹ In *Musik der Roma in Burgenland: Referate des Internationalen Workshop-Symposiums Eisenstadt* 5-6 (Oct. 2001): 83-102.

²² Klára Hamburger, “Liszt cigánykönyvének fogadtatása Magyarországon” [The reception of Liszt’s gypsy book in Hungary], *Muzsika* 43/12 (Dec. 2000): 20-25; and “Understanding the Hungarian Reception History of Liszt’s *Des Bohémiens et leur musique en Hongrie 1859/1881*,” *The Journal of the American Liszt Society* 54-56 (2003): 75-84.

²³ Part 1, *Magyar Zene* 24/2 (1983): 120-144; and Part 2, *Magyar Zene* 25/4 (1984): 346-366.

Hungarian *fantázia* and *ábránd*, which are represented in his *Magyar Dallok* (1840), but then he developed the genre even further, reaching the highest, most complex stage in the *Hungarian Rhapsodies* (1853).

Since Ervin Major's pioneering study (1933) in search of source material to Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*,²⁴ and János Bereczky's study some sixty years later,²⁵ the only systematic survey of Brahms' sources for the *Hungarian Dances* (1865) has been undertaken by Katalin Szerző.²⁶ As part of her research, Szerző examined nearly 70,000 bibliographical entries in the general collection of the library of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, into which Brahms' personal library has been incorporated, to find Hungarian material once in the composer's possession. Her research uncovered an impressive collection of printed Hungarian music from Brahms' legacy. Significantly, the composer owned numerous transcriptions by Hungarian gypsy musicians.²⁷ Szerző's

²⁴ "Brahms és a magyar zene: A *Magyar táncok* forrásai" [Brahms and Hungarian music: sources of the *Hungarian Dances*], in *Fejezetek a Magyar Zene Történetéből* [Chapters from the history of Hungarian Music] (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1933).

²⁵ "Brahms hét magyar témájának forrása" [Sources for seven Hungarian themes of Brahms], *Zenetudományi Dolgozatok* [Studies in musicology], 1990-91, by the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Budapest: Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1991), 75-88.

²⁶ "Magyar zeneműnyomtatványok Brahms könyvtárában: Újabb adatok a Magyar táncok forrásaihoz" [Printed Hungarian music in Brahms' library: new sources for the Hungarian dances], *Zenetudományi Dolgozatok* [Studies in musicology] 1995-96, by the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Budapest: Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1991), 157-166.

²⁷ These 115 compositions published by 52 editors may serve as a scholarly background for the Hungarian elements that appear in many of Brahms' works. Among the earliest of them are an anonymous Viennese edition (ca. 1807) of *Galántai táncok* [Dances of Galánta] for piano (a publication Haydn also owned) and an arrangement for piano, four hands of the *Rákóczy March* (Wien: Mechetti, 1848). Later items represent not only the vanguard of Hungarian art music (Liszt, Goldmark, etc.), but lesser known composers including Kornél Ábrányi (1822-1903), Imre Székely (1823-1887), and Antal Siposs (1839-1923).

research also lists Hungarian sheet music that did not belong to the collection of Brahms but may well have been studied by the composer while in the library. The analytical examination and the publication of the Hungarian legacy from the Brahms collection are awaiting future research.

To shed light on Szerző's discovery also seems important, since recent articles, such as "Dance, Gypsy, Dance!" by Joel Sheveloff,²⁸ still express doubt about the origin of the *Hungarian Dances*. The article states, "We don't know enough to confirm the thesis that the first ten dances of 1869 largely arrange well-known gypsy band sources, while the eleven others of 1880 tend to create new music in the style of the former."²⁹ Michael Musgrave retains this false statement in the article, "Years of Transition: Brahms and Vienna 1862-1875."³⁰ Szerző documented and listed source material to nineteen of the twenty-one dances in her introduction to the Editio Musica Budapest internationally published edition of Brahms' *Hungarian Dances for Piano Duet*.³¹

The information presented about Cziffra mainly derives from his autobiography, concert- and recording-reviews, interviews, documentary films, radio programs, CD jackets, and stories that circulate among the public. About improvisation and his special relationship to Liszt, Cziffra speaks in an interview made with the pianist by Varga Bálint

²⁸ In *The Varieties of Musicology: Essays in Honor of Murray Lefkowitz*, ed. by John Daverio and John Ogasapian (Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2000), 157-166.

²⁹ Sheveloff, 151.

³⁰ In *The Cambridge Companion to Brahms*, ed. Michael Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 45.

³¹ The "Introduction" appears in three languages, German, English, and Hungarian; Johannes Brahms, *Hungarian Dances for Piano Duet*, ed. Gábor Kováts, source publication and commentaries by Katalin Szerző (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1990).

András at the occasion of one of Cziffra's Hungarian visits in March, 1984. This material, included in chapter IV, was accessed by the author on Magyar Rádió on 13 August 2006. The interview is translated to English. All translations in this document are by the author unless otherwise noted.

Some interesting material (collected by Gyula Kárpáthy) concerning Cziffra is in the Hungarian National Széchenyi Library. Included are stories and anecdotes about famous Hungarian gypsies, and three stories about Cziffra that circulated among his friends.³² Numerous posters and concert-programs of Cziffra's 1954-56 Budapest performances and others from the 1980s are also located in the Széchenyi Library.

A memorial documentary edition on Cziffra (1994) by the Magyar Televízió (Hungarian television) Budapest, and a Hungarian radio program assembled in his memory (1994) serve as additional sources to this document, as well as a documentary made by Cziffra's granddaughter (Georges Cziffra: *Virtuose magician*, production of the Fondation Cziffra). Cziffra is also portrayed briefly by Hungarian gypsy musicians in their own words. Mentioned also are some jazz musicians, still living, who played with Cziffra, such as Jenő Beanter (Bubi), Lajos Kathy-Horváth, and Béla Szakcsi-Lakatos.

³² Gyula Kárpáthy, *Menet közben: életúton alkotó cigányokkal* [While on a journey: with creative gypsies on a travel of life] (Budapest: M. Mercurius, 2004).

CHAPTER II
HUNGARIAN GYPSY MUSICIANS

Their History

For the gypsies there is no angel of history, nor is there a past to be redeemed. They live with their gaze fixed on a permanent present that is always becoming.³³

It was from Northern India, before the twelfth century, that the nomadic groups of gypsies started their migrations west.³⁴ Their history throughout nearly a thousand years was the history of discrimination; they had to face persecution, violence in various degrees, or forced assimilation during their movements.³⁵ Today gypsy inhabitants form approximately ten percent of the population in Central and Eastern European countries (less in Western Europe).³⁶ Thorough scholarly studies concerning the gypsies only began within the last few decades of the twentieth century; therefore, many questions remain open. From research today, however, the European history of gypsy musicians can be traced back as far as the fifteenth century. According to one of the most reliable

³³ Michael Stewart, *In the Time of the Gypsies* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), 246; quoted in Ágnes Békési, *Muzsikusok* [Musicians] (Budapest: Pont Kiadó, 2003), 127.

³⁴ According to Angus Fraser (*The Gypsies*, Cambridge, Blackwell, 1992) groups of singers and musicians of Indian origin have appeared in Persia sometime before the tenth century; Békési, 17.

³⁵ Anne Sutherland, "Complexities of U. S. Law and Gypsy Identity," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 45/2 (1997): 393.

³⁶ Sutherland, 394.

Hungarian scholars in this field, Bálint Sárosi, gypsy musicians traveled west from the Balkan Peninsula during the 1410s.³⁷

Fundamental differences between sedentary societies and nomadic societies frequently lead to conflict,³⁸ and most European cultures have hardly proven hospitable to the stateless gypsies who were also strikingly different in many ways.³⁹ Having their roots in India, the gypsies were not only dark-skinned and spoke a foreign language, but had completely different traditions and lifestyles from those of European civilization. Being non-Christian strangers and proclaiming no religious beliefs made their European reception even more problematic. Since they were protected neither by the church nor the state, they were completely exposed to any law that was enforced in any locality at any time.⁴⁰ In most European countries including Russia, punishments, such as expulsion from the country, were enforced.⁴¹ The reason why most gypsies eventually chose Hungary was that they were not subjected there to such dreadful persecutions as in other

³⁷ Bálint Sárosi, "Gypsy Musicians and Hungarian Peasant Music," *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* 2 (1970): 9.

³⁸ Sutherland, 393.

³⁹ Jonathan Bellman, "The Hungarian Gypsies and the Poetics of Exclusion," in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman, 74-103 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 75.

⁴⁰ Bellman, "The Hungarian Gypsies," 78.

⁴¹ This unwelcoming behavior has continued through the centuries. In 1749, in a German encyclopedia the following words were written: "Certainly gypsies had been godless, evil people for all time, and are persecuted for good reason now since this gypsy folk is in the habit of causing much mischief . . . thus . . . they are searched out with force of arms in all places and expelled out of the country by force, as it is ordered almost everywhere in Germany; it is permitted to shoot and kill them on the spot for perceived resistance . . ." Quoted in Bellman, "The Hungarian Gypsies," 78. For a more comprehensive view on the treatment of gypsies in Europe, see pp. 74-80.

countries. Some Hungarian lords found it useful to have them around to provide entertainment (also many gypsies were hired as blacksmiths).⁴²

Gypsy Musicians in Hungary: History and Social Status

The first known documentation of the presence of gypsies in Hungary comes from a Hungarian safe-conduct order issued by Emperor Sigismund dating from 1423.⁴³ The gypsies have since been gradually assimilated into Hungarian culture, coming into contact with the native music and gradually incorporating it into their repertoire. The earliest note about paid gypsy musicians in Hungary originates from 1489, from Queen Beatrix's estate, and was about a lute player.⁴⁴ From 1585 there is documentation of three gypsy musicians, two with bowed instruments and one with lute, playing before a parade in honor of the Austrian imperial ambassador.⁴⁵ Sárosi suggests that it may have been the Turkish occupiers who also introduced the use of gypsy musicians to the Magyars since it was their general custom to have music performed by gypsies. They brought their musicians when they entered Hungary and kept the country under subjugation from the early sixteenth until the end of the seventeenth century.⁴⁶

⁴² Sárosi, "Gypsy Musicians," 11.

⁴³ Sárosi, "Gypsy Musicians," 9.

⁴⁴ Albert Nyári, *The Hyppolit codices of Modena, Századok* (Budapest, 1874), 81; in Sárosi, "Gypsy Musicians," 10.

⁴⁵ Hans Lawenclaw, *Neue Chronica Türken selbst beschrieben* (Frankfurt am Mayn, 1595), 118; in Sárosi, "Gypsy Musicians," 11.

⁴⁶ Sárosi, "Gypsy Musicians," 11.

From 1686, when Hungary was freed from the Turkish oppression of 150 years, it immediately fell under Habsburg rule. Documentation gives evidence of a few gypsy musicians unintentionally becoming involved with the national movement against the Habsburg oppression by playing nationalist music at certain occasions—not as often, however, as the nineteenth-century Romantic nationalists thought.⁴⁷

It took several centuries before the gypsies established themselves as musicians, argues Sárosi. The information from a special census counting Hungary's gypsy inhabitants shows the gradual growth of the number of musicians. According to this count, in 1782 as many as 43,787 gypsies lived in Hungary, among whom there were 582 musicians, while in 1901 about 287,940 Hungarian gypsies included 17,000 musicians.⁴⁸

Max Peter Baumann mentions that during the 1700s some bands in Hungary caused a sensation with their musical ability in that they were able to play at banquets, balls, and festivities at the princely courts.⁴⁹ But at this time people were not yet equating Hungarian gypsies with musicians. That perception became established during the nineteenth century.

⁴⁷ At the courts of Prince Rákóczy Ferenc and his general Bercsényi, mostly Western European (especially French) music was favored, for which there were musicians employed from several foreign nations. Tamás Esze, “Zenetörténeti adataink II. Rákóczy Ferencz szabadságharcának idejéből” [Music-historical data from the time of the war of independence of Ferencz Rákóczy II], *Zenetudományi Tanulmányok* [Studies in musicology] (Budapest, 1955) 4: 59-97; in Sárosi, “Gypsy Musicians,” 12.

⁴⁸ The information is from *Zenevilág* [Music world] (1901-02) 2: 450-451; in Sárosi, “Gypsy Musicians,” 18.

⁴⁹ Max Peter Baumann, “Reflection of the Roma in European Art Music,” *World of Music* 38 (1996): 107.

Through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gypsy musicians were mostly employed by princes, lords, or equally high social classes. In the eighteenth century, there were more and more members of the nobility who hired musicians to imitate their princes. This is also the first time two gypsy musicians were remembered by their proper names.⁵⁰ During this time the musicians were becoming primarily instrumentalists, as they had given up the singing that used to provide entertainment in Turkish parades.⁵¹ After this period they paid little attention to vocal popular music mainly because they were most needed to accompany dances. Also they could not imitate a singing style as effectively as they could improvise on their instruments.⁵²

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several Romani groups traveled with their instrumental ensembles from place to place.⁵³ By the 1800s there were also villages that could afford to have at least one or a few musician gypsies, who were working for the more wealthy peasants. These musicians played for festivities and, most commonly, for dances.⁵⁴ Still, most gypsy music remained in the more urbanized areas where the upper range of society lived because villagers never gave this music as much

⁵⁰ These people were Mihály Barna and a woman, Panna Czinka, whose band was the first proper gypsy band in the history. Sárosi, “Gypsy Musicians,” 11; and Békési, 22.

⁵¹ Sárosi, “Gypsy Musicians,” 14.

⁵² Interestingly their own traditional gypsy folk music consists largely of vocal repertoire; perhaps because the only opportunity for the Romani people for singing in the mother tongue was provided by their own folk music, as Katalin Kovalcsik points out in “Popular Dance Music Elements in the Folk Music of Gypsies in Hungary,” *Popular Music* 6/1 (1987): 45.

⁵³ Baumann, 107.

⁵⁴ Most of these dances that the gypsies learned from the Hungarian upper classes were yet unfamiliar to the villagers. Sárosi, “Gypsy Musicians,” 14.

recognition. That is why genuine Hungarian folk music happened to be preserved in its purest form by the peasants.

As mentioned earlier, in the 1700s gypsy musicians came into close contact with Hungarian national feelings and anti-Habsburg movements. This was the time when the *verbunkos* song and dance started to become popular, providing an important rhythmic and melodic source to the nineteenth-century Hungarian national musical style. The first of these *verbunkos* melodies were composed, sung, and danced at military recruitment ceremonies to attract soldiers for the war of freedom led by Ferenc Rákóczy. This war (1703-11) was an attempt by the Hungarians to defeat the oppressive power of the Habsburg Dynasty and to defy service to the Habsburg emperor. *Verbunkos* music was created from a variety of musical and national styles, and was mainly distributed by the Hungarian gypsies and danced by the Hussars. Stereotypical features of the style are the use of the gypsy scale (augmented seconds between the 3rd-4th and 6th-7th scale degrees); the so-called *bokázó* [heel-clacking dance], which is a brief cambiata-like cadential figure; a wide melodic tessitura with flamboyant decoration; and the alternation between *lassú* (slow) and *friss* (fast, lively) sections. Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* and Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* are the most widely known examples of the transplantation of the *verbunkos* tradition into nineteenth-century art music.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ David Cooper, *Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8; Bence Szabolcsi, *A Concise History of Hungarian Music* (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1974), 56.

It is interesting to note that during the 1700s, of all the famous virtuosos only one, János Bihari (1784-1827), was confirmed to be of gypsy origin.⁵⁶ He was authorized to recruit soldiers with his music during the times of the Napoleon battles.⁵⁷ Together with the *gadje* (non-gypsy) violinists János Lavotta (1764-1820) and Anton Csernák (1774-1822), Bihari was the most famous representative of the *verbunkos* tradition. This tradition with its stylistic elements also persistently influenced the creation of Hungarian art songs, opera, and symphonic poems of the nineteenth century. Bihari's name remains important to us because he created many Hungarian dances appearing in three publications around 1807-11.⁵⁸ However, since Bihari did not know musical notation, he was unable to write his music down; hence, his compositions were often notated by other musicians.⁵⁹ Besides numerous other composers of the *verbunkos* era who were mostly descendants of aristocratic families, there were only a few gypsy musicians who made their names as composers. Counted among them are the well-known Romani composers Muska Farkas (1829-1980), Pál Rácz (1837-86), and Pista Dankó (1858-1903).⁶⁰

The Hungarian composer and leading music historian of the day, Gábor Mátray (1797-1875), who was Bihari's first biographer, left valuable notes characterizing the

⁵⁶ He was authorized to recruit soldiers with his music during the times of the Napoleon battles. Sárosi, "Gypsy Musicians," 15.

⁵⁷ Sárosi, "Gypsy Musicians," 15.

⁵⁸ Baumann, 108.

⁵⁹ Jonathan Bellmann, "Toward a Lexicon for the *Style hongrois*," *The Journal of Musicology* 9/2 (Spring 1991): 109.

⁶⁰ Baumann, 110.

gypsy's art of performing national music. His description corresponds with the traditional elements of the Hungarian gypsy style in general:

Bihari was especially marked by his virtuoso performance of national music, which he freely interpreted and seemed each time to newly improvise. No matter how tumultuous his playing was, and had it been otherwise, it could not electrify a Hungarian auditorium, he did not overload with bombastic ornamentation but played certain melodies absolutely simply, but with an expression that affected every heart. He performed the *frischka*-s with a violent, intoxicating fire, the *lassan*-s with a deep, elegiac melancholy that made deep impression even on professional musicians, who only judge from the standpoint of structure. At that time they used to repeat both the *frischka*-s and the *lassan*-s; now they seem to have concentrated all national music in the *csárdás*.⁶¹

To a great extent Bihari possessed the ability, not rare among gypsies, to incorporate quickly and reshape elements that seem strange and not performable. He gave each theme an emphasis that changed its nature according to his feelings and transformed it in a new and completely personal way. During his lifetime he never learned to read music, but it was enough for him to hear a motive once in order to reproduce it in his strongly individual and emotional way.⁶²

Soon an increasing number of gypsies played the nationalistic *verbunkos* melodies, as they always played what was requested by the aristocracy (the first to patronize gypsy musicians). The performance of a good gypsy band was effective as it encouraged the soldiers and fired up the nation. In the nineteenth century a gypsy virtuoso could even become a national hero if he made an intense emotional impression

⁶¹ Quoted in Baumann, 109.

⁶² Baumann, 109.

on his audience.⁶³ Gypsy musicians knew how to stir the emotions of their listeners. The distinct sound of their crying violins in the impassioned performances of melancholic songs, or the fiery rhythms, witty musical surprises, and passionate virtuosity of dance music, communicated intense emotional expression.

Because of their social status, the Romani people had no chance to receive formal education; many of them were illiterate and could not read musical notation. They learned by ear, and their art was purely improvisational. By listening and observing they had developed a special sensitivity with respect to understanding to what listeners would respond. Since the nineteenth century, the Hungarian gypsy musicians' art has basically been a genuine, instinctive response to the feeling of another culture, charged with their own fire and emotions. The musicians were obliged to assimilate the rapidly changing traditions of their noble, bourgeois, or occasionally peasant audiences.

Listeners who pay the musician for requests often describe the emotion they wish to be expressed by the musician, hoping that Hungarian gypsy musicians understand and feel by instinct how to communicate the listener's personal sorrows and concerns. The instruction of gypsy musicians is documented from the beginning of the 1800s. If the gypsy performer did not know a requested song, the patron would sing or whistle it for him and would describe the feeling and style; then the musician would be able to perform

⁶³ Békési, 21.

it for him.⁶⁴ If the musicians did not interpret a song appropriately, the audience would immediately instruct them. Lajos Újfalussy raised the question in 1859: “Is it the custom with any other people to continuously teach its musicians, as with us even the peasant does, to point out to the musician the badly expressed feelings or the distinct shadings of a song?”⁶⁵

By the mid-nineteenth century the music of the gypsies became so popular that virtually every town could claim to have a band. Gábor Mátray wrote in 1854: “It is a rare community in our country that does not have its own gypsy musicians.”⁶⁶ In the course of the nineteenth century their music began to be thought of as ancient. The Hungarian noble classes, for whom the gypsies most often played, convinced themselves that a gypsy performance had its origins in the music of the ancient Magyar tribes from the ninth century. Now this has been proven to be completely fictitious. The gypsies’ music also reminded the Hungarians of the idealized times of Rákóczy’s war of independence, the *verbunkos* era of the early 1700s.

During the 1848-49 Hungarian revolution against the Habsburgs, the role of gypsy bands was prominent in inspiring the soldiers and noblemen by playing *verbunkos* music. The Magyar nobility and upward striving bourgeoisie sought to discover resources

⁶⁴ The first German article dates on Hungarian national dances dates from 1800, and it informs that if someone is not satisfied with the piece the Gypsy musicians played, he “plants himself before them, hums the music, and tells them what to do.” Henrik Klein, “Über die Nationaltänze der Ungarn,” *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (Leipzig, 1800): 28; quoted in Sárosi, 19.

⁶⁵ Lajos Újfalussy, “Még egy szó Lisztről és a magyar zenéről” [One more word about Liszt and Hungarian music], *Vasárnapi Újság* (Pest, 1859): 476; quoted in Sárosi, “Gypsy Musicians,” 19.

⁶⁶ Gábor Mátray, “A magyar zene és a magyar cigányok zenéje” [Hungarian music and the music of the Hungarian Gypsies], in *Magyar és Erdélyország képekben* [Hungary and Transylvania in pictures] (Pest, 1854) 4: 122; quoted in Sárosi, “Gypsy Musicians,” 15.

for the reformation of their national musical language in the gypsies' music rather than in the court music of Viennese classicism, for the former built its elements from Hungarian folk-style music.

After the revolution it was again the gypsies whose expressive interpretation of the sad and slower Hungarian songs, called *Magyar-nóta*, became the most popular and fashionable national genre among the noble class.⁶⁷ These were folk-like art songs, mixing Viennese and *verbunkos* elements in the style. Usually after their composition they became matter for adaptation to popular taste, re-composition, and the introduction of unlimited variants.⁶⁸ The *Magyar-nóta*, or popular folk-style art music as played by the gypsies, soon became the main representation of the *style hongrois*.

Since the 1850s gypsy musicians were constantly migrating in search of places where there was a greater possibility to earn money, to learn new repertoire from each other, and to take their talents from town to town.⁶⁹ The stylistic unification of Hungarian gypsy music resulted from constant reorganization of individuals from one band to another, as well as close contact and communication between groups.⁷⁰

Other than the Hungarian music they played for a living, Romani musicians did have their own characteristic folk music, which is retained mainly in vocal forms entirely different from Hungarian songs (the language used is completely different as well). The

⁶⁷ Békési, 22.

⁶⁸ Bellman, "Toward a Lexicon," 217.

⁶⁹ Sárosi, "Gypsy Musicians," 16.

⁷⁰ László Dobozay, *Magyar Zenetörténet* [The Music History of Hungary] (Budapest, Planétás Kiadó, 1998), 227.

use of the scale with two augmented seconds, which is so characteristic in *style hongrois*,⁷¹ seldom appears in Romani folk music and is not typical. Neither does this scale come from India. The gypsies possibly either learned it through their wanderings among the Persians or the Arabs, or from the Turks during Hungary's Turkish occupation. It was popular mostly within urban circles starting in the eighteenth century when Hungarian aristocracy adopted Arab and Persian elements in music.⁷²

Performance Style of the Hungarian Gypsies: *Style Hongrois*

One of the most distinguishing elements of a traditional Hungarian gypsy performance versus a classical performer's approach is the importance of improvisation as opposed to memorization and faithful interpretation. The music of the gypsy performers is always improvised, thus having much in common with jazz performers.⁷³ The Hungarian gypsy music, however, is of a markedly different style.

Many of the gestures that make up the *style hongrois* were derived from the performance style of the instrumental traditions of the gypsy musicians.⁷⁴ The main types of music, often joined together, were the slow *hallgató* songs, which originally had texts,

⁷¹ The so called gypsy-scale is basically a harmonic-minor scale with altered fourth (sharp) scale degree. The two augmented seconds (between scale degrees 3 and 4, and 6 and 7) lend a characteristic flavor to the scale.

⁷² Sárosi, "Gypsy Musicians," 23.

⁷³ Further considering this topic, about the influence of the gypsy style on jazz, see Fritz Pauer, "Die Zigeunermusik und ihr Einfluss auf die Jazzmusik," in *Musik der Roma in Burgenland: Referate des internationalen Workshop-Symposiums* 5-6 October 2001, ed. Gerhard J. Winkler, 103-107 (Eisenstadt, 2003).

⁷⁴ Bellman, "Toward a Lexicon," 220.

and the fast, *friss* dances.⁷⁵ The former featured a *rubato* style, rhapsodic playing, and an opportunity for extensive improvisation. This style of performing is described quite accurately by Sárosi, who observes that these songs are played “much more loosely, like an instrumental fantasy,” and the musicians are “working against the dictates of the text; with runs, [emotionally] touching, languid pauses, and sustained or snapped off notes, they virtually pull the original structure apart.”⁷⁶ As Bellman recognizes, the Hungarian songs themselves serve as vehicles for communication between the musicians and listeners where an active and involved kind of listening on the part of the listener is required. In this improvisatory tradition the original qualities of the songs themselves are of little concern.⁷⁷

The image of the virtuosic, fiery, demonic type of gypsy fiddler originates in the fast dance performances. The dances usually started out in a medium fast tempo and almost always sped up towards the end, either by simply accelerating the tempo or by a change of the rhythmic pace to the so-called *esztam* beat.⁷⁸ Practically any of the dances

⁷⁵ The most popular Hungarian *czardas* originally consisted of three sections: 1) slow, 2) moderately fast, 3) extremely fast. Later, toward the end of the nineteenth century, for balls and festivity dances the musicians only played the last two sections together, leaving off the slow part. The slow *hallgató* songs were played separately for special requests during eating and the breaks between the chains of dances. Lujza Ratkó, “A cigányzene szerepe a nyírségi falvakban [The role of gypsy music in the villages of Nyírség],” in *Tanulmányok a magyarországi cigányzenéről* [Studies on gypsy music in Hungary], ed. Zsuzsanna Bódis, 63-83 (Budapest: Magyar Néprajzi Társaság, 2002), 79.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Bellman, “Toward a Lexicon,” 221.

⁷⁷ Bellman, “Toward a Lexicon,” 221.

⁷⁸ Ratkó, 79. The Eastern European accented half-beat rhythm, where the even numbered eighth-notes are accented and the odd numbered ones are even omitted, is known as *esztam* beat in Hungary.

could be played both in the moderately fast and extremely fast sections because there was no significant difference between the melodic materials of these sections.⁷⁹

The instruments' color of sound is also characteristic of the style. The instruments that Hungarian gypsy musicians typically perform on are the violin, cimbalom, clarinet, viola, and double bass. The overall playing style is characterized by sharp dotted rhythms, accented off-beats, syncopation, surprising dynamic, harmonic, and character changes, richly ornamented solo lines, and fiery virtuoso passages.

The solo violin became the main instrument associated with the mature *style hongrois*. Also, the lesser known instrument, the cimbalom, has a fundamental role in gypsy bands. Central to the national music of Hungary, Romania, and other neighboring countries, the cimbalom is related to the *santur*, a traditional Persian instrument, and a type of expanded dulcimer played with mallets. Its range is slightly over four octaves. Although most often it is found in gypsy orchestras, the cimbalom may also be heard on the concert stage.⁸⁰ Its fast note-repetitions, wide-range arpeggios, and percussive sound add special color to the music of gypsy bands. It can be used equally as a harmonic instrument, a declamatory instrument, or an instrument of virtuoso display.⁸¹ The cimbalom helps create the unmistakable sound of a gypsy band when it is heard together with the virtuoso lines and scales of the fiddle and the clarinet, colored by the viola, and accompanied by the harmonically and rhythmically simple *ostinato*-like double bass.

⁷⁹ Ratkó, 78.

⁸⁰ Laurence D. Kaptain, "The Hungarian Cimbalom," *Percussive Notes* 28/5 (June 1990): 8.

⁸¹ Bellman, "Toward a Lexicon," 229.

Gypsy Musicians in the Twentieth Century

A paradox exists as to how Hungarians have perceived the gypsy musicians throughout history. On the one hand they viewed them as conveying and inspiring the feeling of national identity and spirit of freedom in the Magyar soul. On the other hand, these musicians basically lived in the role of serving, playing what was requested (not even their own music) and playing Hungarian music to satisfy the taste of the circles of upper classes.⁸²

Since their arrival in Europe, gypsy musicians built their melodies and musical structures from that of the local societies, as mentioned above. They adopted the musical language of the folk-art styles and the melodic lines of operas and operettas. Their technical accomplishments and improvising capabilities were always respected by classical musicians, for gypsies could play with rare bravura and had great resourcefulness in elaboration and embellishments. When performing classical music, however, their highly emotional, communicative style is often criticized or rejected as being too personal or undisciplined.

One must understand the difference between the *gadje*, referring to people of non-gypsy origin, and the gypsy in their approaches to music. For a gypsy player in general, music-making does not mean something exhibited on a stage, basically separated from the audience. For them music is part of social life, a form of interaction with the audience, not a *speech* but a *conversation*. The musician addresses the listener and speaks

⁸² Békési, 24.

to the audience. He makes his instrument sing about his own emotions and about the people for whom he plays; and he let the music express something about the moment and the immediate connection between musician and audience. Actual “interpretation” is only secondary.”⁸³

The leader of a gypsy band is not only a conductor but the pre-cantor of a musical conversation. He continuously communicates with the members of the band or orchestra, as well as with the audience. He turns to the fellow musicians and the audience at once, and this gives a particularly personal and touching experience “that even the greatest symphonic orchestras can’t produce.”⁸⁴ The musicians watch the reaction of the audience and that of each other, and, much like jazz musicians, also communicate with their eyes and body language. Music-making is a certain way of life, a form of strong self-expression, while reflecting the inherent connection with a subculture. Since childhood gypsy musicians “intertwine” with their instruments, the music of which becomes an organic part of their lives. As Békési expresses, “It is hardly mistakable with any other movement, when a gypsy musician picks up his instrument to play. It is as if he is raising his arm.”⁸⁵

In families the father is usually the first teacher. Generally, he is equally at home with classical music, jazz, gypsy music, Hungarian folk, folk-art music, operetta, and

⁸³ Békési, 68.

⁸⁴ Békési, 68.

⁸⁵ Békési, 68.

salon-music.⁸⁶ And this musical versatility also comes with the knowledge of several instruments. Among neighbors, relatives, children, or adults frequently there is a competition arranged. These private competitions are called “bow-duels.” Whichever family came in first was respected by the others. This respect often depends upon how well one could play. Children from an early age are constantly encouraged to become the best; sometimes they start playing small-size instruments even before they can walk. It is considered shameful not to put one’s heart and soul into practicing and not to fully exert one’s self.⁸⁷

The social-political changes following World War II at first did not favor the gypsy musical tradition; however, in the 1970s and 1980s coffeehouse and restaurant music was again flourishing. After the 1989 democratic transformation the need for this tradition significantly declined.⁸⁸ As a result, during the past twenty years many musicians turned to classical music or jazz, but especially in the field of classical music the competition was extremely high, sometimes perhaps unfair as well. Independence and freedom being fundamental values for a gypsy, as well as emotional intensity and priority of human relationships as opposed to achievement, made it difficult for them to fulfill their studies at a classical musical institution. Romani people enjoy a life free from restrictions, and they have a tendency to lack tolerance for the strict rules of schools in

⁸⁶ Békési, 70.

⁸⁷ Békési, 29.

⁸⁸ Békési, 36.

which environment they often get distracted.⁸⁹ There are numerous excellent gypsy musicians who did not complete their studies at the Liszt Academy. In fact, many of the greatest Romani musicians quit after attending for only one or two years and chose free life: to travel abroad, tour with other fellows, and play in coffeehouses, night clubs, and restaurants to make money.⁹⁰ Sadly there is still to some degree a prejudice at musical institutions against Romani children, which makes their situation even more difficult.⁹¹

In musical life the gypsies have to overcome difficulties similar to those of social life. Their music has hundreds of years of tradition, and if they accept completely the much more restricted style of classical music, they are in conflict with the tradition that an entire family nurtured through several hundreds of years. Still, despite the difficulties and fear of failure, musical talent remains highly treasured in a Romani family.⁹²

In today's classical music performance there is generally less room for free improvisation and free expression of feeling central to the gypsy style. In classical interpretation the score determines exactly the length of notes and dynamics of sound, but the gypsy musician plays extensively with time, with the content, and with the sounds. The most talented Romani musicians are able to reach a level in which they are at home with the strict musical rules of classical styles, yet are able to preserve something from

⁸⁹ Békési, 62. Alan Walker writes about Liszt himself making an attempt in the early 1840s to give a formal education to a young gypsy violinist, Józsi Sárjai, with absolutely no success. The violinist, Lambert Massart, with whom Liszt left the boy, found Józsi "uncontrollable and unteachable." For more information see Alan Walker, *Liszt: The Virtuoso Years* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 339.

⁹⁰ Békési, 54.

⁹¹ Békési, 62.

⁹² Békési, 62-63.

their own traditions. These musicians become prominent and celebrated in the musical culture. The pianist Georges Cziffra was one of the greatest of them.

Hungarian Gypsy Music and Western Art Music

The musical world of nineteenth-century Europe incorrectly interpreted the widespread popular folk-style art music of the Hungarian gypsies as traditional Hungarian folk music. Most of these folk-style art songs were not written down or published, partly because of the notational illiteracy of the composer but also because it was almost exclusively played by fellow gypsies, many of whom did not read music either. In its mode of transmission this kind of folk-style art music revealed itself to be similar to that of the traditional folk music. It was also passed on by playing and learned by listening. The folk-style art music was presented mainly in cafés, festivities, dances, and restaurants by the Hungarian gypsies. During the nineteenth century these folk-style songs became so popular and widely known that their appearance overshadowed folk music. Not only Liszt, but many of the Hungarian aristocracy and the gentry felt that the excessively sentimental and embellished *Magyar-nóta* style was the only representative art for the Hungarian soul. It was Bartók who, in the twentieth century, revealed the differences. When he first began to seek a Hungarian musical idiom at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, however, he did not question the generally accepted idea that the widespread *verbunkos*-style and folk-style art songs were a form of genuine

folk music. He expected to find new melodies in that well-known style; the role of peasants would have been just to provide further examples.

Liszt, who was the first composer to appreciate fully the improvising talent and virtuosity of the Hungarian gypsies and also the first to investigate and to write about them, made the mistake of regarding the gypsies as the exclusive creators and only repositories of Hungarian national music. The Hungarian expression *cigányzene* (gypsy music) was used to refer to Hungarian music as played by the gypsies, but Liszt's literal translation of the word led to further misunderstanding. During the 1860s his book on gypsies, *Des Bohémiens*, the Hungarian translation of which was published in Pest in 1861, caused a "national upheaval" in Hungary.⁹³

Historian Julius Káldy wrote in 1902, "At present our gipsy [*sic*] bands win laurels not only in Europe but also in America and Asia, reaping both money and renown. They deserve our thanks for spreading Hungarian Music."⁹⁴ Hungarian gypsy style had great impact on European art music. Several Western composers were inspired to evoke the characteristic elements of this style in their own musical works.⁹⁵ For the piano the most effective representations of this are Liszt's nineteen *Hungarian Rhapsodies* (1853)

⁹³ Béla Bartók Jr., "Let Us Speak About Liszt," *The Journal of the American Liszt Society* 9 (June 1981): 67; and Klára Hamburger, "Liszt cigánykönyvének fogadtatása Magyarországon" [The reception of Liszt's gypsy book in Hungary], *Muzsika* 43/12 (2000): 20-25; and Hamburger, "Understanding the Hungarian Reception History of Liszt's *Des Bohémiens et leur musique en Hongrie 1859/1881*," *The Journal of the American Liszt Society* 54-56 (2003): 75-84.

⁹⁴ Julius Káldy, *A History of Hungarian Music* (London, 1902; reprint, New York, 1969), 18 (page citation is to the reprint edition).

⁹⁵ Imitations of the Hungarian gypsy style can be already found in works from the time of Haydn, however, often without clear distinction between Turkish and Hungarian gypsy elements. Especially during the second half of the nineteenth century composers found the exotic-sounding *style hongrois* extremely attractive and exciting.

and the well-known twenty-one *Hungarian Dances* by Brahms, originally for piano duet.⁹⁶ It is interesting to note, however, that those identifiable themes that Liszt used in his *Rhapsodies*, the ones that are not original but have been associated with Hungarian composers, were all composed by non-gypsy Hungarian composers. It is probably true that Liszt was not interested in the original melodies as much as in the virtuoso style with which the gypsies dressed up these tunes. Similarly, the themes of Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* also originated in composed dance music derived mostly from printed sources, many of which Brahms owned in his library.⁹⁷ Sárosi points out, coincidentally, that none of this source material was composed by gypsy musicians either.⁹⁸ It was the style that mattered.

The Hungarian gypsy musicians played an important role in contributing to the shaping of the musical culture of their homeland and the enhancing of the central-European popular music culture. The popularity of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* and Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* during the second half of the nineteenth century was not so surprising. By this time most of central Europe had heard these melodies in the sparkling, virtuosic, passionate, and overtly emotional rendering of gypsy bands.

⁹⁶ Brahms issued these dances in number of versions. All twenty-one appeared in arrangements for piano for four hands in four volumes, published in 1868 (volumes 1 and 2: dances 1-10) and 1880 (volumes 3 and 4: dances 11-21); arrangements of the first ten dances for piano solo were published in 1872; Brahms also transcribed nos. 1, 3, and 10 for orchestra (published 1874). Dozens of other transcriptions appeared before the end of the century. Joachim arranged all twenty-one for violin and piano while Dvorák arranged nos. 17-21 for orchestra. Pauline Viardot-Garcia also arranged some of them for voice and piano.

⁹⁷ Szerző, 157-166.

⁹⁸ Sárosi, "Cigányzenészek: Magyar Népies Zene," 153.

CHAPTER III

LISZT, BRAHMS, AND THE HUNGARIAN STYLE

Liszt and Hungarian Gypsy Music

Franz Liszt (1811-1886) was born in Hungary⁹⁹ but spent only the first eleven years of his life in his homeland. His last concert in Hungary as a child was given in 1823 at which time he was returning from Vienna after a year of study with Czerny and Salieri.¹⁰⁰ Following this concert Liszt and his father departed for Paris, and the composer did not visit his home country for the next sixteen years.

The first Hungarian works of Liszt originate from the time he spent in Vienna and Paris shortly after 1823, but these pieces, namely the two movements of his *Zum Andenken* (R. 107), are far from serious enough compositions to even be called fantasies.¹⁰¹ Apart from the transcription of a Hungarian-inspired Schubert song, Liszt

⁹⁹ Doborján, Liszt's town of birth, is now called Raiding and since 1920 has been part of Austria.

¹⁰⁰ At this 1823 performance, Liszt played the famous *Rákóczy March*, which was the same piece that brought the patriotic audience to a frenzy at his 1839 Budapest performance. Works Liszt also played in 1823 were Hungarian melodies by the non-gypsy Hungarians János Lavotta, Anton Csermák, and Bihari, edited and published by Ágoston Mohaupt. After these works, the twelve-year-old Liszt to everyone's astonishment performed his own fantasies and improvisations. This information is based on a quotation from the Hungarian *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* [Scholarly collections] dating from 1823 and reported in Mária Eckhardt, "Magyar fantázia, ábránd, rapszódia a XIX. század zongoramuzsikájában [Hungarian fantasy, fancy, rhapsody in the piano music of the nineteenth century]" Part 1, *Magyar Zene* 24/2 (1983): 125.

¹⁰¹ The first one is altogether twenty measures long, following exactly the original melody, and the second consists of thirty-one bars, including a little variation. Eckhardt, 125.

did not take an interest in his homeland's music until his return as an adult.¹⁰²

It was during the winter of 1839-1840 that Liszt returned to Hungary for the first time since 1823, at the peak of the pianist-composer's virtuoso years. In an excellent study of the social background of Liszt's virtuoso career, Dana Gooley remarks that Liszt's 1839-1840 Hungarian reception became one of the most famous episodes in his life as a traveling artist, matched in its legendary status only by the so-called *Lisztomania* of 1842 in Berlin and the Thalberg-Liszt duel of 1837 in Paris.¹⁰³

Preceding his Hungarian visit, which was charity to help the victims of a devastating flood of Budapest, Liszt gave one well-publicized and well-attended benefit concert in 1838 in Vienna.¹⁰⁴ In an article written and published soon after the concert, Liszt expressed the "profound emotions toward his homeland" that the catastrophe had awakened in him with the following words:¹⁰⁵

Oh my wild and distant homeland, my unknown friends, my great family! Your painful cry calls me back to you, and deeply moved I bow my head, ashamed that I could forget you for such a long time.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² One of Liszt's principal Hungarian musical exposures was to Schubert's *Divertissement à la hongroise* (D.818), which Liszt transcribed and named his *Mélodies hongroises d'après Schubert* and performed at the Vienna benefit concert for the Budapest flood victims in 1838. Christopher H. Gibbs, "Just Two Words. Enormous Success: Liszt's 1838 Vienna Concerts," in *Franz Liszt and His World*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs and Dana Gooley, 167-230 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 187 and 207.

¹⁰³ Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 129-130.

¹⁰⁴ Gibbs, "Just Two Words. Enormous Success," 181. At this charity concert Liszt apparently raised a total sum of 24,000 gulden, which was the largest single donation given to the Hungarians from a private source. Walker, 254.

¹⁰⁵ Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*, 129.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Walker, 253.

The thankful Hungarians invited Liszt to visit the country that he had not seen for sixteen years. On January 6, 1840, at the National Theater, after a concert of tremendous success and storms of cheers,¹⁰⁷ the nation presented him with their Sabre of Honor.¹⁰⁸

An important element of Liszt's 1839-40 return was his renewed contact with the Hungarian gypsies to observe and study their music. Liszt stayed an additional ten days in Pest after the successful appearance on January 6 and gave another concert on January 11 at the National Theater to raise money for a newly proposed National Conservatory of Music.¹⁰⁹ Also, he was eager to revisit the gypsy musicians.¹¹⁰

Liszt already had experienced the musical performances of Hungarian gypsies in his childhood.¹¹¹ Alan Walker paints the picture of a great welcoming among the gypsy families for Liszt's visit as they played and danced for him enthusiastically. Liszt's portrayal of this event and observation of the style in which they performed is as follows:

¹⁰⁷ As mentioned earlier, one of Liszt's greatest successes was the virtuoso transcription-fantasy on the *Rákóczy March* that he played at his farewell concert nearly seventeen years earlier. At this time this music was still not available in print because of current censorship, but handwritten copies did survive from around these years. This arrangement still follows more or less the ternary form of the original theme; however, its introduction, the theme's return, and some connecting passages already pointed toward the solutions and characteristics of a new, fantasy-like Hungarian composition that later under Liszt's hands became the rhapsody. Eckhardt, 125. For more information on Liszt's Budapest concerts in 1839, see "Liszt Ferenc magyarországi hangversenyei" [Franz Liszt's recitals in Hungary] by Zsuzsa Dömötör, Mária Kovács, and Ilona Mona (Budapest, 1980); in Walker, 324.

¹⁰⁸ Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*, 129.

¹⁰⁹ This idea, first originating with Liszt and Hungarian composer Ferenc Erkel (1810-93), finally evolved into the foundation of the Royal Hungarian Academy of Music in 1875. Liszt was giving extraordinary amounts of time and energy to the Hungarian school so that the students could receive enough knowledge and development from this generosity. He gave large numbers of paid admission concerts and devoted the income for scholarships. Fifty years later, in 1925, the institution accepted a new name, Franz Liszt Academy of Music.

¹¹⁰ Walker, 329-332.

¹¹¹ As Alan Walker says, "Ever since his childhood this dark, nomadic race had held him in thrall. The memory of the Gypsy bands, and particularly of the violinist Bihari, was ineradicable." Walker, 334.

Flying to their violins and cymbals, they began a real fury of excitement. The *friska* was not long in rising to a frenzy of exultation, and then almost to delirium. In its final stage it could only be compared to that vertiginous and convulsive, writhing motion which is the culmination point in the Dervish ecstasy.¹¹²

Liszt also wrote to Edmund Singer that “this sort of music is, for me, a kind of opium, of which sometimes I am in great need.”¹¹³ To Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein he said, “You know what a special attraction this music exerts over me.”¹¹⁴ The masterful gypsy violinist, Bihari, remained especially memorable for Liszt, as is revealed in a letter from the 1840s:

I was just beginning to grow up when I heard this great man [Bihari] in 1822. . . . He used to play for hours on end, without giving the slightest thought to the passing of time. . . . His performances must have distilled into my soul the essence of some generous and exhilarating wine; for when I think of his playing, the emotions I then experienced were like one of those mysterious elixirs concocted in the secret laboratories of the Middle Ages.¹¹⁵

In Walker’s perception, one of the main aspects of “what Liszt admired in Tzigane music [referring to gypsy music] was its improvisatory, impulsive nature. It coincided with his own view of the art as something fundamental to mankind.”¹¹⁶ By the 1840s Liszt himself was practicing the art of improvisation. Not only did his fantasies on given

¹¹² Lina Ramann, ed., *Franz Liszt’s Gesammelte Schriften* 6 (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1880-1883):137; quoted in Walker, 335.

¹¹³ La Mara [Marie Lipsius], ed. *Franz Liszt’s Briefe* 1 (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1893-1905): 205.

¹¹⁴ La Mara, 4: 316.

¹¹⁵ Ramann; quoted in Walker, 63.

¹¹⁶ Walker, 62-63.

themes become regular features on his concerts, but also, even during a performance, he constantly introduced elaborate variations on standard works.¹¹⁷

The *Hungarian Rhapsodies*: Origins, Structures, Characteristics

As the first specific artistic result of his interest and enthusiasm for the music of Hungarian gypsies, Liszt composed his *Magyar Dallok - Ungarische National-melodien* [Hungarian National Melodies].¹¹⁸ These eleven compositions were published in four volumes by Haslinger in 1840. They served as pre-studies to the later published and largely revised *Hungarian Rhapsodies* (1853). The musical material Liszt used in the *Magyar Dallok* can be traced to the Hungarian folk-art and *verbunkos* tunes that the gypsies performed so supremely. Liszt took notes on these performances, and he used not only the themes but, more importantly, imitated the stylistic elements with which the gypsies elaborated the music.

The first five compositions of the *Magyar Dallok* are quite short and simple; basically they are arrangements of some of the melodies Liszt sketched down, imitating the performing style he heard. No. 6 is based on a melody by József Kossovits (1750-1819),¹¹⁹ for which the song's structure is more complex. It is still ABA, but the first,

¹¹⁷ Walker, 63.

¹¹⁸ The cataloger Peter Raabe (1872-1945) later registered them under the title *Vorstufen zu den Ungarischen Rhapsodien* as R 105. Eckhardt, 125.

¹¹⁹ Kossovits was a Hungarian composer and cellist who served as court musician until 1794, the date of his employer's arrest for participating in an uprising in Hungary. Some of his Hungarian dance pieces became the best known of the *verbunkos* style. His slow Hungarian dance in C minor, which Liszt arranged, was the primary source to his Hungarian Rhapsody no. 5. Ferenc Bónis, "József Kossovits," *Grove Music Online*, ed. Laura Macy, <http://www.grovemusic.com> (accessed 3 February 2007).

slow section in a minor key consists of four lines while the B section, in a major key, only two. In Liszt's arrangement, it becomes a rounded binary form with *ad libitum* cadenzas at the ends of the B sections. The tempo of the last return of A is increased with the indication *Tempo I ma un poco più animato*.¹²⁰ This practice, for which the last return is in the fastest tempo, was the general custom among the Hungarian gypsy musicians. The remaining five pieces of *Magyar Dallok*, published in three booklets, are more advanced structures.¹²¹ Some of them, as nos. 7, 9, and 11, have multiple themes, with extremely complex forms, and they also exhibit great variety in their tempi and key-structure.¹²²

It was during Liszt's 1846 visit, his second Hungarian concert tour, that he received the inspiration to extend his compositional repertoire with more pieces of the national spirit. The result was the collection of fifteen works titled *Magyar Rhapsodiák - Rhapsodies hongroises*. The new title did not mean an entirely new genre independent of the eleven *Magyar Dallok*. Liszt published these rhapsodies as a continuation of the former. The pieces were numbered starting from 12, and the booklets in which they were published also stayed continuous (volumes 5-10).¹²³ Altogether there are nineteen *Hungarian Rhapsodies*. Liszt wrote the last four later, during the 1880s.

¹²⁰ Eckhardt, 126.

¹²¹ Booklet 2 consists of no. 7 of *Magyar Dallok*; booklet 3 includes nos. 8 and 9; and in booklet 4 nos. 10 and 11 are published.

¹²² As it is with other Liszt works, these pieces also had different stages of development. Between 1840 and 1846, Liszt published some different, elaborated versions of these same pieces. The *Ungarische National-Melodien* was not just a pre-study for the rhapsodies, but some of the themes (namely that of no. 7 and no. 11) were used as basic parts of *Hungarian Rhapsodies* no. 4 and no. 3, respectively. Eckhardt, 126.

¹²³ Eckhardt, 126.

Based on studies of Zoltán Gárdonyi, Eckhardt points out that about half of the themes Liszt used in the *Hungarian Rhapsodies* were *verbunkos* and *csárdás*¹²⁴ in origin. Some of the composers of these are known, such as Antal Csermák (c.1774-1822), Márk Rózsavölgyi (1789-1848), and Béni Egressy (1814-1851). Of the remaining themes half belong to Hungarian folk-style art music, among which composers are Ferenc Erkel (1810-1893), Károly Thern (1817-1886), Egressy, and others. There are a few Hungarian folk melodies, one Romanian tune, and a few of unrecognized origin. The Rákóczy March (in Rhapsody no. 15) and the art-music composition of Kossovits (in no. 5) are also used.¹²⁵

Considering the structure of the rhapsodies, Liszt did not follow a specific plan; rather, he followed the example inherent in the music and the gypsies' performance style. Liszt used the pairing of *lassú* (slow) and *friss* (lively, fresh) sections without aspiring for unity but based on the principles of contrast and relentless intensifying.¹²⁶ A declamatory, melancholic introduction is often contrasted with a quicker, coquettish allegretto followed by a fiery, whirling presto ending.¹²⁷ The description and pedagogical

¹²⁴ Csárdás or czardas is a Hungarian dance originating in the early mid-19th century. It is related to the *verbunkos*, but has more noble and social purpose than that of the recruiting dance. Like the *verbunkos*, the *csárdás* had also slow and fast sections; the slow section was danced with dignity and pride, and the fast part was danced with abandon. Eventually *csárdás* became the primary Hungarian national dance. Jonathan Bellmann, "Csárdás," *Grove Music Online*, ed. Laura Macy, <http://www.grovemusic.com> (accessed 3 March 2008).

¹²⁵ Eckhardt, 128.

¹²⁶ Zoltán Gárdonyi, "Liszt Ferenc magyar stílusa" [The Hungarian style of Franz Liszt], *Musicologica Hungarica* 3 (Budapest, 1936): 21; in Eckhardt, 128.

¹²⁷ Alfred Brendel, "Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies," (1968) in *Alfred Brendel On Music* (Chicago: A Cappella Books, 2001), 271.

commentary of Lina Ramann (1833-1912)¹²⁸ to the third *Hungarian Rhapsody* is worth quoting:

It begins with a type of funeral music (1st Theme, Andante), in which a defiance located deep in the heart, with its somber melancholy, is transformed into stubborn resignation. Abruptly the music changes into a softly gurgling stream (2nd Theme, Allegretto), from which the melancholia bursts forth. This and the defiant emotion, which flow like blood deep through the veins, produce the sentiment of the work.¹²⁹

The *lassú-friss* pairing can be found in rhapsodies nos. 1, 2, 7, 10, 11, and 13.

Sometimes the opposing sections are widely separated (no. 13), other times only by a cadenza-like transitional section (no. 10). In no. 7 the slow part is quite short in comparison with the whole work, thereby acting as an introduction. Other formal plans are followed elsewhere. Nos. 4 and 8 consist of three main sections, gradually increasing in tempo. In no. 12 the increasing tempo is interrupted with a *dolce con grazia* section and a return of the first theme. No. 6 starts in moderate tempo followed by a fast, then a slow, *rubato* part, then a fast pace, followed by a still faster ending.¹³⁰ The structure of no. 9 (*Pest Carnival*) is complex, with thematic reappearances from earlier sections. Such thematic procedures appear in nos. 12 and 14 as well. The basic character of the third rhapsody (in ternary form) is slow, and No. 5 is also distinctive as it ends with a muted *piano* conclusion after a dramatic climax. No. 15 follows the structure of the Rákóczy

¹²⁸ Lina Ramann was Liszt's first biographer; her work, *Lisztiana* (1883) was based on many questionnaires (duly filled in by Liszt) and interviews with the composer. An especially valuable book of Ramann is her *Liszt Pädagogium*, which contains many remarks on piano playing by Liszt and his pupils. Ramann translated Liszt's collected writings into German. Alan Walker, "Lina Ramann," *Grove Music Online*, ed. Laura Macy, <http://www.grovemusic.com> (accessed 6 February 2007).

¹²⁹ Lina Ramann, "Liszt-Pädagogium—Hungarian Rhapsody No. 3," trans. Amy D. Valladares, *Journal of The American Liszt Society* 50 (Fall 2001): 61.

¹³⁰ Eckhardt, 128.

March, which Liszt developed by adding an introduction, transitional sections,¹³¹ and a coda that uses thematic transformations, a technique very familiar to Liszt.¹³²

The last four pieces, composed during 1882-1886 are based on Liszt's own themes and differ greatly from the earlier rhapsodies. These works are more stylized and bear the features of late Liszt compositions such as simplicity, sparse texture, forward looking harmonies, darkness, and a comparative absence of virtuosity. The difference is especially striking compared to the earlier rhapsodies that featured the virtuoso Liszt.¹³³

Alfred Brendel believes that the *Hungarian Rhapsodies* are compositions which came to life "through the improvisatory spirit and fire of Liszt as an interpreter." He suggests that for the performer they "leave room for improvisation like few other pieces in existence."¹³⁴ It is true that Liszt draws attention in his *Rhapsodies* to the improvisational character of the Hungarian gypsies' performance style. The tools he uses for stressing the improvisational nature are extremely rich elaborations of a melodic line, cadenza-like passages, uses of *rubato* style, and free tempo changes.¹³⁵ Cziffra has added improvised passages to many of Liszt's *Rhapsodies*. Other pianists have done the same, as in the recordings of Vladimir Horowitz (*Rhapsody* no. 2; no. 15 *Rákóczy March*) or Marc- André Hamelin (*Rhapsody* no. 6). Whether the improvisations are appropriate to

¹³¹ Harmonic and motivic manipulation of themes and the large amount of introductory and transitional material are commonly found in Liszt's transcriptions. Kenneth Hamilton, "Liszt Fantasizes – Busoni Exercises: The Liszt-Busoni 'Figaro Fantasy,'" *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 30 (1991): 24.

¹³² Eckhardt, 129.

¹³³ Eckhardt, 130.

¹³⁴ Brendel, 269.

¹³⁵ Eckhardt, 129.

the *style hongrois* is sometimes questionable. Cziffra's performances are an exception and worth close examination since they are directly rooted in the Hungarian gypsy stylistic tradition.

Although Bartók sharply criticizes the quality and purely Hungarian value of the *verbunkos* and urbanized folk-style melodies of which Liszt made use, he still speaks of Liszt's work with great respect:

It is in the nature of the genre that his [Liszt's] transcriptions, such as the Rhapsodies—and I refer primarily to the Hungarian Rhapsodies—are perfect specimens of their kind. The material Liszt used for them could not possibly be transformed in some better way, more beautifully, with greater artistry. That the material itself is not always valuable is another matter.¹³⁶

The stylistic traits of the gypsy performances that Liszt's *Rhapsodies* contain, such as the freedom, the romantic exultation, the unusual modulations, the unpredictable, abrupt changes of ideas and mood, and the frequent renunciation of metrical limitations, as Brendel argues, were compatible parts of Liszt's own musical style.¹³⁷ Liszt was a superb improviser who could illustrate the sounds and style of a gypsy performance with great genius.¹³⁸ The *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, however, are more sophisticated compositions than mere imitations of the gypsy style. Characteristic elements of Liszt's compositional techniques, such as thematic transformations, harmonizations, formal construction, and the nature of the piano-writing, also determine the final shape of these

¹³⁶ Andor C. Klay, "Bartók on Liszt," *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 21 (1987): 28.

¹³⁷ Brendel, 270.

¹³⁸ For information on Liszt as improviser, consider Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*, 244-248; also Chapter IV in the present document.

works.¹³⁹ Kenneth Hamilton observes that “with . . . the set of *Hungarian Rhapsodies* published in 1853 the boundaries between arrangements and original composition are well and truly blurred.”¹⁴⁰

Liszt imitates the instruments Hungarian gypsy bands used to achieve a characteristic sound in these works. In the *a capriccio; quasi zimbalo* section of no. 10, the opening of no. 11, and the minor episode of no. 3, sounds of the cimbalom may be heard. Violin figurations are also often imitated. Ramann says in her commentary to *Rhapsody No. 3* that “one should feel the inspiration of cymbal player and fiddler through the work’s character and performance,”¹⁴¹ and points out the “cimbalom rumblings,” “violin-like” vibrato or pizzicato effects, sharply rhythmic Hungarian features, and *rubato* sections “with a dark expression.”¹⁴² Violin-like sounds appear in no. 13, and pizzicato is imitated in no. 3. The range from fiery to dark and languishing shades of tone coloration is reminiscent of the performances of the Hungarian Romani musicians.

Brahms and the Hungarian Gypsies

Johannes Brahms’ attraction to the gypsy style is well known, as is shown effectively in his compositions. His acquaintance with the *style hongrois* began in the early 1850s when he was the accompanist of the Hungarian-Jewish Ede Reményi (1828-

¹³⁹ Eckhardt, 129.

¹⁴⁰ Kenneth Hamilton, “Liszt’s Early and Weimar Period Works,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt*, ed. Kenneth Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 84.

¹⁴¹ Ramann, 62.

¹⁴² Ramann. 62-63.

1898). Reményi adopted the gypsy style and often programmed a generous number of Hungarian popular songs and dances in his performances.¹⁴³ This style was also present in Reményi's classical music interpretations as he was known to cap off a Beethoven sonata theme with a "cadential flourish of *csárdás*."¹⁴⁴ In the spring of 1853 Brahms toured with Reményi to give concerts in Hanover, Weimar, Göttingen, Bonn, Mehlem, and Düsseldorf.¹⁴⁵ In June 1853 Brahms and Reményi met Liszt with a letter of introduction from Joseph Joachim (1831-1907).¹⁴⁶ The vital professional contact, however, never resulted in friendship: they went separate ways after this meeting.¹⁴⁷ Reményi's performances of Hungarian melodies captivated Brahms, stimulating his imagination, but the two musicians were very different in their temperaments. By this time it was not only he who awakened Brahms' passion for the *style hongrois*. Joachim, to whom he next turned, introduced Brahms to a much richer musical world,¹⁴⁸ and they developed a lifelong friendship.

¹⁴³ Reményi was also known as Eduard Hoffmann. He met Brahms in a Hamburg bar where Brahms was playing the piano in the evenings. Brahms may have been present for Reményi's Hamburg concerts of November 10 and 19 in 1849. On both occasions the violinist played his own arrangement of *Ungarische Nationalmelodien*. Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms* (Berlin: Deutsche Brahms-Gesellschaft 1912; reprint, Tutzing: Schneider, 1976), 59.

¹⁴⁴ Siegfried Kross, *Johannes Brahms: Versuch einer kritischen Dokumentar-Biographie*, 1997; quoted in John Daverio, "Brahms, the Schumann Circle, and the *Style Hongrois*: Contexts for the Double Concerto, Op. 102," in *Crossing Paths: Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 294.

¹⁴⁵ Michael Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 200.

¹⁴⁶ Musgrave, 94.

¹⁴⁷ Musgrave, 188.

¹⁴⁸ Musgrave, 189.

Although Brahms first knew Joachim as a violinist, it was his skill as a composer that the young Brahms admired most. Joachim was never a major figure as a composer, yet his spiritual, earnest character was a major stimulus to the young Brahms.¹⁴⁹ Their meeting in May 1853 had been a powerful stimulus to Brahms' compositional imagination.¹⁵⁰ They sent each other new works or compositional exercises for criticism, and Brahms valued highly Joachim's opinion as a critic.¹⁵¹ A significant example, Brahms' *Violin Concerto*, the last movement of which is rich with Hungarian flavor, evolved through the second half of 1878 in close consultation with Joachim.¹⁵²

As a mature composer, Brahms was probably surrounded by the music of Hungarian gypsy fiddlers, who played a prominent role in Vienna's restaurant and coffeehouse culture, but during the 1860s the gypsy idiom was associated with *Hausmusik*, music intended primarily for domestic entertainment. The twenty-one *Hungarian Dances* are classic examples of this style.

The Twenty-one Hungarian Dances

The fact that Brahms neglected to use opus numbers for all twenty-one of the two sets suggests that he felt that these works fell between the realm of arrangement and of

¹⁴⁹ Musgrave, 35.

¹⁵⁰ Musgrave, 65.

¹⁵¹ Musgrave, 68-73.

¹⁵² Malcolm MacDonald, "'Veiled Symphonies?' The Concertos," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brahms*, ed. Michael Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 162.

composition.¹⁵³ Concerning the origins of the themes, Brahms scholars have been misled for decades. Musgrave states:

Though the themes of the first set of Hungarian Dances of 1865 were apparently derived from Brahms' first contacts with Ede Reményi in 1852 and 1853, the contact with the outdoor performances of the *Csárdás* in Vienna from 1862 must have had some effect on the composition, and the second set, using original themes by Brahms, parallels the waltzes in harmonic and formal richness within the prescribed dance form.¹⁵⁴

Sheveloff retains the misbelief about the originality of the second set: "We don't know enough to confirm the thesis that the first ten dances of 1869 largely arrange well-known gypsy band sources, while the eleven others of 1880 tend to create new music in the style of the former." The principal evidence for this he sees in the greater popularity of the 1869 set than that of 1880. He also writes that "until we have good written sources for all the ideas that went into all twenty-one dances, we cannot answer this question."¹⁵⁵

It was Katalin Szerző who recently documented and listed source material to nineteen of the twenty-one dances. Since Ervin Major's pioneering study in search of the source material for Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*¹⁵⁶ and János Bereczky's research sixty years later,¹⁵⁷ the only systematic survey of Brahms' sources for the twenty-one

¹⁵³ Joel Sheveloff, "Dance, Gypsy, Dance!" in *The Varieties of Musicology: Essays in Honor of Murray Lefkowitz*, ed. John Daverio and John Ogasapian (Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2000), 152.

¹⁵⁴ Michael Musgrave, "Years of Transition: Brahms and Vienna 1862-1875," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brahms*, ed. Michael Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 45.

¹⁵⁵ Sheveloff, 151.

¹⁵⁶ See also p. 10.

¹⁵⁷ See also p. 10.

Hungarian Dances has been undertaken by Szerző.¹⁵⁸ Her research in the library of the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* uncovered printed collection consisting of 115 publications of Hungarian music by 52 composers in Brahms' legacy.¹⁵⁹ The largest part of the collection consists of popular *verbunkos* transcriptions and folk-influenced popular art songs composed in the nineteenth century. Brahms collected pieces from the Hungarian gypsies' repertoire with great enthusiasm. Some of his most favored works were the compositions of Pali Rátz, Miska Farkas, János Kálozdy, Ferenc Sárközy, and twelve editions of Károly and József Kecskeméty.¹⁶⁰ Brahms also collected almost every important publication of Hungarian folk music and folk-art music that appeared during the mid-1800s.

In Brahms' own handwritten catalogue to his library, the section marked "Ungarische Lieder u. Tänze einzeln und in Sammlungen" refers to his collection of Hungarian songs and dances. The first editor of the Brahms-catalogue, Alfred Orel, listed the contents belonging to this section as 110 volumes of music. According to the study of János Bereczky ninety percent of this music score collection was a result of deliberate collecting and purchasing. Music historian Antal Molnár says:

¹⁵⁸ See also pp. 10-11.

¹⁵⁹ The *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde*, founded in 1812, was one of the primary foreground locales of Brahms' life and activities from 1862 through 35 years of his life.¹⁵⁹ The composer frequently visited the Society's library to study old music prints and musical autographs. His close friendship with the scholarly librarians Gustav Nottebohm, Ferdinand Pohl, and Eusebius Mandyczewski was partially the reason why Brahms' musical and literal collection found its way into the archive of the *Gesellschaft* after the composer's death. In Brahms' handwritten catalogue to his own library the section "Ungarische Lieder u. Tänze einzeln und in Sammlungen" refers to his collection of Hungarian songs and dances. Szerző, 158.

¹⁶⁰ Szerző, 159.

While Liszt picked up his sources by listening, and in his Rhapsodies evoked the gypsy manner, Brahms learned his Hungarianism from printed score. . . . I've learned from Siebreich, the contemporaneous member of the Rózsavölgyi Publishing Company: Brahms entered their store and requested them to send as many Hungarian dances as possible to him in Vienna.¹⁶¹

The other ten percent show printed or handwritten dedications; consequently those were copies given Brahms as gifts.

Ervin Major and János Bereczky identified thirty-four of the themes that appear in Brahms' twenty-one *Hungarian Dances*. Sixteen of these sources were actually in the composer's collection as printed sheet music. Two were accessed by Brahms in the *Gesellschaft* library with marks on the pages in black or blue pencil.¹⁶² The analytical examination and publication of the Hungarian legacy from the Brahms collection is still the work of the future.

Most of Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* consist of more than one dance. No. 5, for example, includes a *csárdás* from Bártfa (which makes up the opening section), and a Hungarian folk song arrangement for voice and piano (which became the contrasting middle section). In general, Brahms organized the pre-existing material in his own way, each dance crafted "to bring forth a special character or combination of characteristics representing his view of the gypsy and his milieu."¹⁶³ Sheveloff notes that the *Hungarian Dances* "served as a breakthrough for Brahms to a wide, popular audience, as the

¹⁶¹ Antal Molnár, *Brahms* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1959), 64; quoted in Bereczky, 76.

¹⁶² Szerző, 161.

¹⁶³ Sheveloff, 152.

German Requiem did to the intelligentsia.”¹⁶⁴ The Hungarian dance-arrangements also substantially augmented Brahms’ earnings.¹⁶⁵

Arrangements of the *Hungarian Dances* began to appear in Brahms’ own century for numerous standard instrumental settings including piano for two hands, violin and piano duo, voice and piano, chamber groups and wind band, as well as full orchestra. While in the nineteenth century these arrangements were created mostly for the entertainment and popularization of the pieces, in the twentieth century, when printed music became more widely available and recordings started to appear, the purpose and nature of arrangements changed somewhat. The virtuoso transcriptions of Georges Cziffra are of much relevance to the practices of the nineteenth-century pianist. Although it may seem that Cziffra’s arrangements are done for the sake of showing off his remarkable virtuosity at the piano, this author would argue that they are more truly inspired by his love and passion for this music and for the Hungarian gypsy performance style. Truly Cziffra’s transcriptions and their technical wizardry derive from the realization of a fire and passion that dwells in the pianist’s heart.

¹⁶⁴ Sheveloff, 152.

¹⁶⁵ A table of Brahms’ earnings can be found in Valerie Woodring Goertzen, *The Piano Transcriptions of Johannes Brahms* (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, Champagne-Urbana, 1987), 209-211.

CHAPTER IV
GEORGES CZIFFRA (1921-1994)

His Life

György Cziffra was born into poverty on 5 November 1921, in Budapest. Before World War I the Cziffra family had been living in Paris where the father György Cziffra Sr. was employed as a cabaret and restaurant musician. He was a cimbalom player with Hungarian citizenship. During the war the French government chose to expel all residents whose citizenship was from a country that fought against France and seize their properties. Since Hungary was at that time an enemy, Cziffra's father inevitably was imprisoned and his mother, with two little daughters, was forced to leave Paris and return to Budapest. The Cziffra family lost basically everything because of their deportation with the exception of belongings weighing altogether ten pounds.¹⁶⁶

The young György Cziffra grew up in one small room, which he shared with his family in Budapest's Angyalföld (Angel Court).¹⁶⁷ Established by the Hungarian Red Cross to offer a roof to homeless families, Angyalföld consisted of a series of wooden barracks built above a flooded marsh area. The environment and the constricted, tightly-built wooden rooms were ideal for diseases to spread.¹⁶⁸ Because the family had no

¹⁶⁶ Cziffra, *Ágyúk és Virágok*, 12-13.

¹⁶⁷ Cziffra, *Ágyúk és Virágok*, 11-28.

¹⁶⁸ Cziffra, *Ágyúk és Virágok*, 13-14.

steady income, one of Cziffra's sisters soon was sent to a Swiss family, who adopted her, while his other sister, Jolánka, started working as soon as she was old enough. Her hard labor and disciplined savings resulted in the acquisition of an old upright piano, which she rented. Beginning at the time she started to practice and study with her father, the three-year-old György watched her with fascination. Whenever the often sick boy felt strong enough to get up from his makeshift bed, the first thing he would do was to mimic his sister's practicing. Soon his life changed and focused on one thing: the piano and its magic powers.¹⁶⁹ The three-year-old Cziffra was discovering the magical world of melodies and harmonies at the piano, creating little introductions to the melodies as well as playing fantasies on them; in essence, he was improvising. He learned scales and exercises from his sister, melodies from his mother's singing, and progressively more complex harmonies from his father. Music became an alternate reality for the young Cziffra where he could escape from the indigence surrounding him and his family in their stunted one-room home in Angyalföld. Cziffra remembers:

Thanks to the Strausses, the Offenbachs, and many others, by the time I was five years old, improvisation at the piano became basically my only daily practice. It was more than mere pleasure; I had the power in my hands: whenever I liked, I could break away from the reality of Angyalföld.¹⁷⁰

Practicing with all the energy that the scarce amount of food provided him, Cziffra explored to the maximum the technical capabilities of his instrument, and soon

¹⁶⁹ Cziffra, *Ágyúk és Virágok*, 46.

¹⁷⁰ Cziffra, *Ágyúk és Virágok*, 31-32.

his mental and physical capacity at the piano became extraordinary. By the time he was five years old, he knew such a large number of songs by heart that he obtained a paid position at a circus with the responsibility of harmonizing and developing tunes requested by the audience on the spot.¹⁷¹ Clearly he was the star of the show. Because of his poor health, however, this position could not last longer than a few weeks.¹⁷²

Cziffra's reputation among neighbors in Angyalföld grew despite the jealousy he experienced from other little boys of the area.¹⁷³ He soon attracted the attention of teachers at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest where the president of the institution, Ernő Dohnányi, admitted him as the youngest student ever.¹⁷⁴

Cziffra began his official piano studies at the preparatory class of the Franz Liszt Music Academy in 1932 under the guidance of the second generation Liszt disciple, Imre Keéri-Szántó (1884-1940),¹⁷⁵ as well as Jolán Tauszky, his so-called secondary teacher.¹⁷⁶ His theory and composition teacher was Leó Weiner (1885-1960) whose

¹⁷¹ Cziffra, *Ágyúk és Virágok*, 36-43.

¹⁷² Cziffra, *Ágyúk és Virágok*, 36-43.

¹⁷³ Cziffra, *Ágyúk és Virágok*, 44-45.

¹⁷⁴ It must be clarified here that, as opposed to reoccurring statements in several online sources and dictionary entries – including such scholarly items as the Grove Music Online (2008), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (ed. Stanley Sadie) – Cziffra was never Dohnányi's piano student. See the *Official Yearbooks of the National Royal Franz Liszt Academy of Music*, ed. Róbert Meszlényi. A copy is located in the Research Library of the Franz Liszt Academy and Museum, Budapest.

¹⁷⁵ The pianist and teacher Keéri-Szántó was István Thomán's student at the Liszt Academy, and also attained a doctoral degree in law. From 1918 until his death in 1940 he was a piano teacher at the Liszt Academy. He gave several concerts in Budapest and was guest artist in several foreign countries as well. "Imre Keéri-Szántó," in *Kereső.hu: az Online Lexikon*, available online at <http://www.kereso.hu> (accessed on 11 April 2007); and in *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon 1000-1990*, ed. Ágnes Kenyeres, <http://www.mek.oszk.hu> (accessed on 11 April 2007).

¹⁷⁶ Cziffra had to study and prepare his assigned pieces with her before Keéri-Szántó would listen. Cziffra, *Ágyúk és Virágok*, 62.

influence was also prominent. Throughout his entire career as a student at the Liszt Academy, Cziffra obtained scholarships, which allowed him to study entirely free of charge.¹⁷⁷ Cziffra's first year of university-level study started in the fall of 1934. His professor, Keéri-Szántó, proclaimed the young Cziffra "a second Liszt" and maintained that the boy made astonishing progress.¹⁷⁸ Aladár Tóth (1898-1968), who was often considered the greatest music critic of Budapest at the time, immediately noticed the twelve-year-old boy's outstanding talent at the final studio recital of Keéri-Szántó's class in 1934 and wrote glowingly on Cziffra's performance in the Hungarian journal *Pesti Napló*.¹⁷⁹ As a special talent, Cziffra was permitted to attend the advanced masterclasses, which were normally reserved for adult students. These masterclasses were led by the renowned Liszt-pupil István Thomán (1862-1940).¹⁸⁰

Cziffra's autobiography proves that Thomán evidently exerted an intense influence upon him. As Bryan Crimp writes in his *Postlude to Cziffra's Cannons and Flowers*, "It would be difficult to overestimate Thomán's eminence within Hungarian

¹⁷⁷ See the *Official Yearbook of the National Royal Franz Liszt Academy of Music*, edited by Róbert Meszlényi; located in the Research Library of the Franz Liszt Academy and Museum.

¹⁷⁸ Cziffra, *Cannons and Flowers*, English translation by John Hornsby of the French version of the Hungarian manuscript (Northumberland, England: Hexham, 1996), 174.

¹⁷⁹ The review can be found in *Tóth Aladár Válogatott Zenekritikái* [Selected music reviews of Aladár Tóth] (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1968), 23.

¹⁸⁰ Thomán was one of the greatest Hungarian piano pedagogues, and the follower and preserver of the Liszt tradition. He became Liszt's disciple in 1883 and was soon one of the privileged students the master took with him to Weimar and Rome. Thomán, an outstanding chamber musician, gave concerts in Hungary and abroad. Several articles of his were published in such major Hungarian musical journals as *Zenei Szemle* and *Muzsika*; also he wrote a book on Hungarian piano works and songs called *Magyar zongoraművek, dalok* [Hungarian piano works and songs], and on piano technique; *Technikai tanulmányok, A zongorázás technikája* [Technical studies. The technique of piano playing]. Besides these works, seven volumes of technical studies also were written and published by Thomán. "István Thomán," in *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon 1000-1990* (accessed on 30 March 2007).

musical circles during the decades between 1890 and 1940.”¹⁸¹ Such outstanding Hungarian pianists as Bartók, Székely, Dohnányi, Keéri-Szántó, and György Ferenczy were among his pupils. In the postlude to Cziffra’s *Cannons and Flowers* Bryan Crimp writes, “It was under Thomán’s guidance that Cziffra formulated his deep insight into, and his highly personal yet powerfully persuasive performance style of, Liszt’s music.”¹⁸² Cziffra writes about his teacher and mentor: “Thomán absorbed everything that could be absorbed from Franz Liszt’s magnificent personality. While not a giant of the piano, he was a very intelligent man, and so he could pass on everything he heard and received from Liszt.”¹⁸³ One of the most important aspects that “was unsurpassable in Liszt as a master,” said Thomán, “was his training of one’s sense of style and the preservation and development of personality, and these are the two things that have a primary importance in the training of an artist.”¹⁸⁴

For multiple reasons, such as his family’s need for financial support and the death of his professor Keéri-Szántó, Cziffra interrupted his studies at the Liszt Academy in 1937. Instead of taking lessons with another professor, at the age of sixteen he chose to make a career as a bar pianist. Playing various styles from classical music to chanson and jazz, Cziffra attained enormous success becoming a legend in Budapest’s night clubs. Following the techniques of Liszt, Cziffra improvised dazzling fantasies on opera themes

¹⁸¹ Cziffra, *Cannons and Flowers*, 174.

¹⁸² Bryan Crimp, “Postlude,” in Cziffra, *Cannons and Flowers*, 177.

¹⁸³ Cziffra, *Ágyúk és viragok*, 216.

¹⁸⁴ Attila Retkes, Notes for *Cziffra György at the Piano: Works by Liszt*, trans. Dávid Oláh (Hungaroton Classics D 32131, 2002), 3.

and on other popular classical melodies, thereby impressing his audiences with his fiery elaborations of Hungarian folk-art songs that normally the gypsy bands played in restaurants. Later in life, when he attained celebrity as a classical pianist, Cziffra still frequently played his own transcriptions or improvisations at the end of his recitals, which connects his name to such pianist-composers as Liszt or Rachmaninov.

The year 1942 brought major changes in Cziffra's life. At the age of 21, just after he had married the Egyptian dancer, Soleilka, he was called to fight in World War II. Soleilka was expecting their son (born in 1943) when Cziffra entered the military. During the war Cziffra was a foot soldier, tank commander, and fugitive.¹⁸⁵ In the fall of 1946, at age twenty-five, after almost four years, he returned to his wife and little son, and to the piano; not the piano of the concert stage, but that of Budapest's night life.¹⁸⁶ Despite his fame among international visitors, Cziffra's circumstances did not allow him to break out of the life of a musician of the coffee-house culture.

A few years after the war, in 1950, an attempted escape from Soviet-dominated Hungary led to Cziffra's imprisonment and forced labor for three years between 1950 and 1953. For eighteen months Cziffra was carrying 300-pound stones with another prisoner, which was dangerous for his wrists and the fine muscles in his hands. When a friend of his, Jenő Horváth, visited him in the prison camp and saw the damages to Cziffra's hands, he returned to Budapest and collected signatures on a petition to request the

¹⁸⁵ Concerning the ventures of these war years Cziffra gives a detailed account in his autobiography, *Cannons and Flowers* (three editions: French, 1977; Hungarian, 1983; and English, 1996).

¹⁸⁶ From the Radio recordings of György Cziffra, "Cziffra Györgyre emlékezünk" [We remember György Cziffra], (Magyar Rádió, Budapest, 13 February 1994).

exemption of Cziffra from such labor. Cziffra's friends and musical partners, among them some of the greatest Hungarian actors, actresses, and artists, signed the petition, which eventually did bring some release to Cziffra.¹⁸⁷ By this time he never expected to be able to return to piano playing. Yet, despite the pain and injury, immediately after he was released from prison Cziffra started practicing with the help of leather wrist-bands. Within a few months of pain-resistant, persevering work, he returned to performing and played the piano for the enjoyment and ecstasy of his listeners in the Budapest nightclubs and bars.

Cziffra was also an outstanding jazz pianist. Jazz musician Jenő (Bubi) Beanter remembers that when he first heard Cziffra, he could not believe his ears. He says that Cziffra played Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee* at such an astonishing speed that "there could be hardly any bumblebee that could catch up with its pace."¹⁸⁸ Beanter and Cziffra did work together after this, and in their collaboration Cziffra's work as a jazz pianist was of an outstandingly high quality according to Beanter. He also remarked that it seemed that for Cziffra "one piano at a time is too few. This person needed at least three pianos!"¹⁸⁹ Between 1947 and 1950 Cziffra went on European tours with a jazz band.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Kárpáthy, 159-160.

¹⁸⁸ "Cziffra Györgyre emlékezünk," 1994.

¹⁸⁹ "Cziffra Györgyre emlékezünk," 1994.

¹⁹⁰ Peter Seidle, "Georges Cziffra," in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Allgemeine Enzyklopedie der Musik*, ed. Ludwig Finscher, vol. 5 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2001), 235.

His dream, however, which was to return to the concert stage, remained a dream, until György Ferenczy (1902-1983), professor of piano at the Liszt Academy, happened one evening in 1953 to walk into the *Kedves* espresso where Cziffra was the regular pianist. Ferenczy later recalled, “The sound of extraordinary piano music caught my ear. Who could this pianist be, whose playing was partly entertaining, and partly free improvisation, in such a wonderful manner?”¹⁹¹ Cziffra took some lessons with Ferenczy, who later helped him receive an honorary artist diploma and helped him to return to the concert stage.

Cziffra’s first appearance at the highly prestigious concert series at the Liszt Academy occurred in 1954 and brought enormous success to the pianist. Cziffra had altogether three months to prepare an impressive program for such a grand event after almost twenty years away from stage performance. Despite the sensation he created Cziffra writes: “The first concerts after my release from prison were so dull as to verge on the incompetent.”¹⁹² But he recognized the success of his improvisations and transcriptions, “Fortunately, the transcriptions and improvisations I played as encores at the end of each recital compensated for the rest and shook my audience out of their

¹⁹¹ Ferenczy also recalls: “It was such a unique sound and such remarkable improvisation that it could not compare to anything that I have heard before. I listened to him for an hour and half, and it seemed that I was hearing the greatest virtuoso of the century in the smoky espresso. For weeks, months after this, I returned every day to the *Kedves*, trying to convince him that he should not waste his wonderful talent in night-clubs. I suggested that he should be studying some more, especially about musical styles. Cziffra refused to listen to my words for a long while, which was understandable since he had a young child, and he had to support financially his mother’s and his wife’s family as well. Finally he started taking lessons with me at the Liszt Academy as an exceptional pupil, and soon I worked out that Ede Zathureczky, Zoltán Kodály, and Laszlo Somogyi also listened to his playing.” From the Radio recordings of György Cziffra, Budapest, February 13, 1994.

¹⁹² Cziffra, *Cannons and Flowers*, 157.

apathy. These intense moments were like the ecstasy of love.”¹⁹³ Following successful concerts in several cities of Hungary including Pécs and Győr, Cziffra also had chances to perform in Switzerland and Czechoslovakia in 1954 and 1955 respectively.¹⁹⁴ In 1955, Cziffra won first prize at the International Liszt Piano Competition in Budapest, and in April 1956 he was awarded the prestigious Hungarian Franz Liszt Prize for his interpretation of Liszt’s piano works.¹⁹⁵

In 1956, on the eve of the Hungarian uprising and after a stunning account of Bartók’s second piano concerto,¹⁹⁶ Cziffra finally escaped with Soleilka and his son to Vienna where his recital at the *Brahmssaal* on November 17, 1956, caused a sensation.¹⁹⁷ Cziffra’s Paris debut the following year on December 2 in the *Theatre Châtelet* in Paris was also an exceptional success, and the audience included such important musicians as the famous organist Marcel Dupré, the Debussy-disciple and Ravel-specialist Marguerite Long, and the composer Arthur Honegger.¹⁹⁸ Cziffra’s London debut at the Royal Festival Hall with Liszt’s *Piano Concerto no. 1* and the *Hungarian Fantasy* was

¹⁹³ Cziffra, *Cannons and Flowers*, 157. About the tormented self-doubts concerning his reappearance before serious audiences, Cziffra writes in his memoirs in the chapter titled “All or Nothing.” *Cannons and Flowers*, 143-162.

¹⁹⁴ Seidle, 235-236.

¹⁹⁵ Reports listed in *Új Zenei Szemle: A Magyar Zeneművészek Szövetségének Folyóirata* 7/4 (April 1956): 41.

¹⁹⁶ The performance occurred at the night of 22 October 1956, at the Erkel Theater. The revolution started that same night, although in the papers it was noticed and announced on 23 October.

¹⁹⁷ Seidle, 235-236.

¹⁹⁸ When Cziffra made his Paris debut in 1956, he was hailed by the critics as “the most extraordinary pianistic phenomenon since Horowitz. . . . Probably the only one of his generation who can give each note a different coloration without ruining the continuity of the work he is performing.” Philippe Mougeot, program notes *Georges Cziffra Virtuoso* (EMI France D 5737802, 2000).

outstanding. Concerts followed throughout Western Europe, Japan, and North and South America (including a performance in Carnegie Hall with conductor Thomas Schippers).

Cziffra settled in Paris and took French citizenship in 1968, at which time he changed his first name to Georges.¹⁹⁹ After the tragic and premature death in 1981 of his only son, the conductor Georges Cziffra Jr. with whom Cziffra performed and recorded many times, the pianist's performing career suffered greatly because of his emotional pain and his temporary dependence on alcohol. After 1981 Georges Cziffra could no longer appear with an orchestra again.

Cziffra always remained active, and more and more gave himself to charity and the helping of others. About fifty miles north of Paris, in the historic town of Senlis, and with the permission of France's cultural minister, André Malraux (1901-76), Cziffra undertook the demanding task of the restoration of an old church that was in ruins and was used at the time as a parking garage. This was the old Chapel of Saint Frambourg, the once famous royal chapel where the first of the Capeting dynasty was crowned a king. After the restoration it became the center of the still-functioning *Fondation Cziffra* established by Georges and Soleilka in 1975. During the restoration Cziffra used all of his money for this cause and gave numerous concerts to support his plan. He remembers that he was laboring "like a galley-slave to make money for the restoration."²⁰⁰ The Cziffra Foundation was established as a memorial to Liszt, and its purpose was to give young artists support at the beginning of their careers – something Cziffra himself had

¹⁹⁹ "Georges Cziffra Biography (1921-94)," <http://www.biography.com> (accessed on 25 April 2007).

²⁰⁰ Cziffra, *Ágyúk és Virágok*, 228.

never gotten, causing immense hardship at the beginning of his professional life. In 1966 Cziffra also restored an organ at the Abbey La Chaise-Dieu²⁰¹ and started an annual summer festival of sacred music there, and in 1969 he founded the Versailles Liszt Piano competition.

Cziffra had great admiration and love for Liszt both as a charitable man and as a musician. He felt a strong likeness between himself and the nineteenth-century master, and offered all of his own charitable endeavors and accomplishments in his honor. Liszt also supported students in his own lifetime and donated huge sums to numerous charities.²⁰² He also gave humanitarian charity concerts in large numbers.²⁰³ After Liszt's touring career ended in 1847, he devoted much of his time giving masterclasses to a select group of musicians, and by some estimates he taught over 400 students throughout his life, always valuing the training of future generations.²⁰⁴ Liszt's influence on the twentieth century owed much to the large number of his piano students who pursued successful performing careers throughout the world, and passed on the Liszt legacy to their own students. By 1875 Liszt became the founder and served as first president of the

²⁰¹ The Benedictine Abbey of La Chaise-Dieu, founded in 1043 by Robert de Turlande, is located in the county of Haute-Loire, in the region of Auvergne in France.

²⁰² Dana Gooley, "The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Franz Liszt And His World*, ed. Christopher Gibbs and Dana Gooley, 73-101 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 95.

²⁰³ Gooley, "The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity" 95.

²⁰⁴ Liszt held regular master classes in his Weimar residences in the Altenburg during the 1850s and in the Hofgärtnererei during the 1870s and 1880s. His famous pupils included Hans von Bülow, Carl Tausig, Karl Klindworth, Hans and Ingeborg von Bronsart, William Mason, Arthur Friedheim, August Göllerich, Frederic Lamond, Rafael Joseffy, Sophie Menter, Vera Timanoff, Conrad Ansoerge, Vianna da Motta, Alfred Reisenauer, Moriz Rosenthal, Emil Sauer, Alexander Siloti, August Stradal, Giovanni Sgambati, Marie Trautmann Jaëll, and István Thomán. James Deaville, "Liszt and the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liszt*, edited by Kenneth Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35.

Royal Academy of Music in Pest (renamed the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in 1925), the same institution that the nine-year-old Cziffra started attending fifty-five years later.

Cziffra's first return to Hungary occurred in 1973. After this he visited and gave concerts there several times before his death. He died in his Paris home of a heart attack on 15 January 1994.²⁰⁵

Cziffra and Liszt

Cziffra gained the most recognition as an interpreter of Liszt. Reviews, notes in CD booklets, program notes, and online discussion forums on his recordings often praise the pianist's superb interpretation of Liszt's works. His critics, speaking highly of his Romantic pianism and emphasizing his virtuosity, held him as one of the most outstanding Liszt performers of our age.

Other than benevolence and an unexplainable psychic connection, there are at least three other visible elements that connect Cziffra to Liszt. One is the extraordinary mastery of improvisational skill and an astonishing technical brilliance at the piano. Another element is the previously discussed Liszt legacy that Cziffra had acquired from his teachers, especially during the Thomán masterclasses. Finally there was the unique fire that both Liszt and Cziffra inherited from the music of the Hungarian gypsies.

Growing up in Hungary and himself the offspring of a Hungarian gypsy musician, Cziffra experienced this musical tradition from the beginning. Liszt also remembered being strongly under the influence of these musicians since childhood and especially after

²⁰⁵ Bryan Crimp, "Postlude," in Cziffra, *Cannons and Flowers*, 177.

his visits to Hungary at the peak of his virtuoso career. A peerless improviser himself, Cziffra felt closely connected to Liszt's art and musical spirit. He is remembered as one of the greatest Liszt performers of the twentieth century. Respected Hungarian pianist, conductor, and music critic Zoltán Kocsis says of Cziffra's pianism: "It is axiomatic that the free, improvisatory style of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, a style which, moreover, acted as a cohesive element in his multi-faceted art, is similar to Cziffra's art of improvisation."²⁰⁶

Although extremely difficult to play, Cziffra's transcriptions were not composed simply for the sake of virtuosity. As Liszt's most dazzling passages were born from the composer's extreme intensity of expression, Cziffra's technically unequaled, fiery passages were also motivated by inner musical forces. It was Cziffra's belief was that technical mastery should not be displayed for its own sake but rather he made subservient to a powerful emotional intellect and a cultured mind. Adolph K. Böhm writes this about Cziffra: "Frequently he reproached me for my extravagant praise of his phenomenal technique. He accepted no compliments and sometimes answered quite sharply: 'I don't care about technique. What you call technique is simply an expression of feeling.'"²⁰⁷

Along the same lines, in 1838 on the pages of the *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung*, reviewer Heinrich Adami observed this about Liszt's playing, "Whatever he plays, he truly does not play to show his virtuosity, but – this is clear from his whole manner of

²⁰⁶ Gábor Eckhardt, "Preface to Volume 2 of the Cziffra Studies," in Georges Cziffra, *Transcriptions: Grandes Etudes de Concert II pour piano* (Budapest: Akaprint, 2000) [n. p.].

²⁰⁷ Adolf K. Böhm, "Georges Cziffra: Two Hands, One Heart," in Cziffra: *Transcriptions Etudes de Concert II* [n. p.].

execution – because the composition stirs him up, and *among his listeners he is perhaps the most inspired.*”²⁰⁸ Even as a teacher Liszt said little to his pupils about technique; rather, his teaching concentrated on interpretation. What he demanded was “a technique created by the spirit, not derived from the mechanism of the piano.”²⁰⁹

Cziffra and Liszt both considered themselves mainly self-taught. In his childhood, Cziffra was practicing scales and figurations for hours until his fingers and mind developed a vast repertoire of passages. Liszt’s *Technical Exercises* similarly prepared the pianist with technical formulas in all keys. Liszt mastered as a youth a whole range of studies and exercises so thoroughly that he could still play them as an old man. In later years he often complained that “thumping and pounding was now the order of the day – a view shared by Clara Schumann, who, however, held Liszt responsible for this.”²¹⁰

Astounding boldness and clarity, sweeping passages, fire, rhythmic precision, and sparing use of the pedal describe the quality of Cziffra’s performances, along with the vehemence and elemental force of his audacious octaves and chords. He could play octaves at a speed that confounded both eyes and ears.²¹¹ Rudolph Apponyi (1882-1934) described a performance of Liszt in a comparable way:

[Liszt] is especially amazing in a passage, written entirely in octaves, which he plays with such rapidity, and such force, that the hands seem to multiply. It was impossible to follow

²⁰⁸ Emphasis original; the article is in the *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* 5 (May 1838): 399-400; quoted in Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*, 46.

²⁰⁹ Brendel, 280.

²¹⁰ Brendel, 281.

²¹¹ See interview with Tamás Vásáry in the documentary video *The Art of the Piano: Great Pianists of the 20th Century*, A Warner Music Group production (NBC Arts 29199-3, 1999), VCR tape.

with my eyes their rapid, inconceivable motions; they flew from one end of the piano to the other.²¹²

Liszt, in his own time, “had exceeded every available and known possibility of the piano,”²¹³ and Cziffra, with his own *Transcendental Etudes*, often went beyond the limits of piano technique of his day in complexity and speed. In fact, some of these works are still considered barely possible today.

Adopting Liszt as a guide for his technical and musical development, Cziffra cultivated an intimate knowledge of Liszt’s music and his particular method of transposition and improvisation. Cziffra had the wealth of creativity to make his improvisations a fascinating and mesmerizing experience. And, as Brendel suggests, pianists who are at ease with improvisation will have a more original understanding and faithful approach to Liszt interpretation.²¹⁴

Improvisation in European Musical Training

It was unusual to see a classical pianist of Cziffra’s day improvising on stage with such success. During the twentieth century in Hungary, the formal education of a pianist still began with music reading and imitation; the training focused on accomplishing mainly one objective: to re-create a written composition as faithfully as possible. Most of the time is spent on learning to read, to memorize, and to perfect technical ability. In the

²¹² Rudolph Apponyi, *Vingt-cinq ans à Paris*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1913) 2: 179 (journal entry from 18 April 1832); quoted in Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*, 104.

²¹³ Daniel M. Raessler, “Ferruccio Busoni as Interpreter of Liszt,” *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 9 (1981): 33.

²¹⁴ Brendel, 269.

history of Western music this was not always the case. Especially for keyboardists improvisation was an essential part of musicianship. In our day gypsy musicians and jazz players continue the tradition of improvisation, but for classical pianists there are limited opportunities to learn the art, much less to use the skill during a performance.²¹⁵

As Mayumi Randall points out, “Although improvisation and composition may seem like different concepts, they are closely related. Actually many musical forms and techniques originated in, or were influenced by, improvisatory practices.”²¹⁶ The gradual separation between composer and performer that began in the nineteenth century, and the rise of a new type of virtuosity, contributed to the gradual decline of improvisation.

Liszt’s Virtuosity and Improvisation

In Vienna since the 1830s, critics as well as the performers themselves were constantly making comparisons among the leading pianists of the day, including Liszt, Thalberg, Clara Wieck, Henselt, Chopin, Kalkbrenner, and others. As far as skills for improvisation was concerned, Liszt’s name appeared at the top of the list in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*,²¹⁷ and he was considered to be the most outstanding among the pianists in playing with feeling and warmth in a comparison written by Joseph Fischhof

²¹⁵ Mayumi O. Randall, *The History of Piano Improvisation In Western Concert Music* (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, 1993), 1.

²¹⁶ Randall, 2.

²¹⁷ *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (Leipzig, 1834-1844), founded by Robert Schumann, was published twice weekly. Music criticism had special significance for Schumann, and his journal was explicitly conceived of as an alternative to the perceived critical indifference of some earlier music journals such as the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (ed. G. W. Fink). Annette Vosteen, “*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*,” National Information Services Corporation, <http://www.nisc.com/RIPM> (accessed: May 10, 2007.)

(April 1838).²¹⁸ Also, Liszt often pleased his public by taking requests and responding with encores.²¹⁹

During the peak of Liszt's virtuosity, from 1838 to 1847, audiences' enthusiasm for display began to be exhausted, and a new desire for serious, noble music emerged.²²⁰ Opposition to virtuosic music was one of the cornerstones of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* announced in the journal's prospectus of 1834 and confirmed in innumerable reviews.²²¹ Some critics found Liszt's playing to be harsh, mechanical, and overly technical. Audiences were berated for letting themselves be carried away by his nerve-shaking intensity and losing sight of true esthetic values. "Yet what is most remarkable in the reception of Liszt" says Gooley "is how often he was viewed as a shining exception to the usual problems of a culture obsessed with virtuosity."²²²

We may read harsh and unfair criticism about Cziffra's pianism as well. During the late 1950s and the 1960s, at the peak of Cziffra's career, critics tended to prefer an increasingly sober style of playing and downgraded Cziffra's Romantic approach. Most of the time his technical wizardry aroused suspicion, and the derogatory term "circus music" appeared in reviews of his performances. It is interesting to note that apparently Liszt also feared such criticisms, writing, "My hands no longer obey me and I fear that

²¹⁸ Gibbs, "Just Two Words. Enormous Success," 202-203.

²¹⁹ Gooley, "The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity," 95.

²²⁰ Gooley, "The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity," 75-76.

²²¹ Gooley, "The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity," 86.

²²² Gooley, "The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity," 95.

certain composers may see in my works nothing more than circus acrobatics. Let them talk: my time will come.”²²³

**Cziffra Speaking About His Connection to Liszt:
A Radio Interview with András Bálint Varga**

The following excerpt of an interview with Cziffra reveals his thoughts on his close attachment to Liszt. The interview (owned by the Magyar Rádió, Budapest) was recorded in 1984 in Budapest. By this time Cziffra was a regular guest artist in Hungary and visited the country frequently. The interview was made at one of his visits, three years after the death of his son and a year after his Hungarian publication of his autobiography. The excerpt from the interview is transferred from the audio to written format by this author.

CZIFFRA:

I started piano similarly [to Liszt] at a very early age, and I was making people happy with my improvisations, just like him. And, well, I think that I wasn't too much below his [Liszt's] capabilities in this field. This is not the question of immodesty or modesty, this I know, because I was able to improvise in such a way those days that I could think four measures ahead. And I realize that very few people are able to do this. This is similar to a chess-game, where one player is playing with twelve others simultaneously. By the time my hands arrive somewhere my brain has already gone further. And this is perhaps the most difficult thing about it. This is why when I make sound recordings improvising on certain melodies, numerous wrong notes happen; mistakes; my hands cannot follow the outrageous speed that my brain commands. And at the same time I shape the form of the piece as well. I am not only interpreting, but I am creating the actual piece at the moment. So I think I am also a creator from another respect, certainly not to such extent as Franz Liszt was, but some congenial trait we do share.

²²³ Quoted in Cziffra, *Cannons and Flowers*, 168.

VARGA:

And perhaps this can be heard also in your piano playing, when you play works written by composers. . . . Seriously, your playing leaves the impression that the work is being created there, at the moment, under your fingers. . . . And you are also Liszt's "great grandson" in a way, because you are the grandson of Thomán, pupil of Keéri-Szántó: it is a straight line.

CZIFFRA:

Yes, Imre Keéri-Szántó was a wonderful teacher, and I do owe him tremendously much thanks. However, I must say that in this direction, such as passing on the so-called "Liszt-cult," I feel that I had to absorb most of that on my own. I always had a natural understanding of Liszt; I saw his works on paper, and somehow I found an immediate and innate connection with the music. This was such a phenomena for which I could hardly find an explanation. Still, today, I work for a Liszt-piece extremely little. I learn them exceptionally fast.

Selected Stories on Cziffra's Improvising

The following three stories about Cziffra originate from the pianist's friends. They are based on true stories that were collected by Gyula Kárpáthy and included in his Hungarian book *Menet közben*, which is a collection of stories about famous Hungarian gypsies (not necessarily musicians). These three stories are excerpted and translated by this author to provide some insight of the perception of Cziffra as an outstanding improviser and generous human being. The first story is about Cziffra's receiving of the honorary artist diploma; the second one is a memory from the time of World War II; and the last one is about one of his appearances in the United States.

Since Cziffra never completed his studies in the Liszt Academy, during the late 1940s and early 1950s he was facing the problem of not getting paid even an honorarium as a pianist because he had not received an artist diploma. To help Cziffra, his new

professor, György Ferenczy, set up a highly certified jury committee at the Liszt Academy to officially decide whether Cziffra was qualified to receive an honorary diploma. The chair of the jury was Zoltán Kodály. After Cziffra's performance of works from all style periods, Ferenczy asked Cziffra to show some of his extraordinary ability as an improviser. Kodály presented the theme, and Cziffra improvised. After about ten minutes Kodály stood up, and declared, "Gentlemen, if I myself had not created this melody right here, I would have assumed that Mr. Cziffra had known it from long ago, and had time to prepare." Then with a "thank you" he shook hands with the pianist, and left the room. The Director of the National Opera House, who served as the associate chair of the jury, hurried after Kodály to ask: "Sir, does this mean then that we grant him the honorary diploma?" Kodály answered in a frustrated tone: "Such a question is degrading to your qualifications."²²⁴

The second anecdote, from the time of the Second World War, comes after one of the most brutal battles in Ukraine, at which time Cziffra and two of his friends lost track of each other. After weeks of searching, his friends, following the faint sound of a distant organ, found Cziffra at a damaged church packed with dying or wounded soldiers. Cziffra was sitting in only a shirt in the freezing weather of winter playing music continuously for three entire days, to console the injured people and heal their pain. When he stopped playing, the people cried for more, because music meant the last hope and alleviation of their pain.²²⁵

²²⁴ Kárpáthy, 160.

²²⁵ Kárpáthy, 161-162.

The last memory is about a concert in a grand hall of Los Angeles. The official program lasted from 8 until 10 p.m., but the thousands in the enthusiastic audience again and again requested tunes upon which Cziffra would improvise. It was 1 a.m. before Cziffra left the stage.²²⁶

Cziffra's Transcriptions

Virtuosos have always been in the habit of making arrangements for themselves, specifically adapted to their technique and style. Cziffra's *Transcriptions: Grandes Etudes de Concert pour piano*, vol. 1 (Cziffra Edition, 1995) contains a selection of transcriptions, paraphrases, and improvisations. Most of these works were transferred from audio to score format by the pianist's son, Georges Cziffra Jr. Some of these works were already recorded with Pathe-Marconi EMI during the 1950s, but it was only later that the virtuoso Cziffra found them to be full of innovative ideas. He felt that these creative pieces should be shared with people who could read and play them while also learning the secrets of improvisation from one of the greatest Romantic improvisers of the twentieth century.

With the fiery and passionate performance of these pieces Cziffra not only gave his listeners an unforgettable experience but also showed new possibilities. The following quotation from Cziffra's "Introduction to my Transcriptions" reflects his thoughts:

Throughout my whole youth I have been enthralled by improvisational art. . . . When I improvise I feel as if I become one with myself, and my body is freed from all earthly pain.

²²⁶ Kárpáthy, 162.

It is truly a process of going beyond my own talents, which makes it possible at each occasion to step over the known boundaries of the technical side of the piano performance. While I give myself over completely to the moment of inspiration, while I give the field of form and theme over completely to my imagination I always try to maintain a discipline of my thoughts on the following two-three tracks, so that my hands can follow the path of my vision. The practice of this . . . method made it possible for me in the moments of creation to discover the future form of piano performance.²²⁷

Of Brahms' twenty-one *Hungarian Dances* fifteen pieces, numbers 1-6, 8-10, 12-13, 16-17, 19, and 21 were transcribed by Cziffra in 1982-1983 and published as *Fifteen Hungarian Dances*.²²⁸ Cziffra writes:

Between 1982 and 1983 I recorded Brahms' *Fifteen Hungarian Dances*. . . . Inspired by the popular melodies of his time Brahms composed 21 pieces. While these works left a free hand to personal interpretations, the compositions' temperaments were not their unique feature. Liszt's piano ornamentation was too virtuosic for his [Brahms'] taste.²²⁹

Cziffra explains that, inspired by his genuine love for Hungarian melodies, he intends to combine the legacies of Brahms and Liszt, "to bring peace between these two great musicians [Brahms and Liszt,]" respecting the former's "constructive spirit" and the latter's "enthusiasm for improvisation."²³⁰

An earlier transcription of Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance* originates from 1957. Because it is different from Cziffra's later version, it gives an opportunity for studying the final transcription with a different understanding.²³¹

²²⁷ Cziffra, "Introduction to my transcriptions," 8.

²²⁸ They were published for the first time with other transcriptions in the 1995 edition of Cziffra's *Transcriptions*.

²²⁹ Cziffra, "Introduction to my Transcriptions," 9.

²³⁰ Cziffra, "Introduction to my Transcriptions," 9.

²³¹ Cziffra, "Introduction to my Transcriptions," 11.

Not much is written about Cziffra as a transcriber. Mostly he is celebrated as a piano virtuoso or, later, the founder of the *Fondation Cziffra*. Although he was teaching in master classes throughout Europe, Cziffra considered himself a person who educated the world of pianists with his transcriptions and performances rather than with refined words and methods. Cziffra wanted to shed light on Liszt's fantastic improvisational ability, hoping to open new doors for the twenty-first century pianist. He himself phrased it the following way: "I have never seen myself as a teacher in the general meaning of the word. Rather I see in myself someone who sheds light, one who directs with a small lamp those similar to himself."²³² Cziffra was hoping that the pages of his published transcriptions would open the door to new possibilities and encourage a less stereotypical and more personal approach to performances of classical piano music. The transcriptions of Brahms' *Hungarian Dance No. 5* show Cziffra's improvisatory and free approach. These re-workings of the well-known dance are discussed in the following chapter with an attempt to call attention to elements that are pointing toward Cziffra's goals toward new possibilities of a more individualized, creative performance.

²³² Cziffra, "Introduction to my Transcriptions," 8.

CHAPTER V

BRAHMS-CZIFFRA: LA CINQUIÈME DANSE HONGROISE TWO VERSIONS (1957 and 1982-83)

Cziffra's two transcriptions of Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance* are chosen for examination for various reasons. The choice of a Hungarian source is important for portraying a rendition of the *style hongrois*, and Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance* is widely known which makes it easier – without relying upon its score too much – to compare it to Cziffra's elaborated versions. Another reason for choosing this piece is that it is the only work that Cziffra transcribed twice. The two different versions are almost three decades apart from each other; therefore a comparison of them reveals changes in Cziffra's transcribing style, from the more free and extravagant to the more composed and reserved. Both transcriptions exhibit Cziffra's virtuoso capabilities at the piano, as the transcriptions are highly demanding technically. There are numerous instances of Lisztian features in these pieces, as well as passages that connect the transcriber's style to that of fiery Hungarian gypsy performers.

This chapter has four parts. First, the original sources to Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance* are presented; second, Brahms' work receives brief attention concerning basic harmonies and formal structure. Cziffra's 1957 transcription would follow as the third part, but since structurally the 1982-83 version stays much closer to Brahms' work, this later one is examined first. The analysis of the 1957 version becomes the fourth part, and

closes the chapter providing an opportunity to witness Cziffra's uninhibited improvisatory response to the music of the *Fifth Hungarian Dance*.

The Sources of Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance*

Katalin Szerző's commentary to *Brahms' Hungarian Dances for Piano Four-Hands*²³³ includes the source materials for Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance*. Of the two sources that Brahms used for this particular dance, the first one is movement 1 of the *Friss* [lively] section of a *csárdás* [czardas] for solo piano named *Bártfay emlék* [A Memory from Bártfa].²³⁴ The whole czardas consists of an introduction marked *Andante*, three movements under the indication *Friss*, and a *Finale*, which repeats movement 1 of the *Friss* section and adds a *Più mosso* coda. The czardas is apparently Béla Kéler's op. 31 (1820-1882) since his name is indicated on the title page; however, his authorship is doubted by musicologists. According to Max Kalbeck and Otto Goldhammer²³⁵ the piece might have been composed by Ede Reményi. This czardas is still popular with town gypsy bands, but none of its traces can be detected in the rural tradition.²³⁶ Example 1 reproduces the entire movement 1 of the *Friss* section from *Bártfay Emlék* (p. 76).

²³³ Gábor Kováts, ed. (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1990).

²³⁴ The music was published by Rózsavölgyi, and now it is to be found in Budapest at the MTA/ZTI [Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences] under catalog number 600-874.

²³⁵ Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Deutsche Brahms-Gesellschaft, 1912; reprint, Tutzing: Schneider, 1976), 82-88; Otto Goldhammer, "Liszt, Brahms, und Reményi," *Studia Musicologica* 5 (1963): 495-502, in Katalin Szerző, "Introduction," in Brahms, *Hungarian Dances for Piano Duet*, part 1 (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1990), vii.

²³⁶ Szerző, viii.

Example 1: Movement 1 of Kéler's *Bátfay Emlék*.²³⁷

Friss
1.

Allegro vivo.

1 2 3 4 5 6

7 8 9 10 11 12 13

14 15 16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25 26

27 28 29 30 31 32

f *f* *f* *p* *f* *p*

R&C.N°512.

²³⁷ Movement 1 of Béla Kéler, *Bátfay Emlék*, Op. 31. Reproduced by permission of Zsuzsanna Szepesi, head librarian of the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The source that Brahms used for the middle section of the Fifth Hungarian Dance is a folk-style song transcribed for voice and piano. It is no. 8 from the song collection of Ignác Bognár (1811-83) published as *50 eredeti nép- és magyar dal* [Fifty Original Folk- and Hungarian Songs] (Pest, 1857).²³⁸ Both melody and words were written by Bognár, and, according to Szerző, this song still survives in the Hungarian folk tradition.²³⁹ The rhythm and character of speech of the Hungarian text often motivates the choices of rhythm and articulation of the melody. Example 2 reproduces the original song by Bognár (p. 78).

Brahms arranged these two different works into one composition without changing much; there are only slight alterations to the main melodic lines, harmony, and dynamics. The greatest differences occur in the choice of keys (F# minor and major in Brahms, versus the Hungarian sources) and the significant enrichment of texture. The textural and melodic elaborations serve to enhance the Hungarian-gypsy character of these dances and to recall the flavor of the performances of gypsy bands.

In Brahms' ABA structure the *czardas* is used for the *Allegro* sections (A) and the arrangement of Bognár's song for the *Vivace* middle section (B). Brahms' motivation for choosing these particular pieces is unknown, but it is very likely that he heard them performed by gypsies or by friends such as Reményi and Joachim.

²³⁸ József Szinnyei, *Magyar írók élete és munkái* [Life and works of Hungarian authors] (Budapest: Arcanum, 2000). The score is situated today in the OSZK/ZMT (National Széchenyi Library, Musical Collection), Library Code 12.283; Szerző, viii.

²³⁹ Szerző, viii.

Example 2: Ignác Bognár, “Uccu bizon. . .”²⁴⁰

8^{ik} szám.

Ének.

1 *Frissen.* 2 3 4 5

U - czu bi - zon meg - é - retit a ká - ka ,

Zongora.

f

6 7 8 9 *Halkabban.* 10

a sze - re - tőm ha nem sző - ke bar - na. *p* csip - ke bo - kor

11 *Frissen.* 12 13 *Halkabban.* 14 15 *Frissen.* 16

ga - la - go - nya vad bo - kor, nem is le - ány, ha a ha - ja nem bodor.

Frissen. *p Halkabban.*

Translations of the indications and text are included below.

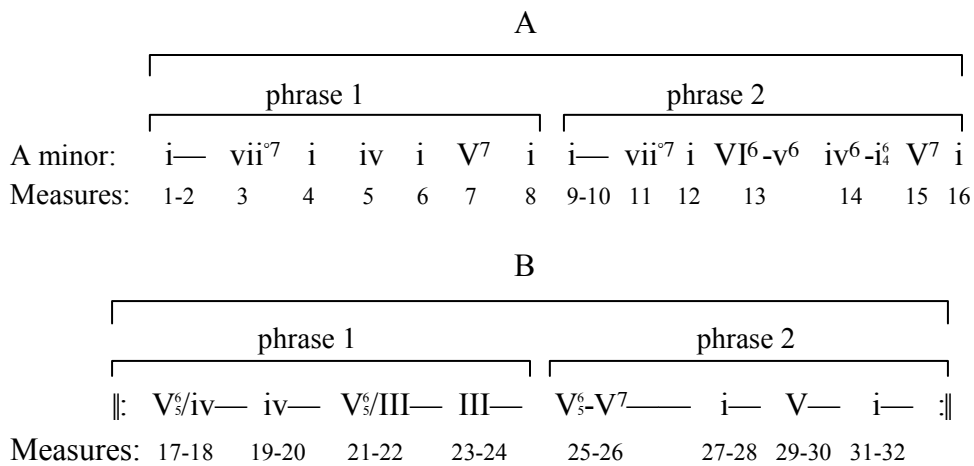
Indications: *Ének* = Voice; *Zongora* = Piano; *Frissen* = in a lively manner / with energy;
Halkabban = more quietly (and with a restrained tempo).

Text:	<i>Uccu bizon megérett a káka</i>	Surely the marsh-brushes are now ripe,
	<i>A szeretőm ha nem szőke barna.</i>	My lover if not blonde, is brunette.
	<i>Csipke bokor galagonya vadbokor,</i>	Wild rosebush, hawthorn, wild bush,
	<i>Nem is leány ha a haja nem bodor.</i>	A girl is not a girl without wavy locks.

²⁴⁰ No. 8 from Ignác Bognár, *50 Eredeti Nép- és Magyar Dal* [Fifty Original Folk- and Hungarian Songs] (Pest, 1857). Reproduced by permission of Katalin Szerző, head librarian and musicologist at the Hungarian National Széchenyi Library.

Brahms transposes the original czardas (A minor) and the song (F major) to F# minor and F# major, respectively, thus making a parallel key connection between the two main sections of his work. The original czardas is a binary form in which the A and B sections are equal in length (16 bars each) and the B section is marked with a repeat sign. Brahms' arrangement repeats the first 16 bars as well. The repeat is written out, because the second time the texture thickens significantly. The form of the czardas's B section Brahms also adopts without changes. The following chart (Example 3) shows the rather simple harmonic plan and formal construction of the original czardas. The first six measures are built over a tonic pedal point.

Example 3: *Bártfay Emlék*, movement 1. Harmony and Form.²⁴¹



This piece has many of the characteristics of the Hungarian gypsy style. The bass is built upon ostinato rhythms, whose single pitches on the beats alternate with chords on

²⁴¹ The longer horizontal lines indicate continuation of a harmony or harmonic pattern through the following measure.

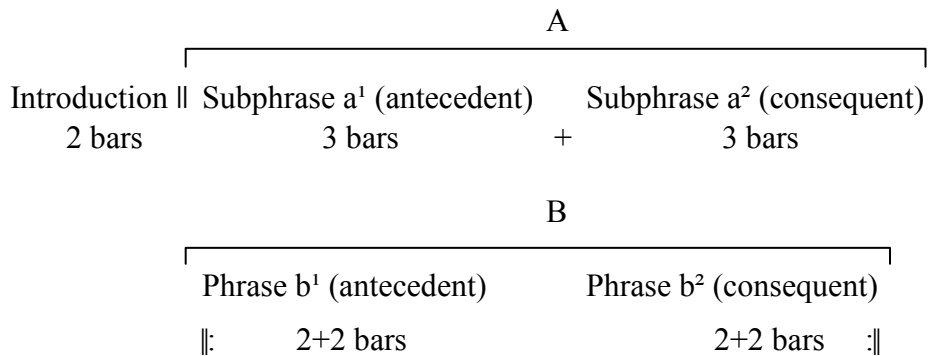
the offbeats. The sharp dotted rhythms of the melody originate in the *verbunkos* style.²⁴² The rhythm of the melody in m. 7 (also in m. 15) where sixteenth notes lead to an accent on beat 2, as well as the syncopated rhythm and cambiata-like shape of the melody in mm. 19-20 (also appearing in mm. 23-24, 27-28 and 31-32), are typical formulas of the *verbunkos*, appearing especially frequently at phrase endings.

The sequence of staccato sixteenth-note patterns in measures 13-14 and the appoggiatura in measure 26 recall the embellishment style of the gypsy violin. Another feature of the Hungarian gypsy performing style is the element of surprise, which may be seen especially in measures 16 and 29 where the *sf* chords contrast sharply with the preceding *piano* passages. The accent on the dominant chord in measure 29 suggests a typical dramatic moment of a gypsy band's performance, when a quiet section would be ended by the sudden, fiery and joyous entrance of the entire group of musicians.

Brahms' second source, the song by Ignác Bognár, begins with a 2-measure introduction in the piano, followed by two 3-measure groups, all of which constitute the A section of this binary form. The song's B section consists of two 4-measure phrases, each built of two 2-measure groups. Example 4 diagrams the form of this song

²⁴² For information on *verbunkos* see Chapter 2, pages 18-19 of this document.

Example 4: Formal chart of Bognár's song "*Uccu bizon. . .*"



Harmonically the piece is extremely simple. Much of the left-hand accompaniment consists of an alternation between scale degrees 1 and 5. The accents on the second of two tied eighth notes in bars 9-10 and 13-14 are peculiar. Since in the text there is only one syllable for each pair of eighth notes, the indication suggests a special effect of a *crescendo* through the tied notes.

The meaning of this playful, folk-style text is elusive; the importance of rhyme sometimes overrides the use of a specific word for its meaning. The text of lines one and three rhyme with lines two and four, respectively (the rhyme scheme is a a b b). The second and fourth lines largely carry the message of the song, which is that the beloved girl who has brown and wavy hair is most special. A sound picture is sometimes painted from words unrelated to each other but related to older, traditional Hungarian folk-song texts. These words therefore often carry some additional meaning; for example, "*csipke bokor*" [wild rosebush] is frequently associated with love and the act of love, appearing in a number of love-themed folk-songs.

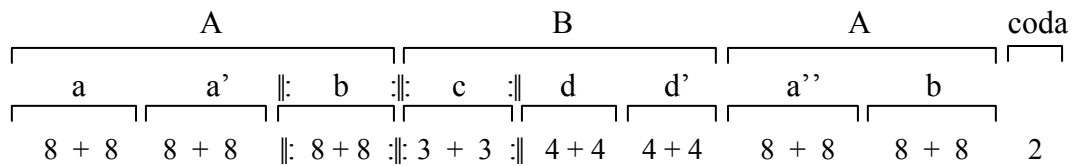
Juxtaposing these two pieces creates contrast, so Bognár's song serves well as a contrasting section in Brahms' arrangement. In Kéler's Op. 31 the first movement returns as the Finale also – and a coda is added – and the ternary form of Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance* reflects the same idea: the czardas part returns after the contrasting middle section, with a brief coda added.

Brahms: *Fifth Hungarian Dance*

Example 5 illustrates how the two source materials are combined in Brahms' arrangement. The opening A section (64 measures built of 4-bar phrases constructing 8-bar periods) is nearly twice as long as the second A section (32 measures + 2 measures of coda), for the latter lacks the repeats of both the first and second parts. In the opening A section, after stating the first main theme (a), Brahms writes out the repeat (a') including much elaboration and added flourish. The second theme (b) is repeated too, but this repeat is not written out because there are no composed changes in it. Upon the return of the A section, Brahms combines some aspects of the first statement of the first theme (a) and its elaborated version (a'), keeps the second statement (b) the same, and adds a two-bar cadence.

In the middle section (B), the song arrangement, Brahms omits the two-bar introduction that opens Bognár's composition, but both parts of the song itself (3 + 3 bars in the first half, and 2+2 + 2+2 in the second half) Brahms repeats. The repeat of the first half is marked simply with the repeat sign, and that of the second half is written out only in order to add a *dolce* marking in measure 67.

Example 5: Form diagram of Brahms, *Fifth Hungarian Dance*.



The texture of Brahms' dance is significantly thicker and more elaborate than its sources, but there is only one significant harmonic change in his arrangement. In measures 27-28 of Kéler's first movement the music simply returns to the tonic chord, whereas Brahms surprises us with a deceptive cadence instead (mm. 41-44). Brahms' choice of harmonic progression is much more interesting and adds a touch of melancholy to the harmony which, together with the *poco rit.* and *p* markings, further contrasts and therefore emphasizes the C# major *forte* dominant chord that follows *in tempo*.

The other harmonic embellishments in Brahms' piece are also important as they make the music considerably more interesting, though they do not bring major changes compared to the original. For the most part, the bass that accompanies the opening melody follows the original harmonic plan, but in Brahms' version, instead of a pedal point as in the original source, scale degree 1 alternates with scale degree 5 – or in measures 3, 5, and 11 with scale degree 4. In the original czardas similar bass movement is introduced only in measures 9-10 and throughout the B section. Brahms' bass motion expands the range of the bass and brings a more driven character to the dance than that of the sources. The locations of *sforzando* markings are on offbeats (the eighth notes following the downbeats), thereby emphasizing a characteristically Hungarian gypsy

rhythm (see mm. 1-6, and the corresponding places in the piece such as mm. 17-22 and 71-76).

In the repeat (a') the right-hand part is further developed by adding octaves to the main theme to achieve a double-stop effect or a fuller orchestra-like sound. Octaves are introduced in the original czardas movement in mm. 9-16 (a') as an elaboration of mm. 1-8 (a). Brahms extends this idea and uses octaves all the way through measures 17-32, the written out repetition of mm. 1-16. The richer texture of the diminished seventh chord over a tonic pedal (m. 19) recalls the sound of the full gypsy band. In mm. 21-22 the melody is transposed up an octave relative to mm. 5-6, and the added voice in the right-hand part may suggest doubled thirds on a fiddle. Playing a motive an octave higher with double stops is a typical strategy used by Hungarian gypsy violinists for a thematic return. In measure 25 the passage in octaves – which earlier (in m. 9) consisted of an arpeggiation of an F# minor triad through an octave – here ascends through *two* octaves, recalling the freer performance style of the gypsies. Example 6 illustrates the short harmonic sequence that Brahms developed compared to their appearance in measures 13-14 by thickening the texture of the *staccato* sixth-chords significantly in the left-hand part (measures 29-30).

Example 6 also shows the last two bars of the (a') section. These are changed slightly compared to the source in that Brahms adds extra emphasis to the downbeats (see measures 31-32). In measure 31 the dominant chord is emphasized by a tripled C#, and in measure 32 the downbeat consists of a complete chord as opposed to just a tripled tonic scale degree as in the source. The right-hand passage is again reminiscent of a violin in

Example 6: Brahms, *Hungarian Dance No. 5*, mm. 29-32

its occasional *staccato* octave doublings. Some rhythmic alterations also occur in the accompaniment. In measure 31 the constancy of the eighth-note patterns is broken by replacing beat 2 (the 3rd eighth note) with a rest, thus creating a syncopated rhythm. That the bass drops out on beat 2 also reinforces the right-hand's rhythm which leads to emphasis on beat 2.

The texture of the second half of the original czardas is enriched by Brahms, and there are also alterations in the interpretation marks. In the original score there are accents on each beat in measures 17 and 21 (see Example 1 on page 76); in their place Brahms writes *marcato*, reserving the accent mark for the dissonant third chord of the right-hand musical gesture, the melodic peak of the subphrase (see Example 7). The *staccato* marks that Brahms adds in measure 33 further emphasize this effect: the accented chord with the dotted rhythm in measure 34 as well as the delayed downbeat in the right-hand part in measure 35 makes those chords stand out significantly from the environment of *staccato* and shorter value chords.

Example 7: Brahms, *Hungarian Dance No. 5*, mm. 33-36.



Brahms elaborates the melody by adding a few grace-note flourishes, such as the C# broken octave in the bass (measure 45) and the G# grace note in measure 47. The original czardas has a grace note in measure 26, a grace note that Brahms emphasizes by giving it an eighth-note duration (measure 41). The new quintuplet in Brahms' arrangement (measure 48) is another typical Hungarian gypsy figuration.

The texture of Brahms' arrangement of the Bognár song is also significantly enriched, while the harmonic functions are again similar to the original song. Example 8 shows how Brahms translates the unusual accents into *crescendos* (mm. 9-10 of Bognár's song; page 78 of this document). Although the effect would be mostly an illusion in the melody (which is where the notes are tied), the pitches in the accompanying harmony are articulated on each beat, providing a chance for the *crescendo* to occur (see mm. 51, 54, 55-56, and 59-60).

Example 8: Brahms, *Hungarian Dance No. 5*, mm. 54-56.



Cziffra's Transcriptions of Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance*

Cziffra must have been intimately familiar with Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance* since its themes were, and still are, among the most popular themes performed and improvised upon by Hungarian gypsy musicians in coffee houses and restaurants. It probably was one of the pieces that he learned from his mother even as a child; certainly it was one of the pieces most requested in the bars where he played piano for several years. As a result, Cziffra recorded his own elaboration of it in 1957 with Pathé-Marconi (later EMI France).²⁴³ The printed version appeared in 1995 among his transcriptions. This work is very different from its source: in its formal construction it is freer, and it is highly improvisatory in character. Its writing resembles the style of Cziffra's four *Concert Etudes*,²⁴⁴ which are published together in the same volume (*Transcriptions:*

²⁴³ In 1931, EMI Records bought Disques Pathé (1894-1928), forming EMI Pathé (1931-1972). The name was changed to Pathé Marconi EMI in 1972. In 1990 Pathé Marconi EMI was closed to form EMI France. See www.emimusic.fr/home.htm (accessed on March 5, 2008).

²⁴⁴ These *Etudes de Concert* also include Rimsky-Korsakoff's *Le Vol du Bourdon*, J. Strauss's *Tritsch-tratsch Polka*, and F. Vecsey's *La Valse Triste*; and *La Fantaisie Roumaine* is an original improvisation based on Romanian gypsy melody-fragments and the slow-fast elements of the style.

Grandes Études de Concert). As with the 1957 Brahms-transcription, these *Concert Etudes* were recorded before the year 1958. These early works of Cziffra (*Le Vol du bourdon*, *Tritsch-tratsch polka*, *La Fantasia roumaine*, *La Valse Triste*, and the *La Cinquième danse hongroise*) are all transcriptions of performances, rather than deliberately composed pieces.

The second version, from 1982-83, is an example of a more planned and thought-out transcription work in a sense that it deliberately remains more or less within the structural frame (the only changes are written out repeats, seven measures of extensions, and an augmented coda); also this transcription often uses similar rhythm patterns as those in Brahms' version. Cziffra's 1982-83 transcription was composed together with the transcriptions of another fourteen of Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*. The similarity of texture and writing among these fifteen transcriptions is striking.

To obtain an idea of formal proportions, it is worthwhile to compare the number of measures of the earlier discussed source materials with Brahms' arrangement and with both of Cziffra's transcriptions. The original czardas and folk-style song number 48 measures together, and 72 counting the repeats. Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance* is 104 measures long, and 126 measures including the repeats. Cziffra's 1957 transcription of the piece is 177 measures long, whereas his (1982-83) arrangement is 135 measures. Most of Cziffra's expansions are achieved by varied repetition of patterns. The diagram in Example 9 shows the correspondences between these four different arrangements. Note that the extra measures in Brahms' work are always related to the original sources,

Example 9: Formal Comparison of the Sources, Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance*, and Cziffra's Two Transcriptions.

Kéler: <i>Bártfay Emlék</i>, mvt. 1; Bognár: <i>Uccu bizon</i>	Brahms: <i>Fifth Hungarian Dance</i>	Cziffra: 1957 transcription	Cziffra: 1982-83 transcription	
Kéler: mm. 1-16	mm. 1-32 16 extra measures: written-out repeat	mm. 1-32	mm. 1-32	A
Kéler: mm. 17-32 Repeated	mm. 33-48 Repeated	mm. 33-64 16 extra measures: written-out repeat	mm. 33-64 16 extra measures: written-out repeat	
Bognár: mm. 3-8	mm. 49-54 Repeated	mm. 65-76 6 extra measures: written-out repeat	mm. 65-76 6 extra measures: written-out repeat	B
Bognár: mm. 9-16 (8) Repeated	mm. 55-70 (16) 8 extra measures: written-out repeat	mm. 77-124 (48) 32 extra measures: the phrase of mm. 77-84 is repeated 4 times (mm. 85- 116); mm. 115- 116 are repeated; the fragment of m. 115 occurs 4 times m. 125 cadenza/flourish	mm. 77-96 (20) 4 extra measures: 8 mm. of written- out repeat (mm. 85-92); 2 repetitions of mm. 91-92 (mm. 93-96)	
Kéler: mm. 1-16	mm. 71-86	mm. 126-141	mm. 97-112	A
Kéler: mm. 17-32 Repeated	mm. 87-102	mm. 142-173 16 extra measures: written-out repeat	mm. 113-131 3 extra measures: internal expansion: mm. 123-127 (Brahms: mm. 11-12)	
	mm. 103-104 Cadence ii ^o _s V / i //	mm. 174-177 Cadence: augmented iv / V / i /- //	mm. 132-135 Cadence: augmented iv / V / i /- //	C O D A

but those in Cziffra's transcriptions correspond to Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance* since Cziffra was modifying Brahms' work.

Brahms-Cziffra: *Danse Hongroise No. 5* (1982-83)

Although chronologically, Cziffra's 1957 extemporization precedes his 1982-83 transcription, the later work is examined first because in most respects it remains closer to Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance*. Cziffra's brilliant pianistic writing is balanced with a clear structure in the 1982-83 transcription. In this work Cziffra remained more or less faithful to the form of Brahms' arrangement. The three formal extensions are (1) a four-measure extension near the end of the B section (mm. 93-96), (2) a three-measure extension in measures 125-127 marked *quasi cadenza ad lib.*, and (3) a two-measure augmentation of Brahms' final cadence.

While Cziffra's music is full of dazzling passages, electrifying runs, sextuplets, scales and patterns in 64th-notes, flourishes, grace notes, broken chords, complex rhythmic juxtapositions, and the exploration of a wide registral span, the likeness to Brahms' arrangement remains noticeable. Cziffra not only employs the same key and preserves the formal outlines, but also pays respect to the original harmonic and rhythmic layout of Brahms' dance.

Slight alterations in the bass line can be found in measures 3, 5, and 11, but the most startling changes occur at the beginning of the second part of the A section (b) (see Example 5 on p. 83). Example 10 shows that Cziffra creates unusually harsh dissonances. The original harmony is V⁶/iv, which Cziffra enhances by adding b9 (G[♭]). The

juxtaposition of the F#-A#-C#-E-G# chord tones with the octave D neighbor-tones and the chromatic passing tones (from A# to the G#E# third) in measure 34 produces clashes of harmony. More specifically, within the first beat the bass's C# clashes against the right melody's D neighbor-tone doubled in octaves; and the A# and E#G# third in the bass clash against the F#A third in the right-hand part. There are cross-relations between the A# in the bass and the A# in the right-hand part, and between the E#G# in the left hand and the E#G# in the right hand. In order to create the illusion of *legato* in the high-range octave melody while the right hand jumps down to catch the chromatic passing tones, the use of pedal is necessary. Cziffra indicates that the pedal is to be held throughout the entire measure, which produces an interesting effect of a wash of chromatic sounds.

Example 10: Cziffra, *Fifth Hungarian Dance* (1982-83), mm. 33-34.

Cziffra faithfully retains the accent that Brahms places on the downbeat of measures 34 and 38, unlike in his 1957 transcription, in which there are rests on those downbeats. In measures 41-48 the harmonic functions remain identical to that of Brahms'

arrangement. However, the chord inversions, the ascending sixteenth-note sextuplet scales and thirty-second-note flourishes, the placement of the melody in the middle range shared by the left hand and right hand, the exploration of extremes in register, the huge octave leaps, and the abundance of grace notes make Cziffra's music much more flamboyant, anxious, and electrifying than its source (see Example 11). In mm. 47-48

Example 11: Cziffra, *Fifth Hungarian Dance* (1982-83), mm. 41-48.

The musical score for Example 11, Cziffra's *Fifth Hungarian Dance*, measures 41-48, is presented in three systems. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 2/4. The score is written for piano and includes various performance instructions and dynamic markings.

- System 1 (Measures 41-42):** Measure 41 features a melody in the right hand with a sextuplet of sixteenth notes, marked *mp*. The left hand has a bass line with a grace note and a ledger line below the staff, marked *pp*. Measure 42 continues the melody with another sextuplet, marked *f*. The left hand has a ledger line above the staff, marked *8va*.
- System 2 (Measures 43-44):** Measure 43 features a melody in the right hand with a sextuplet of sixteenth notes, marked *mf*. The left hand has a bass line with a sextuplet of sixteenth notes, marked *6*. Measure 44 features a melody in the right hand with a triplet of sixteenth notes, marked *f*. The left hand has a bass line with a triplet of sixteenth notes, marked *3*. The system ends with a *loco* instruction.
- System 3 (Measures 46-48):** Measure 46 features a melody in the right hand with a sextuplet of sixteenth notes, marked *8va*. The left hand has a bass line with a sextuplet of sixteenth notes, marked *6*. Measure 47 features a melody in the right hand with a sextuplet of sixteenth notes, marked *loco*. The left hand has a bass line with a sextuplet of sixteenth notes, marked *6*. Measure 48 features a melody in the right hand with a sextuplet of sixteenth notes, marked *mp subito*. The left hand has a bass line with a sextuplet of sixteenth notes, marked *6*.

a melodic interruption occurs by the placement of the B#s an octave lower than the rest of the sixteenth notes.

Through the first 12 measures of the *Vivace* section the harmonic functions are preserved in Cziffra's transcription, but in his version the F# bass appears only on the downbeats rather than on both beats in each measure. This creates a seamless flow in this extremely fast section. The *dolce* note-repetitions of the C# and the weightless bass at the middle of each measure recall the characteristics of gentle cimbalom-rumblings (see Example 12). The steady repetitions of the C# alternating between right-hand and left-hand parts recall the one-note repetitions of a cimbalom player in a gypsy band. Upon the repeat of this 3+3-measure phrase the repeated notes occasionally "get off track" of the pattern by including chromatic neighbor tones in the left-hand part, making the music more interesting. The *dolce egualmente* mark suggests a soft touch and equal rhythmic division among the different layers of music, portraying the effect that the mallets of the cimbalom can provide.²⁴⁵

The second half of the B section (*Moderato*; mm. 77-96) is more complex and free in its melody, harmony, and rhythm than Brahms' version. The melody is expanded through the upper octave, and the melody is enriched with chromatic passing tones in the middle voice. Upon its repeat (mm. 85-92) the melody is placed in the left-hand part and is shadowed by the highest voice in the right-hand part on offbeats, and at the same time

²⁴⁵ The imitation of the sound and playing style of the cimbalom is often captured similarly in Liszt's Hungarian works, especially in his *Hungarian Fantasy*, S 123.

Example 12: Cziffra, *Fifth Hungarian Dance* (1982-83), mm. 65-73.

65

70

the right hand also plays sixteenth-note sextuplet figurations to decorate the theme (see Example 13).

Example 13: Cziffra, *Fifth Hungarian Dance* (1982-83), mm. 85-86.

85

86

The technique of placing the melody in the lower or middle register while the upper registers display a brilliant texture of sixteenth- or thirty-second-note passages was especially familiar to Liszt, who used it particularly often in his opera transcriptions and paraphrases. Cziffra applies this technique also in measures 41-42 and at the return of the same material in measures 121-122.

The bountiful use of grace notes before chords occurs throughout the transcription in at least 21 measures, sometimes occurring several times within one measure (such as mm. 33, 45, 57). These ornaments, sometimes doubled, tripled, or quadrupled, are far more daring and complex than Brahms' occasional single grace notes. At specific places, such as measure 45, Cziffra carefully writes the grace notes before the measure, indicating clearly that their execution needs to precede the beat (see measures 44-45 in Example 11 on p. 92).

Lisztian features are easily recognizable in this arrangement of Cziffra, including instances of improvisatory manipulation of motives, and free, brilliant, and technically demanding passages that exploit either a graceful or fiery character. Passages of sweeping thirty-second or sixty-fourth notes concluding the ends of phrases, such as the one in measure 32, are typical of Liszt. In measures 31-32 Cziffra replaces the B with B \sharp in the harmonic minor scale (the altered fourth scale degree in the key of F \sharp minor), thus turning the scale into a representation of the Hungarian gypsy scale²⁴⁶ (see mm. 31-32 in Example 14).

²⁴⁶ The Gypsy scale contains augmented seconds between the 3rd-4th and 6th-7th scale degrees; see Chapter 2, p. 18.

Example 14 juxtaposes a passage by Liszt from his *Hungarian Rhapsody no. 12* with measure 32 of Cziffra's 1982-83 transcription of the *Fifth Hungarian Dance*. Although Liszt's scale is not based on the Hungarian gypsy scale, the gesture and writing style is very similar not only in the right-hand flourish, but also in the rhythm of the left-hand accompaniment.

Example 14: Cziffra, *Fifth Hungarian Dance* (1982-83), mm. 31-32; and Liszt, *Hungarian Rhapsody no. 12*, m. 105.

The image displays two musical excerpts. The top excerpt, labeled '31', shows a right-hand part with a triplet of eighth notes followed by a 12-measure sixteenth-note scale, and a left-hand part with chords and a triplet. The bottom excerpt, labeled '105', shows a right-hand part with a 9-measure sixteenth-note scale and an octave sign, and a left-hand part with chords and a triplet.

Sextuplet sixteenth-note passages also appear in numerous instances in Liszt's works, as well as in Cziffra's. Cadenza-like free writing is another frequent aspect of Liszt's work, as well as passages of octaves or broken octaves. Example 15 shows

measures 123-128 from Cziffra's transcription to illustrate this improvisatory style in his work. The complexity of writing is apparent in measures 124-125, where the right-hand and left-hand groupings are out of phase.

Example 15: Cziffra, *Fifth Hungarian Dance* (1982-83), mm. 123-128.

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a right-hand and left-hand staff. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 2/4. Measure numbers 123, 125, and 127 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The score includes various performance markings: *accel.*, *quasi cadenza ad lib.*, *Tempo I*, *cresc.*, *ritardando martellato*, and *ff*. Fingerings (6, 7) and articulation (accents, slurs) are also present. The notation includes sixteenth-note runs, triplets, and a trill.

The playing style and effects of the gypsy violin are already evoked somewhat in Brahms' dance, and in Cziffra's version there are several instances of violin-simulation. Violin-like chromatic ascending double stops occur in both transcriptions of Cziffra. The stops are ascending in harmonic intervals of sixths, fifths, and occasionally sevenths. Example 16 shows one instance of simultaneous arpeggiation; ascending harmonic sixths alternate with fifths in Cziffra's transcription.

Example 16: Cziffra: *Fifth Hungarian Dance* (1982-83), mm. 51-52

Liszt also uses such double stops in his *Hungarian Rhapsodies*. Example 17 is a brief excerpt from *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 10*.

Example 17: Measure 76 of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 10*.

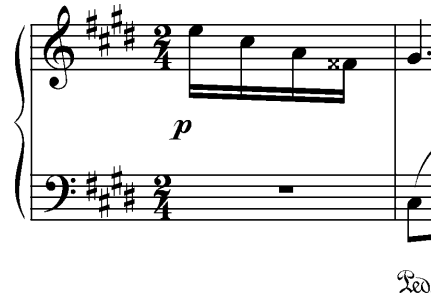
Cziffra: *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, 1957

The way this spontaneous and improvisatory transcription originated connects Cziffra to Liszt. In general, Liszt used certain themes as the basis for free improvisation for sometimes as many as twenty years before a fantasy or transcription was finally written out.²⁴⁷ Certainly the recording of this transcription by Cziffra was preceded by years of improvising on its themes. This transcription of Cziffra projects so much formal freedom and improvisatory elaboration that it has less connection to Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance* than his later transcription. The form is somewhat extended by free cadenza-like sections and the abundant use of decorative and brilliant passages. This transcription has a little bit lighter character than the other one. The alternation between legato and crisp staccato articulation, and the expansive *pp*, *velocissimo* cadenzas make this work in general more rhapsodic and playful than the 1982-83 transcription. The style of writing, the sweeping passagework, the large gestures, and the harmonic color resemble much more the style of Liszt than that of Brahms in this piece.

The transcription opens with a cimbalom-like anacrusis played in the right hand, a descending broken augmented-sixth chord whose final F^x leads to the beginning of the melody on the dominant scale degree G[#] (see Example 18).

²⁴⁷ Kenneth Hamilton, "Liszt Fantasizes – Busoni Exercises: The Liszt-Busoni 'Figaro Fantasy,'" *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 30 (1991): 26.

Example 18: Cziffra, *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, 1957, anacrusis to m. 1.



Cziffra introduces certain harmonic and rhythmic changes, and transposes Brahms' dance to C# minor, a fifth higher. The greater complexity of harmonies in Cziffra's transcription is immediately apparent, as already the second bar introduces an applied diminished-seventh chord. The following chart in Example 19 examines the harmonic structure of the first appearance of the main theme.

Example 19: Comparison of Harmonic Plan
in Brahms, *Fifth Hungarian Dance*, mm. 1-16
and Cziffra, *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, 1957, mm. 1-16.

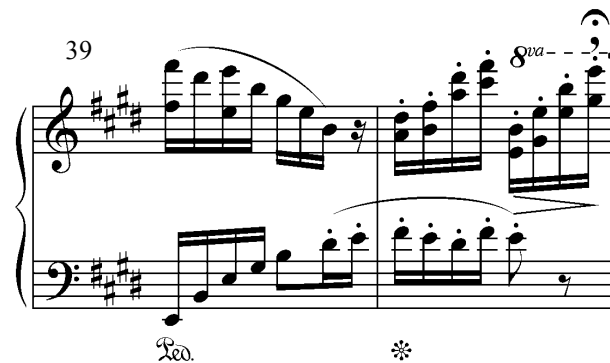
Brahms (F# minor):	i	i	iv	i	iv	i	V ₅ ⁶ -V ⁷	i	i	i	vii ^{o4} ₃	i	VI ⁶ -v ⁶	iv ⁶ -III ⁶	V ⁷	i
Cziffra (C# minor):	i	vii ^{o7} /V	V ₃ ⁴ -V ⁷	i	iv	i ⁶	V ⁷	i	i	i	V ₃ ⁴	i	iv-III	ii ^o -i	V ⁷	i
Measures:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16

Cziffra quite frequently changes the harmonies of the accompaniment from those of Brahms' arrangement. Also, Cziffra adds a significant amount of figuration to enhance the texture and to infuse the piece with fire and other characteristic gypsy elements. He does not wait to embellish only the repeated material, but elaborates melodies already in

their first appearances. Upon their repeats, phrases are often further developed. The extensively applied grace notes enhance the improvised character and bring fire to the character of the piece. In some cases these grace notes anticipate and arpeggiate the chord on the downbeat (in measures 9, 16, 84, 108, 116, 134, 141, 152, 165, and 168), and at other times they create a *grandioso* gesture (in measures 33, 45, 57-58, and 61).

The gypsy violin is already suggested in Brahms' dance, and there are far more simulations in Cziffra's transcription. Violin-like figurations with parallel sixths, fourths, and fifths (double stops) in this version are suggested in bars 36 and 40. Example 20 shows measure 40.

Example 20: Cziffra, *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, 1957, m. 39-40.



Brahms and Liszt use diminished-seventh chords in their Hungarian works very often, and likewise Cziffra frequently incorporates diminished-seventh chords for greater harmonic tension and density of texture. The chromatic descending motion of a series of diminished-seventh chords (measures 42 and 58; see m. 42 in Example 21) recalls the gypsy orchestras' sound and technique, and also the style of Liszt (see Example 22). In

another instance, ascending diminished-seventh chords are combined with octave leaps in Cziffra's transcription (measures 46 and 62; see m. 46 in Example 21). Adding these octave leaps stretches the pitch range and creates a much greater gesture and sound, as well as greater technical difficulty for the performer. Example 21 samples the instances of diminished-seventh chords forming a neighbor figure (m. 42) and an ascending group combined with octave leaps (m. 46). The use of diminished-seventh chords in a chromatic descending or ascending scale is frequently apparent in Liszt's *Rhapsodies* and transcriptions. Example 22 is an excerpt from Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 12*, measure 119.

Example 21: Cziffra, *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, 1957, mm. 42 and 46.

The image displays two musical excerpts from Cziffra's 1957 transcription of Liszt's *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*. The first excerpt, labeled '42', shows a chromatic neighbor figure in the right hand, with diminished-seventh chords in the left hand. The second excerpt, labeled '46', shows an ascending group of diminished-seventh chords in the right hand, with octave leaps in the left hand. Both excerpts are in the key of C# major and feature complex harmonic textures.

For the B section (mm. 65-125) Cziffra's choice of key (C# major) is perhaps more comfortable for the hands than the F# major of Brahms' arrangement and Cziffra's 1982-83 transcription of the piece, but the right-hand part here is a lot more chromatic and technically difficult. The right hand plays constant sixteenth-note patterns marked *staccato* at the tempo ♩ = 126-152. The chromatic neighbor tones in measures 65-83 in

Example 22: Liszt, *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 12*, m. 119.

119

ff strepitoso

8

v

the right-hand part throughout the progression of thirds (with the melody on top) create a sense of urgency with a certain playful character (see Example 23). The articulation, which is *staccato* throughout, suggests a *leggiero* touch, and recalls the virtuosity of the gypsy violinist.

Example 23: Cziffra, *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, 1957, mm. 65-70.

65

p

1

ped.

68

1

This style of writing – two layers of texture in one hand – is often used by Liszt. An excerpt from *Rhapsody no. 10* is given in Example 24. Example 25 shows the complexity of articulations in an excerpt from Cziffra’s work.

Example 24: Liszt, *Rhapsody no. 10*, mm. 68-72.

The image shows a musical score for Liszt's *Rhapsody no. 10*, measures 68-72. The score is written for piano and features two staves. The tempo/mood is marked "sempre staccato". The music consists of rapid, sixteenth-note passages in both hands, creating a dense, textured sound. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4.

Example 25: Cziffra, *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, 1957, mm. 77-84.

The image shows a musical score for Cziffra's *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, measures 77-84. The score is written for piano and features two staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The music is characterized by complex articulations, including slurs, accents, and dynamic markings such as "p" (piano) and "rit. molto" (ritardando molto). The score includes fingerings (1, 7) and dynamic markings like "p" and "rit. molto".

In measures 85-99, Cziffra's use of octave leaps between chords, each of which spans an octave, helps to produce a magnificent sound. This section (part b of section B) is so much greater in size of gesture from its original source that at first the relation is somewhat difficult to recognize (see Example 9, p. 89). The *staccato* articulation of the second half of each measure (following the *legato* gesture in the first half of the measures) emphasizes the accents that appear already in Bognár's original song and which Brahms translates into *crescendo* effects (see mm. 9-10 and 13-14 in Example 2 on p. 78 for Bognár's song; and Example 8 on p. 87 for Brahms' arrangement). An excerpt from Cziffra's *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise* (1957) in Example 26 demonstrates this writing style. The technique of octave leaps is frequently used by Liszt, especially in his *Transcendental Etudes*, concert paraphrases, and sometimes in his *Hungarian Rhapsodies*.

Unlike the Brahms arrangement, the effect of the cimbalom is frequently evoked in both transcriptions of Cziffra. There is more than one kind of role for a cimbalom in a gypsy band. Its fast rumbling of arpeggiated chords are often audible at the closing of phrases while the rest of the band is resting on a chord. Cziffra uses flourishes based on arpeggiated chords at the ends of phrases as well (for example in mm. 8, 16, 24, and 32). Some of these arpeggios include the sharped 4th scale degree (F[×]), which is part of the gypsy scale (see m. 16 in Example 27).

Example 26: Cziffra, *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, 1957, mm. 85-93.

85 meno
 accel. poco a poco al
 cresc.
 Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *
 90 tempo
 f mf
 Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

Example 27: Cziffra, *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, 1957, mm. 16 and 32.

16
 Ped. *
 32
 trava loco
 3
 Ped. *

The expression of another role of the cimbalom, which is to play virtuoso cadenzas, is in Cziffra's cadenza-like extensions such as in measures 149-153 and 165-

169 (see Example 28) – although these measures speak about much more than the colors and techniques of a gypsy band. They do use the gypsy scale but also present a wealth of sweeping runs and passages which are so typical of Cziffra's improvisatory style and that immediately call Liszt to mind also. Since it is cadenza-like writing, Cziffra's notation is written with small print here, following the example of Liszt and other nineteenth-century composers.

The pattern in measure 165 is basically built out of the repetition of one motif divided between the two hands' interlocking octaves: F#-E-D#-E is played then its transposition on C#-B-A#-B, and these two patterns are repeated twice in alternation while ascending. The repetition and alternation of F#-E and C#-B (half of the motif; liquidation) occurs in descent (see second half of measure 165 in Example 28). The right hand's *a capriccio*, *leggierissimo* runs in measure 166 consist of parallel major seconds and minor thirds, which produce very much of a Lisztian sound.

Measure 168 displays a triple suspension with a common-tone diminished-seventh chord on the downbeat of the left-hand part (Example 28). Example 29 summarizes the pitches used throughout this free cadenza-like section of measures 168-169.

Example 28: Cziffra, *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, 1957, mm.165-169.

165

8^{va}-----, loco

dim. e. rit. molto

(165)

a capriccio

pp leggerissimo

mp

Rea Rea

Rea

(166)

8^{va}-----

ad libitum

(8^{va})

167

poco più mosso

* Rea

Rea

169 *8va* *accelerando*

6 6 6 6

3 *ff*

cresc. 6 7

(169) *8va*

6 6 6 6

6 6 6 6

(169) *8va* *molto tenuto* *loco* *accelerando*

f *ff* *ff*

marcato 3 3 3 3

ff

(169) *8va*

f *ff*

marcato *ff*

Example 29: Reduction of Cziffra: *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, 1957, mm. 168-169.

The image displays a musical score for Example 29, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system includes measure 168 and the first two lines of measure 169. The second system includes the last two lines of measure 169. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. Measure 168 features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a chordal accompaniment. Measure 169 is divided into four lines: Line 1 shows a treble clef with a melodic line; Line 2 shows a treble clef with a melodic line; Line 3 shows a treble clef with a melodic line; Line 4 shows a bass clef with a melodic line.

Throughout the free cadenza-like section the pitches D and E# are introduced, and the ascending *velocissimo* runs that produce a three-line-long measure 169 spell a gypsy scale (Example 30).

Example 30: Gypsy scale from Cziffra, *La Cinquième Danse Hongroise*, 1957, m. 169.

The image displays a musical score for Example 30, showing the Gypsy scale from measure 169. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The scale is written on a single treble clef staff and consists of the following notes: D4, E4, F#4, G#4, A4, B4, C#5, D5.

Both of Cziffra's transcriptions exploit in intricate notation his extremely virtuosic style, which owes much more to Liszt than to Brahms. The textures of the Cziffra transcriptions are always very dense and sometimes extremely complex as Cziffra frequently writes more than two independent layers of music. Dana Gooley describes this

characteristic of much of Liszt's piano repertoire within a discussion of Liszt's *Grande fantaisie di bravura sur la clochette de Paganini* as follows:

There is hardly a moment in the fantasy where the texture does not have three or four independent layers. A single hand can be responsible for managing two contrasting types of articulation. Both hands are constantly shifting registers, crossing each other, and switching roles.²⁴⁸

On the same page Gooley comments on the detailed notation also important for Liszt:

Liszt's notation practices are revealing: there is an almost ridiculous density of notated information on dynamics, accentuation, articulation, tempo, and character. Measure 127 alone contains four types of articulation marks, a separate dynamic marking for the lower voice, specific pedaling indications, and four verbal instructions. The score reads more like a transcription of a performance than a prescription for performance.²⁴⁹

These words characterize the writing style of Cziffra as well in his 1957 transcription, which actually is a transcription of a performance. The frequently used verbal indications in Cziffra's work such as *veloce*, *velocissimo*, *a capriccio*, *strepitoso*, *tranquillo*, *leggerissimo*, *tenuto assai*, and the like are common in Liszt's scores. The careful and exceptionally detailed instructions and accurate notation of the extremely fast passages and embellishments in Cziffra's transcription are faithful to the 1957 recording, and guide the performer to a stylistically correct performance as much as possible.

Generally in Cziffra's transcriptions the most characteristic elements are the improvisatory, free style of writing. The energetic, passionate, and fiery nature of Cziffra is expressed through the complexity of passages, and this pianist's transcriptions demand a considerable amount of bravura from the performer. Cziffra's improvisations display

²⁴⁸ Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*, 37.

²⁴⁹ Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*, 37.

many features of the impulsive, yet genuine style of performance of the Hungarian gypsy tradition, but most of these elements also connect to the improvisatory style of the virtuoso Liszt. Innumerable features relate Cziffra's transcriptions to Liszt such as the fascinating fusion of different melodic layers, the constant shift of registers, and roles of the hands which often result in melodic interruptions, as well as the frequent use of widely-spaced chords, arpeggiated chords, and cadenza-like passages. Brahms' role in these two works of Cziffra is mostly important for presenting an arrangement of Hungarian melodies with a stable structure for further development, elaboration, and virtuosic fantasy.

While the transitional passages, elaborate figurations, and frequency of diminished-seventh chords lend a certain sound-color to the Cziffra transcriptions that is similar to that of Liszt's works as well as gypsy band performances, on occasion one finds ninth chords and clashing dissonances resulting from Cziffra's use of passing tones that go beyond what one would find in the works of Brahms and Liszt. Perhaps what makes Cziffra's work most unique from others is that, while more or less relying on traditional elements, Cziffra employs extreme complexity and density of virtuoso elaborations. While using technical means similar to what Liszt used, Cziffra elevates the level of difficulty and complexity in various ways. He juxtaposes patterns and rhythms at a higher complexity, employs grace notes extensively, and writes sudden, fast, and huge leaps between chords.

Conclusion

Georges Cziffra's name has become legendary in the piano world. He has been widely known as a peerless improviser, a bravura performer, and an exceptional Liszt interpreter for over a half a century. Thanks to the publication of Foundation Cziffra and the distribution of Edition Peters, Cziffra is also becoming more and more acknowledged as an innovative transcriber. His pianistically challenging transcriptions demonstrate and record on paper Cziffra's virtuosic improvising style, and they share insights into the technique of developing and elaborating music as it was practiced so masterfully in the nineteenth century.

Equally important is Cziffra's connection to the *style hongrois* through close contact with Hungarian gypsy musicians. The emphasis on the spirit of freedom and using a creative talent to adapt, vary, extend, and reharmonize given themes are key elements in every Hungarian gypsy musician's and Cziffra's improvisatory style. And Cziffra was also free from following fashionable trends and certain schools of pianism; instead, he followed his own particular path. In his Brahms transcriptions, Cziffra combined the legacies of Brahms and Liszt when drawing on Hungarian themes – a genuine love for which binds Brahms, Liszt, and Cziffra together. But it is also significant that the foundation for their improvisatory flights connects directly to the traditions of Hungarian gypsy musicians.

Most of the Hungarian melodies that were written down and published in the nineteenth century, including the two sources of Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance*, were notated quite simply, mostly occupying one page or less in a score. It was the gypsy

musicians who brought these melodies to life by elaborating them spontaneously. They treated these simple tunes as subjects for musical fantasy and momentary inspiration, and enhanced, developed, and decorated the various fragments of the tunes, giving them different characters and colors. Cziffra transcribed the *Fifth Hungarian Dance* in a similar way. Brahms' treatment in the *Fifth Hungarian Dance* is still comparatively straightforward. Cziffra's resourceful melodic, textural, and rhythmic elaborations bring intense fire and electrifying virtuosity to the piece, thus contributing fantastic complexity and a new standard of elaboration and difficulty.

The stylistic origins of Cziffra's two transcriptions of Brahms' *Fifth Hungarian Dance* can also be traced to the virtuoso style of Liszt. In technical achievements Liszt and Cziffra were peerless for their time, but it was an elevated emotional intensity and passionate fire which justified the exceptional technical virtuosity of their performances. Cziffra declared, "I don't care about technique. What you call technique is simply an expression of feeling."²⁵⁰

Like Liszt, Cziffra went occasionally beyond printed scores in his performances by adding elaborations that emphasize certain aspects of a composition, thus becoming a spontaneous creative and personal interpreter. Cziffra's recordings of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* testify to the effectiveness of his inventive spirit. He mastered the post-Romantic improvisational style and had superior command of harmony and rhythm. As an improviser, his virtuosity shows many characteristics ranging from playfulness to the portrayal of demonic power.

²⁵⁰ Adolf K. Böhm, "Georges Cziffra: Two Hands, One Heart," in Cziffra: *Transcriptions Etudes de Concert II* [n. p.].

Cziffra's public image has always been highlighted by the recognition of his prodigious pianistic abilities and achievements; sometimes, however, his critics saw him as little more than a technician or a notable interpreter of Liszt, a position which is hardly justified. Nevertheless, his musicianship is clearly reflected by audiences with such terms as exquisite, fantastic, full of tenderness combined with power and passion.²⁵¹

Such narrow views overlook the unmistakable fact that Cziffra plays with pure elegance and simple, direct expression. His personal commitment and distinctive musicianship reveal themselves in his fine recordings of keyboard music by C.P.E. Bach, Domenico Scarlatti, François Couperin, Johann Tobias Krebs, Jean-Philippe Rameau, Jean-Baptiste Lully, Mozart, and Clementi.

His overcoming life's innumerable hardships and challenges as well as professional rejections may serve as an ever-inspiring example for others. Cziffra's humble autobiographical book, *Cannons and Flowers*, is an extraordinary account of his ever-perseverant battle to overcome the unusual difficulties and obstacles of his life. Just as Cziffra's transcriptions and improvisations have inspired musicians by building a bridge to connect the nineteenth-century virtuoso pianism and today's expanded practices, *Cannons and flowers* may serve to inspire non-musicians as well to deal with the problems of adversity and suffering through the kind of courage and conviction shown by Cziffra purely as a man.

Through his recordings, radio and television appearances, transcriptions, and generous works of charity, Cziffra's spirit remains alive among fellow pianists,

²⁵¹ These expressions are quoted from recent comments of Cziffra's performances on YouTube Inc. 2007, [http://: www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (accessed 7 March 2007).

musicians, and friends. The still active non-profit organization in Senlis²⁵² carries on the generous spirit of the pianist-teacher, and offers continuous financial support and performing opportunity for talented young musicians.

²⁵² <http://www.fondationciffra.org>

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APPENDIX A

KÉLER'S CZARDAS: COVER PAGE



APPENDIX B

BRAHMS' FIFTH HUNGARIAN DANCE

Allegro
f *passionato*

The image shows the first 30 measures of Brahms' Fifth Hungarian Dance. The score is written for piano in 3/4 time, with a key signature of two sharps (D major). The tempo is marked 'Allegro' and the dynamics are 'f' (forte) and 'passionato'. The score is divided into five systems, each with a treble and bass clef. Measure numbers 1 through 30 are indicated above the notes. The first system (measures 1-6) features a melodic line in the treble and a rhythmic accompaniment in the bass. The second system (measures 7-12) continues the melodic and accompanimental patterns. The third system (measures 13-18) introduces a more active treble line with sixteenth notes. The fourth system (measures 19-24) shows a change in dynamics to 'p' (piano) in the treble. The fifth system (measures 25-30) concludes with a final melodic flourish in the treble and a steady accompaniment in the bass.

J. B. 78

33 *f marc.*

34 35 36 37 38

39 *poco rit.*
p

40 41 42 43 44

45 *In tempo*

46 47 48 49 *Vivace*
sf

50 51

52 *sf*

53 54 *poco rit.*

55 56 *p*

57 *In tempo*
p legg.

58 59 *poco rit.*

60 61 *p legg.*

62 63 *poco rit.*

64 65 *p*

66 *p legg.*

67 *dolce*

68 69 70 *p legg.*

J. B. 78

71 *f* *passionato* 72 73 74 75

76 77 78 79 80

81 82 83 84 85 86

87 *marc.* 88 89 90 91 92

93 *poco rit.* 94 95 96 97 98

99 *in tempo* 100 101 102 103 104

J. B. 74