

# HUNGARIAN FOLK SONG RESEARCH IN THE TÁPIÓ REGION

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**Abstract** - Ethnomusicology in Hungary began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Upon the invention and appearance of the phonograph, and by the efforts of ethnomusicologists Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, the theory of Hungarian folk music research was formulated. The goal has always been to preserve our folk song values, bequeath them to future generations, incorporate the Hungarian folk songs into classical music, and introduce daily music lessons (singing) to education to strengthen the Hungarian sense of identity. This was the drive behind my fieldwork, my own research conducted in the 21 towns and villages along River Tápió, my homeland – my goal was to find the folk song values in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Upon summarizing the findings of the new research together with the researches ongoing since 1903, as a result, we now have 1,200 folk songs performed by 380 singers, and compiled by 33 researchers. Publishing the folk songs commenced in 2009, and these songs can be re-learned locally and regionally in schools during music classes, or in elementary schools. By doing so, students will be introduced to and learn about their local heritage, strengthen their sense of identity, and keep and preserve the several-hundred-year-old folk songs of their predecessors. Upon re-learning the folk songs of their region, the young and talented singers of the Tápió River region have had a series of new and nice successes. By compiling, arranging and organizing the tunes and melodies, I have managed to edit and publish in the past 10 years 22 publications either in book format or on CD or DVD-ROM. These publications by now have become educational materials from kindergarten to the Academy of Music. The long-term goal of this research is to make sure that in the 187 towns and villages in Pest County, and later on in all towns and villages in the entire area of Hungary, the folk song values can be revealed by finding folk singers, and by summarizing these values together with the researches of the past, anyone should be able to learn about the tunes and melodies of the folk songs of their regions. This huge task was undertaken by Hungarian pianist and composer, Jenő Takács in the Philippines 70 years ago, and now his research findings constitute an integral part of UNESCO World Heritage. Our perspective or approach to research may as well be of assistance as regards research activities carried out in other countries, where such value preservation activities have not yet been done.

21<sup>st</sup> century fieldworks are equally valuable and may fill the gap in the beginning, similarly to those carried out 50 or 100 years ago, since each researcher recorded the then-current tunes and melodies. Based on scientific classification and grouping of tunes and melodies enables us to differentiate between more archaic or newer tunes and melodies. From an artistic and educational aspect, the tunes and melodies recorded and documented from authentic sources enable re-learning, so that they can be preserved for hundreds of years to come.

**Keywords** - Ethnomusicology, Sense of Identity, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fieldwork, Re-Learning, Education, Preservation of Cultural Heritage, Music

## I. INTRODUCTION

The region around River Tápió is a district of the eastern part of the central Hungarian country of Pest, and the region comprises of 21 settlements. It can be considered a transitional area between the Danube-Tisza Interfluvium, the Northern Hungarian Mountain Range and the plains of River Tisza and, at the same time, it serves as a connecting link between the region of Monor and Cegléd, the plains of River Tisza, the ethnographical region of Jászság, the Gödöllő Hills, and the urban agglomeration of Budapest.

This region around the Tápió is a multi-faceted and diverse one, which is made particularly diverse and beautiful by its forests, groves and other woodlands, marshlands and reed beds, watercourses, streams and lakes. The two main watercourses running through the region are Tápió and Hajta.

It has been inhabited by Hungarians since the Hungarian conquest. With the exception of certain villages, its medieval network of settlements was almost immediately destroyed in the course of history. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century resettlement period, some Slovak communities were established in the

region, but the majority of the new settlers arrived from Northern Hungary. The linguistic unification between the dialects of the old and new settlers had happened by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is largely due to the new wave of settlers from the North that the dialect in the Tápió region became similar to that of the “Palóc” dialect. The development of the peasant communities was attributed to the vicinity of the new capital, Pest, as well as the excellent local transport opportunities.

By singing their folk songs, the locals were able to express any and all kinds of experiences including joy and sorrow, births, marriages, love and death. In the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was still customary for the local population along River Tápió to sing out these experiences, which phenomenon was well-known in the dialect continuum of the entire country. As a result of the folk song research activities, almost 1,200 folk songs encompassing 120 years of research have by now been bequeathed to the generations to come, largely due to the efforts of ethnomusicologists. Upon collecting, making audio and video recordings, making musical notations of

the songs performed by 383 folk singers in the Tápió region, the 33 ethnomusicologists managed to save from oblivion the cultural values of the Tápió region. It was the work of Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály in the communities along River Tápió that set the process of fieldwork in motion. Their spirit and mentality together with formulating the theoretical background of ethnomusicology still guide 21st century researchers on what is to be researched and how it is worth being conducted. As regards the systemization or classification of folk songs, one can differentiate between the authentic folk songs from pure sources, and folk songs with certain influences by art songs. By publishing tunes and melodies that are authentic from musicological aspects, and by making today's generations re-learn them in arts/music classes, or in music schools, the local sense of identity will be strengthened, and the repository of folks songs from the Tápió region can become known and studied/taught in the national educational curriculum. The efficiency of Hungarian ethnomusicology has become manifest in other countries as well, since our researchers have conducted countless researches in geographically separate areas in the world, from Ethiopia to Turkey, or from Russia to the Philippines. Upon the advice by Béla Bartók, Jenő Takács visited the Philippines and became the lecturer at the department of piano and composition at the University of Manila between 1932-1934; and it was where he conducted ethnomusicological research among the ancient local tribes. The sheet music and audio recordings have been the part of UNESCO World Heritage since 1999, and are considered as one of the most important musical relics of that island nation.

## II. HISTORY OF RESEARCH IN THE TÁPIÓ REGION

In every age and time, the goal of Hungarian ethnomusicology was always to strengthen Hungarian sense of identity, gain knowledge of, systemize and classify the original Hungarian folk songs. Shortly after the foundation of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1825, there were a great number of researches that commenced, so conducting researches of the Hungarian folk songs was placed greater emphasis upon. In 1932 the Hungarian Academy of Sciences called on Dániel Mindszenty and János Udvardy to conduct research activities throughout the areas of the Hungarian dialect continuum. The very first collection of tunes and melodies under the title 'Magyar Népdalok Egyetemes Gyűjteménye I-III.' (Universal Collection of Hungarian Folk Songs Vol. 1-3) was created between 1852-1858 by a local ethnomusicologist, Gábor Mátray who was born in the town of Nagykáta on River Tápió; a couple of years later in 1865 Károly Színi also created a collection of tunes and melodies. István Bartalus published his research findings in the volumes titled

'Magyar Népdalok Egyetemes Gyűjteménye I-VII' (Universal Collection of Hungarian Folk Songs Vol. 1-8) between 1873-1896. During conducting research work, the exact data regarding the singers were not recorded, and in many cases, the location of the recording is still unknown. The research activities of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were made difficult by the emergence and appearance of the new musical style of 'nóta' influenced by western musical style, and its typical sequence of musical tones also appeared in folk songs, since a part of the rural society had always been inclined to novelty, while the populace of the lower classes would rather sing the original folk songs.

The shorthand method of text and melody recording established by Béla Vikár in 1890 became a novelty for ethnomusicology, and it helped record the melodies and the lyrics with increased precision. The phonograph invented by Edison in 1877 was first used in 1895 to record folk songs, so on the basis of the audio recordings the musical tones, the lyrics and the folk song variations could be recorded with complete accuracy. As a result, an increasing number of ethnomusicologists from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century began to use phonographs to record the tunes and melodies, and it was this device that greatly helped the work of ethnomusicologists Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, László Lajtha and Jenő Ádám.

Ethnomusicology activities along River Tápió began in 1903, when Zoltán Kodály recorded three folk songs in Eötvös Collegium, Budapest upon the performance of Gábor Német of Gomba, a village on River Tápió. In August 1906 Béla Bartók was a guest and spent some days in Tápiószele upon the invitation of one of his students at the Academy of Music. During his time spent there, he collected folk songs in the communities of Tápiószele, Nagykáta and Kóka. He also recorded, in sheet music format, a ballad from Tápiószecső, but in the community of Tura – this ballad titled 'Fehér László Ballada' (Ballad of László Fehér), a well-known folk song, was recorded here with a unique sequence of musical tones typical of the region only. We do not know his motivation, but Jenő Ádám also recorded four folk songs in Tápióság in 1928. Unfortunately, no audio recordings were made, so these records are preserved in writing only.

After a 25-year-long hiatus, new arrivals carried on the work in the Tápió region from 1953. The folk songs from the 21 settlement along River Tápió were collected by Antal Békefi in 1953, Mária Schnöller in 1954, and Mrs. Andor Szabó née Anna Szojka in 1956. Géza Paulovics conducted collection activities in 1958 followed by Bálint Sárosi on his 2-day-long collection period on 17-18 February 1962, during which he travelled Szentlőrinc-káta, Tápiószecső, and Tápióság, respectively. What he found is now not known to the locals living in the Tápió region. They

were Jewish peddler songs, songs of mourning and grief, as well as other many beautiful local folk songs performed by pleasant-voiced elderly ladies and gentlemen. György Kerényi collected songs in Úri and Tápiószecső in 1967. Zsuzsanna Erdélyi, a fellow at the Museum of Ethnography, and a member of the Lajtha Group collected religious songs from people of Nagykáta during a country fair in Andocs on September 13, 1970. In 1974 János Manga made recordings of almost 200 songs performed by a woman from Tóalmás, and it was in the same year and also in 1975 that Ilona Borsai noticed that singer and invited her to her radio program several times. The scientific research work was continued by Dr. Katalin Lázár, who travelled the longest to collect materials and in almost all the settlements in the Tápió region had many pleasant-voiced elderly ladies and gentlemen sing for her in 1981. It is interesting to notice that the villages of Gomba, Káva and Bénye are practically not represented on the lists of ethnomusicologists, so with the exception of the three songs collected by Kodály's fellow student we have no pieces of old collections from these locations.

Due to the efforts of the local collectors of folk music, we now have recovered such recordings that have not yet been found in any repository in any research institute. Lajos Kálmán and Nándor Nagy collected folk songs in Tápiószecső in 1953, followed by Sándor Ofella 17 years later. János Tóth collected folk songs in Tóalmás in 1956; this collector is not identical with the collector of the same name, János Tóth, who collected a huge volume of material in 1982 from a local shepherd in Tápiószentmárton, József Koncsik, thus he managed to preserve the unparalleled singing technique of the last shepherd of the region, which technique is both incomparable and unteachable to this very day. Collection activities in Mende began in 1983 by Mrs. István Trefék née Klára Herczeg, who collected local Hungarian and Slovak-language songs performed by Mrs. Mihály Benyovics née Mária Rojtos. The collection work of Mrs. János Németh née Erzsébet Bugyi and Mrs. Pál Zemen née Katalin Szabó was carried out in 20103 in Sülysáp, and they recorded probably the last Hungarian women in the 21th century who could sing Slovakian folk songs.

Since 2009, the research activities along River Tápió has been carried out by József Terék, and this fieldwork is still ongoing in 21 different settlements. As a result of the fieldwork, the researcher has so far managed to meet some 250 singers, who performed nearly 500 tunes and melodies. Looking at the research history background, we can definitely state that the Tápió region is an area in Pest County frequently visited by ethnomusicologists and local researchers; it is here that 33 ethnomusicologists have collected the folk song values of the region from 383 folk singers since 1903.

### III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF ETHNOMUSICOLOGY IN THE TÁPIÓ REGION

The basics of the researches were the perspectives of Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály at all times. Béla Bartók said that, proportionally speaking, folk songs are exactly as perfect as the largest ever masterpieces. The goal of their researches was to establish a rich, varied and scientifically organized repository of peasant tunes and melodies, which later can be stylized based on comparison, be systemized and identified as regards their origin.

Zoltán Kodály called our folk songs mountain streams obstructed in their course by large rocks, so that they can continue their downward stream by passing round those rocks. To roll those rocks aside from the streambed to ensure that the flow of the stream go uninterrupted and its rise not be obstructed any longer is still to this very day the primary concern of our public education, as well as scientific and art policies.

So we will have to find those folk songs that were the most isolated from external influences and effects, and managed to preserve the tunes, melodies, and lyrics of the peasant society; and it is these songs that need to be systemized. Old-type tunes and melodies in the Tápió region are less present as tunes and melodies of later ages. The differences are noticeable in the lines, and the sequence of the musical tones, but it needs to be remembered that even the later, newer style has a history of some hundred years.

By examining the researched folk songs we must separate the folk songs with art song influences, be they external influences or songs containing classical music or gypsy music motifs, as well as folk-ish songs, since these tunes and melodies have partly lost their original form. Obviously, these tunes and melodies are still valuable in their own genres, but from the 21th century perspective of Hungarian ethnomusicology they have no validity.

The order types of folk songs were made perfect by Pál Járdányi and László Dobszay upon further developing the system of the orders by Kodály and Bartók. In accordance with this order, the Magyar Népzene Tára (Collection/Repository of Hungarian Folk Songs) was established in 1951 in accordance with the scientific interpretation of the system of the Hungarian folk songs; and it is in this series of publication that introduced us in five volumes to songs of customs and, until today, to seven additional occasional books on folk songs, all published by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Examining the tunes and melodies, we can notice that several of them can also be found in the region along River Tápió.

#### IV. THE RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION RESULTS OF THE COLLECTION ACTIVITIES IN THE TÁPIÓ REGION

Examining the research results, we can state that the region along River Tápió is an extensively researched area in Hungary. The closeness of the capital Budapest presumed in most cases, from the scientific researchers' point of view, that the presence of folk songs with art song influences, and folk-ish songs would be more prevalent. Knowing the recorded folk songs, however, it is still noticeable that beside the urban tunes and melodies appearing as a result of the shift to urban values, several tunes and melodies originating from the peasant society vigorously survived, and were recognized as such by the common people.

Most of the singers assisting the researches were people working in livestock farming, agriculture, and pastoralism, whose everyday lives were greatly influenced by singing. The folk songs were passed on by parents and grandparents, from fathers to sons throughout the centuries. During their daily routine, they frequently learned folk songs from each other by preserving the tunes, melodies typical of the Tápió region. In case of Zoltán Kodály's fieldwork, it is Gábor Német who was the earliest-known singer of the region, of whom written records exist. During his travels and regional research in 1906, Béla Bartók only took notes whether the performers were men or women, or boys or girls, respectively.

Since Jenő Ádám's research work conducted in 1928, the names and ages of the performers have always been indicated in case of each research activity conducted in the settlements in the area. Children's songs, songs of folk games, together with tunes and melodies associated with festive days and occasions, wedding customs, peddlers' activities, mourning and grief, incarceration in prison, as well as gypsy songs, and songs still existing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Slovak minority settled in Hungary in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were all collected there. The earlier times the songs point back in history the less variations they have, while the more popular tunes and melodies were documented in almost all towns and villages.

In case of researches conducted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, several folk-ish art songs and their typical musical tones and lyrics appeared among the collected pieces, while during the researches conducted in the past 40 years, it has mostly been the 'nótas' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their most typical musical tones that blended with the local repertoire, the scientific systemization of which shall be the researchers' tasks.

The findings and the results of the researches have been summarized in countless publications, of which the research in Tápiószele was first published by

Bartók in his book in 1924. 'Magyar Népzene Tára (Collection/Repository of Hungarian Folk Songs)' also contains an old-style melody from Tápiószele, as well as some songs of mourning from Tápiószecső and Tápióság. The very first comprehensive summary of the materials from the Tápió region was carried out in 1985 by publishing the two-volume monograph titled 'A Tápió mente néprajza' (Ethnography of the Tápió Region). Edited by József Terék, there have been 22 CDs, 1 DVD-ROM, as well as 5 books published since 2009, in which the results and findings of the almost 120 years of research have been documented. The year 2013 saw the publication of János Bereczky's four-volume publication with a title 'A Magyar népdal új stílusa' (The New Style of the Hungarian Folk Songs), which also contains quite a number of songs from the Tápió region. The book with the title '100 év 1000 népdal a Tápió mentén' (100 Years and 1,000 Folk Songs along River Tápió) was first published in 2014, which summarizes, for the very first time, the folk song and folk music materials of the 21 settlements of the region. Consequently, our folk songs can now be taught nationwide by this publication, from kindergarten through the Academy of Music.

#### V. TEACHING THE TÁPIÓ REGION FOLK SONGS

Teaching art in Hungary today also involves teaching folk music and folk songs, its curriculum follows a system similar to that of the classical subjects in the particular years. Upon publishing the well-documented audio recordings, it has by now become possible to incorporate folk songs into the various curricula, namely according to years, adjusted to the students' level and complementing the curricular requirements. The researched and published folk songs could help the music education of our youth at several levels. It could strengthen their local sense of identity by learning the local folk songs, which they can pass on as adults to other generations to come. In kindergarten education, it is the local children's games that play a particularly important role. In addition to the local melodies and games, it is also important to share with our youth the folk song knowledge of the region, the 21 settlements along River Tápió, since by learning these songs, our young generation can perform their own folk songs at folk song contests and competitions.

As a result of the publication of the folk songs each and every age group is now offered an opportunity, with the help of the published materials, to learn more about the folk songs of the Tápió region and, consequently, the publication '100 év 1000 népdal a Tápió mentén' (100 Years and 1,000 Folk Songs along River Tápió) have now been in use for a while together with other local and regional publications as supplementary educational resources.

## VI. THE FOLK SONGS OF THE TÁPIÓ AREA IN HUNGARIAN MUSIC

The folk songs of the region were practically not played in the 20th century. One melody was used in Béla Bartók's work 'Gyermekeknek' (For Children); apart from this the only people who could encounter the folk songs of the Tápió region were those who had already searched the documented local folk songs. Due to the latest research results and findings, as well as the most recent publications, the local tunes and melodies have become more widespread since 2009, therefore more and more performers hear about them, and it has made the region a favorite with them. The most widespread form of the songs was with music band performances, when the bands in the Tápió region, mostly folk music bands, gypsy bands, and brass bands alike customarily played either local or locally widespread tunes and melodies. The presence of the bands was always related to certain festivals or celebrations. At local balls or country fairs, it was almost always the local band that entertained the public and they played musical pieces appropriate to the event. Most of the musicians were self-educated in music, they did not have any preliminary musical education. The country musicians played music for their own or their families' amusement, these occasions occurred mainly after the daily work, but more frequently during the periods of winter when there was no work in the fields.

Our folk songs and folk dances were recorded by folk dance researcher György Martin in 1959 and 1978 in Tápiószecső, as well as in 1982 in Mende. Checking the video and audio recordings, it is clearly discernible the subordinate accompanying role of the band. The general lineup of the string bands comprises from the following musical instruments, fiddle, viola, and double bass, which are supplemented, in several settlements, by dulcimers, clarinets, and second fiddles. In case of brass bands, the generally widespread marching band lineup was typical consisting of 8-12 musicians. The brass bands were quite popular, especially in towns and villages that had a history of resettlement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; even the bands were called in their Slovakian name, 'trubacs' (bugler/trumpeter). By today, an increasing number of bands have incorporated the folk songs and folk music of the Tápió region into their repertoire, largely due to the result of the continuously expanding and more widely available publications. Even folk dance ensembles incorporate the folk songs and folk music of the Tápió region into their repertoire in which the traditional costumes of the region also play an important role.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Similarly to the research activities conducted in the areas in the Carpathian Basin inhabited by ethnic

Hungarians, the research of the folk song values along River Tápió commenced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hungarian ethnomusicology, including the research conducted in the 21 settlements and its theory, was established by the works of Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók. Singing songs was an integral part of the daily lives of the local populace working in agriculture and livestock farming, and they expressed their feelings by singing and they still do, as it is seen in the examples of the last surviving singers today. As a result of the researchers' work, 1,200 folk songs have been recorded in the region along River Tápió since 1903, and these songs are now made available for all due to their publications. Anyone, from kindergarten through the Academy of Music, can now be introduced to and learn the content of the publications now serving as supplementary educational materials. Knowing these folk songs, we manage to strengthen the local sense of identity at a regional level, since by re-learning their own folk songs, the songs can now be preserved through 2-3 generations to come. The folk songs can also be performed at folk songs contests and competitions, and their uniqueness is largely due to the fact that the folk songs and folk dances of the Tápió region have long been ignored or not well-known, consequently, there is still much novelty to share with other performers, the members of the jury and the music professionals.

Due to the developed state of the Hungarian ethnomusicology, our folk songs have been properly documented in the past 130 years or so, and as time progresses there are ample opportunities to use state-of-the-art devices to record these songs as audio recordings. Consequently, we can make more precise notes on the particular tunes and melodies, and due to today's digital technology we can now properly document, archive, and make them available in online format for others.

Our folk songs are continuously present in Hungarian folklore, in a region where due to the proximity of the national capitol many no longer wished to find the real, local folk songs. As a result of the publications, however, these materials have now become easily accessible to all who would like to learn more about the folk songs and folk music of the Tápió region from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century till today.

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