Historical recordings of Bartók’s folksong arrangements (1928); variations of performance practice with striking surprises

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I declare that the research presented here is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree. I certify that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Ethical approval has been granted for the study presented in this thesis from the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 15 May 2012 (Protocol number: 14777). Participants were required to read an information statement and sign a consent form.

Signed: ...................................................................................................................

Date: .....................................................................................................................
Abstract

His Master’s Voice recorded two of Béla Bartók’s song cycles in 1928, the *Five Hungarian Folksongs* (BB 97), and the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* (BB 47) with the composer at the piano. The research primarily focuses on the analysis of the 1928 recordings, analysing the singers’ performance, and identifies the three singers’ musical choices. The performance analysis discusses whether the performers’ interpretation conformed to the score and what specific differences they made. The analysis also examines how flexible Bartók was with the singers’ interpretation of his songs.

The final section of the thesis traces how the performance of these songs has evolved over time. For the comparison, recordings made between 1950 and 2011 are considered. The analysis examines what specific performance trends emerge from the artists over this period and how the performing style of the songs has changed since the 1928 recordings. The link between the research and the D.M.A. final recital was to attain a comprehensive background to the two song cycles, to highlight the variety of performance choices in the analysis, and to apply some of the findings in the recital.

The findings may be useful for modern performers and performer-scholars in terms of the background of these songs. Furthermore, if current vocal practitioners decide to perform Bartók’s folksong arrangements, the thesis offers a wide range of musical choices that they might like to consider in their practice. The thesis also contributes to the better understanding of Bartók’s performance of his own music.
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INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the project

Béla Bartók (1881–1945) recorded two of his song cycles in 1928; the Five Hungarian Folksongs (BB 97, 1928)¹ and the Eight Hungarian Folksongs (BB 47, 1907-1917).² These recordings with His Master’s Voice³ were preserved and released in 1981 as part of the collection ‘Bartók at the piano.’⁴ First, the recordings have valuable information about Bartók’s interpretation of his songs as they are the only vocal compositions recorded with the composer at the piano. Second, the recordings offer insight as to what the singers’ performance of Hungarian folksongs was like in the late 1920s. As Bartók accompanied the singers, the recordings are firsthand evidence of his interpretation of the chosen songs. The importance of the study is that the recordings have never been investigated from a vocal practitioner’s perspective.

The current research that closely relates to Bartók’s 1928 recordings, to reports upon twentieth-century recordings of these songs, as well as to studies of his vocal works, is limited. The existing literature on the 1928 recordings offers some background information; however, many questions are still unanswered. For instance:

Where exactly the recording session took place in Budapest?

³ Five Hungarian Folk Tunes: His Master’s Voice AM 1676 - matrix number: 2052, AM 1678 matrix number: BW 2053.
Eight Hungarian Folksongs: His Master’s Voice AM 1671- matrix number: BW 2066, AN 215 matrix number: CW 2071, AM 1671 - matrix number: BW 2067.
What kind of technical equipment it was?

How many microphones they used?

Where did they place the microphone/microphones?

Who were present at the recording session?

How many technical staff were involved?

How many takes did the artists make of each song?

Where did the editing procedure take place?

Who was the sound engineer?

Another matter that raises questions is the fact that in 1928 Bartók did not record song no. 4 Annyi bánat a szűvemen, ‘Skies above are heavy with rain’, from the Eight Hungarian Folksongs. Therefore, without this song the vocal setting is incomplete on the recording. Why is it that they did not record the song? Was it the composer’s or HMV’s decision? Did any technical issues occur that prevented the recording? Was it because the discs had limited length? This question also remains a mystery.

There is little information about the rehearsals between Bartók and the three singers prior to the recording session. Any knowledge of this matter could contribute to the understanding of Bartók’s performance instructions to the singers. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of the thesis I was unable to pursue further research on the recollections of Bartók’s students regarding rehearsal protocols and habits.

Perhaps the most relevant source for the 1928 recordings is László Somfai and Zoltán Kocsis’s commentaries to the Centenary Edition of Bartók’s Records. This booklet provides background information to all of Bartók’s own recordings from the

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phonograph records, piano rolls, studio recordings, and the broadcasts. The editors outline how they collected the material, what repertoire Bartók recorded, who the associated artists are on the recordings, and finally, they discuss the composer’s own performance.

The last chapter of Somfai’s comprehensive book, *Béla Bartók: Composition, Concepts, and Autograph Sources*, the author begins with a detailed account of Bartók’s notation. Aspects of tempo, metronome markings, and duration are considered. Somfai then discusses the importance of Bartók’s own recordings before examining those piano works that have two or more versions recorded with the composer. Somfai concludes that Bartók’s recordings demonstrate that “an objective and correct reading of a score and virtuosity are no substitutes for personality, for the courage and imagination of the genuine artist.” He also states that Bartók’s interpretation shows that “expression and rich musical characters are more important than correct technique.”

An important chapter by Vera Lampert in *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók*, also investigates Bartók’s performance choices through his piano recordings. In the same book, Rachel Beckles Willson’s study examines the motivation behind Bartók’s vocal works in chronological order, commencing with the *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* (1906). Willson investigates Bartók’s

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7 Ibid., 252-279.
8 Ibid., 294.
9 Ibid., 295.
early folksong arrangements, the art songs, the later folksong arrangements, and choral works. The author briefly mentions the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* amongst the early vocal compositions. However, in the conclusion Willson discusses in more detail Bartók and Kodály’s “desired performance practice of folksong arrangements,”13 and refers to the three singers with whom Bartók recorded the two vocal settings in 1928.14

Lampert’s chapter in *The Bartók Companion* examines Bartók’s solo vocal works with piano.15 The author outlines the evolution of Bartók’s compositional style through his folksongs and art song settings. Since the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* is one of the composer’s major vocal works, Lampert discusses the significance of these songs in detail. She explains how the discovery of the ancient pentatonic scale influenced Bartók’s compositional style,16 and when Bartók collected the folk tunes which later became the first five songs of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs*.17 The composer collected the last three songs during World War I and grouped the two parts together in 1918.18

The subject of this thesis focuses on Bartók’s two folksong settings, tracing their recording history while investigating certain performance practices. The research focuses on the analysis of the 1928 recordings regarding performance practices, identifying Bartók and the three singers’ interpretive range of the selected songs. The investigation also examines how flexible Bartók was with the singers’ interpretation of his songs in 1928. The performance analysis then continues with various artists’ recordings of the same songs between 1950 and 2011. This analysis

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14 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 392-393.
17 Ibid., 395.
18 Ibid.
examines what specific performance trends emerge from the artists over this period and how the performing style of the songs has changed since the 1928 recordings. The conclusion synthesises the discussion provided in Chapter 3-4 and provides a summary of the historical evolution of the performance practices of the songs.

A particular aim of the research is to analyse the original 1928 recordings from a singer’s perspective in order to identify the stylistic and interpretive choices that the various artists make. The study primarily comments on the singers’ performance and the analysis focuses on a comparison between the singers’ interpretation and the published score. In order to make the comparison easier to understand, I made transcriptions of the singers’ recorded performances. The intention is to trace the evolutionary changes of these two song cycles since their initial recording in 1928. In one instance, the peasant singer’s performance of the cylinder phonograph is also included in the comparison in conjunction with the score and the singer’s recording from 1928.

The specific questions that this thesis addresses are:

1) How do the singers and Bartók’s own performance vary from the written score in 1928?

2) What do we learn from the performance analysis of the 1928 recordings?

3) What musical performance choices do the singers make in the 1928 recordings?

   How does the 1928 recordings artists’ musical performance shape modern performers interpretation?

4) What specific changes have taken place in performing the songs in the recording history in the last eighty years?

5) What knowledge can modern performers gain from the study? How might the findings influence their performance?
Chapter 1 presents historical background of Bartók’s folksong collecting trips. For this study, primary sources include the composer’s own recordings from 1928, Bartók’s unpublished correspondence at the Budapest Bartók Archives, and a CD-ROM that comprises three published books of Bartók’s letters.19 Another resource that is central to the project is Vera Lampert’s book, _Folk Music in Bartók’s Compositions, A Source Catalog: Arab, Hungarian, Romanian, Ruthenian, Serbian, and Slovak Melodies._20 The book contains the musical notations of 312 folk tunes that Bartók used in his compositions. Lampert attached a compact disc to the book with the phonograph recordings of 182 folk tunes and 33 variants.21 Bartók’s five autobiographies (between 1905 and 1945),22 his essays, scholarly work, and published articles are all amongst the primary sources considered in the thesis. The discovery of the phonograph and its use in ethnography in Hungary are also explored in this section of the thesis.

The first part of Chapter 2 outlines the relationship between Bartók and His Master’s Voice, the second half provides information about the 1928 recording artists in detail. This section discusses the singers’ professional lives leading up to the 1928 recordings. I was particularly interested in investigating the relationship between the composer and the singers; furthermore, what may have influenced the singers’ performance in 1928. The following questions arose when I began the investigation on this topic:

- What was the professional background of the singers (operatic or non-

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21 Ibid., 7.
· Why did Bartók choose two opera (Basilides, Székelyhidy) and one cabaret singer (Medgyaszay) to be the collaborating artists for the recordings?

· What did Bartók find unique about Medgyaszay’s interpretation of Hungarian folksongs? Why did Medgyaszay quit her successful career at the cabaret and turn to Hungarian folksongs?

· In which year and in what circumstances did the singers first meet Bartók?

Had they ever performed Bartók’s vocal works or any Hungarian folksongs prior to the recording session?

· How many rehearsals did the singers have with the composer prior to the recordings?

· Were the three singers aware of the cylinder recordings of the peasants’ performances before they made their own recordings?

Apart from biographical books, a significant part of the information derives from archival sources. Firstly, I was able to gain access to reviews of the performances of the singers from 1910s and 1920s in the Archives of the Hungarian State Opera House, Budapest. Secondly, I obtained permission from the Hungarian Radio Sound Archive to search for recordings of the two song cycles made after 1928. I located a large number of sound files and the bulk of them are currently stored on tape. At the premises of the Hungarian Radio, I was able to listen to these recordings with a studio analog recorder.²³ A professional sound engineer at the Hungarian Radio edited the recordings that I selected for the analysis.²⁴ The bulk of recordings that I was able to obtain, mainly vinyl, are from the library of the

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²³ I used a Mechlabor STM-610 studio tape recorder (1976 model) at the Hungarian Radio Archives.

²⁴ I would like to thank the recording engineer, Sándor Fodor for editing the sound files and Judit Szipszer for assisting me to locate the recordings at the Hungarian Radio.
Budapest Music Center (BMC).²⁵ Thirdly, I found rare documents about the singers’ background at the National Széchényi Library in Budapest, some of which were on microfilm.

Chapter 3 is the performance analysis of Bartók’s two folksong settings of the 1928 recordings. This section discusses whether the performers in 1928 adhered to what was written in the published score or if their performances substantially deviated from the score. There are a number of sources in the form of books, academic articles, and conference papers that outline various strategies regarding how to analyse historical recordings. Contemporary musicologists can now approach the analysis of performances from many different perspectives, thus broadening the scope and range of investigations.

Robert Philip is one of the first pioneers of analysing early recordings; his PhD dissertation was based on the history of recording.²⁶ Phillip continued investigating historical recordings examining the relationship between early twentieth-century performance and recording. Philip published two significant books on this subject: *Early Recordings and Musical Style: Changing Tastes in Instrumental Performance 1900-1950* (1992)²⁷ and *Performing Music in the Age of Recording* (2004).²⁸

In his first book, Philip expressed the following in regards to the significance of early twentieth century recordings: “The recordings have preserved the general performance practice of the period in great detail, and the detail includes habits which are scarcely mentioned, if it all, in written documents. The recordings

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²⁵ Budapest Music Centre, [http://bmc.hu/](http://bmc.hu/).
I would like to thank Gyula Hodozsó for his enormous help to find LP recordings, journal articles, and a manuscript at the library of the Budapest Music Centre.
therefore shed light on the limitations of documentary evidence in any period, not just in the early twentieth century.” Philip’s publications on the analysis of recorded musical performances created an awareness of the value of early recordings in the field of research. These sources are of great value in assisting contemporary researchers to understand the nature of historical recordings.

In 2004, a major research project focusing on recordings was established in the U.K., the AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM). This website provides an excellent overview of the different techniques musicologists use with historical sound recording samples. CHARM also suggests methodologies for performance analyses. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson’s online publication, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performances* (2009) provides vast amounts of historical information about sound recordings and analyses different historical recordings by studying performance. His approach is to establish a closer insight on how music works and what performers do in order to achieve this. To demonstrate the examples, Leech-Wilkinson provides singing, violin, and piano sound files, and analyses of these samples. The historical recordings in singing were made between 1911 and 2000. In order to be able to examine sound files, the author identifies various methods of studying expression/expressive gestures.

Another useful source that gives guidance to this study is Neal Peres Da Costa’s book *Off the Record.* His investigation focuses on performance practices in

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30 http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/index.html.
piano playing in the second half of the nineteenth and the turn of the twentieth century. In order to substantiate his findings, Peres Da Costa provides a discography with musical examples. At the conclusion of the book he states that “a historically informed style of performance for any repertoire, time, or place requires more than just playing the book. It requires a great deal of imagination and reading between the lines.”³³ Peres Da Costa also points out that late nineteenth-century composers and musicians “approached the aesthetics of performance from a very different perspective than musicians today.”³⁴ Bartók’s collaborating artists in the 1928 recordings are his contemporaries. They were all born in the 1880s.

Several studies by Renee Timmers investigate performance practices of Schubert songs. One of them specifically examines them in the recording context.³⁵ Timmers’s paper focuses on three of the most recorded songs of the twentieth century, ‘Die junge Nonne’, ‘Du bist die Ruh’, and ‘Gretchen am Spinnrade’ by Schubert. She explores the link between vocal expression, musical structure and emotion.³⁶ Another paper by Timmers is an exploratory study in which one of the above mentioned Schubert songs, ‘Die junge Nonne’, is investigated.³⁷ For the experiment the author chose musically trained participants who had to listen to six different performances of the song. The recordings were made between 1907 and 1977. Three performances were from before 1945 and three recordings were from after 1950. According to Timmers, “the aim of the study was to examine the influence of the age of the recording and the quality of reproduction on the perception of recorded performances and to compare this to the influence of

³³ Ibid., 310.
³⁴ Ibid.
³⁶ Ibid., 74.
performance characteristics."

The dissertation that is most closely related to my topic is Yu-Yuong Lee’s *Béla Bartók's Eight Hungarian Folk Songs for voice and piano: Vocal style as elaborated by harmonic, melodic, and text factors.* Lee provides a profound analysis of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* and the following vocal factors of the individual songs are examined in the study: text, range, rhythm, syllabic and melodic line structure and modality. Overall, the author investigates the evolution of Bartók’s compositional style through the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* (1907-1917).

Unfortunately there is limited literature on the other song cycle, the *Five Hungarian Folk Tunes.*

For the analysis, the following primary sources were considered: the manuscript of the *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano*, the published edition of Bartók–Kodály *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* (1906), the *Five Hungarian Folksongs* (1928), and the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* (1907-1917). The Preface and the Notes of the manuscript written by Bartók and Kodály contain valuable information concerning the manner of performance of the folksongs and the rhythmic adjustments that the Hungarian language requires. However, the notation

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38 Ibid., 2879.
The reason why I decided to use this particular score for the analysis is that this edition is the one that is widely available in libraries and in bookstores.
of *the Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* in the manuscript are not the songs that Bartók recorded in 1928, and hence they were not examined in the analysis.

In this chapter, the analysis focuses on identifying the differences between the singer’s performance in the 1928 recordings and the published score of the two investigated song cycles, the *Five Hungarian Folksongs* and the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs*. The following aspects are considered: 1) the composer’s metronome markings, tempi, dynamic marks, performance instructions in the score; and 2) the singer’s *rubato*-style singing, use of *portamento* and slides, embellishments (including *appoggiaturas* and *acciaccaturas*), rhythmic adjustments to the text, additional and/or omitted notes, vocal tone, colour, and vibrato.

At the beginning of the analysis of each song, the master sheet of Bartók’s transcription of the folk tune is shown as a figure. Permission for the use of the master sheets was granted from the Institute of Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. I examined some of the songs with Sonic Visualiser software. \(^{45}\) This was illustrated with spectrograms as well as waveform displays.

The study also discusses the peasant singers’ performance on the phonograph recordings (1899-1914). These recordings are primary sources. They were the folk tunes that Bartók recorded in situ.\(^ {46}\) Unfortunately, due to the age of the cylinders, the audio quality of some of these sound files is poor. Permission to use these recordings was granted in June 2015 from the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest.\(^ {47}\) Some of the files are also available online through the database of the Hungarian

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\(^{45}\) Sonic Visualiser software was used for mapping the melody, [http://www.sonicvisualiser.org/videos.html](http://www.sonicvisualiser.org/videos.html).

\(^{46}\) Béla Vikár collected some of the earlier recordings between 1899 and 1902.

Academy of Sciences Institute for Musicology.\textsuperscript{48}

The importance of these cylinder recordings is that they are the first-recorded performances of the songs, hence the closest authentic performances that exist. However, the subject of authenticity is problematic. What exactly is an authentic performance? Richard Taruskin raises the issue in his book \textit{Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance}.\textsuperscript{49} He states that “authenticity [. . .] is knowing what you mean and whence comes that knowledge. And more than that, even, authenticity is knowing what you are, and acting in accordance with that knowledge.”\textsuperscript{50} Laurence Dreyfus expresses\textsuperscript{51} the following view about authenticity: “A musician humbled by authenticity, acts willingly in the service of the composer, thereby committing himself to “truth,” or, at the very least, accuracy.”\textsuperscript{52}

However, the question remains. Is there an authentic performance of a Hungarian folk tune? How it is possible to determine which performance is more genuine than another one when the performance of the songs changes all the time? The peasants’ interpretation of the very same song changes from day to day and a large number of folk tunes have variants which emerge from different regions. Hungarian folk tunes have existed for centuries; however, until a recording device was invented, the performance of the folk tunes remained a mystery. For this study, the closest authentic performances are the first recorded performances of the tunes; those are of the cylinder recordings.

Chapter 4 traces the evolutionary changes of these two song cycles since their

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 299.
initial recording in 1928. The chapter undertakes a comparison study between the 1928 recordings, the score, and recordings made after 1950. For the comparison I chose recordings between 1950 and 2011 that reflect ‘interesting’ or unusual performance choices by the artists. The specific elements that I considered for the selection were the following: very slow or fast tempo, broad legato, frequent use of slides/portamento or the lack of it, error of notes, Sprechgesang, atypical rhythmic adjustments to the text, the use of straight tone or excessive vibrato, scoops, strong emphasis on articulation, and tone-colour.

As a fluent Hungarian speaker, I was able to examine rhythmical changes to the text that the performers made in the recordings (dotted rhythms, accentuation of the texts and shortening/lengthening the extent of the words). The project also identifies the modifications made by the performers to the published score in order to accommodate specific nuances of the Hungarian language.

In Budapest, I carried out interviews with five well-known Hungarian vocal practitioners (Andrea Meláth, Dénes Gulyás, Ágnes Herczku, Lucia Megyesi-Schwartz, and Polina Pasztircsák) who are all currently active performers and have made recordings of these songs. They provided a personal insight into their performing style at the time when their own recordings were made. The specific questions that I addressed to the interviewees were: 1) Were you aware of the existing phonograph cylinders and have you listened to them prior to your own recording? 2) Did you listen to Bartók’s 1928 version of the songs before you made your own recordings? If yes, did you notice any particular performance choices that the singer and/or Bartók made? If yes, in what way did it influence your own performance? 3) Were you aware of any other artists’ recordings of the songs? 4) Has any artist’s interpretation influenced your own performance? 5) What specific
The recordings are the following: Bartók’s *Five Hungarian Folksongs* (BB 97) and five songs from Bartók’s *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* (nos. 1–5, BB 47).

54 The lecture-recital took place on 4 November 2015 at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Recital Hall West.
background of the songs. This analysis helped shape my own performance.

The selected songs for the recital demonstrated the evolution of Bartók’s compositional style beginning with the simplicity of ‘Red Apple’ or *Piros Alma* (1904) to the modernist ‘Fast dance’ or *Székely Friss* (1929). The program included Bartók’s early folksong arrangements, the two song cycles analysed in the thesis, as well as settings by Bartók’s contemporaries, Kodály and Lajtha. The lecture-presentation provided a summary of Bartók and Kodály’s endeavours to change the perception of village folksongs. Their efforts achieved a mind shift from the generalised belief of folksongs as a marginal component of Hungarian culture to an acknowledgement of their central role in defining Hungarian musical identity.

This thesis reflects the first in-depth scholarly work that has been carried out analysing performance practices in Bartók’s solo vocal settings of the 1928 recordings. It is timely to make a comprehensive examination of the two song cycles and to find out whether any stylistic changes have occurred in the last eighty years. The study hopes to provide further insight to singers in the interpretation of Bartók’s vocal settings as well as contributing to the understanding of Bartók’s performance of his own music.

The findings may be useful for current performers and performer-scholars in terms of the background of these songs and how they have been performed over almost a century. I hope this study will motivate vocal practitioners to perform Bartók’s folksong arrangements. If they decide to perform these works, this thesis...

55 I have included in the recital the same four settings (nos. 1, 2, 3, and 5) of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* as Mária Basilides recorded with Bartók.
56 Two songs by Kodály no. 16, *Gerencséri utca* ‘Scarlet roses bloom’ and no. 18, *Törik már a réteket* ‘Now that the fields are being ploughed’ from the book, Bartók–Kodály *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* are included in the program.
57 One of László Lajtha’s nineteen folksong arrangements, *Feljött már az esthajnali csillag* ‘The evening star has risen’ was included in the recital. Lajtha collected the tune in 1914 in Diósad, Szilágy County.
adds knowledge to the background of these songs. The findings could then contribute to the performance choices that modern performers make.
CHAPTER 1 - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In a thousand years, in ten thousand years, I am sure that my whole work will have been lost without a trace; and maybe the entire Hungarian people and their language will have sunk into oblivion forever.¹

The young Bartók wrote these words in a letter addressed to Stefi Geyer in September 1907. Today, in hindsight, we would probably not be able to imagine twentieth-century music without Bartók. When Bartók wrote the letter, he had just started to compile folk music and had not yet recognized the impact that his research would have as the new century unfolded. He was a man of few words, had an introverted personality, and lived all his life in relatively fragile health; yet, he was driven and destined to accomplish the enormous task of discovering and preserving the roots of Hungarian peasant culture as expressed by its folksongs. He was also instrumental in spearheading the universal desire of finding the relationship between a nation’s music and its folk origins. He demonstrated this by extending his research beyond the borders of Hungary and engaging in the same methodical research amongst its near neighbours as well as other nations and regions further afield.

1.1 Influences of Bartók’s early compositional style

Béla Bartók started composing piano music as a child and following further studies in Beszterce (Transylvania, today in Romania: Bistriţa) and in Pozsony between 1894 and 1899 (today Bratislava - Slovakia). He followed Ernő Dohnányi’s (1877–1960) advice and took up musical training at the National Hungarian Royal Academy of Music in Budapest from 1899 to 1903. Bartók gained acceptance to the

¹ János Demény, Béla Bartók’s Letters (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), 82.
Academy in both the department of composition and piano. At that time, Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) and Dohnányi were the major influences on the young Bartók’s compositional style. Dohnányi was Bartók’s contemporary and a successful pianist and composer. Bartók stated in his autobiography in 1923, that as a first year student at the Academy, he began to show interest in Ferenc Liszt (1811–1886) and Richard Wagner’s (1813–1883) compositions. He first came across Liszt’s music at the Academy of Music in Budapest in 1900. His piano professor, István Thomán (1862–1940), was himself a pupil of Liszt. The following year Bartók gave his first public recital at the Academy where he played Liszt’s Sonata in B Minor. At this time, Bartók was more impressed by Liszt’s virtuosity as a pianist than as a composer. Eventually, he came to the realisation that Liszt or Wagner’s music would not lead him to find his own distinctive musical style.

Liszt was convinced that genuine Hungarian music derived from the gypsies and he began to write compositions in the popular Hungarian ‘verbunkos’ style in the 1840s. Well-known violinists, such as Rózsavölgyi, Lavotta and Csermák, introduced Hungarian music in the gypsy style to Europe in the nineteenth century. The gypsy style was recognized exclusively through its distinctive instrumental music, the musicians’ improvisations, and the use of embellishments in the melody. Liszt also used similar sources for his famed Hungarian Rhapsodies thinking that they represented genuine Hungarian music. However, most of his Hungarian themed

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5 Stevens, The Life and Music of Béla Bartók, 22.
7 Antal Molnár, Új Könyvek [New Books] (Budapest: Révai Kiadó, 1925), 143.
works were composed in the last period; ‘Continuation and conclusion of the previous period in Rome, Budapest, Weimar (1862-1886),’\(^8\) when he spent considerable time in Hungary teaching, composing, and touring.

For almost two years, Bartók stopped composing. His professor of composition, Hans Koessler (1853–1926), who himself was a student and friend of Brahms\(^9\) and a follower of the Brahms-tradition, was not convinced by the style of the compositions that Bartók presented for the lessons. Although Bartók was enrolled in both, the piano and composition faculties, he was considered to be more of a virtuoso pianist than a talented composer.\(^10\)

A revolutionary change occurred in Bartók’s compositional life in February 1902 when he heard Richard Strauss’s (1864–1949) symphonic poem, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, op. 30 (1896). The recognition of a new and modern avenue rekindled the enthusiasm in the young composer.\(^11\) Apart from Strauss, the other influence on Bartók’s musical development originated from a nationalistic notion that inundated Hungary’s political and artistic life at the turn of the twentieth-century. Bartók made the following remark:

> It was the time of a new national movement in Hungary, which also took hold of art and music. In music, too, the aim was set to create something specifically Hungarian. When this movement reached me, it drew my attention to studying Hungarian folk music, or, to be exact, what at the time was considered Hungarian folk music.\(^12\)

Inspired by these two factors he began to compose again. During this period, he wrote one of his first major works, the *Kossuth Symphony* in 1903. In 1905, he

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\(^10\) Bartók, "Önéletrajz (1921–1923)," 31.
turned away from the ecstasy of Strauss and was particularly interested in the study of Liszt’s lesser-known compositions. Thus, Bartók concluded that Liszt’s compositions had had a greater impact on his own musical development, than Wagner or Strauss’ works.\(^\text{13}\)

### 1.1.1 Urban popular music in the gypsy style

Up until the 1900s, urban popular music *Magyar nót\á* was known incorrectly as the authentic Hungarian folk music.\(^\text{14}\) Bartók and his fellow Hungarian composers had all shared this mistaken belief. Kodály later described it in the book *Folk Music of Hungary*: “When, about 1900, a great surge of interest in folksong and in folk music occurred, most Hungarians incorrectly regarded the widely diffused popular music current at the time as the folk-tradition.”\(^\text{15}\) Bartók states his opinion on the genre of popular music in folk style thus:\(^\text{16}\)

> Art music in folk music style contains melodies whose composers were musicians infected with city culture, though for the most part dilettanti. Such composers mingle, in their melodies, musical patterns of Western Europe with certain peculiarities of the peasant music style of their homelands.\(^\text{17}\)

In the same paper, Bartók further explains: “On the other hand every single melody of the peasant music in the narrower sense is perfection itself – a classical example of how the musical thought can be expressed in the most ideal manner with the simplest means and in the most finished form.”\(^\text{18}\)

The *Magyar nót\á* was primarily popularised by urban gypsy musicians.

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13 Bartók, "Önéletrajz (1921-1923),” 32.
18 Ibid.
Initially, this had been achieved mostly through oral tradition, although a few publications of these songs in the folk style began to appear in a published form in the beginning of the twentieth-century. Bartók estimated the numbers of *Magyar nóta* in Hungary to lie between 1000 and 2000 and categorically declared that they did not have as much “aesthetic” and “cultural-historical” value as peasant music.\(^\text{19}\)

In an essay which was first published in Hungarian, then in German, and finally in English, in 1931,\(^\text{20}\) Bartók summarises his viewpoint about gypsy music:

> The music that is nowadays played “for money” by urban gypsy bands is nothing but popular art music of recent origin. The role of this popular art music is to furnish entertainment and to satisfy the musical needs of those whose artistic sensibilities are of a low order. This phenomenon is but a variant of the types of music that fulfil the same function in Western European countries; of the song hits, operetta airs, and other products of light music as performed by salon orchestras in restaurants and places of entertainment.\(^\text{21}\)

In the folksong, text and music form an indivisible unity. Gypsy performance destroys this unity because it transforms, without exception, the vocal pieces into purely instrumental ones. This alone suffices to prove the lack of authenticity in gypsy renderings of music, even with regard to popular art music. [. . .] We know that most of our popular art songs are the work of Hungarians; the few songwriters of gypsy extraction follow this style in every detail. Yet there is real gypsy music too, songs on gypsy texts, but these are known to and sung by the non-musician rural gypsies only, the regular gypsy bands never play them in public. What they do play is the work of Hungarian composers, and consequently Hungarian music.\(^\text{22}\)

Oszkár Dincsér in *Ethnographia*\(^\text{23}\) examined the origin of gypsy music and particularly its use of scales. He highlighted the two harmonic scales that most significantly reflect the characteristics of gypsy music. In both, the degrees of the


\(\)\(^{21}\) Ibid., 241.

\(\)\(^{22}\) Ibid., 252.

scales are rich in augmented seconds:\(^{24}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
G & - A & - B & - C & - D & - E & - F# & - G \\
& & & & & & & \\
\text{and} \\
G & - A & - B & - C & - D & - E & - F# & - G
\end{align*}
\]

Basing his viewpoint on his comprehensive fieldwork, Bartók asserted that these augmented second intervals are “much more common in the Balkans and in the East, with the Turks and Arabs, than in Central Europe.”\(^{25}\) He further explained: “It is much more reasonable to assume that the gypsies themselves acquired the distinctive interval from Oriental sources during their wonderings.”\(^{26}\) Thus, these intervals are not authentic characteristics of genuine gypsy music.\(^{27}\)

1.1.2 Bartók’s first encounter with genuine Hungarian folksongs

Benjamin Suchoff (1918–2011),\(^{28}\) a leading expert on Bartók, noted the occurrence of a significant event in the composer’s life in 1904.\(^{29}\) In May of that year, Bartók travelled to the countryside, Gerlicepuszta, for a holiday. In order to be able to practice and work on various piano compositions he took a piano with him on a coach to an ‘idyllic summer place,’ as Bartók called it in a letter addressed to his mother.\(^{30}\) While he was there, he overheard a young Székely\(^{31}\) maid singing a song in

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\(^{25}\) Bartók, "Gypsy Music or Hungarian Music?,” 252-253.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 253.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 252.

\(^{28}\) Benjamin Suchoff was a musicologist and the successor-trustee for Béla Bartók’s estate between 1968 and 1982.

\(^{29}\) Benjamin Suchoff, *Béla Bartók Life and Work* (Lanham, Maryland, and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2001), 40-44.


\(^{31}\) Székely people are a Hungarian-speaking ethnic group, who live in the Eastern part of Romania.
the kitchen. The song that the girl was singing had its origins in the remote Transylvanian village of Kibéd. Bartók was captivated by the discovery of the tune. As Suchoff pointed out, the former must have noticed that the song was structurally and harmonically completely different from the generally known Hungarian popular art songs.\textsuperscript{32}

This episode marked the beginning of Bartók’s contact with genuine folksongs. He repeatedly asked the girl to sing the song, ‘Red apple fell in the mud,’ until he had precisely notated it. In 1904, he wrote an arrangement of the song that was published a year later as \textit{Piros alma} (‘Red Apple’) or ‘Székely Folksong for voice and piano.’\textsuperscript{33} Figure 1 is the musical notation of the melody in Vera Lampert’s book, \textit{Folk Music in Bartók’s Compositions}:

\textbf{Figure 1.} ‘Székely folksong’ or ‘Red apple’, non-architectonic,\textsuperscript{34} three-liner tune. Tune system (BR-number): Bartók C-III 1083a.\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{SZÉKELY FOLKSONG, 1904 (BB 34)}
\end{figure}

\textbf{CD Track 1.} Phonograph recording of \textit{Tisza partján nem jó elaludni} (1900). Collected by Béla Vikár, MH-0111d. With kind permission of the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest.

\textbf{CD Track 2.} Phonograph recording of \textit{Lányok, lányok tőlem tanuljatok} (1900). Collected by Béla Vikár, MH-482d.

\textsuperscript{32} Suchoff, \textit{Béla Bartók Life and Work}, 42-43.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{34} The melody is descending within a non-architetonic stanza structure.

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When Bartók encountered the tune ‘Red Apple’ in 1904, he had not yet met the Hungarian ethnographer, Béla Vikár (1859–1945). Vikár was amongst the first in Hungary who recognised the importance of the phonograph in ethnography, and had begun collecting folk material with a phonograph in 1896.

1.2 The phonograph in ethnography

1.2.1 Edison’s phonograph

Thomas Alva Edison (1847–1931) invented the tin foil phonograph in 1877, although he accidentally created it whilst he was working on the efficiency of the telegraph. David J. Steffen draws attention to Gelatt’s book, The Fabulous Phonograph in which the following remark appears:

In the summer of 1877, he [Edison] was working on an instrument that transcribed telegrams by indenting a paper tape with the dots and dashes of the Morse code and later repeated the message any number of times and at any rate of speed required. To keep the tape in proper adjustment he used a steel spring, and he noticed that when the tape raced through his instrument at a high speed, the indented dots and dashes striking the end of the spring gave a noise, which Edison described as a “light musical, rhythmic sound, resembling human talk heard distinctly.”

However, the cylinder recorder originally was not created as a means of recording music. Edison was partially deaf and presumably for that reason music was not a priority for him. His primary thought was that the phonograph would be useful, amongst many other applications, for “dictation and stenography, talking books for the blind, talking dolls and music boxes, the teaching and preservation of language, the recording of lectures and instructions from teachers and professors, capturing the dying words of friends and family.”

people to conserve them for the future.\textsuperscript{38} In 1878 shortly after the invention of the phonograph, The Edison Speaking Phonograph Company was established.\textsuperscript{39} The business paid a royalty to Edison for the machine, receiving in return rights to organise public events throughout the country in order to demonstrate the phonograph’s advantages. These shows provided a kind of novel entertainment for the public.\textsuperscript{40}

The wax cylinders used by the early phonographs were only capable of recording a maximum of two minutes of voice, music, speech or any other sound. The first cylinder recordings appeared on the market in 1890. The gramophone records then followed these in 1894.\textsuperscript{41} By the 1920s, cylinders became obsolete and no longer utilized because of their length limitation and frail durability. They were replaced by a newer technique, the so-called 78-rpm discs.\textsuperscript{42} These new discs were capable of recording pieces up to four and half-minutes long. However, this still meant that a longer musical piece had to fit on a disc through shortening or leaving out sections of the original music. The 1928 Bartók recordings that are analysed in this study were recorded on these discs.

The age of acoustic recordings had ended by 1925. The ongoing technical development of sound recording technology by the mid-1920s led to other new technical processes, such as the introduction of the electrical recording. The invention of the microphone in 1925 led to a significant improvement in the quality of sound reproduction. This innovation facilitated direct recordings of live performances. Despite all these major advancements, one technical issue had not yet

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Gelatt, \textit{The Fabulous Phonograph}, 26.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 27-28.
\textsuperscript{42} Steffen, \textit{From Edison to Marconi}, 8.
been resolved. There was no means of editing or correcting the recorded music. It was under these “new” technical circumstances that the very first Bartók folksong recordings were made. The importance of these 1928 recordings centres on the fact that these two song cycles are the sole remaining vocal recordings made by Bartók.

1.2.2 Jesse Walter Fewkes

Jesse Walter Fewkes (1850–1930) was an American anthropologist, archaeologist, and later in life an ethnologist, becoming a pioneer in the use of the phonograph as a tool for academic research in the field. In 1890, he began using the phonograph to record the Passamaquoddy tribal language and traditional songs. The Passamaquoddy was a Native American tribe of New England that was in danger of disappearing completely. Fewkes’ aim was to record their spoken language and their songs before they were lost forever. In an article published in *Science* (1890), Fewkes presents some of his conclusions:

> The invention by Edison of the phonograph, and the improvements in its effectiveness which rapidly followed, naturally turned attention to the possibilities which it presents in the preservation of the languages of the aborigines of the United States. [...] There are inflections, gutturals, accents, and sounds in aboriginal dialects, which elude the possibilities of phonetic methods of expression. It is desirable, also, to preserve songs, sacred and secular, which are rapidly becoming extinct. Their counting out rhymes often have inflections which are imperfectly expressed by letters.

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1.2.3 Béla Vikár and the beginning of folk music research in Hungary

At the same time in Europe, the Hungarian ethnologist Béla Vikár was experimenting with various methods in order to preserve Hungarian peasant folklore. Initially his main objective as a linguist, ethnographer and folklorist, was finding the roots and dialects of the Hungarian language by collecting and writing down folk ballads and folk tales. His stenographic skills assisted him well in this endeavour, as he was able to transcribe dialogue simultaneously.

However, the invention of the phonograph revolutionised sound recording potential around the world. There is evidence confirming that as Fewkes was recording material during his 1890 field trip amongst the Passamaquoddy, the Hungarian Ethnographic Society [Vikár was one of the founders] was also recognising the usefulness of the phonograph as a tool in the conservation of folk music material.47

During the ‘Commemorative Conference to Béla Vikár,’ held in Budapest in 2009, Ildikó Landgraf48 mentioned an article that appeared in 1890 in the first volume of Ethnographia. In this article, Vikár expressed as early as 1889 the desirability of obtaining a phonograph in order to use it on a research trip to Finland.49 In the paper, Vikár stated that whilst he was on an extensive collecting trip in a village, he found it extremely difficult to write down all the mourning songs because the singers could not repeat them twice. Vikár said that “[. . .] since the informant is sobbing whilst she sings, or rather performing the song with a mock

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crying voice, I was not able to write it down. This explains why there are quite a few gaps in the text. It would have been a blessing to have a phonograph with me.”

Landgraf supports the idea that by now, they [Vikár and the members of the Hungarian Ethnographic Society] were aware of Fewkes achievements with the phonograph. Unfortunately, it took six years for the society to receive adequate funding from the ministry to purchase a cylinder recorder. As soon as they obtained the machine, Vikár set out for his first field trip in December 1896. He thus became the first ethnographer in Europe to employ the phonograph for field recording purposes.

The phonograph was a revolutionary invention in sound recording technology and Vikár soon discovered its vital role in ethnography. The fact that the cylinder recorder was portable and was capable of playing back the recorded material was a remarkable innovation. The apparatus also gave folklorists the opportunity to rescue the remnants of Hungary’s ancient folk culture. Although Vikár could play the violin and had some singing ability, he was not a professional musician and was therefore not able to notate the tunes. To compensate for these shortcomings, he set out in 1896 to record the folk tunes using an Edison phonograph in rural parts of Hungary.

Vikár made his first trip to the villages by train and horse coaches with a
machine that weighed fifty kilograms. His aim for the trip was to collect folk tunes from the elderly in the villages who still remembered the old melodies. The very first song he recorded was the ‘Ballad of Fehér László’ from Borsod County and the original roll is available online through the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography’s database.

In 1905, Vikár published another essay in *Ethnographia* in which he outlines the experiences of that first trip. In the paper, he explains how he initially only encountered songs that had been substantially influenced by contemporary urban popular music. He was left with the impression that many singers were reluctant to sing what they perceived to be old-fashioned songs. His conclusion was that these songs were of little value as they contained few, if any of the characteristics of the authentic Hungarian folksongs.

Undeterred by this early disappointment, Vikár persisted with his quest until his determination finally paid off when he met some peasants who remembered and were willing to sing the ‘Ballad of Szűcs Marcsa.’ The song relates the story of a young girl who had lived in that particular village about one hundred years earlier, before being tragically killed by her jealous lover.

At the beginning of the fieldwork, both the weight of the recording apparatus and the fact that Vikár did not know how to operate it correctly, were significant hurdles. He nevertheless concluded that even though the machine had its challenges, the task was feasible. Since 1896, the Hungarian Ethnographical Society had been

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58 Ibid., 273.
59 Ibid., 273-274.
60 Sebő, *Vikár Béla Népzenei Gyűjteménye*, 228.
receiving funding from the government. This gave Vikár the opportunity to experiment with various machines and by 1897, and just prior to that year’s expeditions, he finally settled on a device that suited his particular needs.\footnote{Ibid.}

Having resolved the technical and practical problems that field recordings posed, he was now in a position to continue the enormous task of bringing the folk material together. The cylinders were costly and had length limitations; therefore, Vikár only recorded the first verse of a song. He wrote down the remaining verses in situ. One of Vikár’s greatest merits was that he was capable of documenting the entire text of a ballad without interrupting the singer during the performance. Once collected, he lodged all the material at the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest.

**1.2.4 Vikár’s achievements in Paris 1900**

Vikár’s work received international recognition during the Paris 1900 World Exposition. Coinciding with this event, The International Congress of Folklore was also held in Paris. Dr. Gyula Sebestyén, the then secretary-general of the Hungarian Ethnographic Society, later gave an enthusiastic account of the event.\footnote{Gyula Sebestyén, “A Párisi folklorista kongresszus, [The Ethnomusicology Congress in Paris],” *Ethnographia*, (1901): 249-257. http://apps.arcanum.hu/ethnografia/default.html.} As Vikár was unable to attend the conference, Paul Sébillot, the secretary-general of the ‘Société des Traditions Populaires’ presented and read his paper: ‘Recueil phonographique des chants populaires de la Hongrie’\footnote{Ibid., 252.} - ‘Phonographic collection of folksongs from Hungary.’ In the paper, Vikár argued that any given folk tune was usually performed, and modified, depending on the dialect used by the singers. He concluded that there were as many versions and renditions of the same song as there are dialects in the Hungarian language. Vikár explained further: “when folk people take up a melody
with its origins in a different region, they will almost always alter both the tune and the text so that it conforms to their own dialect.”

In order to support these findings, they played phonograph recordings of the folk tunes and folktales to the scholars assembled at the conference.

The international audience at the congress were surprised to hear that the Hungarian Ethnographical Society had already been using the cylinder recorder in their collecting trips for over five years. Furthermore, they were also impressed with the Hungarian National Museum’s initiative giving access to the entire collection of 2000 wax cylinders to students, thus making them available for research purposes.

At the conclusion of the paper, Vikár declared that folk music research in the field could not be fruitful without the phonograph.

During the ‘Commemorative Conference to Béla Vikár,’ Sebő stated that although prior to Vikár there were other ethnographers in Europe who used the phonograph, Vikár was the first ethnographer in the world who carried out field research using a scientific and systematic approach. This approach was complemented by his brilliant stenographic skills; it was crucial for him to document the whole text of a song without altering any of the words.

He continued to collect ethnographical material for over forty years. His passion and determination were driven by the knowledge that this could well be the

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64 Ibid.
Kornélia Pérchy made the English translation from Hungarian. The original Hungarian text: “Ha a nép más dialektusból vesz át dallamot, akkor azt épp úgy átalakítja, mint a velejáró szöveget.”
67 Ibid., 253.
68 Vikár Béla – Emlékülés a Magyar Tudományos Akadémián, Budapest, 2009 Október 27. [Commemorative Conference to Béla Vikár at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 27 October 2009.]
last opportunity that anybody might have to preserve what he believed was the cornerstone of Hungarian heritage. In his expeditions, Vikár also recorded instrumental melodies (mostly violin, clarinet, and pipe) and whistled tunes from the villages.\textsuperscript{71} Bartók later transcribed most of the folk tunes that Vikár collected and Kodály transcribed some of the instrumental melodies.\textsuperscript{72} In his lifetime, Vikár compiled about eight thousand pieces of material, which contained folksongs, ballads, and tales.

1.2.5 Kodály and Vikár

It was in 1896, at the time of Hungary’s Millennium Exhibition, that a fourteen-year-old Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) first came across Vikár’s phonograph recordings. The recording was the previously mentioned ‘Ballad of Fehér László.’ Kodály, in the preface to the first volume of \textit{Magyar Népzene Tára} (Corpus Musicae Popularis Hungaricae, 1951), considered this phonograph recording a milestone, as it “meant the dawn of a new era in folksong research.”\textsuperscript{73} Kodály and Vikár eventually met in 1903 at the time when the former was looking for a topic for his doctoral dissertation.\textsuperscript{74} This encounter spurred him on in his ever-growing desire to find the origins of authentic Hungarian music. Kodály was familiar with peasant music since early childhood. From 1885, to 1892, the family lived in the village of Galánta (today Galanta in Slovakia) where Kodály had learned folk tunes from his peers at school.

Believing the preservation of folk tunes was a matter utmost importance; he decided to follow Vikár’s lead and began his own collecting in 1905. In 1906, he gained a PhD in musicology under the title, \textit{A magyar népdal strófaszerkezete}, ‘The

\textsuperscript{72} Vikár, \textit{Vikár Béla Erdélyi Népdalgyűjtéséről}, 196.
\textsuperscript{74} Sebő, \textit{Vikár Béla Népzenei Gyűjteménye}, 254.
Strophic Structure of Hungarian Folk-Song.’ In his lifetime, Kodály collected over 5000 tunes on 604 wax cylinders.75

1.3 Kodály and Bartók’s initial field trips

Zoltán Kodály started collecting folksongs in August 1905. Initially without the aid of a phonograph, he travelled on foot to the villages of Csallóköz (today Žitný ostrov - Slovakia) and returned to Budapest with over hundred and fifty tunes.76 Of those melodies, the Ethographia journal published thirteen songs under the title, ‘Mátyusföldi gyűjtés,’ (‘Collection from Mátyusföld’) in 1905.77 Bartók, who at the time did not yet know Kodály, read the article with enthusiasm.78 During that year they met and Kodály introduced him to the important process of collecting the original folksongs from rural villages. The realisation that these authentic folk tunes were in danger of imminent extinction drove them to take steps to search for, and collect Hungarian peasant melodies. In order to cover the fieldwork more effectively, Kodály and Bartók divided the country between them.

During the summer of 1906, Bartók used a phonograph during his first systematic folk song collecting trip to Békés County (Hungary). Vikár gave the cylinder recorder to him from The Museum of Ethnography in Budapest79 to record village people’s performances. Bartók fondly recalled:

A longing for the unknown, some indefinite feeling that true popular music, the genuine national temperament in music, could be discovered only among the

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78 Sebő, Vikár Béla Népzenei Gyűjteménye, 255.
peasants, led us to our first inquiries. These first inquiries resulted in the
discovery of rich and – up to that time – entirely unknown material. And only
then did we commence the regular collection. It is impossible to imagine what
an immense amount of work we had to do. To find musical material still
untouched by civilization we were compelled to visit such villages as were
remotest from the centres of civilization and the means of communication.
[... ] We lived in a primitive way in the most miserable hamlets, but in spite of
the fact, those days were the happiest of my life.⁸⁰

Bartók and Kodály’s persistence and determination in carrying out this task
was eventually very fruitful. They recorded the folk tunes that people sang for them
and they absorbed everything they could about their cultural heritage. They were
aware that each of the songs had many versions “which testify most eloquently to the
autochthonous character and vitality of folk melodies properly so called.”⁸¹ During
these trips in the Carpathian Basin, Bartók and Kodály found not only authentic folk
tunes, but also a new and unique music idiom that derived from these folksongs. This
discovery also acted as a new musical inspiration, something that they had always
looked for in their own compositions. One of Bartók’s most cherished ambitions was
the attainment of a distinctive Hungarian identity in his music.

1.4 Twenty Hungarian folksongs (BB 42, 1906)

At the end of 1906, Bartók and Kodály published their first folksong
arrangements including ten songs by both composers, Bartók–Kodály Hungarian
Folksongs for Voice and Piano (1906).⁸² Despite the extensive number of songs that
they had already collected, Bartók and Kodály included five songs gathered by
Vikár. These five peasant songs along with the other fifteen were chosen as the best
eamples of authentic Hungarian folksongs.

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⁸⁰ Béla Bartók, “The National Temperament in Music,” The Musical Times 69, no. 1030 (Dec. 1,
Faber & Faber, 1976), 59-60.
⁸² Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, Hungarian Folksongs for Voice and Piano (Budapest: Editio
For the 1928 HMV recordings, Bartók selected five of the ten folksongs that he had first arranged in 1906. For these recordings, he composed new piano accompaniments for all of the songs. The piano parts in these re-arranged scores did not double the melody line and were clearly more complex in comparison to the 1906 publication.

At the time Bartók and Kodály began working together in 1906, they soon realised that it was not always a simple task to determine a song’s authenticity. For example, one of Bartók’s songs: no. 5, *Ucca, ucca, ‘Street, street’*, was mistakenly published in the 1906 edition, Bartók–Kodály *Hungarian Folksongs*, as a genuine Hungarian folk melody. A few years later, the composers realised that it was in fact a *Magyar nóta* (an urban popular song), composed by Elemér Szentirmay (1836–1908). Therefore, Bartók did not include this song in the second edition of Hungarian Folksongs in 1933. Szentirmay was a well-known csárdás (czardas) and Magyar nóta composer around the turn of the twentieth century. Figure 2 shows the musical notation of the tune in Lampert’s source catalogue.

**Figure 2.** Musical notation of *Ucca, ucca, ‘Street, street’* as it appears in the source catalogue. Vikár collected the original tune in 1898.

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Denijs Dille,\(^\text{86}\) approached Kodály for some advice in 1962.\(^\text{87}\) During the interview, Kodály stated the following: “At the beginning, at times we [Bartók and Kodály] made mistakes; some of the *Magyar nőta* were treated as authentic Hungarian folk tunes; most probably because they were very similar.”\(^\text{88}\)

In the foreword of the 1906 Bartók–Kodály publication, Kodály [on behalf of Bartók] emphatically stated that the purpose of the edition was to popularise Hungarian folksongs to an audience that had not previously been exposed to authentic folk music. Their aim was also to bring these folksong arrangements to the same level as European Art songs:

Hungarian folksongs in the concert hall! – Today this still sounds strange. Equal in rank with the masterpieces of world literature and foreign folksongs! But the time will come: a time when there will be Hungarian music in the home, when Hungarian families will not be content with the most inferior foreign music-hall songs or with the products of domestic folksong factories.\(^\text{89}\)

This notion was foreign to Hungary’s musical elite at the beginning of the twentieth century. Disregarding the general negative attitude towards Hungarian peasant music, Bartók and Kodály printed 1500 copies at their own expense.\(^\text{90}\) They were hopeful that if the publication was successful, they would be able to use the profits to fund both the following year’s field trips and the publication of a whole new series of songs. Disappointingly, it took thirty-two years to sell those initial

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\(^{86}\) Denijs Dille (1904-2005) was the first director of the Budapest Bartók Archives between 1961 and 1971, and was the editor of *The Young Bartók* publication.


\(^{88}\) Denijs Dille, "Bartók és Kodály első találkozása,” 320. Kornélia Pérchy made the English translation from Hungarian. The original text in Hungarian: "Kezdetben néha tévedtünk; bizonyos magyar nótákat népdalnak vettünk; valószínűleg azért, mert elég közel állnak hozzájuk.”

\(^{89}\) Bartók–Kodály, foreword to *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano*, trans. Lili Halápy.

copies. This outcome did not shatter the two enthusiastic composers’ dream, but it prevented the possibility of printing any further publications. Despite this setback, they carried on with their mission, and although the original publication had received unfavourable reviews, the 1906 folk song arrangements truly marked the start of a new era in Hungarian music.

1.5 Pentatonic scale

In 1907, Bartók was eager to start field research in Székelyföld (Székely Land or Szekler Land), which was then part of Hungarian Transylvania and later ceded to Romania through the Peace Treaty at the end of the First World War. At the time, this region was renowned as the cradle of the Magyars [Hungarian people]. In order to carry out the research, Bartók managed to obtain sufficient funding from Count Albert Apponyi, who was the Minister of Religion and Public Education of the Hungarian Kingdom (twice: 1906–1910 and 1917–1918) within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This funding allowed Bartók to go to Csík County.

Kodály considered Bartók’s trip to that region as a very significant episode in the early days of collecting: “He [Bartók] came back with such a pile of pentatonic melodies that, in conjunction with my own simultaneous findings in the north, the fundamental importance of this hitherto unnoticed scale suddenly became obvious.”

Apart from the pentatonic scale, Bartók recognized other characteristics of the ancient Hungarian melodies, such as the rich use of embellishments and the ‘tempo rubato’ style. Bartók collected over 9000 folk tunes (2700 Hungarian, 3400

92 Kodály, ”Bartók the Folklorist,” in The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály, 104.
Romanian, and 3000 Slovak)\textsuperscript{93} between 1906 and 1918. Unfortunately, he was unable to continue with the collecting trips after the First World War ended.

**Figure 3.** An example for a pentatonic scale.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{pentatonic_scale.png}
\end{center}

\textbf{G – B♭ – C – D – F – G}

1.6 The end of the field trips

Prior to the First World War, Hungary was a multi-ethnic country. Following the Peace Treaty,\textsuperscript{94} the country lost two thirds of its territory and an equal proportion of its population, creating borders where previously there had been none. Virtually overnight, the Hungarian population of Transylvania lost their affiliations to Hungary and suddenly found they were now part of Romania. Hungarians who lived in the northern regions of the country also experienced the same fate, as they became a minority group within the new nation of Czechoslovakia. Croats and Serbs in the southern regions of Hungary joined to become the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, later becoming the new republic of Yugoslavia. This sudden and much unexpected transformation of the country put an end to Bartók’s fieldwork. Ongoing animosity between the newly constituted nations made freedom of movement between these territories almost impossible.

Thus, unable to continue with their field research, Bartók and Kodály’s efforts focussed on incorporating Hungarian folk music into their body of work, and also making transcriptions of the collected material and systemizing it. Kodály made the

\textsuperscript{93} Suchoff, \textit{Béla Bartók Studies in Ethnomusicology}, ix.

\textsuperscript{94} The Peace Treaty of Trianon was signed in June 1920 between the victors of the First World War and the defeated Hungary.
following remark in 1925 in reference to their findings: “We have not invented Hungarian music. It has existed for a thousand years. We only want to cherish and preserve the old treasure and sometimes, if the possibility presents itself, we want to enrich it.”

Bartók was still teaching piano at the Academy of Music in Budapest in the early 1930s, but he realised that in order to complete the work of transcribing and systemizing the collected songs, he would eventually have to give up this position. After further examination of the data, he also noticed there were inaccuracies in the previous notation of the Romanian folk song collection and he was committed to make the necessary corrections.

In 1934, Bartók was released from his teaching contract with the Academy of Music, giving him the opportunity to continue his work with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He was thus able to devote his time to the investigation of his much-cherished folk tunes. In 1940, Bartók left his homeland to live in self-imposed exile in New York. As his health began to fail, his hopes of returning to Hungary after the end of World War II became increasingly forlorn. He died on 26 September 1945, never seeing his beloved Hungary again.

1.7 Characteristics and classification of Hungarian folksongs

Most Hungarian folksongs are composed in unison and structured in four-line strophes. Hungarian peasant folk tunes can be classified into three major styles, the ‘old’ (A), the ‘new’ (B) and the ‘miscellaneous’ (C). The latter style is made up of melodies that could not have been classified as either in the ‘old’ nor in the ‘new’

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95 Kodály, “Thirteen Young Hungarian Composers (1925),” in The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály, 74.
category. By far the largest numbers of folk tunes that folklorists collected were from the ‘old’ and ‘new’ styles. The ‘old’ melodies can be traced back a number of centuries, although according to Kodály, some of them were almost 1500 years old.\(^98\)

The ‘new’ style songs had their origins in the nineteenth century.

### 1.7.1 An overview of the characteristics of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ style

Typical characteristics of the ‘old’ style (A) folksongs\(^99\):

- the anhemitone pentatonic scale: G–B♭–C–D–F–G
- non architectonic stanza structure, the melody is descending
- the initial line generally begins higher than the closing line (usually a fifth higher)
- form of A–A–B–B and its variants, e.g. A–Av–B–Bv or A–B–B–C
- generally the melody line has six, eight or twelve syllables
- usually a lower number of syllables in one line than in the ‘new’ style
- the interpretation of the song is ‘parlando’ (speech-like)
- the tempo is ‘rubato’
- the ‘ambitus’ or the vocal range of the tune is small
- isometric text lines (same number of syllables)

Figure 4 is an example of an ‘old’ style folk tune, *Kemény Kősziklának*. The ‘ambitus’ or the range of the tune is small and the melody is recitative-like. The structure is A–B–Bv–C and the lines have the same number of syllables, 12+12+12+12.\(^{100}\)

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\(^{100}\) Bv stands for ‘B variant.’
Figure 4. An ‘old’ style Hungarian folk tune, *Kemény Kösziklának.*

![Musical notation](image)

The next musical example (see Figure 5) is a pentatonic fifth hanging, or fifth-shifting ‘old’ type of folk tune, *Leszállott a páva.* Its form is $A^5-A^5 v-A-Av$ and the number of syllables per line is 6+6+6+6.

Figure 5. An ‘old’ style folk tune with rich embellishments, *Leszállott a páva.*

![Musical notation](image)

Typical characteristics of the ‘new’ style (B) folksongs:

- ‘dotted adjustable’ rhythm

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102 Av stands for ‘A variant.’
• tempo giusto character
• architectonic\textsuperscript{105} stanza structure, the melody is returning
• the initial and closing line are the same or similar; e.g. form of
  A–B–B–A, and its variants, e.g. A–A\textsuperscript{5}–A\textsuperscript{5}–A, A–A\textsuperscript{5}–A\textsuperscript{5}–B,
  A–A–B–A, or A–A\textsuperscript{5}–B–A.
• the inner lines (nos. 2 and 3) are usually positioned a fifth higher than
  the first and the fourth line
• generally more syllables in one line than in the ‘old’ style
• heterometric lines (different number of syllables)

Figure 6 is the musical notation of a ‘new’ style folk tune, \textit{Által mennék én a Tiszán}. The form of this architectonic structured song is A–A–B–A. The number of
syllables of the third line varies from the other lines, 18+18+14+18.

\textbf{Figure 6.} Example of a ‘new’ style folk tune, \textit{Által mennék én a Tiszán}.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{105} An architectonic Hungarian folk tune has a rounded structure. The first and the closing lines are similar or identical.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 272.
1.7.2 Classification based on Ilmari Krohn’s system

As the amount of data collected in the field trips increased, Bartók and Kodály came to the realisation that there was a pressing need to develop a system for classifying the folk tunes. Consequently, they began searching for established models that could provide guidelines in the construction of their own system. Kodály examined various methods used by European musicologists, finally focussing on the method developed and used by Ilmari Krohn (1867–1960).

Krohn, a Finnish composer and musicologist published a series of books between 1893 and 1932: Suomen Kansan Sävelmiä (lit. ‘Finnish Folk Compositions’). Each volume comprised a selection of Finnish folksongs. One particular volume of the series, the Laulusävelmiä (Folk Songs, lit. ‘Folk Song Compositions’), published in 1904, drew Kodály’s attention. As Pekkilä states in his article, the book was the first systematic and comprehensive publication of folksongs, based on musicological aspects. Within the categorization, one of Krohn’s chief objectives was to focus on the investigation of different versions of the songs.

In April 1911, Bartók and Kodály were participants at an international conference in Rome. Originally, two other Hungarian delegates were invited but they cancelled their attendance just before the conference. For that reason, it was too late for Bartók and Kodály to prepare and deliver a paper themselves at the

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109 Ruth-Esther Hillila, and Barbara Blanchard Hong, eds., Historical dictionary of the music and musicians of Finland (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), 193.
112 Béla Bartók’s life in letters, CD-ROM, notes on 4 April, 1911.
symposium. Their attendance, however, gave them the opportunity to meet Krohn, who was one of the presenters. In the following years, their mutual interest in folk music research led the three composers to develop a friendship.

At the conference, Bartók and Kodály also met another presenter, the French musicologist and critic, Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi (1877–1944). Calvocoressi was aware of Bartók’s talent, as he had heard the young Hungarian’s piano playing at the Rubinstein Contest in Paris (1905). According to Gillies, soon after the Hungarian debut of Bartók’s *Kossuth Symphony*, the composition was also premiered in England (Manchester, February 1904). After a number of positive reviews beginning in 1912, Bartók and Kodály’s names gradually became more familiar to British audiences. From 1913 onwards, Calvocoressi began to support the two Hungarian composers’ achievements by writing articles and essays about them in *The Musical Times*.

Other influential musicologists and critics Cecil Gray and Philip Heseltine, both of whom admired Bartók’s music, also gave this support. Their endorsement assisted Bartók in gaining further recognition within Britain’s musical circle. In 1928, Calvocoressi was able to convince His Master’s Voice Company to record in Budapest (1928–1929) a series of folk song arrangements by both composers.

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113 Zoltán Kodály, *Visszatekintés II. Kodály Zoltán összegyűjtött írásai, beszédei, nyilatkozatai* [In Retrospect II. Zoltán Kodály’s Collected Writings, Speeches, Declarations], ed. Ferenc Bónis (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1982), 459.
114 Béla Bartók’s life in letters, CD-ROM, notes on April 4, 1911.
115 Ibid.
118 Ibid., 213.
119 Ibid., 214-218.
Bartók and Kodály initially adopted Krohn’s lexicographical\(^{121}\) approach. As Bartók stated, Krohn’s method was based on the idea that “grouping is made according to the melodic cadences of the verses (sections) of the songs.”\(^{122}\) This statement illustrates how, in many respects, Bartók and Kodály followed the Finnish musicologist’s methodology. However, in the process of structuring their own system, they realised that it would have to be tailored to the specific requirements of the Hungarian folksongs. Consequently, rather than focusing on the cadence of the lines, the final notes of each line turned out to be one of the key points for the categorization. Other subcategories were to follow later.

In order to facilitate the classification, they transcribed the entire collection of folksongs, always finishing the ending note on a G\(_4\). The songs were classified according to their cadence, the range of the tune, the number of syllables in the lines, and ultimately whether the structure of the melody was architectonic (ABBA) or non-architectonic (AABB).\(^ {123}\) These later subdivisions made the classification process very complex. Based on this classification system, Bartók published a comprehensive book in 1924, *The Hungarian Folk Song*. Its first edition contained three hundred and twenty-three illustrations of musical examples.\(^ {124}\) Up until 1939, Bartók classified thirteen thousand five hundred melodies into three major categories.\(^ {125}\) In October 1940, just before he emigrated to the United States, he gave

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\(^ {121}\) Stephen Erdely defines ‘lexicographical’ as a ”system that groups the melodies by their cadential structures: the number of syllables in each line is a secondary principle". Stephen Erdely, “Classification of Hungarian Folksong,” *The Folklore and Folk Music* V, no. 3 (1962), https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/910/Archivist_5_3_erdely.pdf?sequence=1.


\(^ {123}\) Ibid., 157.


\(^ {125}\) For further details about the classification, please refer to the ‘Structure of the melody-classification system’, ed. Sándor Kovács, The Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute for
the entire collection of the classified songs to Kodály.

In Chapter 1, I investigated the historical background of Bartók’s early compositional style and his first encounter with genuine Hungarian folksongs. In this part of the thesis, I explored the impact of the discovery of the phonograph and its use in the United States of America. I investigated the Hungarian ethnographer Béla Vikár’s achievements, as he was the first ethnographer in Europe to employ the phonograph for field recording purposes in 1896.

In the second half of Chapter 1, I examined Kodály and Bartók’s folk song collecting trips (1906-1917) which were followed by an exploration of the pentatonic scale in Hungarian music. Due to its importance, I discussed Bartók and Kodály’s joint publication *Hungarian Folksongs for Voice and Piano* (BB 42, 1906). Finally, I provided an overview of the characteristics and classification system of Hungarian folksongs.

In Chapter 2, I present an overview of the ten hours of Bartók’s recordings that survived. The core of this section then points to Bartók’s 1928 recordings with His Master’s Voice. In the second half of Chapter 2, I offer a comprehensive account of the three singers’ professional life and their background. All three singers had previously performed Hungarian folksongs and were familiar with Bartók and/or Kodály’s music prior to the 1928 recordings.
CHAPTER 2 - 1928 THE HMV RECORDINGS

2.1 Bartók’s recordings

In total, Bartók left approximately ten hours of recordings. From these, he recorded six hours of his own compositions and the remaining four hours were other composers’ music. The very first recording he made with an Edison phonograph took place in August 1910 for Kodály’s wedding. Bartók’s phonograph recordings were then followed by piano rolls in the early 1920s. He made his first studio recordings with a microphone in 1928. Other surviving recordings include studio and amateur recordings of broadcasts of recitals for the radio and a recording of a public performance from 1940.

Somfai states in his edition of the records that Bartók’s recordings for His Master’s Voice (HMV) from 1928 and 1929 are “amongst the most valuable documents.” Fortunately these recordings have survived and can be used as a reference point as to how they were performed by the composer himself. His Master’s Voice recorded the following works in 1928: Five Hungarian Folk Tunes and the Eight Hungarian Folksongs. In the following year, some of Bartók’s piano works were recorded: Suite Op. 14, Romanian Dance (no. 1), Evening in Transylvania, Bear Dance, Bagatelle (no. 2), Burlesque (no. 2), and Allegro Barbaro.

Although in an essay in 1937 Bartók stated that “mechanical music is a

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4 Ibid., 20.
5 Ibid., 25.
manufacturing industry; live music is an individual handicraft,“6 he recognised the benefits of this new technology and was committed to recording his own music. If the possibility arose, he was disposed to make recordings of not only his own compositions, but also other composers’ works.7 In the same paper from 1937, Bartók acknowledged that the gramophone “offers the possibility for composers to pass on to the world their compositions not only as musical scores but in the form of their personal appearance or in a presentation which conforms to their ideas.”8

As highlighted in Chapter 1, through the good offices of Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi, in December 1928, the renowned label of His Master’s Voice recording company came to Budapest specifically to record two song cycles by Bartók and fifty various compositions by Kodály.9 Bartók played the piano part to all the folksong arrangements; twenty-six by Kodály and twelve of his own songs. As a result, fourteen discs of music with Bartók at the piano were recorded.10

When the opportunity arose to make recordings of his own compositions with His Master’s Voice, Bartók had only two folksong settings that were ready to be recorded: the Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano from 1906, which was a collaborative work with Kodály, and the Eight Hungarian Folksongs composed in 1907 and in 1917. In the 1906 publication, Bartók and Kodály wrote a relatively simple piano part to the songs. Kodály explained the reason for this in the preface of that book:

There are two objectives to folksongs publication, two different approaches. One is to bring together all songs originating among the people. [. . .] The other

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7 Lampert, "Bartók at the piano," 233.
9 László Eösze, preface to Kodály Zoltán Művei His Master’s Voice Lemezeken, 1928 [Kodály Historicals on His Master’s Voice, 1928], edited by Zoltán Kocsis, Budapest, Hungaroton: LPX 12420 (mono), "n.d.," LP.
objective is to introduce the general public to folksongs so that they can be taught to appreciate them. In view of the conditions prevailing Hungary, we have included the melody in the accompaniment, too. In the forthcoming volumes, we shall not adhere this. We are presenting something to be sung, not to be played on the piano.¹¹

Bartók decided to rearrange five of his songs: nos. 1, 2, 4, 9, and 8 from the Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano 1906 edition for the 1928 recordings. By doing this, his intention was to compose more complex piano arrangements to the songs. Denijs Dille was able to shed light on the eventual fate of these drafts. For thirty-five years the location of these manuscripts was unknown. They surfaced in 1963 when Mrs. Bartók, Ditta Pásztory, revealed that they were in her possession. She gave the manuscripts to Dille, who identified them as the drafts of the Five Hungarian Folksongs that Bartók had written down in haste in order to have them ready for the 1928 recordings.

In 1963 Dille, the editor of the Five Hungarian Folksongs (BB 97), met Nádasdy¹², who informed him that during the recording sessions Bartók played from these drafts. Nádasdy had inside information as he was Medgyaszay’s regular accompanist at the time, and he was present at the rehearsals prior to the final recordings. As to the fate of these revised versions of the songs, Dille provided an in-depth explanation. Dille was able to compare Bartók’s notes with the recordings and from these two primary sources was able to transcribe the songs and publish them in 1970.¹³ The lyrics and the vocal melody of the songs remained the same as they had been in 1906 with the exception of song no. 9, Nem messze van ide kis Margitta, ‘The horseman.’ This song was now shorter as some of the verses were omitted for

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¹² Kálmán Nádasdy (1904–1980) was a composer, opera and film director.
the 1928 recording.

His Master’s Voice brought from London to Budapest the latest electrical sound recording equipment and staff. Unfortunately, limited information is available about many of the technical aspects of these recordings such as the location where the recordings took place, the set up of the studio, specific equipment used and the number and backgrounds of the specialist staff engaged in the project. There is no documentation/evidence at the Hungarian Radio that would suggest that the recordings were made there.

As was the norm at the time, it is likely that only one microphone was used in the studio during the recording process. It is also likely that at least two or three takes of each song were performed. The best take was then chosen for the final disc. His Master’s Voice recorded twelve pieces. The recordings were made on 5 and 7 December 1928. Only one piece of correspondence from 20 December 1928 refers to the recording sessions, in which Bartók noted that he played the piano part on thirteen or fourteen discs. He said the following:

I am glad that we have finished the gramophone recordings. I found the recording procedure interesting but at the same time exhausting, because due to the general chaos, all the recordings had to be done on the last days. I was the accompanist on about 13 or 14 discs.

In 1929 and 1930, His Master’s Voice Company released the series of

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14 Kodály Historicals on His Master’s Voice (1928).
Kornélia Péchy made the English translation from Hungarian: “Örülök, hogy túl vagyok már azokon a grammofon felvételeken. Érdekes volt ugyan, de fárasztó, mert az általános fejetlenség következtében az utolsó napokra torlódott össze minden felvétel. Kb. 13 vagy 14 lemeznél kísérék [. . .].”
recordings and according to Eősze they were a big success.\(^{18}\) In the preface to Bartók’s *Five Hungarian Folksongs*, the editor, Denijs Dille sheds some light as to the fate of those 1928 master discs. Bartók confirmed to Dille that all the original recordings were destroyed during Hitler’s occupation of Czechoslovakia.\(^{19}\) His Master’s Voice visited Budapest for the second time in November 1929.\(^{20}\) This time the company recorded more of Kodály’s various vocal works and Bartók’s piano compositions. Only two of Béla Bartók’s vocal settings have ever been recorded with the accompaniment played by the composer.\(^{21}\)

### 2.1.1 Kuno Klebelsberg and the HMV recordings

In 1906, Bartók and Kodály’s vision was that one day concert halls would include Hungarian folksongs in their programme.\(^{22}\) They had to wait twenty years for the audience to be interested in authentic folk music. Unfortunately, up until the mid-1920s, folk music did not gain much recognition as a valuable genre of music in Hungary.

At the time the His Master’s Voice recordings were made, the minister of Religion and Public Education of Hungary was Count Kuno von Klebelsberg (1875–1932), who was also responsible for cultural affairs. In one of his early speeches in 1918, Klebelsberg stated that folk music, and particularly singing, was a very significant part of Hungarian traditions, and he did not want this art form

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\(^{19}\) Denijs Dille, preface to Bartók: *Five Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1970).

\(^{20}\) Lampert, “Bartók at the piano,” 234.


The 1928 HMV record details:
- (10) Hungarian Folksongs, 1906 Nos. 1, 2, 4, 8, 9 V. Medgyaszay & B. Bartók, G.AM 1676 & 1678.
- (8) Hungarian Folksongs, 1917 Nos. 1, 2 3, 5 M. Basilides & B. Bartók, G.AM 1671.
- (8) Hungarian Folksongs, 1917 Nos. 6, 7, 8 F. Székelyhidy & B. Bartók, G.AN 215.

\(^{22}\) Bartók–Kodály, Foreword to *Hungarian Folksongs for Voice and Piano*. 52
disappearing entirely from the country’s cultural heritage. He argued that the growing exodus of village people from their traditional homes would gradually lead to the demise of this folk tradition. To avoid this outcome, Klebelsberg suggested introducing music-based lessons at village schools.\footnote{Kuno Klebelsberg, Gróf Klebersberg Kuno beszédei, cikkei és törvényjavaslatai 1916-1926, [Count Kuno Klebelsberg’s Speeches, Articles, and Bill Propositions 1916-1926], (Budapest, Athenaeüm Irodalmi és Nyomdai R.-T. kiadása, 1927), 342. http://mtdaportal.extra.hu/books/klebelsberg_kuno_beszedeek_es_cikkek.pdf. The original text in Hungarian in the article: “A tömegek művészi nevelése szempontjából nagy jelentősége van a zenének, különösen olyan sajátos zenével bíró dalos nemzetnél, mint a magyar. Szomorú jelenség, hogy a fővárosba beköltöző nép ajkán lassanként elhal az ének, ami a kedély sivárra válásának is jele. A népiskolai zenetanítás és adóskörök szervezése sokat segíthet a bajon.”} Between 1922 and 1931, Klebelsberg, as the minister responsible for culture, proposed a number of bills in the parliament. At the core of these bills was a belief that laws must be in place in order to carry out the necessary cultural and educational reforms that would guarantee the preservation of what he saw as the essence of Hungarian culture.

Klebelsberg’s master plan was to raise the nation to a higher educational and intellectual level. He was convinced that the country needed to educate an “intellectual elite [. . .] whose soul is Hungarian but its knowledge is European.”\footnote{Ibid., 332. Kornélia Péchy made the English translation from Hungarian. The original text in Hungarian: "Korántsem arisztokratikus kulturpolitika tehát az, amely párhuzamosan a magyar nemzet széles rétegei művelődésének emelésével követeli egy szellemi elite-nek tervező és szisztematikus kiképzését, olyan emberek nevelését, kiknek magyar a lelkük, de európai a tudásuk."} He was aware that universities and academic institutions required financial support in order to stay competitive with other European countries.

In order to make education available to every child in the peasant population and abolish illiteracy, Klebelsberg established a new school system, “népiskola,” (a school for everyone) in Hungary. By 1926, the government had built over a thousand classrooms in three hundred and seventeen remote villages and hamlets throughout Hungary.\footnote{Ibid., 309.} At the time, most rural communities had never had a library and many of those that had had one lost them during the immediate post war period, mostly
through neglect. The ministry was able to budget sufficient funds to purchase books, projectors, and gramophones and to establish or re-establish new libraries that eventually were to become the cultural hubs of village life.²⁶

In 1929, the Ministry under Klebelsberg’s direction secured an agreement with His Master’s Voice Company to record a wide selection of Hungarian folk music.²⁷ The objective of the project was to protect, preserve, and popularise Hungarian folk music by making it available to schools in every corner of the country.²⁸ Apart from Bartók’s and Kodály’s work, thirteen folksong arrangements by László Lajtha²⁹ (1892–1963) were also chosen to be part of the series.³⁰ According to Géza Gábor Simon, the ministry ordered 500 copies of the entire collection of thirty-four different discs of the HMV recordings.³¹

Unfortunately, the Great Depression (c. 1929–1940) and the consequent downturn in the economy led to a change in the original plan. Due to the budgetary restrictions placed upon the ministry, the final allocated funds were only able to cover the purchase of one hundred copies.³²

### 2.1.2 Bartók’s correspondence with Universal Edition

In one of his unpublished letters, dated November 1928, Bartók mentions that HMV had agreed to make the recordings with him at the piano. The plan was to record eight folksong arrangements from two of his song cycles. One of the

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²⁶ Ibid., 330-331.
²⁹ László Lajtha was a Hungarian composer and musicologist. In 1910, following Bartók and Kodály’s paths, he also began folksong collecting trips.
³¹ Géza Gábor Simon, Magyar hanglemeztörténet [History of Recording in Hungary], (Jazz Oktatási és Kutatási Alapítvány Budapest, 2008), 46-47.
³² Fittler, ”Lajtha László: Magyar népdalok – nyomtatásban.”
conditions stipulated by His Master’s Voice prior to the recording was that the ownership rights over the song cycles had to be established beyond doubt. This particular letter was addressed to his Vienna-based publisher, the Universal Edition, and it seeks clarification as to who exactly owned the intellectual property rights of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs*.

Bartók does not ask about the *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano*, as they had been published by the Hungarian Rozsnyai company in 1906, and his ownership was beyond any possible doubt. The *Five Hungarian Folksongs* that Bartók intended to record with HMV was a revised version of five songs from the *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* from 1906.

### 2.2 Performers of the 1928 recordings

Bartók and Kodály carefully chose singers for the 1928 recordings who they

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I would like to thank Mária Fekete (former Head of Vocal Studies at the Béla Bartók Conservatorium in Budapest) for translating the letter from German into Hungarian. Kornélia Péchy made the English translation of a shorter version of the letter:

Dear Gentlemen,

"I would like to ask you for some clarifications about recordings of folksongs by His Master’s Voice Company. They’ve requested to record four of my compositions from the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* and four songs from the *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs*. They want to know who owns the publisher’s rights of these songs. [. . .] Who owns the rights of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs*? Universal Edition, Amre or me? My question is only about the rights of the gramophone recordings and whether you wish to receive half the income? [. . .]"

Access to a copy of the letter was given to the researcher at the Budapest Bartók Archives in June 2013. I would like to thank Dr László Vikárius, the Head of the Budapest Bartók Archives for the approval and for his guidance.
felt would faithfully represent the criteria that folksong singing requires. Two opera and one cabaret singer were to be selected to perform the songs.\textsuperscript{34} As is discussed below, all three singers selected had previously performed Hungarian folksongs and were familiar with Bartók’s and Kodály’s music.

Two of the singers Mária Basilides (1886–1946) and Ferenc Székelyhidy (1885–1954) were opera singers from the Hungarian State Opera House. The third performer, however, the soprano Vilma Medgyaszay (1885–1972), was a celebrated cabaret-singer.\textsuperscript{35} As the latter singer was not known as a classically trained musician, it is noteworthy to point out how she became one of the three performers on the 1928 recordings. It can be said without exaggeration that her life and artistic goals were changed when she first encountered Kodály and Bartók’s folk song settings.

\textbf{2.2.1 Vilma Medgyaszay (1885–1972)}

\textbf{The first cabaret in Hungary}

‘Le Chat Noir’ (The Black Cat) was the first cabaret that opened in Paris in 1881. Cabaret was an establishment where the acts included a variety of entertainment introduced by the \textit{conférencier} or ‘master of ceremonies.’ As described in The Grove Music Dictionary:

The founders of ‘Chat Noir’ intended cabaret to be a place where painters, poets, composers and performing musicians could not only meet each other but confront the public, the bourgeoisie; an element of provocative artistic statement was the essence of cabaret during its heyday.\textsuperscript{36}

These nightclubs had a stage and the performers sang chansons, danced, or played drama or short comic acts. This genre of entertainment became increasingly

\textsuperscript{34} Somfai, and Kocsis, \textit{Centenary Edition of Bartók’s Records}.
\textsuperscript{35} Literary cabaret was popular in the 1910s-20s of Budapest.
fashionable in the early 1900s in Germany, soon followed by other parts of Europe: Krakow, Barcelona and Vienna. Many later well-respected composers such as Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951) launched their careers in the cabaret. Schönberg’s early vocal works, the Brettl-Lieder (Cabaret Songs) from 1901, were performed in the famous Überbrettl Cabaret (Buntes Theater) in Berlin. By the turn of the twentieth century, Budapest, as one of the two capitals of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was also growing in importance as an economic and cultural centre of the region.

The concept and the success of the Überbrettl and Schall und Rauch theatres in Berlin captured the attention of Jenô Zoltán, an influential Hungarian journalist. In 1901, he formed the first cabaret-like theatre in Budapest, Tarka Színpad (Variety Theatre), which was short lived. Although a few critics were enthusiastic about this new phenomenon, eventually the audience and the National Association of Actors determined the fate of the theatre. One of the reasons for the failure was that the management decided that all acts were to be performed only in the Hungarian language. The ‘Pesti’ audience expected the performances to be in German and was not sympathetic to this idea. There was also a general belief that cabaret was a low quality form of entertainment. The Association of Actors struck the fatal blow to Zoltán’s aspirations, as they believed that performing in front of an audience who drank and ate was unacceptable.

A few months after opening night, the association forced the actors to leave Zoltán’s company. The actors had no other choice but to resign as they were told that

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no theatre in Budapest would ever employ them in the future if they stayed any longer. The combination of both the audience’s lack of enthusiasm towards this new form of entertainment, and the Association of Actors’ belief that cabaret was a low quality art form, eventually led to the decline of the establishment.39

In the ensuing years, Budapest experienced a rapid social and cultural transformation. General public opinion of the value of the cabaret shifted away from its earlier negative perception. By 1907, hundreds of café houses now offered a venue where a young generation of intellectuals could meet and discuss current affairs. This new generation began to embrace cabaret as chic and modern.

March 1907 saw the opening of the first official cabaret theatre, Fővárosi Cabaret Bonbonnière. Soon after its opening, the owner of the Bonbonnière decided to broaden the variety and intellectual appeal of the acts by introducing literary readings into the programme. His goal was to encourage writers and poets to recite their works in the cabaret. This task, however, proved to be a very difficult one.40 At the time, many literary artists shared the bohemian view that it was preferable to live a life of poverty than to live off an inferior category of art that paid well.41 Kondor approached the journalist and writer Endre Nagy (1877–1938) who at first was also reluctant to accept, but finally succumbed to the offer to recite a monologue of his recent novel.42 Nagy’s success and popularity led to his appointment as the Bonbonnière’s first master of ceremonies.

While the Hungarian cabarets began to blossom as an art form, Bartók spent his time teaching, composing, performing and collecting folksongs. During this period between 1907 and 1917, the field trips provided the core material of the Eight

39 Tibor Bános, A Pesti Kabaré 100 Éve, [100 Years of the ‘Pesti’ Cabaret], (Budapest: Vince Kiadó, 2008), 16-17.
41 Ibid., 98.
42 Ibid., 14.
Hungarian Folksongs. In 1911, he finished his one act opera, Bluebeard’s Castle, but he had to wait seven years for its premiere.

Vilma Medgyaszay’s career

Medgyaszay’s career as a singer and actor began in 1904. She played the title role ‘Iluska’ in the premiere of Kacsóh’s operetta, János Vitész (John the Hero), at the Király Színház (Király Street Theatre). The success of this nationalistic work went beyond any expectations: “within five months two hundred thousand people had seen the production.”

Bartók briefly mentioned John the Hero in a letter to his mother on 18 January 1907. Dille drew attention to this correspondence in the reprint of the original manuscript of the Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano (1906), in which Bartók expressed his deep concerns about the quality of music that Hungarian audiences generally preferred. Bartók did not know Medgyaszay at the time the letter was composed in 1907:

[. . .] For, I won’t bother any more with Hungarian blockheads, that is the public. Kodály is right in writing ’roast pheasant is no food for asses, even if forced into them they can’t digest it.’ Let asses be asses and let us go with all serious intellectual achievements abroad. The people here might well drown into their precious John the Hero (János Vitész) and into their Merry Widow (Víg Özvegy) if they please, it is no business of mine.44

However, twenty-one years later Bartók and Medgyaszay’s paths coincided when the composer asked Medgyaszay to be one of the singers for the 1928 recordings.

In 1907, as Medgyaszay’s fame gradually grew, Ferenc Molnár (1878–1952), a

43 “A Király Színház, [The Royal Theatre].” in Magyar Színháztörténet II. 1873-1920, Magyar Elektronikus Könyvtár (MEK), [Hungarian Electronic Library], 614. 
44 Bartók–Kodály, Hungarian Folksongs for song with piano, Reprint of the original manuscript with commentaries by Denijs Dille, 51. 
The reprint was accessed by Kornélia Pérchy in June 2013 at the library of the Budapest Music Center (BMC).
contemporary journalist, novelist, and playwright approached the director of the Modern Színház Cabaret (Modern Theatre Cabaret), encouraging him to sign a contract with her. Molnár saw Medgyaszay in John the Hero and commented at the time on her excellent acting and singing style and good sense of humour.\footnote{Bános, A Pesti Kabaré 100 Éve, 30.}

Medgyaszay’s debut coincided with the opening night of the cabaret’s glamorous new building. Although she only sang a small number of short songs, she received a triumphant reception from the audience.\footnote{Bános, A Pesti Kabaré 100 Éve, 30.} As Báños described her, she eventually went on to become the prima donna of the cabaret.\footnote{Ibid., 38.}

In the following year, Endre Nagy (1877–1938) was appointed the director of the theatre, which had been renamed as the Modern Színpad (Modern Stage Cabaret). He was to become a very polished ‘master of ceremonies.’ His wit, which focused on the politics of the day, society gossip, and general intrigues, attracted large audiences. Nagy was a devotee of Medgyaszay and often remarked that her unique talent was her ability to interpret any kind of song, from the mundane to the most sophisticated, with such excitement that the songs turned into gems.\footnote{Ibid., 38.}

As time passed, Medgyaszay gained the privilege of selecting her own repertoire. Because of this freedom, she was able to give free reign to her love of poetry and often sang arrangements of many of her favourite Hungarian poems. One of her preferred poets was the novelist and critic, Dezső Kosztolányi (1885–1936), who also spoke highly of Medgyaszay. He said in Nyugat, the leading Hungarian literary journal at the time, that Medgyaszay had a distinctive Hungarian approach to the performance of cabaret songs. According to Kosztolányi, her delivery was

\footnote{The original text in Hungarian: "[. . .] az ő [Medgyaszay] előadásában az útszáli kuplé is dallá nemesedett, és a legelvontabb dal is megtelt a kuplék szikrázó ízgalmával."}
distinctively different from the Viennese, Parisienne or Berliner style. Jenő Heltai (1871–1957), poet and novelist, even described her as “The Queen of Hungarian song.” In an essay from 1932, Kodály recalls seeing Medgyaszay in the cabaret whilst Nagy was the director. In the paper, he describes how Medgyaszay sang Hungarian songs surrounded by dancers in folk costume.

By the second decade of the twentieth-century, Medgyaszay’s fame as a cabaret star was well established, and she was already at the pinnacle of her career. The five-year lease on Nagy’s theatre ended in 1913, which prompted his move to Paris for one year. Medgyaszay’s popularity and financial independence allowed her to take over the lease and manage the cabaret herself. The establishment underwent another name change. This time it bore her own name, the Medgyaszay Cabaret. For a number of weeks after opening in August 1913 the cabaret thrived because of her reputation, but this initial success was not to last. The audience missed Nagy’s witty sense of humour, intellect, and brilliant skills as a ‘master of ceremonies.’

Medgyaszay’s cabaret struggled further when the rival theatre, the Royal Orfeum, invited Nagy back to the stage. By 1914 as the tragic events brought on by the outbreak of World War One impacted on the morale of the population, the desire for distraction began to manifest itself amongst the people. Cabaret and the

51 Zoltán Kodály, "Confession," in The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály, ed. Ferenc Bónis (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1974), 211. “Once Vilma Medgyaszay, accompanied by some girls in Palóc attire, appeared on the stage of the Endre Nagy Cabaret. They sang prettily and then Endre Nagy came forth and expounded his opinion on the folksong, which, naturally, reflected the view of his own period. He said that every provincial region must surely have its own poet who wrote the songs, which then spread among the people. The evening meetings of the Friends of Nyugat had not yet begun so that I could only argue with Endre Nagy in myself, thinking that anyone who could write even three lines of the kind we had found would be worth his weight in gold.”
52 Bános, A Pesti Kabaré 100 Éve, 51-53.
emerging moving picture theatres were two of the most popular forms of light entertainment at this time. They were in fact the most affordable and accessible options open to the general public who desired, even if fleetingly, to leave the horrors of the war behind them. This resurgence in interest did not, however, benefit Medgyaszay. Losing Nagy to a rival meant that her cabaret also lost the vital comic ingredient that audiences were looking for. The cabaret tried to stem the exodus of audiences by hiring some of the best-known entertainers, but still could not save the theatre. Medgyaszay finally closed the doors of her cabaret in 1915.

Despite this setback, Medgyaszay continued her solo performing career. She was an artist in high demand in many theatres and her reputation followed her beyond the borders of Hungary. She was invited to perform in Vienna at the Theater an der Wien and several times in Germany in 1920 and 1930, receiving a warm reception wherever she went. Towards the end of her career, Medgyaszay performed as an actress in various theatres in Budapest eventually retiring from the Comedy Theatre at the age of seventy.

Bartók’s letters reveal that the composer and Medgyaszay already knew each other by 1924. They performed separately at the Comedy Theatre in Budapest on a literary cabaret evening. Three weeks later, on the evening of 15 February they met and performed again at the Magyar Tőzsde Klub (Hungarian Stock Market Club). At this event, apart from his own solo piano compositions, Bartók accompanied Izabella Nagy, who sang some of his songs. Presumably, it may have been the first time that

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53 Ibid., 56.
55 Béla Bartók’s life in letters, CD-ROM, notes on January 25, 1924. Date of the events: 25, 26, and 28 January 1924.
56 The detailed program of the event can be found at the concert’s database of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute for Musicology, http://db.zti.hu/koncert/koncert_Adatlap.asp?kID=2928.
Medgyaszay heard Bartók’s vocal compositions.

In the mid-1920s, Medgyaszay gave frequent recitals in Budapest and at times, her accompanist was Kálmán Nádasdy, one of Kodály’s students at the Academy of Music. Usually the programme included a vast selection of music from English and French folk ballads, cabaret chansons and musical arrangements of Hungarian poems. This collaboration between Medgyaszay and Nádasdy coincided with the appearance of Bartók and Kodály’s art songs and folk song arrangements in Hungarian bookshops.57

Although Bartók composed the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* much earlier, in 1907 and in 1917, the Viennese Universal Edition first published it in 1922. One of Bartók’s most significant art song cycles, op. 16. *Öt Dal* (Five Songs, BB 72) was composed in 1916. However, the first printed edition appeared in 1923.

By this time, Kodály had produced a large number of compositions for voice and piano. Two volumes of Kodály’s *Magyar Népzene* (Hungarian Folk Music) series already existed, as did some of his art song cycles such as op. 6. *Megkésett Melódiák* (Belated Melodies) composed in 1912–1916, and op. 5. *Két Ének* (Two Songs) from 1913–1919. Kodály previously completed op. 1. *Énekszó* (‘Singing’) in 1907–1909, which includes sixteen art song settings based on folk poems. This book was first published in 1921.

Nádasdy purchased all the existing music58 and introduced the songs to Medgyaszay, who was captivated after listening to them.59 As a purist, she was determined to learn and perform these compositions in the most authentic manner. In order to achieve this goal she gave up singing cabaret chansons for a whole year,

58 In Bónis’s book, Nádasdy mentioned the following scores that he had purchased:
Bartók–Kodály: *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* (1906), *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* (1917), Bartók: *Five Songs* op. 16 (E. Ady, 1916), and various Kodály’s publications, 136.
despite the risk this entailed to her career. Her enthusiasm was such that she simply did not want to be distracted by any other kind of music. She learned the songs with Nádasdy, who soon recognized that Medgyaszay’s musicality and approach to the folk song singing style was exceptional.

In the following year he was eventually able to convince Medgyaszay to give a recital at the Academy of Music. Through this recital, Medgyaszay wanted to capitalise on the emerging interest in Hungarian folksongs, in order to highlight their merits. As many of Bartók and Kodály’s art were complex, no one had up until then attempted to perform them in recital. The fact that the first solo performance was given by a cabaret singer made the feat all the more extraordinary. Prior to the concert, Medgyaszay sought permission from the composers. She went to see Bartók, who commented at the audition: “[. . .] I wish everybody would sing the songs like you do, [. . .] because unfortunately – with some notable exceptions – the singers merely sing the note heads but they cannot interpret the songs.”

On the day of the concert, 3 February 1927, both composers were present at the Academy of Music. György Kósa accompanied Medgyaszay at the piano. The recital was well received by the audience and most of the critics. In his review, Viktor Lányi described how Medgyaszay’s delivery avoided any unnecessary

61 Bónis, Így látott Kodályt, 136.
62 Czigány and Lázár, A muzsika hallámhosszán, 261.
63 Bónis made the translation from Hungarian into English.
The original text in Hungarian: “[. . .] bár mindenki így énekelné, mint maga. [. . .] mert sajnos – tisztelet a kivételnek – az énekesek csak kottafejeket énekelnek, de kifejezni nem tudnak...”
64 György Kósa (1897-1984) was a Hungarian composer and pianist. From 1912, he learned piano from Bartók at the Academy of Music – Budapest.
In 1930, Bartók in a verbal conversation with one of his piano students, Irma Molnár, revealed that he considered Kósa as his most talented apprentice. The book that contains this information is: Ferenc László, Bartók könyv 1970/71 (Bukarest: Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 1971), 111-112.
65 The detailed program of the recital can be found at the concert’s database of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute for Musicology, http://db.zti.hu/koncert/koncert_Adatlap.asp?kID=3366.
gestures and movements, and how the essence of her performance centred on the way she coloured the words and naturally altered the rhythm to the text. However, another critic, Sándor Jemnitz was not convinced by Medgyaszay’s vocal rendition. He did not find Medgyaszay’s approach to Bartók’s art songs well connected. Jemnitz stated the Five Songs (op. 16), could only be performed by an “accomplished artist.” In the booklet of the ‘Centenary Edition of Bartók Records’ in 1981, Somfai noted the following about Medgyaszay:

> Her voice was nothing out of the ordinary, and her singing style pretty instinctive, but perhaps it was precisely a performing manner which was unlike that of the concert platform’s which enchanted the two composers.

After the concert’s success, both composers were convinced that Medgyaszay’s honest interpretation faithfully represented the Hungarian folk song performing style.

In appreciate for her performance, Kodály dedicated the fourth volume of *Hungarian Folk Music for voice and piano* (Magyar Népzene IV) to Medgyaszay.

From 1928 onwards, Medgyaszay demonstrated her wholehearted dedication to Bartók and Kodálys’ songs by incorporating their songs in her concert program whenever the possibility arose. From time to time this was to prove a difficult task, especially when event managers asked her not to include them because as they assured her, the audience would not like them. In 1928 after a recital in Temesvár (today Timișoara, Romania) she said to a journalist:

> I am going to sing the songs by Kodály and Bartók and I don’t mind if some people do not like them [. . .] and I believe the time will come when the audience will want to listen to nothing else but Kodály and Bartók’s music. I

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also believe that they will eventually value their music more than cabaret songs. Look, if I am saying this, someone who has made a living from singing these cabaret chansons, you must believe me when I tell you that we should not underestimate these musicians.\(^{70}\)

Following this, Medgyaszay devoted her life to popularise Bartók and Kodály’s compositions and became one of the best-known artists in the field, acknowledged and endorsed by both composers.

2.2.2 Mária Basilides (1886–1946)

Mária Basilides’s career had a more conventional start. After completing her studies at the Music Academy in Budapest, Basilides was immediately engaged by the Népopera\(^{71}\) (The People’s Opera) in 1911.\(^{72}\) During that first year, one of the most memorable roles she played was Mignon in Ambroise Thomas’s opera of the same name. Her performances were well received by the audience and critics alike, which assisted her to consolidate her reputation as one of the great mezzo-sopranos of the period.\(^{73}\) During the following two seasons the People’s Opera Company gave her the opportunity to sing fifteen various mezzo and alto roles.\(^{74}\) She later made her debut as a member of the Hungarian Royal Opera on 14 May 1916, singing the title role in Bizet’s Carmen. Although the premiere received an ambiguous reception...

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\(^{70}\) László Szirmai, Medgyaszay Vilma a Kodály és Bartók-dalról (Temesvári Hírlap, 11 July, 1928), quoted in Ferenc László, Bartók Dolgozatok 1981 (Bukarest: Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 1982), 53. Kornélia Péchy made the translation from Hungarian into English. The original text in Hungarian: “Én eléneklem Kodály- és Bartók-dalaimat, nem bánom, ha nem mind tapsolnak [. . .], és hiszem, hogy eljön egyszer az az idő, mikor a közönség már nem is fog mást akarni, csak Kodályt és Bartókot, úgy gondolom, hogy ezeket a muzsikusokat fogja megbecsülni és nemcsak a kabarédalokat. Látja, én beszélek így, aki egész életemen keresztül énekeltem ezeket a kabaréaszonokat, ha én beszélek így, elhíheti, hogy ezekkel a muzsikusokkal szemben nem szabad kishitűnek lenni.”

\(^{71}\) The People’s Opera today is known as the Erkel Theatre.

\(^{72}\) Antal Molnár, Basilides Mária (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1967), 12.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 66.
from the critics, her career at the Royal Opera was on the rise.

Apart from Basilides’s exceptional voice and musicality, her modesty and sincere manner were factors that also contributed to her growing popularity. Basilides was capable of adopting the different styles that the opera house’s repertoire required, from Monteverdi and Wagner to modern music. She was also able to combine her operatic career with performances on concert platforms. According to Molnár, in the early 1920s Basilides was one of the few artists who recognised Bartók and Kodály’s genius and their effort in Hungarian folk music research.

In 1923, she was amongst the first singers who began to collaborate with both composers in their efforts to popularise Hungarian songs in the concert halls. One of the first joint recitals took place at the Corvin cinema on 15 April, with Basilides performing a number of Kodály’s songs. On 4 November of that same year, she sang two art songs by Bartók at the Vigadó concert hall in Budapest.

During the following year, Basilides made her first concert tour abroad to Germany. This tour was a resounding success, and she began to receive invitations from conductors and management companies which made her a regular guest artist in European concert halls. During her career as an oratorio and concert singer, Basilides worked with the most acknowledged conductors of the era such as Bruno Walter, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Erich Kleiber, and Richard Strauss. Her love of Bartók and Kodály’s music was such that in that same year of 1924, she performed Kodály’s
songs in a recital in Berlin.80

Between 1924 and 1932, Kodály wrote a number of new solo vocal compositions: the series of Hungarian Folk Music (Magyar Népzene) which in the end contained sixty-two songs in eleven volumes. In contrast, Bartók had not composed any solo vocal works between 1918 and 1928, with the exception of one song cycle, Five Village Scenes (Falun, BB 87a) published in 1924. Perhaps the 1928 HMV recordings prompted Bartók to write new vocal settings again, as in the following year he began to compose the Twenty Hungarian Folksongs (Húsz Magyar Népdal, BB 98), which he completed in four volumes in 1929.

Some of Bartók and Kodály’s works were dedicated to Basilides or premiered by her. She became a devoted performer of their songs. Between 1928 and the 1940s, Basilides gave three annual solo recitals at the Academy of Music.81 Whenever it was possible, she ensured that she incorporated Bartók and Kodály’s songs into her programme.

A newspaper article suggests that Basilides was certainly aware of and had heard Bartók and Kodálys’ original phonograph recordings by 1929. She stated the following in that paper:

In my forthcoming recital, I am going to introduce a new way of performing some folksongs from Bartók and Kodály’s collection. I will sing them without any accompaniment, based on the authentic phonograph recordings, in a traditional way as village people sing them.82

During this particular concert at the Academy of Music in Budapest on 16

80 Molnár, Basilides Mária, 48.
81 Molnár, Basilides Mária, 61.
82 Károly Kristóf, Beszélgetések Bartók Bélával (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1957), 54. Kornélia Pérchy made the translation from Hungarian into English. The original text in Hungarian: "Következő daléstémen újítást vezetek be. Elhatároztam, hogy a Bartók-Kodály népdalgyűjtésből, az eredeti fonográf-felvételek alapján minden kíséret nélkül (úgy, mint falun szokás) elénekelek néhányat [. . .]."
October 1929, Basilides performed nine folksongs ‘a cappella’. The selected songs were collected by Bartók, Kodály and Lajtha. According to the critic, Gyula Fodor, Basilides’s rendition of the songs had a great impact on the audience. Most of those present that evening had never heard authentic folksongs before. Basilides interpreted the melodies with a depth of feeling, and her vivid rendition of the poems captured the audience’s attention. Basilides became Bartók’s regular concert partner, finding the right balance between operatic and folk styles of singing. As Somfai stated:

She [Basilides] was the great Hungarian operatic, oratorio and Lied contralto of the age, and she understood that Bartók did neither require an operatic approach, nor an imitation of peasant performances of the folksong-revival type. These folksong arrangements of a highly varied style had to be tackled using “Lied” technique. [. . .] it is clear to the listener of their joint recordings that she proved to be Bartók’s best partner.

In August 1946, Basilides’s health suddenly deteriorated. Her affinity with Bartók was such that one of her last wishes was to die on the anniversary of the composer’s death. On 26 September 1946, on the first anniversary of Bartók’s death, Mária Basilides passed away.

2.2.3 Ferenc Székelyhidy (1885–1954)

Ferenc Székelyhidy was originally a lawyer. Whilst completing his legal studies he also learned singing in Kolozsvár (now in Romania, Cluj-Napoca). Although he had no desire to become a professional singer, after three years of taking formal lessons, he auditioned for the Hungarian Royal Opera. He was

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83 Szabolcsi and Bartha, Zenetudományi Tanulmányok Bartók Béla Emlékére, 347. The detailed program of the recital can be found at the concert’s database of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute for Musicology, http://db.zti.hu/koncert/koncert_Adatlap.asp?kID=3645.
84 Ibid.
86 Molnár, Basilides Mária, 64-65.
87 Viktor Papp, Arcképek az Operaházból (Budapest: Stádium Sajtóvállalat Rt., 1924), 59.
accepted and offered a three-year contract. Initially he did not accept the offer as he intended to pursue a career as a town clerk—singing was just his hobby. He returned to Kolozsvár and worked in public administration.

However, the opera house sent him a written contract with ‘better’ conditions, which in turn changed his original decision. Central to this change of mind were contractual arrangements allowing him to leave the opera house after one year if it did not suit his needs. He debuted at the Royal Opera on 16 November 1909 in the title role of Hunyadi. Ferenc Erkel (1810–1893) wrote this Hungarian opera, Hunyadi László in 1843. Despite the fact that Hunyadi’s character had always been considered a challenging one for a young tenor’s voice, twenty-four year old Székelyhidy received a positive reception from most of the critics. Generally, the reviews emphasised his good vocal technique and acting ability and some of the critics mentioned his clear Hungarian diction.

In the next two years Székelyhidy’s career blossomed and he became one of the leading tenors of the opera house. In 1911, Richard Wagner’s son, Siegfried, invited him to perform at the Bayreuth Festival. During the 1911 and 1912 festival seasons, Székelyhidy gave twenty-eight performances in three Wagnerian operas. The appearances were highly successful. After his return from Germany, Székelyhidy’s career continued to flourish in Hungary in both opera and concert.

Székelyhidy’s first encounter with Bartók’s songs took place in Vienna on 12

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89 Papp, Arcképek az Operaházóból, 59.

90 Kornélia Péchy accessed the article in June 2014 at the Archives of the Hungarian State Opera House, Budapest.


92 “Művészek otthonukban,” Vasárnapí Ujság, 3 March 1918, 137.

93 Papp, Arcképek az Operaházóból, 59.
January 1918, in a concert organised by the Ministry of War. Székelyhidy performed five soldiers’ songs (Ungarische Soldatenlieder) arranged by Bartók and Kodály. At this concert, Bartók was the accompanist and was pleased with Székelyhidy’s performance. Székelyhidy concurred with the composer’s opinion as to the success of the concert in a newspaper interview on 15 January 1918 for Magyar Színpad, under the title, ‘Székelyhidy’s opinion about the historical concert in Vienna.’ Towards the end of the interview, he stated the following: “When I say that the Hungarian songs were a great success in Vienna, it is not because I am a patriot.” It was the premiere of the last three songs (no. 6-8, 1917) of the song cycle, which were later to become the second sets of Bartók’s Eight Hungarian Folksongs.

On 19 November 1923, Székelyhidy sang at the première of Kodály’s Psalmus Hungaricus op.13 (Hungarian Psalm) in Budapest. Kodály composed this epic choral

94 Bartók Jr., Bartók Béla műhelyében, 125.
95 In Béla Bartók Jr.’s book, Kodály’s name appeared as the other composer.
96 According to the detailed catalogue of Bartók’s recitals at the Bartók Archives in Budapest, another recital with Bartók and Székelyhidy took place 11th February 1918 at the Royal Opera House in Budapest. On this occasion they performed the same repertoire of songs as in Vienna on 12th January 1918. Three songs were arranged by Bartók and two by Emma Kodály, Kodály’s wife. The following songs were performed: Töltik a nagy, Eddig való dolgom, Olvad a hó, Keresik a nem lelik, Nézd a huszár.
98 The researcher acknowledges Ferenc János Szabó for providing this article.

An extract of the interview in Hungarian:
“A Konzerthaus Pazar látványt nyújtott, olyan kép tártult elém a pódiumról, ami örökre felekedhetetlen lesz számonma. Csillagó egyenruhák, érdemrendek ezei és gyönyörű estélyi toilettek, mesés ékszerek. A királyné kíséretében huszonhat főhercegnő jelent meg a hangversenyen. Az udvar jelenlété mellett is rendkívül lelkes volt a hangulat, a közönség nem feszélyeztette magát és zajosan ünnepelte a közremüködőket. Nem a sovinizmus beszél belőlem, mikor azt mondom, hogy a magyar dalok aratták a legnagyobb sikert [. . .].”
and orchestral work for the gala concert to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the union of Buda and Pest. The Psalmus’s first international performance took place in Zürich on 17 June 1926. The success was such that from the following year this piece was performed all over Europe. The enthusiastic reception of the work in Cambridge on 30 November 1927, and in London on 4 December of the same year was to play a pivotal role in the decision of HMV to go to Hungary to make recordings in 1928.99 According to Breuer:

After the success of the Psalmus Hungaricus, His Master’s Voice accepted M. D. Calvocoressi’s suggestion that it should make recordings in Budapest of the finest pieces of the Hungarian Folk Music cycle, with Béla Bartók as pianist and the best Hungarian Kodály singers. Thus the first recordings of Kodály works were inspired by an English source.100

Székelyhidy’s first participation in a recital of Kodály’s songs took place at the Budapest Academy of Music on 22 April 1924.101 From 1925, on Székelyhidy regularly gave recitals of Kodály’s songs. Critical reception was favourable: “thanks to the effort of Zoltán Kodály, Mária Basilides, Rózsi Marschalkó and Ferenc Székelyhidy, there have been a growing number of folk song recitals in recent years.”102

Although Hungarian music and authentic Hungarian folksongs were not yet a fashionable genre, they had at least arrived at the doorstep of the concert halls. The recitals were only patronised by a small group of people who shared an interest in

101 There is only limited information about the recital at the concert’s database of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute for Musicology. The names of the singers appear but the detailed program or the pianist/pianists’ name are not.
Kornélia Pérchy made the translation from Hungarian into English. The original text in Hungarian: "Népzenehangversenyünk, hálá Kodály Zoltán, Basilides Mária, Marschalkó Rózsi és Székelyhidy Ferenc fáradozásának, az utóbbi esztendőkben örvendetesen megszaporodtak.”
this “new” music. The dilemma was how this Hungarian music, which was at this stage a fringe interest, could reach out to the wider public. In the same article, Tóth expressed the view that music critics could play a defining role in building a bridge between the art that is not yet known, and the audience.103

As Bartók and Kodály’s reputation grew internationally, an ever-growing number of listeners were drawn to their music. By 1932, Bartók and Kodály were well-known composers in Hungary. The first performance of the *Psalmus Hungaricus* at the Budapest Opera House took place in 1932 to celebrate Kodály’s fiftieth birthday, Székelyhidy singing the tenor solo. In a review the day after the concert, Tóth expressed the view Székelyhidy was the pre-eminent interpreter of Kodály’s songs. Székelyhidy had always been at the vanguard of Kodály’s supporters fighting for recognition of Kodály’s music, even in the days when very few people had any faith in the composer.104

In the first section of Chapter 2, I presented a brief overview of the ten hours of Bartók’s recordings that survived. The core of this section then points to Bartók’s 1928 recordings with His Master’s Voice. These recordings include the two song cycles—*Five Hungarian Folksongs*, and the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs*—that I analyse in Chapter 3.

In addition, in this chapter I also explored the minister of Religion and Public Education of Hungary, Count Kuno Klebelsberg’s achievements in relation to the HMV recordings. He was responsible for cultural affairs at the time the 1928 recordings were made, and he secured an agreement with HMV to record a wide selection of Hungarian folk music. The next section of the chapter provides an

103 Ibid.
unpublished letter written by Bartók to Universal Edition in November 1928. This is the only correspondence in which the composer mentions his agreement with HMV.

In the second half of Chapter 2, I offered a comprehensive account of the three singers’ professional lives and their background. Two of the singers were classically trained opera singers, Mária Basilides (alto) and Ferenc Székelyhidy (tenor), who were principal artists at the Royal Opera House Budapest. The third performer, however, Vilma Medgyaszay (soprano) was a famous cabaret singer. All three singers had previously performed Hungarian folksongs and were familiar with Bartók and/or Kodály’s music prior to the 1928 recordings.
CHAPTER 3 – ANALYSIS OF THE TWO SONG CYCLES

Characteristics to be considered in the analysis

In this chapter, the thesis focuses on the performance analysis of Bartók’s 1928 recordings and identifies the three singers’ performance choices within the selected songs. Although the analysis primarily focuses on the vocal performance, at some points, I also comment on Bartók’s performance. The analysis also examines what specific changes occur between the recorded performances and the score’s notation. This provides valuable information about how flexible Bartók was with the singers and how faithful the artists were to elements within the score. In Chapter 4, the thesis further examines how the performance of these songs has evolved over time. The following parameters will be considered in the analysis:

- rhythm and text (rhythmic adjustments to fit the text)
- *portamento* and slides
- tempo (overall and specific moments)
- breath control and dynamics
- *parlando-rubato* style singing
- *Sprechgesang* (speech-like singing)
- ornamentation (*appoggiatura* and *acciaccatura*)
- vocal tone and colour
- vibrato or straight tone
- background of the singers (operatic, lied or cabaret)
- additional and/or omitted notes
- deviation from the score
Bartók’s views on the interpretation of Hungarian folksongs

In 1906, Bartók expressed his view on the interpretation of folksongs in the manuscript notes for Bartók–Kodály *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano*. These notes, however, were not incorporated in the 1906 edition. They first appeared in print in 1970 when Denijs Dille published the reprint of the original manuscript.¹

In this publication, Nancy Bush and Ilona L. Lukács made the translations from Hungarian to English. The following remark appears in the notes:

[…] one should not come to believe that each song has its own standard and regular tempo: folk singers very often sing the same song with greatly varying tempi. It is up to the performer to hit upon the right tempo by which a particular song is at its best. […] Dynamic effects are unknown to folk singers. According to the occasion and to their mood, singers sing louder or more softly, however, no other shading can be discerned than the natural change in volume due to the mounting and descending of the voice. Artistic performance, on the other hand, cannot do without dynamic effects, but with folksongs, this artistic means has to be applied very sparsely. However, one should not believe that the sole manner in which folksongs are to be performed is by imitating the way folk singers sing them. […] It might well be that a good Hungarian singer will reveal such beauties of our folksongs which have remained hidden when sung by common people.²

The manuscript’s notes in the first series in Bartók–Kodály *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* (1906) reveal elements of the two composers’ performance rationale in the following manner:

Those who know the way common people sing in the villages will not err in performing the songs. Even those who speak Hungarian well will not commit grave mistakes. […] For a song is a song; not all words must necessarily sound in a song the way they sound in ordinary speech. A slight divergence from ordinary pronunciation does not disturb the rhythm.³

¹ Denijs Dille, ed., *Béla Bartók – Zoltán Kodály: Hungarian Folksongs for song with piano, Reprint of the original manuscript with commentaries by Denijs Dille* (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1970), 44.
   The reprint was accessed by Kornélia Péchy in June 2013 at the library of the Budapest Music Center (BMC).
² Notes to *Béla Bartók – Zoltán Kodály: Hungarian Folksongs for song with piano, ed. by Dille*, 44.
³ Ibid.
Rhythm adjustment

Bartók expressed that “in the majority of the songs the text is decisive for the performance, the rhythm of the music follows the words more closely than signs can express.” All three singers documented in the 1928 recordings made adjustments to the text and they did not follow exactly the composer’s notation. The most likely reason why this occurs is because Hungarian, as any other language, has its own melody, both long and short vowels (there are fourteen vowels in the Hungarian language; eight high and six low), and stressed syllables that would be difficult to understand if the singer closely follows the written score.

How do non-Hungarian singers perform Hungarian folksongs?

Although most of Bartók’s song cycles have English or German translations, both song cycles—the *Five Hungarian Folksongs* and the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs*—are typically performed in Hungarian, which has proven to be a considerable challenge to many non-Hungarian singers. However, this does not necessarily mean that a non-Hungarian would be unable to perform these songs. Somfai explains:

A foreign musician of outstanding intelligence and with an outstanding ear can absorb sufficient folk music (not only Hungarian, but if possible Rumanian and Slovakian as well!) and can familiarize himself with the rhythms and intonations of the Hungarian language.5

The remarkable recordings of Bartók’s *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs* (BB 98, 1929) by the Turkish soprano Leyla Gencer support this statement very well. For twenty-five years, Gencer was one of the finest singers of Teatro alla Scala, Milan,

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4 Ibid.
where on 16 April 1978 she gave a recital which included thirteen songs by Bartók. Kodály’s *Hungarian Folksongs* sung by the American soprano, Felicia Weathers in 1966, and the Swedish mezzo-soprano, Anne Sofie von Otter from 1998, are also outstanding performances by non-Hungarian speaking artists.

More recently, the American soprano Dawn Upshaw has at times included Bartók’s folk song arrangements in her recital programmes. In a recital in Budapest in 2003, the Russian opera singer Evgeny Nesterenko (bass) sang the 1906 version of *Elindultam szép hazámbul* ‘I left behind my country’ (CD track 21). Nesterenko’s diction is nearly perfect in this recording, which adds weight to the argument that non-Hungarian singers can also perform the songs.

The above-mentioned singers’ excellent diction and interpretation of Hungarian folksongs confirms Somfai’s statement. Unfortunately, even though Bartók composed over eighty songs for solo voice and piano, including art songs and folksong arrangements, non-Hungarian singers rarely perform his songs.

**Portamento**

David Milson describes *portamento* as “the process of gliding from one note to another through all intermediate pitches.” The term *portamento* means ‘carriage’ and according to Ellen T. Harris “defines an important vocal technique for *legato*

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6 *Leyla Gencer in Concert*, Walter Baracchi (Piano), Recording Date: April 16, 1978, Recording Location: Milan, Teatro Alla Scala, Audio CD (released in March 28, 2006), Myto Records Italy / Qualiton Imports Ltd, ASIN:B000ERJ55O.
8 *Anne Sofie von Otter – Folksongs* (Dvořák, Kodály, Britten, Grainger, Larsson, Hahn), Bengt Forsberg (Piano), Audio CD (released in July 18, 2000), Deutsche Grammophon, ASIN: B00004TL2P.
9 Evgeny Nesterenko (b. 1938–) is a Russian operatic bass.
10 The recital took place at the ‘Óbudai Társaskör’ on 16 October 2003, pianist: Anna Lugosi.
singing already established at the beginning of the 17th century.”  

Throughout the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, the use of *portamento* was common practice and widely used both in opera and in song recital. The year of the HMV recordings falls into this period. Hence the analysis of these recordings centred on the role of *portamento*, rhythmic adjustments and the accuracy between the edited score and the recordings. As Elliot states in relation to the use of *portamento*:

> Early twentieth-century recordings also show French singers using *portamento* as a gentle slide or stretch to enhance legato and connect small and large leaps. As with everything else in the French style, *portamento* was used with refinement and subtle expression.  

This statement is very close to the *portamento* that Hungarian folk style singing requires. It is more like an expression that the performers instinctively create in order to add different colours and delicate nuances to the tone, depending on the importance of the word he or she wants to emphasize. In an essay from 1921, Bartók affirmed the following about the use of *portamento* in authentic Hungarian singing style:

> [. . .] we must have recourse to the phonograph or the gramophone as often as possible, even if we have to deal with apparently simple melodies. That is because the peasant’s singing style is full of peculiarities, often very characteristic and worthy of recording with precision (such as the *portamento* of the voice, irrational rhythms, and so forth), which [. . .] we are hardly able to note down on paper with our conventional symbols.  

In the fifth volume of the book, *Writings by Bartók*, the composer described a *portamento* sign in the following manner:

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The oblique wavy line means a gliding (portamento or glissando). means: the gliding takes the full value of the note, i.e. the glissando starts immediately after the beginning of the note and ends approximately on the pitch where the wavy line ends. means: the gliding glissando takes only the second half or last third of the note.[ . . .]15

However, the portamento with its long tradition began to lose its currency around the mid-1940s. It has not disappeared completely, but its role certainly has diminished since that time. John Potter tracks the history of portamento in singing through the centuries, making an interesting observation about today’s singers who focus on early music and historical performance. According to Potter, most of these singers do not apply portamento in their own singing.16

Bartók’s notation

Bartók was meticulous with the notation of the folk tunes that he collected in the field. He gave clear instructions and detailed explanations for the musical signs, which he used extensively.17 In The Cambridge Companion to Bartók, Rachel Beckles Willson states the following about Bartók’s notation:

“Although by 1920 he [Bartók] had a code of signs for notating all the nuances of the peasant singers (intonation falling between two notes, speech, clucking sounds, slides and tremolos, irregular metres, subtle variances in pulse, secondary stresses and relative intensity of individual notes, occasional sobs) such indications never appeared in his vocal scores.”18

Before beginning to analyse the songs, Martha Elliott’s thoughts about the use of a published score are worth mentioning. In her book, Singing in Style, she stated:


The English version of Bartók’s description of gliding can be found in the on-line version of Béla Bartók: Complete Collection of Hungarian Folk Songs.

db.zti.hu/nza/br_use_en.asp.


17 See an example for Bartók’s description of portamento in the previous “Portamento” part.

It was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that composers began to insist their music be performed exactly as it was written. Consequently, they began to include more precise performance instructions in the score. As a result of this relatively recent practice, we are accustomed to treating any score with reverence in order to serve the wishes of the composer.¹⁹

If this is the case, the selected Bartók’s songs would have met this criterion. Following on from Elliott’s assertion, the intention of this dissertation is to provide some insight into whether the performers did or did not present precisely the composer’s notation and markings in the score.

3.1 FIVE HUNGARIAN FOLKSONGS (BB 97)

The recording of the *Five Hungarian Folksongs* 20 took place on 5 December 1928 in Budapest. 21 The performers, Bartók and Medgyaszay, used the revised version of five songs of the *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* (BB 42, 1906). 22 According to Dille, Bartók provided very few, if any, tempo indications and dynamic marks for the songs in the 1928 drafts. However, in the first publication of 1970, Dille made some necessary changes to the score according to the manuscript and the original recordings. For instance, in Dille’s published score of 1970, the MM (metronome marking) numbers appear at the beginning of the songs, which are editorial additions. 23

Before the first edition was printed (Editio Musica Budapest - 1970), Dille sought consent from Kodály in 1963 to include the modifications in the score. 24 Somfai noted that Bartók only began to introduce metronome markings (MM) to his compositions as of 1907–1908. 25 In 1930, when Universal Edition decided to reprint some of Bartók’s works, the composer realised that the given MM numbers in previous publications were at times incorrect. 26 In order to explain the composer’s concerns regarding the metronome, Somfai points to a letter addressed to Max Rostal dated 6 November 1931. 27 In this correspondence, Bartók explained the following

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20 *Five Hungarian Folksongs*: His Master’s Voice AM 1676 - matrix number: 2052, AM 1678 matrix number: BW 2053.
23 Dille, preface to Bartók: *Five Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano*.
24 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 254-255.
27 Max Rostal (1905–1991) was an Austrian violin player. In the early 1950s, Rostal recorded Bartók’s *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* with the London Symphony Orchestra, Conductor: Sir Malcolm Sargent. Vinyl LP, Decca LXT 2574 2 sides.
about the metronome: “[. . .] in my earlier works MM signs are very often inexact, [. . .]. The only explanation I can think of is that I metronomized too hastily at that time, and perhaps my metronome was working imperfectly.”

The songs that Bartók revised from the 1906 publication were nos. 1, 2, 4, 8, and 9. However, the sequence of the songs deviated for the HMV session. Almost certainly, the reason for this discrepancy was the time limits of the 78-rpm discs. This meant that in order to fit the songs on one side, they had to split them. Three songs were recorded on one disc (nos. 1, 2, and 4), and two songs on another disc (nos. 9 and 8). The best take was then selected and used for the ‘master’ record.

3.1.1 Far behind I left my country

The first setting from Bartók’s Five Hungarian Folksongs is Elindultam szép hazámbul, ‘Far behind I left my country’. The song is about someone who is leaving his beloved country and will probably never be able to return. It is one of the best-known Hungarian folksongs expressing patriotic sentiments with which most Hungarians would be able to identify.

The song also has a poignant significance in Bartók’s life. On 8 October 1940, four days prior to emigrating to the United States, Bartók and Ditta Pásztory (the composer’s second wife), gave a farewell recital at the Liszt Academy of Music. According to Klára Huszár, who was present at the recital, while Bartók was exiting the stage at the end of the concert, someone from the audience began to sing Far behind I left my country. This impromptu singer was joined by the entire hall

28 Somfai, Béla Bartók Composition, Concepts, and Autograph Sources, 254.
29 The detailed program of the recital can be found at the concert’s database of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute for Musicology, http://db.zti.hu/koncert/koncert_Adatlap.asp?KID=7138.
30 Klára Huszár (1919–2010) was a Hungarian opera director and dramaturge.
31 Tünde Tanzer made the English translation of the song: When leaving my beautiful country
and together they sang it for the composer. Huszár describes how Bartók briefly acknowledged the tribute from the stage but sadly and prophetically, he was never again able to return to Hungarian platforms.\footnote{Ferenc Bónis, \textit{Igy láttuk Kodályt} (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Budapest, 1982), 209-210.}


Permission for the master sheet was obtained from the Institute of Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences in June 2015.


\textbf{CD Track 4.} Bartók-Medgyaszay, nos. 1–3, ‘Far behind I left my country’,

The famous little Hungary,
I looked back when I was half way,
With tears falling from my eyes.

‘Crossing the river’, and ‘In the summer fields’ (1928).

Bartók collected the original phonograph recording of the tune in July 1906. The song is in the group of the ‘old’ style melodies with a descending melody.\textsuperscript{34} In the master sheet of the phonograph recording, Bartók wrote \textit{molto rubato} (see Figure 7), which was the peasant singer’s rendition of the song. Bartók indicated the metronome marking $\ora = 188$.

\textbf{Figure 8.} Bartók, ‘Far behind I left my country’, bars 1–4 (Editio Musica Budapest, 1953).\textsuperscript{35} The current version of the 1906 publication.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{figure8.png}
\caption{Bartók, ‘Far behind I left my country’, bars 1–4 (Editio Musica Budapest, 1953). The current version of the 1906 publication.}
\end{figure}

In the 1928 recording, the duration of the song is 1’06 minutes (CD track 4). In Dille’s published score of 1970, the metronome marking appears as $J = 48$ (see Figure 9).

\textsuperscript{34} A more detailed account on Bartók’s classification system of Hungarian folksongs, including ‘old’, ‘new’ and ‘miscellaneous’ style melodies had been discussed in Chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{35} Bartók–Kodály, \textit{Magyar Népdalok énekhanger, zongorakísérettel} [Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano] (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1953).

One of the most obvious changes in the 1928 version is that Bartók added two extra bars in the piano part, one at the beginning and another one at the end, which changed the length of the song. The other difference is that in the 1928 version the tune of the melody only appears in the vocal part, whereas in 1906 Bartók duplicated them in the piano arrangements, more specifically in the right-hand. The only exception in the 1906 publication is the third song, \textit{Fehér László lovat lopott}, ‘László Fehér stole a horse,’ where Bartók did not double the melodic line. For these reasons, subsequent recordings of the 1906 version of the song cannot be included in the comparison study.

The yellow highlights in Figure 10 indicate the rhythm adjustments and slides that Medgyaszay made to the text. In each bar where quavers appear, she alters the rhythm to dotted quavers, inverted or reversed, depending on the inflection of the word:

\[
\begin{align*}
\uparrow\uparrow & = \downarrow\uparrow \quad \text{or} \quad \downarrow\downarrow.
\end{align*}
\]
Medgyaszay, who was renowned for her acting ability, sings the song from an actor’s perspective, which is text oriented and follows the melody according to the text. In the score (see Figure 10), Bartók added some ornaments in the vocal part which the soprano leaves out entirely. The first one appears at the beginning of bar 4. The composer wrote two demisemiquavers ($B_{b}^{4}$ and $C_{5}$) just before $D$. The second embellishment appears in bar 7 in a form of two semiquavers ($F_{4}$ and $E_{b}^{4}$) between $G_{4}$ and $D_{4}$. In Figure 10, these ornaments are identified inside the black rectangles.

Instead of singing the actual notes in bar 7 and 11, $F_{4}$ and $E_{b}^{4}$, Medgyaszay always sings a glissando between descending perfect fourth intervals ($G_{4}$ and $D_{4}$). In bar 7, the glissando is identified by a wavy line. These slides seem to be the

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37 Ibid.
performer’s own choices. Other than this type of sliding, one gentle leap can be identified between a descending major second (D₅ and C₅) in bar 4. In Figure 10, this is shown as a slur on the first crotchet beat at the beginning of bar 4. Throughout the recording’s fourteen bars, Medgyaszay uses the same stylistic pattern.

At the opening chord of bar 10, the two performers did not wait for each other to jointly start the new musical phrase, even though it is written in the score (see Figure 11). This unsynchronized beginning is marked with a black rectangle (Figure 11). On the recording Bartók plays the first chord (G♭₃, D♭₄, C₅, and F₅) in relative tempo, whilst Medgyaszay takes as much time as necessary for an adequate breath before she calmly begins her last line. It is the only occasion during the song when the two instruments are clearly not synchronised.

**Figure 11.** Bartók, ‘Far behind I left my country’, bars 10–14 (Editio Musica Budapest, 1970).³⁸

³⁸Ibid.
3.1.2 Crossing the river

Song no. 2 is Által mennék én a Tiszán ladikon, ‘Crossing the river’. The song is about a young man crossing the river on a small barge in order to see his beloved, who lives in a town on the other side of the river. Bartók collected the song in July 1906. It is a ‘new’ style Hungarian folksong with a returning melody. The structure of the song is A–A–B–A. Figure 12 is the transcription of the phonograph recording from 1906.

In 1928, the length of the song is 0’50 (CD track 4). Bartók and Medgyaszay began the opening bar at $\frac{\dot{\textbf{e}}}{\textbf{e}} = \pm 96$, which is a slightly slower tempo than the metronome mark in Dille’s edition quaver equals $\frac{\dot{\textbf{e}}}{\textbf{e}} = 104–108$ (see Figure 13). By the beginning of the second system in bar 5, the tempo gradually accelerates and reaches $\frac{\dot{\textbf{e}}}{\textbf{e}} = \pm 112$. In bar 8 the piano slows down the last two quaver beats to $\frac{\dot{\textbf{e}}}{\textbf{e}} = \pm 108$.

In between the following passage, in bars 9–16, the tempo does not vary greatly and remains at approximately $\frac{\dot{\textbf{e}}}{\textbf{e}} = \pm 112$. However, at the end of bar 16 the piano slightly slows down again to $\frac{\dot{\textbf{e}}}{\textbf{e}} = \pm 108$. In the performance, the same pattern can be perceived in the last eight bars of the song (nos. 17–24). At the beginning, the tempo picks up again and stays $\frac{\dot{\textbf{e}}}{\textbf{e}} = \pm 112$ up until the very last bar, where the performers finish the song at $\frac{\dot{\textbf{e}}}{\textbf{e}} = \pm 108$.

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39 The English translation of the song is in Lampert’s *Folk Music in Bartók’s Compositions*, 56.
"I crossed the Tisza on a boat, on a boat,
I don’t know where my sweetheart lives, where my sweetheart lives.
She lives in the city, in the third street,
White roses, blue forget-me-nots and violets are blooming on her windowsill."
Figure 12. Transcription of the phonograph recording, ‘Crossing the river’, (1906). Tune system (BR-number): Bartók B 1482c (09208).

Permission for the master sheet was obtained from the Institute of Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences in June 2015.


From the second bar onwards (see Figure 13), Medgyaszay sings similar kinds of rhythm adjustments to the text that she had made in the previous song, but this time she sings sharper dotted rhythms.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\(\frac{\text{}}{\text{}}\)} & = \text{\(\frac{\text{}}{\text{}}\)} \quad \text{or} \quad \text{\(\frac{\text{}}{\text{}}\)}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{40}\) Béla Bartók, Complete Collection of Hungarian Folk Songs, Online Publication.
In the Hungarian language, strong stress always takes place on the first syllable; the subsequent syllables have weak stresses. Even if a word contains long vowels, the stress remains on the first syllable. In this song, Medgyaszay strongly accentuates the dotted rhythm pattern according to the declamation of the Hungarian language. To illustrate this principle, the second bar contains one, two, and three syllable words (see Figure 14). The stresses of the words are highlighted in black rectangles whilst the number of syllables is listed in brackets:

Figure 13. Bartók, ‘Crossing the river’, bars 1–8 (Editio Musica Budapest, 1970).

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In Figure 14, the top line shows what approximately on the 1928 recording, and the line below, what is written in the score. These rhythmic changes between the recording and the score are highlighted in yellow.

**Figure 14.** Bartók, ‘Crossing the river’, bars 1–8. Score versus Medgyaszay’s recording (1928).

In the second bar, Medgyaszay alters the rhythm of the first semiquaver note (G₄) by making it longer and dotted, whilst at the same time shortening the second sixteenth note (A₄) to a demisemiquaver note. In this case, the first syllable that she emphasises is ‘én’, which means ‘I’ in English. In the Hungarian language, this ‘é’ is in the group of long vowels, hence the reason Medgyaszay sings it longer.

Still in bar 2, the next word is ‘Tiszán’ (English: ‘on the Tisza river’), B♭₄ and A₄, which has two syllables. The accent remains on the first syllable but in this case, it falls on a short vowel ‘i’. However, in the second syllable of the same word the
vowel ‘á’ is a long vowel in Hungarian. Yet again, the soprano changes the written rhythm according to the nuance of the spoken language; in this case, however, the other way around. She shortens the semiquaver note (B♭₄) to a demisemiquaver, and makes the following note (A₄) a dotted semiquaver.

The last word in this bar is ‘ladikon’ (English: ‘on a small barge’). For the three syllables Bartók wrote two semiquavers (G₄ and A₄) and a quaver note (F₄). Medgyaszay alters the first two syllables to two demisemiquavers, and the end of the word to a dotted quaver (F₄). The sharp rhythm changes that Medgyaszay applies to the score assist the listener to comprehend the words more clearly. Similar rhythmic patterns can be detected in the performance in all the five folksongs.

The next example (Figure 15) illustrates various types of sliding. Descending slides or portamenti appear between intervals of perfect fourths (C₅ and G₄), major thirds (A₄ and F₄) and major seconds (D₅ and C₅). The subtle downwards glissandi are short and hardly perceptible. In Figure 15, they are marked with slurs and twice, in bars 19 and 21, with a wavy line. In total, portamenti appear eight times during the song. Perhaps Medgyaszay applied them in order to enhance legato within a phrase, and because singers of the era commonly used portamento as a key technical trait. She introduces a rapid upward slide first in bar 11, then repeats it in the middle of bar 19 between ascending perfect fourths (G₄ and C₅). In both cases, she applies the same method. The slide begins with an almost imperceptible note that is a repeated note of the previous G₄, than it rises to a C₅. This new kind of slide happens rapidly.
Figure 15. Bartók, ‘Crossing the river’, bars 17–24. Score versus Medgyaszay’s recording (1928)

On the recording Medgyaszay almost modifies a single note. In the score in bar 23 (see Figure 15), the first note is an E₄ but instead of that, she nearly sings an F₄ that is likely an unintentional error by the singer. This particular note is highlighted within a black rectangle.

For the analysis of this song, the data, the beat annotation and dynamics were obtained using Sonic Visualizer software. The spectrogram display in Figures 16 measures the loudness and rubato of the 1928 recording. It also shows the frequency of the notes. The purple line maps out the bar level whilst the yellow line indicates the amplitude of the sound file. The bar level was measured by quaver beats with a tapping method. Bar numbers were then added, in total 24, running horizontally across the top of the spectrogram.

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Sonic Visualiser software was used for mapping the melody, http://www.sonicvisualiser.org/videos.html.
Figure 16. Spectrogram display, ‘Crossing the river’ (bars 1–24).

The rising purple line between bars indicates that the tempo is slowing down, while if the same purple line is descending, the opposite is true (Figure 16). The yellow line maps out the volume of the recording. The following pattern was observed: as the performers play or sing faster the volume or loudness increases, and vice versa; when the recording is slower, the dynamic is softer.

In summary, Medgyaszay’s version of the song ‘Crossing the river’ reveals six prominent performance characteristics:

- consistent vibrato throughout the song, in particular longer and/or louder notes
- an unintentional error of a note (in bar 23)
- rhythmic variations from the score
strong emphasis on the declamation of the Hungarian language

frequent use of portamento (all descending)

the level of dynamics increases when she sings faster and the opposite is true when she sings slower

Out of these, Medgyaszay’s most notable performance elements are the changes of rhythm from the score. The tempo variations within the song remain relatively steady and do not vary greatly. Bartók’s accompaniment demonstrates a conscientious pianistic approach, with slight lessening of tempo before the singer takes an appropriate breath at the beginning of a new phrase.

3.1.3 In the summer fields

The third setting of the song cycle is A gyulai kert alatt, ‘In the summer fields’. It is about a young couple who live apart from each other. The tune has typical characteristics of a ‘new’ style folksong; tempo giusto and a returning melody form: A–B–Bv–A. Figure 17 is the master sheet from 1906. A young girl performed on the phonograph recording, and she sang the melody with rich embellishments (CD track 7).

44 The English translation of the first verse is in Lampert’s book: Folk Music in Bartók’s Compositions, 58.
"Below the gardens of Gyula
A dark haired lad is cutting rosemary.
I am the one who bundles it up,
I am this lad’s true love."
Permission for the master sheet was obtained from the Institute of Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences in June 2015.

**CD Track 7.** Phonograph recording of *A gyulai kert alatt* (MH-925b). With kind permission of the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest (May 2015).

The song’s waveform display is shown in Figure 18. It sets out the following data; (a) the sound wave form (orange), (b) the dynamics (dark green), and (c) the line graph of the *rubato* (light blue). The tempo was measured by tapping the first beat of each bar. The time signature was indicated 2/4, two crotchet beats per bar. In Figure 18, the graph illustrates the *rubato* of the performance in detail. The total number of bars of the strophic song is 48 with two verses.

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45 Béla Bartók, *Complete Collection of Hungarian Folk Songs*, (Online Publication).
**Figure 18.** Waveform display of ‘In the summer fields’, bars 1–48.

Figure 19 shows the metronome markings of the recording. At the opening of the first bar, the performers begin the tempo at the written mark of $\downarrow = 104$.

However, by the fifth bar it accelerates to $\downarrow = \pm 114$ which continues until the end of bar 16.

In the last 8 bars (nos. 17–24), Bartók and Medgyaszay marginally slow down the performance to $\downarrow = \pm 110$ and they maintain this tempo until the end of the first verse (CD track 4). The second verse begins at this same pace ($\downarrow = \pm 110$) which is a slightly faster tempo than the first verse. It stays relatively steady up until bar 16, then in bar 17 it slows down to $\downarrow = \pm 106$ and remains at this pace until the last 2 bars of the song. Finally, the performers conclude the song at a significantly slower tempo at $\downarrow = \pm 96$. Overall, the tempo variations within the verses are measured between $\downarrow = \pm 96$ and $\downarrow = \pm 114$. 

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Figure 19. Bartók, ‘In the summer fields’, bars 1–8. Tempo fluctuation of the recording with MM numbers (Editio Musica Budapest, 1970).

A clear example of Medgyaszay’s *portamento* style singing appears in this song. Figure 20 illustrates the differences between the score and the soprano’s performance on the recording. The eight bars’ excerpt is the middle part of the first verse (bars 9–16). The top line shows Medgyaszay’s singing and below this, the vocal parts from the score. Within eight bars, *portamento* occurs three times. These *portamenti* are highlighted in yellow in Figure 20.
In the first two cases, the slides appear between $D_5$ and $A_4$, beginning with the last note of bars 10 and 13, and in the second case between $A_4$ and $F_4$, commencing on the crotchet beat of bar 14. In this song, Medgyaszay usually applies broader *portamenti* on the last syllable of a bar and connects it with the first syllable of the following bar (see Figure 20). With the use of this gliding movement, it seems that the soprano wishes to maintain continuity within a phrase.

Two types of descending slides can be identified in this example. Medgyaszay sings the first type of *portamento* with vibrato, whilst for the second type of slide she uses straight tone. This is shown in Figure 20, where the slide with the vibrato is marked with a wavy line at the end of bar 10. The straight tone slide is marked with a *glissando* line in bars 13–14. Medgyaszay’s vibrato is more evident when she sustains longer notes. In the first verse, Medgyaszay sings five descending *portamenti* and two upward slides, while in the second verse the numbers are two and two. In this piece, she stresses these slides in a more deliberate manner, while in
comparison to the first two songs her slides are rather subtle. Figure 20 and Figure 21 also shows the rhythm adjustments that Medgyaszay added to the score.

In Figure 21, the top line shows Medgyaszay’s performance in the first eight bars of the second verse. The line directly below is the score in which Bartók did not indicate any slide, *glissando*, or *portamento*. In this example, both types of slides that Medgyaszay sings, upward and downward, appear.

**Figure 21.** Bartók, ‘In the summer fields’, 2nd verse, bars 1–8. Score versus recording (1928).

In Medgyaszay’s performance, the short rising slides are shown in bars 3 and 6 are encased in black rectangles, while the descending slides are highlighted in yellow in bars 1 and 7. In Figure 21, the *portamenti* are indicated with slurs. The downward slides also have a straight *glissando* line as indicated in bars 1 and 7 between D₃ and A₄. Medgyaszay sings these *portamenti* with no vibrato.

The main difference between these two *glissandi* is the speed of the slide. Although in the first bar Bartók wrote four equal quavers, Medgyaszay’s idiomatic expressiveness changes the rhythm completely. ‘‘Benedeki’ in English means ‘from
Benedek village’. The first syllable has a long stress; the following three syllables have weak stresses. The ‘e’ and ‘i’ vowels are in the group of high and short vowels in the Hungarian language. She sings a triplet on the first three notes and makes the last note D₅ in bar 1 longer a crotchet beat. This alteration allows her to spend more time on the portamento. The singer holds this D₅ a little longer before she begins to slide down. She also takes her time during sliding. In bar 7 there is no time for the slide, as it occurs more rapidly. Medgyaszay immediately begins the slide on D₅ and arrives at A₄ in a second.

The second types of slides are upward and they emerge in bars 3 and 6 (black rectangles in Figure 21). They emerge unexpectedly, often with the addition of an extra note that is almost imperceptible. These extra notes are acciaccaturas⁴⁶: ( ). Nicola Vaccai (1790–1848), a prominent singing teacher from Italy, described in his book in 1833: “the acciaccatura differs from the appoggiatura in as much as it does not interfere with the value or the accent of the note to which it is prefixed.”⁴⁷

In a relatively short song (0’55), Medgyaszay sings eleven portamenti; seven in the first stanza and four in the second. Of the total eleven portamenti, seven of them are ascending and four are descending. Overall, the variations of slides are the most distinctive features of Medgyaszay’s performance of the third setting ‘In the summer fields’ in the 1928 recording. For the first time, the soprano introduces ascending types of slides. One type of portamento is broad with solid vibrato, whereas the

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⁴⁶ Robert E. Seletsky, “acciaccatura,” Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed March 15, 2015, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/00101. “In the 19th century, acciaccatura came to mean quick single grace notes, usually a major or minor 2nd above the main note; these were defined as short appoggiaturas in the 18th century by Quantz (1752) and C.P.E. Bach. [. . .] This type of acciaccatura is generally notated as a small note of semiquaver value before the main note. The custom of writing these semiquavers as quavers with perpendicular slashes through their flags originated in the 18th century shorthand notation of single semiquavers [. . .].”

**glissando** is rapid with straight tone. Occasionally, she also adds an additional note as an *acciaccatura* to upward slides. Again, the vibrato is always more prominent when Medgyaszay sustains longer notes. The various slides and almost imperceptible ornaments assist her to create a colourful and vivid performance. In addition, another performance characteristic of the 1928 recording is Bartók and Medgyaszay’s tempo changes. These occur on a broader spectrum than during the first two songs.

### 3.1.4 The horseman

In the song cycle, song no. 4 is *Nem messze van ide kis Margitta*, ‘The Horseman’. The song is about a highwayman who arrives at an inn. The police soon arrive and attempt to arrest him. The dialogue is between four characters: the owner of the inn, the highwayman, the police officer, and the narrator. Bartók recorded this ‘new’ style folk tune in 1906. Figure 22 shows the master sheet of a later version of the song.

Out of the five arrangements within the song cycle, this song underwent the greatest transformation in 1928. One of the most obvious changes is that this 1928 version is much shorter in length than the composer’s 1906 version. Unfortunately, I have not been able to ascertain with certainty the reasons why Bartók decided to omit from his 1928 version some verses from the 1906 publication. Bartók’s changes reduced the song’s duration substantially.

On the 1928 recording, the length of the song is 1’54 (CD track 9). It is plausible that his reasons for shortening the song in such a drastic manner could have been the time constraints encountered in recording on 78-rpm discs. Given the limited time available, the last two songs of the cycle may have had to fit on one

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The English translation of the song is in Lampert’s book:

“Kis-Margitta is not far from here, the river of Hortobágy surrounds it. There is a ramshackled inn in its center, where six outlaws revel in their sorrow.”
Permission for the master sheet was obtained from the Institute of Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences in June 2015.

**CD Track 8.** Phonograph recording of *Nem messze van ide Kis-Margitta* (MH-166a). With kind permission of the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest (May 2015).

**CD Track 9.** Bartók-Medgyaszay, nos. 4–5, ‘The horseman’ and ‘Walking through the town’ (1928).

In 1928, when they made the recordings, two disc sizes were available that could record either three or four and a half minute long pieces. Any longer music had

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49 Bartók, *Complete Collection of Hungarian Folk Songs*, (Online Publication).
to be split. ‘The horseman’ is the longest song from the five arrangements and on the recording this was paired with the shortest one, song no. 5 ‘Walking through the town’ (0’44). This pairing was under three minutes in length (2’38) and could fit on one side of a disc. The first three songs were also recorded on one side, which gave them a total length of 2’50. Another theory could well be that Bartók simply decided to make the song shorter without any particular reason, or because by 1928 his compositional style had evolved and he was inspired to create an almost ‘new’ song from the 1906 version.

This song highlights Medgyaszay’s rubato style singing most strongly. The performance instruction in Dille’s published score\(^{50}\) is *parlando, molto liberamente*. She interprets the song as if she was speaking, in other words *parlando*, and with great freedom *molto liberamente*. Figure 23 shows the vocal part (bars 2–3) in the 1970 edition:

Figure 23. Bartók, ‘The horseman’, bars 2–3 (Editio Musica Budapest, 1970).\(^{51}\)

In the 1970 edition, Dille stated that in this particular song (‘The horseman’) “the pencil drafts provide a general harmonic outline. [. . .] The recording more or less follows this outline; otherwise it is almost purely improvisation [. . .].”\(^{52}\) Because of this constant fluctuation in tempo and rhythm, it is a challenging task to make an

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\(^{50}\) Bartók, *Five Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano*, ed. D. Dille.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{52}\) Bartók, *Five Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano*, ed. D. Dille. Kornélia Pérchy made the English translation. The original text in Hungarian: "A ceruzavázlat egy általános harmoniavázat ad. [. . .] A hanglemezfelvételezt ezt a vázat követi, különben pedig csaknem improvisáció [. . .]."
accurate transcription of the recording. Fortunately, László Somfai made
transcriptions of two passages of Medgyaszay’s singing in Dille’s 1970 edition (see
Figure 24 and Figure 26).

**Figure 24.** Bartók, ‘The horseman’, bars 2–3. László Somfai made the transcription
for the first edition of the *Five Hungarian Folksongs* (Editio Musica Budapest,
1970).53

![Musical notation](image)

It is evident that Medgyaszay’s rendition is very different from the score. She
does not follow the written rhythm in the drafts. She mainly focuses on clear
articulation, and delivers the meaning of the song through expressiveness. There are
three additional performance aspects in Medgyaszay’s recording: the consistent
vibrato when she sings louder or longer notes, the lack of *portamento* and any type of
slides throughout the song, and not much variety of dynamic levels. The next
example, Figure 25, shows bars 4–5 in the Editio Musica Budapest edition:

**Figure 25.** Bartók, ‘The horseman’, bars 4–5 (Editio Musica Budapest, 1970).54

![Musical notation](image)

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53 Ibid., 10.
54 Ibid., 8.
Figure 26 shows Somfai’s transcription of the voice and piano part of the same two bars in the 1928 recording.

**Figure 26.** Bartók, ‘The horseman’, bars 4–5 (EMB edition, 1970). László Somfai made the transcription for the first edition of the *Five Hungarian Folksongs.*

The two versions’ (1906 and 1928) piano parts differ significantly. For instance, in his drafts Bartók did not write pedal marks in bars 4 and 5 (Figure 25). On the recording, however he used pedal (see black rectangles in Figure 28). This example also shows additional chords that Bartók played on the recording, yet they did not appear in his drafts. The recording reveals that in bar 4 the composer repeats the first arpeggiated chord (B♭2–D3–G3–A3 and B♭3–D4–G4–A4) three times, whilst in the drafts it only appears once. In this same bar, the time signature also changes from 4/4 to 5/4. Continuing in the same bar, he only plays the subsequent chord (B♭2–D3–F3–G♯3 and B♭3–D4–F4–G♯4) on the fifth crotchet beat instead of playing it on the third beat as it is marked in the edition in bar 4 (Figure 25).

In this song, Medgyaszay occasionally allows herself to lengthen the four-beat bars. For example, it occurs in bar 4 in Figure 26. At the beginning of new musical phrases—in bars 4, 6, 10, 12, 17, 21, and 23—where the piano and voice parts are

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55 Ibid., 10.
meant to start at the same time, she often begins her line much later than the piano. Regardless of when the piano plays the initial chord of a bar, Medgyaszay takes her time and does not rush to start her phrase. It is unlikely that the soprano’s interpretation of the song surprised Bartók during the recording session, as they had undertaken a number of rehearsals.\(^{56}\)

Out of the five settings, Bartók and Medgyaszay’s performance of this song, ‘The horseman’, is probably the most enigmatic one. The soprano drew to life the various characters from an actor’s point of view. The rising tension between characters creates irregular tempo changes. This irregularity may derive from Medgyaszay’s expressive and text-oriented interpretation. Bartók, who knew which words were more significant, often played specific chords for a much longer period than as it was marked. At other times, he had to play additional chords in a bar in order to comply with the soprano’s interpretation. Pacing the text seems to be Medgyaszay’s initiative and Bartók accommodated her vocal inflections. The 1928 recording of the song demonstrates an excellent collaboration between the two artists who complement each other well. The recording also demonstrates that Bartók allowed substantial changes to the score in both the piano and the vocal parts.

Twenty-seven years after Medgyaszay and Bartók recorded the song, the soprano made another version with István Hajdu at the piano in 1955 (although they performed the 1906 version). I was able to locate this recording at the Hungarian Radio Archives.\(^{57}\) I analysed this version and made a comparison between the two

\(^{56}\) Ibid. In the preface of Dille’s 1970 edition, the editor refers to a meeting with Nádasdy who was Medgyaszay’s regular concert partner in the mid 1920s. Nádasdy was able to clarify some information, as he was present at the rehearsals. In the preface, Dille wrote plural for the rehearsals, not ‘a’ rehearsal. As it appears in the preface in Hungarian: "Medgyaszay Vilma korrepetítóra, Nádasdy Kálmán megerősítette, hogy Bartók a próbák során vázlatokból zongorázott [. . .]."

\(^{57}\) Recording Artists: Vilma Medgyaszay (soprano) and István Hajdu’s (piano), Recording Date: 11 October 1955, Recording Location: Hungarian Radio, Budapest.
recordings (1928 and 1955) in Chapter 4. The result of this analysis demonstrates how Medgyaszay’s artistic approach to the setting changed across three decades.

3.1.5 Walking through the town

The last song of the song cycle is Végigmentem a tárkányi, ‘Walking through the town.’ Béla Vikár collected the original tune ca. in 1899 (see Figure 27, CD track 10). The performance of Vikár’s phonograph recording begins with a metronome mark of $\dot{=} = \pm 92$ and by the second half it reaches $\dot{=} = \pm 98$. The given time signature in Lampert’s book is $4/4$ (Figure 27). Lampert’s publication also encloses a compact disc with all the original phonograph cylinder recordings of the tunes that Bartók later incorporated in his compositions. On Lampert’s CD, song number eleven is ‘Walking through the town.’

Figure 27. Musical notation of ‘Walking through the town’ in the source catalogue.

58 Lampert, Folk Music in Bartók’s Compositions, 60.
      The English translation of the song is in Lampert’s book:
      "I was walking down the main street of Tárkány, hey,
      I looked through the window of my sweetheart.
      She was making her downy bed,
      And sweeping her painted room with rosemary."
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.

I made a transcription of the cylinder recording as well as Medgyaszay’s version from 1928 and the score (Figure 28). It must be noted that the performer on the 1899 phonograph recording sings the following bars (nos. 4–5 and 7–8) an octave lower. The peasant performer on the 1899 cylinder recording does not sing any slides in her performance, with one exception where she sings a leap in bar 11 between C₄ and F₄. In Figure 28, this leap is indicated with a slur.

Medgyaszay’s recording is 0’44 minutes long. Her rendition of the first twelve bars, without repeating the last six bars, includes five *portamenti*. Of these slides, four are descending and one is ascending. Medgyaszay sings this song accurately according to the score, but with one exception. She often sings sharp dotted rhythms instead of the written quavers or semiquavers. She begins the song at a relatively slow pace \( \frac{4}{4} = \pm 90 \) then by bar 4 she gradually speeds up to \( \frac{4}{4} = \pm 108 \).

Medgyaszay’s musical choices display a vibrant performance. Her additional performance choices include gradual tempo changes within phrases, the use of sharp dotted rhythm, occasional slides, and a bright vocal tone.
**Figure 28.** Bartók, ‘Walking through the town’, bars 1–12. Comparison of the phonograph recording, the score, and Medgyaszay’s recording.

Some conclusions on Medgyaszay’s performance

Elliott stated the following in her book regarding early twentieth century vocal performance: “Two central artistic goals were common to all: the importance of communicating the text with a more realistic acting style, and a growing demand for
accuracy and precision in performance."

Certainly, Medgyaszay has interpreted the songs using the same approach. Somfai described Medgyaszay’s voice as:


[. . .] nothing out of the ordinary, and her style pretty instinctive, but perhaps precisely a performing manner which was unlike that of the concert platform’s which enchanted the two composers [Bartók and Kodály].

It must be noted that Medgyaszay’s articulation in the five arrangements is outstanding. Her delivery of the songs incorporates an actor’s perspective. It seems that her prime focus was on expressiveness; how to communicate the meaning of the words, how to differentiate emotions and how to create different tone-colours for the words in order to capture the audience’s full attention. Medgyaszay was forty-three years old in 1928 and vocally she was at the peak of her singing ability. Her breath control was excellent.

Some general conclusions can be drawn about Medgyaszay’s performance in 1928. Chief amongst them is the various types of portamento that she applies in her singing; the descending portamenti are more distinctive in length, volume and nature, and therefore they are easier to identify. In most cases, they are broad and slow in comparison with the ascending slides, which are at times almost imperceptible and fast. She also uses both types of portamento, upward and downward, at unexpected places.

The other significant conclusion is that Medgyaszay continually modifies the written rhythm according to the idiomatic declamation of the language. She also allows herself to use her own stylistic approach to the songs, which is a rubato approach. Apart from focusing on clear articulation, Medgyaszay creates her own style by applying different kinds of sliding and vibrato. Typically, her vibrato is

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present when she sings louder or longer notes. During the slides, she either uses a broad or narrow range vibrato or in some cases a straight tone.

Overall, the recordings of the *Five Hungarian Folksongs* with Bartók and Medgyaszay demonstrate a wide interpretive range. The compelling performance aspects vary in each song. In the first song, ‘Far behind I left my country’, the unsynchronized openings between the piano and vocal part, and the use of slides instead of the notes of an ornament are amongst the most prominent characteristics. The second song, ‘Crossing the river’, includes the following important features: rhythmic adjustments to accommodate the text and alteration from the score. In the third song ‘In the summer fields’, the variation of slides—both descending and ascending—are the most notable performance elements.

The fourth song, ‘The horseman’, comprises a number of performance aspects, including dramatic characterization, expressive performance, *rubato*, consistent vibrato, tempo changes, and for the first time in these settings, the lack of *portamento* or slides. Here, the two artists—Bartók and Medgyaszay—made substantial deviations from the score. Perhaps Medgyaszay’s vibrant performance and the changes of rhythm are the most interesting performance elements of the last song, ‘Walking through the town’.

The recordings of the five settings reveal Medgyaszay’s artistic versatility, while demonstrating Bartók’s flexible approach to the interpretation of his songs. Bartók himself made changes from the score by following the soprano’s tempi. These variations mostly derived from Medgyaszay’s expressive performance, which was to present the songs faithfully according to the text.
3.2 EIGHT HUNGARIAN FOLKSONGS (BB 47)

Bartók collected over ten thousand folk tunes between 1905 and 1917. Of this extensive material, three hundred and thirteen were later absorbed in different forms in his compositions.¹ This number is one third of his total number of works; in other words, one third of his compositions are based on folksong arrangements.² At times Bartók used the same melody in various musical pieces.³ Somfai notes Bartók’s first major song cycle as the Eight Hungarian Folksongs.⁴

Out of the eight folksongs, the first tune was collected in 1906, followed by four (nos. 2–5) in 1907. Bartók completed the arrangements of these first five songs in 1907 (they were also known as ‘5 Székely songs’ or ‘Five Old Hungarian Folksongs from Csík County’). Their premiere took place in Budapest on 27 November 1911 with the opera singer, Dezső Róna, and Bartók at the piano.⁵ The last three songs (nos. 6–8) of the song cycle were collected in 1916 and 1917, which Bartók had also arranged in 1917 (they are also known as ‘Székely Soldiers Songs’). The first performance of these second set of songs (nos. 6–8) occurred in Vienna on 12 January 1918 with Ferenc Székelyhidy and Bartók.⁶ Five melodies are in ‘old’ (nos. 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7), two in ‘miscellaneous’ (nos. 1 and 3), and the last one (no. 8) in ‘new’ style.⁷

² Ibid., 9.
³ Ibid., 14.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ See more details about the concert, 18 January 1918, in this dissertation in Chapter 2, section: “Ferenc Székelyhidy.”
⁸ Lampert, Folk Music in Bartók’s Compositions, 132-136.
Bartók only decided to jointly publish the two different settings (nos. 1–5 and nos. 6–8) when the Universal Edition offered to print his yet unpublished works. Initially, in 1918, Bartók’s aim was to publish at least ten to twelve arrangements in one set; however, by 1921 he was convinced that the eight songs, ‘5 Székely songs’ from 1907 and three ‘Székely Soldiers Songs’ from 1917, could be performed jointly as a song cycle. Although from 1921 Bartók occasionally performed three, four, or five songs from the eight arrangements in recitals, he never played the eight songs on any one occasion.

The first concert, in which Bartók combined songs from both the 1907 and 1917 settings, took place in Budapest on 27 February 1921. Bartók accompanied Izabella Nagy and they performed three songs. They [Bartók and Nagy] performed the same songs again on 25 April 1921. In the following year, Bartók accompanied various singers in recitals; Béla Farkas in Kolozsvár (today: Cluj-Napoca, Romania) on 19 and 26 February 1922; Ágnes Dudutz in Marosvásárhely (today: Târgu-Mureș, Romania) on 24 February 1922; Grace Crawford in London on 24 March 1922; Rózsi Marschalkó in Budapest on 10 October 1922, and finally, Izabella Nagy in Budapest 20 December 1922.

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8 Bartók Complete Edition/Vocal Works, CD, 8-9. László Somfai wrote the notes for the Eight Hungarian Folksongs on the CD.


10 Ibid., 398.

11 According to the detailed catalogue of Bartók’s recitals at the Bartók Archives in Budapest, Bartók and Izabella Nagy performed the following songs at the Royal Apollo on 27 February 1921: 1. Istenem, Istenem [My God, My God], 2. Töltik a nagyerdő útját [They are mending the great forest highway], 3. Asszonyok, asszonyok [Women, women; let me be your companion]. Private access to the catalogue was given to the researcher at the Budapest Bartók Archives in June, 2013. [http://www.zti.hu/bartok/index.htm](http://www.zti.hu/bartok/index.htm).

12 Private access to the catalogue was given to the researcher at the Budapest Bartók Archives in June 2013. The detailed program of Izabella Nagy and Bartók’s recital on 20 December 1922 can be found at the concert’s database of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute for Musicology.
According to Lampert, sometime during this 1921 and 1922 period, Bartók began to revise the songs before Universal Edition published them in 1922. In the same paper, the author draws attention to a letter dated 20 September 1922. The letter from Bartók to his publisher (UE) was in German. In this correspondence, the composer stated the following: “some of the songs are too high, while others are too low, thus I have to transpose them first. Nor have I provided precise performance marks for all the songs. The translations were also in need of much correction; therefore I must see these as well before they go to print.” With the new transpositions of the songs, the eight songs’ vocal range turned out to be suitable for a single performer’s voice. There are numerous recordings of the eight songs with female performers, despite the fact that the second sets of songs are soldier’s songs (nos. 6–8).

HMV recorded only seven songs of the eight settings in 1928. It is unknown why they did not record the fourth song *Annyi bánat*, ‘So much sorrow’. The recordings took place on the same day, 7 December 1928. Mária Basilides sang nos. 1–3, and 5. Ferenc Székelyhidy (tenor) performed the remaining three songs (nos. 6–8). Songs nos. 1 and 3 were recorded together on one side of the disc, songs nos. 2 and 5 on another disc, and HMV recorded the last three songs on a third disc (nos. 6–8).

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14 Ibid.
3.2.1 Black is the earth

The first song of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* (BB 47) is *Fekete föd*, ‘Black is the earth.’ Bartók collected this tune in December 1906, the same year he started the fieldwork with Kodály. On the master sheet (see Figure 29), in between two verses, Bartók wrote some additional notes: “The tiny notes are left out during the first verse.”\(^\text{16}\) The song is in the group of the ‘miscellaneous’ style songs. The tempo indication is *poco rubato* and it must be noted that Bartók erased the metronome marking of \(\mathbf{J} = 78\) to \(\mathbf{J} = 69\). The song is about a broken-hearted woman who cries because her beloved has left her. Although the words do not explain why her suitor left her, one could infer it was because he had died. She expresses how her sorrow will soon lead to her own demise.\(^\text{17}\)

In the published score the tempo marking is *Adagio*, and the MM number is \(\mathbf{J} = 88\).\(^\text{18}\) Bartók indicated the estimated duration of the song at ca. 1’10 minutes. Bartók and Basilides’s performance in 1928 is 1’23 minutes (CD track 12) which is slower than the composer’s estimated time in the score. The song is 17 bars long and the time signature changes between 3/2, 2/4 and 4/4 (see Figure 30).

\(^{16}\) Bartók, *Complete Collection of Hungarian Folk Songs*, (Online Publication). Kornélia Pérchy made the English translation from Hungarian. Bartók’s notes in Hungarian between the 1st and 2nd verse: "Az 1. veresszaknál elmaradnak az apró hangok.“

\(^{17}\) Nancy Bush made the English translation of the song in the music score, Bartók: *Eight Hungarian Folksongs*, London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1955. "Snow-white kerchief, dark both field and furrow show. He, who loved me once has left me lonely now. Silent, tearless, is it so true lovers part? Chill of death I feel upon my breaking heart.”

Figure 29. Master sheet of the phonograph recording, ‘Black is the earth’ from 1906. Tune system (BR-number): Bartók C-IV 1231b (12389).\textsuperscript{19}

Permission for the master sheet was obtained from the Institute of Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences in June 2015.


**CD Track 12.** Bartók-Basilides, no. 1 and 3, ‘Black is the earth’ and ‘Women, women’ (1928).

Analysing the recording further, and specifically the first two bars, the piano begins the tempo at $\downarrow = \pm 88$ and then slows down to $\downarrow = \pm 80$ by the third bar. This change coincides with Basilides’ entry. In the following bar, a sudden change in tempo occurs when both performers slow down to $\downarrow = \pm 58$. By bar 6, the tempo speeds up again to $\downarrow = \pm 89$, and then slows down in bar 7 to $\downarrow = \pm 59$. Finally the first half of the song finishes at $\downarrow = 45$ (Figure 30). The melody is the same in the second

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\textsuperscript{19} Lampert, *Folk Music in Bartók’s Compositions*, 132.
part of the song (bars 9–17). The time signature then changes in bars 13 and 15–16. The tempo changes in the second part are very similar to the first part.

**Figure 30.** Bartók, ‘Black is the earth’, bars 1–8 (Boosey & Hawkes, 1955).

Figure 31 shows Basilides’s slides and rhythm changes to the score made by her during the first half of the song (bars 3–8). At the singer’s opening bar (in bar 3) she sings the first syllable of the word ‘fe-ke-te’ (English: ‘black’) much shorter than as it appears in the score. Instead of a quaver, she sings the first note D₅ as a semiquaver (see first black rectangle in bar 3, Figure 31). The yellow highlights

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20 Ibid., 3.
between bars 3–8 identify Basilides’s rhythm changes.

**Figure 31.** Bartók, ‘Black is the earth’, bars 3–8. Score versus recording (1928).

The following word in the same bar is ‘főd’ (English: ‘earth’). Basilides holds this note (A₄) one crotchet beat longer than it appears in the score. In the top line, this is marked with a fermata sign at the end of bar 3 (see second black rectangle in Figure 31). In the recording, Basilides sings two very short acciaccaturas (♯), which are almost imperceptible. She sings one of the acciaccaturas in bar 5, a G₄ before A₄, and the other one, in the middle of bar 7, a B₄ before D₅. In this case, the interval between the acciaccatura and the main note is a minor third. In Figure 31, the two acciaccaturas in bars 5 and 7 are identified within the black rectangles.

According to the score, the pianist and the mezzo-soprano should begin jointly at bar 8. Instead, Basilides is slightly late with her entry. She begins the first syllable of the word ‘szeretőm’ (English: ‘my lover’) after a semiquaver rest. The black rectangle in bar 8 shows the specific spot of this rest (Figure 31). This delay may be because Basilides needs time to take an adequate breath prior to finishing the first
half of the song.

In the first part (bars 1–8), she sings only one *portamento* that is descending (in bar 4) and two upward leaps (in bars 5 and 7). As the words intensify in the second verse, Basilides begins to incorporate more *crescendo-decrescendo* dynamics in her performance along with more *portamenti*. It is plausible that the reason for the 18% difference in length between the composer’s estimated time in the score and the recording is that Basilides needs to take sufficient time in order to execute the dynamics and slides. These subtle changes occur at the same time as she changes her mood from a narrative mode in the first verse to a more personal and heartbroken woman in the second.

In the second half of the song (bars 9–17), Basilides sings four distinctive downward slides. The yellow highlights and slurs in Figure 32 illustrate these slides.

**Figure 32.** Bartók, ‘Black is the earth’, bars 11–16. Score versus recording (1928).

In total, Basilides sings five *portamenti* and all of them are descending. At the beginning of the song, Bartók wrote a *forte* dynamic mark for the singer, in the second half he did not write an indication of dynamics. Instead of *forte* Basilides
sings the whole song softly, either mezzo piano or piano. Within the soft singing, she is able to create a range of dynamics. Purely singing loudly would not make the performance more powerful. Instead, Basilides expresses the drama by adding tone-colours for the words, as if she was the person to whom this drama occurs. With her warm and rich voice, she is able to display the tragedy through deep emotions. This is what makes her performance outstanding.

Probably the most striking performance element in her singing is the vocal control over the dynamics. At the end of the song (bars 15–16), she sings the last word ‘meghalok’ (English: ‘I will die’) pianissimo, repeating the E₄. On the last two notes, she sings crescendo decrescendo on both E₄ notes corresponding to the last two syllables of the word ‘meg-ha-lok’ (see bars 15–16, in Figure 32).

3.2.2 My God, my God

The Eight Hungarian Folksongs’ second setting is Istenem, istenem, ‘My God, my God.’ Béla Vikár recorded the first variant of this song in August 1902 (CD track 13).²¹ This song is the most dramatic one in the song cycle. It is about a young woman forced to marry someone whom she does not love. She only finds out after they are married that her husband is a highwayman, and at times, even murders people for their valuables. She is desperate and cries out for help from her parents.²²

Bartók’s estimated total time of the song is ca. 1’14 in the score. This duration is very close to Bartók and Basilides’ recording of 1’18 (CD track 14). The composer’s performance markings for the singer in the score are the following:

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²¹ Lampert, Folk Music in Bartók’s Compositions, 132.
²² Bartók, Eight Hungarian Folksongs for high voice and piano 1907-17.
Nancy Bush made the English translation of the song in the music score: "Coldly runs the river, reedy banks o’erflowing. River, bear me homeward, stormy floods, enfold me. Bear me to my mother, to my father’s threshold. Let them see my bridegroom, see to whom they sold me. He is a worthless soldier, Robber and mountebank. Close by the mountain road even now he is hiding.Murdering travellers, if it can profit him. Then with his stolen wealth careless comes riding home."
parlando, semplice, and non espressivo. Instead of singing the song in a simple manner, Basilides’s interpretation, especially in the second part of the song, is rather passionate. She also sings with a wide range of dynamics. Notably in this song, Basilides sings a significant number of slides and ornaments.

A comparison between this performance and the original phonograph recording would have been useful to ascertain how faithful her performance was to the original. Unfortunately, the quality of this 1902 cylinder recording is poor and therefore difficult to hear the singer’s performance.

In total, Basilides sings nine acciaccaturas ( располагаю ) and ten downward slides in this song. The singer uses the acciaccatura not only as an ornament, but also to slide up to the principal note. In other words, every acciaccatura in her performance is a slide as well. Amongst the descending slides, one is a glissando in bar 12. In this case, instead of two semiquavers, A₄ and G₄ (see bar 12 in Figure 33), Basilides sings a gliding movement between a perfect fourth, from A₄ to E₄. It is marked with a glissando sign in bar 12. In the recording, she sings three acciaccaturas in bars 10–12. These acciaccaturas are marked in black rectangles in Figure 33. Within the same bars (nos. 10–12), she also sings six slides that are differentiated with yellow highlights in Figure 33.

In bar 10, Basilides sings three different types of ornaments. The first ornament is an acciaccatura, an A₄ before B₄. On the second beat of the same bar, she sings a rapid descending slide from A₄ to G₄, and on the third beat, she sings a generous downward portamento between E₄ and D₄ (see three yellow highlights in bar 10, Figure 33).
**Figure 33.** Bartók, ‘My God, my God’, bars 9–14. Score versus recording (1928).

The 1928 recording of this song reveals constant tempo and rhythm changes. The top lines in Figure 33 and Figure 34 identify the rhythmic adjustments made to the score by Basilides. In the previous song, Basilides only occasionally used *portamento*. In this song, it is interesting to note that for the first time, Basilides makes three downward slides after each other. These three *portamenti* appear in bars 27–28, between B₄–A₄, A₄–G₄, and G₄–E₄ (see large black rectangle in Figure 34).
Basilides’s recording of this song comes across as a desperate woman’s cry for help. Although the first setting was also dramatic, the character she portrays here is different. In the first song, she kept the pain within herself whilst in this second song, she communicates the text more externally. Perhaps this is the reason why there is a lot of *portamento* and sliding present in the performance. At some point, she sings three slides in one bar. Perhaps she sings these frequent slides to express grief and weeping. The other important performance characteristic of her singing is the refined *acciaccaturas*. Overall, this recording demonstrates how an outstanding artist combines superb singing with passionate performance.

3.2.3 Women, women; let me be your companion

The third setting of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* is *Asszonyok, asszonyok*, ‘Women, women; let me be your companion.’ Bartók collected the original folk tune in Csík County at the time when Transylvania was still part of Hungary (CD track 15). Figure 35 shows the transcription of the melody from 1907.
Figure 35. Master sheet of the phonograph recording, ‘Women, women; let me be your companion’ (1907). Tune system (BR-number): Bartók C-II 950a.\(^\text{23}\)

Permission for the master sheet was obtained from the Institute of Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences in June 2015.


In both the master sheet and the score, Bartók indicated the rhythm of the song as *tempo giusto* (Figure 35 and Figure 36). The song is about a girl who wants to leave her mother’s house because she wishes to marry her beloved, who lives in the

\(^{23}\) Bartók, *Complete Collection of Hungarian Folk Songs*, (Online Publication).
neighbouring village.\textsuperscript{24} In the score, the total duration of the song is marked as 1’00 minute. The length of the 1928 recording is 1’07 minutes. The song is divided into three parts. The first part is in bars 1–13, the second is in bars 14–25, and the third part is in bars 26–37. In the published score, the tempo indication is Allegretto (tempo giusto) and the metronome marking is $\textdagger = 140$ (Figure 36). However, Bartók begins the solo piano introduction (bars 1–2) at a much slower pace, at $\textdagger = \pm 96$ (see Figure 36, CD track 12). This tempo is very close to the 1907 phonograph recording of $\textdagger = 90$. As soon as Basilides begins to sing (bar 3), the tempo accelerates to $\textdagger = \pm 120$.

In the 1928 recording, Bartók marginally changes the initial tempo of the song from the one he had recorded in the village. The first bar of his own performance begins at $\textdagger = \pm 96$ (Figure 36), whilst on the master sheet, he wrote $\textdagger = 90$ (Figure 35). However, from the first bar onwards, the tempo constantly changes on the 1928 recording; it slows down or speeds up gradually or immediately. In contrast, the performer on the original phonograph recording sings the first part at a steady tempo of $\textdagger = \pm 108$ in bars 7–10. On the master sheet (Figure 35), this place is shown under the *piu mosso* and $\textdagger = 107$ sign.

By the beginning of the fifth bar, Bartók and Basilides gradually achieve the speed of $\textdagger = \pm 138$. Then in bar 7, a swift change can be perceived in tempo, and in bar 8 the tempo accelerates further to $\textdagger = \pm 167$ (Figure 36). By the end of the first verse Basilides’ tempo (bars 9–10) is much faster than in the 1907 original peasant

\textsuperscript{24} Bartók, *Eight Hungarian Folksongs for high voice and piano 1907-17*. Nancy Bush made the English translation of the song in the score:

“Women, women, listen, let me share your labour. I can rinse and rub as well as any neighbour. Soft as silk and white as milk, maids as sweet as honey. Such I never saw for sale, no, not for any money! If my mother’s wrath I had not so much dreaded, I’d have begged her blessing, and by now be wedded. Dogs begin to bark and loud my heart is drumming. Hark! Along the street the village fads are coming.”
singer’s performance, who ended the song at $\downarrow = \pm 116$.

**Figure 36.** Bartók, ‘Women, women’, bars 1–8 (Boosey & Hawkes, 1955).\(^{25}\)

With further *accelerando* in bars 11–12, the piano reaches the fastest tempo of the first verse, approximately $\downarrow = \pm 172$ (see Figure 37). A sudden change in tempo occurs in the last bar of the first stanza (bar 13) when the piano slows down to $\downarrow = \pm 100$.

The *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* are often sung by a soprano, not a mezzo-soprano. What makes this particular song vocally problematic for sopranos is the low tessitura (D♭₄ - D♭₅) in the second half of the first and second verse. Sopranos often find it difficult to increase the volume in the lower register, particularly when the piano part is strong and loud. This is certainly not the case with Basilides, whose voice is very strong in this register. She sings *crescendos* with ease while the piano part is getting louder. Her voice is well placed, warm, and has a unique dark timbre. She almost whispers the last line of the third stanza, yet her articulation in this register is still immaculate. Basilides’s operatic vibrato is present throughout the song and constant during *piano* dynamic parts. However, she is able to straighten it at the end of the song on the last word ‘vó-na’ (English: ‘would be’).

In published form, this song cycle illustrates Bartók’s precise notation of his own music, and the desire to write down as many performance instructions as necessary for future performers. In the rather short piece, ‘Women, women,’ within thirty-seven bars the composer wrote seventeen dynamic markings and twenty musical terms relating to tempo. The recording of ‘Women, women’ is a fine

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26 Ibid.
example of mutual musical understanding and common artistic goals between the
two artists, Bartók and Basilides.

3.2.4 So much sorrow

In 1928, HMV did not record song no. 4, *Annyi bánat a szívemen*, ‘Skies
above are heavy with rain.’ The reason is unknown, although there is some evidence
to suggest that Bartók performed this song shortly before HMV recorded the songs.
What we do know is that apart from the premiere of the first five settings,²⁷ Bartók
accompanied this song at least three times in concerts with various artists between
1922 and 1928. The first time was with Izabella Nagy (mezzo-soprano) on 20
December 1922 in Budapest.²⁸ The next performance of this song was on 12 March
1925 in Rome, in which Bartók accompanied Ghita Lénart (mezzo-soprano).²⁹ The
third recital took place six weeks prior to the HMV recordings at the Academy of
Music in Budapest, on 29 October 1928. The title of the event was, ‘An Evening
with Bartók and Kodály’s Folksong Settings.’ Bartók accompanied the singers
Medgyaszay, Székelyhidy and Rózsi Fuchs-Fayer (soprano); the latter singer sang
the first five settings of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs*.³⁰

²⁷ The premiere took place on 27 November 1911 with Bartók and Dezső Róna.
²⁸ According to the detailed catalogue of Bartók’s recitals at the Bartók Archives in Budapest, Bartók
and Izabella Nagy performed the following songs at the Academy of Music, on 20 December 1922:
1. Fekete föld [Black is the earth], 2. Istenem, Istenem [My God, my God], 3. Asszonyok, asszonyok
[Women, women; let me be your companion] 4. Annyi bánat a szívemen [So much sorrow], 5. Ha
kimegyek [If I climb the summit].
²⁹ Ghita Lénart and Bartók performed six songs from the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* on 12 March
³⁰ Private access to the catalogue was given to the researcher at the Budapest Bartók Archives in June,
2013.

The detailed program of Izabella Nagy and Bartók’s recital on 20 December 1922 can also be found
at the concert’s database of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute for Musicology,
⁳¹ Ghita Lénart and Bartók performed six songs from the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* on 12 March
Private access to the catalogue was given to the researcher at the Budapest Bartók Archives in June,
2013.
³⁰ Private access to the catalogue was given to the researcher at the Budapest Bartók Archives in June
2013.
It begs the question as to why HMV or Bartók chose not to record this song given that Bartók had performed it only a couple of weeks prior to the recordings. An unpublished letter from Bartók31 dated 18 November 1928 revealed that initially the recording company had requested only four songs from the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* for the recordings. In the end, they in fact recorded seven out of the eight. To date there is not sufficient evidence to explain the omission of the fourth setting ‘So much sorrow’.

### 3.2.5 If I climb the high summit

The fifth song of the settings is *Ha kimegyek arr’ a magos tetőre*, ‘If I climb the high summit.’ Figure 38 offers the transcription of the melody from 1907. The tune is in the group of ‘old’ style with an ascending melody (CD track 16). The text refers to someone who has no difficulties in finding a suitor, but his or her (the gender is not identified) heart has already been taken.32

Figure 39 shows the correlation between two parameters; the loudness, and the *rubato* of the 1928 recording (CD track 14). On top of the graph (Figure 39), the red line shows the loudness level of the sound file (1st verse, bars 1–18). As the red line rises, the recording increases in volume. The opposite happens, when this same line descends. In this case, the performance is softer. Under this red line, the light blue line indicates the bar level.

The detailed program of the recital on 29 October 1928 can also be found at the concert’s database of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute for Musicology, http://db.zti.hu/koncert/koncert_Adatlap.asp?kID=7620.
http://db.zti.hu/koncert/koncert_Adatlap.asp?kID=7621.

31 See unpublished letter in Chapter 2.
32 Bartók, *Eight Hungarian Folksongs for high voice and piano 1907-17*.
Nancy Bush made the English translation of the song in the score:
"If I climb the rocky mountains all day through, Sure I’ll find a sweetheart waiting, maybe two. Ah me, love’s free, will not stray. Why my darling’s so soft hearted, who can say? Try and blame me, fickle name me, if you will; She who loved me first shall prove me, faithful still. Ah me, love’s free, will not stray. Why my darling’s so soft hearted, who can say?"
Figure 38. Master sheet of the tune ‘If I climb the high summit’, 1907. Tune system (BR-number): Bartók A-II 1539j (04896).³³

Permission for the master sheet was obtained from the Institute of Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences in June 2015.


The Sonic Visualiser software was used in order to map out the melody. This was done by tapping the crotchet beats of each bar in the first half of the song. As the blue line rises, the performance is slower, and when it goes down, the tempo speeds

³³ Bartók, Complete Collection of Hungarian Folk Songs, (Online Publication).
up. Specifically, the second half of the first verse (bars 11–18) where Bartók plays the solo instrumental part, the pattern is more noticeable. In this section, the piano is loud whilst the tempo is fast.

**Figure 39.** Waveform display of ‘If I climb the high summit’ (first verse, bars 1–18).

Basilides’s performance reaches its peak in volume in bar 4; specifically in the middle of the bar on the second and third crotchet beats (see Figure 40). The bar and crotchet beat numbers are shown on top of the graph. In the bottom of the graph, the colours turn to red and black where the performance is the loudest. This point
coincides with the *glissando* sign that Bartók wrote in the score for the singer on top of the third beat in bar 4 (see Figure 41). Returning to the loudness level in Figure 39, a drop in volume is clearly visible between bars 5–10. In this case, although the tempo is gradually getting faster, this is where the melody is descending and therefore cannot be as loud.

**Figure 40.** Spectrogram display of the loudness level in bars 3–6, ‘If I climb the high summit’.

Returning to the first verse, the loudness of the recording is illustrated in more detail in Figure 42. The louder the performance gets the spectrogram colours change from yellow into red. In the spectrogram, the two white ovals show the loudest parts. They coincide with the yellow line on top of the graph, which also indicates the volume level. The *tessitura* at the beginning of the verses is a little higher than the
previous songs. Basilides’s vocal line and articulation in this register is effortless. Here, she alters her dark and sombre tone to a brighter and more lyrical one. The tone she displays almost sounds like a soprano’s not a mezzo-soprano’s voice. Her performance is playful, while reflecting the composer’s marking *giocoso* (see Figure 41).

**Figure 41.** Bartók, ‘If I climb the high summit’, bars 1–4 (Boosey & Hawkes, 1955).

The only slides that Basilides sings in this song are the four *glissandi* which reflect the composer’s markings in the score. Apart from these, she sings one *acciaccatura* (in bar 21) that does not appear in the score. It is plausible that this ornament is an unintentional phenomenon.

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34 Bartók, *Eight Hungarian Folksongs for high voice and piano* 1907-17.
Figure 42. Spectrogram display, ‘If I climb the high summit’, bars 1–18.

Some conclusions on Basilides’s performance

One of the most interesting aspects of Basilides’s performance of the four settings is the varied application of *portamento* and slides. In songs, no. 1, ‘Black is the earth,’ and no. 2, ‘My God, my God,’ she over emphasises the number of slides. The tempo of these songs is slower than songs nos. 3 and 5. Song no. 1 is *adagio* and it is in the group of ‘miscellaneous’ songs, the second one is written in the ‘old’ style, the tempo indication is *andante*, and the performance is *parlando-rubato*. Most interestingly, she does not sing any slides, or only a small number of them in songs
that require *tempo giusto* character. These songs are no. 3, ‘Women, women,’ and no. 5, ‘If I climb the high summit.’ Somfai explained it in his book that Bartók’s *rubato* marking in scores refers to *parlando-rubato* folk music: “The latter is not a rhapsodic rendition *per se* with romantic slowing down, but a characteristic declamation, often quite agitated, as if there were a text behind the themes.”

The other important aspect of performance practice that Basilides employs is the particular characterization of the songs. Her voice is dramatic, expressive and has a dark timbre in the *parlando-rubato* songs (no. 1 and 2). In the first song, the character that she conveys is a broken-hearted woman, whilst in the second song the person is suffering from living in a forced marriage. Basilides’s voice changes in the faster *tempo giusto* songs (no. 3 and 5). Here, the voice is vibrant and lighter. She was forty-two years of age when the recordings occurred in 1928, yet her characterization of a young girl in both songs is credible.

Similar to Medgyaszay, Basilides does not always follow exactly the composer’s markings. One of the alterations occurs when the mezzo-soprano and the pianist do not begin a musical line jointly because the singer needs to take an adequate breath. This delays her entry significantly (song no. 1). Of the recordings of the four settings, this is the only song where such a delay occurs.

The other modifications that Basilides makes to the score are the changes of rhythm. These occur most notably in the slower *parlando-rubato* songs (nos. 1 and 2) and they are not as prominent as Medgyaszay’s in the *Five Hungarian Folksongs*. One of the four arrangements’ recording is slower than the composer’s estimated time in the score. The length of the other three arrangements deviates slightly from indications in the score. The reason for not having a significant time difference may

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be that Basilides and Bartók held joint recitals from 1923 onwards in which they performed Hungarian folksongs.

During Basilides’s career, songs were closest to her heart. As of 1928/29, she held regular concerts at the Academy of Music in Budapest in which she mostly sang songs or song cycles. According to Molnár, Basilides believed that the interpretation of songs should not be operatic or speech-like. It is the artist’s responsibility to find a fine balance in between these two. Once such an approach was established, the equally important text and vocal melody could be unified in the musical performance as a whole. Basilides’s rendition of songs displayed an internal, personalised approach, while at the same time she was able to interpret and communicate the songs to the audience objectively.

Although Basilides had a classically trained operatic voice, her down-to-earth performance remained close to the village people’s interpretation. She was able to achieve this style by not adding unnecessary embellishments to the vocal part, by conveying deep human emotions in the expressive performance, and by delivering the text meaningfully. These factors enabled her to add colours to the voice. Her diction is excellent in all registers, and the vocal control over the dynamics—particularly in the slower songs—is outstanding. Her impressive and rich voice has an extensive vibrato that is always present; however, it is less prominent when she sings softer or at a slower pace.

Basilides’s 1928 recordings reveal a conscientious artist’s performance. In the

36 Antal Molnár, Basilides Mária (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1967), 58.
37 Ibid., 61.
38 Ibid. The Hungarian text as it appears in Molnár’s book:
"Azt vallotta [Basilides], hogy a dal előadása nem szavalás, de nem is áriázás, a kettő között kell megteremteni azt a sajátos előadásmódot, hogy a költemény és a melódia külön-külön hiánytalanul hasson, mégis a zene valamennyi elemének ötvözeteként, elválaszthatatlan egységben."
39 Ibid.
mid-1920s, some of Basilides’s fellow artists at the Royal Opera House Budapest probably could not comprehend why popularising Hungarian folksongs was important to her. This misunderstanding came from the belief that folksongs did not have much artistic value because up until then only peasants sang them, not opera singers. Basilides was one of the first artists who championed Bartók and Kodály’s mission of cultivating Hungarian folksongs and performing them in concert halls. In appreciation, the two composers dedicated a number of their compositions to the greatest mezzo-soprano of her era.

3.2.6 The forest road is crowded

Ferenc Székelyhidy sang the last three songs of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* for the 1928 recordings. Székelyhidy was forty-three years old and he was at the peak of his operatic career. Bartók transposed these three songs to a higher key that suited Székelyhidy’s tenor voice. The sixth song is *Töltik a nagy erdő útját*, ‘The forest road is crowded.’ The song is written in the ‘old’ musical style, *parlando-rubato* (CD track 17). The song is about Székely soldiers who die on the battlefield.\(^{40}\) Although Székelyhidy sings the song a minor third higher than the original key in the score, his strong lyrical tenor voice does not lose its warmth and roundness in the upper register.

One of the most interesting characteristics of Székelyhidy’s interpretation of the song is the *rubato* style singing (CD track 18). Because of this, his performance occasionally changes the time signature and the rhythm. At times the piano is ahead of the tenor or, on other occasions, the tenor is early with his entries in comparison to

\(^{40}\) Bartók, *Eight Hungarian Folksongs for high voice and piano 1907-17*. Nancy Bush made the English translation of the song in the score:

“All the lads to war they’ve taken. Woods and mountains are forsaken. Lusty lads too young for dying. Soldiers for their homeland sighing. Far away to war they are going. Blood upon the road is flowing Death awaits them, undefended. So both youth and joy are ended.”
the piano part. It is rare when the tenor and the piano jointly start a new musical phrase.

Bartók expressed his view regarding tempo in 1906 in the manuscript of the *Hungarian folksongs for voice and piano*: “In the musical part of rendering, the main distinction to heed is, whether the song in question is a dance or a slow tune. A dance proceeds at a steady tempo. [. . .] The manner of performance of a slow tune is free in tempo. . .”41

Szekelyhidy’s performance at the beginning of the two verses is passionate and fast. He deliberately prolongs the first quaver note in both verses in order to grab the listener’s attention from the start. Then he speeds up and sings the *parlando* openings quickly (in bars 4 and 17) whilst maintaining the clear articulation. Enunciation of the text is central in this song. Towards the end of the verses, Székelyhidy slows down the tempo significantly. Here, he takes his time on certain words: ‘Székely legényeket’ (English: ‘Székely young men’), ‘lándzsa’ (English: ‘spear’) and ‘összevágta’ (English: ‘had been cut’).

Bartók’s dynamic markings in the score are *forte* in the first and *piano* in the second verse. The tenor does not deliver this contrast. Székelyhidy’s dynamic level remains either *forte* or *mezzo forte* throughout the song. From the start, he sings each note loudly, heavily, and with equal importance. However, when the pace slows down his voice slightly softens. Bartók’s view regarding dynamics was that increasing or decreasing the dynamic levels of a folksong was unknown in village

41 Béla Bartók, notes to Béla Bartók – Zoltán Kodály: Hungarian Folksongs for song with piano. *Reprint of the original manuscript with commentaries by Denijs Dille* (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1970), 44. The reprint was accessed by Kornélia Péry in June 2013 at the library of the Budapest Music Center (BMC).
peoples’ interpretations. He also said: “Artistic performance, on the other hand, cannot do without dynamic effects, but with folksongs this artistic means has to be applied very sparsely.”

The use of glissando is another feature in Székelyhidy’s performance although it is difficult to identify the differences between glissando and portamento. In his interpretation, the glissando is more like a straight line, without much of a vibrato, connecting two notes, and it begins slightly earlier than a portamento. Figure 43 shows the first five bars of the vocal part in the score:

**Figure 43.** Bartók, ‘The forest road is crowded’. The vocal part in the score, bars 4–8. (Boosey & Hawkes, 1955).

The other interesting performance element of Székelyhidy’s recording is the modification of the notes from the score. More precisely, he does not sing any of the written semiquavers, demi-semiquavers. Instead of these ornaments, he sings almost exclusively a glissando or portamento. The only exceptions are in bars 7 and 20. In bar 7, instead of a triplet (C♯5, B4 and A4, see Figure 43), he sings two of the notes, which because of the transposition are E5 and D5, but leaves out the last note of a C5. In Figure 44, the yellow highlight illustrates this area. A similar adjustment occurs on the triplet in bar 20. I made a transcription of Székelyhidy’s interpretation of the same bars, (Figure 44):

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42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
**Figure 44.** Bartók, ‘The forest road is crowded’, bars 4–7. Székelyhidy’s recording (1928).

![Figure 44](image)

**CD Track 17.** Phonograph recording of *Bóthajtásos az én szobám* (MH-1016a). With kind permission of the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest (May 2015).

**CD Track 18.** Bartók-Székelyhidy, nos. 6–8, ‘The forest road is crowded’, ‘Up to now my work’ and ‘The snow is melting’ (1928).

Székelyhidy sings two very similar *glissando* slides in this first sentence (see black rectangles in Figure 44). In bar 5, where the first slide appears, the composer wrote specific notes (see black rectangle in bar 5, Figure 43) which Székelyhidy leaves out entirely (bar 5 in Figure 44). The second *glissando* is in the middle of bar 6 between G₅ and D₅ (Figure 44).

The tenor modifies the ornaments spontaneously, possibly in an attempt to interpret what he felt was the mood of the song. Although it is difficult to notate Székelyhidy’s performance because of the *parlando-rubato* style, it seems that he changes the tempo signature in various parts throughout the song. A comparison between the score and the recording illustrates these changes between bars 4–8 (see Figure 43 and Figure 44).

Figure 45 shows bars 22–28 of the vocal part in the score. This is followed by the transcription that I made of Székelyhidy’s performance (Figure 46).

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44 Kornélia Péchy made the transcription of Székelyhidy’s performance on the 1928 recording. The bar numbers differ from the score.
Figure 45. Bartók, ‘The forest road is crowded’. Vocal line in the score, bars 22–28.

Figure 46. Bartók, ‘The forest road is crowded’, bars 22–27. Székelyhidy’s recording (1928).

The only _acciaccatura_ that Székelyhidy sings during the 1’19 minutes long piece happens just before the second beat in bar 24 between F₅ and G₅. In Figure 46, the _acciaccatura_ is emphasised in yellow. He makes the _acciaccatura_ by shortening the F₅ note and rising to the G₅ quickly before he repeats this note again. Between these notes, F₅ and G₅, he also sings the only upward _portamento_ that appears in the recording. In total, Székelyhidy sings eight downward slides, four _glissandi_, and four _portamenti_. The frequently used descending slides appear between perfect fourth, fifth and major sixth intervals.

In discussing Székelyhidy’s performance, his musical choices in this song include:

- _rubato_ style singing
- unpredictable changes of tempi and time signature
- unsynchronised beginnings with the piano
- the text delivery is central to the performance

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
omitting written notes/embellishments

- frequent use of portamenti and glissandi
- not much variation of dynamic levels
- broad legato

3.2.7 Up to now my work

The second last song is *Eddig való dolgóm*, ‘Up to now my work.’ The tune is in the group of ‘old’ style, *parlando-rubato* and it was collected in 1914 (CD track 19). Figure 47 is the musical notation of the melody. The song is about a man who is drafted into the army when the war breaks out. As a result, his idyllic life on the farm with his family comes to an end.47

The length of the 1928 recording is 1’27 minutes: twelve seconds slower than Bartók’s estimated duration in the score of ca. 1’15 (CD track 18). In the published score the composer’s metronome marking is ca. $\frac{4}{4} = 72$. Bartók also provides precise notation of the embellishments in the vocal part. Székelyhidy adds an extra passing *appoggiatura* note to the written embellishments in bars 10, 12, and 30. These are slight modifications and hardly noticeable in the recording.

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47 Bartók, *Eight Hungarian Folksongs for high voice and piano 1907-17*. Nancy Bush made the English translation of the song in the music score:

“Spring begins with labour; then is the time for sowing. Summer brings green cornfields, meadows ripe for mowing. Tho’ my horse still waits me, bearing bit and bridle. All unyoked my oxen, rake and plough stand idle.

Daybreak and rising sun will on the march find me. House and home, sad-hearted, I must leave behind me. From my loving parents sad farewell I have taken, and my wife, my dear love, I must leave forsaken.”
**Figure 47.** Musical notation of ‘Up to now my work’in the source catalogue.\(^{48}\)

![Musical notation of ‘Up to now my work’in the source catalogue.](image)


Figure 48 shows bars 8–11 of the score. The first black rectangle in bar 10 indicates the place where the tenor alters the ornament. However, he does not change the embellishment in bar 11. The second black rectangle in Figure 48 illustrates this area.

**Figure 48.** Bartók, ‘Up to now my work’, bars 8–11 (Boosey & Hawkes,1955).\(^{49}\)

\(^{48}\) Lampert, *Folk Music in Bartók’s Compositions*, 135.

\(^{49}\) Bartók, *Eight Hungarian Folksongs for high voice and piano 1907-17*. 

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For the recording the song was transposed a major second higher than the score (Figure 49). At the onset of bar 10, Székelyhidy adds a clearly audible C₅ between B♭₄ and D₅ (Figure 49). It is most likely an intentionally delivered embellishment by the tenor. In total, he sings five subtle *portamenti* in this song. These five slides are all descending (bars 11, 16, 17, 34, and 35) and not as prominent in length as they are in the previous song. For instance, in bar 11, he sings a delicate *portamento* between C₅ and B♭₄ (see yellow highlight in Figure 49). In this song, all slides occur in between descending second or third intervals.

Probably the most obvious performance choice of this recording is Székelyhidy’s deliberate vowel additions. Often when a word ends with an ‘n’, ‘m’, ‘r’, or ‘l’, he adds a Hungarian short ‘ö’ or long ‘ő’ vowel to them. For instance, instead of singing ‘ök-röm’ (English: ‘my ox’) in bar 12, he sings ‘ök-rö-mő’. Another example is in bar 18 when instead of singing the word ‘kan-tár-szár’ (English: ‘reins’), he sings ‘kan-tá-rö-szá-rö’. Probably Székelyhidy’s intention with this was to sustain the *legato* in between the lines in order to keep the tension and the meaning of the words uninterrupted.

The transposition of the song enhanced Székelyhidy’s vocal quality. The voice is powerful in the higher register and the placement sounds ideal for him, whilst depth and musical expressiveness are still present. The division between the registers is smooth, even if he does not demonstrate a controlled *messa di voce* as Basilides does in the lower register. Similar to the previous song, Székelyhidy sings *mezzo forte* or *forte* dynamics where the composer’s instruction is the opposite *pianissimo*. This happens at the opening of the second verse in bar 23.
I was unable to find any record of what performance instructions Bartók gave to Székelyhidy during the rehearsals. It is plausible that it was an unintentional musical choice by Székelyhidy, or it could well be that he purposely sang them because the ornaments were more suitable to the character of the song.

3.2.8 The snow is melting

The last song of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* is *Olvd a hó*, ‘The snow is melting.’ It is the only one written in the ‘new’ style with a returning melody (CD track 20). In December 1906, Bartók composed the first version of the song, which was one of ten settings that he was eager to include in the second volume of Bartók-Kodály *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* (BB 42).\(^\text{50}\) The first series appeared in the bookshops in 1906, but the second volume (BB 43) was only published eighteen years after the composer’s death, in 1963.\(^\text{51}\)

In 1917, Bartók composed a new arrangement of ‘The snow is melting.’ At the time, it was one of the three *Székely Soldiers’ Songs*, which later became part of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs*. Returning to the score, the tempo indications are *allegro moderato* and *tempo giusto*, metronome marking \( \text{\textbullet} = 100 \) (see Figure 50). The general tempo of the 1928 recording is slightly faster (see horizontal black rectangles in Figure 50, CD track 18) than as is indicated in the published score. However, the

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\(^\text{50}\) Béla Bartók, preface to the *Ten Hungarian Songs for voice and piano*, ed. Peter Bartók, (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 2004).

\(^\text{51}\) Four songs, nos. 4, 6, 7, and 8 appeared in Denijs Dille’s *Der Junge Bartók I*, Editio Musica Budapest, 1963.
tempo fluctuations of the recording are between $\downarrow = 110$ and $\downarrow = 116$. In other words, the performers keep the strict tempo giusto character until the end of the song and the tempo only changes marginally.

One of the peculiarities of Székelyhidy’s performance of this song is the change of the dotted rhythms. Most of the time, the dotted rhythm is indicated in the score, but not as distinctly as he makes them. Figure 51 and Figure 52 compare the rhythmic adjustments between the score and the recording. Figure 51 illustrates the score of the last eight bars of the song (bars 19–26).

Figure 50. Bartók, ‘The snow is melting’, bars 1–8 (Boosey & Hawkes).52

52 Ibid.

**Figure 51.** Bartók, ‘The snow is melting’, bars 19–26. The vocal line in the score.

Figure 52 illustrates Székelyhidy’s performance in 1928. Bartók transposed the song for the tenor to a major second higher:

**Figure 52.** Bartók, ‘The snow is melting’, bars 19–26. Székelyhidy’s recording (1928).

The yellow highlights are the rhythmic changes, and the light blue highlights are the slides that Székelyhidy sings on the recording (see Figure 52). At the beginning of bar 23, he introduces a new performance trait—an almost imperceptible *appoggiatura* D₅ before E₅ (see black rectangle in Figure 52). This *appoggiatura* sounds like ‘scooping’⁵³. He may not have made this sound intentionally in bar 23. In

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bar 15 where the same words and notes appear for the first time, he does not make this sound.

In twenty-six bars, Székelyhidy sings five downward and three upward slides. Two of the descending slides are distinctive in volume and length, whereas the other three slides are light and hardly noticeable. The three ascending slides occur between C₅ and D₅ in bars 12, 20 and 22. The first one in bar 12 is almost imperceptible, whilst the other two are more prominent. The *appoggiatura* and four characteristic slides happen in the last eight bars (bars 19–26), which indicates that towards the end of the song Székelyhidy sings with a growing sense of expressiveness. He probably delivers these performance choices spontaneously without any conscious effort. He makes rhythmic adjustments to the text throughout the song.

**Some conclusions on Székelyhidy’s performance**

Bartók only transposed the last three songs in 1928. This is again an indication that the composer was flexible about making changes to his compositions. The key changes gave Székelyhidy free rein and allowed him to reveal the finest qualities of his voice. His articulation even in the higher vocal register is excellent and very accurate. The transposition of the songs could have jeopardised clear articulation; however, this is not the case with Székelyhidy.

The most interesting musical and interpretive choices that Székelyhidy made in the sixth arrangement ‘The forest road is crowded’ are the following: 1) *parlando-rubato* style singing; 2) vowel addition after certain consonants; and 3) significant deviation from the score. In addition, Székelyhidy omitted the written

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"A feature of national style for German-trained Lieder singers of Gerhadt’s generation is the ‘scoop’ or ‘swoop’, a fast slide up to the start of a note. Among later singers scoops were generally too fast to be perceived as slides, but are heard rather as emphases, and as such tend to be placed on particularly important words or at moments in a compositional phrase that, for harmonic, metrical, and/or melodic reasons, afford the greatest degree of expressivity."
embellishments and semiquavers.

A significant contrast can be perceived regarding ornaments in the next song, ‘Up to now my work’. Here, Székelyhidy sings all the embellishments as they appear in the score. Another interesting performance choice that the tenor frequently displays is the extra vowel addition. This phenomenon did not occur in Medgyaszay’s or in Basilides’s performance. Finally, the tenor did not execute the written dynamic markings in the score. Instead, the dynamic level remains between mezzo forte and forte in the recording.

The last setting of the song cycle reveals a new striking performance choice by Székelyhidy, which is the appoggiatura at the beginning of his last musical phrase in bar 23 of the last song. This ‘scooping’ is a new occurrence that Medgyaszay and Basilides did not apply in their performances but it was common practice by opera singers in early-twentieth-century recordings.

Overall, Székelyhidy’s performance choices in 1928 were the following:

- frequent use of glissando instead of the actual notes (no. 6)
- clear articulation and expressive performance (nos. 6–8)
- unsynchronized beginnings between the piano and vocal part (no. 6)
- rubato (nos. 6–7)
- constant rhythm changes (nos. 6–8)
- regular use of appoggiatura (nos. 7–8)
- not much vibrato and dynamic changes (no. 7)
- vowel addition after certain consonants (no. 7)
- ‘scooping’ (no. 8)
- significant changes from the score (nos. 6 and 8)
- frequent use of portamento and slides, mostly descending (nos. 6–8)
Summary

In this chapter, I analysed the 1928 HMV recordings of Bartók’s two song cycles. Through the analysis, I was able to identify the various musical choices that the three singers made. The comments that I draw from the examination was based on a comparison between the published score and the recordings.

Bartók’s 1928 recordings provide valuable information regarding how three of the well-known singers sounded and what performance choices they made in the 1920s in Hungary. At the time of the recordings, they were all at the peak of their stage careers and the recordings display the best quality of their voices. The recordings demonstrate great variety of performance elements.

The artists convey individual as well as similar characteristics in the chosen songs. The use of portamento and slides is more typical in the slower parlando-rubato songs with all three singers’ interpretation illustrating this. Deborah Kauffmann stated in an article about the early recordings of Adelina Patti, Emilio Perea, Fernando de Lucia, and Emmy Destinn: “For these singers, portamento is more than a manner of execution; it is an expressive device.” This is also the case with Medgyaszay, Basilides, and Székelyhidy’s performances in 1928.

Overall, the study reveals that the three singers’ performances vary from the published score. Medgyaszay and Székelyhidy make more substantial changes than Basilides does. The most obvious alteration takes place in the fourth setting of the Five Hungarian Folksongs, ‘The horseman’ by Medgyaszay. This song is a ballad with parlando, molto liberamente performance instructions in the published score. The soprano delivers the text with a characterization that makes the performance

55 Bartók, Five Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano, ed. D. Dille.
vivid and to a certain extent unpredictable. In the end, this recording is the most charismatic one with a broad, artistically informed interpretation evident in the five settings.

The other considerable change between the recording and the score happens in the sixth setting of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* by Székelyhidy ‘The forest road is crowded’. Apart from singing the song in a higher key, the tenor’s tempo and rhythm changes lead to unsynchronized openings with the piano. This setting is also amongst the *parlando* style songs which allows freedom for the tenor to speed up or slow the pace when he feels the necessity for expressive purposes. Here, again Bartók accepted the tenor’s conception of the song and followed his artistic choices in the accompaniment.

The 1928 recording artists frequently used *portamenti* and slides. They sang the slides with great variations; ascending and descending, with or without *appoggiaturas*, with straight tone or with vibrato, and ‘scooping’ was a new performance element that the tenor introduced. In general, vibrato was more prominent in all three artists’ recordings in the fast and loud *tempo giusto* songs than in the slow and soft *parlando-rubato* songs.

Present-day vocal practitioners do not sing these gliding movements, or at least certainly not to the extent that the three artists presented in 1928. If they did sing them, their performances would likely be considered old-fashioned. Nonetheless, today’s performers can learn from the 1928 the recordings. The HMV recording artists demonstrate that expressiveness, articulation, and connection to the text are more important performance elements than immaculate vocal technique and sound production.
CHAPTER 4 - COMPARISON TO SUBSEQUENT RECORDINGS

Considerations for final recital

I considered various options in selecting the final recital’s repertoire. The link between the research and the recital was devised in order to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the two vocal settings. I was considering three possible options for performce of Bartók’s folksong arrangements in the final-recital in November 2015.¹ The three alternatives were the following:

1. as village people performed the songs in the phonograph recordings
2. as the 1928 artists did
3. or to perform the songs in my own style considering a range of musical choices from the cylinder phonographs, the 1928 recordings, and modern vocal practitioners’ recordings.

When I began to write the thesis, I was thinking of performing the songs as village people sang them in the phonograph recordings. If I chose this option, I would have learnt the tunes from the master sheets with the embellishments. This would have been a challenge itself, but the real obstacle would be altering my voice from an operatic to a non-trained singer’s voice. In order to make this change of voice, I would have sung the songs with a straight tone, produce the sound with laryngeal constriction, and be cautious of not using many dynamics. When I tried to reproduce this kind of singing, it did not feel right. The sound was harsh and not natural. I came to the realisation that I was unable to disguise my classically trained voice in order to sound as if I had an untrained voice, hence, I discarded this alternative.

The second option was to sing the songs in the 1928 recording artists’ style. In

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¹ The detailed program of the D.M.A. final recital is included in the Appendix of the thesis.
this case, I would have learnt and replicated their musical choices in the songs, without expressing my own ideas in the performance. As one of the objectives of the final recital was to perform Hungarian folksongs drawing on a broad-ranging musical interpretation, I decided to sing the songs without altering my voice and implement as many performance elements as possible from the recordings that I examined in the thesis.

I began the lecture-recital by drawing attention to the importance of Bartók and Kodály’s joint publication, *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* (1906). From this score, I selected four songs for the recital; two songs by Bartók and two songs by Kodály. The next song was ‘Red apple fell in the mud’, which was the first tune that Bartók believed was a Hungarian folk song. I included six songs from the second volume of Bartók’s early folksong settings, *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* (1906-1907). I decided to perform from this publication because it contains songs that are not as well known as the tunes in the first volume, therefore they are seldom performed.

Given that the research was based around Bartók’s two song cycles and their 1928 recordings, I chose to sing both the *Five Hungarian Folksongs* and the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* in the recital. During the PowerPoint presentation, I offered some background to the three singers’ professional life leading up to the 1928 recordings.

I decided to include one of László Lajtha’s folksong arrangements in the recital.

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(1914) because he was one of the composers who followed Bartók and Kodály’s path in collecting Hungarian folk tunes. I concluded the recital with two songs from Bartók’s last major vocal work, the *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs* (1929). The selection of songs chosen for the recital demonstrated the evolution of Bartók’s compositional style beginning with the simplicity of ‘Red Apple’ (1904), to the modernist ‘Fast dance’ (1929). At the end of each song in this chapter, I provide a brief explanation of the interpretive choices I decided to make in the recital and why, and/or which performance characteristics I did not, as well as which recordings have influenced my performance.

4.1 FIVE HUNGARIAN FOLKSONGS (BB 97)

Unfortunately, there are only a limited number of recordings available of the *Five Hungarian Folksongs*. The fact that the songs were only published in 1970 may well be one of the reasons why this is the case. In the last one hundred, years there have been considerably more recordings made of the 1906 version of the songs. The following list (see Table 1) illustrates twelve versions of the first song, ‘Far behind I left my country,’ in which the performers used the edition of Bartók’s 1906 version. The recordings were made between 1908 and 2006, some of which were found in the Hungarian Radio Archives.

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7 Note: The final recital’s performance is on DVD. The recital took place at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music on 4 November 2015. In 2014, I recorded Bartók’s two song cycles with Phillip Shovk at the piano at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, The University of Sydney. The CD attachment of the thesis includes these audio files.
9 The researcher could identify only four recordings of the *Five Hungarian Folksongs*. The recordings were made in 1928, 1978, 1980, and 2006.
Table 1. List of recordings of ‘Far behind I left my country’, 1906 (BB 42).


One of the recordings is a very slow performance from 1955 by Imre Palló.

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10 Imre Palló (1891–1978) was a principal artist (baritone) at the Hungarian Royal Opera House from 1917. He was born in a small village in Transylvania, Mátisfalva. Because of his clear Hungarian
(baritone) and István Hajdu\textsuperscript{11} (piano). The duration of the song is ninety-five seconds (CD track 22).\textsuperscript{12} The fastest recording is also from 1955 and the pianist is the same, István Hajdu, who accompanied Vilma Medgyaszay. This recording is forty-eight seconds long (see Table 1, CD track 23). The difference between the slowest and the fastest version is thirty-seven seconds.

One of the reasons for Palló’s slow performance is that he sings the song with large portamenti, scoops, and slides upwards and downwards. The song is fourteen bars long and within twelve bars, Palló sings nine downward and six upward slides. His articulation of certain words and syllables is also an added factor contributing to the slow performance of this song. This is particularly apparent in the second half of the song between bars 7–12. By today’s standards, Palló’s expressive style might be considered an exaggerated performance. For example, when he begins to sob on the word “könny” (in English: ‘tears’), he holds this G\textsubscript{4} quaver note (“könny”) for five seconds. While he sustains this note, he increases the volume and intensity of his vibrato.

A contrasting performance to Palló’s is the interpretation by Andrea Meláth\textsuperscript{13} (mezzo-soprano) and Emese Virág (piano) from 1999 (CD track 24). Meláth had just finished her postgraduate studies when she made the Bartók album and one of the five Hungarian singers that I interviewed in Budapest.\textsuperscript{14}

Firstly, I was interested to discover what stylistic choices Meláth was thinking of using before she recorded Bartók’s early compositions. The answer to this question

\textsuperscript{11}Istvan Hajdu (1903–) was a pianist and accompanist. For a number of years he worked in the Hungarian Radio. Eventually, he became Johanna Martzy’s (violin) regular concert partner.

\textsuperscript{12}It must be noted that Hajdu begins the recording with a solo piano introduction that is the first two bars of the song. This prelude does not appear in the score and it lasts for 7 seconds.

\textsuperscript{13}Andrea Meláth (b. 1968–) is a Hungarian mezzo-soprano.

\textsuperscript{14}Andrea Meláth, interview by author, Budapest, 12 June, 2012, audio recording, transcript.
was that there were two objectives in her mind: simplicity and text-oriented delivery. Secondly, I asked if there was any particular singer or recording artist who might have influenced her performance. Meláth’s response was that two things could have influenced her interpretation; Erika Sziklay’s simple delivery of Bartók songs (1969), and the phonograph recordings. She distinctively remembered that a lecturer played and analysed a number of cylinder recordings at university during music history classes. In the interview, Meláth said the following: “If peasant people could sing the folk tunes so beautifully and simply, in my opinion I should not add anything else to the songs either.”

Meláth’s recordings from 1999 correspond to what she was saying in the interview. Her delivery of ‘Far behind I left my country’ is simple; she focuses on clear diction, perfect pearly sound, minimal or no vibrato and finally, she does not sing any slides.

A recent investigation carried out by János Ferenc Szabó in 2012 revealed the existence of the earliest-known recordings of Bartók’s compositions from 1908.

The first two songs of Bartók–Kodály Hungarian Folksongs, no. 1, ‘Far behind I left my country’, and no. 2, ‘Crossing the river’, were recorded by the Gramophone Concert Record. The disc only acknowledges the singer’s name, Richárd Erdős (1881–1912). Unfortunately, the pianist’s name remains unknown. At the beginning

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15 Ibid.
16 János Ferenc Szabó: "Erdős Richárd 1908-as Bartók-hanglemeze," [Richárd Erdős’s Bartók Recordings of 1908], in: Tudományos ülésszak a 70 éves Berlász Melinda tiszteletére, 2012. November 29. Budapest, MTA BTK Zenetudományi Intézet. Paper presented at a conference at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Musicology, 29 November 2012. http://real.mtak.hu/8656/1/Berlasz70_SzaboFerencJanos_Erdos_Richard.pdf. A meeting with János Ferenc Szabó and Kornélia Péchy took place in June 2014, at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute for Musicology in Budapest. During the meeting, Szabó, the author of the article provided detailed information of the songs. The timings of the songs with Erdős are the following: ‘Far behind I left my country’ (1’22), and ‘Crossing the river’ (1’06). As to Szabó’s knowledge, there are two available 78-rpm LP records with Erdős that can be found in Hungary. One of them is at the Sound Archives at Pécs (Marton-Bajnai Collection of Discographies), and the other LP is at the National Széchényi Library in Budapest (in József Kovács’s discography).

Gramophone Concert Record 2-102832, vinyl number: 427lr.
17 Ibid., 2.
of the twentieth century, Erdős was a member and principal bass artist at the Hungarian Royal Opera House in Budapest. The two artists’ rendition of the songs is considerably different to the 1906 published score. For instance, the pianist plays an introduction to both songs that is completely absent in Bartók’s composition. According to Szabó, it is likely that Bartók was not aware of the existence of these recordings. Bartók’s correspondence does not reveal any knowledge of them.

Apart from the 1928 recordings, there are only two or three versions of the *Five Hungarian Folksongs* (BB 97) that were identified. In these recordings, the performers used the Editio Musica Budapest publication, first printed in 1970. Tables 2–6 show the following details of the recordings, the name of the performers (singer and pianist), the year when the recordings took place, and the timing of the songs. It is worth pointing out that since the benchmark recordings of 1928, the duration of all subsequent recordings of the second song are faster. The only exception is song no. 3 ‘In the summer fields.’

### 4.1.1 Far behind I left my country

In the 1928 recording, the duration of the first song, ‘Far behind I left my country’ is sixty-six seconds. This is the slowest one out of the four versions. The fastest is Klára Takács (mezzo-soprano) and Zoltán Kocsis’s (piano) adaptation from 1980 (see Table 2, CD track 25) which is fifty-three seconds. Kocsis made another recording of the song in 1978 with Katalin Seregély (mezzo-soprano) and

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18 Ibid., 4.
19 Ibid., 2.
20 Klára Takács (b. 1945–2017) was a Hungarian opera singer (mezzo-soprano).
22 Katalin Seregély (1951–1980) was a Hungarian mezzo-soprano.
it is fifty-four seconds long (CD track 26).\textsuperscript{23} Seregély has a dark timbre and she often sings \textit{portamento} between descending intervals. She sings six wide downward slides in the first eight bars of the melody.

In the 1980 recording, Kocsis plays the opening chord ($C_4$ and $E♭_4$) at a similar pace as is written in the score $\text{♩}= 48$. From the second bar onwards, when Takács begins to sing, the tempo speeds up to $\text{♩}= \pm 60$, before it reaches $\text{♩}= \pm 70$ in bar 4. The tempo is constantly changing, speeding up some bars, and slowing down others. Takács sings the song with rich vibrato and she does not use \textit{portamento} or slides to enhance \textit{legato}.

Ágnes Herczku (folk singer)\textsuperscript{24} and Timea Djerdj’s (piano) performance\textsuperscript{25} in 2007 was transposed a minor third lower than the original key in the score (CD track 27). I interviewed Herczku in 2012. She said that she needed one and a half years of preparation time in order to be able to do the recordings.\textsuperscript{26} Firstly, she did a thorough background research on Bartók and the phonograph recordings. She read Lampert’s book \textit{Folk Music in Bartók’s Compositions}, and listened to the CD attachment with the phonograph recordings from Bartók’s collection. Secondly, Herczku also began to take up singing lessons. When I asked her what her approach was in singing folksongs, she said: “You need only two things in order to be able to sing Hungarian folksongs well; excellent ears and a good sense of style.”\textsuperscript{27}

Herczku confirmed she was aware of the 1928 recordings, however she did not want to listen to the Bartók-Basilides recordings repeatedly because she was afraid that they would compromise her interpretation. What Herczku meant by this was that

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Katalin Seregély and Zoltán Kocsis made the recording on 11 April 1978.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ágnes Herczku (1975-) is a Hungarian folk singer and folk dancer. http://herczkuagnes.hu/.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Bartók Béla, \textit{Hungarian Folksongs for Voice and Piano}, with Ágnes Herczku and Timea Djerdj, © 2007, by Hungarian Heritage House, HHCD016, Compact disc.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ágnes Herczku, interview by author. Budapest, 19 June, 2012, audio recording, transcript.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}

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she did not want to lose some of the folk characteristics in her performance by listening to other artists’ versions too many times.

When Herczku started to record the Bartók album in 2007, she received different opinions from people. She said: “Some people commented that the way I sing the songs was too authentic. Other people said the opposite; the style that I was singing with was not authentic enough. [. . . ]. So I decided to find a balance between the two, somewhere in the middle.” Later in the interview, Herczku stated the following: “Today, five years after I made the Bartók album, I would record the songs in a different way. I would be more courageous and I would follow my instincts. In other words, I would do it in a more simplistic approach and I would not follow the score as much as I did.”

Herczku’s version of the song ‘Far behind I left my country’ is a folk singer’s performance. Probably the two main characteristics of folk singing technique are; laryngeal constriction and using straight tone/no vibrato. The pianist’s tempo in the opening bar is $\frac{\text{crotchet}}{\text{quarter note}} = \pm 64$ instead of the score’s suggested metronome mark of $\frac{\text{crotchet}}{\text{quarter note}} = 48$. In the second bar Herczku accelerates the tempo further to $\frac{\text{crotchet}}{\text{quarter note}} = \pm 71$. From bar 5, the two artists gradually begin to slow down the tempo. Finally, they conclude the song at $\frac{\text{crotchet}}{\text{quarter note}} = \pm 36$ (bars 13–14). Herczku does not sing slides but frequently changes the written quavers to sharp dotted notes. At the beginning of bar 4, Herczku sings an appoggiatura $\text{A}_{4}$ instead of two demisemiquavers $\text{G}_{4}$ and $\text{A}_{4}$. Other than this alteration, she sings the same ornaments as they appear in the score.

28 Ibid.
Table 2. Recordings of song no. 1, ‘Far behind I left my country’ (BB 97).

- In the recording, the performers used the following music score, Bartók: *Five Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* edited by D. Dille (Editio Musica Budapest, 1970).
- In the recording, the performers used Bartók’s drafts (1928).


In the final D.M.A. recital in November 2015, I decided to sing both versions of the song ‘Far behind I left my country’. I started the recital with the 1906 version, *Hungarian Folksongs for Voice and Piano*, which was followed by the *Five Hungarian Folksongs for Voice and Piano*, 29 which was followed by the *Five Hungarian Folksongs for Voice and Piano*.

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Hungarian Folksongs\textsuperscript{30} (1928). The first version was fifty-five seconds long, the second was slightly slower seventy seconds.

Of the four surveyed recordings (see Table 2), Bartók and Medgyaszay’s version—which is the slowest—has influenced my performance the most. When I listened to the recording, I was able to connect to the song through the two artists’ convincing interpretation of the heartrending text. The slow tempo derives from the calm and emotional performance they convey. This is the reason why I decided to sing the song at a slow pace in my recital, which, in turn, was very similar in duration to the 1928 recording.

Apart from the tempo of Bartók and Medgyaszay’s recording, the current research influenced my interpretation, particularly the background of this song. It was the account of Bartók’s last concert at the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music in September 1940. At the end of the recital before Bartók left the concert platform, someone from the audience began to sing ‘Far behind I left my country’ and soon the entire hall joined him.\textsuperscript{31} This spontaneous act by the audience was a reaction to the knowledge that Bartók had decided to leave his beloved country to live in exile in the United States. This image inspired me as I sang this song at the recital.

\textbf{4.1.2 Crossing the river}

The second setting of the song cycle is ‘Crossing the river’ (see Table 3). Bartók and Medgyaszay’s recording of this song is fifty seconds whereas Seregély and Kocsis’s performance from 1978 is merely thirty-six seconds (CD track 28). In this case, a significant difference in length (fourteen seconds) is apparent between the two recordings.


Table 3. Recordings of song no. 2, ‘Crossing the river’, (BB 97).


Although Seregélly’s performance is much faster, the rhythm adjustments that she makes are almost the same as Medgyaszay’s. The top line in Figure 53 illustrates Seregélly’s performance, the middle line Medgyaszay’s rhythmic changes, and the bottom line is the score. Apart from the tempo, the main difference between the two artists’ performance is that Seregélly does not sing slides at all in order to enhance legato. In fact, it seems that she avoids singing any legato in her performance. The black rectangles in bars 18, 20, and 21 (see Figure 53) show the areas that vary from Medgyaszay’s recording. These bars are where Medgyaszay sings slides and Seregélly does not.
Figure 53. Bartók, ‘Crossing the river’ (bars 17–24). Seregélly and Medgyaszyay’s recordings versus score.

The *tessitura* of the song is comfortable for Seregélly’s dark voice. Her rendition is fast and quite restrained. The mezzo-soprano’s brisk performance does not allow sufficient time to colour the words. Seregélly sings an additional Hungarian short ‘ö’ vowel to the words that end with an ‘n’ or ‘m’. The same pattern was perceived in Székelyhidy’s performance of ‘Up to now my work’ in 1928. Most probably, the reason for this was to achieve clearer articulation; however, it has
changed the spelling of the words. For example, instead of ‘ut-cá-ban’ (English: ‘in the street’), Seregély sings ‘ut-cá-banõ’.

Since there are only four recordings of the second song, it is worthwhile to investigate the recordings that used the 1906 publication of the song. The vocal line is the same in both scores. Of the eight performers that used the 1906 version, Leslie Chabay (tenor) and Tibor Kozma’s (piano) recording from 1960 reveals a completely different approach to this song. The recording is forty-eight seconds long and Chabay sings it a major second higher than the score (Figure 54). He sings the semiquavers in bars 2, 3, 6, and 7 in a stilted way, short and almost staccato. Another peculiarity of his performance is that he follows the rhythm almost exactly the way the composer wrote it in the score.

**Figure 54.** Bartók, ‘Crossing the river’ (bars 1–8). L. Chabay’s recording versus score, (BB 42, 1906).

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33 Access to listen to the recording was granted to the researcher at the Hungarian Radio Archives in 2012 and 2014. The recording was made on 16 June 1960.
My performance of the song at the final recital was fifty seconds. This timing is the same as the 1928 recording (see Table 3). The three other versions of this piece with Seregély (1978), Takács (1980), and Herczku (2007) are faster.

I did incorporate some of the performance choices that I learned from the recordings. Firstly, I included in my singing numerous slides/portamenti that I heard from Medgyaszay’s recording. I find the gliding movement an important tool for musical expression. The slides are not present in any of the three artists’ versions. Secondly, I did not interpret the rhythm as it appears in the score; instead, I tailored it according to the declamatory nuances of the Hungarian language. Thirdly, I decided not to use many dynamic variations because of Bartók’s statement in the manuscript of the Hungarian Folksongs: “Dynamic effects are unknown to folk singers. [. . .] Artistic performance, on the other hand, cannot do without dynamic effects, but with folksongs this artistic means has to be applied very sparsely.”34 In the end, my performance choices regarding tempo, slides and dynamics were closer to Medgyaszay’s version than to the later recordings.

4.1.3 In the summer fields

The third setting, ‘In the summer fields,’ is the only song of the five where a later recording is slower than Bartók and Medgyaszay’s performance, which is fifty-five seconds (see Table 4). The slowest recording of the song is sixty seconds and it is Herczku35 and Djerdj’s version from 2007 (CD track 29). For the recording, they

34 Béla Bartók, notes to Béla Bartók – Zoltán Kodály: Hungarian Folksongs for song with piano, Reprint of the original manuscript with commentaries by Denijs Dille (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1970), 44. The reprint was accessed by Kornélia Péchy in June 2013 at the library of the Budapest Music Center (BMC).
transposed the song a perfect fourth lower than as it is in the score.

Herczku is a folk singer, and especially in the first verse, she frequently sings upward *appoggiaturas* on the first syllable of certain words. These *appoggiaturas* are clearly noticeable. For example, at the beginning of bars 9, 10, and 13 (see Figure 55). In bar 9, the word is ‘Én’ (in English: ‘I’), in the next bar, she sings the *appoggiatura* on the first syllable of the word ‘rozmaring’ (in English: ‘rosemary’), and in bar 13, ‘barna’ (in English: ‘brown’). The yellow highlights in Figure 55 illustrate the *appoggiaturas* that Herczku sings during the first verse between bars 9–16. In total, she sings twelve *appoggiaturas*: nine in the first verse and three in the second. Her performance does not include many slides, but when she does, they are short and almost negligible.

The 1928 recording is the second slowest at fifty-five seconds. The fastest performance is Seregélly and Kocsis’s recording from 1978 at forty-one seconds (CD track 30). Her performance is energetic and a little rushed. Although the metronome marking in the score is $\underline{\|} = \pm 106$, Kocsis and Seregélly’s initial tempo is much faster, *vivace* and $\underline{\|} = \pm 140$. In the second half of the first verse, the two performers speed up to $\underline{\|} = \pm 153$. Seregélly sings four quick slides during the first verse and *appoggiaturas*, although not as many as Herczku does.
One of the most interesting performance characteristic of all recorded performances of this song are the frequent use of appoggiaturas, which I also employed during my recital. The appoggiaturas assist the singer in decorating the musical lines and/or give emphasis to the beginning of important words. Typically, appoggiaturas are applied on on ascending second intervals at the beginning of a phrase. However, they could occur at larger intervals of a third or fifth. For instance, appoggiaturas of a perfect fifth are present in Herczku’s recording (2007) and in my recital (2015).
Table 4. Recordings of song no. 3, ‘In the summer fields’ (BB 97).


4.1.4 The horseman

Apart from the 1928 recording, only two versions of the fourth song, ‘The horseman’, are available for the comparison study (see Table 5). The fastest one is interpreted by Seregély and Kocsis (1978, CD track 32) at eighty-eight seconds. The slowest version is by Terézia Csajbók (soprano) and Lóránt Szűcs (piano) at one hundred and twenty six seconds (1971, CD track 33).

As mentioned in Chapter 4, more recordings were made of the 1906 version of

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the five songs. Song no. 4 also has more recordings of the first version. Amongst these recordings, probably Vilma Medgyaszay and István Hajdu’s performance at the Hungarian Radio from 1955 is one of the most interesting (CD tracks 34 and 35).\footnote{Recording Artists: Vilma Medgyaszay (soprano) and István Hajdu’s (piano), Recording Date: 11 October 1955, Recording Location: Hungarian Radio, Budapest.}

In 1955, Medgyaszay was seventy years old and her voice began to lose quality in comparison to the 1928 recordings. Nevertheless, the value of this recording lies in the fact that it shows how Medgyaszay’s performance has evolved over twenty-seven years.

**Table 5.** Recordings of song no. 4, ‘The horseman’ (BB 97).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer/pianist and date of recording</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bartók: Five Hungarian Folksongs, BB 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Nem mesze van ide kis Margita (The horseman)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The black vertical lines in Figure 56 illustrate how frequently Medgyaszay takes a breath during the first six bars of the second verse in the 1955 recording. This second verse is omitted from the 1928 version and recording. Within six bars, Medgyaszay takes eight breaths in order to articulate the meaning of the words more effectively.

In contrast, in 1928, Medgyaszay took a breath after every two bars. Apart from the dissimilarity in breath control, the other difference between her two recordings is that in 1955 she sings some phrases in *Sprechgesang* style. The speech-like singing appears in the first and the last four bars of the second verse. For the first time, it is the voice of the narrator’s character (see red dotted rectangles in Figure 56), and the second time, at the end of the same verse, it is the voice of the owner of the inn (blue dotted rectangles in Figure 56). Medgyaszay differentiates between the four characters with sudden colour and tone changes in her voice.

Medgyaszay’s outstanding acting skills allow the audience to follow the story line easily. At times, she whispers the words in order to describe the story more vividly; for example, during the second verse when the owner of the inn tells the police that the highwayman they are looking for is inside the tavern. It is plausible that since Medgyaszay’s voice was declining by 1955, she sings with greater emphasis on the text and characterisation than she did in 1928. Artistically, however, this recording is still of great value.
When I began to prepare this song for the recital, my initial objective was to find the voices of the four characters. I was inspired by Medgyaszay’s 1955 recording, in which her outstanding skills in characterisation are evidenced. I am not aware of any other recording in which an artist altered her voice as well as Medgyaszay did in this recorded performance.

As a female singer, it is difficult to imitate male voices and I needed to find the police officer and the highwayman’s tone. Once this was established, I began to practice how to switch quickly from one character to the other. The next step was to

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**Figure 56.** Bartók, ‘The horseman’, second verse, bars 1–6. The first version of the song from 1906 (BB 42).  

find a way to colour important words. My ultimate goal in the recital was to communicate the story in a way that the mostly non-Hungarian audience would also understand.

4.1.5 Walking through the town

The last arrangement of the song cycle is ‘Walking through the town.’ There are five versions of the song (see Table 6). The fastest one is Kocsis and Seregély’s 1978 performance with thirty seconds (CD track 36). Bartók and Medgyaszay’s recording is the slowest with forty-four seconds.

In order to make a comparison, recordings of the 1906 version of the song are also included in the analysis. Amongst these, Erzsébet Török (soprano) and István Hajdu’s recording from 1953 is thirty-six seconds (CD track 37). Although their performance is relatively fast, Török sings four quick upward appoggiaturas and ten downward slides throughout the song.

Another recording by Csajbók and Erzsébet Tusa’s (piano) reveals the opposite. It is thirty-seven seconds and in this case, Csajbók’s performance choices do not include any slides (CD track 38). A few years later, in 1971, Csajbók made another recording of the song at the Hungarian Radio with Lóránt Szűcs at the piano (CD track 39). In this recording, she alters her performance style by adding upward slides at the beginning of bars 1, 4, and 7. These slides are subtle and barely noticeable. Nonetheless, Csajbók’s two versions are different.

39 Recording Artists: Erzsébet Török (soprano) and István Hajdu’s (piano), Recording Date: 1953, Recording Location: Hungarian Radio, Budapest.
40 Béla Bartók: Eight Hungarian Folksongs (1907-1917) and Hungarian Folksongs for Voice and Piano (1906), Recording Artists: Terézia Csajbók (soprano) and Erzsébet Tusa’s (piano), Date of Recording: some time before 1967, Recorded in Hungary, Qualiton LPX 1253-33a. Stereo LP. An LP recording can be found at the library of the Budapest Music Center (BMC).
41 Recording Artists: Terézia Csajbók (soprano) and Loránt Szűcs (piano), Recording Date: September 17, 1971, Recording Location: Hungarian Radio, Budapest.
Table 6. Recordings of song no. 5, ‘Walking through the town’ (BB 97).


CD Track 38. Csajbók-Tusa, Végigmentem a tárkányi (BB 42, 1960s).


In 1955, Medgyaszay also recorded this song with István Hajdu at the piano (CD track 40). The length of their recording is forty-seven seconds, which is very similar to the 1928 recording of forty-four seconds. Apart from the ageing factor, another difference between Medgyaszay’s two recordings is that in 1955 she significantly slows down the tempo in bars 8 and 9. At this point, she wishes to express the individual words colourfully. In order to find the right colour, she needs
more time; therefore, she slows down the pace.

In the 1955 recording, the two artists begin the tempo at $\frac{4}{4} = \pm 105$, whilst in 1928, Bartók and Medgyaszay’s initial tempo is $\frac{4}{4} = \pm 94$. In 1955, a swift change in tempo occurs in bars 8–9, where Medgyaszay slows down the tempo to $\frac{4}{4} = \pm 78$. This is not the case in 1928 when the two artists only marginally slow down the tempo to $\frac{4}{4} = \pm 96$. In other words, in 1955 the tempo fluctuation of the song is broader than their performance in 1928.

**Summary**

At the beginning of Chapter 4, I discussed what performance decisions I made during the recital preparation. I explained what repertoire was selected and why, and how this relates to the research. In the analysis of recordings, at the end of each song, I briefly reflected on my own performance. I discussed whether there was any artist who influenced my interpretation of a specific song. Overall, this part of the chapter examined the later recordings as well as my performance of the songs.

I analysed the available recordings of the *Five Hungarian Folksongs* produced after 1928. In discussing the analysis, the fluctuation of tempo, ornaments, rhythm changes, surprising musical choices (like ‘sobbing’ by Palló), characterisation, breath control, straight tone, and vowel addition were examined. In the comparison, I drew attention to some individual performance choices reflective of a particular artist.

Given the limited number of recordings of the *Five Hungarian Folksongs* (1928), in order to draw some conclusions, I also refer to those artists who made recordings of the *Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano* (1906).\(^{42}\) The following performance trends emerged over a period of ninety years in the performance of the songs:

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\(^{42}\) Note: The * sign refers to those artists who made recordings of the 1906 version.
The tempo is generally faster than the 1928 recordings. The fastest version is by Seregélly (1978).

The *portamento* and slides are less prominent or not present at all: Chabay* (1960), Takács (1980), Herczku (2007).


Chabay* (1960) slightly alters the rhythm from the score whilst the other artists significantly change it (‘Crossing the river’).

Perhaps the most surprising performances of all is Palló’s* (‘Far behind I left my country’, 1955). His unique musical choices include sobbing, deliberately slow tempi, broad *portamento* and slides of all types, and emotional text delivery.

Csajbók (1971) and Herczku (2007) sing the songs with a straight tone.

Herczku (2007) creates her own embellishments into the performance.

Medgyaszay* (1955) introduces *Sprechgesang* speech-like singing into her vocal delivery.

The following performance choices are present or similar in the 1928 and in the later recordings:

- The *appoggiaturas* are often used by Medgyaszay (1928), Herczku, (2007), Pérchy (2015).
- A few artists often add a Hungarian ‘ö’ vowel following an ‘m’, ‘n’, or ‘r’ consonant: Seregélly (1978), and Takács (1980).
- All recorded artists considerably modify the rhythm from the score except Chabay* (1960).
- The only song that Bartók wrote embellishments to is no. 1, ‘Far behind I left

Overall, the recorded performances are all individual and unique. However, a general pattern may be perceived from the recorded performances that artists made after 1928. The characteristics are the following: faster tempo, ornaments are sung as they appear in the score, *portamento* and slides are not extensive or in many cases negligible after the 1928 recordings, and some artists attempt to sing without vibrato.

There are patterns that emerge from a singer’s individual artistic flair. These occurrences are singular and unique: sobbing effect by Palló* (1955), Chabay* sings the rhythm as it appears in the score (1960), *Sprechgesang* by Medgyaszay* (1955), making up ornaments by Herczku (2007).
4.2 EIGHT HUNGARIAN FOLKSONGS (BB 47)

A relatively large number of recordings can be found of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs*. The number of versions range from fifteen to twenty-four for each song.

4.2.1 Black is the earth

In the comparison study, twenty-four versions of the first song were included (see Table 7). In 1950, Nina Valery (mezzo-soprano) and her husband Rudolph Goehr (piano) made a recording of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs*. In this recording, Valery’s interpretation of the first song avoids slides and vibrato. In bars 7 and 14, she does not make any rhythm adjustments to the words but simply sings all quaver notes as they appear in the score. She sings these quaver notes of equal length, and it seems that she adds a *tenuto* sign above each note. The *tenuto* makes every syllable even, as if they were all of equal importance. There is no *rubato* in Valery’s performance. She firmly sings the rhythm according to the score and does not attempt to adjust it to the spoken language.

In 1954, Magda László (soprano) and Franz Holetschek (piano) recorded the song (CD track 41). Although both recordings (Valery and László) took place in the 1950s, László’s performance is very different to Valery’s style of singing. László’s recording is not only one of the slowest of the twenty-four versions of the song at one hudred and five seconds, but her musical style varies greatly from Valery’s. László’s voice has a notable vibrato that comes from her operatic background. Her singing style includes *rubato* and sliding movements. In total, she

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44 Magda László (1919–2002) was a Hungarian opera singer. She moved and settled in Italy in 1946.

45 *Béla Bartók: Songs, Op. 16 and Hungarian Folksongs*, Recording Artists: Magda Laszlo (Soprano) and Franz Holetschek (Piano), Recording Location: Konzerthaus, Vienna, Published: 1954, LP, Westminster: WL 5283.
sings five descending *portamenti* and one upward *appoggiatura* during the song.

**Table 7.** A list of artists who recorded Bartók’s ‘Black is the earth’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer/planist and date of recording</th>
<th>Duration in seconds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basildes/Bartók, 1928</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valery/Goehr, 1950</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Török/Freymann, 1953</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>László/Holetschek, 1954</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Székely/Hajdu, 1960s?</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seiner, Salter, 1969</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Szirmay/Szűcs, 1970</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csajbók/Tusa, 1970s</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Kovács (a)/Fellegi, 1972</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seregely/Kocsis, 1978</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Takács/Kocsis, 1980</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamari/Prunyi, 1992</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Takács/Jandó, 1995</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Kovács (b)/Vékey, 1995</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marton/Jandó, 1996</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megyesi Schwartz/Bizjak, 2001</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horváth/Szokolay, 2006</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herczku/Djerdl, 2006</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rost (a)/Simon, 2007</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csordás/Simon, 2007</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upshaw/Kalish, 2008</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kretzinger/Hovrin, 2010</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paszticsák/Kozlov, 2010</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rost (b)/Kocsis, 2011</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**CD Track 42.** Marton-Jandó, *Fekete föd* (bars 1–8, 1996). With kind permission of the Hungarian Radio Archives.

In 1996, Éva Marton⁴⁶ (soprano) and Jenő Jandó (piano) recorded three songs from the song cycle at the Hungarian Radio.⁴⁷ Marton, one the most acclaimed opera singers in the world, sings the dramatic and soft dynamic parts of the song, ‘Black is the earth’ with clear articulation (CD tracks 42 and 43). Her vibrato is dominant when she sings louder or longer notes, like dotted crotchets or minims. Marton’s extensive vibrato substantially decreases when she sings softer phrases or shorter notes, such as quavers. Her performance includes two subtle downward portamenti. The first slide appears in bar 4 and the second one in bar 11. This recording is seventy-eight seconds, which is six seconds faster than the average of eighty-four seconds.

The three sopranos mentioned above—Valery, László, and Marton—are notable representatives of the 1950s and 1990s. Valery’s only weakness is the pronunciation of the Hungarian language. This possibly derives from not being able to adjust the rhythm to the text. Although László’s recording is slow, she compensates for this shortcoming with beautiful vocal quality and impeccable technical delivery. Marton’s voice is large and powerful.

My version of the song in the recital was eighty-six seconds. This duration is very close to the average of eighty-four seconds. By examining Bartók’s and Basilides’ recording (eighty-three seconds), I noticed that the estimated performance in the published edition is seventy seconds. The difference of thirteen seconds between the composer’s recording and the estimated length of a performance in the score suggests that Bartók was relatively flexible with the tempo. Of his tempi in the manuscript of the Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano, Bartók states: “folk

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⁴⁷The songs that Marton and Jandó recorded were: no. 1, Black is the earth, no. 2, My God, my God, and no. 4, So much sorrow. Date of recording 22 June 1996.
singers very often sing the same song with greatly varying tempi. It is up to the performer to hit upon the right tempo by which a particular song is at its best.”

This statement by Bartók had an impact on my interpretation of the songs in preparation for the recital. I no longer felt compelled to sing the songs in the tempo that was indicated in the score. In the end I chose the tempo according to what I felt was the most suitable for my voice and the song.

4.2.2 My God, my God

There are twenty-two versions of the second song, ‘My God, my God,’ included in the comparison. The recordings took place between 1928 and 2011 (see Table 8). Erzsébet Török and Magda Freymann’s (piano) interpretation from 1953 includes some striking performance choices (CD track 44).

Török’s voice is well trained and closer to a folk than classical style. As the ethnographer Gyula Ortutay said, “her aim in life was the true presentation of Hungarian folksong.” Ortutay further described Török’s performing style, “there was no sort of fake additive in her singing, no folksy dilution, no tricks, none of those off-key sounds of the Pseudo-Magyar which so enraged Bartók.” In the same article Antal Molnár stated: “Erzsi Török’s rare gift was to combine a rural soul with urban and European culture. In other words she was the avatar of the ideal

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48 Béla Bartók, notes to Béla Bartók – Zoltán Kodály: Hungarian Folksongs for song with piano, Reprint of the original manuscript with commentaries by Denijs Dille (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1970), 44.
49 Erzsébet Török (1912–1973) and Magda Freymann made the recording at the Hungarian Radio on 31 August 1953. Erzsébet Török began her career as an actor and a crooner but turned to Hungarian folksongs in the late 1930s.
50 Gyula Ortutay (1910–1978) was a Hungarian ethnographer and politician.
52 Ibid.
53 Antal Molnár (1890–1983) was a Hungarian composer and musicologist.
which Bartók and Kodály had in mind."\(^{54}\)

Török sings the song with a straight tone, changes dotted rhythms into even more sharply dotted ones, uses *rubato*-style singing to a great extent, and sings four downward slides. In particular, the last two slides towards the end of the song, in bar 27, are extremely broad and slow. These two slides occur after two quaver notes B\(_4\) and A\(_4\). Although in the score the composer indicates a slowing down, *ritardando* from bar 27 onwards, Török holds these two notes (B\(_4\) and A\(_4\)) for a long time as there are *fermata* signs above them.

Occasionally a wrong note by the singer occurs in some of the recordings. For instance, Eszter Kovács’s performance from 1995 contains a wrong note in the middle of bar 10, where instead of a quaver note G\(_4\), she sings an F\(_4\) (CD track 45).\(^{55}\) Her interpretation is simple and she sings the song with a relatively straight tone without much audible vibrato. In the first half of the song, she sings one descending (in bar 8) and three ascending slides (in bars 11 and 12). The three ascending slides are notable and appear as if they were ‘scoops.’ These scoops emerge from below the main note.

The average length of the twenty-two versions of the song is seventy-seven seconds. Amongst them, by far the slowest recording is László and Holetschek’s version of one hundred and two seconds from 1954 (CD track 46). Bartók’s metronome marking in the score is \(\text{♩}=112\), instead László’s initial tempo is much slower, approximately \(\text{♩}=±57\). She begins the second half of the song marginally faster at \(\text{♩}=±62\) and keeps this speed essentially throughout the song. She uses considerably more *portamento* than she does during the first song. In this case, in total, she sings five ascending and eleven descending slides.

\(^{54}\) Székely, Török Erzsi, *Hungarian Artists* LPX 12536.
Molnár’s words appear in the ‘Notes’.

\(^{55}\) Eszter Kovács (soprano) and Mariann Vékey (piano) made the recording on 22 June 1995.
Table 8. A list of artists who recorded Bartók’s ‘My God, my God’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer/pianist and date of recording</th>
<th>duration in seconds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basilides/Bartók, 1928</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valery/Goehr, 1950</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Török/Freymann, 1953</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>László/Holetschek, 1954</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sziklay/Szűcs, 1969</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Szirmai/Szűcs, 1970</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csajbók/Tusa, 1970s</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Kovács (a)/Fellegi, 1972</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seregelly/Kocsis, 1978</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>E. Kovács (b)/Vékey, 1995</td>
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<td>Rost (a)/Simon, 2007</td>
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<td>Csordás/Simon, 2007</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kretzinger/Hovrin, 2010</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasztirsák/Kozlov, 2010</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rost (b), Kocsis, 2011</td>
<td>64</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Another noteworthy recording is by Polina Pasztircsák (soprano) and Aleksandra Sacha Kozlov (piano) from 2010. Pasztircsák has a rounded voice, which is well-placed. The main characteristics of her performance are simple presentation and parlando-rubato style. She does not sing any slides, nor additional notes, or appoggiaturas that would change the score. She also pronounces three specific words according to the composer’s markings. These words appear in the second verse of the song: ‘és’ [English: ‘and’], ‘kérésztútállani’ [English: ‘crossroad’], ‘embért’ [English: ‘human being’]. The vowel that appears in three different words is ‘ë’. This ‘ë’ symbol is not used in the Hungarian spelling but the pronunciation of it corresponds to the Hungarian ‘ö’.

I interviewed Polina Pasztircsák in Budapest in 2012. At the meeting, she said that she did listen to Bartók and Basilides’s recordings prior to making her own CD album. She remembered that primarily Bartók’s rubato style captured her attention in the 1928 recordings. Pasztircsák also noticed that the composer and Basilides’s interpretation of the songs was flexible and quite substantially deviated from the score. Regarding other artists’ recordings, Pasztircsák said that she listened to Erika Sziklay’s performance (1969). This was because she was seeking different interpretations of the songs in order to be more familiar with them. Pasztircsák said that when she begins to learn a new musical piece, she likes to listen to various recordings. However, after that she likes to put them out of her mind and concentrate only on her artistic rendering.

When I asked Pasztircsák whether she was thinking of any particular performance choices during the recording session, the response was that her motto

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56 Polina Pasztircsák (b. 1982–) is a Hungarian soprano.
58 Polina Pasztircsák, interview by author. Budapest, 23 June, 2016, audio recording, transcript.
was to sing the songs simply. She further explained that her desire was to use a simple vocal tone in order to avoid operatic sound projection, and to communicate the text with lots of emotion.\textsuperscript{59} This statement by Pasztircsák is very similar to Basilides’s desire to find the balance in between speech-like delivery and operatic sound projection.

The four singers examined in this section—Török (1953), László (1954), Kovács (1995), and Pasztircsák (2010)—demonstrate great variations in musical style. Although Török and László are both representatives of the 1950s, little resemblance can be detected in the two performances. Török has a distinctive voice with no or minimal vibrato. Her singing style is closer to folk than classical and avoids slides (except two broad and slow \textit{portamenti} at the end of the song). As Török began her career as an actor, her performance is text oriented. On the other hand, László’s recording is quite the opposite. Her voice is operatic and has an excessive vibrato. She employs a large number of \textit{portamenti}/slides in the song and adds an ‘ö’ vowel after the ‘m’ consonant. Perhaps Török and László’s musical taste is surprising for a modern listener; however, they demonstrate ideas—for example, Török’s folksy voice or László’s extreme slow tempo—that current vocal practitioners may consider imitating in their own practice.

Kovács’s performing style has more resemblance to Török’s than to László’s. She displays little vibrato when she sustains longer notes and the slides are negligible. Perhaps the most surprising musical error in Kovács’s performance is when she sings a wrong note. Pasztircsák’s recording represents the style from the modern era. The \textit{parlando} singing style and simple manner are the main aspects of her interpretation.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
Perhaps the most notable difference between the 1928 and the later recordings is Basilides’s sensitive, soft singing approach. There is no other recorded performance of this kind. My intention for the recital was to sing the first verse softly, *piano* or *pianissimo*. As soon as I began to practice the song, a problem arose. Whilst Basilides’s contralto voice was blooming and displayed full dynamic control in the low register, my soprano voice was not coping well with the soft singing in this tessitura. As a result, at the recital I decided to sing the first verse *mezzo forte* not *piano*. Apart from this, clear articulation and finding the character were my priorities.

Another interesting point regarding the 1928 recording is that Basilides does not follow Bartók’s performance instructions in the score of *semplice* and *non-espressivo*. Instead, her interpretation is emotional and passionate. Prior to the recital, I decided that I would sing the song in a similar way, which was to allow myself more flexibility in expressing feelings.

### 4.2.3 Women, women; let me be your companion

Listening to subsequent recordings of this song (see Table 9), Erika Sziklay (soprano) and Lóránt Szűcs’s (piano) version stands out (CD track 47). The recording was made at the Hungarian Radio in 1969. Sziklay’s performance is not typical in the sense that she sings *legato* at the beginning of the song in bars 3–6. Other artists who recorded this song do not use as broad *legato* as Sziklay does. She was thirty-five years of age at the time she made the recording. Her lyrical voice is light and bright and suits the young girl’s character who sings the song.

Another notable performance is by Vera Rózsa (soprano) and Isidore Karr

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60 Erika Sziklay (b. 1934–) and Lóránt Szűcs made the recording on 5 August 1969.
61 Vera Rózsa (1917–2010) was a Hungarian soprano. She had engagements with the Hungarian Opera House and the Vienna State Opera. She moved to the United Kingdom in 1954 and later became one of the leading experts in teaching voice in the world.
(piano) from 1963 (CD tracks 48 and 49). The pianist plays the opening two bars at a very fast tempo \( \text{presto} \, \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} = \pm 177 \), whilst the indicated metronome mark in the score is \( \text{allegretto} \, \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} = \pm 140 \). For the beginning of the second part of the song (bars 14–15), Bartók’s tempo marks are \( \text{quasi a tempo, meno mosso} \, \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} = \pm 120 \). Instead, Rózsa’s tempo is \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} = \pm 156 \). At the beginning of the final part, Bartók’s metronome mark is \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} = \pm 112 \). On the recording, Karr begins to play this part slightly slower at \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{m}} = \pm 95 \).

Rózsa’s interpretation of the song is free of sliding and \textit{legato} singing. She sings the quaver notes short and detached, while her articulation is excellent.

It is noticeable that the pace of fifteen versions of the song, between 1950 and 2006, was faster than Bartók and Basilides’ recording. In other words, it took almost eighty years before another artist recorded the song as slowly as the composer’s own recording.

Five artists—Szirmay, Csajbók, Kovács, Seregélly, and Takáts—recorded this song in a fast tempo between 1970 and 1980. The length of their recordings varied between fifty-two and fifty-five seconds. Table 9 also illustrates that there is a thirty-year gap until the next singer, Polina Pasztirsák recorded the song in this fast tempo again in 2010 (CD track 50).

One of the fastest recordings of all is Pasztirsák’s. Her version is fifty-three seconds. She includes minimal \textit{legato} singing at the beginning of each section (bars 3–6, 14–17, and 28–31). Her performing style is delicate and consistent. However, Pasztirsák’s voice in the low register does not come across as powerfully as it does in the other songs. It is plausible that the reason for this is simply an editing issue.

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62 Vera Rózsa and Isidore Karr made the recording at the Hungarian Radio on 29 July 1963.
Table 9. A list of artists who recorded Bartók’s ‘Women, women’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer/pianist and date of recording</th>
<th>duration in seconds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basilides/Bartók, 1928</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valery/Goehr, 1950</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Török/Hajdu, 1953</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>László/Holetschek, 1954</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rózsa/Karr, 1963</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seiner/Salter, 1969</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sziklay/Szűcs, 1969</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Szirmai/Szűcs, 1970</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csaibók/Tusa, 1970s</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kovács/Fellegi, 1972</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seregély/Kocsis, 1978</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Takács/Kocsis, 1980</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamari/Prunyi, 1992</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Takács/Jandó, 1995</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megyesi Schwartz/Bizják, 2001</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horváth/Szokolyay, 2006</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herczku/Djerdj, 2006</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rost (a)/Simon, 2007</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csordás/Simon, 2007</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kretzinger/Hovrin, 2010</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasztircsák/Kozlov, 2010</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rost (b)/Kocsis, 2011</td>
<td>55</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


The data shows that the quick tempo re-occurs time and time again. For example, the most recent recorded performances by Kretzinger (2010), Pasztircsák (2010), and Rost (2011) are fast again. The average length of twenty-two versions of the song is fifty-eight seconds.

The following musical choices are similar in all three artists’ performances: minimal vibrato, no slides, and fast tempo. The interesting point in Rózsa’s performance is her ability to communicate the text in a vibrant and sensitive manner. Her excellent acting ability even comes through the recording. Sziklay displays legato style in her singing that makes her version unique. Pasztircsák’s voice displays pure tone quality and little vibrato.

Basilides’s 1928 recording has influenced my interpretation of the song. This is because the Eight Hungarian Folksongs and her voice complement each other greatly. Apart from her sensitive approach to the songs, the way she communicates emotions, and her immaculate vocal delivery, there is one more important factor that makes Basilides’s performance outstanding and memorable; the fact that Bartók was at the piano.

My version of the song in the recital was sixty-five seconds in length. This is almost the same as the 1928 recording at sixty-seven seconds. During the rehearsals, Phillip Shovk (the pianist) and I had to establish the speed for each part. It was a time-consuming process as the tempo constantly changes. The other important point in the preparation was to be familiar with the deviation from the score. This was the case because I made rhythmic adjustments to the text according to the nuances of the spoken language and the pianist had to learn these changes. The final step was to adjust the dynamic level between the voice and the piano part. This step was crucial.
as in the low register my lyric soprano voice is not as powerful as a mezzo-soprano’s voice. For this reason the accompanist had to play these parts softly.

4.2.5 If I climb the high summit

Table 10 illustrates the list of twenty versions of the fifth song, ‘If I climb the high summit.’

Table 10. A list of artists who recorded Bartók’s ‘If I climb the high summit’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer/planist and date of recording</th>
<th>duration in seconds</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basilides/Bartók, 1928</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valery/Goehr, 1950</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Török/Hajdu, 1953</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>László/Holetschek, 1954</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sziklay/Szűcs, 1969</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Szirmay/Szűcs, 1970</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csajbók/Tusa, 1970s</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kovács/Fellegi, 1972</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seregély/Kocsis, 1978</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Takács/Kocsis, 1980</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamari/Prunyl, 1992</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Takács/Jandó, 1995</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megyesi Schwartz/Bizják, 2001</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horváth/Szokolay, 2006</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herczku/Djerdj, 2006</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rost (a)/Simon, 2007</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csordás/Simon, 2007</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kretzinger/Hovrin, 2010</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasztirsák/Kozlov, 2010</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rost (b),Kocsis, 2011</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Perhaps one of the most unusual performances of all the versions is Nina Valery and Rudolph Goehr’s recording from 1950.\(^{64}\) This performance is the second on the list and it is ninety-one seconds. Valery sings the song almost exactly the same way as it appears in the score. She does not make any rhythmic adjustments to the text, which is foreign to Hungarian ears. To explain further, what sounds ‘foreign’ is for instance, the pronunciation of the Hungarian ‘é’ vowels. Instead of singing these ‘é’ long and wide, she pronounces these, as they were ‘e’ vowels, which are short and flat in the Hungarian language. The words where the articulation is not clear are ‘szegeny’ instead of ‘szegény’ (English: ‘poor’), and ‘legenyeket’ instead of legényeket (English: ‘young men’).

In the reprint of the manuscript of the *Hungarian Folksongs for song with piano*, Bartók and Kodály express their view about how to perform Hungarian folksongs:

> Those who know the way common people sing in the villages will not err in performing the songs. Even those who speak Hungarian well, will not commit grave mistakes. Correct speech is the better part of singing well; in the majority of the songs the text is decisive for the performance, the rhythm of the music follows the words more closely than signs can express. It is only seldom that a short note falls onto a syllable which can be prolonged or, the other way round, that a long note falls onto a syllable which cannot be prolonged and thus the language has to yield the music. For a song is a song; not all words must necessarily sound in a song the way they sound in ordinary speech.\(^{65}\)

The composers further explain, “The regular flow of rhythm is broken only where foreign musical phraseology is linked to the words.”\(^{66}\) Bartók’s performance

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64 Valery and Goehr, *Béla Bartók: 5 Songs on Poems by Endre Ady / 8 Hungarian Folksongs, BB 47*. 
65 Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, notes to *Béla Bartók – Zoltán Kodály: Hungarian Folksongs for song with piano, Reprint of the original manuscript with commentaries by Denijs Dille* (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1970), 44. The reprint was accessed by Kornélia Pérchy in June 2013 at the library of the Budapest Music Center (BMC). 
66 Ibid.
instructions in the score to the singer are *parlando* and *espressivo*. Valery performs the musical phrases with extensive *legato*; however, she does not perform the song in a speaking manner *parlando*.

Another atypical characteristic of Valery’s recording is that she deliberately sings all quavers the same length. Although the Hungarian language has short and long vowels, the soprano does not differentiate between them. Unfortunately, I was unable to determine whether Valery spoke the language or not.

Valery’s recording reveals that according to the 1955 publication of the song cycle, she sings four wrong notes. Unfortunately, it is unknown which publication Valery and Goehr used at the time they recorded the song. Figure 57 shows the score where this incident occurs. \(^{67}\)

**Figure 57.** Bartók, ‘If I climb the high summit’, bar 9. \(^{68}\)

![Figure 57](image)

Instead of a quaver note of a B\(_4\) and A\(_4\), the soprano sings a G\(_4\) in both places (see Figure 58). She does the same in the second half of the song in bar 25. This bar is identical to bar 9.


\(^{68}\) Bartók, *Eight Hungarian Folksongs for high voice and piano 1907-17*.
Figure 58. Bartók, ‘If I climb the high summit’, bar 9. Valery’s recording versus score.

In 1953, Erzsébet Török made a recording of this song (CD track 51).\textsuperscript{69} Török, who dedicated her life to popularising Hungarian folksongs from the 1940s, sings the song with a regional accent. For instance, she strongly emphasises and prolongs the Hungarian consonant ‘j’ at the end of the word ‘baj’ (English: ‘problem’) and ‘vaj’ (English: ‘butter’). In order to extend the ‘j’ sound at the same time she needs to shorten the ‘a’ vowel. This idiosyncrasy changes the spelling of the word. Instead of ‘baj’, the soprano sings ‘bajj’ or ‘vajj’. Apart from this, her accent does not compromise clear articulation. Török sings with a straight tone and other than the four written \textit{glissandi} in the score, she hardly ever uses slides in her interpretation. From her acting background, she has the ability to add tone-colours for the words.

The average duration of twenty different recordings is sixty-six seconds (see Table 10). Júlia Hamari\textsuperscript{70} (mezzo-soprano) and Ilona Prunyi’s (piano) performance from 1992 is the slowest at seventy-eight seconds (CD track 52).\textsuperscript{71} Because of her operatic background, Hamari’s voice is rich in resonance. Although Hamari and Török’s voices are completely different, their interpretation regarding the slides is similar. Resembling Török, Hamari does not use sliding for expressive purposes with

\textsuperscript{69} Erzsébet Török and István Hajdu made the recording at the Hungarian Radio on 31 August 1953.
\textsuperscript{70} Júlia Hamari (b. 1942–) is a Hungarian contralto, mezzo-soprano.
\textsuperscript{71} Bartók Five Songs, op. 15, Five Songs op. 16, Hungarian Folksongs, Júlia Hamari (mezzo-soprano) and Ilona Prunyi (piano). Recorded at the Hungarian Studio, Budapest, March 14-23, 1992, Audio CD, Hungaroton Classic LTD, HCD 31535.
the exception of the four written *glissandi* in the score.

By examining three recorded performances—Valery (1950), Török (1953), and Hamari (1992)—there is one factor that emerges that is the same in all of them: none of the three artists sings slides other than the written *glissandi*. It seems that the artists carefully considered and executed the composer’s instructions regarding the embellishments. This characteristic resembles Basilides’s version.

There is a strong contrast in resonance between the three voices. Hamari’s large voice is rich in vibrato, whilst Valery’s voice is small and lacks excitement. Török’s voice is the lightest of all. She performs the song according to the score’s instructions, *leggero* and *giocoso*. Although her instinctive singing technique does not display vibrato, her performance is vivacious, accurate in style, and dramatic or humorous when needed.

There are three interesting points in Valery’s performance. Firstly, the quavers are equal in length where she sings *legato*, whilst when the *legato* is not present, the quavers are detached and/or *staccato*. Secondly, she executes four audible wrong notes that change the tune. Thirdly, she does one scoop at the onset of the verses.

While many singers made wonderful versions of the song, perhaps Basilides (1928), Török (1953), and Hamari’s (1992) recordings have influenced my performance the most. My aim was to take the best out of these performances, then synthesise this knowledge. The performance choices that I took notice of were Basilides’s dynamics and *glissandi*, Török’s bright and lively performance and Hamari’s rounded sound. They all maintained the storytelling interest throughout the song. The analysis of these recordings assisted me in experimenting with various musical choices which I would not have considered prior to the performance.
4.2.6 The forest road is crowded

Out of the fifteen recordings of the sixth song, ‘The forest road is crowded’, there are three male singers (Székelyhidy, Chabay and Gulyás) listed in Table 11. One of the finest performances of the song is the third one on the list: Leslie Chabay\textsuperscript{72} (tenor) and Tibor Kozma’s (piano) recording from 1960.\textsuperscript{73} Chabay uses dynamics in a delicate way.

For example, at the beginning of the score, a \textit{forte} dynamic mark is suggested for the singer, but on the recording, Chabay’s dynamic is not even \textit{mezzoforte}. Although his polished tenor voice is undoubtedly operatic, Chabay is capable of singing the song in a simple manner, as if he was a folk singer. He expresses sadness by slowing down the tempo at certain phrases, whilst he sings \textit{crescendo-decrescendo} to words that he wants to emphasise. For instance, at the end of the first half of the song (bars 12–14), he sings “szegény Székely legényeket” (English: ‘poor Székely soldiers’), he adds weight to the word ‘Székely’ which is the region where the soldiers come from.

The length of Bartók and Székelyhidy’s recording is seventy-nine seconds, which is the fastest of fifteen recordings. The average timing of other recordings is eighty-nine seconds. In other words, the difference between the 1928 recording and the average duration of the following performances is ten seconds.

\textsuperscript{72} Leslie Chabay (1907–1989) was a Hungarian tenor. Apart from his European career, he made his US debut at the New York Metropolitan Opera in 1946.

\textsuperscript{73} Leslie Chabay and Tibor Kozma made the recording at the Hungarian Radio on 30 March 1960. Access to listen to the recording was granted to the author at the Hungarian Radio Archives in 2012 and 2014.
Table 11. A list of artists who recorded Bartók’s ‘The forest road is crowded’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer/pianist and date of recording</th>
<th>duration in seconds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Székelyhidy/Bartók, 1928</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valery/Goehr, 1950</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chabay/Kozma, 1960</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Szirmay/Szűcs, 1970</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csajbók/Tusa, 1970s</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kovács/Fellegi, 1972</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulyás/Kocsis, 1978</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megyest Schwartz/Bizják, 2001</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herczku/Djerdj, 2006</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horváth/Szokolay, 2006</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rost (a)/Simon, 2007</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csordás/Simon, 2007</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kretzinger/Hovrin, 2010</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paszticsák/Kozlov, 2010</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rost (b), Kocsis, 2011</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Two versions have the same duration as Bartók and Székelyhidy’s recording:

Dénes Gulyás74 (tenor) and Zoltán Kocsis’s (piano) interpretation from 1978 (CD track 53),75 and Andrea Rost (soprano) and Kocsis’s version from 2011. It is plausible that Kocsis’s knowledge of Bartók’s work—he wrote the commentaries to

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74 Dénes Gulyás (b. 1954--) is a Hungarian opera singer.
75 Dénes Gulyás and Zoltán Kocsis made the recording on 11 April 1978, at the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest.
the *Centenary Edition of Bartók’s Records with László Somfai*\(^7^6\)—influenced the tempo of these two particular recordings.

### 4.2.7 Up to now my work

The seventh song of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* is ‘Up to now my work.’ The same three male performers who recorded the previous song (no. 6) also made recordings of this one. Table 12 illustrates fifteen versions of the song.

**Table 12.** A list of artists who recorded Bartók’s ‘Up to now my work’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer/pianist and date of recording</th>
<th>Duration in seconds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Székelyhidy/Bartók, 1928</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valéry/Goehr, 1950</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chabay/Kozma, 1960</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Szirmay/Szűcs, 1970</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csajbók/Tusa, 1970s</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kovács/Fellegi, 1972</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulyás/Kocsis, 1978</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megyesi Schwartz/Bizják, 2001</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horváth/Szokolay, 2006</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herczku/Djerdij, 2006</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rost (a)/Simon, 2007</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csordás/Simon, 2007</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kretzinger/Hovrin, 2010</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasztircsák/Kozlov, 2010</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rost (b), Kocsis, 2011</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Of all recordings, the slowest version at one hundred and fifteen seconds is Leslie Chabay and Tibor Kozma’s from 1950. Although in the score Bartók indicates the metronome mark as $\frac{d}{e} = 72$, Kozma begins to play the three opening bars relatively slower at $\pm \frac{d}{e} = \pm 58$. From bar 4 Chabay continues with this slow tempo, but in bar 16 he slows down even further to $\frac{d}{e} = \pm 40$. At this point, the composer’s instruction is *più sostenuto*. Chabay faithfully follows this; he slows down the tempo, retains his *legato*, and prolongs the value of the notes. He keeps this tempo until the end of the first part of the song (bar 20). The beginning of the second half of the song reveals one of the most remarkable performances of all versions. Again, Chabay follows Bartók’s dynamic marking, which is *pianissimo* in bar 23. Because this part is quite high, it is a difficult task for singers to sing a *pianissimo*, but Chabay is capable of achieving this. The soft sound that he makes is outstanding.

The fastest recording of all is Dénes Gulyás and Zoltán Kocsis’s version from 1978 at eighty seconds (CD track 54). I interviewed Gulyás in 2012 in Budapest. He was twenty-four years old when he recorded the last three songs of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* in 1978. The first question that I asked him was whether he was aware of the Bartók recordings prior to his own recordings being made. His answer was yes, but at the time, he did not want to listen to them. The reason for this was that Gulyás prefers not to be influenced by other singers’ performances.

However, Gulyás did listen to the Bartók recordings many years later. In his opinion, the most striking performance elements of the 1928 recordings were the singers’ crystal clear articulation in all registers, the excellent correlation between

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77 Leslie Chabay and Tibor Kozma made the recording at the Hungarian Radio on 30 March 1960. Access to listen to the recording was granted to the researcher at the Hungarian Radio Archives in 2012 and 2014.

78 Dénes Gulyás and Zoltán Kocsis made the recording at the Hungarian Radio on 11 April 1978.

rhythm and text, and the freedom of *parlando-rubato* style they used. I asked Gulyás if he remembers anything that may have influenced his performance. His response was that in general the combination of two things shapes his performance choices: the background research and the musical analysis of the songs. When I asked Gulyás about the phonograph recordings, he said that the ornaments that village people used remind him of birds’ singing. He said: “If you ever listened to a recording of a bird singing and slow down this recording, there is a point when the bird’s tune and the embellishments of a folk tune on the cylinder recordings are very similar.”

Gulyás and Kocsis’s performance is eighty seconds. Kocsis’s initial tempo in bars 1–3 is $\frac{4}{4} = \pm 82$. Gulyás’s tempo from bar 4 is slightly slower, about $\frac{4}{4} = \pm 75$. This pace is very close to Bartók’s metronome marking of $\frac{4}{4} = \pm 72$. Gulyás sings the song in a *parlando-rubato* style. At times, he alters the written ornaments, either leaving out or changing the actual notes. For example, in bar 10, instead of singing the last two semiquavers (B♭₄ and A♭₄), he omits the B♭₄ and he only sings a quaver note of an A♭₄. Occasionally he also adds a passing *appoggiatura* to principal notes. In bar 26, for instance, he sings a B♭₄ *appoggiatura* before a crotchet C₅. Gulyás’s articulation is very clear.

Apart from Székelyhidy’s performance, the two other male artists’ recordings

80 Ibid.
are the slowest and the fastest. Chabay’s version (1960) is one hundred and fifteen seconds whilst Gulyás’s (1978) is eighty seconds (see Table 12). The average length of fifteen recordings is ninety-seven seconds (see Table 12). This is ten seconds slower than Bartók and Székelyhidy’s version of eighty-seven. Chabay’s singing style comprises the following performance elements: clear diction, sudden dynamic changes, simple manner and frequent slides.

4.2.8 The snow is melting

The last song of the cycle is ‘The snow is melting.’ Seventeen recordings are listed in Table 13. Márta Szirmay and Lóránd Szűcs made a recording of the song in 1970 at the Hungarian Radio. Szirmay’s performance style of the song is very operatic. Apart from an almost imperceptible ‘scoop’ at the beginning of bar 8, she does not sing slides. Her performance choices include extensive legato, and dynamics that range between mezzoforte and forte throughout the song. Szirmay and Szűcs’s version is sixty-six seconds.

Terézia Csajbók and Erzsébet Tusa’s recording from the 1970s, is very unlike Szirmay’s version (CD track 55). Their performance is fifty-two seconds long. Csajbók’s bright timbre has less resonance and she sings the song with almost a straight tone. The soprano often changes the rhythm to sharp dotted notes, and does not constantly use legato. In fact, she regularly sings the crotchet beats or longer notes with an emphasis, as if they were marked with a tenuto sign above. Apart from four hardly noticeable passing appoggiaturas (in bars 12, 16, 20, and 24), she excludes any slides in her performance.

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81 Márta Szirmay (1939–2015) was a Hungarian opera singer, mezzo-soprano.
82 Access to listen to the recording was granted to the researcher at the Hungarian Radio Archives in 2014.
83 An LP recording can be found at the library of the Budapest Music Center (BMC).
Table 13. A list of artists who recorded Bartók’s ‘The snow is melting’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer/pianist and date of recording</th>
<th>Duration in seconds</th>
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<tr>
<td>Székelhidy/Bartók, 1928</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valery/Goehr, 1950</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
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<td>Székely/Hajdu, 1950s?</td>
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<td>Chabay/Kozma, 1960</td>
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<td>Serkoyan/Souder, 1962</td>
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<td>Szirmay/Szűcs, 1970</td>
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<tr>
<td>Csajbók/Tusa, 1970s</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kovács/Fellegi, 1972</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gulyás/Kocsis, 1978</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Megyesi Schwartz/Bizják, 2001</td>
<td>61</td>
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<td>Horváth/Szokolay, 2006</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herczku/Djerdj, 2006</td>
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<td>Rost (a)/Simon, 2007</td>
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<td>Csordás/Simon, 2007</td>
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<td>Kretzinger/Hovrin, 2010</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasztircsák/Kozlov, 2010</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rost (b)/Kocsis, 2011</td>
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</tr>
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**CD Track 55.** Csajbók-Tusa, *Olvd a hó* (early 1970s, or 1960s)


A more recent recording from 2001 is by another mezzo-soprano, Lucia Megyesi Schwartz84 and Dóra Bizják’s (piano).85 I interviewed Megyesi in 2012.86

84 Lucia Megyesi Schwartz (b. 1971–) is a Hungarian mezzo-soprano.
My first query was to find out whether she knew about the 1928 recordings and if she could recall any interesting elements of Basilides’s performance. Megyesi’s response was that unfortunately she only vaguely remembered the 1928 recordings. However, she did remember Basilides’s diction/articulation. Megyesi said: “Basilides was a great singer and an expressive performer. However, I think her singing style is a little bit ‘old-fashioned’ by today’s standards.” Megyesi also pointed out Basilides’s pronunciation of the vowels and consonants that are slightly different from current Hungarian speakers’ articulation.

Regarding the phonograph recordings, Megyesi said that in her view, village people sang the folk tunes full of emotion and they created the ornaments instinctively. Megyesi also stated that authenticity did not mean that all interpretations had to be identical. This is because folk tunes were passed on through an oral tradition. One person learns and sings a tune with certain emotions, but the same tune evokes different feelings from another person."

The length of Megyesi and Bizják’s recording is sixty-one seconds (CD track 56). The characteristics of Megyesi’s performance style are similar to the above-mentioned Szirmay’s rendition. Megyesi sings with broad legato and excludes slides in her interpretation. She often modifies the rhythm from the score. Megyesi sings passing appoggiaturas at the beginning of bar 15 and 23. In both cases, she adds a clearly audible C₅ before the written D₅. This stylistic choice appears in Székelyhidy’s version as well in 1928 when he sings the same ornament in bar 23 (CD track 18).

The average duration of the listed versions of the song is sixty seconds. It is

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85 Lucia Megyesi Schwartz and Dóra Bizják made the recording at the Hungarian Radio on 20 September 2001.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
almost the same as the timing of the 1928 recording. The fastest recording of all versions is by Dénes Gulyás and Zoltán Kocsis from 1978 (CD track 57) at forty-five seconds\(^89\). The composer’s metronome marking is \(\text{d} = \pm 100\); instead, Kocsis plays his opening two bars at \(\text{d} = \pm 132\). The tempo accelerates further to \(\text{d} = \pm 140\) when Gulyás begins to sing in bar 3. They gradually speed up and reach \(\text{d} = \pm 148\) by bar 7. In their performance, the tempo fluctuation is between \(\text{d} = \pm 132\) and \(\text{d} = \pm 150\). The tempo suddenly slows down in the last bar to end the song at \(\text{d} = \pm 136\). It could well be that the pianist’s fast tempo in the opening two bars may have influenced the entire performance’s pace.

Of all the versions, Dénes Gulyás and Zoltán Kocsis’s recordings (1978)\(^90\) of the last two songs of the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* are the fastest. Their version of the songs is much faster than Bartók and Székelyhidy’s recordings. During the interview with Gulyás in 2012,\(^91\) I asked him if he remembered any particular performance choices that Székelyhidy made. His response was that he had noticed three outstanding performance aspects: clear articulation, strong connection between the rhythm and text, and the *parlando-rubato* style.\(^92\)

Gulyás’s version of the songs mirrors these characteristics. He delivers the songs with great freedom, he sings in accordance with the rhythm of the spoken language, his performance is expressive, does not precisely follow the printed notation, changes the ornaments instinctively, and he sings with clear articulation. However, one of the major differences between the 1928 recordings and Gulyás’s performance is the transposition of the songs. Bartók transposed the songs a minor

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\(^{89}\) Dénes Gulyás and Zoltán Kocsis made the recording in the Hungarian Radio, Budapest on 11 April 1978.

\(^{90}\) Ibid.

\(^{91}\) Dénes Gulyás, interview by author.

\(^{92}\) Ibid.
third (no. 6), or a major second (nos. 7–8) higher for Székelyhidy.

Summary

In the second part of Chapter 4, I examined subsequent recordings of Bartók’s Eight Hungarian Folksongs. I carefully selected recordings that demonstrated some intriguing performance characteristics. For the analysis, the number of recordings for each song ranged between fifteen and twenty-four. At the end of each song (nos. 1–3, and 4), I continued the discussion regarding what performance choices I made in preparation for the final recital and which recordings have influenced my performance.

I discussed the following performance aspects in the analysis: tempo, vibrato or straight tone, deviation from the score, slides, error of notes, rhythm adjustment, legato, scooping, vowel addition, ornaments, and dynamics.

- The tempo of the songs remained close to the 1928 recordings. However, the average length of the third setting, ‘Women, women’, is faster than in 1928.
- There is no resemblance between the performance of two sopranos’ recordings from the 1950s. I examined Török and László’s version and their performing style is not similar in any noticeable manner. Török has a folk-like voice without vibrato. She does not display slides in her singing. László is the opposite with an operatic voice with rich vibrato, and she uses many slides in the performance.
- Valery (1950) and Kovács (1995) sing a few wrong notes in the melody.
• Rhythmic adjustment to the text is scarcely present in Valery’s recording (1950). All the other recording artists considerably alter the rhythm from the score.

• The extensive legato style employed by Valery (1950), Sziklay (1969), Szirmay (1970), Megyesi (2001) is a phenomenon that was not present in 1928.

• Török (1953), Csajbók (1971), and Herczku (2007) sing with a relatively straight tone.

• Scooping is present in Székelyhidy (1928), Valery (1950), Szirmay (1970), and Kovács’s (1995) recordings.

• Székelyhidy (1928) and Seregély (1978) add a Hungarian ‘ő’ vowel following an ‘m’, ‘n’, or ‘r’ consonant.

• Székelyhidy (1928) occasionally changes the time signature in the sixth setting, ‘The forest road is crowded’.

• Omission and/or change of embellishments are present: Székelyhidy (1928), Gulyás (1978).

• Basilides (1928) and Chabay’s (1960) recordings display outstanding use of dynamics.

The discrepancy regarding tempo variations seems to occur only with specific songs. For example, nearly all the artists sang the third setting, ‘Women, women’, substantially faster than Basilides in 1928. Five recordings from the 1970s and 1980s, and two from 2010s are less than fifty-five seconds in length (see Table 13).

There are a number of instances where the tempo of a song is extremely slow in comparison to the 1928 recording. For instance, Seiner’s version (1969) of ‘Black is the earth’ is the slowest at one hundred and ten seconds. Another example is
Chabay’e version of “Up to now my work’ at one hundred and fifteen seconds which is significantly slower than the 1928 version.

It was also surprising to observe that opera singers like Szirmay (1970), Hamari (1992), Marton (1996), all of whom have large voices, do not sing slides or they keep them to a minimum in their recordings. The other interesting point is the use of broad legato that appears for the first time in Valery’s version (1950). Sziklay (1969), Szirmay (1970), and Megyesi’s (2001) followed this practice in their recordings.

The 1928 recordings demonstrate that Bartók was flexible with the interpretation of his songs. It is quite noticeable that the composer and the singers did not follow precisely his notation and markings in the score. It can be inferred that Bartók was pleased when singers had their own ideas and brought individual styles into the songs. It did not matter if, for example, he had to play extra chords or wait for the singers’ entry much longer than he expected, if it was justified by expressive artistic flair. As Somfai summarises, “Bartók shows in his own interpretation that an objective and correct reading of a score and virtuosity are no substitute for personality, for the courage and imagination of the performing artist.”93

The objective of the D.M.A. lecture-recital was to perform Hungarian folksongs with a broad range of musical choices. In order to develop this knowledge, I examined a large number of recordings. The link between the research and the recital offered a comprehensive background to the songs in their historical context, to highlight the variety of performance choices in the analysis, and to apply some of the findings in my recital.

4.3 RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS

The five Hungarian singers that I interviewed in Budapest were Andrea Meláth (mezzo-soprano), Ágnes Herczku (folk singer), Polina Pasztircsák (soprano), Megyesi Schwartz Lucia (mezzo-soprano), and Dénes Gulyás (tenor). Four of them are classically trained opera singers and Ágnes Herczku is a folk singer. They all have made recordings of either Bartók’s *Five Hungarian Folk Tunes* and/or the *Eight Hungarian Folksongs*. These recordings took place between 1978 and 2010.

The aim of the interviews was to seek information as to whether the five singers’ interpretation of the songs was influenced by any other artists’ versions. During the interviews, I asked the same questions of the five singers. The first question was to find out whether he or she knew about or listened to any of the phonograph recordings. If they had done so, I followed this up with the next question, which was: what did he or she think about the peasants’ performances and the ornaments they had used. I then asked whether the participants were aware of Bartók’s 1928 recordings prior to their own recordings. If this was the case, I asked them if they remembered any specific performance choices from the 1928 recordings. I also asked the interviewees whether they listened to other recordings of the songs. If this was the case, I asked whether they remembered any particular performance. Finally, I asked whether any other singer’s performance had influenced his or her own interpretation and what specific stylistic choices they had made in their own recordings.

In summary, the five interviewees’ responses to the research questions were similar. They all knew and learned about the cylinder phonographs during their studies in Hungary as part of the music syllabus. How they described the peasants’ performances were also similar, using such words as ‘simple’, ‘instinctive
ornaments’, and ‘clear diction’ to describe the peasants’ recordings. Although they did not remember the Bartók recordings in detail, they were all aware of them. Only one of the singers, Ágnes Herczku (folk-singer), listened to the 1928 recordings purposely as part of the preparation and background research before she recorded the songs. However, even Herczku stopped listening to it because she did not want her ideas/version of the songs to be compromised. Two interviewees (Meláth, Pasztircsák) remembered and listened to Erika Sziklay’s version of the songs (1969).

The five interviewees also agreed that they always interpret a musical piece with their own ideas. Three singers (Meláth, Gulyás, and Megyesi) prefer not to listen to other artists’ recordings prior to their performance. The other two singers (Herczku and Pasztircsák) purposely like to listen to other versions. However, they did not listen to any of those particular recordings repeatedly. Overall, the five interviewees made very similar performance choices when they made their recordings: simplicity, text-oriented delivery, and expressiveness. Apart from these, they did not analyse nor give any further thought as to what specific performance choices they made.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to analyse Bartók’s two song cycles that he recorded in 1928 and to shed some light as to whether subsequent recordings of these songs still maintain some, if any performance characteristics from the 1928 artists’ interpretation. The study primarily focused on the vocal perspective but at some points, it also commented on Bartók’s performance. Apart from discussing various aspects of vocal delivery, another objective of the analysis was to investigate how the singers’ and Bartók’s own performance varied from the score. This in turn provided information about how flexible Bartók was with the singers and how faithful he was to the score.

The intention was to trace the evolutionary changes of these vocal works since their first 1928 recordings. In the comparison study, I investigated how the performing style of the songs has evolved over a period of eighty-five years and what stylistic choices the various artists made. Apart from offering a comprehensive background to the songs, the thesis also encompasses a wealth of musical choices to which I drew attention in the analysis of the various recordings.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the performance variations of Bartók’s 1928 recordings. Perhaps the most significant is that the 1928 recording artists’ performances all demonstrate strong deviation from the score. These deviations include rhythm adjustments to the text, unsynchronised beginnings with the piano, constant fluctuation in tempo, and large-scale rubato in the slower parlando-rubato songs. Furthermore, the performers have a preference to change/or even exclude the score’s written embellishments in order to display or apply their own ideas and styles to the song. Reflecting on vocal quality, the variations of
Portamenti and slides are abundant, which in turn add colours to their singing style. The use of vibrato is present although not as excessive as is evident in recordings from the 1950s.

Such reflection leads me to conclude that Bartók was quite flexible with the singers’ interpretation of his own music, and that he accepted and allowed the singers to exercise their individual styles and imagination when they performed the songs. Occasionally Bartók even adjusted the piano part to the vocal part if he felt it was justified to do so.

Bartók’s flexible approach to the singers’ interpretation is manifested in a number of ways. Firstly, he allowed the singers to modify the written score in order to make the necessary rhythmic adjustments to the text. Secondly, Bartók also permitted the singers to modify or omit the written embellishments according to what they believed was the best variant or most appropriate ornament on the day of the recording session. Finally, there are instances when Bartók allowed the singer to delay the starting note of a musical phrase when the score indicates the two parts were to begin at the same time.

Overall, the singers’ performance style in 1928 was similar on many levels. Their interpretation of Hungarian folksongs is traditional, and chiefly a text-oriented approach with clear articulation. Although the three artists do not display sudden dynamic outbursts, the performance is expressive and emotional. The characterisation is well defined and they execute sudden mood changes when it is necessary.

It is plausible that some of the performance practices apparent in the 1928 recording are unfamiliar to current performers, or if they are aware of these, they find these musical choices simply old-fashioned. Singing style has changed and the
expectations of singing style today are very different from the 1920s recorded performances. If a current performer decided to sing in the style of the 1920s, it would only be encouraged by a small group of people, most of whom are musicologists with a special interest in performance practice related research, or musicians with interest in historical recordings. As Daniel Leech-Wilkinson explains, “it would be impossible for performers to please audiences, promoters and critics, or even as students to please examiners and teachers, if their way of making music were as different from the current norm as we hear on earlier recordings.”¹

Folk song singing style and its performance practice has changed since 1928. However, it is difficult to define when the specific changes occurred. By examining recordings between 1928 and 2011, I came to the realisation that in every decade there are one or two artists whose performing style varies greatly from the others. For example, two singers who made recordings of Bartók’s songs in the 1950s perform the same songs in very different ways. It is interesting to note that they were contemporaries, both born in 1912. One of the artists, Török displays similar characteristics to the 1928 recordings. Her tempi are similar to the 1928 recordings. She keeps the vibrato to a minimum, the approach to the song is text-oriented, and she avoids slides. At the same time, the other singer, László’s interpretation is quite the opposite: operatic vibrato, slow tempo, various types of slides.

I noticed the same pattern over the following decades in other musical aspects as well. Valery, for instance, introduced intensive legato (1950), which was not amongst the 1928 recording artists’ musical choice. However, I detected it also on single occasions by Sziklay (1969), Szirmay (1979), and Megyesi (2001).

However, if current performers decide to sing Hungarian folksongs in a

different manner, and they are willing to experiment with styles, this study provides information as to those ‘unusual’ musical choices. To name a few of these practices: variations of slides and little vibrato (1928); scooping by Székelyhidy (1928), Valery (1950), Szirmay (1970), and Kovács (1995); Sprechgesang by Medgyaszay (1955). The following artists change the score’s written ornaments: Székelyhidy (1928), Medgyaszay (1928), Palló (1955), Gulyás (1978), Herczku (2007), whilst the other singers sing the embellishments as they appear in the score. The sobbing effect by Palló (1955) is a unique and perhaps exaggerated musical choice but it works well in the context of the whole performance. This weeping is perhaps the most striking performance element of all.

Further musical choices that I highlighted in the comparison study are extensive legato by Valery (1950), Sziklay (1969), and Szirmay (1970), and minimal or no vibrato by Török, (1953), Csajbók (1971), and Herczku (2007). Of these, Török and Herczku are folk singers. It is reasonable not to expect opera singers to sing without vibrato; however, it is something for them to be aware of when they perform Hungarian folksongs. As mentioned earlier, vibrato was present in the 1928 recordings although it was not dense or overpowering. Since then, only the above-mentioned three singers (Török, Csajbók, and Herczku) attempted to create similar sounds to the village people.

The findings of the study show that the overall durations of the twelve songs have not changed significantly from the 1928 recordings. However, there are three exceptions, all of them from the Eight Hungarian Folksongs. The average length of two parlando-rubato songs (nos. 6–7) are now slower, and a tempo giusto song (no. 3) is faster. However, there are particular performances in which the tempi are extremely fast or very slow.
New performance ideas may surface if modern performers test the tempi of some of the songs to the extreme. For example, the analysis of László’s (1954) recordings reveals that her tempi are either very fast or very slow. I noticed a pattern for speedy performances by a concert pianist and conductor, Zoltán Kocsis.\(^2\) He accompanied a number of opera singers who made recordings of Bartók’s songs: Seregély (1978), Gulyás (1978), Takács (1980), and Rost (2011). Regardless who the singer was, Kocsis’s tempi were always the fastest of all the versions of the songs. Unfortunately, I was unable to establish the reason for his fast tempi. If modern musicians wish to incorporate any of these ideas into their practice, the preferred choices may add colours and shades to their performances.

Overall, the 1928 recording artists’ performances demonstrate that text-oriented approach, expressiveness, and vocal delivery are equally important, whilst it seems that striving for a perfect sound and vocal technique are central to modern performances. As a modern performer, I am not exempt from them. Although I did apply a number of musical choices in the D.M.A final recital—variations of slides, scooping, appoggiaturas, rubato, and focus on characterisation—I was hesitant and decided not to alter my operatic voice to produce a sound that would jeopardise vocal quality.

Finally, Bartók himself was flexible with the interpretation of the songs and allowed imagination and individual flair in the singers’ performances. However, the later singers also have their own individual style that makes their performance distinctive. It is because they all perform the songs in different ways. Some of the singers with an operatic background perform the songs focusing more on the vocal perspective whilst text and characterization is the core for singers who have a folk

\(^2\) Zoltán Kocsis (1952–2016). My intention was to interview Kocsis in Hungary in 2012 but due to his schedule and my short stay in Hungary, I was unable to see him.
singing background. Current vocal practitioners who may wish to perform Bartók’s folksong arrangements are in a fortunate position because, as Somfai states, “we are in a possession of a reliable guide: the recordings which Bartók the pianist made.”

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Biographical Sketch

Born in Hungary, Kornélia attended a selective music primary school, which was specialising on the Kodály method. She completed a Master’s Degree in opera at the Liszt University in Budapest. She was the recipient of the French Government’s postgraduate scholarship to the École Normale de Musique de Paris, the Italian Government’s Youth Excellence scholarship to the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatorio in Milan, and the ‘Eötvös’ scholarship from the Hungarian Government for further studies in Milan.

Kornélia has participated in a number of prestigious international competitions including the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World and the Placido Domingo Competition in Tokyo, as well as the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo (Japan), and the Ravinia Festival in Chicago (U.S.A.).

Kornélia joined the Hungarian State Opera as one of its principal artists in 2002. She has toured extensively in Europe, Mexico, Israel, Japan, and Thailand both with the State Opera and as a solo performer. Kornélia has been invited to present lecture recitals at international conferences in Singapore, Brazil and at the University Of Cambridge (UK). She now lives in Sydney, Australia where she teaches voice.
Appendices

Appendix A: Program of D.M.A. Final Recital

Doctor of Musical Arts
Final Recital
4th November 2015, Recital Hall West, 6.30pm
Sydney Conservatorium of Music

Program

Kornélia Pérchy – soprano and Phillip Shovk – piano

Bartók – Kodály: Hungarian Folksongs, BB 42, 1906

Bartók: Elindultam szép hazámbul (no. 1, ‘Far behind I left my country’)

Bartók: Piros alma (‘Székely Folksong’), BB 34, 1904

Bartók – Kodály: Hungarian Folksongs, BB 42, 1906

Bartók: Szánt a babám (no. 10, ‘My sweetheart is ploughing’)
Kodály: Gerencséri utca (no. 16, ‘Scarlet roses bloom’)
Kodály: Törik már a réteket (no. 18, ‘Now that the fields are being ploughed’)


No. 1, Tiszán innen... (‘On this side of the river Tisza...’)
No. 4, Ha bemegyek a csárdába (‘Down at the tavern’)
No. 6, Megittam a piros bort (‘My glass is empty’)
No. 7, Ez a kislány gyöngyöt fűz (‘This maiden is threading pearls’)
No. 10, Kis kece lányom (‘My dear daughter’)
No. 3, Olvad a hó (‘The snow is melting’)

Bartók: Five Hungarian Folksongs for voice and piano, BB 97, 1928

No. 1, Elindultam szép hazámbul (‘Far behind I left my country’)
No. 2, Által mennék (‘Crossing the river’)
No. 3, A gyulai kert alatt (‘In the summer fields’)
No. 4, Nem messze van (‘The Horseman’)
No. 5, Végignéztem (‘Walking through the town’)

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Bartók: Eight Hungarian Folksongs, BB 47, 1907 and 1917

No. 1, Fekete főd (‘Black is the earth’)
No. 2, Istenem, istenem (‘My God, my God’)
No. 3, Asszonyok, asszonyok (‘Women, women’)
No. 5, Ha kimegyek (‘If I climb the high summit’)

Lajtha: Feljött már az esthajnali csillag (‘The evening star has risen’)


Székely “Lassú” (‘Slow dance’)
Székely “Friss” (‘Fast dance’)

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Appendix B: Ethics Approval

RESEARCH INTEGRITY
Human Research Ethics Committee
Web: http://sydney.edu.au/ethics/
Email: hr.ethics@sydney.edu.au

Address for all correspondence:
Level 6, Jane Foss Russell Building - 302
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA

Ref. MFJ/M
15 May 2012

A/Prof Michael Halliwell
Sydney Conservatorium of Music
Greensway Building
The University of Sydney
Michael.halliwell@sydney.edu.au

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your correspondence dated May 7th, 2012 addressing comments made to you by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

I am pleased to inform you that with the matters now addressed your protocol entitled “An investigation of historical recordings of Béla Bartók’s folksong arrangements (1928): performance practices with striking surprises” has been approved.

Details of the approval are as follows:

Protocol No.: 14777
Approval Date: 15 May 2012
First Annual Report Due: 31 May 2013
Authorised Personnel: A/Prof Michael Halliwell
Ms Kornelia Perchy
Dr Rowena Cowley

Documents Approved:

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HREC approval is valid for four (4) years from the approval date stated in this letter and is granted pending the following conditions being met:

Special Conditions of Approval

1. It will be a condition of approval that independently certified translations of the public documents are forwarded to the HREC. Translations must be certified by a person who has no conflict of interest and is not associated with the research project (either an applicant or other persons identified in the application). They need to indicate that the translated documents are a true and accurate representation of the English language versions submitted to the HREC. A statutory
declaration to this effect would be appropriate if they are not an official translator. A statutory declaration form can be found at [http://www.ag.gov.au/STATDEC](http://www.ag.gov.au/STATDEC).

2. Permission from the Budapest Opera House to contact employees should be obtained and forwarded to the HREC before research commences.

3. Permission from the Hungarian Music Library to access the archives and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for access to the original recordings must also be obtained and forwarded to the HREC before research commences.

Note: All of the above listed special conditions of approval have been met.

**Condition/s of Approval**

- Continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans.

- Provision of an annual report on this research to the Human Research Ethics Committee from the approval date and at the completion of the study. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of ethics approval for the project.

- All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC within 72 hours.

- All unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.

- Any changes to the protocol including changes to research personnel must be approved by the HREC by submitting a Modification Form before the research project can proceed.

**Chief Investigator / Supervisor’s responsibilities:**

1. You must retain copies of all signed Consent Forms (if applicable) and provide these to the HREC on request.

2. It is your responsibility to provide a copy of this letter to any internal/external granting agencies if requested.

Please do not hesitate to contact Research Integrity (Human Ethics) should you require further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Dr Margaret Faeds  
Manager, Human Ethics  
On behalf of the HREC

This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), NHMRC and Universities Australia Australian Code for the Responsible Conduction of Research (2007) and the CPMP/ICH Note for Guidance on Good Clinical Practice.


Bartók, Béla, and Zoltán Kodály. "Hungarian Folksongs for song with piano." Reprint of the original manuscript with commentaries by Denijs Dille.


Lajtha, László. "Bartók Béla zenefolklorisztikai munkái, [Béla Bartók's folkloristic


Leech-Wilkinson, Daniel. "Recordings and histories of performance style." In *The


Székely, György, ed., Török Erzsi (mezzo-soprano), Hungarian Artists, Budapest: Hungaroton recording, 1983. LPX 12536, LP.


**Musical Scores**


Discography

Anne Sofie von Otter – Folksongs (Dvořák, Kodály, Britten, Grainger, Larsson, Hahn), Bengt Forsberg (Piano), Audio CD (released in July 18, 2000), Deutsche Grammophon, ASIN: B00004TL2P.


Bartók, Béla. 5 Songs on Poems by Endre Ady and 8 Hungarian Folksongs BB47, with Nina Valery (Mezzo-soprano) and Rudolph Goehr (Piano), Audio CD, 1950, Catalogue No.: 9.81029, Naxos Classic Archives.


Bartók, Béla. Songs, Op. 16 and Hungarian Folksongs, with Magda László (Soprano) and Franz Holetschek (Piano), Recording Location: Konzerthaus, Vienna, Published: 1954, LP, Westminster: WL 5283.

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