

The Embodiment of Csárdás Style in Musical Works

Tianjia Chen^{1,a,*}

¹*School of Music Performance, Henan University, Kaifeng, China*

a. chentj@ldy.edu.rs

**corresponding author*

Abstract: This paper studies how Csárdás style is reflected in music works and the performance techniques related to the style. In previous literature, some tend to analyze repertoire and performance techniques, while others are related to the development of Gypsy culture and the characteristics of Gypsy music in relation to Csárdás. There is little analysis of Sarasati's *Zigeunerweisen* and Monti's *Csárdás* combining Csárdás's relevant characteristics and playing techniques. Based on this situation, this paper will analyze Sarasati's *Zigeunerweisen* and Monti's *Csárdás* to reveal the characteristics of Csárdás style and its origin Gypsy culture, and put forward suggestions on how to improve the performance techniques to make Csárdás style more prominent. The final conclusion is as follows: Csárdás style is inseparable from Gypsy wandering experience, and its main features are reflected in the structure, mode, rhythm, national scale, improvisational decoration. In the performance, musicians usually pay more attention to the expression of emotion, and to conform to the gypsy free, unruly characteristics.

Keywords: Csárdás style, Gypsy, *Csárdás*, *Zigeunerweisen*.

1. Introduction

Csárdás originated from the folk dance of the Gypsies, which was widely spread in Hungary. Over a hundred years later, Csárdás evolved into a significant genre of Hungarian folk music. This genre gave rise to renowned musical works, such as Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody*, Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen*, and Monti's *Csárdás*. In Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen* and Monti's *Csárdás*, how is the musical style of Csárdás embodied? Additionally, how can performers highlight the strong characteristics of Gypsy or Hungarian music through the adaptation of playing techniques? These are the primary questions this paper aims to address.

Most research on the Csárdás style focuses on these two works: *Zigeunerweisen* and *Csárdás*. For instance, Ma Baoyan and Lu Yate [1] examine the playing techniques and musical content of *Zigeunerweisen*, while Liu Na [2] focuses on the musical analysis and playing techniques of *Csárdás*. Other research, like that of Li Yitong [3], explores the relationship between Gypsy culture and Csárdás, emphasizing the characteristics of Gypsy music. Li Yi, Yang Ye, and Xing Yuan [4] delve into performance techniques but lean more toward comparing different instruments in works such as *Zigeunerweisen*.

Given the current research landscape, this paper aims to reveal the stylistic characteristics of Csárdás and its roots in Gypsy culture through a detailed analysis of Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen* and Monti's *Csárdás*.

2. An Introduction to the Csárdás Style

2.1. The Origin

Csárdás originated from the folk dance of the Gypsies, becoming popular in Hungary around the 1430s. By the 1850s and 1860s, it had developed into a major genre of Hungarian folk music. Gypsies, being a nomadic people, incorporated elements from various cultures and regions into their music and dance, making Csárdás a product of this multicultural synthesis, reflecting the creativity and musical prowess of the Gypsy people.

2.1.1. The Gypsies

The earliest references to Gypsies date back to around the 9th century, identifying them as a minority within the Caucasian race. For hundreds of years, Gypsies have been forced to migrate, leading to their distinct "wandering" lifestyle, which has diversified their culture [5]. Some scholars argue that Gypsies originated from lower castes in India, a factor contributing to their widespread discrimination in Europe. This marginalization compelled them to continually move, fostering a nomadic and exclusive lifestyle. The isolation of Gypsy communities appealed to the European imagination, as evidenced by their influence on Romantic literature [6]. British scholar George Borrow noted that the Gypsy way of life had a profound impact on Romantic writers, indirectly influencing the development of Romantic literature and music, helping to pave the way for the broader spread of Gypsy music.

2.1.2. Stylistic Features

Csárdás possesses a distinct Hungarian and Gypsy musical identity, typically structured in two parts: the "Lassú", a slow, lyrical section often featuring male soloists, and the "Friss", a fast, energetic section that creates a lively and cheerful atmosphere, often involving male-female duets. The frequent use of grace notes gives the music an improvisational feel. Additionally, the augmented second interval, a hallmark of Gypsy music, is prominent in Csárdás compositions. These scales, characteristic of Gypsy music, serve as a strong identifier of its cultural roots.

3. The Csárdás Style in Musical Works

3.1. Vittorio Monti's *Csárdás*

In Vittorio Monti's *Csárdás*, the piece begins with a very slow and expressive section, commonly referred to as the "Lassú" section. For the performer, this part allows for a degree of freedom, enabling them to create a melancholic atmosphere through the use of sustained notes. The augmented second interval, formed by the notes B-flat and C-sharp, is a key feature of Gypsy music and contributes to the sorrowful tone of the opening. The allegro section, also known as the "Friss", features a rapid succession of sixteenth notes, grace notes, and syncopation. The tempo, dynamics, and intensity fluctuate dramatically, evoking a wide range of emotions [2]. The emotion builds continuously, eventually culminating in an explosive climax when the two main voices emerge. After this, the piece transitions into beautiful and lyrical double harmonics, creating a strong contrast. Finally, the main theme is reprised, with the extremely fast sixteenth notes driving the music towards a climactic conclusion, ending with a vibrant and energetic atmosphere.

In terms of performance, the first part of the allegro can be played with a lighter touch to capture the mysterious yet free-spirited mood, setting the stage for the eventual explosion of double tones. In the allegro reprise, the intensity gradually increases from light to heavy, peaking emotionally with the double stops at the end.

3.2. Pablo de Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen*

This piece showcases strong national characteristics through the distinctive augmented second interval formed by E-flat and F-sharp, a key feature of the "Gypsy scale." Additionally, the alternation between the tonic major and minor keys in the fourth section further emphasizes the Gypsy influence. The opening "Lassú" conveys a deep sense of sorrow through its free rhythm and rich, somber tone. The second half, "Friss," transitions into a passionate and lively allegro, bringing the music to life. Notably, the rapid bowing technique in the fourth section mimics the perpetual motion often found in Hungarian folk dances, with sixteenth notes creating a dynamic flow. The performance of this piece demands precise coordination between the left and right hands to achieve a strong sense of articulation and rhythmic clarity, embodying the free-spirited and unrestrained passion of Gypsy music [1].

Compared to Monti's *Csárdás*, *Zigeunerweisen* requires greater attention to the variation in vibrato technique. In the opening "Lassú," the performer must apply a wide and frequent vibrato to enhance the power and emotional depth of the sound. This technique adds richness to the section's melancholic atmosphere. In the third part of the piece, a more delicate emotional expression is needed, achieved through a smaller, subtler vibrato. This lighter touch complements the poignant and heart-wrenching melody of this section. If the vibrato technique in both parts were identical, it would fail to fully convey the Gypsies' sense of fatalism and their lamenting, sobbing voice [7]. Table 1 below summarizes the similarities between the two pieces in their embodiment of the "Csárdás" style.

Table 1: Features of Csárdás style

Features	Augmented second	Rhythm	Improvisation	Mode (Conversion Between Major and Minor Keys)
Csárdás	B flat and C sharp	syncopation	grace notes	d minor to D major
Zigeunerweisen	E flat and F sharp A flat and B	syncopation	ascending scales	c minor to C major

4. Analysis of the Csárdás Style

The characteristic augmented second interval is a defining feature of the Gypsy scale, which is composed as follows: C – D – E-flat – F-sharp – G – A-flat – B – C. The interval relationships include seconds, minor seconds, augmented seconds, and other minor seconds, which give the scale its distinctive sound. In *Zigeunerweisen*, the theme of the overture partially uses this Gypsy scale, and through slow bowing and intense vibrato, the national characteristics of the Gypsy style are fully expressed, conveying a deep and profound sadness [3]. Similarly, in *Csárdás*, the opening "Lassú" section employs a slow tempo and slightly free expression to establish a melancholic mood while also highlighting the Gypsy sense of freedom.

When discussing freedom in music, improvisation is a key feature of Gypsy music. Improvisation involves, but is not limited to, the use of scales and grace notes. Gypsies often express strong emotions through their spontaneous, impromptu playing. This characteristic is evident in both pieces. The frequent use of grace notes in *Csárdás* gives the music a sense of fluidity and rich emotion. In *Zigeunerweisen*, not only do we find grace notes but also rapid scales, which require highly refined technical skills to convey the freedom and passion inherent in the music. It is important to note that while improvisation through scales and grace notes is found in traditional Western music as well,

Gypsy musicians push this to the extreme, using these elements to fully release their emotions in the moment. This is a viewpoint shared by Hungarian composer and ethnomusicologist Béla Bartók [3].

5. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the embodiment of the Csárdás style through Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen* and Monti's *Csárdás*. The analysis demonstrates that in order to highlight the national characteristics of Gypsy or Hungarian music, composers divide the structure into two parts: "Lassú" and "Friss." Additionally, the use of the "Hungarian scale" and its distinctive augmented second interval, along with grace notes, syncopation, and the transition between major and minor keys, adds a rich texture to Gypsy music.

In performance, musicians must capture the essence of Gypsy music, fully showcasing the contrast between "Lassú" and "Friss" while embracing the element of improvisation. The freedom and unrestrained emotion of the Gypsy people, coupled with the deeper feelings brought on by a life of exile, can be conveyed through attention to detail in performance, creating a more profound and direct connection with the audience.

In summary, Gypsy music is a powerful expression of national identity and charm. It is the result of the blending of regional cultures and traditions, continuously evolving and being reinterpreted over time. Its artistic and cultural value is immeasurable, representing a rich and enduring legacy.

References

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