

HUNGARIAN CULTURE COURSE

Hungarian Music

From Bartók's phonograph to the dance house: collecting, using and keeping alive a nation's songs

10 Chapters

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HUNGARIAN MUSIC

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Hungarian Music

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · Why Hungarian Music? Scope & Sources

Hungary is a country of about ten million people with a language unrelated to those of its neighbours, and a musical reputation far out of proportion to its size: Liszt, Bartók, Kodály, the operettas of Vienna's golden age, the dance-house revival, and rock bands that played behind the Iron Curtain. This first chapter sets out what the course covers, why folk song sits at its centre, how it handles names and a sensitive piece of terminology, and the sources to use. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Why Folk Song at the Centre?

A distinct tradition

Hungarian folk song has its own old layers, among them melodies built on a five-note (pentatonic) scale that scholars link to older strata of Central Asian and other traditions (check how firmly this can be stated). It differs from the folk music of the Slavic and Germanic neighbours.

Composers who went to the source

Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály travelled the countryside around 1905 onward, recording peasant singers, and used what they found to change the music they wrote (check the dates; Chapter 4). Few countries have a tradition in which two leading composers were also pioneers of folk-music research.

A living revival

From the early 1970s the dance-house (*táncház*) movement brought village music and dance back to young city audiences (check; Chapter 6). The tradition is not only history.

Strands of the Course

Strand	Examples (check)	Chapters
Folk and Roma-band music	Peasant song, the *verbunkos* and *csárdás*, Roma bands	2, 6, 9

Strand	Examples (check)	Chapters
Romantic and national	Liszt, Erkel, the idea of a national style	3
Modern classical	Bartók, Kodály, Dohnányi, Ligeti, Kurtág	4, 5
Operetta	Lehár and Kálmán	5
Popular and rock	Beat, Omega, Locomotiv GT, post-1989 rock, Sziget	7, 8
Folk revival and world music	Muzsikás, Márta Sebestyén, Ghymes, Besh o droM	6, 9

The course is Hungary-centred. Hungarian-language culture in Transylvania, Slovakia and Vojvodina, and the Hungarian diaspora, appear only where they cannot be separated from the story, such as the many Hungarian musicians who made careers abroad. Hungarian jazz is mentioned within Chapters 6 and 8, not as a separate strand.

Names and Terms

Two things to settle at the start

Name order. Hungarians write the family name first, so the composer is *Bartók Béla* in Hungary. This course uses the English order, Béla Bartók, as English-language sources do (check). **"Gypsy" music.** The traditional Hungarian term *cigányzene* and the English "Gypsy music" are widely used in older books, but "Gypsy" is regarded as offensive by many Roma people, and the term "Roma" is used in this course (check usage by source). Where an older source or an established title uses the other word, the course quotes it and says so. The distinction between Roma bands playing "Hungarian" music for Hungarian audiences and the music of Roma communities themselves is treated in Chapter 2.

Myths to Test

Common claim	The question a careful reader asks (check each)
Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies are Hungarian folk music.	Where did the tunes come from, and who played them?
Hungarian folk music is Roma music.	Which repertoire belongs to peasant singers, which to professional Roma bands, and which to Roma communities?
Bartók simply copied folk tunes.	What did he collect, and what did he make of it?

Common claim	The question a careful reader asks (check each)
Hungarian is musical because of an ancient heritage.	What can be shown, and what is a story told about origins?
Communism killed Hungarian music.	What was controlled, what flourished, and who decided?
Operetta is Viennese, not Hungarian.	Who wrote it, in which city, and for whom?

Sources to Use

- **The music itself,** in named recordings, including the field recordings of Bartók and others, many of them digitised (check availability).
- **Histories and biographies** by musicologists and ethnomusicologists, who disagree on some points, especially the origins of the style.
- **Archives and institutions,** such as the Liszt Academy in Budapest, the Bartók archives and the Institute for Musicology (check names and what is open).
- **Lyrics,** discussed and quoted only briefly in translation, with the translation or paraphrase named.

A British comparison

Compare Ralph Vaughan Williams and Cecil Sharp collecting English folk songs in the early twentieth century (check the dates), at about the same time as Bartók and Kodály. The same questions arise about who the singers were, what the collectors chose and how the songs were used in concert music.

Check the details

Every name, date and attribution in this course comes from general knowledge and is marked "check" where it is uncertain. Claims about the origin of the Hungarian musical style, and about the communist era, are debated, so verify against current ethnomusicology and music histories before quoting anything.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

List five Hungarian musicians or groups you already know, and for each say one thing you believe about them, marking it as documented, claimed or unknown.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose one of the myths in the table and write a short plan for testing it: what evidence you would look for and where.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain in two or three sentences why the course uses "Roma" and the English name order, and what a reader should do when an older source uses other terms.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **The centre:** folk song, collected by Bartók and Kodály and revived in the dance-house (check)
- **The strands:** folk and Roma bands, Romantic, modern classical, operetta, popular, revival
- **Names:** the course uses the English order (Béla Bartók)
- **Terms:** "Roma"; older sources may say "Gypsy"
- **The caution:** claims about the origin of the style are debated

Hungarian Music

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Folk Song, Verbunkos & Roma Bands

What most of the world calls "Hungarian music" is not the same as the folk song that Bartók and Kodály later recorded in the villages. Two quite different things sat side by side in the nineteenth century: an old tradition of peasant song and dance, and a fashionable urban style played by Roma bands and written down by town composers. This chapter separates them, describes the verbunkos and csárdás, and asks who made the "Hungarian style" that European audiences came to know. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Peasant Song

Old layers

Bartók and Kodály distinguished an older layer of Hungarian folk song, often with pentatonic melodies and a free, descending shape, from a newer style with more regular rhythm and Western major or minor scales (check how they described the layers; Chapter 4).

Occasions

Songs belonged to the year and the life cycle: weddings, harvest, laments, ballads, and soldiers' and shepherds' songs (check the categories). They were sung unaccompanied, or with simple instruments such as the bagpipe, the zither or the fiddle.

Dance

Village dances, with regional styles in Transylvania, the Great Plain and Transdanubia, were played by small groups of fiddle, bass and a second string instrument (check the regional names). These are the sources of the dance-house revival (Chapter 6).

Peasant song was little known in towns in the early nineteenth century. Educated Hungarians, who often spoke German or Latin, heard a different music, which is the subject of the next section.

The Verbunkos

- **The name.** From the German *Werbung*, "recruiting". The *verbunkos* was the dance and music performed to recruit soldiers for the imperial army in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (check).
- **The sound.** A slow, proud section (the *lassú*) followed by a fast, lively one (the *friss*), with dotted rhythms, ornamented melody and characteristic cadences (check the terms).
- **Who played it.** Mostly Roma bands, who had long worked as professional town and court musicians, with violin, cimbalom (a hammered dulcimer) and bass (check).
- **Why it mattered.** It became the sound of Hungarian national feeling in the early nineteenth century, played at celebrations and gatherings of the reform era and used by composers (Chapter 3).

The Csárdás

Feature (check each)	Detail
Name	From *csárda*, a country inn; the dance appears as a national dance from the 1830s and 1840s.
Form	Like the verbunkos, a slow part followed by a fast part, with the speed building to a climax.
Role	Spread through town ballrooms and became the national dance in Hungary and abroad.
In art music	Used by Liszt, by Brahms in his dances and by operetta composers, and heard widely in Europe as "Hungarian".
Relation to village dance	A stylised, town version drawing on village material, not a direct record of it (check the scholarly view).

Roma Bands and the "Hungarian Style"

> **Whose music was it?**
>
> The popular style of the nineteenth century was created and played largely by Roma musicians, whose bands were hired by the gentry, taverns and cafes for entertainment,

and who adapted tunes by Hungarian composers and popular songs into their own manner (check). Hungarian composers wrote "in the Hungarian style" for those bands. Later, Bartók and Kodály argued that this urban music was not true peasant folk music, and the point was sharply put against Liszt's claim that the "Gypsy" bands expressed the Hungarian soul (check; Chapter 3). The disagreement shows how music can be called "Hungarian" in more than one sense.

- **Professional musicians.** Roma bands were skilled professionals, with family traditions of training, and often had more technical training than village players (check).
- **Two repertoires.** Roma bands also had their own music, sung and played within Roma communities, which was often different from the music they performed for Hungarian patrons (check, and see the terms in Chapter 1).
- **Status.** The musicians were admired as performers while often facing discrimination in daily life. Both facts belong in the account.
- **The legacy.** The restaurant-and-cafe band tradition lasted into the twentieth century, and Roma musicians remain central to Hungarian folk and popular music (Chapters 6 and 9).

A British comparison

The relationship resembles that between Scottish traditional fiddle music in the home and the polished "Scotch" style of the Victorian drawing-room, or the music-hall version of Irish songs (check the comparison). In each case a popular, stylised version came to stand for the nation to outsiders, and later collectors went back to find the older material.

Check the details

Dates, terms and the roles of different groups are from general knowledge and are debated by ethnomusicologists. Use older sources with care, since many use outdated terms and make claims about "race" and music that are not accepted today.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain the difference between peasant folk song and the verbunkos or csárdás style, naming who performed each and where.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe the two-part structure of the verbunkos and the csárdás and say what the contrast does in performance.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Write a short, balanced paragraph on the role of Roma musicians in what was called "Hungarian music" in the nineteenth century, covering both their achievement and their social position.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Peasant song:** older pentatonic layers, sung at life events, village dance (check)
- **Verbunkos:** recruiting dance, slow *lassú* then fast *friss* (check)
- **Csárdás:** national dance from the 1830s and 1840s, slow then fast (check)
- **Roma bands:** professional musicians who created and played the urban "Hungarian style" (check)
- **The caution:** "Hungarian music" meant different things to different listeners

Hungarian Music

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Liszt, Erkel & the Romantic Nation

In the nineteenth century Hungary was part of the Habsburg Empire, and questions of language, culture and independence were fiercely argued. Music took part in the argument. This chapter looks at Franz (Ferenc) Liszt, the most famous Hungarian musician of the age and one who barely spoke Hungarian; at Brahms's popular Hungarian Dances; and at Ferenc Erkel, who wrote the first Hungarian national operas and the music of the national anthem. It asks what "Hungarian" meant in each case. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Liszt

Origins

Born in 1811 in Raiding, then in the Kingdom of Hungary and now in Austria, to a German-speaking family (check). He left as a child to study in Vienna and Paris and built an international career as a pianist.

The virtuoso

In the 1830s and 1840s he toured Europe to enormous acclaim, so much so that the fervour was nicknamed "Lisztomania" (check the term and its use). He later turned to composing, teaching and conducting in Weimar and Rome.

Hungarian identity

He identified himself as Hungarian, gave benefit concerts for flood victims in Pest in 1838 and later helped to found the music academy in Budapest, which now bears his name (check). He wrote little in Hungarian.

- **The Hungarian Rhapsodies.** Nineteen piano pieces, published between the 1840s and the 1880s, based on the verbunkos and csárdás style played by Roma bands, with slow and fast sections (check the number and dates; Chapter 2).
- **The sources.** The tunes came from popular urban music, published songs and the playing of Roma musicians, not from peasant song collected in the field (check).

- **The book.** In 1859 he published a book on the "Bohemians" and their music in Hungary, which credited Roma musicians with creating the Hungarian style and drew sharp criticism from Hungarian nationalists later (check the title and details).
- **Other works.** Symphonic poems such as *Hungaria*, the *Coronation Mass* for Franz Joseph's crowning as King of Hungary in 1867, and many others (check).

Brahms and the Hungarian Dances

Item (check each)	Detail
The work	Twenty-one Hungarian Dances for piano four hands, published in two sets in 1869 and 1880, later arranged for orchestra.
The source	Brahms heard the Hungarian violinist Ede Reményi in the 1850s and learned tunes from him, then arranged them (check).
The dispute	Brahms called them arrangements, not compositions, but Reményi accused him of taking tunes he had considered his own, and some tunes were in fact by Hungarian composers (check).
Effect	They were hugely popular in homes across Europe and fixed an image of "Hungarian music" for many listeners.

Erkel and the National Opera

A composer for the nation

Ferenc Erkel (1810 to 1893) wrote the first Hungarian national operas, most famously *Bánk bán* and *Hunyadi László*, in the 1840s and 1850s, with plots from Hungarian history and some verbunkos-style music (check). In 1844 he won the competition to set Ferenc Kölcsey's poem "Himnusz" (Hymn), and his music is still the national anthem (check). He was also a conductor and a founder of the Philharmonic Society of Budapest and helped to shape the country's musical institutions.

- **Language.** Writing opera in Hungarian was a political and cultural act at a time when German and Italian dominated stages (check).

- **Reform and revolution.** His career overlapped the reform era and the 1848 revolution and war of independence against Habsburg rule, which was defeated in 1849 (check).
- **The compromise.** The Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 gave Hungary a large share of self-government, and the following decades saw a growth of Hungarian cultural institutions (check).

A British comparison

Compare Elgar and the "national" voice in English music, or Smetana and Dvořák in the Czech lands, who also built a national tradition within a multi-national empire (check). The questions are the same: what counts as national, and who gets to decide.

Check the details

Dates, numbers of works and the exact wording of Liszt's book are from general knowledge. Both Liszt and Brahms are often misdescribed as drawing on peasant folk music; check against musicological sources before quoting.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain in what sense Liszt was a Hungarian composer and in what sense he was not, giving two points for each.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Compare Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies and Brahms's Hungarian Dances: their sources, their purpose and how each shaped the image of Hungarian music.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe two ways in which Erkel's work was part of building a Hungarian national culture, and say how it differed from Liszt's approach.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Liszt:** born 1811 in Raiding; Hungarian Rhapsodies; the 1859 book on Roma music (check)
- **Brahms:** Hungarian Dances, 1869 and 1880, arranged from tunes (check)
- **Erkel:** *Bánk bán*, the anthem tune of 1844 (check)
- **The context:** Habsburg rule, 1848 and 1849, the 1867 Compromise (check)
- **The caution:** "Hungarian style" in this period is mostly the urban Roma-band style

Hungarian Music

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Bartók & Kodály

Two composers born a year apart changed what Hungarian music meant. Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály went into the villages with a phonograph, recorded what they found, and showed that the real folk song of Hungary was quite different from the Roma-band style that Liszt and Brahms had made famous. They then turned that material into some of the most important music of the twentieth century, and Kodály's ideas about teaching singing spread across the world. This chapter follows the collecting, the composing and the teaching. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Two Careers

Béla Bartók

Born in 1881 in Nagyszentmiklós, then in Hungary and now in Romania; a pianist, composer and scholar who taught at the Budapest academy (check). He left Hungary in 1940 for the United States and died in New York in 1945, in poor health and poorer circumstances than his reputation suggests (check).

Zoltán Kodály

Born in 1882 in Kecskemét; composer, folk-song researcher and educator, who remained in Hungary through the war and into the communist period, dying in 1967 (check). He was a leading public figure in Hungarian music for decades.

The partnership

They met around 1905 and began collecting together, publishing a joint volume of folk songs in 1906 (check). Their friendship and collaboration were close in the early years and less so later.

Collecting with the Phonograph

- **The method.** Using wax-cylinder phonographs, Bartók and Kodály recorded singers and players in villages across the Kingdom of Hungary, writing down the tunes later and cataloguing them by type (check the equipment and the dates).
- **The scale.** Bartók eventually collected thousands of melodies, not only Hungarian but also Slovak, Romanian and later Turkish and others (check the figures). He treated them as scholarly material, publishing long studies.
- **The discovery.** They found that the old peasant songs were different in scale, rhythm and form from the verbunkos and csárdás (Chapter 2), and that the "Hungarian" music of the cafés was a later, urban style.
- **Neighbours.** Bartók recorded the music of Slovak and Romanian villagers as carefully as Hungarian, and he found influences moving in all directions (check). He argued against narrow national claims about folk music, and this brought him trouble with nationalists (check).

Bartók's Music

Work (check each)	Note
Six String Quartets (1908 to 1939)	Widely regarded as among the most important quartet cycles of the century; they draw on folk rhythms and sound without quoting tunes simply.
Duke Bluebeard's Castle (1911)	A one-act opera, with a libretto by Béla Balázs, which was slow to find an audience.
Mikrokosmos (1926 to 1939)	153 graded piano pieces for teaching, from beginner level upward.
Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta (1936)	A concert work known for its structure and sound.
Concerto for Orchestra (1943)	Written in the United States for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and one of his most popular works.

More than quoting tunes

Bartók did arrange folk tunes directly in many works, but in his major compositions he absorbed the rhythm, the modes and the structure of the folk music into a modern style,

rather than quoting. The claim that he "copied folk tunes" mixes up his arrangements with his original works (check, see the myth in Chapter 1).

Kodály's Music and Method

- **Choral music.** Kodály wrote a large body of choral music, from unaccompanied choruses on folk and poetic texts to the *Psalmus Hungaricus* (1923), written for the fiftieth anniversary of the union of Buda, Pest and Óbuda (check).
- **Other works.** The opera *Háry János* (1926), with the well-known suite, and the *Dances of Galánta* (1933) (check).
- **The method.** From the 1930s Kodály argued that children should learn music through singing, beginning with folk songs of their own culture, using movable-do solfège and hand signs. Many of these elements were developed by his colleagues and by earlier traditions (check how much came from him).
- **Spread.** Music teaching based on his ideas was adopted in Hungarian schools and in many other countries, and there are Kodály institutes abroad (check).

A British comparison

Cecil Sharp and Ralph Vaughan Williams collected English folk songs at about the same time, and the songs entered school singing books and later English concert music (check the dates). The Hungarian case is notable for the scale of the field research and for how closely it was tied to a national system of music education.

Check the details

Dates, places of birth, counts of recordings and works, and the origins of parts of the Kodály method are from general knowledge. Several are debated by scholars, and the question of how Bartók's reputation changed after his death is also complicated. Verify against biographies and the Bartók archives.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain what Bartók and Kodály discovered by collecting folk songs and how it changed the idea of "Hungarian music".

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose one work by Bartók and one by Kodály and say how each used folk music: by arrangement, by absorbing its features, or both.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe the core ideas of the Kodály method and give one reason it spread internationally and one point on which scholars would want more evidence.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Bartók:** born 1881; collecting from about 1905; quartets, *Mikrokosmos*, *Concerto for Orchestra*; died 1945 (check)
- **Kodály:** born 1882; *Psalmus Hungaricus*, *Háry János*; the Kodály method; died 1967 (check)
- **The discovery:** old peasant song differs from the café "Hungarian" style
- **The method:** teaching through singing, folk songs first (check)
- **The caution:** Bartók absorbed folk music; he did not simply copy it

Hungarian Music

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Operetta & the Twentieth-Century Concert Hall

Hungarian musicians made some of their biggest international successes in places and forms that are not obviously "Hungarian": the operetta stages of Vienna and Berlin, the concert halls of Europe and America, and the avant-garde festivals of the post-war decades. This chapter follows two groups: the operetta composers Franz Lehár and Imre Kálmán, and the concert-hall composers Ernő Dohnányi, György Ligeti and György Kurtág. It asks what made them Hungarian and what it meant to work abroad. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Operetta

The genre

Operetta is a light musical stage work with spoken dialogue, popular tunes and dance numbers. Its centres were Vienna, Budapest and Berlin from the later nineteenth century through the 1930s (check). The "silver age" of Viennese operetta in the early twentieth century had many Hungarian composers.

Franz Lehár

Born in 1870 in Komárom, then in Hungary and now in Slovakia, to a military bandmaster father (check). *The Merry Widow* (1905) was an international sensation. He worked mainly in Vienna and wrote in German.

Imre Kálmán

Born in 1882 in Siófok; wrote *Die Csárdásfürstin* (The Csárdás Princess, 1915) and *Gräfin Mariza* (1924), full of csárdás rhythms and Hungarian colour (check). He worked in Vienna and Budapest and left Austria in 1938 as a Jewish composer (check).

- **Language and place.** Most of these works were written in German for Viennese and Berlin audiences, with Hungarian settings and music in the café style of Chapter 2.

- **"Hungarian" or not?** Their Hungarian identity lay in birth, background and musical colour, while their careers and audiences were international. The question echoes Liszt (Chapter 3).
- **The Nazi period.** The regime banned Jewish composers, including Kálmán, and the story of how their work was treated, and how Lehár (whose wife was Jewish) was treated, is complicated and debated (check carefully).
- **Afterlife.** Operetta remains in the repertoire of theatres in Budapest and Vienna, and the Budapest Operetta Theatre keeps it in regular performance (check).

The Concert Hall

Composer (check dates)	Career	Note
Ernő Dohnányi (1877 to 1960)	Pianist, composer and teacher in Budapest, director of the music academy; left Hungary in 1944 and later taught in the United States	A leading figure of Hungarian musical life between the wars; his reputation was damaged by wartime accusations, of which he was cleared (check the details).
György Ligeti (1923 to 2006)	Left Hungary after the 1956 uprising and worked in Vienna, Cologne and Hamburg	Known for dense, shifting textures; his music was used in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) (check).
György Kurtág (born 1926)	Studied in Budapest and Paris, taught at the Budapest academy	Short, intense pieces and a highly concentrated style; *Kafka Fragments* and *Játékok* (Games) for piano are well known (check).
Peter Eötvös (1944 to 2024)	Composer and conductor	Worked in Germany and France as well as in Hungary (check).

Leaving and staying

Hungary has seen waves of departure: after the First World War, in the 1930s and 1940s, and after the failed uprising of 1956, when many artists left (check). Ligeti left in 1956 and made his career in the West, while Kurtág stayed and built his reputation partly through teaching and chamber music. Both are counted as Hungarian composers, which shows that the national label depends on origins and training as well as residence.

A British comparison

Compare Gilbert and Sullivan's light operas in Britain and their long afterlife in amateur theatres (check). Operetta in Vienna and Budapest played a similar role: a popular form, much loved, sometimes scorned by critics, and bound up with a national audience.

Check the details

Dates, birthplaces, accounts of the Nazi and communist periods and the careers of composers who emigrated are from general knowledge and are sensitive. Verify against reliable biographies, and treat accusations and rehabilitations with care.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain in what sense Lehár and Kálmán were Hungarian composers, even though they wrote mainly in German for Vienna.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Compare the careers of Ligeti and Kurtág after 1956 and say what each tells us about leaving or staying.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Choose one composer from the chapter and write a short plan for checking how far their reputation abroad matches the record at home.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Operetta:** Lehár (*The Merry Widow*, 1905) and Kálmán (*Die Csárdásfürstin*, 1915) (check)
- **Concert hall:** Dohnányi, Ligeti, Kurtág, Eötvös (check)
- **1956:** a wave of departures including Ligeti (check)
- **Settings:** Vienna and Berlin as well as Budapest
- **The caution:** national labels depend on birth, training, language and residence

Hungarian Music

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · The Táncház Revival

In the early 1970s a group of young people in Budapest began to hold evenings at which village dances were taught by dancers and played by live musicians, with the audience joining in. This was the táncház (dance house) movement. It took the music that Bartók and Kodály had recorded and made it a living social activity, and it became one of the most influential folk revivals in Europe. This chapter follows how it began, who made it, what it changed and why it has lasted. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

How It Began

The first dance houses

The first táncház is usually dated to 1972 in Budapest, organised by young dancers and musicians, among them Béla Halmos, Ferenc Sebő and Sándor Timár (check the names and the exact date). The idea was to learn village dances directly, with live music, in an informal setting.

The sources

They drew on the recordings and films made by folk-music researchers, and on visits to villages, especially in Transylvania, where older village traditions were still active (check; Chapter 4). Some older musicians were brought to Budapest to teach.

The setting

Hungary in the 1970s was a one-party state with a relatively liberal cultural policy compared with some neighbours, and a state-supported folk-culture programme. The movement grew in this space (check how far the authorities supported or constrained it).

The Format

- **Teaching and playing.** A dance-teacher shows the steps, a small band plays village-style music (violin, viola, double bass, sometimes cimbalom or other instruments), and the group dances together.
- **Regional styles.** Programmes include dances from several regions, such as Szatmár, Mezőség and Kalotaszeg, each with its own steps and music (check the regions and the names).
- **Not a stage show.** The point is participation, so the audience are the dancers, and the musicians play for them.
- **The singing.** Songs, laments and ballads were also learned from older singers and from archives.

Groups and Singers

Name (check each)	Note
Sebő Ferenc and the Sebő Ensemble	Early leading musicians of the revival.
Muzsikás	Founded in 1973; became the best-known group, touring widely and recording with artists including Márta Sebestyén (check).
Márta Sebestyén	Singer of folk songs, known abroad for her work with Muzsikás and for the song on the soundtrack of *The English Patient* (1996; check).
Hagyományok Háza (House of Traditions)	A state-supported institution for folk-culture education and archives, founded in the 2000s (check).

Revival or invention?

The dance house is a revival, but not a copy. Village dances were learned by city people in a very different setting, the repertoire was selected and sometimes simplified, and the bands performed for a new audience. Scholars of folk revivals ask how far such a movement preserves a tradition and how far it creates a new one, and for the táncház the honest answer is both (check the scholarship). That a village tradition continues in a changed form is not a failure.

Recognition and Spread

- **The táncház method.** In 2011 UNESCO recognised the táncház method of teaching folk music as an example of good practice in safeguarding intangible heritage (check the year and the wording).
- **Transylvania and beyond.** The movement spread to Hungarian communities in Romania, Slovakia and elsewhere, and to Hungarian diaspora groups, linking communities across borders (check).
- **Festivals and camps.** Annual gatherings, such as a large dance-house festival in Budapest, bring musicians and dancers together (check).
- **Jazz and cross-over.** Some musicians combined folk material with jazz and other styles, as in the work of Hungarian jazz players who drew on village tunes (check; this feeds into Chapter 9).

A British comparison

Compare the English and Scottish folk revivals of the 1950s and 1960s and the later ceilidh and folk-club scenes (check the dates). The Hungarian movement is unusual for its emphasis on dance and for the way it brought rural players into a city youth culture.

Check the details

Dates, founders' names, group histories and the role of the state are from general knowledge and are discussed in the scholarly literature on folk revival. Verify against Hungarian ethnomusicology, the House of Traditions and band histories before quoting anything.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe how a táncház evening works and explain why its format differs from a concert of folk music.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Trace the line from Bartók and Kodály's field recordings to the táncház movement, naming the steps in between.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Write a short paragraph answering the question "Is the dance house a revival or an invention?", with evidence for both sides.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Start:** first táncház in Budapest, 1972 (check)
- **Format:** a teacher, a village-style band, an audience who dance
- **Names:** Sebő, Muzsikás (1973), Márta Sebestyén (check)
- **Recognition:** UNESCO good-practice listing, 2011 (check)
- **The caution:** a revival changes what it revives

Hungarian Music

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Beat, Rock & Socialist-Era Pop

While folk musicians were reviving village dance in the cities, young Hungarians were also listening to the Beatles, Radio Luxembourg and the Rolling Stones, and forming their own bands. From the 1960s to the 1980s, beat and rock music in Hungary grew up under a one-party state that licensed musicians, controlled records and radio and worried about Western influence, yet allowed more room than in many neighbouring countries. This chapter follows the main bands, the system they worked in, and the question of how far they were free. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Beat Years

The context

After the 1956 uprising was crushed, the government of János Kádár slowly relaxed its grip in the 1960s, in the policy later nicknamed "goulash communism" (check). Western music came in through radio, tourists, records and tape copies.

Illés

The Illés band, founded in the early 1960s, became the leading beat group, with songs in Hungarian, and a rock opera, *Fekete leves*, in the early 1970s (check). Its members included Lajos Illés and Szabolcs Szörényi, who later wrote the rock opera *István, a király* (1983; check).

Metro and others

Metro and other bands of the 1960s played a mix of covers and original songs, and some members later became well known in Hungarian music (check). Radio and a state record label shaped what reached the public.

Rock in the 1970s and 1980s

Band (check each)	Note
Omega	Formed in 1962; their song "Gyöngyhajú lány" (Girl with Pearls in Her Hair, 1969; the English version is "Pearls in Her Hair") was a hit in Hungary and in parts of Europe, and the band toured in West Germany and elsewhere.
Locomotiv GT	A progressive-rock group formed in 1971, with a large following at home and some international attention (check).
Syrius and Bergendy	Other well-known Hungarian groups of the period, each with a different sound (check).
Punk and new wave	Late-1970s and 1980s groups such as Beatrice and Hobo Blues Band, and underground bands, pushed into more critical territory (check the names).

Licensing and control

Performers in the socialist period needed approval to perform professionally, and the state record label (Hungaroton), radio and the concert agency controlled access to audiences (check the institutions). Lyrics could be reviewed and bands could be classified as acceptable, tolerated or banned, a system sometimes summarised as the "three Ts": supported, tolerated or banned, though the exact formula varied and the term needs a source (check). The control was real, but it was uneven and changed over time, and many bands managed to work and to speak in indirect language.

Song, Language and Meaning

- **English or Hungarian?** Some bands sang in English to be heard abroad, and others stayed with Hungarian to speak to local audiences (check which bands did what).
- **Indirect speech.** Lyrics could carry criticism through metaphor and implication, so listeners learned to read between the lines (check examples and treat reading-in with care).
- **Stadium and festival moments.** Large rock concerts in the 1980s, including Western acts' visits, mark the opening of the culture (check which acts and when).
- **Rock opera.** *István, a király* (1983), about the founding of the Hungarian state under King Stephen, was a huge popular success and mixed national history with rock (check).

A British comparison

Compare the BBC's role in deciding what British pop listeners could hear in the 1960s, before the pirate radio ships and the licensing of commercial stations (check). In both cases a state broadcaster shaped the music, though the Hungarian system had political as well as commercial and moral aims.

Check the details

Dates, band histories, the details of censorship and claims about hidden political messages are from general knowledge and often exaggerated in retelling. Verify against Hungarian music histories, archives and interviews, and treat stories of "secret protest songs" with caution.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe how popular music was controlled in socialist Hungary and give one reason the control was uneven.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose Illés or Omega and write a short profile covering the band's sound, its language choice and its audience.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain why stories about hidden protest messages in socialist-era lyrics need careful checking, and how you would test one.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Bands:** Illés, Omega (1962), Locomotiv GT (1971), Metro (check)
- **Hits:** "Gyöngyhajú lány" (1969); the rock opera *István, a király* (1983) (check)
- **Control:** licensing, a state label, radio, review of lyrics (check)
- **Context:** Kádár's "goulash communism" (check)
- **The caution:** stories of hidden protest are often exaggerated

Hungarian Music

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · After 1989: Rock, Electronic & Sziget

The end of one-party rule in 1989 removed the licensing system and opened the music business to the market, foreign labels and the internet. Hungarian popular music in the following decades is more varied and harder to summarise than the socialist-era scene: rock and alternative bands with large followings, an active electronic and club scene, and one of Europe's biggest music festivals, held on an island in the Danube. This chapter follows those developments and asks what changed and what did not. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

A New System

The end of licensing

With the end of the old system, anyone could form a band, record, release and perform without state approval. State institutions lost their gatekeeping role, and the old record label was privatised (check).

The market

Bands had to find audiences, labels and money in a small-language market of about ten million people, with competition from Western music (check). Many worked in Hungarian, others in English.

New media

Commercial radio and television in the 1990s, then the internet and streaming, changed how music was promoted and heard (check).

Rock and Alternative

Band (check each)	Note
Tankcsapda	A hard-rock band formed in the late 1980s, among the best-selling Hungarian rock groups, with Hungarian-language lyrics on everyday life.

Band (check each)	Note
Quimby	A band led by Tibor Kiss, mixing rock with folk and other influences and known for poetic lyrics and lively concerts.
Kispál és a Borz	An influential alternative band of the 1990s, with a loyal following and distinctive lyrics.
Republic, Edda Művek and others	Established rock and pop acts that continued from earlier decades or began in the 1980s.
Hip-hop and pop	A younger generation of rappers and pop artists, many using streaming platforms and Hungarian-language lyrics (check names).

Electronic and Club Music

- **Budapest as a club city.** The city has a thriving club scene, with parties in old buildings and "ruin pubs" (*romkocsma*) in the former Jewish quarter, which became popular with young Hungarians and visitors (check).
- **Producers and DJs.** Hungarian electronic producers and DJs have worked at home and abroad, and the country hosts electronic music festivals (check names and events).
- **Crossovers.** Some musicians combined folk instruments and electronic beats, a thread that links to the revival of Chapter 6 and the world-music scene of Chapter 9.

Sziget

An island festival

The Sziget Festival ("Island Festival") was first held in 1993 on Óbuda Island in Budapest, initially as a student event, and grew into a week-long international festival with major rock, pop and electronic acts and hundreds of thousands of visitors (check the dates, the origin and the attendance). It has been called one of Europe's largest music festivals. It also hosts theatre, circus and other arts, and has become a tourist attraction in its own right (check).

- **The audience.** A large share of visitors come from abroad, so the festival is a place where Hungarian and international youth cultures meet (check the figure).
- **Hungarian acts.** The festival gives local bands a large platform next to international stars.

- **Politics.** Like other cultural institutions, festivals have been drawn into debates about state funding, media and politics in the 2010s and after (check, and treat contested claims with care).

A British comparison

Compare Glastonbury or Reading in Britain, which also grew from smaller events into major national festivals (check the origins). Sziget differs in being held in a capital city on an island, and in the high share of foreign visitors.

Check the details

Band histories, chart and sales claims, festival figures and political controversies are from general knowledge and change quickly. Verify against current press, the festival's own history and Hungarian music sources before quoting.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe three ways the end of the licensing system in 1989 changed how Hungarian bands worked.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose one band from the table and write a short profile covering its sound, its language and its audience, marking anything you would need to check.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain what the Sziget Festival shows about Hungary's place in European popular music, giving one advantage and one risk of a festival-centred scene.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **1989:** the end of licensing and the opening of the market (check)
- **Bands:** Tankcsapda, Quimby, Kispál és a Borz (check)
- **Clubs:** Budapest ruin pubs and electronic scene (check)
- **Sziget:** first held in 1993 on Óbuda Island (check)
- **The caution:** festival and sales figures change and are often promotional

Hungarian Music

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Folk Revival & World Music

The dance-house movement of the 1970s produced more than dance evenings. Over the following decades, Hungarian folk-influenced musicians moved on to stage performance, recordings, festivals abroad and fusion with jazz, rock and other traditions, entering what record shops and festival organisers call "world music". This chapter follows that path through three kinds of group: those who stayed close to village tradition, those who built new music from it, and Roma-led bands who brought their own heritage to wider audiences. It also asks what the "world music" label does for and to the music. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

From Dance House to World Stage

Staying close

Groups such as Muzsikás (Chapter 6) kept to village repertoire and playing style, recording with older musicians and touring internationally (check). Their credibility rests on closeness to sources.

Building new music

Other groups used folk instruments and melodies as raw material for new compositions with rock, pop or jazz influences. Ghymes, a group formed in Slovakia by Hungarian-speaking musicians, is a well-known example (check the origin and the dates).

Roma-led bands

Besh o droM (the name means "sit on the road" in Romani; check) mixes Hungarian, Roma and Balkan influences with brass and rock energy, and has toured internationally (check). Other Roma-led groups, such as Kalyi Jag, work in Roma musical traditions (check).

The World Music Scene

- **The label.** "World music" was adopted as a marketing category in the late 1980s, bringing together music from many places that did not fit Western pop or classical shelves (check the origin of the term). It opened doors for Hungarian groups and also lumped very different traditions together.
- **Festivals and labels.** Hungarian groups appeared at festivals such as WOMAD and recorded for international world-music labels (check which).
- **Recognition.** Márta Sebestyén's voice reached wide audiences through film and recordings (Chapter 6), and Hungarian groups have been nominated for and won awards in the world-music field (check).
- **Authenticity.** Audiences and critics often ask whether such music is "authentic", and musicians reply that tradition is always changing and that the question can be unfair (check).

Hungarian Jazz

Item (check each)	Detail
Early history	Jazz reached Hungary in the 1920s, played in cafés and clubs, and had a mixed reception under the state in the mid-twentieth century.
Folk and jazz	Musicians such as the guitarist Gyula Babos and others combined jazz harmony with Hungarian melodies and rhythms.
Abroad	Hungarian players made careers in the United States and Western Europe, among them the guitarist Gábor Szabó, who left in 1956 and played in the United States (check).
Today	A lively scene in Budapest with clubs, a jazz academy and festivals (check).

What does "world music" do?

The label can bring a small-language country's music to an audience that would never hear it, and it can lead listeners to hear "traditional" as a single, timeless sound. For the musicians, the risk is being asked to repeat an image of tradition for foreign audiences, while the benefit is a working career. Scholars who study the field ask who defines

authenticity, who profits and who gets to change a tradition (check the scholarship). The honest answer for Hungarian groups is that it has done both.

A British comparison

Compare Scottish and Irish traditional music in the folk and world-music circuits, where groups such as Capercaillie and Altan travel the same festivals (check the examples). The same debates about authenticity, fusion and the marketing label apply.

Check the details

Group names, origins, dates and awards are from general knowledge and change as bands form and split. Take care with the Roma-related names and the translation of Romani words, and verify against the groups' own websites, labels and reliable reference works.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the three kinds of folk-influenced group in this chapter and give a reason a listener might prefer each.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain the argument over "authenticity" in world music and give one point for each side.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Pick one Hungarian group or musician working abroad and write a short plan for checking how they present Hungarian tradition to a foreign audience.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Close to tradition:** Muzsikás and similar groups (check)
- **New music from folk:** Ghymes (check)
- **Roma-led:** Besh o droM, Kalyi Jag (check)
- **World music:** a marketing label from the late 1980s (check)
- **The caution:** "authentic" is a claim to be tested, not a fact

Hungarian Music

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Capstone: Collecting a Nation's Songs

The first chapter put folk song at the centre of Hungarian music and promised to test what that meant. Nine chapters later there is enough to answer. This final chapter traces one thread through the whole course, how a nation's songs were collected, used and kept alive, from Bartók's phonograph cylinders to the dance house to streaming, then gathers the myths and what the evidence says, sets out a timeline and gives a method for testing any claim about folk music. Names and dates are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

One Thread: Collecting, Using, Keeping Alive

Collecting (1900s)

Bartók and Kodály recorded village singers with the phonograph, catalogued the tunes and showed that the old peasant song differed from the café style of the nineteenth century (Chapters 2 and 4). Recording turned a vanishing practice into an archive.

Using (1900s to 1980s)

Composers drew on the collections for concert works (Bartók, Kodály), schools used folk songs for teaching (the Kodály method), and the state promoted folk culture, while popular musicians in the socialist era worked in a rock idiom with Hungarian words (Chapters 4 and 7).

Keeping alive (1970s onward)

The dance-house movement turned the archive back into a social practice, and later groups carried it to world stages and mixed it with other styles. Streaming and online archives now make the whole collection available to anyone (Chapters 6, 8 and 9).

- **The cycle.** Collecting makes an archive, the archive supplies the revival, the revival creates new music, and the new music is in turn recorded and archived.
- **The agents.** Scholars, composers, teachers, the state, young city dancers, village musicians and, increasingly, international audiences.

- **What changes at each step.** A song heard in a village is not the same thing as a transcription, a concert arrangement, a school exercise or a track on a streaming playlist.

Myths Versus Evidence

Myth	What the course found (check each)	Chapter
Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies are Hungarian folk music.	They draw on the urban Roma-band style and published tunes, not on field-recorded peasant song.	2, 3
Hungarian folk music is Roma music.	Peasant song, the professional Roma-band repertoire and Roma community music are different things.	1, 2, 9
Bartók simply copied folk tunes.	He arranged some and absorbed the features of others into a modern style.	4
The Kodály method was invented by Kodály alone.	It drew on earlier ideas and the work of colleagues.	4
Operetta is Viennese, not Hungarian.	Its leading composers were Hungarian-born and worked in several cities.	5
The dance house is a perfect copy of village life.	It is a revival that changes what it revives.	6
Communism killed Hungarian popular music.	It was controlled and licensed unevenly, and bands worked within and around the system.	7
"World music" shows a tradition unchanged.	The label simplifies, and traditions have always changed.	9

A Timeline

Year (check each)	Event
1840s	Erkel's national operas; the csárdás becomes a national dance.
1844	Erkel's music chosen for the anthem "Himnusz".
1859	Liszt's book on Roma music in Hungary.
About 1905	Bartók and Kodály begin collecting with the phonograph.
1905	Lehár's *The Merry Widow*.
1943	Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*.

Year (check each)	Event
1956	The uprising and a wave of departures, including Ligeti.
1969	Omega's "Gyöngyhajú lány".
1972	The first dance houses in Budapest.
1989	The end of one-party rule and of the licensing system.
1993	The first Sziget Festival.
2011	UNESCO recognises the táncház method as good practice.

A Method for Testing a Claim About Folk Music

Choose any claim of the kind "this is the folk music of X" or "this is the authentic sound". Ask these questions in order, and mark each answer as *documented*, *claimed* or *unknown*.

1. Whose music?

Who actually sang or played it: villagers, professional town musicians, a revival band, a composer?

2. Who recorded it?

Who collected or transcribed it, when, with what equipment and what choices about what to keep?

3. What changed?

How did the version in front of you differ from the original performance: arranged, harmonised, shortened, translated?

4. Who used it, and why?

A composer, a school, a state, a record label, a festival: what did each want from it?

5. Which label?

"Folk", "Gypsy", "world", "authentic": who chose the word and what does it include and leave out (Chapter 1)?

6. What is the evidence?

Field recordings, scores, programmes, interviews and archives, or only retelling?

A Worked Example

Question	"Muzsikás plays authentic Hungarian village music" (check each)
Whose music?	Village dance and song from several regions, especially Transylvania, learned from older players (documented in the group's accounts and archives).
Who recorded it?	Researchers and the group themselves; the older recordings of the earlier collectors are in archives (documented).
What changed?	Presented on stage and on records to audiences who are not dancers, with selected repertoire (claimed, to be tested).
Who used it?	The dance-house movement, festivals abroad and film soundtracks (documented).
Which label?	"Folk", "authentic", "world music": each is a choice by someone (documented that the labels are used).
Evidence?	Strong for the sources they learned from; weaker for the word "authentic", which is a judgment (partly unknown).

The pattern

Most claims about folk music come out part documented, part claimed and part a matter of labels. That is not a reason to distrust the music or its makers, but a reason to ask which part of a statement is a fact about sound and source, and which is a story about identity.

A British comparison

Try the method on a claim about British folk music, such as "this is the authentic sound of English folk" (check the example you choose). The same questions about who sang it, who collected it, what was changed and who used it apply, and the answers often show a similar mixture of real tradition and later shaping.

Check the details

Every name, date and attribution in this course comes from general knowledge and is marked "check" where it is uncertain. Folk-music scholarship, and the history of the communist period, are revised regularly, so verify against current ethnomusicology and archives before quoting anything.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose a claim about folk music (any country) and answer the six questions, marking each answer as documented, claimed or unknown.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Pick three of the myths in the table and write one sentence each, in your own words, saying what the evidence supports.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Write a short timeline of five events that best show how a nation's songs were collected, used and kept alive, and say why you picked each.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **The thread:** collecting, using, keeping alive
- **The method:** whose music, who recorded it, what changed, who used it, which label, what evidence
- **The habit:** label each claim documented, claimed or unknown
- **The big distinction:** peasant song, Roma-band style and revival music are different things
- **The caution:** "authentic" is a judgment, not a measurement

Course complete

You have finished *Hungarian Music*: folk song and Roma bands, Liszt and Erkel, Bartók and Kodály, operetta and the concert hall, the dance-house revival, beat and rock under socialism, the music after 1989, the world-music scene, and a method for testing claims about folk music. Related courses include the other Hungary-specific Culture courses on the site, such as *Hungarian Folk Art & Traditions* and *Hungarian Animation & Children's Television*, and, for a neighbour's story, *German Music*.