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# Liszt's *Verbunkos* Legacy and the Paradoxes of Progressive Hungarian Music

SHAY LOYA

## Introduction: A Lost Generation?

Sunday, 25 December 1870, was a historic day for Hungarian music. On the afternoon of that day, Prime Minister Gyula Andrassy paid a visit to Liszt and persuaded him to take on more formal duties in Hungary.<sup>1</sup> Dezső Legány, who writes in detail about this occasion and the lobbying behind the scenes that led to it, also mentions a more modest event that took place on the same day: a Sunday morning concert at which new works by Ödön Mihalovich (1842-1929) and Henri(k) Gobbi (1842-1920) were played. One of these works, Mihalovich's *Fantasia* in C-sharp Minor, was performed by Liszt himself and enjoyed great success. The concert featured also a short violin piece by Gobbi, but two years earlier the composer had published his *Première Grande Sonate dans le style hongrois*, also for solo piano, declaring the scope of his ambition in the title as well as the music.<sup>2</sup>

As we shall see later in this article, both Gobbi's *Sonate* and Mihalovich's *Fantasia* exemplified different aspects of Liszt's legacy in Hungary. What they both embodied, however, was a determination to create Hungarian art music in step with progressive trends in 1870s Europe. The timing was auspicious. After Liszt's important contribution in the 1850s to a canon of national works (most importantly, the Hungarian Rhapsodies, *Hungaria*, and the "Gran" Mass), the revival of the country's musical culture was signalled in the early 1860s by Erkel's masterpiece *Bánk bán* (1861) and a wealth of original and

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<sup>1</sup> Dezső Legány, *Liszt and his Country, 1869-1873* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1976), 62-64, 89, 264 and 277. See also WFL III:288-92. The plan was to appoint Liszt as president of the prospective Royal Academy of Music (an appointment that was formalized in March 1875, before the academy finally opened in the following November), and more immediately appoint him as Chief Musical Director of the sacred music of the Catholic Church in Hungary.

<sup>2</sup> Legány, *Liszt and his Country*, 77-78. Legány claims that, at the time, Gobbi and Mihalovich were the keenest followers of Liszt's musical style. A report of this concert entitled "Matinée Liszt Ferencnél," appeared in Pest's *Zenészetűi Lapok* (8 January 1871): 174-75. Accessed 8 June 2013 at <http://fidelio.hu/zencszetilapok>.

imaginative *verbunkos*-based compositions by Mihály Mosonyi (1815-1870).<sup>3</sup> 1860 was also the year that Kornél Ábrányi Sr. (1822-1903)—a former pupil of Chopin, gifted pianist, minor composer, and supporter of Liszt and Wagner—founded the first and seminal Hungarian-language musical journal, *Zenészet* *Lapok* (“Musical Papers”).<sup>4</sup> Politically too the country was slowly emerging from the trauma of the failed 1849 uprising and the political repression and economic slump that followed. Thanks both to the 1867 Compromise with Austria and to the political and economic union that came with the establishment of the dual monarchy, Hungary’s industry and economy were growing rapidly, as was her political confidence.<sup>5</sup> Now, in the 1870s, with Liszt taking on more formal responsibilities and personally patronizing emerging young talents, there were good reasons to believe the country’s musical culture was also heading toward a bright future.

And yet the generation of composers who first came into public attention in the 1870s—the “1870s generation,” as I shall henceforth refer to this group—has been superseded and forgotten. Somehow the music and reputations of the likes of Mihalovich, Gobbi, Sándor Bertha (1843-1912), Károly Aggházy (1855-1918), János Végh (1845-1918), Géza Zichy (1849-1924), and Jenő Hubay (or Huber; 1858-1937) all sank into near- or total oblivion. How did this happen? Postwar Hungarian musicologists, under the sway of Bartók’s and Kodály’s brilliant success and influential opinions, believed the 1870s generation suffered from a fatal aesthetic flaw: its members had attempted to create national music based on the Westernized and

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<sup>3</sup> Three notable nationalist works of Mosonyi’s, all dating from 1860, are his cantata *Festive Purification of the Magyars at the River Ung*, *Funeral Music for the Death of István Széchenyi*, and the *Hungarian Children’s World* for solo piano.

<sup>4</sup> A close friend and associate of Liszt, Ábrányi was the equivalent of Alexander Serov in Russia and played a pivotal role in promoting original and modernist national composition. Ábrányi was also something of a precursor to Kodály in his emphasis on building a network of choral societies and linking that to musical education. See Katalin Szerző, “The Most Important Hungarian Musical Periodical of the Nineteenth Century: *Zenészet* *Lapok* [“Musical Papers”] (1860-1876),” *Periodica Musica* 4 (1986): 1-5.

<sup>5</sup> The “Compromise” (*Ausgleich*) of 1867 created the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and granted Hungary virtual autonomy and substantial influence in foreign affairs, though not independence from Habsburg rule. Liszt, who along with other politically moderate Hungarians supported this outcome and wrote the *Hungarian Coronation Mass* for the crowning of Franz Joseph as King of Hungary on 8 June 1867. For a study of Hungary’s economic growth after the 1867 Compromise, see David F. Good, *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire, 1750-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 96-124.

simplistic *verbunkos* genres of the lower nobility,<sup>6</sup> rather than the more primal and culturally authentic folk music of the peasantry. *Verbunkos* genres, however, were no match for the overwhelming influence of Brahms and Wagner, and the result was national art music that was inauthentic and epigonic. Bence Szabolcsi, who researched Hungarian music history and *verbunkos* extensively, reinforced this view by claiming that *verbunkos* as a genre had been in decline since the 1840s, implying that the 1870s generation staked its fortune on a spent genre. *Verbunkos* had just about been able to serve the Liszt-Erkel generation, but could not serve the next one. Caught between increasingly trashy czardas music and ascendant German art music, it was inevitable that lofty, late-nineteenth century plans for Hungarian sonatas or even *verbunkos*-related counterpoint were to remain a pipedream.<sup>7</sup>

Bartók, who championed Liszt as a composer, was determined to absolve him of culpability and disassociate him from the very school that claimed to uphold his (Liszt's) *verbunkos* legacy. To that end Bartók championed modernist works that were not based on *verbunkos* (at least not in any obvious way) in his essay "Liszt Problems" (1936).<sup>8</sup> Kodály's pupils, most notably Zoltán Gárdonyi and Lajos Bárdos, proposed a different interpretation of history: rather than marginalizing Liszt's *verbunkos* idiom, they pointed to its intersection with Liszt's modernism.<sup>9</sup> This rehabilitation of a specifically Lisztian *verbunkos* idiom, however, did not save the reputation of *verbunkos* itself, and certainly not that of Liszt's immediate successors. Gárdonyi and

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<sup>6</sup> *Verbunkos* is also historically known as *verbunk*, *verbonk*, and *verbung*: literally "recruiting," from the Magyarized German word "*Werbung*." The term comes from the Austrian army's widespread practice in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century of using local music and dance for propaganda purposes in recruiting campaigns. Despite this etymology and associations of a certain type of *verbunk* with military march music, there were other slow and fast dance and improvisatory genres that fall under the term "*verbunkos*." I use this term here in its widest possible sense, which is in any case generically and historically more precise than timeless ethnic labels such as "Hungarian-Gypsy" music.

<sup>7</sup> Bence Szabolcsi, *A Concise History of Hungarian Music*, trans. Sára Karig and Fred Macnicol (Budapest: Corvina, 1964), 53-94, especially 63-64 and 77-83.

<sup>8</sup> Béla Bartók, *Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), 501-10. See also Shay Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian-Gypsy Tradition* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 124-28.

<sup>9</sup> Zoltán Gárdonyi, *Die ungarischen Stileigentümlichkeiten in den musikalischen Werken Franz Liszts* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1931); and Lajos Bárdos, "Die volksmusikalischen Tonleitern bei Liszt," in *Franz Liszt: Beiträge von ungarischen Autoren*, ed. Klára Hamburger (Budapest: Corvina, 1978), 168-96.

Bárdos did not contradict Bartók's central argument that *verbunkos* genres were too urban, simplistic, and hackneyed, as well as too much part of the Western world of phraseology and major-minor tonality, to be of any use to a composer trying to create modern music based on a native musical idiom.<sup>10</sup> Rather, Liszt was credited with transcending the limitations of *verbunkos* through sheer inventiveness that exceeded the capabilities of his contemporaries and successors.

More recent studies have begun revising our view of the aesthetic climate and artistic achievements of the 1870s generation.<sup>11</sup> It has always been easy enough to understand why Bartók, Kodály and their intellectual progeny rejected the legacy of the older school, but thanks to recent research it is also possible to see concealed historical continuities rather than emphasized differences, as well as critique a polemical historiography written by the victors of a bitter culture war.<sup>12</sup> For my own purposes, what emerges from all of this is a need to reappraise the role of the *verbunkos* idiom in the composition of Bartók's immediate predecessors. This is not to be confused with a general rehabilitation of the 1870s generation. Their standing and status as composers is not at stake here. Rather, this paper aims to explore critically the compositional and aesthetic quality of the *verbunkos* idiom in the works of

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<sup>10</sup> Bartók consistently and systematically argued for the virtuous alliance between peasant musics and modern art music—and against its supposed opposite, the unhealthy connection between the *verbunkos* Gypsy-band culture and defunct Romanticism—in a series of essays written over three decades. See Bartók, op. cit., 301-96. For a summary and critique of these essays see Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism*, 120-24.

<sup>11</sup> The most rehabilitated composer of his generation is Mihalovich, largely thanks to Katalin Szerző's pioneering study of the composer's operas. See Szerző, "Eine Oper der ungarischen Wagner-Schule: Edmund von Mihalovich: Eliane," *Studia Musicologica* 19 (1977): 109-60; and "Mihalovich Ödön: Wieland der Schmied: der Versuch, einen ungarischen Typus des Wagnerschen Musikdramas zu schaffen," *Musica Conservata: Günther Brosche zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Josef Gmeiner, Zsigmund Kokits, Thomas Leibnitz, and Inge Pechotsch-Feichtinger (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1999), 407-31. See also Ákos Windhager, "A Construed Portrait of Mihalovich Ödön (précis of Ph.D. dissertation). Accessed 1 June 2011 at <http://doktori.btk.elte.hu/lit/windhagerakos/thesis.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Judit Frigyesi, *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Lynn M. Hooker, "Modernism Meets Nationalism: Béla Bartók and the Music of Pre-World War I Hungary" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2001) and "The Political and Cultural Climate in Hungary at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók*, ed. Amanda Bayley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7-23; and David E. Schneider, *Bartók, Hungary and the Renewal of Tradition: Case Studies in the Interaction of Modernity and Nationality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Mihalovich and Gobbi, two important representatives of this school. Rather than foreclosing discussion through negative historicism (presupposing some inevitable historical failure), the role of the *verbunkos* idiom in their composition begs a few questions, especially given their closeness to Liszt. For example, how did they square Wagnerian/Lisztian chromaticism and evasion of cadences with repetitive, dance-like and square-shaped *verbunkos* phrases? To what extent did they attempt to follow specifically Liszt in a search for music novelty through cultural hybridity?

By 1870 Liszt had already provided many examples of how to adapt *verbunkos* to his vision of *Zukunftsmusik*. The extent of this idiom in his oeuvre is debatable (especially where it is highly abstract) but two things are beyond doubt. First, Liszt used *verbunkos* elements compositionally far beyond the confines of self-declared “Hungarian” works; in fact, he integrated *verbunkos* materials, both abstract and concrete, in all of the numerous genres and styles with which he dealt.<sup>13</sup> Second, this sustained commitment enabled him to enrich and remake his musical vocabulary and syntax quite extensively, and was an important part of what I had termed his “transcultural modernism.”<sup>14</sup>

In relative historical terms, Liszt was as much a transcultural modernist as Bartók. For Liszt was not limiting his use of the idiom to quotations of national songs or to surface gestures that imitated Gypsy bands. It is possible to extrapolate from twentieth-century transcriptions of traditional Hungarian instrumental music less obvious harmonic and structural features of the idiom such as prolonged consonant 6/4 chords, polytonality, cyclic tonal structures and, in a few cases, an entire culture of non-Western chordal modality. The received view that Liszt somehow rescued a hackneyed genre and made the most of it does not take into account these idiomatic aspects of his music, nor the fact that these have helped to shape and even transform his music precisely because of cultural distance, most notably when we observe the more rural

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<sup>13</sup> In my research I have so far found the *verbunkos* idiom in different forms in about 15% of Liszt's oeuvre. Apart from providing a vague idea of the extent of this idiom, this statistic is almost meaningless because it may not be complete. More importantly, it says nothing about the many different ways this idiom is integrated within each work. The mixture of idealist and hyperrealist depiction of *verbunkos* in the Hungarian Rhapsodies is very different, for example, from the way Liszt lightly incorporates idiomatic elements into a declared “Polish” work, such as his “Polonaise mélancolique” (1851-1852), or again different from the more thorough use of both surface and structural elements of this idiom in his various “Mephisto” waltzes.

<sup>14</sup> Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism*; and “Beyond Gypsy Stereotypes: Harmony and Structure in the *Verbunkos* Idiom.” *Journal of Musicological Research* 27, no. 3 (2008): 254-80.

types of *verbunkos* that Liszt absorbed during his travels in Transylvania in 1846-1847.<sup>15</sup>

Transcultural [musical] modernism, then, can be viewed as the steady transformation of central and peripheral musical cultures through reciprocal interaction in the context of European modernism. It would be impractical to look at the full phenomenon here or even defend my appropriation of Fernando Ortiz's "transculturation," as I have done elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> Rather, I will necessarily limit a transcultural perspective to compositions by Liszt's circle (we are not dealing with reciprocal transformations between social groups or examining the effects of "modernization" on the repertoire and playing of Gypsy bands in that period). This focus will help us to explore the way modernist aesthetics and techniques can be imposed on *verbunkos* material but also derived from it. Thus the more familiar case of composers actively grafting their "modernisms" on putatively innocent musical materials can be seen as a kind of transcultural modernism "from above." Think, for example, of the way Liszt suddenly introduces a whole-tone scale towards the end of Hungarian Rhapsody no. 7 (such a scale is no way related to *verbunkos* genres). On the other hand, a transcultural perspective also reveals the inverse possibility of composers allowing the materials and even logic of other musical cultures to transform canonic norms of their own musical culture (it is not important whether they do so consciously or not). For a paradigmatic example of such transcultural modernism "from below" look no further than the famous finales from Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies nos. 6 and 14, where the intensely idiomatic circular motion between two keys effectively suspends the normative teleology of mid-nineteenth-century Western tonality.<sup>17</sup> These two complementary aspects of transcultural modernism—superimposition and derivation—posed different challenges and even paradoxes for progressive Hungarian music in and around the year 1870.

### Problems and Paradoxes

One problem for transcultural modernism "from below" was that Hungarian cultural identity in the 1870s, as determined to a large extent by the

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<sup>15</sup> Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism*, 138-53.

<sup>16</sup> My defence of this conceptual adaption can be found in *ibid.*, 1-16. For the original sense of "transculturation" see Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism*, 26-30, 40-41, 174-190.

lower nobility class (the largest enfranchized demographic), demanded immediately recognizable melodic and rhythmic *verbunkos*-type gestures. It was not only repertoires of both Magyar and non-Magyar peasant folksongs that were ignored. The cult of *magyar nóta* (“Hungarian song”), which allowed amateur composers of noble birth to participate directly in the formation of the national canon, created an overall aesthetic of noble simplicity and classicism that shunned rhythmic complexity, harsher dissonances, or unusual progressions or structures associated with Gypsy bands: the very things that interested Liszt as a composer. In other words, given a wide range of choices from the more rural and rough types of *verbunkos* to the more urban and Westernized types, the national culture in the 1870s opted for the latter.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, the more “alien exotic” types of *verbunkos* remained unknown to audiences outside Hungary, whereas compositions in a “familiar-exotic” *style hongrois* were ubiquitous throughout Europe, especially in Vienna and the German-speaking world.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, much like concertgoers in Budapest, non-Hungarian audiences expected recognizable markers and entertainment, rather than challenges, from *style hongrois* in concert music.

All this meant that Hungarians who wished to reinvent *verbunkos*-based composition were saddled with the additional burden of reclaiming their own music. But there was always a danger—a potential paradox—that the more “authentic” a given piece, the more likely it would be received outside Hungary as a form of exoticism, an enhanced *style hongrois*: wonderfully entertaining in its

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<sup>18</sup> For an introduction to traditional Hungarian instrumental music, see Bálint Sárosi, *Folk Music: Hungarian Musical Idiom*, trans. Maria Steiner (Budapest: Corvina, 1986). A wealth of recordings from the national archive is available on the *Publikált Népzenei Hangfelvételek* website. Accessed 28 June 2011 at <http://db.zti.hu/24ora/dalok> (the search engine is at [http://db.zti.hu/24ora/dalok.asp?VBSdbClickClass\\_1=VBSdbFilter](http://db.zti.hu/24ora/dalok.asp?VBSdbClickClass_1=VBSdbFilter)). For excellent transcriptions of rural types of *verbunkos* from Transylvania, see László Lajtha, *Széki gyűjtés* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1954); and *Kőröspataki gyűjtés* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1955). For urban *verbunkos* from Western Hungary by the same transcriber, see Lajtha, *Dunántúli táncok és dallamok* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1962) and *Instrumental Music from Western Hungary: From the Repertoire of an Urban Gypsy Band*, ed. Bálint Sárosi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988). Lajtha’s transcriptions may present, at first, an impression of a dichotomy between East and West, and between countryside and town—but closer study reveals a generic continuum. See also Lujza Tari, “‘Verbunk’—‘Verbunkos’: Interactions between Towns and Villages in an Instrumental Musical Genre,” in *Historical Studies on Folk and Traditional Music*, ed. D. Stockmann and J. H. Koudal (Copenhagen: Danish Folklore Archives, 1997), 107-20.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Bellman, *The Style Hongrois in the Music of Western Europe* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993).



intense quaintness, and not to be taken too seriously because of that. The line between self-determination and auto-exoticism was fine indeed.<sup>20</sup>

Those Liszt followers who wished to transculture Hungarian music “from above,” on the other hand, encountered an altogether different set of challenges, most prominently posed by the unstoppable rise of Wagner and Wagnerism in the late 1860s. This exposed them to the wrath of critics who accused them of “Germanizing” Hungarian music.<sup>21</sup> But the style and opinions of their idol posed an even greater and more immediate problem. There was no getting away from the fact that, notwithstanding the folkloristic gestures in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868), Wagnerian opera was not really about *couleur locale*. Moreover, in his essays, Wagner denounced what he saw as soulless low-brow art-music imitations of folk music and promoted a more idealized *Volkstümlichkeit*: a quality of folk music he associated with generically elevated works.<sup>22</sup> On one occasion these aesthetics touched on Hungarian music. In an open letter to Kornél Ábrányi, published in the *Pesther Lloyd* on 8 August 1863, Wagner warned that simplistic art-music can degrade and corrupt the very source it draws upon, whereas elevated works like Mosonyi’s “Piano Studies for Development in the Performance of Hungarian Music” (*Tanulmányok zongorára a magyar zene előadásának képzésére*, 1860) show the promise of a healthy synthesis. Significantly, Wagner’s only concrete reference to Mosonyi’s work was to one of the most harmonically sophisticated and least dance-like numbers of the set (no. 13): the one that also reminded him of a

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<sup>20</sup> Auto-exoticism is discussed in the context of Spain by James Parakilas, “How Spain Got a Soul,” in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 137-93. See also Loya, “Auto-Exoticism? The Hungarian Response to Viennese Style Hongrois”: a paper presented at the AMS/SMT Conference in Indianapolis, 4-7 November 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Legány, *Liszt and his Country*, 78-81.

<sup>22</sup> Wagner’s ideal of *Volkstümlichkeit* can be gleaned in “Oper und Drama” (1852), where he contrasts the artificial adaptation of folk melodies in traditional operatic arias to Beethoven’s organic assimilation of folk music, as embodied in the “An die Freude” melody from his Ninth Symphony. See Wagner, “Opera and Drama,” in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works 2*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kagen Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1893), 77-78 and 103-11. In “Zukunftsmusik” (1860-1861) Wagner declared that “dance forms” have evolved due to the advent of German symphony, reaching a final point of perfection in Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony, before finally being replaced by more fluid forms, historically leading to his own work. See Wagner, “Zukunftsmusik,” 3, 313-18 and 332-39. See also James Garratt, *Music, Culture and Social Reform in the Age of Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 165 and 170-74.

Bach fantasy-type prelude. There was no reference to any other Hungarian composition.<sup>23</sup>

If Hungarian music was to head toward a Wagnerian future, its relationship to *verbunkos* had to be transformed. Somehow dance forms with a regular pulse and rhythm, square phrases, and strong cadences needed to be remade in terms of elastic phrase structures that avoided clear cadences (the so-called *unendliche Melodie*). The “characteristic” harmony with its few peculiarities had to merge with sophisticated and possibly extreme chromaticism. But the most difficult challenge was at the level of *verbunkos* gestures: surely a national style demanded strong markers? Yet, if so, how could a composer avoid generic writing and cliché? These basic contradictions pointed any aspiring Hungarian *Zukunftsmusiker* toward a single solution: the abstraction, or “submergence” of *verbunkos* elements within some form of “New-German” composition. As we shall see, this was a risky solution that required a delicate balance: too much abstraction could result in the loss of recognizable national identity, whereas an overt national style and quotations of patriotic songs risked downgrading the artistic status of the work itself.<sup>24</sup>

### Submergence, Abstraction and Topical Association

The abstraction of the *bokázó* figure or cadence, one of the strongest markers of Hungarian identity in the music of that era, is a case in point. *Bokázó* means “capering,” referring to the dance movement of leaping and clicking of the heels (the most typical variants of the equivalent musical figure are given in Example 1).<sup>25</sup> In his *Grande Sonate*, Gobbi created a second subject

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<sup>23</sup> Wagner, “Über ungarische Musik” [an open Letter to Kornél Ábrányi], *Pesther Lloyd* (19 August 1863). Jonathan Bellman discusses in more detail Wagner’s attitude to *couleur locale* and this specific letter in “The ‘Noble Pathways of the National’: Romantic and Modern Reactions to National Music,” *Pendragon Review* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 53.

<sup>24</sup> In a manner similar to my description above of the generic rift, Ralph P. Locke discusses how the combined pressures of commercialism and modernism split exoticism into more low-brow overt genres and high-brow genres where exotic topics were either “submerged” (they were perceptible in a highly stylized and abstract form) or completely deconstructed and absorbed so as to become more abstractedly “transcultural” than representationally “exotic.” See Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 214-75. Locke’s historical analysis of modern(ist) exoticism is easily applicable to musical nationalism in 1870s Hungary.

<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed morphological study of *verbunkos* melodic formulae, see Csilla Pethő, “*Stylé Hongrois*: Hungarian Elements in the Works of Haydn, Beethoven, Weber and Schubert,” *Studia Musicologica* 41 (2000): 199-284, especially 201-05.

based on a lyrical transformation of this figure (Example 2). In this he was following Liszt, who had similarly extracted this motive from its original stylistic context, turning it into a symbol of Hungary and at times transforming it lyrically into an expression of longing in works such as Hungarian Rhapsody No. 13 and “La Notte” from *Trois odes funèbres*.<sup>26</sup> Gobbi’s *bokázó* motive, like the example above from Liszt, is only ever so slightly submerged: it is meant to be projected as a symbol of identity and therefore its melodic contours are clearly audible. The sentimental, yearning harmonic sequences also have their antecedent in works such as “La Notte”. However, going further than Liszt in this respect, Gobbi completely disassociates the figure from its original cadential function, as none of his *bokázó* figures closes a phrase with an authentic or plagal cadence. In fact, the whole section stretches toward C-sharp minor without resolution, longingly hovering over A Major (VI), and the *bokázó* figure is conspicuously *absent* from the moment of transition to the tonic E itself, where it should have been most pronounced (see m. 48).<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to Gobbi’s method of retaining a clear melodic profile, Mihalovich almost completely submerges the *bokázó* motive in the repeated slow section of his *Fantasie* (Example 3). He could not have done otherwise: overt *bokázó* cadences would have destroyed the fluid phraseology of this section and would have awkwardly clashed with its general style and specific allusions to Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. Mihalovich, then, expresses his dual allegiance to the “Music of the Future” and Hungarian nationalism by subtly fusing Wagnerian motives with Hungarian ones. It is as if he wished to demonstrate that the most progressive style of the era need not be incompatible with *verbunkos* even when a work by Wagner is directly quoted. This strategy of topical associations and direct allusions is consistent with a compositional technique rich in both thematic transformation and the spinning of *Leitmotive*, as we shall presently see.

Example 1: Variants of the *bokázó* cadence

normative I — V — I  
harmonization: or IV

<sup>26</sup> See mm. 94-99 of the Hungarian Rhapsody No. 13 and the middle section of “La Notte” (from *Trois odes funèbres*, 1864-66). See also Loya, *Liszt’s Transcultural Modernism*, 198-204.

<sup>27</sup> This absence is even more pronounced at the close of the second allegro subject in mm. 77-80 (not quoted in Example 2).

Example 2: *Bokászó* figures in Gobbi's *Grande Sonate*, mm. 33-48

33 *con espressione*  
mf

41 *f* rit.

Example 3: A hidden *bokászó* in Mihalovich's *Fantasie*, mm. 93-104

93 "Tristan" allusions  
(con sentimento sotto voce)

99 submerged *bokászó* cadence?  
p pp  
IV — VI

### Réminiscences de Tristan à l'hongroise

Mihalovich became an enthusiastic Wagnerian after the 1862 première of *Tannhäuser* in Pest, which he attended at the age of 20. He became president of the new Wagner Society in Pest in 1872. Following Liszt's death and Erkel's

resignation, Mihalovich was appointed Director of the Royal Academy of Music in 1887, a post he held until 1919. His operas and symphonic poems were highly regarded works in their time, achieving a measure of recognition outside Hungary through concerts mounted by the likes of Arthur Nikisch in the early twentieth century. Probably the best-known Hungarian composer of his generation, and the most prominent composer to attempt to reconcile Wagnerian influences with *verbunkos*, Mihalovich disappeared from public attention, which symbolizes the oblivion into which the whole of the 1870s generation fell.<sup>28</sup>

The *Fantasie* is an early work, a well-constructed piece in quasi-sonata form that can be heard almost as a paraphrase on *Tristan und Isolde*, principally on memorable motives from the opera's Prelude and its final scene, Isolde's "Transfiguration." Mihalovich's choice of Wagnerian motives points to the influence of Liszt's 1867 transcription *Isoldes Liebestod*, S. 447. Liszt's more direct influence, however, is evident in the work's pianistic and harmonic style, and its dynamic process of thematic transformations. Above all, and with no relation to Wagner, we can see it in the *meno mosso* march theme that forms the first subject proper of the work (Example 4a) and concludes the work in the triumphant coda (mm. 294-321). This theme is in the heroic *verbunkos* style, distantly recalling the first theme from Liszt's *Hungaria* (1856),<sup>29</sup> but more directly alluding, I believe, to the second movement of Liszt's *Mélodies hongroises* (1838-1883): an arrangement of the equivalent movement from Schubert's *Divertissement à la hongroise* (D. 818, 1825; Example 4b). As Liszt's pupils and confidantes knew well, Mihalovich's *Fantasie* was one of Liszt's favorite works.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Katalin Szerző, "Mihalovich," in *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online; and Ákos Windhager, "A Construed Portrait of Mihalovich Ödön." Accessed 1 June 2011 at <http://doktori.btk.elte.hu/lit/windhagerakos/thesis.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> There are also possible allusions to the earlier *Heroischer Marsch im ungarischen Styl* (1840), which has the same theme; for example, the *Fantasie's* accompaniment figures in mm. 21-32 recall mm. 57-66 of the *Heroischer Marsch*.

<sup>30</sup> The first version of *Mélodies hongroises d'après Schubert*, S. 425, dates from 1838-1839, and included all three movements of Schubert's *Divertissement*. However, Liszt subsequently transcribed the second movement in many different (possibly ten) versions, the final one dating from 1883 (actually two different versions due to an extensive *ossia*). The importance of this work to Liszt—and by extension to the whole Hungarian school—deserves a separate article, but it is worth mentioning here that in 1870-1871 this march movement was revised and published for the first time in an orchestral version as the fourth (final) movement of *Franz Schuberts Märsche*, S. 363.

On a topical level, the *Andante molto moto* section in 6/8, based on motives from *Tristan und Isolde*, provides the lyrical and feminine contrast to the masculine *verbunkos* march in 2/4. In spite of the obviousness of such references, this work is hardly a salon paraphrase. There are no themes that are elaborated in the manner of a virtuoso variation, but mere echoes of several leitmotifs from Wagner's opera, and these seem to lurk beneath the threshold of recall. The effort to remember them generates associations between motives and a narrative process that leads, gradually, to a clearer and increasingly climactic statement of the "Transfiguration" motive. Moreover, the thematic antithesis between the Hungarian march and the Wagner paraphrase (the *Andante molto moto*) is counterbalanced by connecting passages that transform one theme into another (mm. 33-38 and 218-43).

Example 4: March theme from a) Mihalovich, *Fantasia*; and b) Liszt-Schubert, *Mélodies hongroises*

Meno mosso

(a)

*mf marc.*

(Andante con moto) *sempre marcato*

(b)

*sempre marcato*

Example 5: A subtle combination between Wagner's "Glance motive"  
and the march theme in the *Fantasia*, mm. 121-24

The musical score for Example 5 consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains the "Glance" motive (developed), starting at measure 121. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a march theme, labeled "Recalling march theme and verbunkos-minor mode". The score includes dynamic markings such as "acclerando", "fp ritard.", and "rit.". The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4.

Mihalovich creates further synthesis, as we saw in Example 3, by submerging *verbunkos* elements in his Wagner paraphrase. He even fleetingly recalls the *Fantasia*'s march theme in m. 122, within a passage that develops Wagner's "Glance" motive. This recollection of the Hungarian march is heightened by sharp 4th and 7th scale degrees derived from the *verbunkos* ("Hungarian") minor mode (Example 5; see Example 4a).<sup>31</sup> But ephemeral intervallic associations with *verbunkos* modes assume their true role in the recurring and increasingly concrete quotations of the "Transfiguration" motive (Example 6). Here Mihalovich colors his "Transfiguration" quotation with sharp 2nds and 4ths, derived from the *verbunkos* lydian (lower-case intentional), a major-type *verbunkos* mode.<sup>32</sup> Most surprising is his insistence on adding these intervals to the repeated phrase of the final climax in *staccato* articulation (Example 6c). By emphasizing the piano's percussive nature rather than imitating the sound of strings, Mihalovich may have intended to evoke the sound of the cimbalom (Hungarian dulcimer). Whether any of his listeners heard such intervals, textures, and articulation as a "*verbunkosization*" of

<sup>31</sup> E-F#-G-A#-B-C-D#. The '*verbunkos* harmonic minor' (or '*verbunkos* minor' in short) is my generic but non-ethnic term for the more familiar, but problematic, "Gypsy minor" or "Hungarian minor." In this case the *verbunkos* minor patently signals Hungarian identity and could therefore be referred to as "Hungarian minor" too. Both problem and neologism are explained in Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism*, 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> C-D#-E-F#-G-A-B. The "*verbunkos* lydian" is my term, and the lower case is intended to disassociate this and other *verbunkos*-related modes from (capitalized) Church modes: see "Notes to the Reader" in Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism*.

Example 6: Increasingly animated *Tristan* quotations in Mihalovich's *Fantasie*, lightly tinged with the *verbunkos*-lydian mode in a) mm. 113-16; b) mm. 131-34; and c) mm. 145-48

(a) mm. 113-16, *p*

(b) mm. 131-34, *fp*

(c) mm. 145-48, *rit. cresc.*, *ff animato*, *riten.*

Wagner, or heard them and deemed them part of a successful synthesis, is a question for future reception studies.<sup>33</sup> Certainly Mihalovich attempted to

<sup>33</sup> Reviewing the work in a positive light, Kornél Ábrányi described it as being original rather than merely resorting to an arrangement of known themes. He also saw it as a successful synthesis of Liszt's and Chopin's styles (with Chopin's fantasy its closest model) that succeeds in not copying those styles. Although the influence of Chopin and Liszt is certainly present, it is curious—to say the least—that Wagner's name is not even mentioned, let alone any quotations from *Tristan und Isolde*'s "Prelude" and "Transfiguration"; curious, because these excerpts from the opera were performed in Budapest on 23 July 1863, in a concert promoted by Ábrányi and



create Hungarian *Zukunftsmusik* chiefly through submerging topical associations, a form of transcultural modernism from above.

### A Hybrid Hungarian Sonata

Henrik (or Henri) Gobbi enjoyed a respectable career in Hungary, though not as illustrious as that of Mihalovich. A gifted pianist, Gobbi began concertizing professionally at the age of eighteen (1860) with a piano trio, and completed his composition studies with Robert Volkmann, an adherent of Schumann and Brahms but also an acquaintance of Liszt. Gobbi made contact with Liszt in 1867 and sent him his *Grande Sonate*, which was published soon after (probably 1868) as Op. 13. He became Liszt's pupil and friend in 1869. Liszt was impressed by his talent, interceded on his behalf, helped him financially, became godfather to his child, Franz (1874-1932), and in 1879 Liszt secured for Gobbi the post of piano professor at the Academy in Budapest. Gobbi remained close to Liszt until the latter's death and served as a board member of Mihalovich's Wagner Society. However, he also cultivated friendly relationships with Brahms and his circle.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, in his compositions Gobbi managed to transcend the bitter aesthetic divide between the "New German School" and German Romantic classicism.

The *Grande Sonate* testifies to this ecumenical tendency as well as to Gobbi's transcultural aesthetics and techniques. There are many passages inspired by Schumann (Example 8 provides a few examples of this), but Liszt is the dedicatee of the work, and the latter's Sonata in B minor is the clear inspiration for the *Grande Sonate*'s double-function form, its thematic transformations, and the idiomatic keyboard style of a few passages. There are even specific motivic allusions to Liszt's Sonata, as if Gobbi sensed a hidden

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his journal. Moreover, Liszt's transcription "Isoldes Liebestod aus Tristan und Isolde" was published in 1868 and must have circulated among Liszt's Budapest friends and allies. I leave further speculation in this matter for future research. See "Radamanthos" [Kornél Ábrányi], "Kompozitori szemle," *Zenészetűi Lapok* (Pest: 15 October 1871): 45-46; and (23 July 1862): 345. Accessed 8 June 2011 at <http://fidelio.hu/zeneszetilapok>.

<sup>34</sup> Szilvia Gyöngyösi, "Gobbi Henrik, a Zeneakadémia zongoratanára: Liszt és Gobbi kapcsolata," ["Henrik Gobbi, a Piano Teacher at the Music Academy: Liszt and Gobbi's Relationship"], *Muzsika* 44, no. 10 (October 2001), 34-37. Accessed 30 August 2011 at <http://www.epa.hu/00800/00835/00046/223.html#fel>; *Liszt and his Country*, 143-45, 150, and 207, and "Liszt's and Erkel's Relations and Students," *Studia Musicologica* 18, no. 4 (1976): 19-50; and *Liszt Letters in the Library of Congress*, ed. and trans. Michael Short (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2003), 166, 169, 197, and 205-206.

Hungarian character in that Liszt work that could be brought out in his own. We can hear this intention already at the beginning, where Gobbi's slow chorale theme ("Grave") recalls that of Liszt's (cf. Liszt, "Grandioso," mm. 105-20), while imbuing it with short-long Hungarian rhythms (Example 7).<sup>35</sup>

Example 7: Opening of Gobbi's *Grande Sonate* (reduced to a single staff)

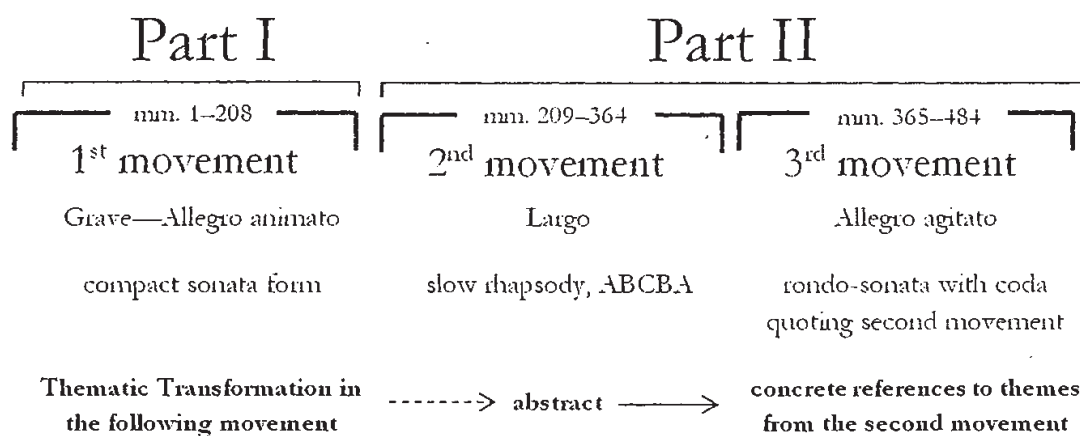
Grave M.M.  $\text{♩} = 50$   
*p*  
*Pedale*  
 6  
*rit.* -----  
*a tempo f marcato*  
 End of theme in C# major    Theme recommences in E major

But Gobbi's ambition went further: he seems intent on generating a hybrid sonata form through the use of idiomatic *verbunkos* harmony. He achieves this, in the first instance, by using a typical  $||: I \rightarrow vi :||$  structure, where each phrase progresses to a conclusion on the sixth degree of the scale (sometimes concluding with a Picardy third), and a new phrase recommences on the tonic with no modulation in between: we can see this already at the end of Example 7. This manner of pendular harmonic motion to and from the tonic creates tonal stasis in the long run, which is perfectly normal for a *verbunkos* melody but curious for sonata form, as it delays the structural modulation to the secondary key. As a result of this delay, the transition section starts very late and the secondary key is arrived at only in the closing eight measures of the exposition (See Table 1). Next, the development starts and ends in D despite moving restlessly between keys, D Major remains the

<sup>35</sup> Both the chorale topic in general and specific allusion to the *grandioso* character of Liszt's theme show us that Gobbi's concept of a "Grande Sonate" related not only to the work's dimension but also to its expression. There are several other notable allusions, the most obvious of which is the opening of the second part in m. 209 (Example 8b) that recalls both the opening of Liszt's sonata and, curiously, the imitative counterpoint in Schumann's Piano Sonata, Op. 11.

Table 1

Gobbi's double-function sonata form



principal key of the recapitulation instead of E, and in the thematic (but not tonic!) recapitulation it is D Major that is over-prolonged through internal repetitions and the *verbunkos*-idiomatic harmony. The tonic key will be regained only in the last eight measures—a tentative closure at the end of the first internal movement that would be out of place in a normal sonata, but works well in a double-function one, as we now expect a continuation.

Gobbi's sonata may owe something to Liszt, but its double-function structure is a bold experiment in its own right and one with an interesting transcultural dimension (see Table 2). The first movement is in the curious sonata form just described; the second is slow and fantasy- or rhapsody-like; and the third is in quasi-rondo form. This choice of forms is both effective and innovative, in a way that is quite independent of Liszt. First, the theme-rich genre of the rhapsody is ingeniously deployed to suggest the “double function” of a slow movement and development section. In terms of development, themes and motives from the first movement appear highly transformed. Second, the rondo form of the third movement consolidates and then literally quotes the main theme of the second movement, thus functioning as a kind of recapitulation; but, most originally, it recapitulates not the “exposition” (the first movement) but rather the “development” (second movement). The first theme of the second movement and more distantly recalls the tempo and texture of the first (Example 8c). It seems to me that Gobbi attempted to reconcile the cyclic and dynamic form of a double-function sonata with the

**Table 2**

Thematic and tonal structure of the first internal movement of the *Grande Sonate*.

	Mm.	Section	Key and harmony
Exposition	1-16	Introduction (Grave)	E Major → C-sharp minor
	17-32	First theme (Allegro)	E Major → C-sharp minor
	33-80	Second theme + first theme	Still E major, with excursions into C-sharp minor
	81-104	Transition	Modulatory, ending in a chromatic progression of diminished chords
	105-112	Closing theme	D Major → B minor
Development	113-132	Recitative, fragmentation, and suspension of time; section thematically takes over the function of the introduction	Modulatory, subdominant directionality (unresolved $\frac{6}{4}$ chords)
Recapitulation	133-40	First Theme	D Major → B minor
	141-86	Second Theme	D Major: no recapitulation of key
	187-200	Transition	As in mm. 81-104, but all keys are a major second lower
	201-8	Closing theme	E Major: brief and belated tonal recapitulation

Example 8: Thematic transformation and variation in the *Grande Sonate*:

- a) first theme from first (internal) movement, mm. 17-21; and  
 b) opening of the second movement, mm. 209-26

Allegro animato M.M.  $\text{♩} = 100$

(a) *mf* *ten* \* *ten* \* *ten* \* *ten* \* *ten* \* *ten* \* etc.

Largo  $\text{♩} = 66$

(b) *p* *dim.*

215 *diminuendo* *pp* *p* *sempre tenuto* *ten* \* *ten* \* *ten* \* *ten* \*

222 *ten* \*

Example 8 (continued): Thematic transformation and variation in the *Grande Sonate*; c) opening of the third movement, mm. 365-368.

Allegro agitato M.M.  $\text{♩} = 100$   
*ben marcato il canto*

(c)

365

3

Pedales

3

367

more episodic form of a *verbunkos* suite (or indeed, that of a Liszt Rhapsody), drawing inspiration as well from the fragmentary, arabesque-like style of early Schumann. One could argue here that Gobbi is attempting to transculture “from below” a Lisztian type of sonata form.

### A Misunderstood Work?

Gobbi's *Grande Sonate* was published in Pest (Táborszky & Parsch), Vienna (F. Vessely), and Leipzig (F. Hofmeister): cities where the *style hongrois* was familiar and commercially successful. At the same time, however, Gobbi was searching for an international market that would recognize his sonata as a serious Hungarian artwork (“Grande Sonate”), one above and beyond the lowbrow and middlebrow European traditions of *style hongrois*. Given the biased mode of reception that *style hongrois* attracted, the odds were stacked against this ambition. And considering that there was very little knowledge then (as now) of harmonic and structural features related to *verbunkos*, let alone of how those features might relate to sonata form, it seems that Gobbi's *Grande Sonate* could have only met with partial appreciation, centered more on its “character” than its artistic conception or merit.

Predictably enough, one review from Leipzig's *Signale für die musikalische Welt* (1870) mixed praise for the work's style with criticism of its formal design.

We draw attention to this opus as the first "Hungarian" Sonata—dedicated to Liszt—and describe it as the inspiration of a talent that is worth taking notice of but is still in the process of developing, and [which is] apparently youthful. Such a talent, when composing, has to engage itself primarily with two matters: with the invention of pithy themes, and with developing them organically.... Overall his originality still seems to be in the process of development; in this sonata it comes across as considerably matured through the national element of the Hungarian tunes which are a mother tongue to Mr Gobbi. The further development of the sonata, however, has little firm structure, it is more improvised [*fantasirt*] than composed. However, Mr Gobbi can find out how both [ways of writing music] can be combined, e.g. in Liszt's B-minor Sonata, which is as marvelously imaginative [*fantasirt*] as it is artfully composed, a masterpiece in its thematic metamorphosis, apparently floating freely into the distance and yet keeping reliably on its predestined track. We will be pleased, in the fullness of time, to receive work done on the same lines—only less exclusively destined for the hands of pianistic titans—from Mr Gobbi. Until then we recommend his sonata, which contains many an interesting passage and is overall capable of making a unique impact, to be played through by all capable players with Magyar-musical sympathies. - L.K.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> L.K. [possibly Ludwig Karpath], *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 28 (1870): 35. Translation by Irene Auerbach. "Wir heben dieses Opus als die erste 'ungarische' Sonate—Liszt gewidmet—hervor und bezeichnen sie als die Inspiration eines beachtenswerthen—aber noch in der Entwicklung stehenden, offenbar jugendlichen Talents. Ein solches hat es beim Componiren vorzugsweise mit zwei Dingen zu thun: mit der Erfindung kerniger Themata und mit der organischen Entwicklung derselben. Jene bekundet die Natur des dem Talente eingeborenen und von ihm aufgenommenen Ideenstoffs, diese die geistige Tragkraft der Fantasie. Ueber die thematische Erfindung des Herrn Gobbi können wir insofern Günstiges äußern, als sich dieselbe voll Impuls und also anregend giebt. Die Originalität scheint bei ihm überhaupt noch im Herausbilden begriffen zu sein, in dieser Sonate ist dieselbe, durch das nationale Element der ungarischen Weisen, die für Herrn Gobbi Muttersprache sind, als wesentlich gereift. Die weitere Ausarbeitung der Sonate indessen hat wenig festen Halt, sie ist mehr fantasirt als componirt. Wie man aber Beides in Eines fassen kann, wird Herr Gobbi z. B. in Liszt's so großartig componirter als kunstvoll fantasirter Hmoll [sic] Sonate finden, die ein Meisterwerk in der thematischen Metamorphose frei ins Weite zu schweifen scheint und sich dennoch beständig auf festvorgezeichneter Bahn hält. Arbeiten im gleichen Sinne—nur weniger ausschließlich für die Hände pianistischer Titanen bedacht—von Herrn Gobbi zu empfangen, soll uns seiner Zeit freuen. Bis dahin empfehlen wir seine Sonate, die gar viele interessante Partien enthält und im

The biases of “L.K.” (possibly Louis Karpath) are interesting since he clearly admires Liszt, or at least Liszt’s B-minor Sonata, despite his slightly anti-virtuoso sentiment. Like many critics of his time, L.K.’s ideal is the Beethovenian sonata (“pithy themes” that follow “organically” a “predestined track”), which Liszt upholds but Gobbi does not. As the final sentence makes clear, he sees the work’s character as its only saving grace. Much is said about what this work ought to be and very little about what it is or tries to do; nothing at all is said about the work’s double-function conception or its sweeping ending (a snippet of which is quoted in Example 8c).

One would think that a champion of modern Hungarian music such as Kornél Ábrányi would be more enthusiastic or sympathetic than the Leipzig critic. But no: in a review from 5 January 1868, “Radamanthos” (i.e., Ábrányi) complained that Gobbi has mistakenly resorted to an exhausted classical form that was unsuited to his work’s style, and indeed to the aesthetic aims of the Hungarian school. Hungarian music did not need classical models to idealize or elevate it; rather “it should always be the main task of a developing new branch of music to create forms for its own world of ideas.” “Radamanthos” concludes by saying that the work is hardly a sonata in any case, and it would have been therefore better to give it a Hungarian title.<sup>37</sup> Here the forty-six-year-old Ábrányi passed a negative judgment on the efforts of his aspiring younger colleague with the rhetorical certainty of a law-giver.<sup>38</sup> As an old man, however, he wrote his own ‘Millennium Hungarian Sonata’ Op. 103, for the Hungarian millennium celebrations of 1896.

Back in the 1860s, Liszt’s thoughts on the matter were far less rigid, as revealed in two guardedly formal letters to Gobbi, written before he and Gobbi had ever met. Like the two critics and independently of them (his first letter predates their reviews), Liszt thought the work’s strength was in its expression. Generally, Liszt was closer to L.K.’s opinion than Ábrányi’s; rather than reject the idea of a Hungarian sonata, Liszt pointed out certain problems with the work’s construction. He reserved his detailed comments (of which we have no record) for a future meeting, but something of his opinion can be

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Ganzen einen eigenthümlichen Eindruck hervorzubringen vermag, allen denjenigen fähigen Spielern zur Durchsicht, die magyarisch-musikalische Sympathien haben.” - L.K.

<sup>37</sup> See Radamanthos, “Kompozitori szemele,” *Zenészet* [Pest] (5 January 1868): 217-18.

<sup>38</sup> Note the allusion in the pen name “Radamanthos” to the figure of a wise law-giver (the son of Zeus) from the Greek mythology.



gleaned from the letters, especially the first one written from Rome on 16 February 1867, almost a year before Ábrányi's review:

Dear Sir,

The excessive modesty, which prevented you from visiting me in Pest, has hurt me. It would have been pleasant for me to tell you personally and in detail of my sincere praise for your compositions. These display a decided talent, fine and sensible musicality. Opus 5 [character pieces from 1865] ... and the Hungarian Sonata appeal to me especially. Mind you, the latter could be worked out more artistically, with *passages of contact* blended with its rather *four-square* structure,—in other words, to make its successive homogenous movements more effective through interludes and bridge-passages—of which the most superb examples are to be found in many of the Beethoven Sonatas and in the first Sonata (F-sharp Minor) of Schumann. If you find some occasion to do so, I will impart to you with pleasure precisely such things, which belong to the technical details ...<sup>39</sup>

The second letter, sent from Rome a year later (25 February 1868), appears to have been written in more haste. Liszt thanks Gobbi for sending his sonata (perhaps the published version this time), and declares the work's noble feelings more important than any technical deficiencies while recommending "fewer repeats and parallel passages, as well as more skillful working out of the bridge passages" in future works.<sup>40</sup> Unlike the Leipzig critic, however, Liszt did not praise Gobbi's work merely for its "Hungarianness" or complain about its coherence. Rather, he agreed that there were problems with the thematic development: a lack of motivic elasticity in the transition between themes (precisely the sort of thing Mihalovich excelled at) and an overabundance of

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<sup>39</sup> *Liszt Letters*, 166. The original text (*ibid.*, 331), including underlining, is as follows: "Geehrter Herr, Ihre übertriebene Bescheidenheit, welche Sie verhinderte mich in Pest zu besuchen, hat mir Abbruch gethan. Es wäre mir angenehm gewesen Ihnen mein aufrichtiges Lob über Ihre Compositionen persönlich und eingehender mitzuthemen. Dieselben zeigen entschiedenes Talent, feinen und verständigen Musik-Sinn. Insbesondere sagen mir zu: Opus 5, (Nocturne, Stern, und Impromptu) und die ungarische Sonate. Bei dieser liess [sic] sich allerdings die Composition noch künstlerischen [sic] Ausarbeiten [sic], und deren etwas *continuirlichen rechten Winkel* einige *Berührungs Winkel* beimischen,—anders gesagt: den nebeneinander stehenden homogenen Sätzen mehr Wirkung abgewinnen durch Zwischen- und Verbindungs Sätze—wovon die vorzüglichsten Beispiele in vielen Sonaten Beethoven's und der 1ten Sonate (fis moll) von Schumann. . . [original ellipsis] Wenn sich je dazu Gelegenheit findet will ich Ihnen gerne dergleichen Dinge, zum Fach gehörig genauer andeuten . . ."

<sup>40</sup> *Liszt Letters*, 169: "... sparsamere Wiederholungen und Parallelphrasen; nebst gewandtere Ausarbeitung der Zwischensätze" (332).

literal, rather than developmental, repetitions. And yet, “fewer repeats and parallel passages” does not seem to take into consideration the very effective climax of the work in the third movement (the beginning of which is quoted in Example 8c). That final rondo-like movement is based on repeating and cumulative episodes whose modal character and modernist primitivism foreshadows the “Bydlo” movement from Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874) and even the sweeping conclusion of Sibelius’s Second Symphony (1902). Although some of Liszt’s compositions also point to a similar type of proto-primitivism or even proto-minimalism, particularly certain fast sections in his Hungarian Rhapsodies (e.g. the *friska* of No. 2 or the finale of No. 6), they do not anticipate his sonata from 1852, nor were they anything Liszt recommended that Gobbi resort to in future.

On the other hand, Liszt’s response could be understood simply as sympathetic professional advice given freely and with good intentions.<sup>41</sup> Copious repetitions as well as episodic and fragmentary writing may be fine for a *verbunkos* suite, but—Liszt seems to be warning Gobbi—less suitable for a sonata, a form that demands more dynamic and continuous process of thematic and harmonic development. Perhaps Liszt was merely concerned that Gobbi was working with a genre that he had not yet mastered or did not fully understand. If so, Liszt’s advice represented a problem and even a potential paradox for the concept of a “Hungarian sonata.” To cross the threshold of *style hongrois* reception in Europe, such a sonata needed to be more than just a modern, post-Beethovenian work peppered with Hungarian motives. The form itself had to be successfully hybridized if it were to receive serious international recognition.

I do not believe, however, that Liszt’s thoughts on this matter were final in 1867-1868. His *Csárdás macabre* of 1881-1882, a Hungarian sonata in all but name, proves otherwise: there Liszt preserves the dynamic thematic process of the sonata, but crucially he also incorporates formal and tonal principles and elements taken from *verbunkos*, including copious internal repetitions within the

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<sup>41</sup> As Legány rightly argues, Liszt could be much more critical, and at least on one occasion he criticized a composition by Gobbi more severely than here. See Legány, *Liszt and his Country, 1874-1886* (Budapest: Occidental, 1992), 141. [Legány’s opinion is based on a letter, apparently unpublished, from Liszt to Gobbi and written in July 1879, found in D-WRgs]. See also Liszt’s warm yet critical response to Sándor Bertha, after the latter sent him his compositions, in a letter from 28 August 1869, published in *Franz Liszt: Briefe aus ungarischen Sammlungen, 1835-86*, ed. Margit Prahács (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1966), 137.

main sonata sections.<sup>42</sup> Liszt's harmonic language and motivic concentration is a long way from the Romanticism of the 1870 generation, but certainly some of the transcultural structure and "barbaric" element in the *Csárdás macabre* is already suggested in Gobbi's sonata.

## Conclusion

Mihalovich's and Gobbi's works broadly represent, for the purposes of the present chapter, two main strands of transcultural modernism: techniques imposed "from above" (Mihalovich) in contrast to materials and techniques derived "from below" (Gobbi). My purpose is not to summarize the transcultural interests of two composers (that is impossible), or to construct a simplistic dichotomy, but rather to extrapolate throughout the examination above some issues that confronted the 1870s generation, as well as open up further questions about Liszt's legacy. Were Mihalovich, Gobbi, and their peers narrower or less transculturally innovative than Liszt in their respective stylistic experiments? Were members of the 1870 generation stricter in what they defined as "national" than Liszt had been? What was their attitude to Gypsy bands and musicians (of Romani descent or otherwise)? Did they lack contact with rural forms of *verbunkos* even more than Liszt did? Or, conversely, is it possible that these composers tried new transcultural forms and genres Liszt had not yet thought of? Certainly there is nothing to suggest that Mihalovich and Gobbi especially were destined to be forgotten. Rather than start from such anachronistic teleological historicism, I find it more interesting to look more closely at the works and thoughts of the 1870s generation and try to recapture *their* understanding and appropriation of Liszt's *verbunkos* legacy.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism*, 244-47.

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