The Hungarian Cimbalom: History and Evolution

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Abstract

Two distinct and separate traditions exist in the repertoire and performance styles of the Hungarian cimbalom (classical and folk). These two approaches are intertwined and can be perceived in both the canon of certain Western Art Music composers, and the performance practices of contemporary Classical cimbalists. The implicitly stated thesis of my dissertation is this very idea of a Western Art Music instrument being intrinsically linked to a folk music tradition (Jewish and Roma), that in turn lead up to its very inception in the late nineteenth century.

During the relatively brief history of the Hungarian cimbalom, very few changes in its design structure have occurred. Prior to Joszef Schunda's innovation of 1874, no one had considered the possibility of transfiguring a hammered dulcimer—a portative folk instrument—into a piano-like concert instrument where the performer could play in a seated position, have all the pitches of the Western scale at their disposal (chromatic vs. diatonic), and the controlled use of a damper pedal. Schunda's clientele prior to 1874 were middle and upper class Hungarians' (predominately amateur musicians) looking to purchase a piano or tárogáto. With respect to Schunda's *cimbalom*, this would eventually become the domain of the Roma musician. The long-standing tradition of hammered dulcimer playing that had already been in place with Roma and Jewish itinerant musicians continued well in to the twentieth century with the concert cimbalom. The acclaimed cimbalom soloist of Roma descent, Aladár Rácz, would be the first performer to introduce transcriptions of Western art music for the cimbalom (mostly baroque repertoire) to European audiences. Racz would go on to perform in the premieres of compositions by Igor Stravinsky, namely the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, and the one-act opera, *Renard*.

The cimbalom's first entrance into the symphony orchestra, via the few works of Franz Liszt, Béla Bartók, and Zoltán Kodály, was in large part informed by the performers themselves and their Gypsy music aesthetic. A turn of events transpired in 1915 when the composer Igor Stravinsky composed his first works for cimbalom featuring a series of innovative (and idiosyncratic) concepts in notation, sticking patterns, and functionality with the instrument. Since the 1950s, two streams in cimbalom performance practice are apparent: a classical and a folk (Gypsy/Roma) tradition. A schism between the two traditions resulted with the need for modern cimbalom players to overcome the challenges with contemporary classical music. Composers Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez wrote in ways that were less idiomatic, but at the same time brought a level of respectability for the instrument hither to unseen. The Hungarian composer György Kurtág continues to champion the cimbalom well into the twenty-first century with an impressive catalogue of solo, chamber, and orchestral works.

Film and television composers are largely responsible for the cimbalom's "renaissance" in the twenty-first century. The instrument shows up in the scores of numerous Hollywood blockbuster films, historical or "period" set dramas, documentaries, and television series in ways that are both codified (East European, Gypsy music), or less so (science fiction, Far East or Middle East, ancient civilizations).

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the many people who in some way made this body of work a possibility. First, to my parents, James Lloyd Moore (1938–2009) and Betty Louise Moore, who brought me into this world and unconditionally supported me with all my life's choices; my partner and soulmate Barbara Lee Croall, who encouraged me to take up the cimbalom and has supported me all the way in this undertaking; Neil Ellwood Peart, OC, for being a mentor and a friend for life; my committee, Michael Coghlan (Supervisor), Mark Chambers, and Robert van der Bliek. A special thanks goes out to Bruce Redstone for the photographic images and layout design of the musical examples. Finally, I dedicate this work to all my teachers, family, and friends who have encouraged me along the way and helped shape my life in so many diverse ways.

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The Hungarian Cimbalom: History and Evolution

Introduction

The Hungarian cimbalom has a relatively brief history. Invented by piano and tárogáto[1] maker, Józef Schunda, who began producing musical instruments in Pest, Hungary (present day Budapest) in 1848. In 1874 Schunda registered his first cimbalom patent. Chapter Two's Cimbalom Organology will look at both Schunda's first instrument and later instruments' overall design. The cimbalom's basic size, structure, and string layout remains generally intact from 1874 to the present. Recent improvements to the instrument include the support frame, choice of woods, pitch range, and sound projection. Schunda's first instruments served as the templates for his successor, Lajos Bohák, to improve and develop. Bohák instruments, while no two are alike, are known and coveted for their rich, dark sound, and their ability to hold pitch. Bohák Sr. made instruments from the 1920s up until the 1950s, while Bohák Jr. continued in his Father's tradition with cimbalom making into the 1970s. The two prominent cimbalom builders today are Balázs Kovács and Nagy Ákos. Both based in Budapest, their instruments are durable and known for their brighter sound and projection (due to the addition of a sound hole underneath the instrument). Historical background will lead to an examination and comparison of wood types, frames, string construction, and overall design of the cimbalom from 1874 to the present.

[1] An instrument of Hungarian origin, it is usually classified as a member of the clarinet family.

Precursors to the cimbalom can be traced back centuries with a set of competing theories as to their exact date and places of origin. When considering factors such as the mistranslation of texts, and false misrepresentation of instrument types, the uncertainty is extended further. Ancient instruments that were plucked or strummed (the Greek lyra or medieval psaltery as two well-known examples) were sometimes either misrepresented or mistranslated in texts as a species of the hammered dulcimer. While there is some evidence to suggest that these instruments might have also been "hammered" in some fashion, the steady practice of "hammering" a dulcimer did develop a tradition until the Renaissance.[2] Chapter Three briefly examines some of the cimbalom's precursors which, without their development and evolution, would not have made the instrument's fruition possible. The remainder of the chapter considers both Jewish and Roma connections with respect to the cimbalom's history (precursors) and evolution into the twentieth century with Roma musicians being the main driving force in popularizing the modern version of the instrument (Schunda's cimbalom). While largely outside the scope of the dissertation,[3] references will be made when necessary to folk performance practices, in other words, whenever there is evidence of the Gypsy music aesthetic at work. It should be pointed out that students today studying the cimbalom at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest[4] have the option to pursue courses in either the classical repertoire or folk music.

[2] See page forty for an elaboration on this point.
[3] The dissertation focuses on the classical rather than the folk tradition associated with the modern cimbalom.
[4] https://www.ifze.hu

Chapter Four offers a brief introduction to Schunda's design of a hammered dulcimer with piano-like features.[5] The first classical works written for the modern cimbalom are also covered in Chapter Four: two works by Franz Liszt, and one work by Claude Debussy. Liszt's and Debussy's relationship with Roma musicians is well- documented, and while there are no written accounts of the musicians who gave the premieres of their works, both composers were familiar with the players of the day and what was then known as "Gypsy music." Cimbalom players at the time who were of Hungarian or Eastern European descent remain essentially unaccounted for in the literature. One can only deduce that from the thousands of instruments that came out of Schunda's factory (and later, his competitor's) there would have been numerous amateur musicians from the middle and upper classes who would have played the instrument in their parlours or at social gatherings, and performed informal recitals. For the most part, the instrument held a strong association with the Roma and their virtuoso renderings of the popular music of the day. One such virtuoso, Aladár Rácz, a Roma musician who attained international recognition for his classical transcriptions at the cimbalom, developed a lengthy relationship with Russian composer Igor Stravinsky.

Chapter Five examines two works by Igor Stravinsky written for cimbalom: *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, and the one-act opera, *Renard*. The early drafts of *Les Noces* are also discussed as way of comparison with the two works mentioned above. Living in self-

[5] A more elaborate discussion of Schunda's cimbalom will be taken up in Chapter Eight, *A Cimbalom Organology*.

declared exile in Switzerland[6] between the years 1914—20, Stravinsky had entered into a highly experimental phase of composition. Two factors that had a profound effect on his compositional output from this period were: his introduction to the cymbalist Aladár Rácz at a café in Geneva; and, his exposure to ragtime music that was being imported from the United States. Stravinsky's first work scored with a cimbalom part is the one-act chamber opera, *Renard.* The opera features the instrument prominently throughout and at times it functions as the "stand-in" for the Russian folk dulcimer, the *gusli*.[7] Composed almost two years after *Renard*, the *Ragtime for Eleven instruments* is set in a quasi-ragtime style that utilizes the cimbalom as the lead voice. The two abandoned drafts (published as Draft One and Draft Two) of the ballet *Les Noces,* call for two or one cimbalom performers respectively. The final version of the work (1920) was re-orchestrated without the use of cimbalom(s). A resurgence of interest with these earlier drafts came about in the 1970s and 1980s, following in a series of premier performances. The 1920 version remains the most widely programmed version of the work.

Chapter Six considers works by Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály. Both Hungarian Nationalists, Bartók and Kodály's exposure to Roma musicians and the prevailing Gypsy music in Hungary at the time would have been intentionally avoided. Both composers' musicological research and preservation of Hungarian and Romanian folk songs resulted in their steering clear of the popular music of the day and avoiding any fusion of genres. Despite this, Bartók did have limited dealings with Aladár Rácz and his instrument's capabilities. When arranging his *First Rhapsody for Violin and Piano* for orchestra,

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[6] Stravinsky moved his family to "neutral" Switzerland during World War I.
[7] The gusli, a member of the zither family, is a Russian folk instrument that Stravinsky recalled hearing in his childhood.

Bartók included the cimbalom in the orchestration, possibly as a result of his meetings with Rácz. The cimbalom plays a substantial role in the work, second only to the solo violin. Zoltán Kodály's *Háry János Suite* remains the most often programmed orchestral work featuring the cimbalom. Originally composed as an opera, the suite continues to be a staple in the repertoire for cimbalists to master and perform. The opera, though rarely mounted, has a substantial cimbalom part throughout. The suite's six movements are taken from the opera's musical interludes with the "Lied" and "Intermezzo" featuring the cimbalom in a solo capacity. Although he lived some forty years after the *Háry János* opera and suite were first premiered, Kodály never scored another work for the cimbalom. Given its subject matter—a nineteenth century Hungarian folk hero's tales of victory of the Motherland over its oppressors—perhaps the composer felt no other work would suit the instrument better than a work known primarily for its ties to the Hungarian culture and folklore.

György Kurtág, active as a composer into his eighties, is the most prolific composer when it comes to scoring for the cimbalom with over nineteen works for the instrument.[8] Chapter Seven examines his two major works for the cimbalom: the solo piece *Splinters*, and the chamber work, *Scenes from a Novel*. Any analysis of the music of Kurtág's requires a multilayered approach. The bulk of his music is informed by spoken text, sometimes present in the work, sometimes not, and often in a fragmented or reductive form. Well-versed in the Russian language, Kurtág sets to music the fifteen poem fragments of the Russian poet, Rimma Dalos, in his *Scenes from a Novel*. In the solo work, *Splinters*, Kurtág sets the music (with no text) to a poem of the same title by the

[8] A list of Kurtag's works for cimbalom is in Appendix A.

Hungarian poet, János Pilinszky. A musical analysis of Kurtág's approach to writing for cimbalom is considered within the context of his overall musical aesthetic. Finally, questions are be asked as to why the composer chooses the instrument for the majority of his chamber and orchestral works.

Chapter Eight surveys a number of select works by composers from the 1950s to the present. Chosen for their innovation and contribution to the cimbalom literature, this list is by no means an exhaustive one.[9] The 1950s bridge both modernism, post-modernism, and experimental schools of composition in Europe and America. The cimbalom at this juncture began to lose more of its folk connotations and the gap between the two traditions widens. Composers such as Stockhausen and Boulez score for the instrument in a way that is on equal footing with the piano or pitched percussion instruments. While composers in Hungary at the time might have been scoring for the cimbalom in a similar manner, composers beyond the Iron Curtain were introducing the cimbalom to a wider audience in the West. A composers' collective that sprang up in Hungary in 1970, *The New Music Studio*, was known for an experimental approach that picked up the thread from composers such as Stockhausen and Boulez. The cimbalom, as an instrument widely accessible to the composers from *The New Music Studio*, was now being written for in a more experimental way that did not exist prior to the formation of the collective. One notable composer from *The New Music Studio*, Peter Eötvös, would also perform with the *Stockhausen Ensemble* during the 1970s, eventually leaving both groups to take over the baton from Pierre Boulez to lead the *Ensemble Intercontemporain* in the 1980s.

[9] Appendix B includes works written for the cimbalom by composers since 1970 not covered in Chapter Six.

His major work for cimbalom, the concerto *Psychokosmos*, was also arranged for a trio consisting of flute, cello, and cimbalom. The trio version of this work is analyzed in Chapter Six.

Film and Television, the last section of Chapter Eight, investigates the cimbalom and its use in various soundtracks. The 1935 Hollywood swashbuckler *Captain Blood* was the first film known to use the cimbalom. Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) and Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy (2001–2003), two very successful blockbuster films from the early twenty-first century, both make elaborate use of exotic musical instruments in the score in support of the narrative of "another time and place." The cimbalom, featured in the foreground of both films, marked a revival of sorts and other scores soon followed suit. This in part was helped along with a resurgence in interest in historical and period set subject matters in film, which in turn created a new set of challenges for the film composer—challenges that are not dis-similar with academic research when it comes to examining musical styles and their instruments from specific time periods. Today there is more of an awareness and "demand" for authenticity not only in music, but also in wardrobe, language, and historical accuracy in general.[10]

Television, as with film, has also experienced a revival with historical documentaries along with period set dramas like *The Borgia's, The Tudors,* and *Vikings.* Channels such as *The History Channel* devote 24 hours of broadcasting to historical subject matters. Soundtracks for television series and documentaries have come a long way in terms of

[10] In its infancy, Hollywood films and their soundtracks were quite liberal with what was acceptably termed "the exotic." For instance, African drums might have been scored for in a Western film as stand-in for Native American drums.

what is expected from the composer. Rather than the scoring with just MIDI samples, composers today are now looking back on certain musical instruments for their unique timbral properties (like the cimbalom and hammered dulcimer) and perhaps their inherent "out-of-tune" quality that is not easily replicated, and nearly impossible to sample satisfactorally. The expressive and idiomatic function of the cimbalom performer's playing is another aspect made difficult to capture by playing digitally sampled imitations.

Chapter One

1.1 Location of Self

My passion for drumming and all things percussive began at the age of thirteen. Starting on drum set, I took lessons at a local music store and played in local rock bands throughout my teens. I was further mentored under my high school band teacher, David Sale, who encouraged me to take up other instruments in the percussion family like the timpani, xylophone, and various hand drums. David was the first person to introduce me to classical music and jazz, two traditions that would impact my career choices down the road. After graduating from high school I continued with private music studies in between touring the club circuit in Ontario, Quebec, and the US. In 1989 I entered my first year at the University of Toronto's Percussion Performance degree program under Dr. Russell Hartenberger. Essentially a classical music degree program, I also had the opportunity to perform in the university big band, African drumming ensemble, percussion ensemble, gamelan ensemble, and the university's symphony orchestra. I earned my Bachelor's degree in 1993 and entered directly into the master's degree program in 1994, also at the University of Toronto. My master's degree studies focused on advanced repertoire for solo percussion, two recitals, courses in North Indian classical music, and private lessons on the tabla. In 1998 I pursued advanced studies in percussion for two years at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich under Dr. Peter Sadlo. Peter helped with my timpani playing (including baroque timpani) and solo percussion repertoire. His musical approach to percussion performance left a lasting influence on me. Sadly, Peter passed away in 2016 at the age of 54.

Since my time in university and for the past twenty-five years, I have maintained a successful career as a freelance professional musician working in musical theatre, jazz, world music, symphony orchestra, and chamber music across Canada, the United States, and abroad. As both drummer and percussionist, I have extensive professional credits in music theatre, jazz, and world music genres. Experience in pit orchestras includes musical productions at the Stratford Festival, Mirvish Productions, Soul Pepper Theatre, Drayton Entertainment, Dancap Productions, Young Peoples Theatre, and the Randolph School. Currently a member of the OTR Big Band, I enjoy the privilege of working in an ensemble with some of the top jazz performers in Canada. In the world music genre, I studied tabla with Pandit Sharda Sihai and Dr. James Kippen. I also studied gamelan with Dr. Annette Sanger. My six years as a Teaching Assistant at York University offered me unique opportunities to work with West African (Ghanaian) master drummer, Kwasi Dunyo for four years, and for two years with the Cuban music ensembles and the Brazilian (Escola de Samba) ensembles. In the arena of contemporary classical music, I was a founding member of Ergo Projects, a new music ensemble based in Toronto (1999–2004), and performed with the Ergo Ensemble at new music festivals in Germany, France, Lithuania, Finland, New York City, and Newfoundland. I have also performed with the Esprit Orchestra, New Music Concerts, NUMUS, and Soundstreams.

My interest with and exposure to the world of cimbalom and hammered dulcimers began in the late nineties in Munich, Germany. Munich's streets (and occasionally its concert halls) would court itinerant musicians from Bavaria, Austria, Hungary, and further afield. A strong Turkish presence is intact since the Turks make up the second largest ethnic group in Germany since the Second World War. The Turks brand of

Middle Eastern music occupies a significant space in the German world music scene. Gypsy music can be found in major city centres like Cologne thanks to the survival of the Sinti people, an ethnic group that makes up a large section of Germany's Roma population.[11] Munich's streets are the perfect meeting ground for the traditional folk music of rural Bavaria and Austria. Folk instruments like the hackbrett (Germany's version of the hammered dulcimer) and zither play a significant musical role in the Austrian-Bavarian folk ensembles. The Sinti influence is present with its travelling Roma bands usually consisting of violin(s), double bass, cimbalom, and sometimes guitar and/or accordion. Often these itinerant folk ensembles would congregate in the *Marienplatz*, Munich's main market square. Santur and santoori players can also be seen from time to time in the streets of Munich, performing solo or with other Turkish, Greek, and Persian musicians. The timbre from all these different types of hammered dulcimers would "ring out" to me in a way that would have an enduring effect on my consciousness. Incidentally, this connection or contact would not have been possible had I not travelled to this part of the world. Hammered dulcimers in general and the cimbalom in particular have virtually no presence in North America.[12] After this powerful aural connection had been made, my next step was to find an instrument (and perhaps a teacher) to see what this journey into the world of "hammered stringed instruments" would entail. It is worth

[11] It is estimated 500,000 of the Roma were exterminated under Hitler's rule during the Second World War. The majority of the Sinti population was based in Germany at the time.

[12] "Pockets" of a hammered dulcimer tradition, and to a lesser extent a cimbalom tradition, did exist at one time in Canada and the USA. These minor, regional traditions all but died off in the late nineteenth century. A hammered dulcimer revival took place during the nineteen seventies, but then quickly died off. For the most part younger generations seemingly have little interest in learning to play these instruments or learn their associated musical styles.

noting at this juncture in time that my curiosity and passion for these instruments had nothing to do with a perceived earning of a living down the road as either a performer or teacher; my career path had already been chosen much earlier as a drummer and percussionist. My choice with a teacher would be have to take into consideration my budget and the potential language barrier. The Roma and middle-eastern musicians travelling through Munich had very little English (and sometimes little German, too), and most could not read music. Also, their time spent in one location was contingent on the money they would make. I eventually chose an instrument called the *hackbrett-cimbalom* (also sometimes referred to as a *tenor hackbrett*). An instrument whose Germanic origins survive to the present day—especially in the south (Bavaria and Austria)—it is the largest member of the hackbrett family. The three and a half octave instrument is fully chromatic and equipped with a damper pedal mechanism. The hackbrett-cimbalom is closely related to the Hungarian cimbalom with an identical string layout to the cimbalom's bass register of two and a half octaves. Like the Hungarian cimbalom, the hackbrett-cimbalom has two traditions: a classical tradition and a folk tradition.

I studied the hackbrett-cimbalom for two years at Munich's largest conservatory of music, the *Richard-Strauss-Koservatorium*.[13] With the help of my teacher, Birgit Stolzenburg, I acquired an instrument to practice on in between lessons. My studies with Birgit focused on technique and the classical repertoire for the instrument. Therefore my time spent in Munich was divided up between lessons with Peter at the Hochschule, lessons with Birgit at the RSK, and in my spare time, researching the repertoire and method books for both the hackbrett and the cimbalom. In 2000 I returned to Canada with

[13] The Richard-Strauss-Konservatorium merged with Munich's Hochschule für Musik on August 1, 2008.

my hackbrett-cimbalom and all the books and scores packed away in suitcases. Upon my return I continued my research at libraries like the Univeristy of Toronto's Music Library and Robart's Library. My research revealed that the majority of works written for a hammered dulcimer type instrument by Western classical composers was written for the *Hungarian cimbalom*. The reasons became obvious: the instrument had the largest register of all the hammered dulcimers (almost five octaves), a fully functional damper pedal system, and the ability to be heard in a symphony orchestral setting. I had already acquired numerous books and repertoire on the cimbalom while living in Germany, so my new quest became to find a Hungarian cimbalom and transfer what I knew from my lessons with Birgit over to the larger instrument.

In 2001 I met Rudy Toth, an instrument builder and amateur cimbalom player living near Fort Erie, Ontario. Rudy was born in Canada to parents of Hungarian descent. Rudy taught me how to play the upper register of the cimbalom (the region of the instrument that differs from the hackbrett-cimbalom's), and also taught me how to replace broken strings. After purchasing two of Rudy's instruments (he told me it was a "two-for-one-sale" that day)[14] I would occasionally visit him for tips and advice on playing, tuning, and how to properly care for the instrument. Many more questions remained unanswered, but time ran out as Rudy's health quickly declined leading to his passing away in 2004. For more than fifteen years I have been studying, researching, and performing on the cimbalom throughout Canada, the United States, and Europe. To my knowledge, I am the only person living in Canada who plays the cimbalom in its classical tradition. For the past ten years I have been the first-call cimbalist for all the major orchestras and chamber

[14] One of the instruments was retired recently due to a "sinking" soundboard underneath the middle right bridge.

music ensembles in Canada. Since commencing my doctoral studies at York University in 2010, my research has been consumed by the instrument's history, construction, repertoire (primarily drawn from the classical tradition), and performance practice concerns. Combining this with my vast experience as a performer it allows me the distinction as an expert both from the "inside" and the "outside."

As cimbalom soloist I have made many appearances with the Toronto Symphony, the National Arts Centre Orchestra, the Winnipeg Symphony, the Quebec Symphony, Esprit Orchestra, Opera Quebec, the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra, the National Ballet of Canada Orchestra, the Hamilton Philharmonic, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, New Music Concerts, Boston Musica Viva, Soundstreams and the Ergo Ensemble. I have performed the works of Zoltán Kodály, Igor Stravinsky, György Kurtág, Pierre Boulez, Peter Eötvös, Heinz Holliger, George Crumb, Louis Andriessen, Vinko Globokar, Chris Paul Harman, and Barbara Croall. As soloist I have worked with such notable conductors as Pierre Boulez, Heinz Holliger, Peter Eötvös, Jukka Pekka Saraste, Johannes Debus, Kristjan Järvi, Alexander Mickelthwate, and David Briskin. From 2009 to 2011 I was the cimbalom soloist with the Canadian Opera Company and Robert Lepage's touring production of *The Nightingale*. The latter featured the works of Igor Stravinsky and my role focused on the parts for cimbalom in *Renard* and the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*. Since 2015 I have been involved with the touring ballet production of *The Winters Tale*. A co-production with The Royal Ballet in London, England and the National Ballet of Canada, I have an important on-stage musician's role (in costume) playing a solo dulcimer/cimbalom part in all three acts. To date this production has toured to the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, and the Four Seasons Centre. Other solo

engagements include Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* (score by Howard Shore) with live orchestra. I have performed the solo cimbalom part and hammered dulcimer parts many times to the LOTR's *The Fellowship of the Ring,* as well as Howard Shore's orchestral suite, the LOTR Suite, at the National Arts Centre, Roy Thomson Hall, and the Centre-In-The-Square. Other tours I have been involved with as the cimbalom soloist is the tour of Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* with live orchestra (music by Hans Zimmer). To date I have performed this work at the Place des Arts and the Sony Centre. Recording projects with cimbalom include the video game series *Total War*, and sound design/incidental music recordings for the Stratford Festival.

As the proud owner of three cimbaloms, I have the distinction of owning a set of unique instruments in my collection: a late model Bohák (Budapest); a Kosmosz (Budapest); and a Toth cimbalom (Canada). This stable of instruments allows me the luxury of enjoying the subtle tonal differences and specialized technique issues that characterize each instrument. In addition, the multi-faceted awareness of the instruments nature in actual "performance" places me as an "insider" with respect to my research. In addition to my performance and teaching careers I hold advisory positions/artist endorsements with Drum Workshop, Sabian, Latin Percussion (LP), Remo, Vater, Alternate Mode (Malletkat), and Protection Racket.

Chapter Two

2.1 Cimbalom Organology

Hornbostel-Sachs classifies the Hungarian cimbalom under the general heading, *Chordophone*. The sub-classification is a "board zither with resonator" (Classification Number: 314.12-4).[15] While most zithers are played with the use of the fingers or a plectrum(s), in theory, it is also possible to strike a zither with a hammer or mallet. The only obstacle in this case would be the placement of the bridges and their distance from each other. Another factor is the nature and structure of the strings themselves: are they conducive to hammering? While a concert cimbalom has similarities to some large zithers, the differences between the two instruments are numerous. Although the topic is well beyond the scope of this dissertation, it can be argued that a separate classification is required (within the broader category of *Chordophones*) for all dulcimer instruments that are struck with a hammer or mallet.

The concept of fastening strings across a soundboard is an ancient one, and today it remains the first principle with all dulcimers and zithers. The fundamental goal with all hammered dulcimers is: 1) their ability to hold pitch, and 2) the durability of the materials used, especially the wood, in their construction (the same principles apply to piano construction). Prior to the Schunda's cimbalom, strings on dulcimers were typically made

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[15] See Hornbostel-Sachs. *Revision of the Hornbostel-Sachs Classification of Musical Instruments by the MIMO Consortium* (2011). www.mimo-international.com/documents/Hornbostel%20Sachs.pdf

from iron, copper, or brass. Starting with Schunda and up to the present, concert cimbalom's strings are made from the same material that piano strings are made from: high carbon steel. The upper half of the instrument uses high carbon steel piano wire that is graduated in thickness (measured with a micrometer), staring from "g_3" and ascending to "g_6." The lower half uses wound strings made from brass or steel[16] over a steel core, beginning on "c_2" and going up to "$f\#_3$." The wound strings are custom fit for the cimbalom in order to fit between the two outer bass bridges, with the steel core exposed from just before the bridge down to the hitch pin on the left, and the tuning peg or pin on the right. The upper strings are referred to as "straight-gauged" piano wire, cut to fit from the hitch pin with several lengths, usually three to four windings, around the tuning peg. The number of windings is important for non-slippage while tuning or playing. Cimbalom builders use piano tuning pegs that are set into the right pin block of the instrument. Smaller tuning pegs, like the ones used in harpsichords, are preferred for the more portable cimbaloms (sometimes referred to as "¾ sized cimbaloms"). The amount of string pressure on a cimbalom depends on the number of courses of strings used. Typically an instrument will have between 160 to 200 pounds of string tension per string, resulting in approximately 15,000 pounds of tension on the instrument (approximately half the amount of string tension of a grand piano). Each tuning peg is set deep into the pin block, requiring at least sixty psi (pounds per square inch) on the pin in order to hold the tension on the string. Pin blocks are made from a hard wood, usually maple, and are drilled with a smaller gauged bit that is slightly narrower than the diameter of the pin. The hitch-pins on a cimbalom are set into the left pin block. Since the time of Schunda,

[16] I personally own instruments with wound strings made with both brass and steel.

the hitch-pins have always been on the left side of the instrument, and the tuning pegs on the right. Some cimbaloms tuning pegs turn counter-clockwise to tension the string while others turn clockwise.[17] The tuning pegs for each string are set in a row, side-by-side, resulting in slightly different string lengths for each string. Wound strings, usually in sets of threes or twos, have to have different ratios of gauge windings on the core from the hitch pin to the bridge. Most instruments run a single wound string for the "c_2" (lowest pitch on the cimbalom) with courses of two strings for the "$c\#_2$" and "d_2." Starting from the "$d\#_2$" and going up to "$f\#_3$", the courses run in sets of threes. The upper portion of the instrument, where the straight piano wire (unwound) begins, the courses are in sets of fours. Schunda's early instruments started on an "e_2" in the bass, and went up to an "e_6" in the treble. Schunda's later instruments extended the bass down a tone, starting on a "d_2." Stravinsky bracketed these low "d_2" notes in his score to *Renard* (see Chapter Three). "C_2" has been the standard starting bass note on all cimbaloms since the time of Bohák's instruments.[18] Recent experimental models coming out of Hungary start their bass note on an "a_1." Figures 2–1 and 2–2 are overhead views of two different makes of cimbaloms, both built in Budapest, Hungary. The tuning pegs, hitch pins, bridges, and damper bars are identical in both images. The wound and unwound strings can be differentiated by their color (brass and silver).

[17] On my Bohák and Kosmosz cimbaloms (both built in Budapest, Hungary) the tuning pegs turn (tension) counter-clockwise. My Toth cimbalom (built in North America) turn clockwise. I can state confidently that all cimbaloms, with the exception of cimbaloms made by Rudy Toth, have tuning pegs that tension counter-clockwise.
[18] A discussion of Lajos Bohák cimbaloms will be covered later in the chapter.

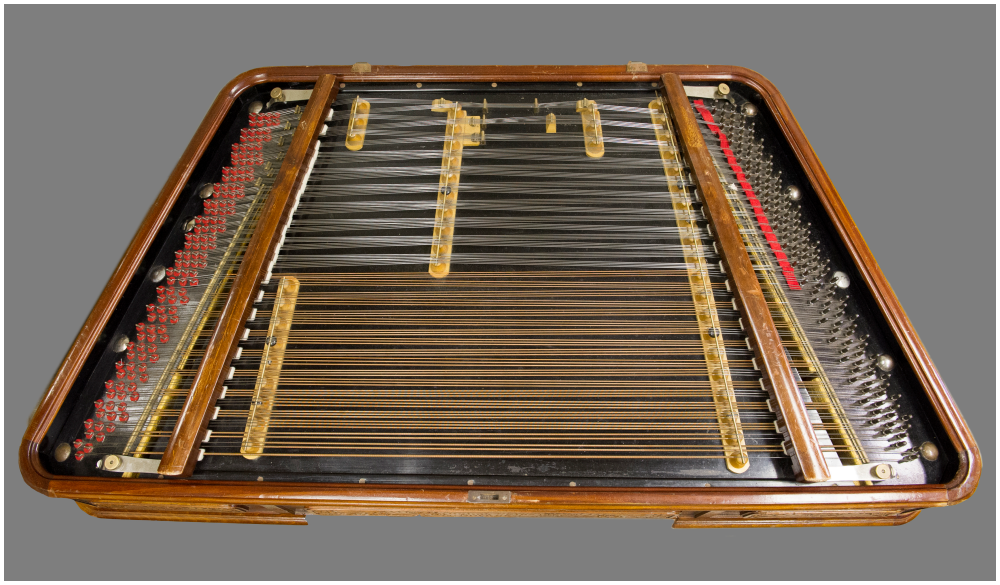

Fig. 2–1 Lajos Bohák cimbalom.[19]

Fig. 2–2 Kosmosz cimbalom.[20]

[19] Photo taken of Bohák cimbalom from personal collection.
[20] Photo taken of Kosmosz cimbalom from personal collection.

Soundboards on earlier model cimbaloms were often made from a single sheet (one ply) of wood. Spruce is one of the more common woods used for soundboards, but regional woods have also been used, depending on the instrument's country of origin. The sound holes on Schunda's instruments (and other earlier makes of cimbaloms[21]) were cut right into the soundboard (see Figure 2–3). The single-plied soundboard with the cut holes would often crack at the edges and a buzzing sound would often ensue at the cracks. One of Bohák's innovations was the adding of more plies to the soundboard and moving the sound holes to the outer sides of the board. These sound holes became an open space for the sound to come out that did not require any cutting into the soundboard (see Figure 2–1).

Fig. 2–3 Schunda style soundboard with four circular cut sound holes.

[21] Paul Gifford cites Gyula Mogyoróssy, Sternberg Ármin és Testvére, and Antal Habics as manufactures of cimbaloms from as early as 1892. During the Soviet era in Hungary, the Bohák company's name had been changed by the government to Kozmosz. These instruments, like the Bohák brand, are considered to be top tier. See Paul Gifford. *The Hammered Dulcimer* (Lanham, Maryland, and London: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2001), p.115.

Dimensions vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, but a standard size concert cimbalom's dimensions are: fifty-seven inches wide at the back and thirty-six inches wide at the front. The sides are thirty-one inches in length. The instrument's depth is ten inches, and the legs are approximately twenty inches in length (not factoring in the protruding threads). Wood varieties, as mentioned above, would often be regionally cut. A hard wood (usually maple) has been the preferred choice for pin blocks for decades. The "belly" of the instrument, as well as the carved legs, vary, but walnut is the most common. Schunda and Bohák instruments have wooden legs that are threaded into the round wooden posts (the posts have "female" threads) that are glued and bolted to the bottom of the frame. The leg's "male" threads on the end are also made from wood that are carved to fit inside the threaded post. Since the 1970s, some manufacturers built instruments with metal threads set into the wooden leg with their "female" counter-part, also made of metal, placed inside of the four wooden posts. Wooden cylinders, also made from maple, are glued to the inside "belly" of the instrument that point upwards to meet and support the soundboard. The number of wooden cylinders required can range from twelve to twenty, depending on the size of the instrument. "Chessman" style bridges are made from maple (or walnut) and have grooved slots known as "saddles." A metal rod, made from brass or other metal materials, sits in the bridges saddle and runs the entire length of the rowed bridges. The strings cross over the metal rod that divides the string with the required pitch ratio. Single bridges run the entire length of the bass register, vertically on both sides of the instrument. Bass strings cross over only the one bridge. The mallet strikes the string closest to the bridge where its string runs over top. The same string runs vertically across the instrument and crosses underneath the opposite bridge.

The pattern follows for all bass strings, played off of either the right or left bridges. The bridge just above the bass bridge on the right, what we might call "the middle right bridge," has unwound strings that start on the pitch "g_3" and ascend chromatically to a "b_3." Two extra notes are added that the top of the bridge: a "$c\#_4$" and "$d\#_4$." The centre bridge, a double-bridge, begins on a "c_4" ("middle c"), and goes up to the "e_5." The centre bridge divides the strings in fifths ("c_4" to "$f\#_4$"), then in tritones for two courses ("$g\#_4$" and "d_5", "$a\#_4$" and "e_5"). The upper bridges at the middle top of the instrument, three triple-bridges, divide the strings into three pitches per course. The pitch scheme on the triple-bridges are: major second and a fifth on the first bridge ("f_5"–"g_5"–"d_6"); minor third and a tritone on the second bridge ("$f\#_5$"–"a_5"–"$d\#_6$"); minor third plus a fourth on the third bridge ("$g\#_5$"–"b_5"–"e_6"). The three remaining bridges in the treble region are double-bridges that run from the far left of the instrument to the right. These three upper bridges are set just below, in the middle, and on top of the three triple-bridges. The pitch relationship of the three remaining treble bridges (double-bridged) are: "$a\#_5$"–"$d\#_5$"; "c_6"–"$c\#_6$"; "f_6"–"g_6").[22] There have been recent cimbalom's coming out of Hungary that add a fourth treble bridge (double-bridged) with the extended pitches "$g\#_6$" and "a_6."[23] Figure 2–4 shows where the five bridges on the cimbalom are positioned. Each bridge in the diagram has a set of small circles inside it to represent where the courses of strings cross over the bridge. "C_2," the cimbalom's lowest pitch, is at the bottom right of the diagram. The cimbalom's highest pitch, "g_6," is at the top right.

[22] Some manufacturers tune this last bridge to the "f_6" and "$f\#_6$."
[23] Ákos Nagy and Balázs Kovács of Budapest both offer instruments with an extended range up to the "a_6."

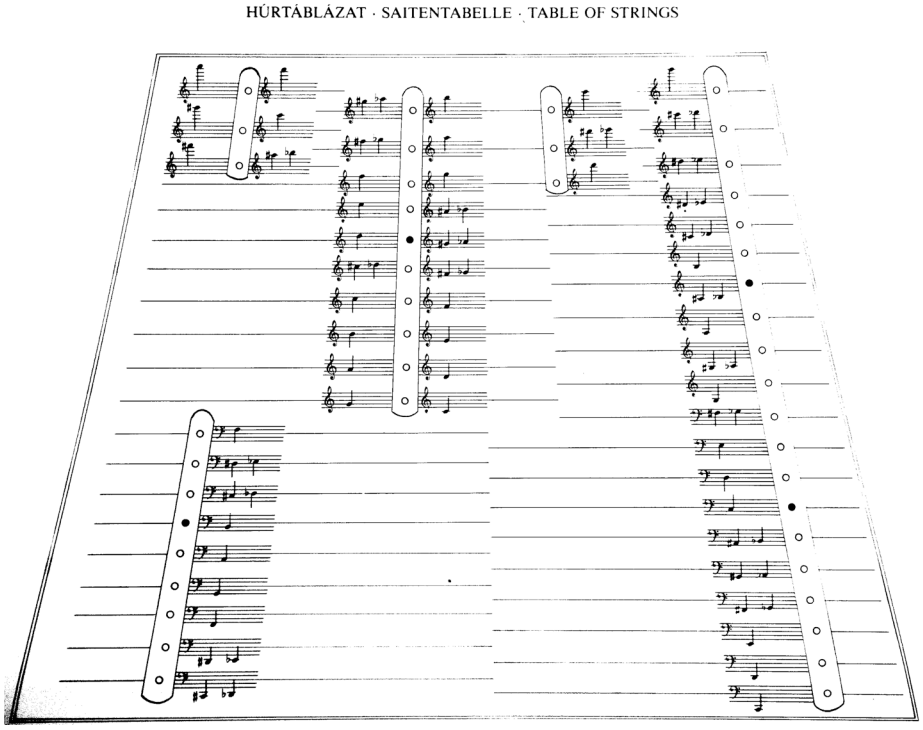

Fig. 2–4 pitch diagram of a modern cimbalom.

The bridges are glued to a thin strip of wood that runs underneath all of the rowed bridges. The strip of wood is then glued to the soundboard. Schunda's instruments employed the use of a cast iron "A-frame" for support that was placed inside the open chamber of the instrument. The "A-frame" would push up against the two pin blocks, in an outwardly opposing direction, thus preventing the instrument from caving inwards due to the immense string pressure.

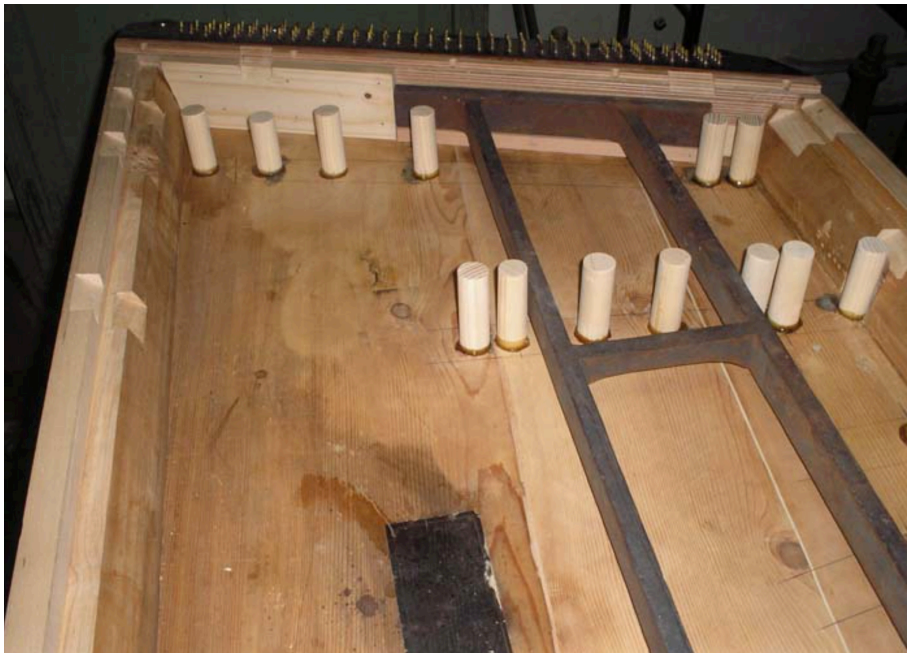

Fig. 2–5 Schunda cast iron "A-frame."

Lajos Bohák (1870–1952) was born in Kvetná, Slovakia. He was refused employment in Schunda's Budapest factory, so he opened up his own factory and displayed his first cimbalom at an exhibition in 1896, twenty-two years after Schubda's first cimbalom. For a brief time Bohák was a competitor of Schunda's. Lajos Bohák Jr. (1910 –1979) made many improvements on Schunda's design, some already being mentioned above (soundboards made of stacked plies, open sound holes off the soundboard, extended range in the bass and the treble). Another improvement Bohák made was to reduce the instrument's weight while also improving its stability. Having abandoned Schunda's "A-frame" system, Bohák Jr. incorporated the use of two cast iron pipes to support the instrument's structural integrity.[24] These sturdy pipes run underneath the length of the

[24] Cast iron support pipes eventually fell out of use to be replaced with aluminum or aircraft metal. These newer metals reduced the overall weight of the instrument without sacrificing its integrity or strength.

soundboard, from side to side, and are held in place by the outward pressure from the instrument's two pin blocks. Steel plates are fastened to the sides of each pin block were the pipes meet up with them. The steel plates prevent the pipes from sinking into the wood, which in turn prevent the pin blocks from moving inwards due to the instrument's string pressure.

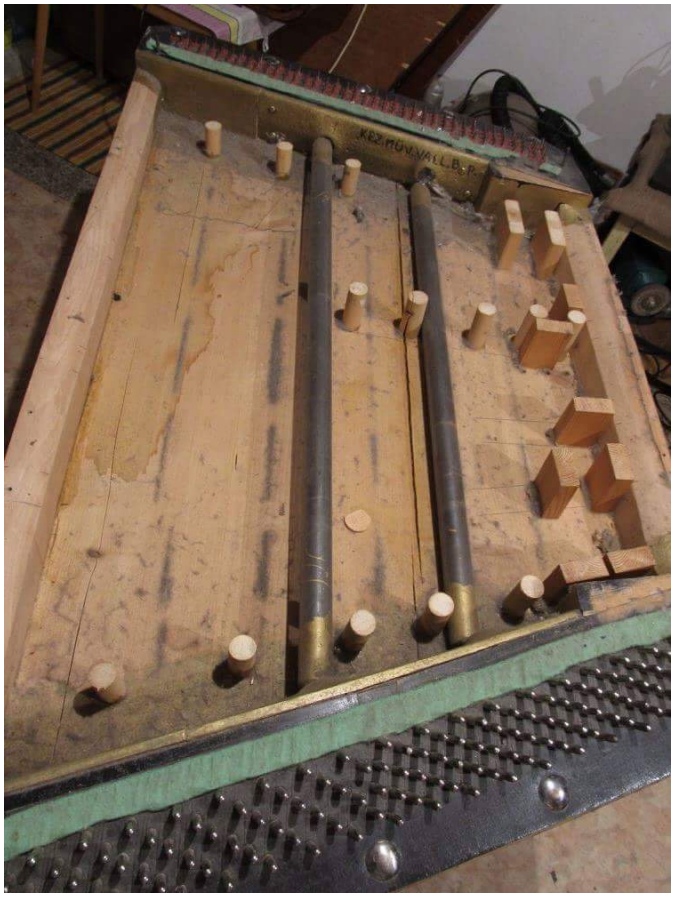

Fig. 2–6 Bohák's "twin pipe support system."

The cimbalom's damper pedal mechanism design has changed very little since the time of Schunda. While the author has no immediate access to a Schunda model, the

drawings and photographs I have observed have a similar pedal system to later Bohák instruments. The two wooden damper bars that run the length of the strings are located a few inches away from the outer bridges situated between the pins and the bridge. Each wooden damper bar has piano damper felt glued to the underside in sections that sit above each course of strings. The right bar dampens strings on the left side of the instrument, and the left bar dampens the strings on the right. The strings at the top centre (treble region) of the instrument that are triple-bridged and must be dampened by hand since the damper bars cannot reach over to the centre course of strings.[25] A damper pedal system, in order to work properly, would have to be designed in such a way to dampen the strings from underneath.[26] The damper bars are held in place with two threaded posts, one at the top and one at the bottom of the bar, and are set into the frame of the cimbalom. Attached to the bars are two brass strips that extend outwards from the threaded posts and are spring-loaded to help push the damper bars upwards. The right amount of resistance for the bars is created by the opposing tension of the threaded post's brass nut. The brass nuts can be turned clockwise or counter-clockwise to maintain the proper distance of the damper bar to the strings. The correct amount of string dampening is achieved by the turning of the brass nut while listening for the proper rate of decay. Two lever push-rods come up from underneath the instrument that pass through holes just underneath of the damper bars. The push-rods move the damper bars up and down via the action of wooden levers underneath the "belly" of the instrument. The levers meet up in the centre and attach to a metal rod that connects to the pedal near the floor. The pedal itself is hinged to

[25] Damper bars, if added to the middle of the treble bridges, would inhibit the performer's playing area.
[26] No such system as been designed to date.

a wooden frame, often made into the shape of a *lyra*.[27] The wooden "lyra" is then secured to the bottom of the cimbalom with a setscrew.

Cimbalom finishes vary from manufacturer to manufacturer. Some paint their instruments before applying a protective layer(s) of lacquer. Schunda would sometimes paint his instruments black, or stain them with a dark coloured stain. Some were left with their natural wood look, but with coats of lacquer applied over top. Bohák's instruments were either stained or left with a natural wood look. Wood engravings on the sides were a trademark of Bohák instruments. The engravings were often floral designs, or some kind of leaf pattern. Another trademark is the etched-in name *Bohák Lajos* with *Budapest* written underneath of it. This was usually placed on the back panel of the instrument. Soundboards are painted black on most instruments.[28] Players often prefer a darker colour for the soundboard since they can see the strings more easily against its background. Schunda's soundboards were often left with a natural wood look, but some were also stained.

[27] The shape is often referred to as an "Apollo's lyra."
[28] The three instruments from my collection have black soundboards.

Fig. 2–7 Side panel of Bohák cimbalom with carved leaf motif.[29]

Fig. 2–8 Back panel of Bohák cimbalom.[30]

[29] Photo taken from personal collection.
[30] Photo taken from personal collection.

The two prominent builders of cimbaloms today are Kovács Balázs and Nagy Ákos. Both builders work out of factories based in Budapest, Hungary.[31] Their cimbaloms are both modeled after the Bohák system, but with a few modifications. Mentioned previously, their instruments ranges can be extended down to an "$a_{2,}$" and/or up to an "a_6." Nagy Ákos offers the option of a third sound hole, located underneath the instrument, for more volume and projection. He also offers four different sizes of cimbaloms: a "concert" sized instrument, "portable" size, "table" instrument and the "individual" sized cimbalom. Both manufacturers offer instruments in a painted, stained, or natural looking finish. One of the last known cimbalom makers in North America was Béla Somsak. An American citizen of Hungarian ancestry, Somsak built his cimbaloms in the San Francisco area as a pastime. He passed away in 1999 at the age of eighty-five. A website is kept in his memory and maintained by his children.[32] Rudy Toth, a Canadian of Hungarian descent, made cimbaloms up until the time of his death in 2004.

Cimbalom mallets come in two basic styles: the traditional mallet and the modern mallet. The traditional mallet has two types of handles: the two-piece handle and the one-piece (carved) mallet. The preferred wood used for cimbalom mallets is some kind of hard wood. The author has seen the following wood types used for mallets: maple, cherry, oak, white basswood, padouk, walnut, and acacia. Mallet lengths range from twelve inches to fifteen inches (thirty to forty centimeters). The ends of the mallets curve outwardly to prevent the mallets from getting crossed while playing. Each hand has its own designated mallet since its curve points outwardly in one direction (right mallet

[31] https://www.pianoteq.com and https://www.cimbalomkeszito.hu
[32] https://www.cimbalom.ca

curves to the right, left mallet curves to the left). A stain and lacquer is applied to each mallet before wrapping the mallets ends. The mallets are wrapped in either a cotton-like felt or leather. The material is then secured by winding cotton thread around it and the mallet. The number of layers applied will determine the hardness or softness of each mallet. Typically players would carry three or more sets of mallets (soft, medium, hard, extra hard). Traditional mallets are held between the index and middle fingers and played with a "French Grip" (thumbs pointing upwards). Most traditional mallets are carved from a single piece of wood. The two-piece traditional mallet consists of a carved handle with a wooden dowel stuck inside a drilled out section of the handle. The dowel is then glued in place once the position and angle of the curvature has been determined. An advantage to the two-piece system is the dowel can be replaced if broken (a damaged one-piece mallet has to be fully replaced). Modern cimbalom mallets have a large wooden ball-like object that is attached to the end of the mallet. This type of mallet is gripped in the palm of the hand with the fingers only functioning to wrap around the "ball." An advantage with the modern grip is its similarity to other grips—especially grips used by percussionists. The modern mallet/grip is closest to the "German grip"—the most common grip used for playing snare drum and timpani.[33]

[33] I use both grip styles with a preference for the traditional grip. I find that the cimbalom's traditional grip closely resembles the French grip in timpani playing and thus works better for me with the instrument's vertical movement. I also prefer the subtle difference in attack sound with the traditional grip.

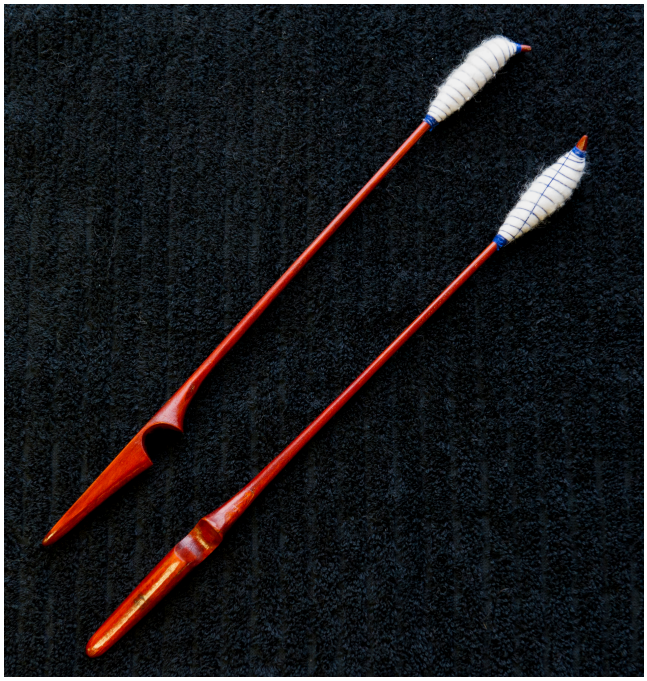

Fig. 2–9 one-piece (carved) traditional cimbalom mallet.

Fig. 2–10 two-piece traditional cimbalom mallet.

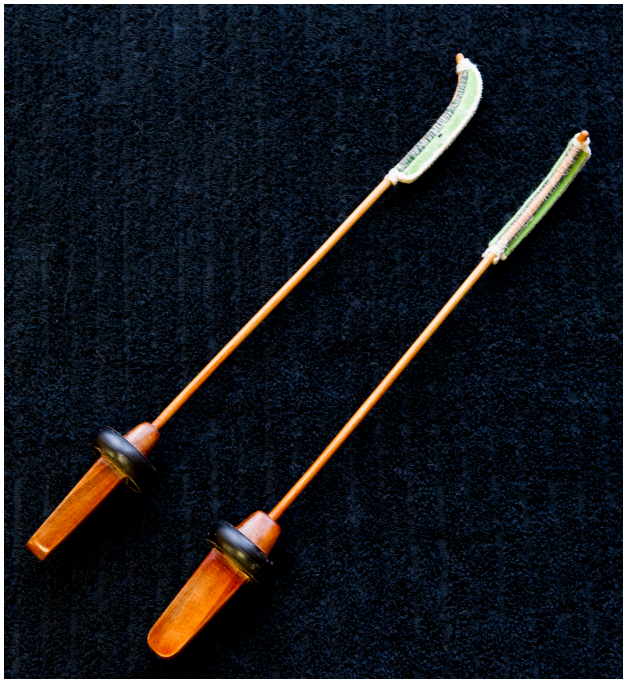

Fig. 2–11 modern style cimbalom mallet.

2.2 Conclusion

Cimbaloms built in the twenty-first century are greatly improved since Józef Schunda's first concert cimbalom of 1874. Schunda's template, along with his basic string configuration, more or less remains intact to the present. Improvements in frame designs, support systems, overall weight (lighter), and the instrument's range have been thoroughly covered in the current chapter. Different manufacturers' instrument sound is a grey area and somewhat subjective in taste. Like Steinway pianos, no two Boháks or Schunda's sound alike. Having said that, certain points can be made as to what constitutes a quality instrument. Stated earlier, the most important factor with all stringed instruments is stability in holding pitch—an instrument that cannot hold pitch obviously will not sound good. Stability in tuning becomes more critical with a cimbalom because of the instrument's pitches being spread across single, double, and triple bridges that require a "compromised tuning" method for "pitch agreement."[34] Older instruments naturally have more challenges in terms of their ability to hold pitch. Schunda instruments today are shunned for this reason (in addition to cracked soundboards and narrow pitch range). Another factor with older instruments is wood shrinkage, often due to the natural drying out process of wood and/or the instrument not being stored properly (in a humidity controlled environment). Wood shrinkage can affect the instrument's integrity and result in problems further on with its ability to hold pitch. Bohák instruments are known for having stood the test of time and are coveted today for their

[34] Agraffes are used on modern cimbaloms to allow for fine-tuning in the middle and upper registers. These metal grafts are placed under the string, just before the string meets the hitch pin and tuning peg. Whenever a string crosses over a bridge(s), dividing a string into two or more pitches, tuning becomes a challenge in terms of getting all the pitches in perfect agreement. It has been said that the sound and "charm" of a cimbalom is its slight "out-of-tuneness."

dark, robust sound. Schunda instruments that are playable today hardly compare to a Bohák in terms of their volume, projection, or full-bodied sound in the bass register.[35] Kosmosz cimbaloms were built in the Bohák factory after Bohák Jr.'s death, but now under total state control.[36] The materials and machinery were essentially Bohák, but the workers and craftsmanship was sub-standard in comparison. Today Balázs Kovács and Nagy Ákos are building cimbaloms that are known for their quality in sound and stability with tuning. Classical cimbalom players tend to prefer these instruments (rather than an older Bohák or Kosmosz) for their brightness in sound and ability to project in a symphonic setting. Roma musicians prefer Bohák instruments for their darker, more complex sound.[37] An analogy to pianos would be the difference with a modern grand piano (Yamaha or similar manufacturer) versus an older Steinway piano.

The cimbalom's pitch configuration since the time of Schunda (instruments today have extended pitch range) have kept the same format. The initial problem remains: how to fit four and half to five octaves of chromatic strings (set in courses of threes and fours) into a space so the performer can easily reach all of the notes. Multiple bridges allow for more notes thus saving on instrument space or "geography." The division of notes on bridges is not arbitrary (for example, assigning perfect 5ths to all the notes on a dividing bridge would result in other problems further on) but rather a careful planning out of the chromatic scale. The bass register crosses over only the one bridge therefore allowing the

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[35] The Schunda instrument I owned for years was eventually sold and replaced with a Bohák instrument (built in the 1970s) and a Toth instrument (also built in the 1970s).
[36] Kosmosz was a state owned company that produced violins, guitars, and many other instruments, including the cimbalom.
[37] Jenö Lisztes, cimbalomist for the Roby Lakatos ensemble, in conversation with the author (paraphrasing) preferred a Kovács instrument for classical music and a Bohák for Gypsy music.

easy layout of alternating chromatic pitches from side to side, starting on the "c_2" and going up to "$f\#_3$."[38] The middle register continues the scale, in semi tones, on the right side of the instrument, and then picks up from the centre bridge, starting on the "c_4" ("middle c"). Mentioned previously, the centre bridge divides the strings into perfect fifths and tritones from the "c_4" to "e_5." The upper bridges divide the strings in different ratios (covered previously in the chapter) from the "f_5" to the "g_6." The cimbalom, as with all members of the hammered dulcimer family, has a learning curve that bears no relation to other stringed or keyboard instruments. It has been said that the cimbalom's pitch layout is an "irrational" one.[39] The author believes that this can be overcome with the mental attitude of treating the cimbalom as an instrument in a class of its own.

[38] Can also be viewed as two whole tone scales running up each side of the bass register, a semi tone apart, creating a chromatic scale.

[39] In my fourteen years of experience performing on the cimbalom, the most difficult challenge is reading orchestral parts while watching a conductor. While the same can be said for any keyboard percussion instrument, the cimbalom's added layer of changing pitch layout from register to register increases this challenge.

Chapter Three

3.1 Precursors

Cimbalom (from the Latin *cymbalum)*, the singular form of the noun *cymbal*, is the name associated with Józef V. Schunda's patented cimbalom of 1874. Prior to this, cymbal (from the Greek *kynbalon*) would have been the terminology most widely used in Hungary for dulcimer instruments played with hammers. The Latin word cymbalum dates back much further and there is little agreement among scholars as to what kind of instrument it might reference.[40] Feldman dates the use of the word cymbal as far back as sixteenth-century Hungary.[41] The instrument used in Ferenc Erkel's Opera, *Bánk Bán* (1861), would have most likely been a cymbal, not a cimbalom as some research has suggested. The main difference here being one of dimension, range, and dampening possibilities between the two instruments. Outside of Hungary, surrounding countries lay ownership to instruments of national origin that would bear more resemblance to Hungary's cymbal rather than cimbalom. Proof for this phenomenon is twofold: 1) the word cymbal is much closer in *translation* than cimbalom for the names of similar instruments from surrounding countries. For instance, *tsimbal* (Yiddish), *Tsymbaly* (Ukraine and Belarus), and Tambal (Romania) all closely resemble the word *cymbal*.

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[40] See Gifford, p.103

[41] See Walter Zev Feldman. "Tsimbl," *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (2010). http://www.yivoencylopedia.org

2) After 1874, performers outside of Hungary would have performed on Schunda's instrument exclusively for a few years until instrument builders in their respective countries would eventually copy Schunda's design.[42] Misuse of the word cimbalom (to designate any type of hammered stringed instrument built outside of Hungary prior to 1874) is ongoing within and outside of scholarship.

Gifford marks the point of origin with the hammered dulcimer in the fifteenth century. Although references to dulcimer-like instruments appear as early as the Old Testament[43], Gifford argues that the art of hammering stringed instruments became common practice only after the middle ages. Prior to the Renaissance, dulcimers were, for the most part, plucked or strummed (either with a plectrum, quill, or fingers). The problem, as Gifford sees it, is one of translation. He goes on to say that while the word "dulcimer" appears in sources as late as the Geneva Bible (1560) and the Bishop's Bible (1568), these were in fact bagpipes.[44] Dulcimer instruments appearing in texts and illustrations prior to the fifteenth century were members of the *psaltery* family. The psaltery (from the Aramaic *psalterion* and the Greek verb *psallein,* "to pluck") first appeared in a text dating from 250 BC.[45] The psaltery was an instrument of European origin that becomes difficult to trace prior to 1000 A.D. By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the psaltery's decline was owed in part to the newer, more favourable "hammered" stringed instruments. Gifford's timeline chart below, points to the fifteenth century as the starting point for hammered stringed instruments and the decline of the psaltery. In his doctoral

[42] The CWA (Cimbalom World Association) has a list of current cimbalom manufacturers at www.cimbalom.org
[43] See Gifford, p.7
[44] See Gifford, p.9
[45] See Gifford, p.10

thesis, *The Dulcimer*, David Kettlewell[46] supports Gifford's argument that instruments with two or more bridges and strings crossing in two planes did not appear until approximately 1500 A.D. Multiple bridges and the crossing over/under of strings, while advantageous to a performer using hammers (more notes per octave in limited space), is a hindrance to someone plucking or strumming such and instrument.

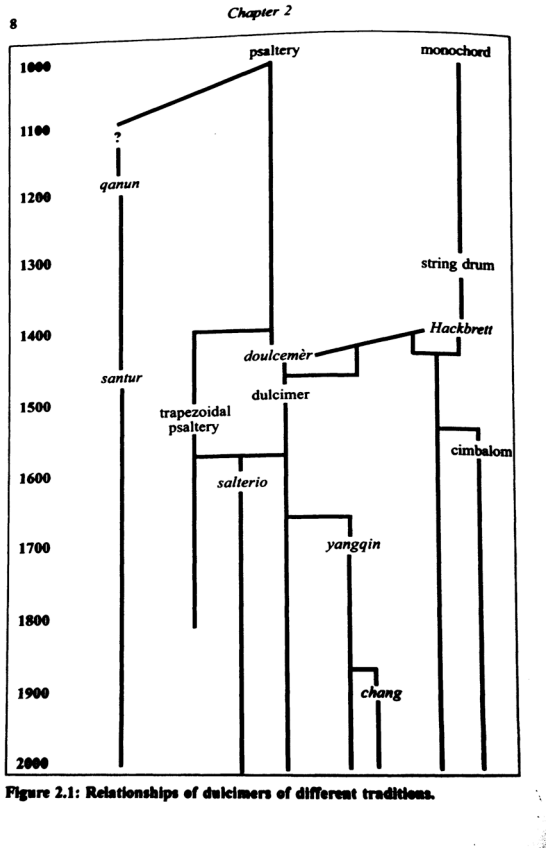

Figure 2.1: Relationships of dulcimers of different traditions.

Fig. 3–1 Gifford's chart.[47]

The forerunners to Schunda's concert cimbalom are the hammered dulcimers of fifteenth century Europe. The hackbrett, an instrument played in German speaking

[46] See David Kettlewell. "The Dulcimer." PhD diss., University of Loughborough, 1976.
[47] Gifford chart p.8 Permission given by Paul Gifford.

countries during the fifteenth century, and later, the Italian *salterio* (mid seventeenth century to the present day)[48] are the two main hammered dulcimers that serve as the "genetic roots" of later (regional) instrument designs to come out of Eastern European countries like Belarus, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Names like cymbal, cimbál, tsimbl, and tysmbaly are assigned to some of these early instruments of Eastern European origin.[49] Jewish peoples of Eastern and Western Europe would be the first proponents of dissemination for these early instruments (the second wave being the Roma) with the ongoing Jewish diaspora during the late middle-ages and early Renaissance. While the names of these instruments would often be regionally assigned, the Yiddish word *tsimbl* would be the name most likely used among Jewish peoples. While the music of Jewish peoples during post-Renaissance Europe is well outside of the scope of this dissertation, it still bears relevance to the cimbalom's evolution as a folk instrument in both Klezmer music and Gypsy (Roma) music today. The Western classical cimbalom tradition, while taking up the bulk of the research contained within this dissertation, did not develop until the late nineteenth century.[50]

[48] The Italian salterio has all but declined in present day Italy. A salterio tradition remains today in select areas of Mexico. For an in-depth history of the salterio and its decline, see Gifford, pp. 171, 179, 180.

[49] For reasons of classification, all hammered stringed instruments (hammered dulcimers) since the Renaissance may be viewed as members of the genus *dulcimer.* The "hammered dulcimer" today refers to an instrument of British/American origin.

[50] It could also be argued that the classical tradition of cimbalom playing really began in the early twentieth century. The two nineteenth century works by Franz Liszt did not by themselves initiate a classical tradition. See chapters on Liszt and Igor Stravinsky for further elaboration.

3.2 Jewish and Roma Influence before 1900

While many scholars are uncertain about precise historical timelines with the Jewish and Roma traditions of dulcimer playing, there is evidence of overlap and concurring practice with both ethnic groups by the middle of the sixteenth century.[51] While both the Jewish and Roma peoples did not enjoy a monopoly on the use of dulcimers (Gifford references other ethnic groups and wandering minstrels during similar time frames), they did however play a major role in promoting Schunda's concert cimbalom in the late nineteenth century—especially the Roma. As mentioned earlier, the Yiddish word for dulcimer, *tsimbl*, took on other spellings. In Hungary and surrounding countries, the word cymbal came into popular usage, which eventually became cymbalum (cimbalom in English), the name Schunda patented his instrument under. Gifford points out that it was most likely Hungarians who would at first use the word *cymbalum* to refer to dulcimers as early as the late sixteenth century.[52] True as this account may be, a dulcimer in late sixteenth century Hungary would most likely have been a *hackbrett*. Since the borders of German speaking communities by the mid sixteenth century stretched as far east as Transylvania, it stands to reason that the hackbrett would have been known throughout these communities. Gifford argues that the Gypsy association would come later in the century and that the primary use of the instrument up until this time would have been among clerics and scholars. Jewish migration further east would most likely have brought

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[51] "Roma" or "Romani" are erroneously used as interchangeable. Romani specifically refers to the language spoken by the Roma. The politically incorrect term "Gypsy" is still in usage both inside and outside the community. When referring to the historical musical practices of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the author will use the term "Gypsy music." Otherwise, the term Roma will be used.

[52] See Gifford, p.104

the hackbrett from German speaking districts to cities like Lviv (now in present day Ukraine). Christian minstrels were on the rise in the seventeenth century, which in turn creates its own set of problems when sorting out instrument migration patterns with dulcimers. Gifford's research does however create a strong case for the existence of Jewish ensembles (usually consisting of a violin and dulcimer) from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. While outside the scope of this dissertation to attempt to unpack and delineate the differences among Jewish, Christian, and Roma "instrument migration" patterns from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, it is at the same time clear that the association of dulcimers with the Jews of Eastern Europe is well documented.

The second wave of association with dulcimers gained momentum in the eighteenth century with the Roma peoples. For the most part, the two traditions of cimbalom performance practice since the twentieth century has been a classical tradition and a Gypsy or Roma (folk) tradition. Gifford states:

> Although the cimbalom had already been known [in the eighteenth century] in Hungary, it is likely that the particular tradition with which the Hungarian instrument has been most closely associated—that of the Gypsy music—derives from the Bohemian Jewish tradition. (Gifford 2001, 112–113).

Gifford attributes this "passing over" of tradition to the Jewish migration into Hungary and Slovakia from neighbouring Bohemia and Moravia. It will be established in the following two chapters that the Gypsy tradition holds more influence with the cimbalom's classical tradition (rather than the Jewish) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Chapter Four

4.1 Schunda, Liszt, and Debussy

4.2 Schunda

In 1874 József Schunda (1818–1893) patented his concert cimbalom. Schunda's younger brother, Vencel József Schunda (1845–1923), joined the company as an apprentice in 1856. The brothers were Czech Nationals who started up their business in Budapest, Hungary. The most significant feature of Schunda's patented cimbalom, unlike any hammered dulcimer instrument up to this point in history, is the instrument's range of four chromatic octaves. Prior to 1874, with rare exceptions, dulcimer tunings were either diatonic or modal in their design layout. Schunda's cimbalom of 1874 had a range of "D_1" – "e_3."[53] This feature alone would have been revolutionary at the time in terms of the powerful bass resonance the instrument would be able to produce, in part due to innovations in string winding technology only seen previously in piano construction. Schunda's cimbalom, outfitted with piano strings (wound and unwound) across a chromatic four-octave range, would push the instrument closer to legitimacy as a *classical* instrument.[54] Other features of Schunda's cimbalom were the additions of weighted dampers with pedal mechanism, and the fastening of four legs to the bottom of the instrument. Prior to 1874, dulcimers would have been played on either the

[53] The previously mentioned Schunda instrument in my collection had a range of "E_1" – "e_3." József Schunda built instruments with ranges less than 4 octaves in order to accommodate the needs of his customers for more portable (lighter weight) cimbaloms.

[54] With a few minor exceptions in Western Classical music, the cimbalom, along with the violin/fiddle, would be an instrument that would establish and maintain two traditions (folk and classical) into the twenty first century. A few early exceptions are Ferenc Erkel's scoring for the cymbal, and Antonio Vivaldi's scoring for the salterio.

performers' lap, set on a table (or over a barrel), or strung with leather straps over the shoulder of the player. Schunda's cimbalom remains to this day as the basic template for all concert cimbaloms. By the year 1884, Schunda's factory had produced ten thousand cimbaloms. It is believed that there were thirty thousand instruments in existence by the time Schunda's factory closed down. The future modifications that would build on Schunda's design would amount to extending the range of the instrument, and finding ways of making the instrument more stable in order to maintain its pitch.[55] Experiments with the addition of sound holes underneath the instrument were covered in Chapter Two.

Fig. 4-1 An example of Schunda's cimbalom, Budapest.

[55] See Chapter Two for a more in-depth discussion about Schunda's cimbalom.

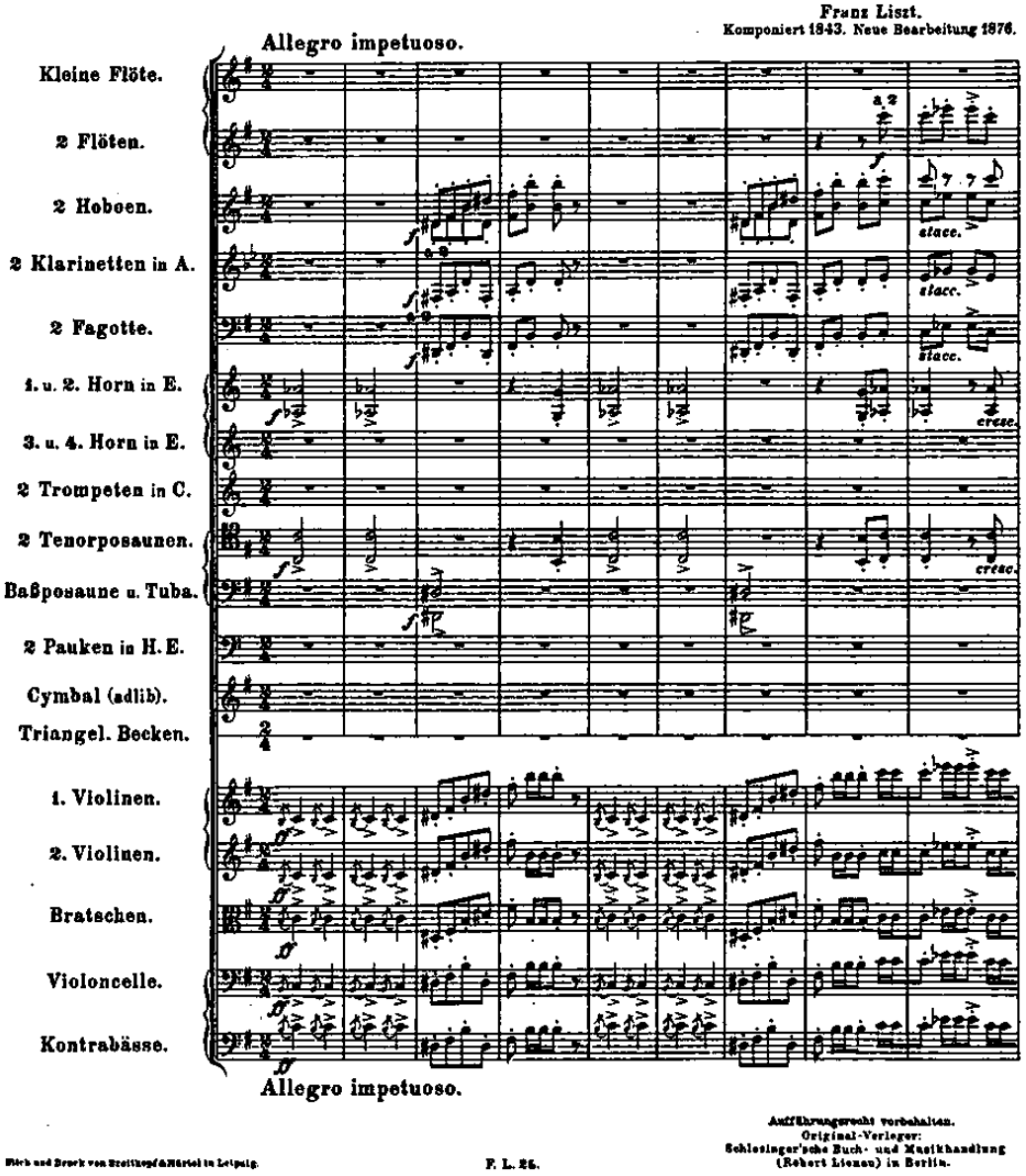
4.3 Franz Liszt

The nineteenth century Hungarian composer, Franz Liszt (1811–1886), is credited with scoring the first published orchestral work with cimbalom. The *Ungarischer Sturmmarsch* was published in 1875, one year after Schunda patented his concert cimbalom. On the score's title page, Liszt uses the older terminology "cymbal" to designate what in fact might be a cimbalom. While there is no conclusive evidence for or against the idea that he scored the *Ungarischer Sturmmarsch* with a modern cimbalom in mind, Liszt is at least consistent in his use of the term cymbal—for it appears three times in the score: on page one; three measures before its first entrance at *Un poco meno Allegro* (key change to C# minor); and three measures before the key change in to F major. Example 4–1 shows where the cimbalom, scored as *Cymbal (adlib),* is situated on page one of the score and notated with the percussion section.

Ungarischer Sturmmarsch.

Hungarian March to the Assault. Marche militaire hongroise. Magyar induló.

Dem hochgeborenen Grafen Alexander Teleki freundschaftlichst gewidmet.



Ex. 4–1 Franz Liszt *Ungarischer Sturmmarsch*, first page of score with *Cymbal (ad lib)* scored in with the percussion section. 1916, Breitkopf and Härtel.

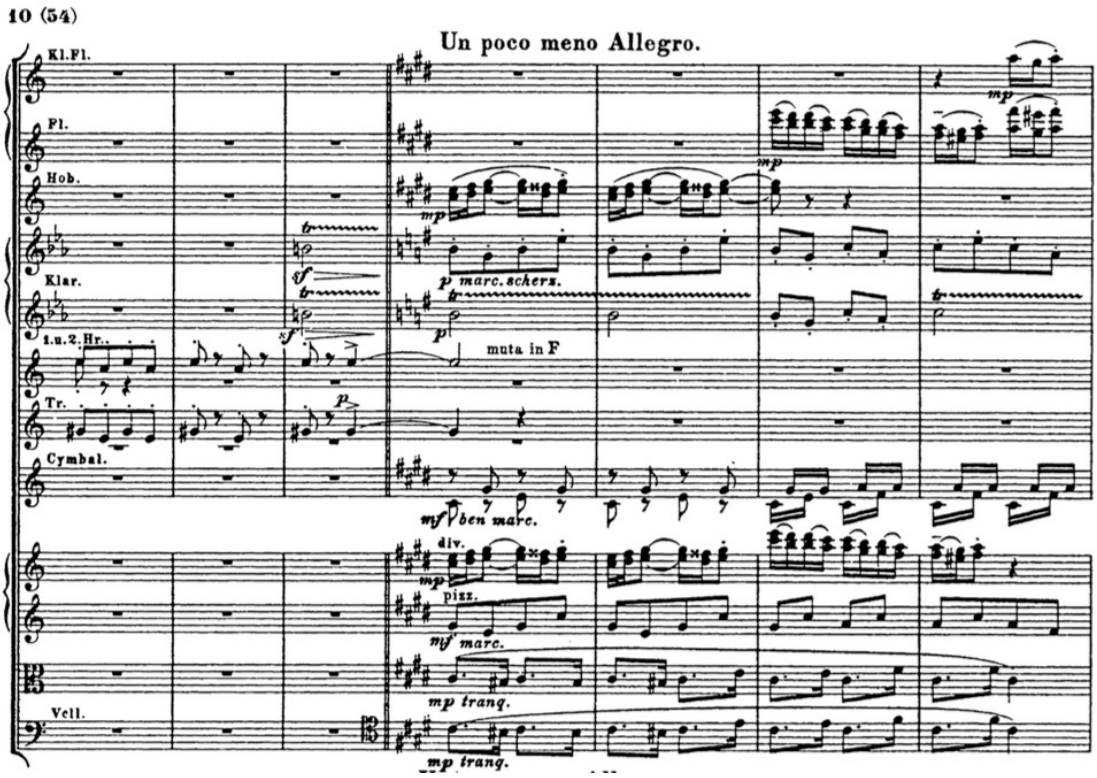
It is conceivable that Liszt might have used a predecessor to the cimbalom in the *Ungarischer Sturmmarsch* since the pitch content he wrote spans only an octave and a fourth ("c_4" – "f_5"), thus making it possible to use a smaller forbearer, like a cymbal or hackbrett (the Hungarian composer Ferenc Erkel scored for such an instrument [cymbal] in his 1861 opera, *Bank Ban*).[56] The instrument's tuning scheme would then have to be reconfigured to accommodate pitches from two unrelated keys (E major and F major)—something that is possible on hammered dulcimer, but not at all common. The question then would remain: if Liszt would have indeed used a modern cimbalom in this work, then why limit himself to an octave and a fourth if he had four octaves at his disposal? Also, would Liszt have scored for a smaller dulcimer knowing that it might not be heard above the orchestra? Unfortunately there are no written accounts as to what instrument was used for the *Cymbal* part at the premiere or any subsequent performances of the *Ungarischer Sturmmarsch*. It is conceivable that one of Schunda's instruments might have been used—but was Liszt aware of the instrument within the span of only one year?

The cymbal's (cimbalom) first entrance (*Un poco meno Allegro*) in the *Ungarischer Sturmmarsch* is a signpost for the change in atmosphere from the preceding strict march to a more relaxed pastoral setting—a hallmark of nineteenth century Romantic music. Liszt's imaginative use of the cimablom in this context is highly innovative for its placement of a folk signifier within a work from the nineteenth century orchestral canon, here perhaps matched only by his predecessor, Ferenc Erkel. The combination of the two streams, nineteenth century Romanticism and Hungarian (folk) nationalism is cleverly put into symbiosis with a genre piece written for the purpose of a public celebration—a

[56] See Ferenc Erkel, *Bank Ban*.

(Hungarian) patriotic march. Liszt uses the musical term *ben marcato*, an indication for the cimbalom to be heard above the orchestra in the "pastoral sections." A dual signifier is heard with the driving march themes in the orchestra (military connotation), and a pastoral, folk-like theme that features the cimbalom (rural and folk connotation).

Liszt's notational method scores for the cimbalom in a way that may be referred to as the "split-hand-notation" style, in other words, stems down for one hand and stems up for the other.[57] (This method of notating cimbalom parts was the preferred system used by Igor Stravinsky some forty years later).[58]

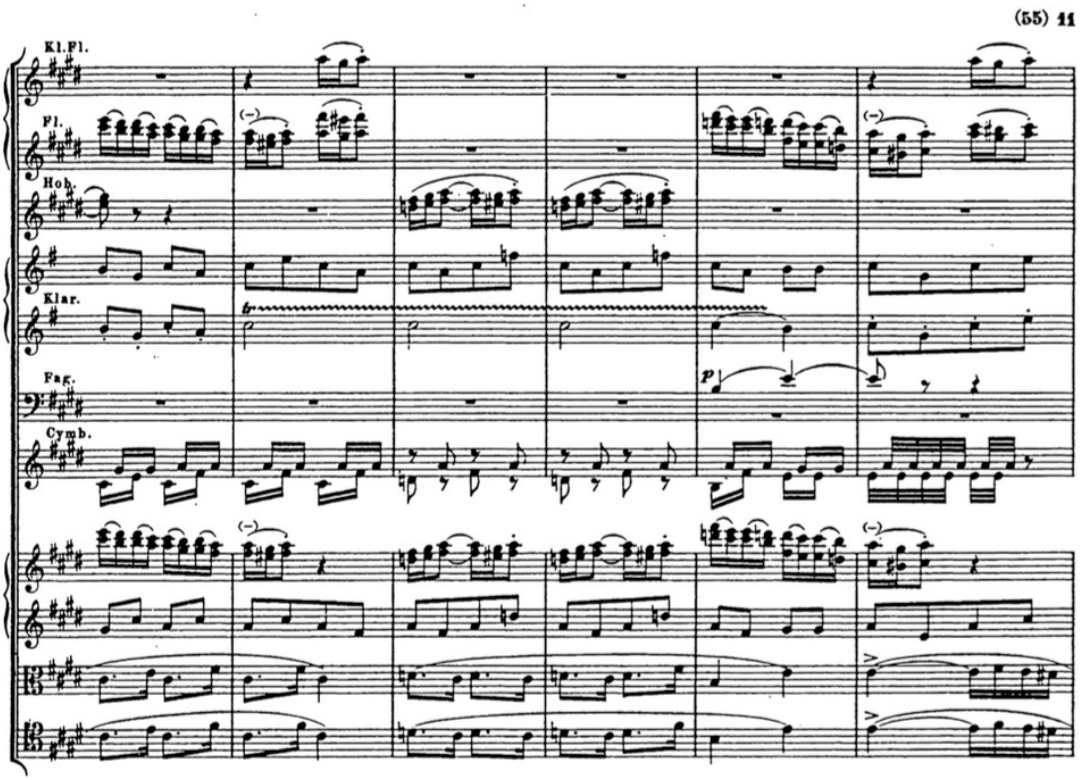


Ex. 4–2 Franz Liszt *Ungarischer Sturmmarsch*, score, mm. 115–118

[57] "Split-hand-notation" is a term I coined to describe the assignment of the right and left hand to separate musical staves.
[58] See the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments* and *Renard* in Chapter Three.

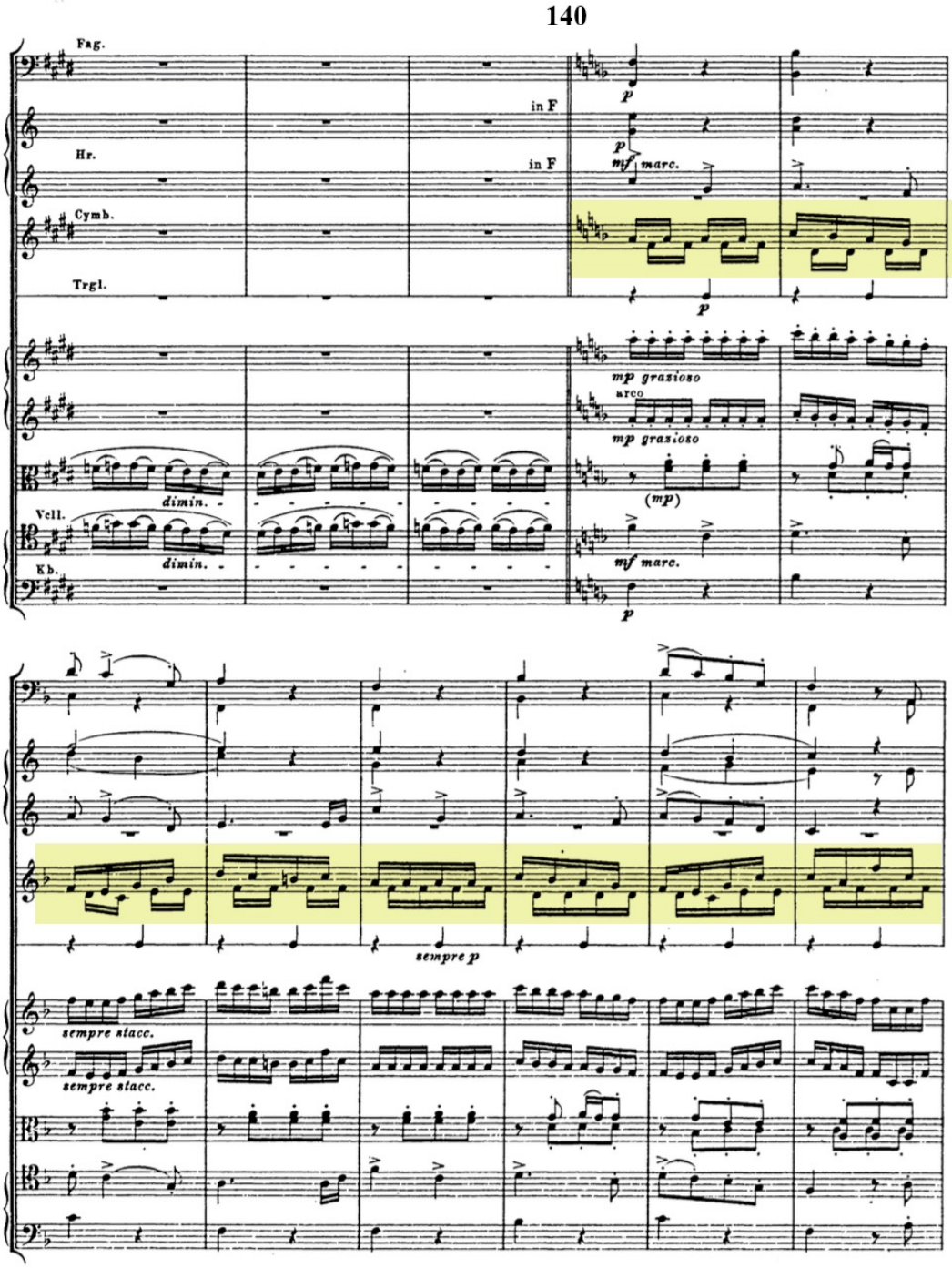
Typically, a pianist might play the lower line (stems down) with the left hand and the upper line (stems up) with the right hand. A cimbalom player would do exactly the opposite of this: the bridges on a cimbalom divide the strings up in a manner that requires movement from left to right (like a piano), but also forwards and backwards (from top to bottom of the instrument). In the case of the Liszt example above, cimbalom players often find this approach with notation confusing to sight-read. In the case of Stravinsky's works for cimbalom, the composer carefully worked out sticking patterns at the cimbalom and notated it accordingly. In Liszt's case, it can be argued that while the composer was not familiar enough with the cimbalom's string layout and bridging, a first attempt was made to accommodate players at an instrument that was typically not played from music notation. Fortunately, the *Ungarischer Sturmmarsch* is not considered difficult to play by today's standards; its notation is a minor obstacle that any competent player can overcome.

The cimbalom's rhythm, while at first glance may look like a simple march pattern, can be heard as the cimbalom's incessant beating to create an texture and colour in order to invoke a Gypsy sound or "Gypsiness." The phraseology works on a common tone principle centering around the pitch "A", and moves "through" c# minor, f# minor, D major, b minor, E dominant seventh, arriving at A major, as a chord sequence (mm. 125-130). The thirty-second notes in measures 130, 132, and 134 (A major chord) function as a tremolo—another iconic feature of the instrument to be found in Gypsy music.



Ex. 4–3 Franz Liszt *Ungarischer Sturmmarsch,* score, mm. 125–130.

The final passage with cimbalom modulates to the key of F major. Liszt continues with the common tone principle, but now centering on "F." The intensity increases in both the cimbalom and orchestra's sixteen-note rhythmic motion (previously in eighth notes) until leading us back to the main theme, Liszt's Hungarian march.



Ex. 4–4, Franz Liszt *Ungarisher Sturmmarsch*, score, mm. 137–147.

Liszt initially wrote nineteen Hungarian rhapsodies for the piano. From the nineteen rhapsodies, numbers Two, Five, Six, Nine, Twelve, and Fourteen were arranged for orchestra.[59] The *Hungarian Rhapsody No.6* (for orchestra) was the only rhapsody scored for cimbalom,[60] however, Liszt would make abundant use of cimbalom motives and effects in the other rhapsodies for solo piano. Rhapsody No. 8 in f sharp minor (1853) is one notably example of Liszt's use of cimbalom devices. Quoting Victor Ledin: "The eighth of the set is full of lavish ornamentation and effects simulating the cimbalom." (Ledin, 1999). On a macro level, the rhapsodies are Liszt's homage to Hungarian national identity. Liszt equated this identity in part with the Hungarian Gypsy musical tradition. *Verbunkos*, an eighteenth century dance form used for military recruitment, was borrowed by Liszt in many of the Hungarian rhapsodies. The verbunkos would eventually become associated with the Hungarian Gypsy musical tradition in the post Austro-Hungarian Empire.[61] The *Hungarian Rhapsody No.8* serves as one of the best examples of Liszt's borrowing of this Gypsy tradition, which in turn is a borrowing from the Hungarian verbunkos. While there is little use of Gypsy scales[62] in this early rhapsody,

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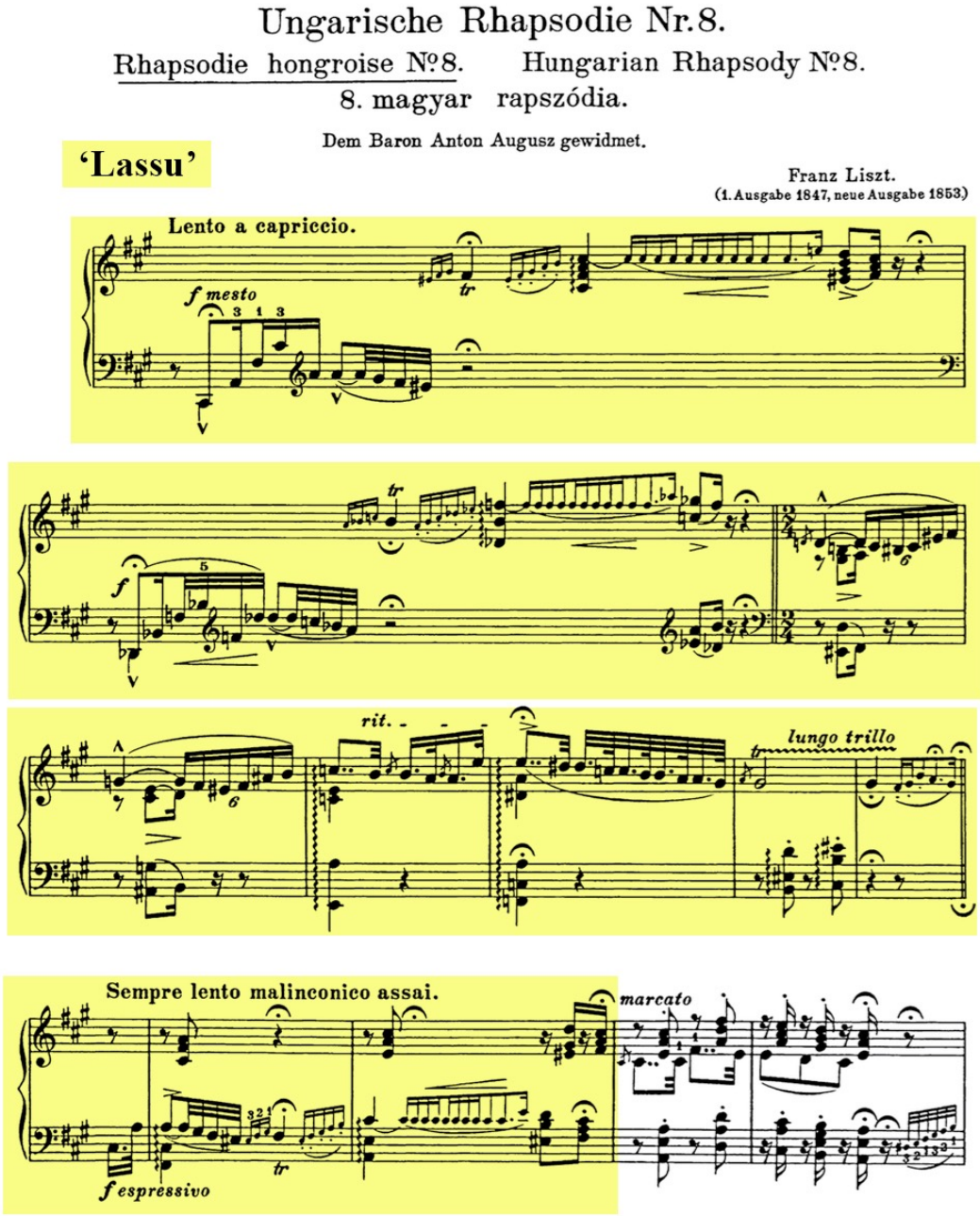
[59] The orchestral arranger of the rhapsodies was Franz Doppler (1821-1883). A colleague of Franz Liszt's, Doppler's arrangements of the six Rhapsodies were later revised by Liszt, but the composer allowed Doppler to keep his name on the arrangements.
[60] Originally published as *Hungarian Rhapsody No.3*
[61] *Verbunkos* or "recruitment song" is an eighteenth century Hungarian dance and music genre. Distinguishing features are the alternation of slow (lassú) and fast (friss) passages. The genre was later adopted and became associated with Hungarian Gypsy music.
[62] Gyspy scales are closely related to the minor mode in western classical music. One scale uses the natural minor mode with a raised fourth degree; the other the melodic minor mode with a raised fourth (also known as the "Gypsy minor" or sometimes "Hungarian minor").

the template of the *csárdás* is quite apparent.[63] The work begins in a *Lento a cappricio*, in other words what is known as a *lassú* in csárdás. Minor keys (in the present work f sharp minor) are another defining feature of the lassú. In Gypsy music performance practice, the lassú is highly ornamented, improvisatory, and free in tempo. The minor mode of a lassú lends itself well for the various gypsy scales to be freely improvised over. Liszt clearly follows this tradition in the opening measures of the *Hungarian Rhapsody No.8*.

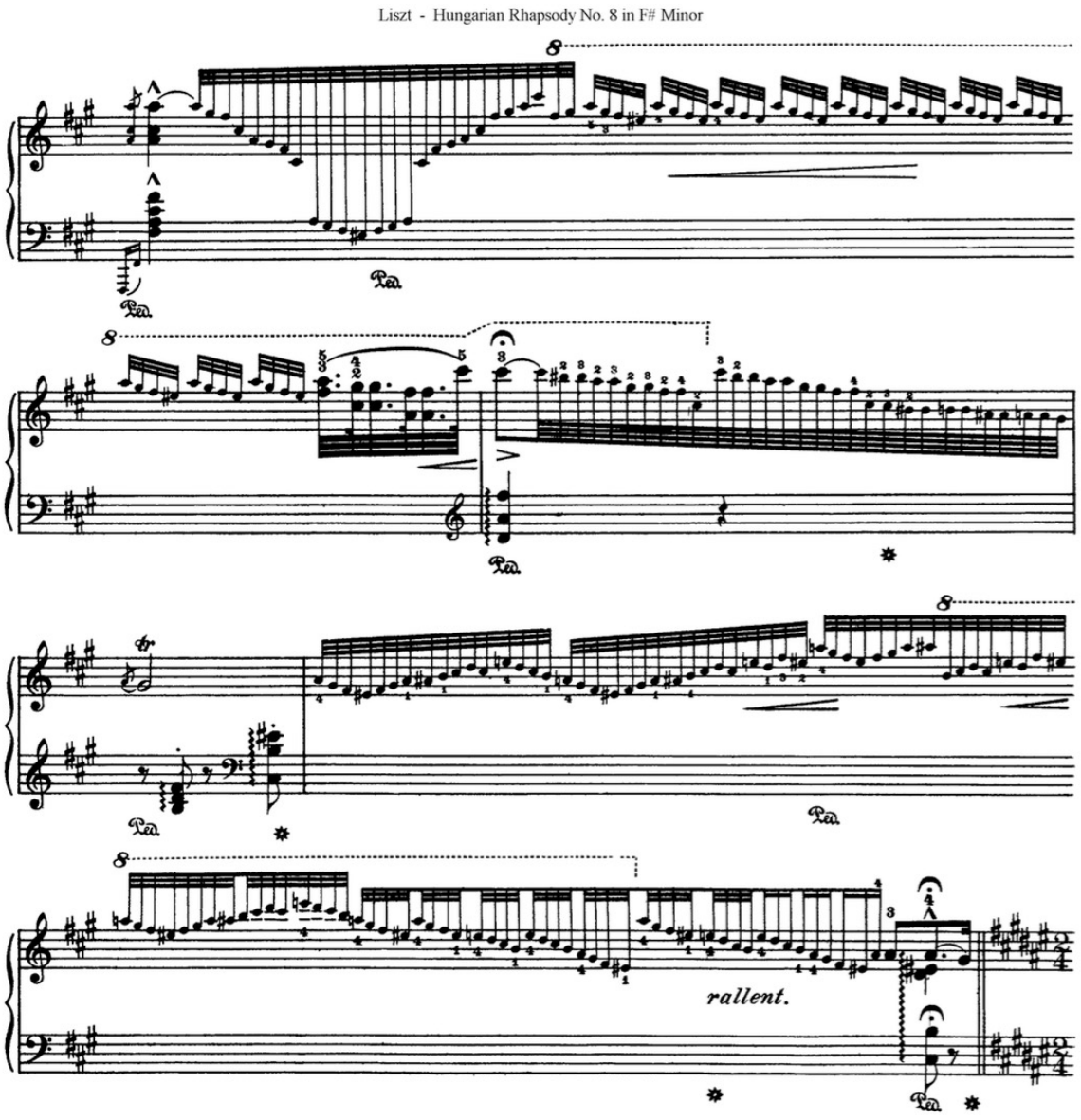
Another significant feature of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No.8* is the tempo shifts during the *Allegretto con grazia*, or what is referred to as the *friss* in csárdás. Set in the key of F# major, the tempos are in tiered sections and the energy ebbs and flows until a final climax, with ritardando, is reached ending on a tonic chord. Four tempo shifts in all take place during the *Allegretto con grazio* (friss) section: the *un poco animato; poco a poco più animando; più forte stringendo;* and the *presto giocoso assai.* Here Liszt is adopting the Gypsy music performance of the czardas with its alternating lassú and friss sections of intense rhapsodic emotive quality juxtaposed with fast passages of incredible speed and virtuosity.

[63] The term Csárdás is derived from the old Hungarian word for "tavern." Taverns were one of the main venues where Gypsy musicians performed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



Ex. 4–5 Franz Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody No.8 in f sharp minor,* piano score, opening "lassú."

Measures 1, 2, and 10 of Example 4–5 have repeating figures on c#, f, and c# respectively that are an iconic feature of cimbalom players—especially with Roma cimbalom players when performing a csárdás. The freely improvised and often quick succession of arpeggios Liszt scores for in the rhapsodies is another example of this borrowing from Hungarian Gypsy cimbalom performance practice (see Example 4-6).



Ex. 4–6 Franz Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 8,* part, mm. 37–41.

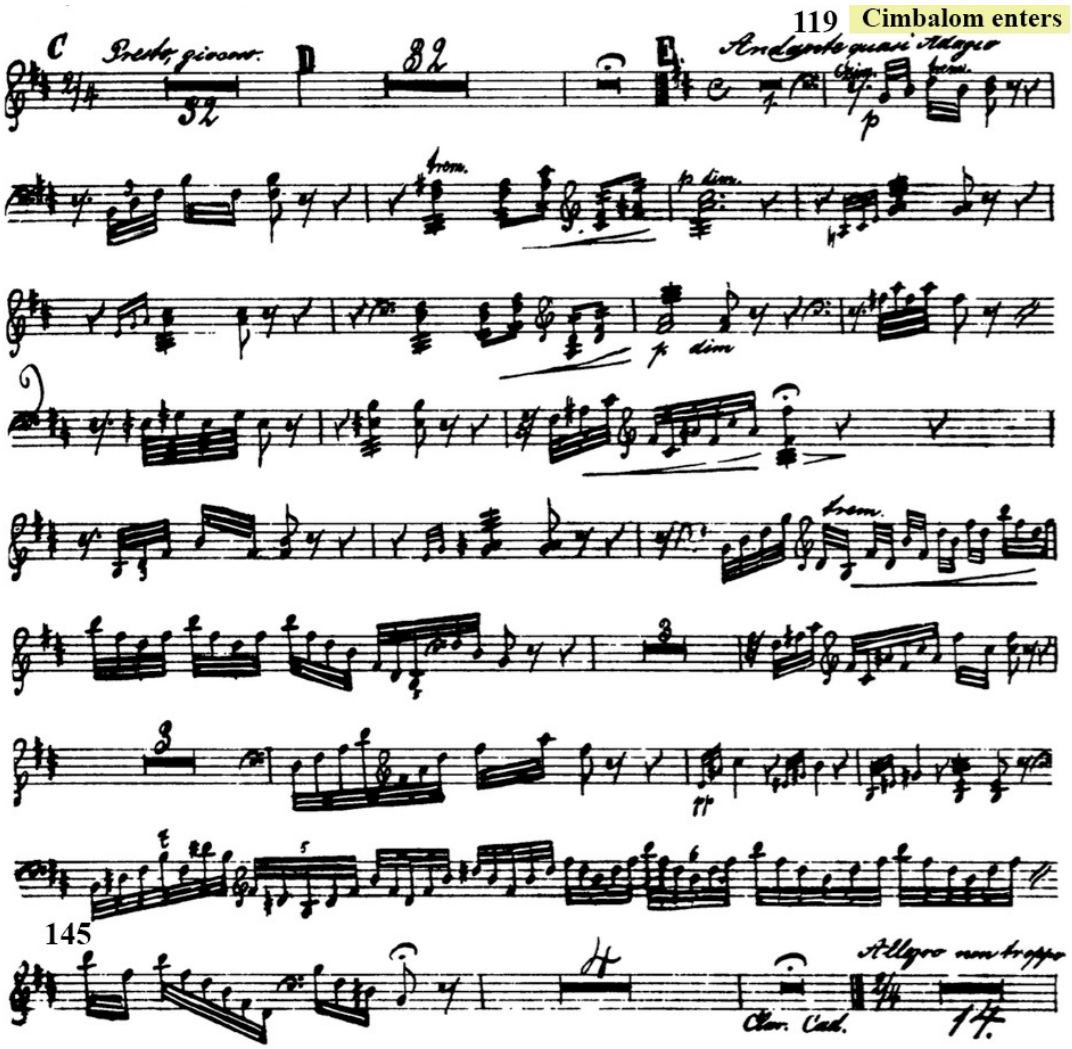
In his section of the book titled *Keyboard-Based Polychordal and Bimodal Effects*, Shay Loya describes how Liszt makes use of these cimbalom devices in the context of modal harmony at the piano.

> The confluence of Lisztian piano techniques with verbunkos performance practices— particularly impressions of percussive cimbalom playing— and modality often results in sonorities we usually associate with more modern music. Truly dissonant sonorities can arise from the Lisztian technique of juxtaposing all-white against all-black keys of the piano. When this topographical aspect meets verbunkos modality, the result is often unique. For example, in RH 10, black against white-key tremolos intone the verbunkos minor, as well as conspicuously imitate the cimbalom; the sustaining pedal is held down throughout, blending the harmony, likewise an imitation of cimbalom playing. (Loya 2011, 53)

In the *Hungarian Rhapsody No.6*, 1847 (Doppler's orchestral arrangement is dated 1875), Liszt and Doppler decided to score for cimbalom in the orchestration. As stated earlier, the work was originally published as No.3 in D major (No.6 is in D-flat major). The orchestral version of No.6 begins in b minor, in other-words, in neither one of the original keys of the piano versions for No.6 or No.3. B-flat major only shows up in the final section (letter H, "friss") of the orchestral version. The cimbalom's function, beginning one measure after letter E, is one of accompaniment. The clarinet acts as the lead instrument (in the same way the violin or "prima" does in a Gypsy ensemble), with the cimbalom supporting the clarinet in a manner similar to a baroque continuo. The orchestration thins out starting at letter E; the clarinet here carries the melody with the cimbalom marked down to a "*p"*dynamic. From a performance practice perspective, the soft dynamic in the cimbalom would be relative to the clarinet's volume, and the performance venue.[64] Perhaps Doppler and Liszt chose this dynamic marking being that

[64] Cimbaloms in the late nineteenth century did not have the projection and volume that current models offer.

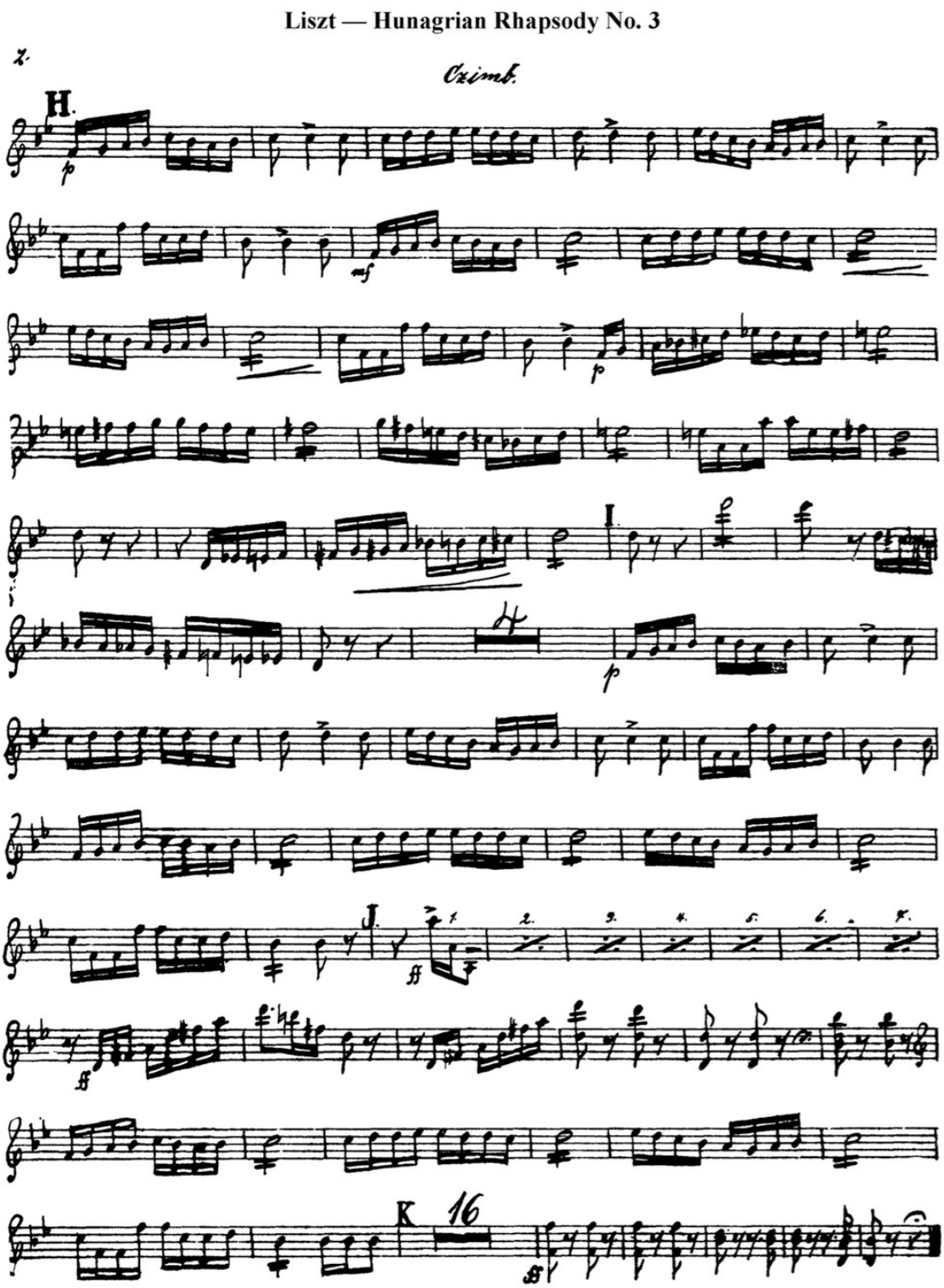
the clarinet is the only other instrument playing throughout the passage? Nonetheless, the cimbalom's amplitude could be considerably less than a nineteenth century clarinet.



Ex. 4–7 Franz Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody No.6,* cymbal part, mm. 119–145.

Liszt uses the Gypsy scale sparingly in the *Hungarian Rhapsody No.6*. The main reason for this is that the Gypsy scale in a csárdás is reserved for the minor modes. The major modes, like in the finale ("friss") section at Letter H to the end, modulates through a set of major keys (B flat major – D major – B flat major) where the Gypsy scale is

absent. A few notable examples where the Gypsy scale is present is the “a” natural alternating with “a#” in measures 21 to 27 (“a” natural being the lowered seventh degree in b minor), and the “g#” or raised fourth that occurs in measures 28 to30. The lowered seventh degree and raised fourth degree (in the minor mode) being the salient feature of the Gypsy scale sound.



Ex. 4–8 Franz Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody No.6,* cymbal part, letter H to the end.

4.4 Debussy

Claude Debussy (1862–1918) wrote his *La plus que lente* in 1910. A work for solo piano, set in a "slower than slow" waltz tempo, was orchestrated by the Parisian arranger Henri Mouton for orchestra in the same year. Debussy's dissatisfaction with Mouton's arrangement resulted in the composer scoring his own arrangement of the work in 1912. What Debussy was looking for was something with a lighter texture than Mouton's heavy-handed use of brass and percussion. In a letter to his publisher, Durand, dated August 25, 1910, the composer writes:

> I've examined the "brasserie-style" orchestration of *La Plus que lente* and it seems to me to be needlessly decorated with trombones, timpani, triangle, etc. . . . and therefore designed for a kind of "brasserie de luxe" I've never come across! I've no desire to upset Mr. Mouton, who is probably a master of the genre, but there are one or two clumsy passages that could easily be avoided! I have taken the liberty of trying out another kind of arrangement which strikes me as more practical. One other point: It's impossible to start a piece in a brasserie the way you would in a salon; you simply must have a few introductory bars. . . . Anyway, let's not limit ourselves just to brasseries; we must think of the innumerable "Five o'clocks" and the gatherings of beautiful listeners I had in mind! (Keller 2016, p.1)

While on a tour of Austria and Hungary to promote his music in 1910, Debussy made the effort to explore its capitals, Vienna and Budapest, and take in some musical performances. The cafés and restaurants he frequented while in Budapest had a profound effect on him, especially the music he heard there—the Hungarian Gypsy music.[65] The composer writes about one Gypsy musician: "In an ordinary, commonplace café, he gave

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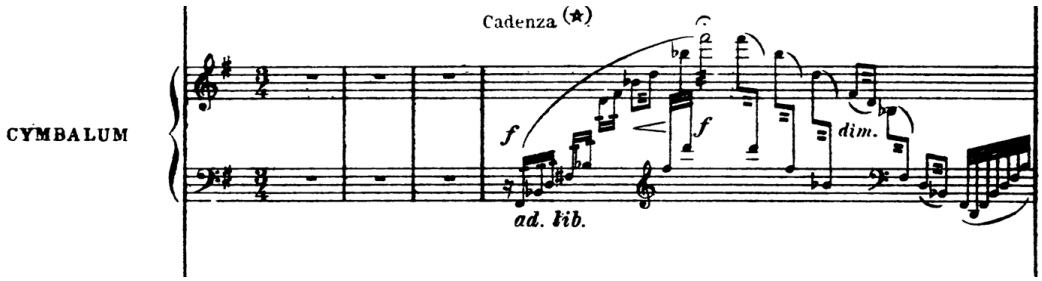
[65] On the same tour (Vienna), Debussy took in a performance of the opera *Carmen*. The main character in Bizet's opera "Carmen" a Gypsy girl who woos a Spanish soldier from his future family and military duties. While being a favorite of the operatic repertoire, *Carmen* is also laden with Gypsy clichés and stereotypes.
See Ian Hancock's article, *The 'Gypsy' stereotype and the sexualization of Romani women*. www.radoc.net/radoc.php?doc=art_d_identity_sexualization&lang=fr

one the impression of sitting in the depths of a forest; he arouses in the soul that characteristic feeling of melancholy in which we so seldom have an opportunity to indulge." (Keller 2016, p.1)

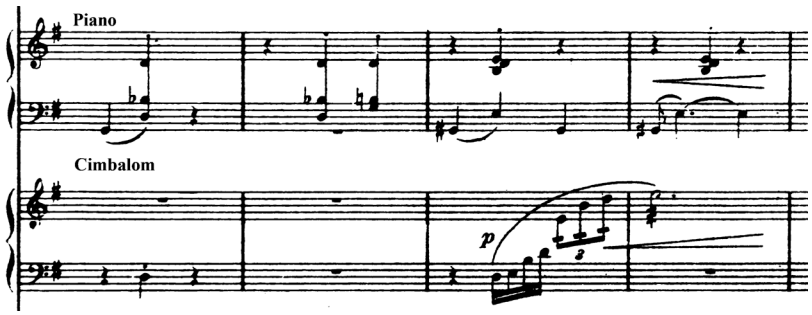
Although Debussy makes no mention of a cimbalom while in Budapest (or any instruments the Gypsies played for that matter), one can only deduce that this "melancholy" feeling he had experienced in the cafés was then carried over into his arrangement of the *La plus que lente*. The cimbalom would then be an obvious choice for the composer with this pursuit of a recreation of a "melancholic" Gypsy aesthetic. Logistically, this would have been a difficult choice for the composer to make since that the cimbalom was an instrument rarely heard outside of Hungary at the time. Sourcing out players in France and other Western European countries would have proven to be a challenge. Having been aware of this problem, Debussy adds a footnote at the bottom of the first page of the score as follows: "Ces cadènces ne doivent pas s'executer ensemble; il faut choisir ou l'une ou l'autre." The English translation is roughly as follows: "both cadences [cimbalom or flute] should not be played at the same time; you must choose one or the other."[66]



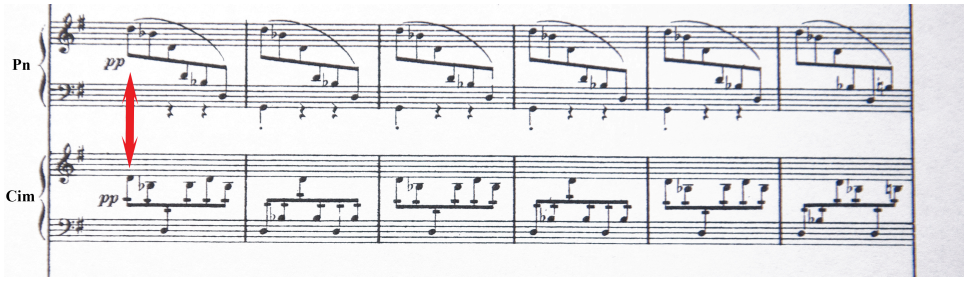
Ex. 4–9 Claude Debussy *La plus que lente*, score, opening cadenza, m. 4.

[66] Translation: the *Larousse French Dictionary* (Paris: Éditions Larousse, 2011).

After the opening cadenza, the cimbalom and the flute proceed independently of each other. Below the clarinet and flute lines, Debussy includes an optional *concertante* piano part as a substitute for the cimbalom in the event one was not available. The piano writing aligns itself with the cimbalom at certain key points, but often deviates from it. In sections where the cimbalom might have rests the piano plays throughout. Debussy obviously gave careful thought to his orchestration in this respect rather than creating a similar (or identical) part to be played by both instruments (a practice that both Stravinsky and Bartók would employ). Example 4–10 is an excerpt of the cimbalom and piano part independent of each other. Example 4–11 indicates where the cimbalom and piano are in rhythmic unison (cimbalom part has added slash marks to indicate sixteenth notes to the piano's eighth notes).



Ex. 4–10 Claude Debussy *La plus que lente*, score, mm. 11–14.



Ex. 4–11 Claude Debussy *La plus que lente*, score, mm. 23–28.

4.5 Conclusion

Franz Liszt was committed to the Hungarian Gypsy musical tradition both in his *Hungarian Rhapsodies* and in his late works.[67] He is also credited as the first Western classical composer to have scored for the modern (Schunda) cimbalom. While his passion for Gypsy music remained strong up to the end of his life, the last decade produced no new works for the cimbalom. Despite this, Liszt's commitment towards and love for the instrument has been well documented. Quoting Gifford on Liszt:

> At the middle of the nineteenth century, Liszt commented that the Hungarian cimbalom was played exclusively by Gypsies. He felt that the violin and cimbalom provided the foundation of the Gypsy orchestra and that the cimbalom shared "with the first violin the right to develop certain passages and to prolong certain variations indefinitely according to the good pleasure of the moment". (Gifford 2001, 114)
>
> The improvisatory nature of the cimbalom accompaniment was well established by this time, and Liszt incorporated elements of cimbalom style into his *Hungarian Rhapsodies*. He particularly liked the instrument; when entertaining guests in his later years, Liszt frequently hired Gypsy musicians, more often a cimbalom player like Pál Pintér, rather than a violinist. (Gifford 2001, 114–115)

Debussy's *La plus que lente*, while being both gentle and evocative in its melancholic manner, has few idiomatic features of cimbalom writing that align with the Hungarian Gypsy tradition. The part writing aligns more with the Western art music tradition with which Debussy was more comfortable. Perhaps it is enough to acknowledge that the composer was deeply moved by Gypsy music and its sense of "otherness," often steeped in deep emotions of mystery and melancholy.

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[67] See Shay Loya's *Listz's Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian-Tradition* for an analysis of Liszt's late works and the influence of Gypsy music on his harmonic style.

Chapter Five

5.1 Stravinsky

Four published works for cimbalom with chamber ensemble remain in Igor Stravinsky's oeuvre. Of the four published works, two have endured as regularly programmed works: the one-act opera, *Renard* (1916), and the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments* (1918). The two remaining titles are published drafts of the same work, *Les Noces* (1913–1923). Four versions of the *Les Noces* are currently in publication, all currently available for rental or purchase. Stravinsky mapped out a version of the *Les Noces* (for full orchestra) in 1913, eventually abandoning the idea. Of the four published versions (of *Les Noces*), two go by the titles "Draft One" (1917) and "Draft Two" (1919). The two remaining versions, simply going by the title *Les Noces*, were composed in 1923. The version most often programmed today is the 1923 chamber version, scored for four solo voices, choir, four pianos, and six percussionists. The 1923 orchestral version and the two drafts are rarely programmed. In the case of the drafts, the obscure instrumentation remains as the primary obstacle for mounting these works. In the "Draft One" Stravinsky scores for a single cimbalom, while "Draft Two" calls for two instruments. Apart from the four published works with cimbalom, Stravinsky composed three short pieces (unpublished) for solo cimbalom with piano accompaniment: *Polka* (1915), *Waltz* (1915), and *Chant Dissident* (1918).[68] This brings the total up to seven works for the instrument, with published scores being available only for the four

[68] Published versions of some of these works remain in a vocal/piano version.

published pieces.[69] This chapter will research and discuss the two main works—the one-act opera, *Renard*, and the *Ragtime for Eleven* Instruments—as the primary source material when looking at Stravinsky's compositional style and approach with scoring for cimbalom. The "Draft One" and "Draft Two" of *Les Noces* will be considered as secondary source material to support conclusions based on the previously mentioned two main works.

5.2 Stravinsky's Introduction to the Cimbalom

The historical lead-up to Stravinsky's fascination with the cimbalom takes place during what is known commonly known as the composer's "Swiss period"[70] (1914–20). Stravinsky relocated his family to the neutral country at the outset of World War I, an event that made for major lifestyle changes that also impacted the composer's overall compositional approach and style, here signaling a break from his "Russian Period." Two main factors to consider when examining Stravinsky's compositional output from 1914–20 are: rural settings (a departure from the urban), and financial restrictions (due to the war). The folk ensembles of rural Switzerland—groups consisting of mostly brass and percussion instruments (with the occasional woodwind instrument added)—inspired the composer with the sonic possibilities of working with smaller forces as a result of the financial limitations due to the War effort.[71] It was also during this time that Stravinsky

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[69] Recordings of the *Polka* and *Waltz* are available as recordings. See Discography and *Aladár Rácz at the cimbalom*.

[70] Sometimes also referred to as his "Exile Period." See Richard Taruskin. *Stravinsky And The Russian Traditions* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p.1119

[71] One of the best examples from this period, with its substantially reduced "orchestra," is *L'Histoire du Soldat*.

was introduced to the Hungarian cimbalom and ragtime music (an unlikely pairing that would intersect in the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*). Stravinsky's first hearing of the cimbalom, by way of the American conductor Ernest Ansermet, was in 1914 at Maxim's Café in Geneva. Aladár Rácz, a cymbalist of Roma descent, caught the attention of the composer while improvising over a Serbian *kolo*. Stravinsky was taken in both by Rácz's virtuosity and the sonic possibilities of the instrument. It can be hypothesized at this juncture that the cimbalom's timbral properties (with its percussive attack) was for Stravinsky an instrument with immense possibilities in both a modernist and folk musical context. This must have resonated with the composer given his interest in folk music, and the direction he was moving in (new experimental phase with limited resources).[72] By the request of the composer, Rácz purchased a secondhand Schunda cimbalom for Stravinsky (from a local Roma player), which was then moved in to the composer's den along with other instruments like the harmonium, and an assortment of percussion instruments.

Stravinsky's imagining of unusual pairings of obscure instruments was the result of the following factors: 1) geography (Switzerland), 2) compositional phase (post-Russian period), 3) World War I (limited finances and the lack of large-scale orchestral resources), and 4) personal circumstances (meeting Aladár Rácz and first exposure to the cimbalom and ragtime music). From 1914 to 1919, Stravinsky's most adventurous musical experiments with combining "obscure" musical instruments were first seen in the "Draft One" and "Draft Two" of *Les Noces*. One idea the composer with the early drafts was to create a "mechanized" sounding ensemble with a cimbalom, harmonium, and a

[72] Stravinsky's ballet, Le Sacre du Printemps, a work laden with folk melodies (Russian and Lithuanian) and "violent" percussive angularity, was composed a year prior to his "Swiss period."

pianola[73] (with solo voices and choir). Another conception Stravinsky had was to replace the cimbaloms with a pair of the recently invented, French luthéals.[74] Eventually abandoning the luthéals (for reasons related to design flaws), Stravinsky then added a second cimbalom part to the "Draft Two" (1919). The 1923 chamber version of *Les Noces*—by far the most regularly programmed version of the work—has no cimbalom.[75] Speculation as to why Stravinsky dropped the cimbalom altogether in the 1923 version could be 1) due to a lack of competent players, or 2) scarce availability of the instrument across Western Europe.

5.3 Renard

Stravinsky completed his one-act opera, *Renard* (The Fox), in 1916. The composer also wrote the libretto (in Russian), based on a series of folk tales by the Russian author, Alexander Afanasyev. Subtitled: "Histoire burlesque chantée et jouée" (a burlesque in song and dance), the score calls for: 2 tenors, 2 basses, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, 2 horns, trumpet, percussion, cimbalom, 2 violins, viola, cello, and double bass. A later printing of the score added a footnote reading: "cimbalom (or piano)." The footnote implies either a lack of an available instrument, and/or proficient cimbalom player. In the *Memories and Commentaries*, Stravinsky writes (about the cimbalom):

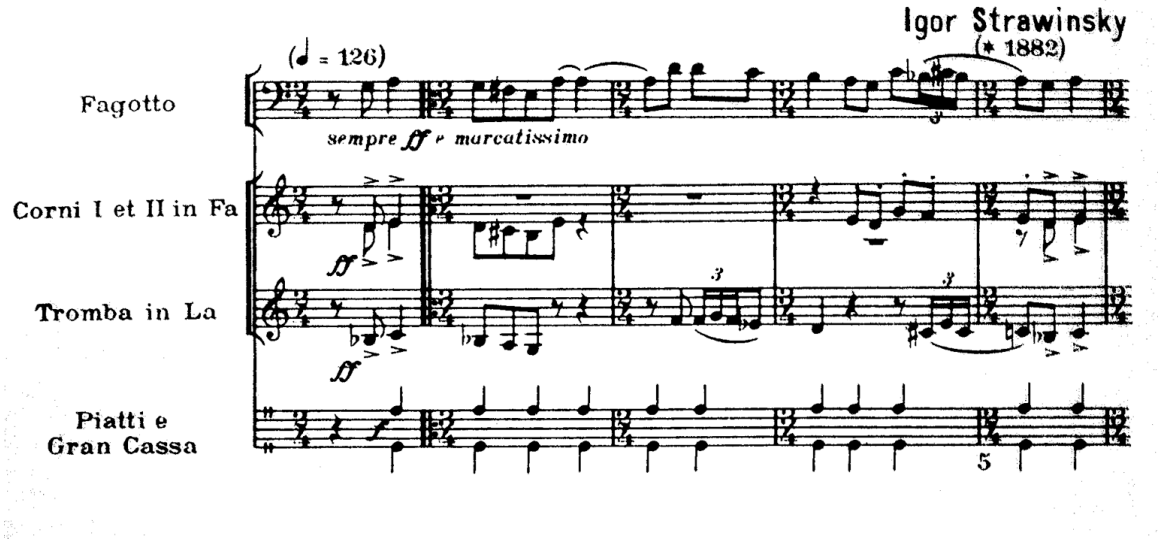
> No substitute, no thumb-tacked or otherwise doctored piano is admissible for the cimbaloms, the scarcity that constitutes the chief obstacle to performance. A rare animal, more rarely tamed—meaning played by people who read music—hence the chance of capturing *two* of the species, then of corralling a pair of competent

[73] Sometimes goes by the name "player piano."
[74] Considered to be an unsuccessful attempt at producing a prepared piano to sound like a cimbalom.
[75] The 1923 orchestral version also has no cimbalom.

> players, is astronomically poor. But its sound is so winsome that a society for the preservation of musical wildlife must be persuaded to endow a school both with the instrument and with scholarship for its study. The cimbalom sound bounces, glittering delicately when articulated with felt sticks, and with wooden ones, as compact, as the click of billard [sic] balls. (Stravinsky 1960, 127–128)

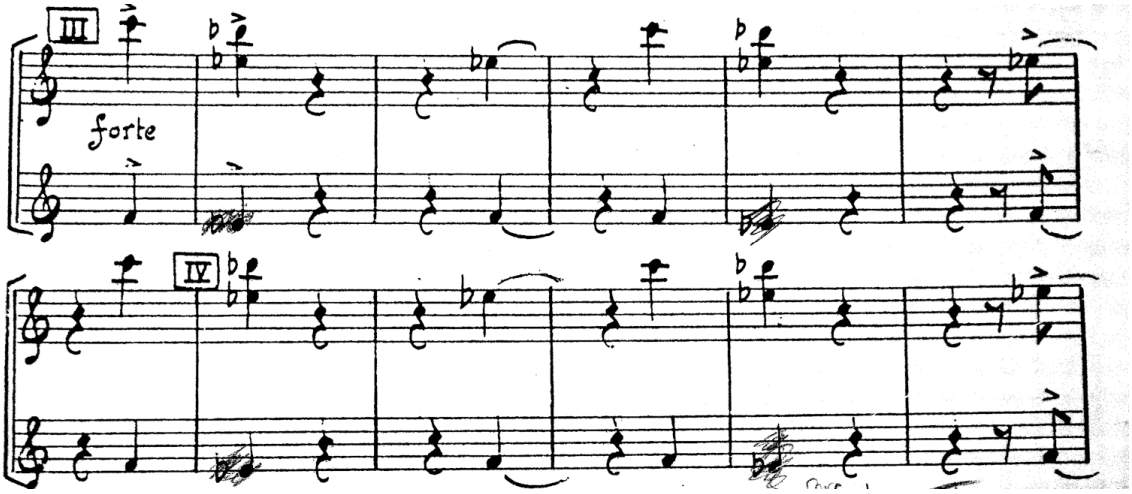
The function of the cimbalom in *Renard* is multifaceted. Still viewed at that time as an instrument with a Roma association, Stravinsky's reimagining of the cimbalom's musical role is steeped both in folklore expression, and as a new sonic tool to be used in a Western art music context. Indeed, no Western art music composer had scored for the instrument since the time of Liszt. Stravinsky would now be the link (along with Rácz) in bringing the instrument to the fore in terms of its "acceptance" as a legitimate instrument for the concert stage.

The opening and closing sections of *Renard* consist of a "book-ended" march, aptly titled "Marche." Functioning as an overture to the opening dialogue, thirty-six measures (with da capo) are carried forward by the bass drum and cymbals with a circus-like melody in the bassoon, french horns, and trumpet. Odd-metre changes and the use of heterophony lend the *Marche* a quirky, asymmetrical form that is reminiscent of a folk banda (small-scale), or the "Sacrificial Dance" from *The Rite of* Spring (large scale).



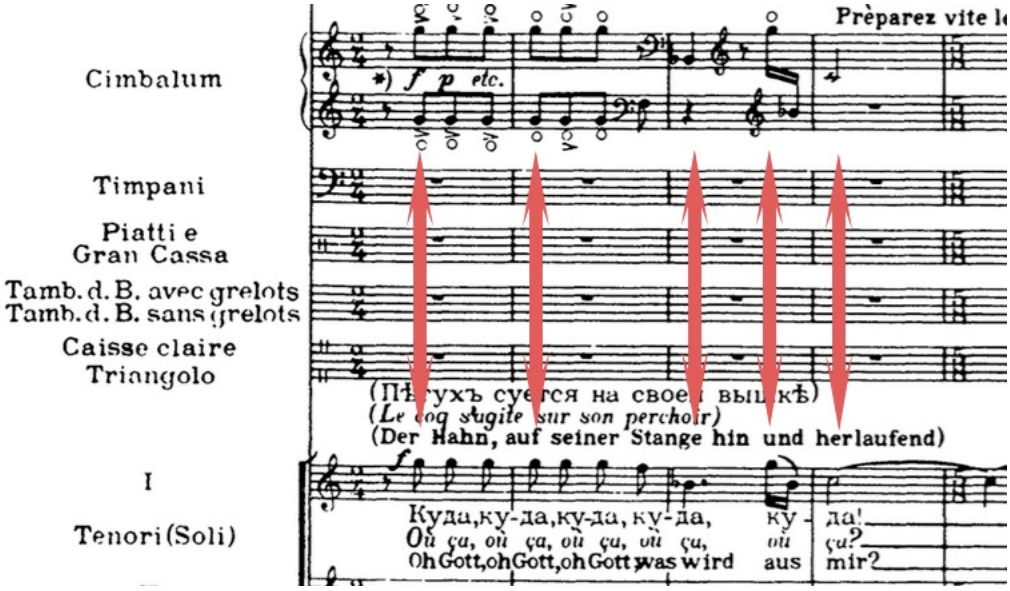
Ex. 5–1 Igor Stravinsky *Renard*, score, opening *Marche,* mm. 1–5.

The cimbalom's first entrance at measure 20, or Roman numeral III, occurs during the *Marche*. The composer employs the two-stave "piano system" for the cimbalom's notation, in other words, hands separated by staves. Stravinsky would also use a similar method when notating percussion parts (see *L'histoire du Soldat*). The dyads in the upper system at measures 21, 24, 27, and 30 are impractical since the left hand is already playing the "eb-flat" an octave below. The "e-flat" and "b-flat" dyads would be impossible to reach with one mallet in the right hand since the pitches are situated at opposite ends of the instrument. Perhaps the composer had scored this in the manner of an *ossia*? There is no evidence of a four-mallet grip that was in use with the cimbalom in the early twentieth century, so the notation here remains as a question mark.



Ex. 5–2 Igor Stravinsky *Renard*, cimbalom part, mm. 20–31, dyads in the right hand with octave doubling in the left.

The 2/4 *Allegro* (6 measures before rehearsal number 1) has the cimbalom imitating the Cock's (a rooster) "pecking" noises with an eighth note figure in unison with Tenor 1 (the Cock). The octave "g" notes are written with circles above and below (see Ex. 5–3). While there are no markings or footnotes to explain what the circles are, it is left up to the performer to decide whether or not it is a pedaling indication, or a sticking pattern.



Ex. 5–3 Igor Stravinsky *Renard*, score, cimbalom and Tenor 1 in imitation.

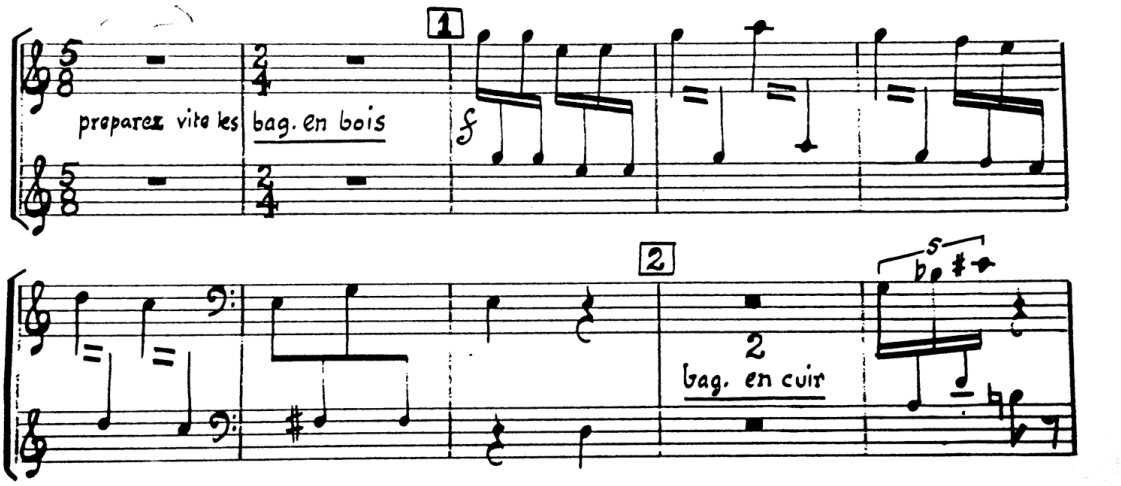
One of Stravinsky's early musings about the cimbalom was its similarity in sound to the Russian folk instrument, the *gusli*. A member of the zither family,[76] that is rarely seen or heard today, the gusli was an instrument Stravinsky had recalled (and wrote about) from his early childhood years.

[76] A chordophone that can be viewed as a cognate of the hammered dulcimer and cimbalom, zithers in general are played by the plucking of fingers or plectrum(s) rather than mallets.

Fig. 5–1 Picture of a Russian *gusli.*

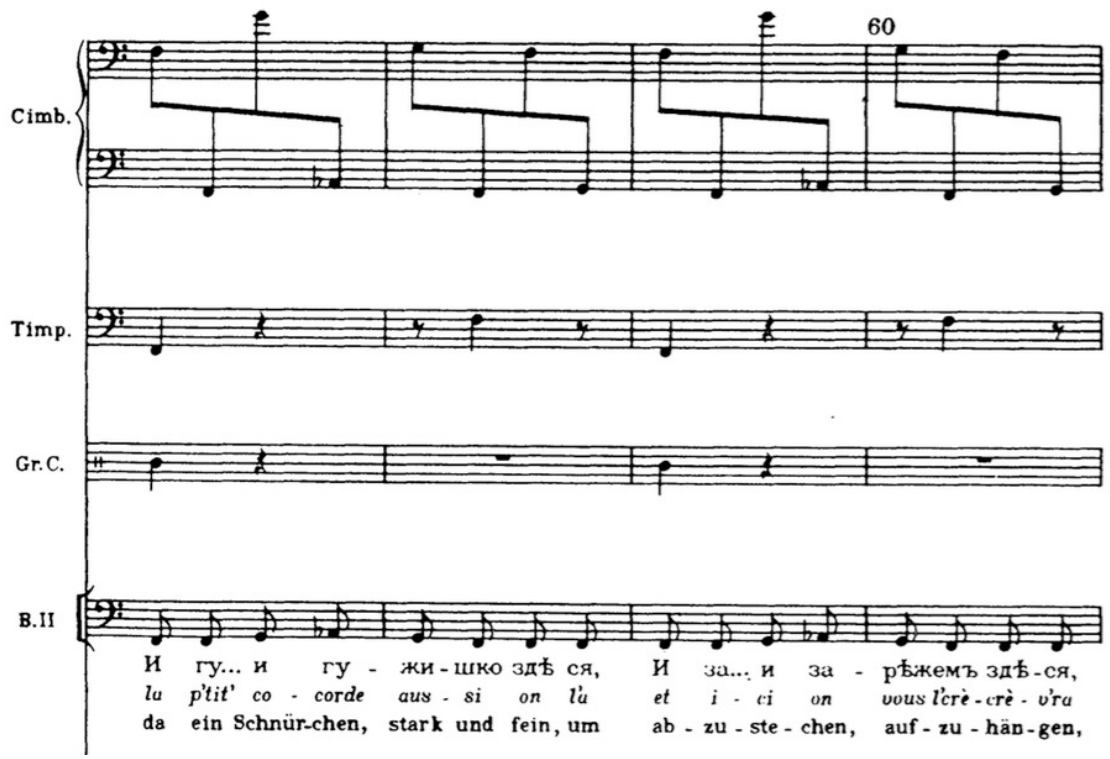
Stravinsky imagined the cimbalom's sound (in *Renard)* as a stand-in for the gusli, which in turn portrays the Cock's character in the narrative—an imagining of an imagining.[77] The metallic sound of the gusli is recreated by the cimbalom with a footnote by the composer instructing the player to use the reversed (wooden) ends of the mallets.[78] A gusli motive occurs in the scores at rehearsal numbers 1 to 2, and then reappears at rehearsal number 5. The composer uses two staves to split up the sixteenth note figure between both hands—on the surface a seemingly practical approach, yet visually distracting to read.

[77] Reasons to why Stravinsky never used an actual gusli in the *Renard* remain unclear. One hypothesis could be the gusli's limited range and diatonic tuning, limitations he would not have when scoring for the cimbalom.
[78] "Préparez vite les bag. en bois" (prepare quickly the mallets of wood).



Ex. 5–4 Igor Stravinsky *Renard*, gusli motive, cimbalom part, rehearsal number 1 to 2.

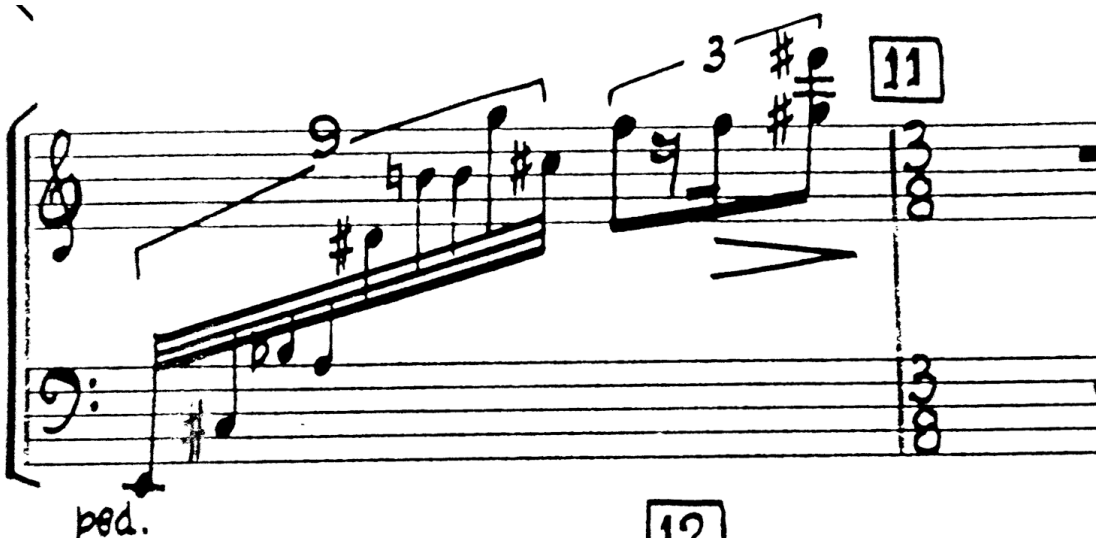
The gusli motive is followed by a leaping bass motif in the cimbalom that first appears five measures after rehearsal number 2. The leaping motive foreshadows the voice (Bass II), four measures after rehearsal number 8. The rhythmic unison between the cimbalom and Bass II functions as a reductive mirroring of one other: while the cimbalom leaps around the motive, Bass II has an ascending/descending pitch cell, contained to a minor third.



Ex. 5–5 Igor Stravinsky *Renard*, score, unison cimbalom and Bass II motivic "mirroring."

The *Meno Mosso* (rehearsal number 9) is the releasing of the tension built up from the previous bustling and jostling between the Cock, the Cat, and the Ram, here represented by rapid musical figures in the *Allegro*. After having declared (in the text) the numerous ways in which the animal characters might kill the Fox, the cimbalom's "voice" announces the *Meno Mosso* in a manner that diverts the attention away from the physical action to one of a calm reflection. The cimbalom's rapid ascending figure, here traversing most of the instrument's range, ends with a triplet rhythm that sets up the new tempo of the *Meno Mosso*. The ascending cimbalom motive (ending with triplet) occurs a total of six times in the work, each time reestablishing the *Meno Mosso* section. Now in its

enharmonic form, the ascending cimbalom motive at one measure before rehearsal number 11 signals the entrance of our antagonist in the narrative, *Renard* (the Fox). Tenor II becomes the voice of Renard at this juncture.[79]



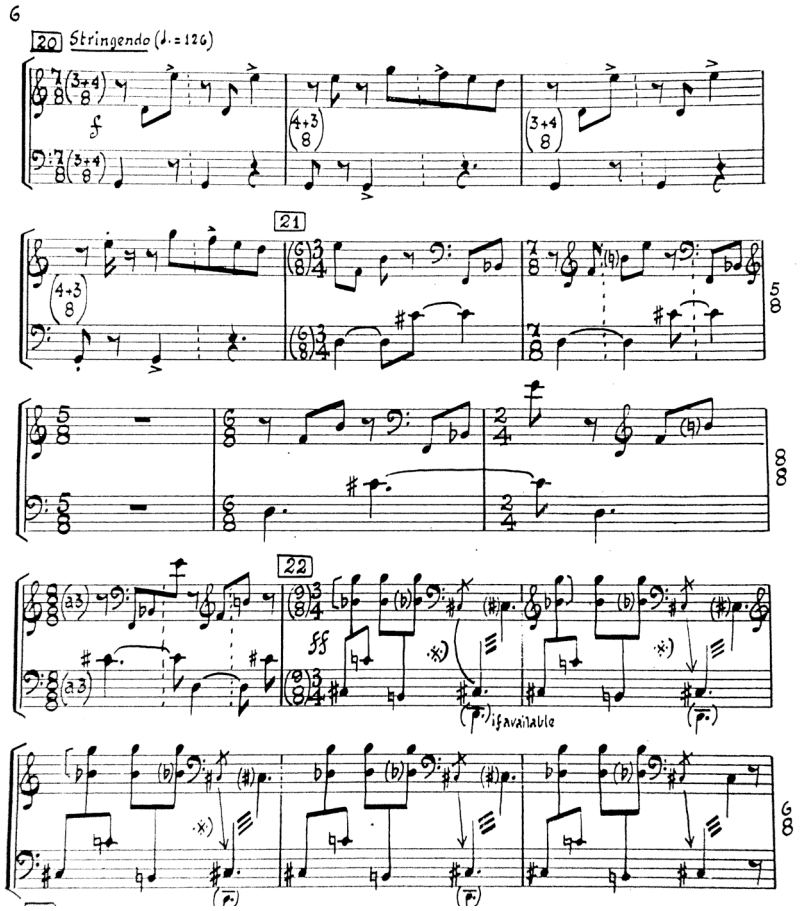
Ex. 5–6 Igor Stravinsky *Renard*, cimbalom part, cimbalom's motive announcing Renard's entrance, one measure before rehearsal number 11.

The rhythmic unison motive returns at rehearsal number 13, but now in the Tenor II voice. An asymmetrical phrase consisting of nine measures, in a quick tempo (*Piu Mosso*), has the cimbalom in a leaping pattern once again, and Tenor II with its descending pitch set motive. The Tenor II's motive opens up to a major sixth, the inversion of Bass II's minor third, and also inverts its direction (descending) to Bass II's ascending motive. Now that the Cock has announced to Renard that he cannot be fooled

[79] It is of interest to note that the composer rotates the four voices with the animal characters throughout his opera.

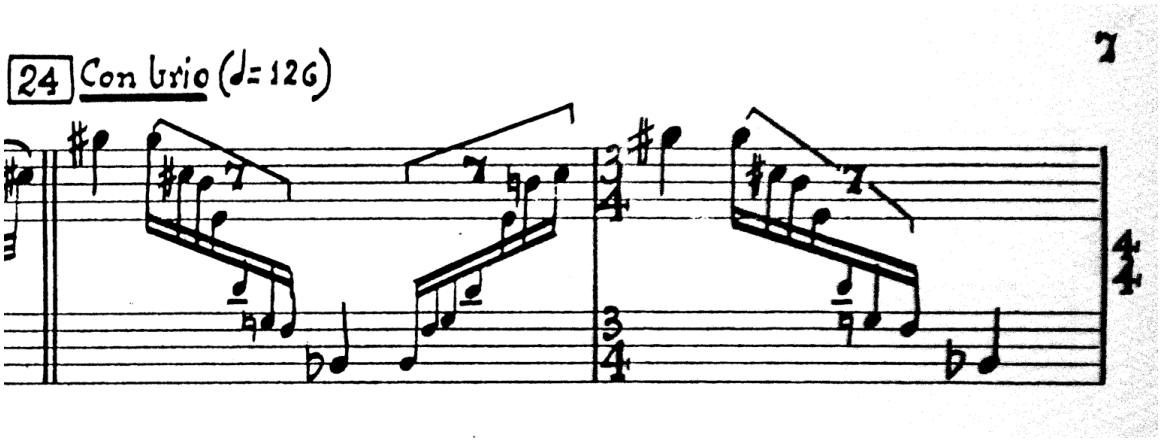
and “come again another day,” the *Meno Mosso* section returns with Renard’s attempts at convincing the Cock to come off of his perch.

The *Stringendo* section, beginning at rehearsal number 20, is a nineteen measure long section set in a mixed metre. Here the Cock and Renard are entangled in a struggle that results in the Cock being captured by Renard. The 7/8, 8/8, 9/8 metres are subdivided into groupings of threes and twos. The emphasis within the mixed metre groupings jostles around in an unpredictable manner that mimics the text. The double stops in the cimbalom, beginning at rehearsal number 22, are notoriously difficult to execute.



Ex. 5–7 Igor Stravinsky *Renard*, cimbalom part, rehearsal 20–23.

Stravinsky's "Gypsy borrowing" in the cimbalom writing occurs between rehearsal numbers 24 to 26 (an asymmetrical passage lasting eleven measures). Rapid arpeggios on a repeating pitch set consist of two horizontally "stacked" minor seventh chords an augmented fourth apart: "g–b-flat–d–f–and c#–e–g#–b." The result here is more of what may be called a "Gypsy colouring" as opposed to harmonic support. Part of the reason for this is due to Stravinsky's dense orchestration that sometimes overpowers the cimbalom.

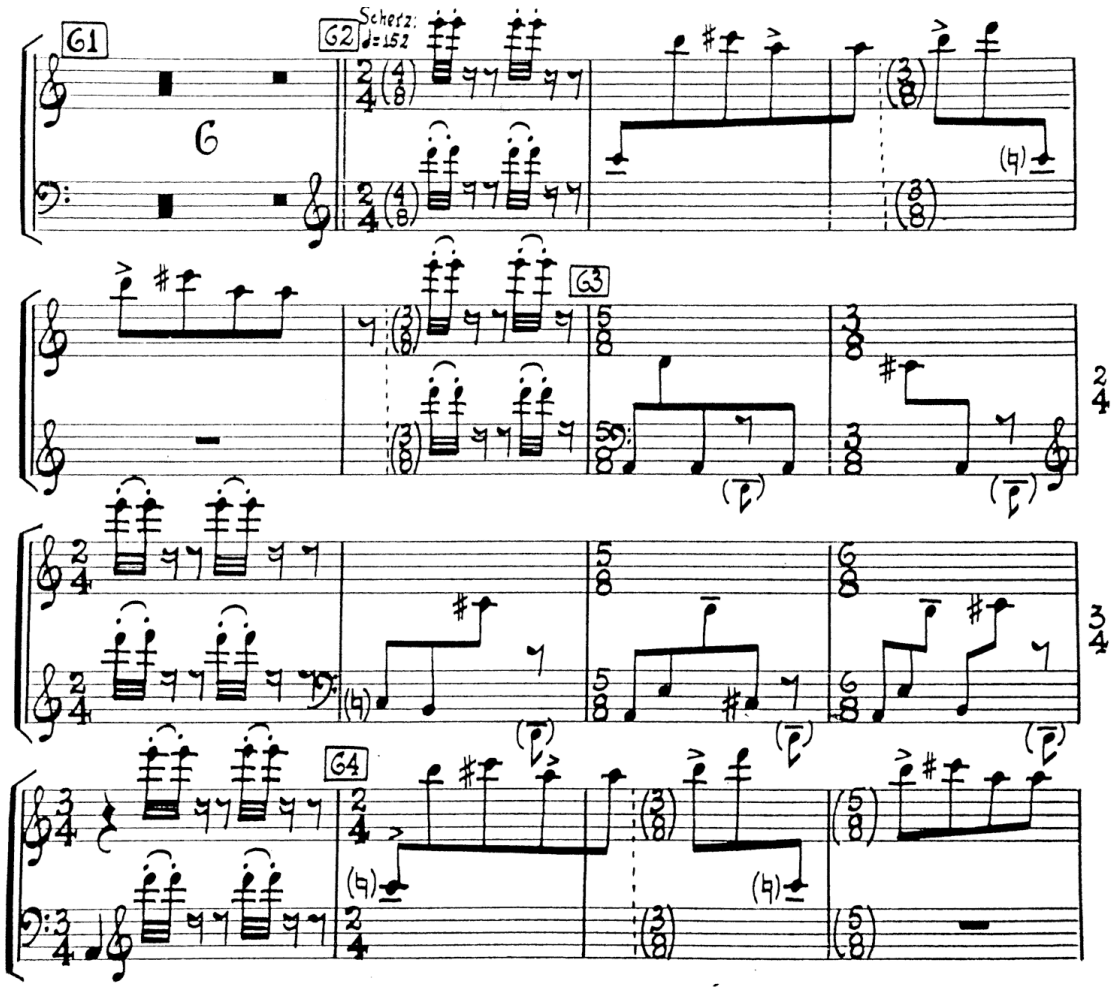


Ex. 5–8 Igor Stravinsky *Renard*, cimbalom part, arpeggios beginning at rehearsal number 24.

The cimbalom's function changes at rehearsal number 27*,* the *Sempre l'istesso tempo*, and comes into the foreground in a duet with Bass I. The tight rhythmic unisons and over-the-bar-line phrasing employed by the composer—a feature often found in Eastern European folk rhythm homophony—was familiar to Stravinsky. The preceding *Meno Mosso* section at rehearsal number 41, now extended, releases the tension once again with the Cock safely back home on his perch. The cimbalom motive at one measure before rehearsal number 11 returns with its announcing of the *Meno Mosso*. This motive happens a total of four times, each time beginning on a different pitch scale as follows: "f-flat, f, and e" (Stravinsky sometimes notates the f-flat motive-scale starting on the "e," in other words, an enharmonic version of the same motive-scale). Rehearsal number 53 marks a second Stringendo—the Cock now being seized for the second time—with the cimbalom functioning in a similar same manner to the previous *Stringendo*. The *Moderato*, with a *poco a poco accelerando*, segues into the *Scherzo* section at rehearsal number 62 (Ex. 5–9). The Cat and Goat enter back into the narrative with their attempts

at luring Renard of his hole with a "pretty song"—a folk tune set in a rhythmically complex, mixed metre passage. The cimbalom returns to its role as a "gusli stand-in," now accompanying Bass I and II with their singing pleas for the Cock's release. In the piano-vocal score, the composer writes: "Enter the cat and the goat. Accompanying themselves on the "guzla" they sing for Renard a nice little song." (Stravinsky, 1917/56, 43). The mixed metres in the *Scherzo* are subdivided in the score with the composer's suggestion of interpreting the metres as seen with the notated brackets and dotted lines. Discrepancies between the cimbalom part and score occur in the second measure of the 2/4 (2/4 plus an eighth note with dotted line) where the score it is written as a 5/8 measure. The same discrepancy occurs again in the second measure of rehearsal number 66 where the bracketed "d" bass notes in the *Scherzo*, a total of seventeen, is an option indication for the newer instruments equipped with a bass extension that goes down to a "d^2."[80]

[80] In the early twentieth century, cimbaloms built by manufacturers other than Schunda, and possibly some Shchunda instruments, had their lowest note as an "e^2". In the 1920s, cimbalom maker Lajos Bohák would design his instruments starting on a "c^2." Boháks cimbaloms would become the standard which lasted for decades.

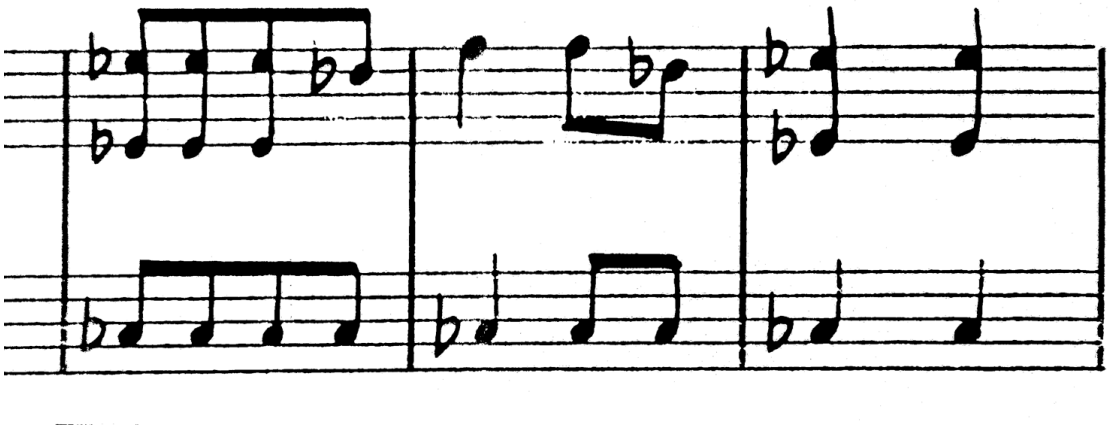


Ex. 5–9 Igor Stravinsky *Renard*, cimbalom part, rehearsal number 62, *Scherzo* section - Renard's capture and death.

In the second gusli theme, it is interesting to point out that Stravinsky does not give an indication for the cimbalom player to use the wooden mallets as indicated at rehearsal number 1. The ten measures of rest prior to the cimbalom's reentry would allow for ample time to make the switch (to wood), but only allowing one measure to switch back to the regular mallets at the *Poco meno mosso*, or second measure of rehearsal number 71. Perhaps this an editing mistake on the part of the publisher? Or did Stravinsky forget

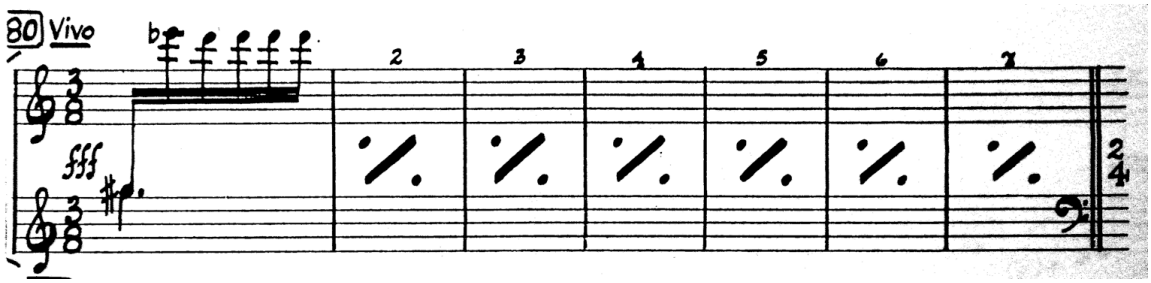
to write it in the score a second time? It is hard to imagine that a composer as meticulous as Stravinsky would have overlooked such an important footnote.

Having convinced Renard to come out of his hole, a chase ensues once again between the Cat, Goat, and Renard. The tonal centre moves to "a-flat" set in a simple rhythm in 2/4 metre that both "floats" and yet still drives the action rhythmically forward. The cimbalom's motive at this point is two-tiered: repeating "a-flats" in the left hand (pedal tone), and a unison melody with Tenor II in the right hand (Ex. 5–10). The intensity builds at rehearsal number 74 with mixed metres being reintroduced, and the cimbalom's motive modulating to a new tonal centre around "b." The three-part form of the chase sequence ends with the cimbalom's motive moving through a "d" tonality and ending with a three-measured arpeggio on "e." Renard has finally been caught!



Ex. 5–10 Igor Stravinsky *Renard*, cimbalom part, motive on "a-flat," after rehearsal 71.

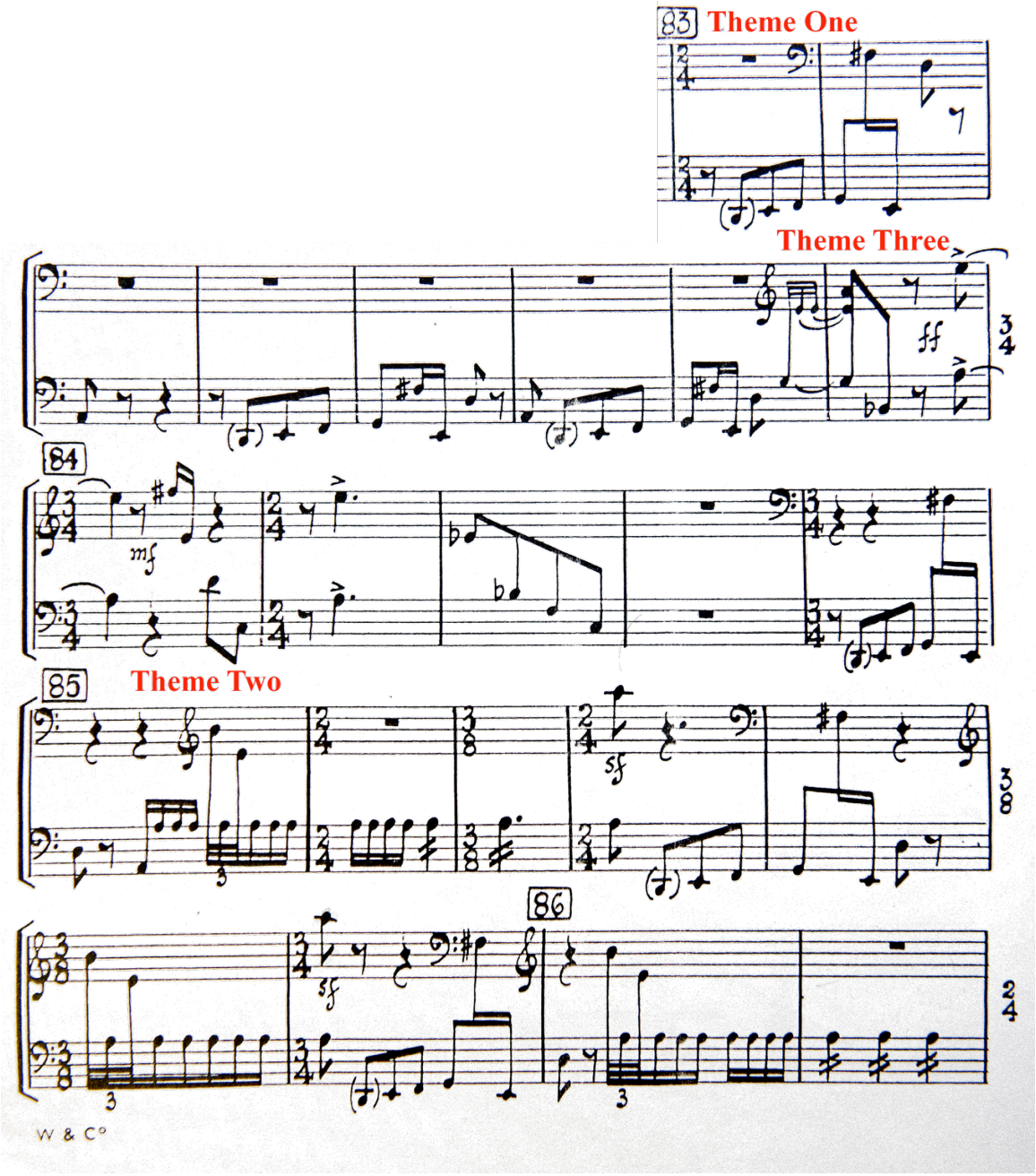
Renard's death (by strangulation) occurs over a seven-measure phrase at the *Vivo*, or rehearsal number 80 (Ex. 5–11). The cimbalom's motive, a "cutting" sixteenth note repeating pattern, consists of a "g#/d" tritone cell with an "e-flat" upper neighbor note.



Ex. 5–11 Igor Stravinsky *Renard*, cimbalom part, motive at rehearsal number 80, "Renard's death."

In the final section of Stravinsky's one-act opera, rehearsal number 81 to 90, the Cock, Cat, and the Goat sing and dance in celebration to Renard's death. A disjointed, folk-like dance is divided up into three sub-sections consisting of irregular repeating phrases that are displaced (syncopated) and often fragmented and/or in diminution. The cimbalom's first statement in the finale starts on an upbeat with a bracketed "D_2" (see Ex. 5–12). Stravinsky's footnote about the bracketed notes, placed beside the contra bass part, reads: "Ces notes mises entre parenthèse se jouent seulement au cas où Cimbalum ne possède pas le re grave" (play these notes if not available on the cimbalom) Stravinsky 1917, 126. The cimbalom's first theme in the finale, set in the key of D major, happens a total of three times. The pedal section or theme two, here on the pitch "a" (dominant of D major), is a driving sixteenth note pattern in unison between the cimbalom, violin, oboe, and the four voices, set in mixed meters. Theme one returns at rehearsal number 83, here leading us into a third theme group, a syncopated five-measured "interlude," before themes one and two return. Rehearsal numbers 85 to 86 is a contraction of themes one and two before theme two dominates the nine remaining measures. The final section of the finale, rehearsal number 87 to 90, is the alternating of

themes one and three to conclude the celebratory folk dance. A coda marks the return to the *Marche*—a "bookended" conclusion the opera.



Ex. 5–12 Igor Stravinsky *Renard*, *Allegro* section, cimbalom part, themes one, two and three, rehearsal number 83 to 86.

5.4 Ragtime for Eleven Instruments

Stravinsky's introduction to ragtime music was made possible by way of the Swiss conductor, Ernest Ansermet, who toured America in 1918 with the dance company, Ballet Russes. Ansermet returned to Europe with piano scores and reductions of the ragtime idiom that he in turned gifted to the composer. Stravinsky would then copy out the piano scores, in the form of a musical exercise to familiarize himself with the genre, thus resulting in three compositions he set in the ragtime style. Published in 1918, the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments* (often written in the abbreviated form as *Ragtime*, but not to be confused with the movement "Ragtime" in *L'Histoire du Soldat*) is one of Stravinsky's works written for a paired-down ensemble during the "Swiss period." Like the *L'Histoire du Soldat*, written one year later, the "orchestra" is confined to one instrument per "section." Stravinsky also composed a solo piano work written in the ragtime style, dedicated to the pianist Arthur Rubinstein. Quoting Barbara Heyman, the *Piano-Rag-Music* (1919) was written for Rubinstein "to encourage [him] to play contemporary music." (Heyman 1982, 543).

In the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, Stravinsky chose the cimbalom as the lead instrument or "voice" that was an unusual choice given that 1) European audiences were still somewhat unfamiliar with the cimbalom at this juncture in time, and 2) the ragtime genre was still making its way throughout Europe being less familiar to concert goers in smaller cities and villages. Discussing Stravinsky's approach to the work, Boris Asaf'yev quotes the composer as saying: "The cymbalum [alternate spelling of cimbalom seen in various scores and parts] plays an important role [in the *Ragtime*]: as in *Renard*, it acts as

the unifying element, "cementing" strings and percussion instruments." (Asaf'yev 1982, 227). It was been that suggested that Stravinsky might have heard the cimbalom's timbre as fitting one for a ragtime inspired work—now reimagined not as a gusli, but as a slightly out-of-tune, "honky-tonk" piano. In discussing the work in this context, Barbara Heyman states: "The predominant instrument, the cimbalom, then unknown to jazz bands, adds considerably to the authenticity of the sound its tone suggests something in between the twang timbre of the banjo and the honky-tonk quality of a dilapidated piano." (Heyman 1982, 556). Heyman, in a critical stance to the work, questions Stravinsky's claims of authenticity when it comes to composing in the ragtime style. According to the composer, the *Piano-Rag Music, Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, and *L'Histoire du Soldat* where all composed in "isolation" with the piano rolls and piano reductions as his only source material. Quoting Stravinsky from the composer's co-authored book, *Expositions and Developments,* Heyman writes:

> My knowledge of jazz was derived exclusively from copies of sheet music, and I had never actually heard any of the music performed, I borrowed its rhythmic style, not as played, but as written. I could imagine jazz sound, however, or so I liked to think. Jazz meant, in any case, a wholly new sound in my mind and *Histoire* marks my final break with the orchestral Russian School…" (Stravinsky and Craft 1962, 103)

Heyman challenges the composer's statements on the basis of both his mobility and cosmopolitan lifestyle leading up to his "Swiss period." At this juncture in time (1919), ragtime music had all but expired in America, but was still the rage in Europe. Heyman points to not only the cities the composer had been visiting, but also to musical sources like Edison's cylinder, and the famous European tours of John Philip Sousa. Edison's cylinder, invented in 1877, must have been familiar to Stravinsky (given his travels throughout Europe), as would be the imported American jazz recordings (78 RPM) and

their ubiquitous playing/hearing. John Philip Sousa's band toured Europe a total of four times: three tours to the Continent from 1900–1905, and a tour of England in 1930. It was during the 1900 tour, at a stop at the Paris Exposition, that Claude Debussy wrote (somewhat sarcastically): "…[Sousa] was the King of American music…" (Vallas 1929, 165).[81] Considering all the above-mentioned factors, it is hard to imagine that Stravinsky would have not heard a hint of early American jazz music at this time. Heyman goes on to say:

> Stravinsky would have had to isolate himself almost completely from the European community. But with regard to his own perception of the influence of jazz on his at the time, there are certain discrepancies. One of the problems that contributes to this is that even though there is an abundance of letters, interviews, diaries, and the like which provides firsthand documentation about the composer's ideas, experiences, and chronology, frequently there are contradictions in these sources—perhaps the result of faulty memory or poor translations. (Heyman 1982, 546)

If, as stated by the composer, he had never heard the sounds of jazz prior to 1918, then there certainly is a problem with chronology when discussing the antecedent influences surrounding the composer's three ragtime pieces. The first sketches of the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments* appeared in the fall of 1917—here predating the piano scores gifted to the composer. This fact alone supports Heyman's argument regarding Stravinsky's (probable) previous exposure to the ragtime genre. In summing up the composer's connection to jazz music, Heyman states:

> Why would Stravinsky have wished to make connections between works of his and specific sources of American jazz if there is doubtful evidence that there was a direct connection? And why does he deny having firsthand exposure to jazz sounds before he composed his rag works when the sounds of ragtime were the rage of Europe? The numerous scholars and musicians who seem to find it almost voguish to speculate on how much of Stravinsky's early music was influenced by jazz compound the confusion over these issues. (Heyman 1982, 548)

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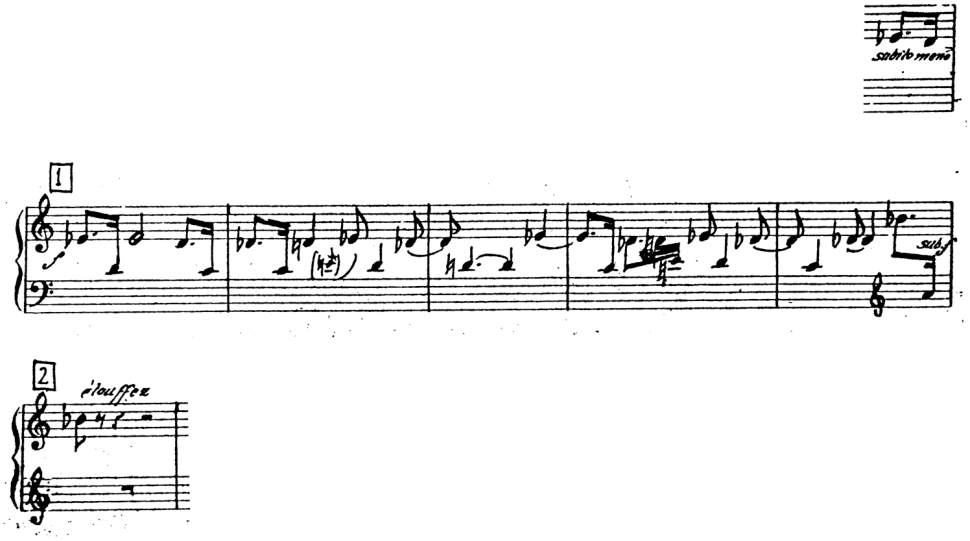
[81] Sousa's band performed novelty works—precursors of early jazz—along with marches on four European tours spread across 1900–30.

The instrumental configuration of the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, being similar to *L'Histoire du Soldat*, is loosely modeled after what could be called the "standard American jazz band" from the early twentieth century. The previously mentioned financial constraints on the composer would be a major factor with Stravinsky's choice of orchestration. His "loose modeling" of the "American jazz band" came with two minor alterations: a bassoonist as stand-in for the saxophone, and a percussionist (one player) approximating what a trap kit player might play.[82] The cimbalom, violin, and clarinet act as the lead "voice," with the trumpet and trombone adding support. The bass holds the foundation throughout with a "two feel" in half notes. When looked at as a whole, Stravinsky's *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments* comes closest to what Heyman pens "the model for ragtime music." Unlike other works from the "Swiss period," the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments* maintains a steady rhythm throughout that is set in a 4/4 metre, with the bass holding the foundation (a "walking" pattern in whole notes and half notes, at times doubled by the cimbalom), and the syncopated interplay between the lead "voices." When looking at the *Piano-Rag-Music* and the *Three Pieces for Clarinet*, Stravinsky deviates somewhat from the "conventional ragtime" style with a freer approach and the abandoning of time signatures at one point, and the omitting of bar lines. "[The] *Piano-Rag-Music* gives the impression that Stravinsky had extracted many rhythmic and melodic figurations from stock ragtime music and gleefully but haphazardly strung them together in an improvisatory fashion that merely fizzles out at the end." (Heyman 1982,

[82] The percussion writing has less of a timekeeping role in the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*—it functions more as punctuation and colour. The trap kit analogy applies more to the configuration of instruments rather than its function. In addition, a percussionist typically would stand up while playing the part, where as a traps player would normally sit down playing the bass drum with a foot pedal, and perhaps a low hat or hi hat with the other foot.

560). Quoting the composer from the same article, Heyman writes: " [*Piano-Rag*-Music]… a more successful essay in jazz portraiture because it showed an awareness of the idea of improvisation." (Heyman 1982, 560).

Rather than using a standard jazz phraseology (4, 8, 16 bar phrases) in the *Ragtime for Eleven Instrument*, Stravinsky uses two and three-bar phrases as motifs, often strung together to form larger phrase groupings. Arguably one of the first works written as a hybrid form (Western art music meets early jazz), the composer chose a rondo form with a quasi-development section for the formal structure of the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*. "The rondo theme, the first strain, returns at least six times in its rhythmic form if not for verbatim." (Heyman 1982, 559). See Ex. 5–13.



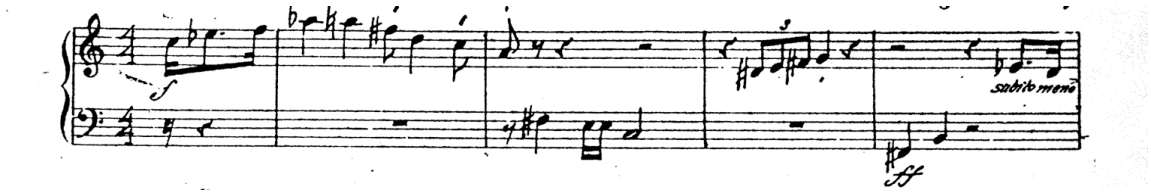
Ex. 5–13 Igor Stravinsky *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, cimbalom part, "Rondo theme."

The common ragtime harmonic progression of tonic-subdominant-dominant was of little interest to Stravinsky. Heyman, writing on the subject, states:

" [The *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*] does not follow the plan of traditional ragtime pieces; much of the time Stravinsky seems to be avoiding a commitment to a tonal centre.

However, he does use typical jazz coloristic seasonings of diminished chords, major seconds plunked on series of accented notes, and other suggestions of 'blue note' sounds, in their adaption to instruments with fixed pitches, for example the cimbalom skidding between D natural and D flat at measures 5–10, while the bass line suggests a tonal centre of B flat…" (Heyman 1982, 559).

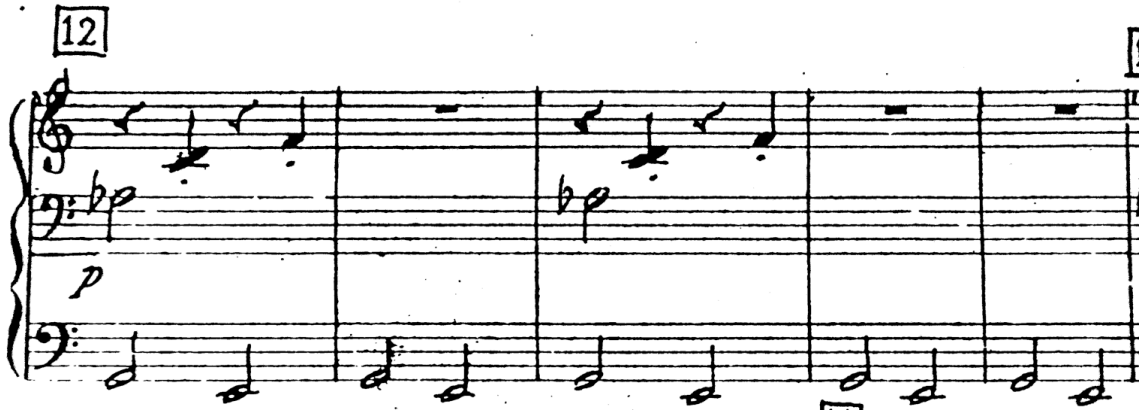
Like the one-act opera *Renard*, Stravinsky scores for the cimbalom with a two-stave format (piano system), with a bass and treble clef respectively. The opening four measures of the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, starting on an anacrusis, sets up the work's spirit and style with a compact tune in the cimbalom that is doubled by the winds and strings. See Ex. 5–14.



Ex. 5–14 Igor Stravinsky *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, cimbalom part, opening measures of tune fragment.

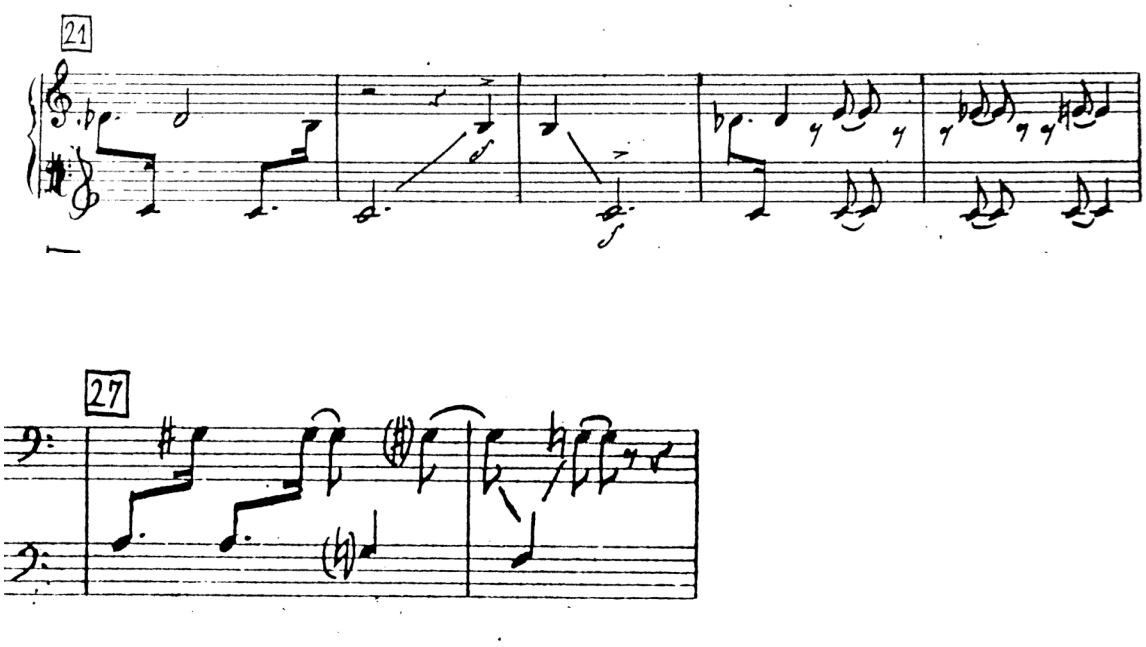
The use of dotted rhythms in the *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*—one of the defining features of ragtime music—are often interpreted today in an "open" swing style. Ragtime recordings from the early twentieth century give evidence to either a strict dotted eighth note/sixteenth note rhythmic interpretation, somewhere in between a strict and a swing (triplet) feel. The melody writing in the cimbalom "bounces" along in a dotted eighth/sixteenth note swing-like fashion that is similar in manner similar to the right hand of a piano ragtime work. Stravinsky once again uses the two-stave system for the cimbalom, but here with a more horizontal approach in the scoring, and fewer double-stops than *Renard*. Starting at four measures before rehearsal number 12 (see Ex. 5–15), the cimbalom switches to role as accompanist, here doubling the bass while the violin and

viola take over the melody. The cimbalom's double stops (written in the upper stave) create some performance issues when trying to articulate the staccato markings. A question of interpretation then arises: does the performer release the pedal to play the double stops as staccato (with the result of the bass notes being cut short), or to let the upper notes (staccato) ring in order to keep the sustain going in the bass?



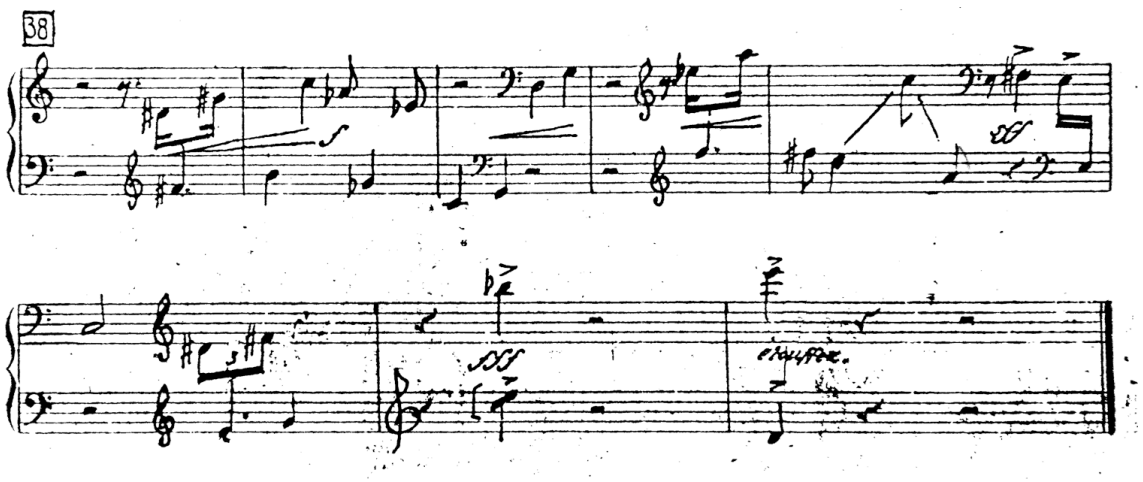
Ex. 5–15 Igor Stravinsky *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, cimbalom part, rehearsal number 12, doubling the bass part with upper notes in staccato.

Stravinsky now fragments the rondo theme in the cimbalom, at first using the instrument's middle register (between rehearsal number 21 and 23), then moving to its lower register (rehearsal number 27). See Ex. 5–16.



Ex. 5–16 Igor Stravinsky *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, cimbalom part, rondo theme fragmented in the cimbalom, rehearsal numbers 21 - 25 and 27.

The opening theme's five measures in the cimbalom (doubled by winds and strings) returns as a false recapitulation starting at four measures after rehearsal number 30. Rehearsal number 38 (see Ex. 5–17) to the end returns to the opening theme, now fragmented, until the abrupt stop on beat two of the second last measure on a C9 dominant chord. Time is suspended for two beats until the final chord is sounded on the downbeat of the last measure: an F major 7 chord over a "b" in the bass (F maj7/b). A solo cymbal note ("choked") has the last word on beat two—a stock ragtime cliché (signifier).



Ex.5–17 Igor Stravinsky *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*, cimbalom part, two fragmented statements of the opening theme with final two measures, rehearsal number 38 to end.

5.5 Conclusion

In the chapter on "Stravinsky's Neoclassicism" in the *Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, Martha M. Hyde argues that Stravinsky's compositional output during the "Swiss period" can be seen as "works in parody" and "…a controlled mode of anachronism…" (Hyde 2003, 101). She goes on to say that the composer was mocking the popular conventions of the day, albeit in a playful and "innocent" manner. Further into the article, Hyde makes the claim that the composer was really not all that interested in improvisation—he was actually mocking it.

> Stravinsky's *Piano-Rag-Music* bears out this view, especially when in its ending, which surely pokes fun at contemporary infatuation with jazz improvisation and rags (see Ex. 6.1). Building up to an extended climax of improvisatory flourishes, the piece suddenly subsides to an exhausted, motoric vamp that abruptly breaks off for no apparent reason, as if the performer abandons the piece for lack of inspiration of interest. (Hyde 2003, 101)

By 1920 Stravinsky had lost all interest in the ragtime style. Reasons for this can be explained as a series of correlated events: 1) the genre had all but declined in America

(now replaced by the newer styles, like the "Charleston" and the "Two-Step"); 2) ragtime music was in a decline throughout Europe; 3) World War I was now over and Stravinsky had returned to Paris (urban centre) with a new interest in the older forms and tonality of classicism; 4) his self-proclaimed neo-classical approach resulted in his distancing from the folk music that prevailed during his Swiss Period (rural centre); 5) the use of non-standard Western instruments, like the cimbalom, harmonium, luthéal, et al, while not being intrinsically tied to the ragtime genre, seemingly had no place in his neo-classical phase. Although Stravinsky never scored for the cimbalom after 1920, he nonetheless gave the instrument its well-deserved place and respect in the Western art music canon.

Chapter Six

6.1 Hungarian Nationals

6.2 Zoltán Kodály

6.3 Belá Bartók

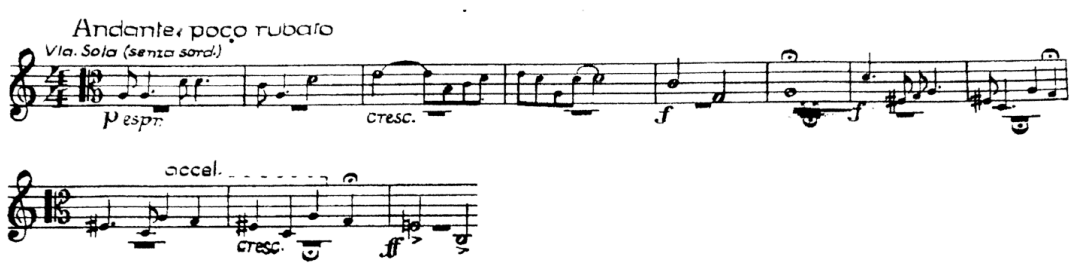
Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) wrote the comic opera *Háry János* in 1926. That same year he wrote a six-movement suite, the *Háry János Suite*, consisting of instrumental interludes taken from his opera. To date, the *Háry János Suite* remains one of his most programmed works, perhaps only rivaled by his *Psalmus Hungaricus* (1923) and the D*ances of Galánta* (1933). An iconic piece of Hungarian nationalism, the *Háry János Suite* (and opera) are rife with symbolism. Kodaly's only work scored for cimbalom, the opera is both a homage and a continuation of the Hungarian national operatic tradition, established by the composer, Fernec Erkel (1810–1893). Perhaps it is no coincidence that Kodály, like Erkel, chose the cimbalom (Hungary's National Musical Instrument) to play a significant part in the orchestration of a nationalistic opera. The musical form *verbunkos,* like the cimbalom, function to reinforce Hungarian national pride by drawing on its history. Kodaly, who initially had an aversion to the verbunkos medium (as did Bartók), eventually gave way and revisited the nineteenth century musical form in his *Háry János*. "Both composers [Kodály and Bartók] must have returned to it through the verbunkos elements preserved in instrumental folk music… Kodály seemed to wish to do justice to this nineteenth century music out of historical and national considerations." (Dobszat 1993, pp.187). Both traditions, the verbunkos and the cimbalom, place their historical origins in Hungary prior to Roma contact. However, the Roma eventually

appropriated both traditions by the mid nineteenth. Perhaps this might account for both composers "aversion" to the verbunkos medium, and perhaps even a reticence for scoring for the cimbalom despite its prior use by other Western art composers (see Liszt and Erkel).

Unlike his contemporary, Belá Bartók (who scored for the cimbalom more as an accompaniment), Kodály had pushed the instrument further into the "sonic spotlight." This is not surprising given the narrative of *Háry János* is steeped in Hungarian folklore and mythology. Having the cimbalom front and centre in the orchestration, Kodaly reinforces the opera's narrative while also transporting the listener to "another time and place," in other words, nineteenth century Hungary. Háry János (the first name and last names being reversed in Hungarian) was a fictionalized living person who was a retired solider from the early nineteenth century. His tales were grossly exaggerated over time (like his single-handedly defeating of Napoleon) and were used as folkloric device to further the cause of Hungarian nationalism. The tales became legend, and were eventually memorialized in a poem by the Hungarian poet, János Garay. The opera's libretto was a reworking of Garay's poem by the librettists Béla Paulini and Harsányi Zsolt.

It is easier to examine the suite from *Háry János* since only two of its six movements feature the cimbalom. The order of movements is slightly different than that of the opera's, and Kodály reworked the overture ("The Tale Begins") to open the suite. The

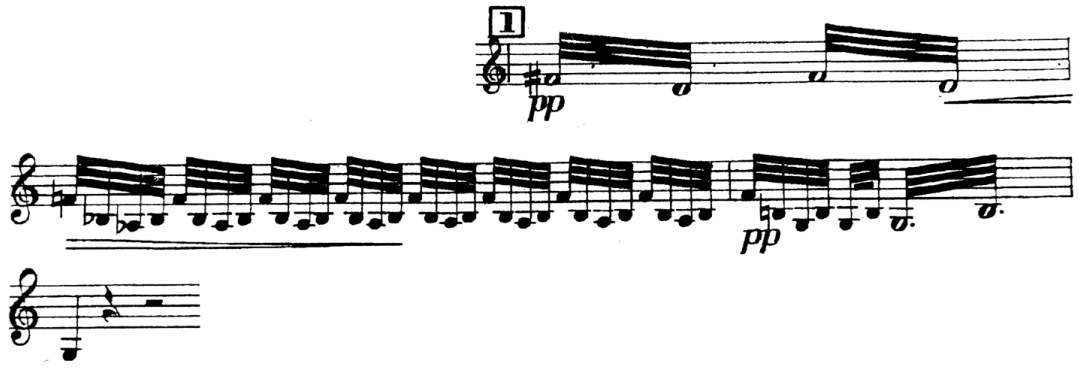
cimbalom's first entry happens directly after the viola solo in the third movement,[83] "Lied" ("song" in English): a love duet and telling of Háry's love for Örzse. In the suite's version the vocal line is absent, but the melodic approach with the strings and cimbalom scoring function in a similar manner: to draw the lovers into a state of reflection and reminiscing of the homeland (in its rural essence). The opening melody in the viola is a folk tune that traverses two keys: a minor and D major (see Ex. 6–1). Kodaly "borrows" (appropriates?) the folk tune, known as *This Side the Tisza, Beyond the Danube*, from a collection of folk songs in Bartók's *Hungarian Folksongs Volume 2*.[84]



Ex. 6–1 Zoltán Kodály *Háry János*, "Lied" mm. 1–11, folk tune in the viola.

[83] The third movement of the Suite is the eighth movement in the opera, "Duo." There are seven extra measures of cimbalom writing—a roll on the pitch "a"—in the opera that Kodály cut from the Suite.
[84] See Belá Bartók, *Hungarian Folk* Songs. (Westport, Conn: Hyperion Press, 1979).

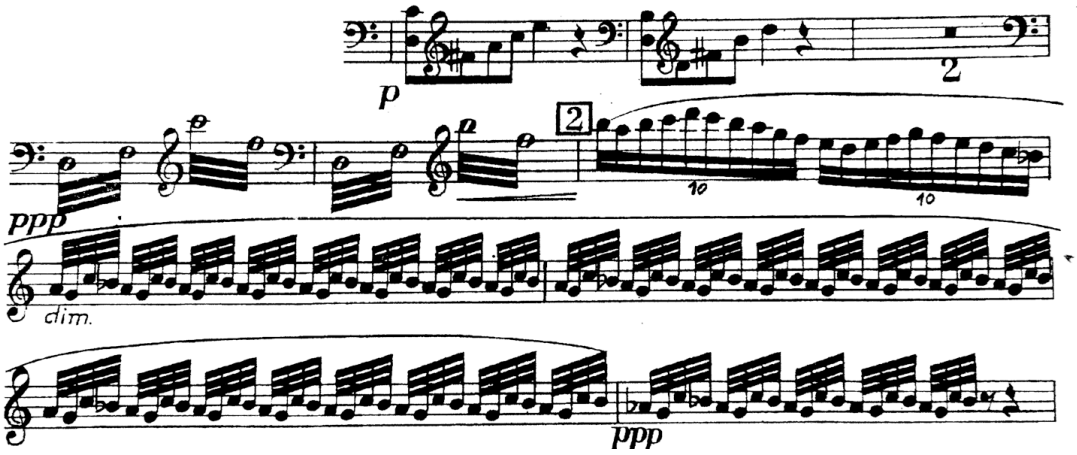
The cimbalom entrance at rehearsal number 1 functions as textural coloring—a "shimmering" effect that picks up on the D major tonality, then moves through f minor and G major tonal centres. Overall, the harmonic approach is one of a common practice tonality throughout the entire work (both opera and suite). However, the melodic writing traverses both folk and non-folk mediums. The rhythm at rehearsal number 1 is often performed in a fluid way that is less mechanical than written. The function here again is one of "colouring" effect that in turn evokes a feeling (longing) for the homeland (see Ex. 6–2).



Ex. 6–2 Zoltán Kodály *Háry János*, "Lied," cimbalom part, mm. 12–15.

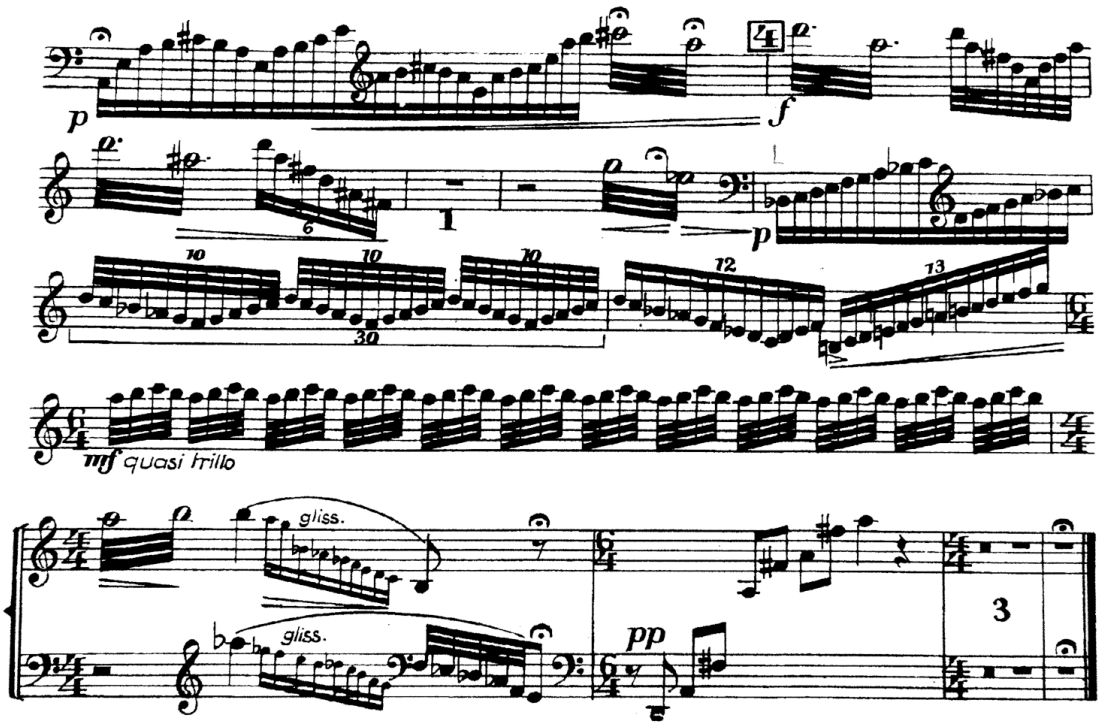
Measures 23 and 24 are solo punctuations in the cimbalom, in the form of "answers," harmonically sounding on a dominant 7th chord in D major, and then a b minor chord. Two bars prior, at rehearsal number 2, the cimbalom rolls on a d minor chord are a build up to the solo in the next measure (see Ex. 6–3). The rolling on the strings of a cimbalom are seen and heard as an idiomatic device of the instrument that has a parallel in marimba performance practice. Listeners often equate the timbre of trills, rolls, or flourishes on the cimbalom with a multitude of images and emotional responses. Personally, the author

has heard comments like: “another time and place,” “old world Europe,” “rural countryside,” “folk-ness” or “Gypsy-ness.” In measures 27 and 28, Kodály uses these subjectively codified devices to the fullest as a lead-up to the cadenza-like solo in measure 29 (rehearsal number 2). Measure 30–33 returns to the “coloring” effect as background, similar to measures 13 and 14.



Ex. 6–3 Zoltán Kodály H*áry János*, “Lied,” cimbalom part, mm. 23–33.

The solo writing, beginning at one measure before rehearsal number 4, has idiomatic use of cimbalom scale flourishes that are often heard in Roma performance practice (see Ex. 6–4). Kodály here makes use of a freer, more improvised style that looks back and draws from the verbunkos. Although not indicated in the part, a sense of the exaggerated is what often is needed in these passages. Having performed the work many times, I have concluded that this is exactly what Kodály would have wanted. It is important to note that the composer must have worked out theses passages in advance since they “sit” well on the instrument. The descending glissando, six measures from the end, has both hands traversing each side of the centre bridge—a made-up scale consisting of tritone pairs and perfect fifths that result from playing down the centre bridge’s tuning scheme.



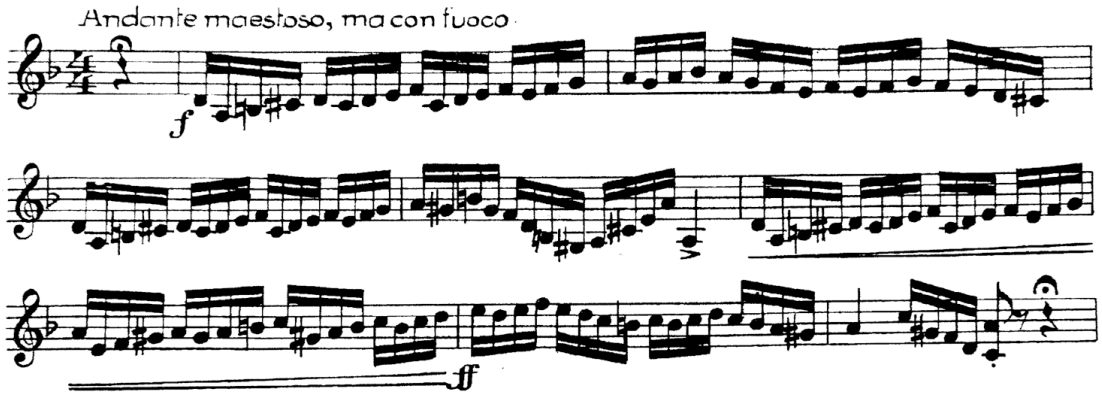
Ex. 6–4 Zoltán Kodály *Háry János*, "Lied," cimbalom part, one measure before rehearsal number 4 to five measures before the end.

The fifth movement of the Suite, the "Intermezzo," appears as the ninth movement in the opera, titled "Zwischenspiel" (Interlude). In his book, *Zoltán Kodály A Hungarian Musician*, Percy M. Young reveals the source of the pitch material Kodály borrows from in the "Intermezzo":

> The folk-music came mainly from Kodaly's own researches, but the melody of the Intermezzo [No.10 (sic) in the opera, the fifth movement of the Suite] was taken from a piano method by István Gáti, issued in 1802, and that of the *con moto* of Háry's song, 'Hullo, hullo, brave rider', from a piece ascribed to Bihari. (Young 1964, p. 85)

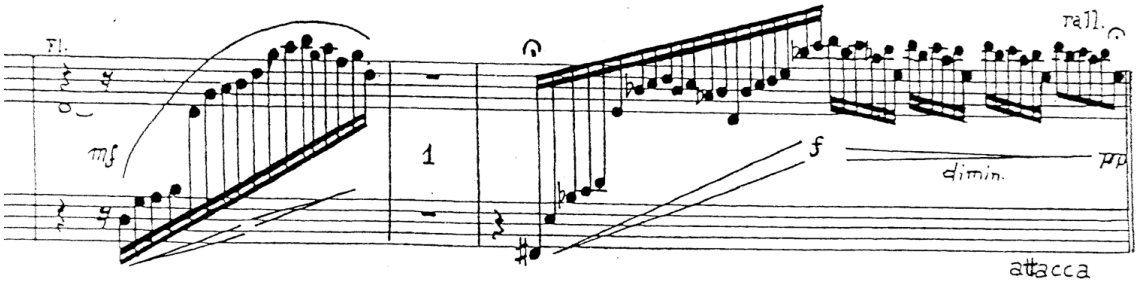
Kodály's uses the verbunkos in the "Intermezzo" as a three-part form with the trio in two-part form. The rhythms are lively and decorated—a spirited dance that transports the listener to back in time (nineteenth century Hungary). This is the closest Kodály comes to

any Gypsy music styling in either work: the verbunkos form structure plus musical signifiers in the cimbalom writing (arpeggios and one note trilling). Example 6–5 clearly shows how the cimbalom supports and rhythmically drives the opening (main) theme of the "Intermezzo."



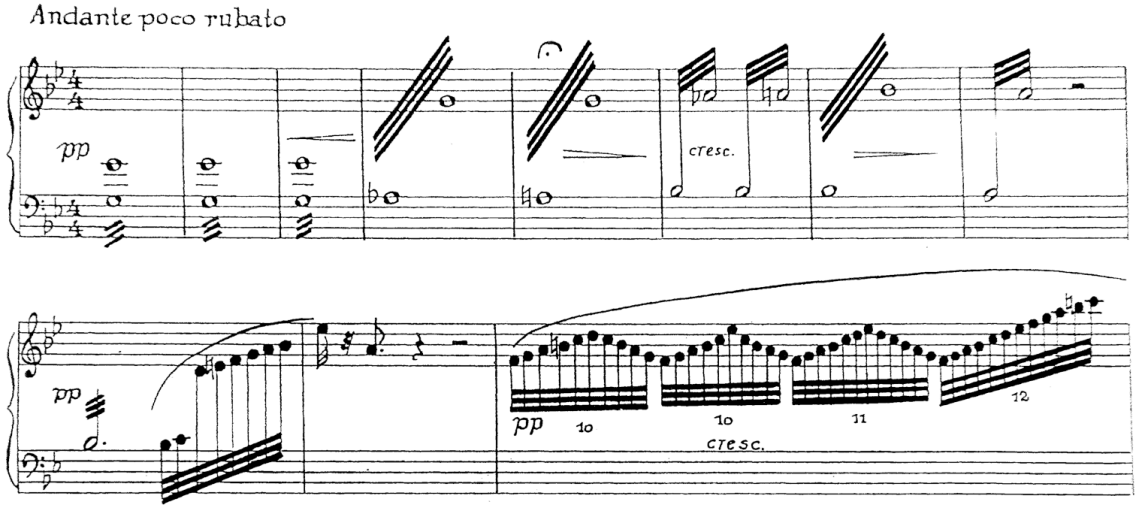
Ex. 6–5 Zoltán Kodály *Háry János,* "Intermezzo," cimbalom part, mm. 1–8.

The opera's remaining movements with cimbalom (six in total) do not appear in the Suite. The opera's second movement, "Flötenspiel des Husaren" (a Hussar is playing the pipe), is a flute solo using the same folk melody as the viola from the third movement of the Suite ("Lied"). While both versions function as musical interludes (without voices), the opera's version is more pastoral than the folk-like "Lied" from the Suite. The flute acts as the stand-in for the piper (onstage actor/role of a soldier) who mimics the flute's sound coming from the pit of the orchestra. The cimbalom's role is one of support with its "answering" of the flute's solos with flourishes (see Ex. 6–6).



Ex. 6–6 Zoltán Kodály *Hary Janos,* cimbalom part, last three measures of "Flötenspiel des Husaren."

Movement six, "Lied: Roter Apfel" (also known as "Piros alma"), is János's solo (see Ex. 6–7). The cimbalom supports János's baritone voice with textural underpinnings in the form of trills and colouristic flourishes. Kodály's writing here straddles two mediums at once: Western art song and a Gypsy lassú (verbunkos).



Ex. 6–7 Zoltán Kodály *Háry János*, "Lied: Roter Apfel," cimbalom part, mm. 1–11.

Movement seven, “Trinklied: Plattensee,” is a baritone solo with a prominent cimbalom part heard above the orchestra. The movement is likened to a Viennese operetta that is set in a steady 2/4 metre (*con moto*). The running melodic figures in the cimbalom are more idiomatic of wind writing (clarinet and flute) set in the Viennese operetta style. Movement 14, “Lied: Hühner…,” the soprano is lead voice with the cimbalom doubling the winds and the strings. The cimbalom’s timbre comes into the foreground when the orchestration thins out or when the dynamics are marked “piano” in the orchestra. The cimbalom’s function here is more support with the filling out the texture in the orchestration—in other words, a more classical approach rather than a folk or Gypsy music styling. The final two movements of the opera (with cimbalom) are Movement 22, “Das Lied von den Husaren” (A Soldier’s Song), and Movement 28, “Lied Arm Warich,” (literally translates as Song of the Poorly Warmed”). The cimbalom writing is very densely written in the “Das Lied von den Husaren” with its endless repetition of melodic patterns and arpeggios. In the “Lied Arm Warich,” the cimbalom reverts back to its role as textural colouring, similar to Second and Sixth movements.

6.3 Béla Bartók

Belá Bartók (1881–1945) wrote only one work for cimbalom, the orchestral arrangement of his *First Rhapsody for Violin and Piano* (1928). Written and dedicated to the violinist Joseph Szigeti, the orchestral version was published under the title of *First Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra* one year later. It has been argued that Bartók's familiarity with Hungarian Gypsy music (and by proxy, the cimbalom) was extremely limited. Bartók, like his contemporary, Zoltán Kodály, was an ardent supporter for the preservation of the Hungarian *folk* song tradition. Bartók's ethnographic research in the remote villages of rural Hungary and Romania has been well documented. His writings, based on transcriptions from the recordings he made using Edison's recording device (cylinders), are published in his book, *Hungarian Folk Music*.[85] In another published work, *Gypsy Music or Hungarian Music?*[86], Bartók argues his case for the idea of there being no such thing as a "Gypsy music." He goes on to state that what has commonly been labeled "Gypsy music" is nothing more than a lowbrow brand of appropriated "Hungarian popular music." Therefore, according to Bartók, this labeling of "Gypsy music" is nothing but a misuse of terminology. Quoting from his *Gypsy Music or Hungarian Music*, Bartók states the following:

> In reality the truth is simply this. The music that is nowadays played "for money" by urban gypsy bands is nothing but popular art music of recent origin. The role of this popular art music is to furnish entertainment and to satisfy the musical needs of those whose artistic sensibilities are of a low order. This phenomenon is but a

[85] See Bartók, Belá. 1979. *Hungarian Folk* Songs. Translated by M.D. Calvocoressi. Westport, Conn: Hyperion Press.
[86] See Bartók, Belá. 1931. "Ethnographia," *Hungarian Ethnographic Society. XLII, No.2.* Reprinted in the *Musical Quarterly, Vol.33, No.2 (Apr., 1947)*, pp.240–257.

> variant of the types of music that fulfill the same function in Western European countries; of the song hits, operetta airs, and other products of light music as performed by salon orchestras in restaurants and places of entertainment. That this Hungarian popular art music, incorrectly called gypsy music, has more value than the abovementioned foreign trash is perhaps a matter of pride for us, but when it is held up as something superior to so-called "light music", when it is represented as being something more than music of a low order destined to gratify the undeveloped tastes, we must raise our solemn voices in protest. (Bartók 1931/1947, 240–241)

The question then remains: why would Bartók score for an instrument with its strong associational ties to "urban popular music" and the Roma? David Schneider puts forth the notion that Bartók might have been paying tribute to his friend and colleague, Zoltán Kodály (Kodály scored for the cimbalom two years prior to Bartók's *First Rhapsody* in his *Háry János*). It can also be argued that Bartók may have taken an interest in the cimbalom having discovered (probably for the first time) its capabilities of a four octave chromatic range with damper pedal—both design features hitherto unavailable on earlier cognates. Either way, the composer gave the cimbalom its legitimacy by featuring the instrument in a substantial work in the repertoire. Quoting Schneider:

> Bartók's decision in 1928 to turn to Transylvanian fiddle tunes he had collected before the First World War in his two **Rhapsodies** for Violin may have been inspired by Kodály's use of Transylvanian instrumental music in his popular *Dances of Maroszék* (1932?–27). Likewise, Bartók's inclusion of a cimbalom in the orchestration of the **First Rhapsody** may we owe a debt to Kodály's use of the instrument in *Háry János* (1926). (Schneider 2006, 216).

In his chapter titled "Cimbalom as Symbol," David Schneider notes that at the first performances of the *First Rhapsody* the cimbalom was taken as a sign of "authentic peasant roots" (a point I am sure Bartók would not agree with).[87] Later in the article

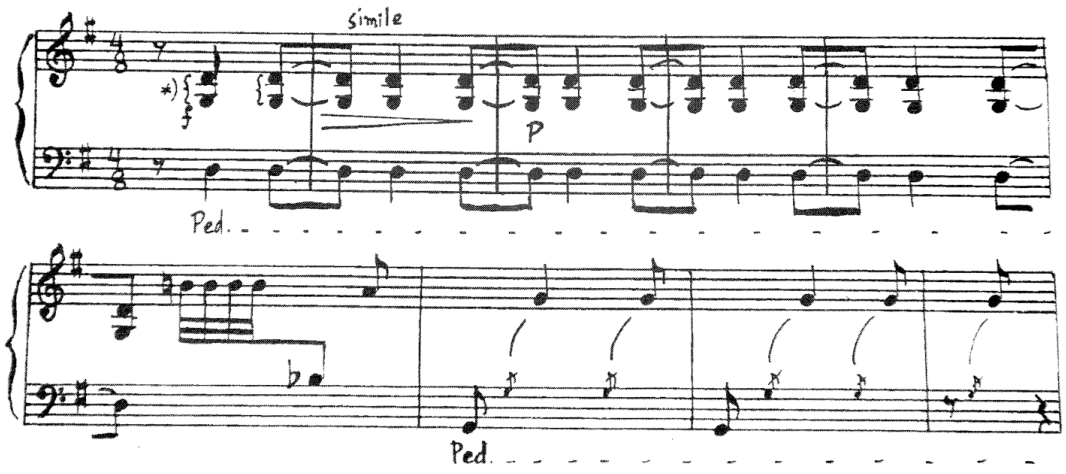
[87] See Schneider, p.216

Schneider points out that the cimbalom, or rather its earlier cognates, are markers with a rural association: often manufactured in urban centres (e.g., Schunda), but ultimately ending up back in a "rural" environment. Although somewhat of an easy position to argue for, perhaps this points more towards the Roma's nomadic nature. The "Cimbalom as Symbol," with its rural or "peasant" signifiers, has more to do with the cimbalom's predecessors (for example, the tsymbl or hackbrett) and its performers, often Jewish or Roma itinerant musicians. With respect to the *First Rhapsody* and Bartók's approach with the instrument, the writing aesthetic comes more from a modernist angle with any of the "peasant" appropriations being restricted to the melody and pitch material in the solo violin. For Bartók, the cimbalom was essentially a *classical* instrument despite its Roma stewardship at the time. Further to that, Bartók would have been aware of the cimbalom's roots and its classical tradition via the few works by Erkel, Liszt, and the Nemzeti Zenede.[88] Quoting Schneider again: "Despite its folk roots, Bartók includes it [the cimbalom] in the "art instrument" section of his 1924 dictionary entry *Instruments of Hungary*."[89]

The cimbalom player who worked closely with Bartók on the *First Rhapsody* was the virtuoso, Aládar Raáz. Rácz would have been an obvious choice for Bartók given his long-standing association with the composer Igor Stravinsky (see Chapter 3). Rácz, who also gave the work its premiere, is quoted, as saying there were passages deemed "unplayable." The passages he would be referring to are most likely the ones written for

[88] Nemzeti Zenede was Budapest's oldest music conservatory. The cimbalom had been accepted into the school's program as a serious instrument of study in 1890.
[89] See Schneider, p.216

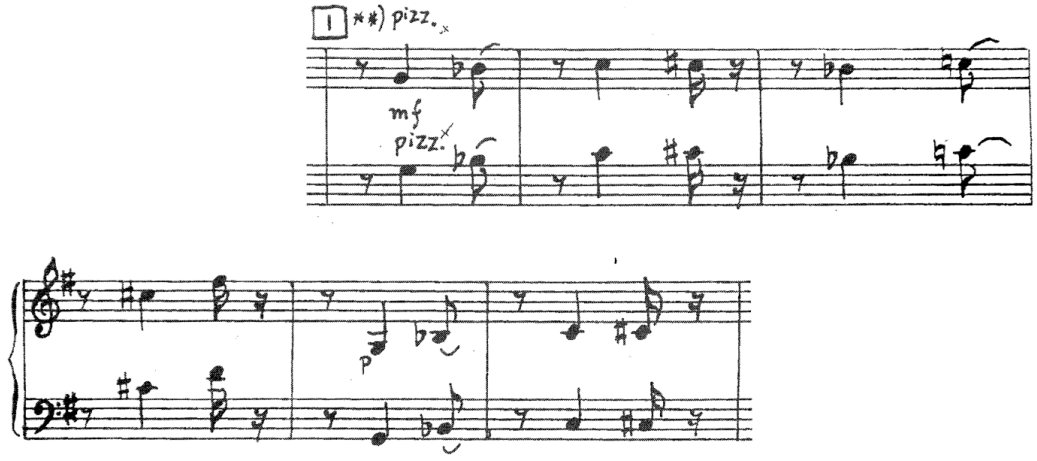
more than two notes in one hand. The opening six measures of the work shows a clear example of this problematic writing (see Ex. 6–8).



Ex. 6–8 Belá Bartók *First Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra*, Movement I, cimbalom part, mm. 1–8.

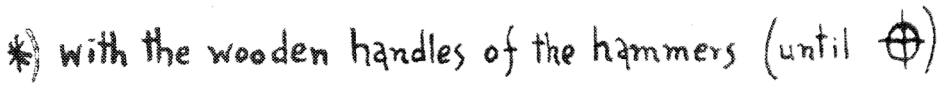
The "g" and "d" in the upper stave would be impossible to play in the one hand given its expanse. Also, and unlike any keyboard instrument (piano, marimba, et al), the strings on a cimbalom run vertically, thus making it difficult to position the mallets across the string with two mallets in each hand. We see a similar problem occurring with the opening March in Stravinsky's *Renard* (see Ex. 5–2). It is also interesting to observe that Bartók chose the same system of notation that Stravinsky preferred when notating his cimbalom parts—piano stave notation. However, the two composers diverge when it comes to how they each work out the instrument's seemingly arbitrary pitch placement: Stravinsky worked out his sticking patterns ahead of time and would sometimes use the staves to separate the hands rather than just limiting them to bass and treble clef pitch division; conversely, Bartók had left everything up to the performer to work out on their

own. Bartók's use of the pizzicato in the *First Rhapsody*, something not used up to this point in cimbalom performance practice, was consistent with his overall modernist aesthetic in string writing (for example, the use of the composer's name for the extended technique known as the "Bartók pizzicato"). *Pizzicato* markings occur at rehearsal numbers 1, 3, and 14 in the first movement, rehearsal numbers 11 and 31 in the second movement, and rehearsal number 25 in the "Alternate Finale" (see Ex. 6–9).



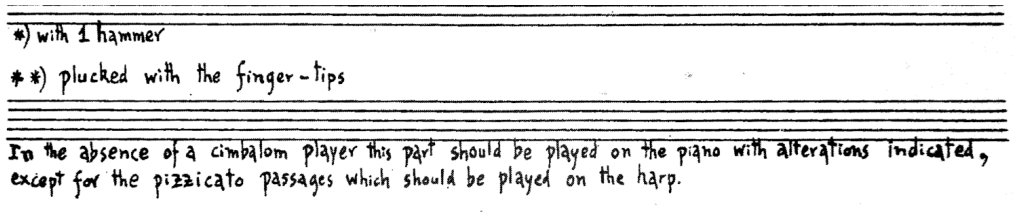
Ex. 6–9 Belá Bartók *First Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra*, Movement I, cimbalom part, mm. 11–16.

The indication for use of "wooden handles of the hammers [on the strings]" might have come by way of a suggestion from Rácz. A technique that Stravinsky made prominent use of in his *Renard*, Rácz would have been familiar with this technique having played Stravinsky's works.



Ex. 6–10 Belá Bartók *First Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra,* Movement I, footnote on page 2 of cimbalom part.

At the bottom of page one of the cimbalom part, Bartók's footnote reads as follows: "the one hammer indication for two notes; the pizzicato with fingers indication; and the substitution of piano and harp 'in the absence of a cimbalom player." Stravinsky gave a similar instruction in his score and parts for his *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments*. The availability of recordings today (for both works) can be heard with either instrument—the cimbalom, or its suggested substitutes.[90]



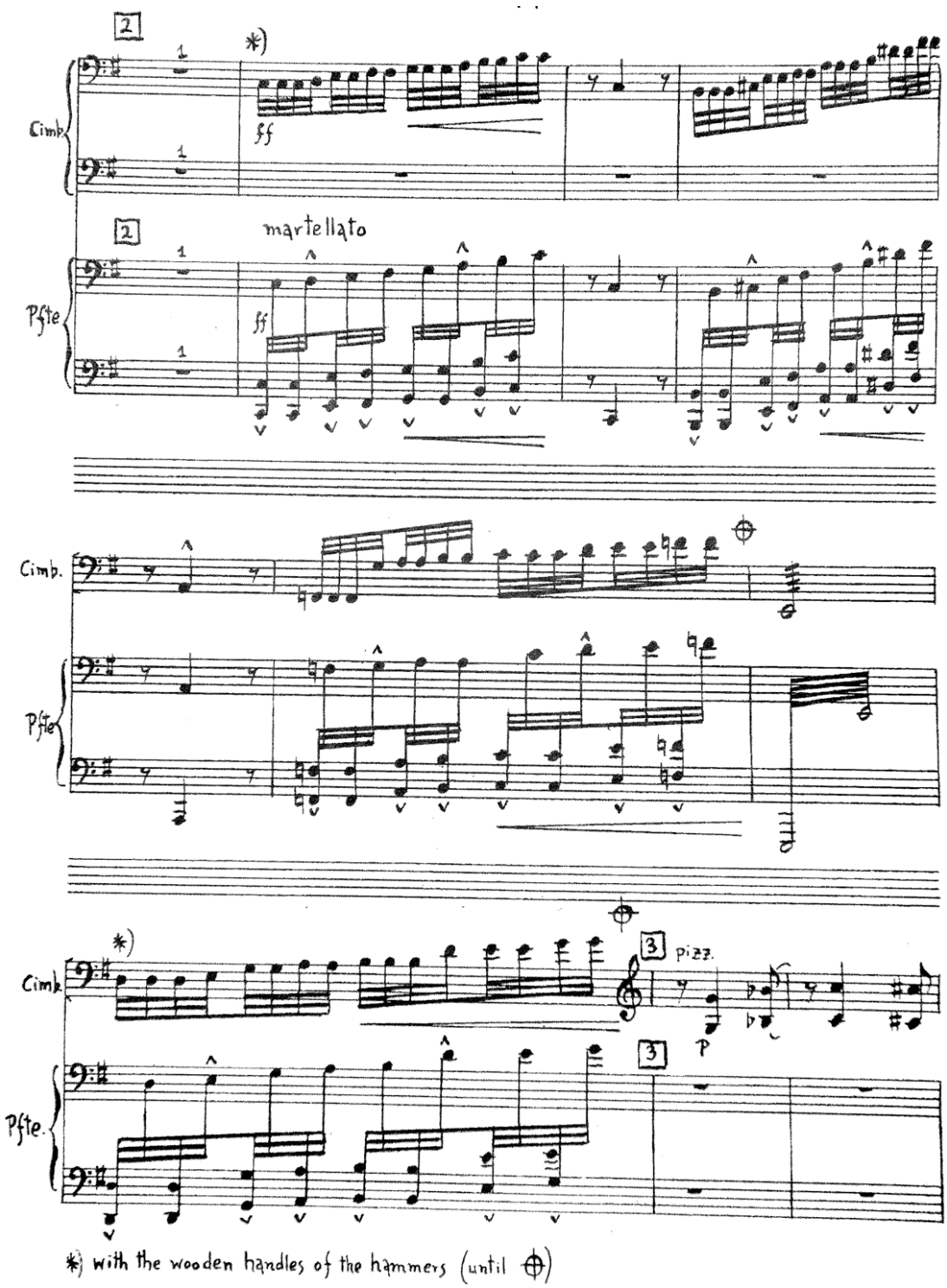
Ex. 6–11 Belá Bartók *First Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra*, Movement I, footnote on page one of cimbalom part.

The cimbalom's function in the *First Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra* is that of a continuo-like, chordal accompaniment to the solo violin. Referencing the opening measures in the cimbalom part, and much of the part writing in general, Schneider points to Bartók's use of the *esztam* as its accompaniment model. Schneider defines the esztam as: "A traditional accompaniment used by Gypsy and peasant musicians." (Schneider

[90] When comparing two or more recordings of these pieces—one with a cimbalom, the other with a piano or harp—it is quite remarkable to note the differences in terms of their timbral and emotional effect on the listener.

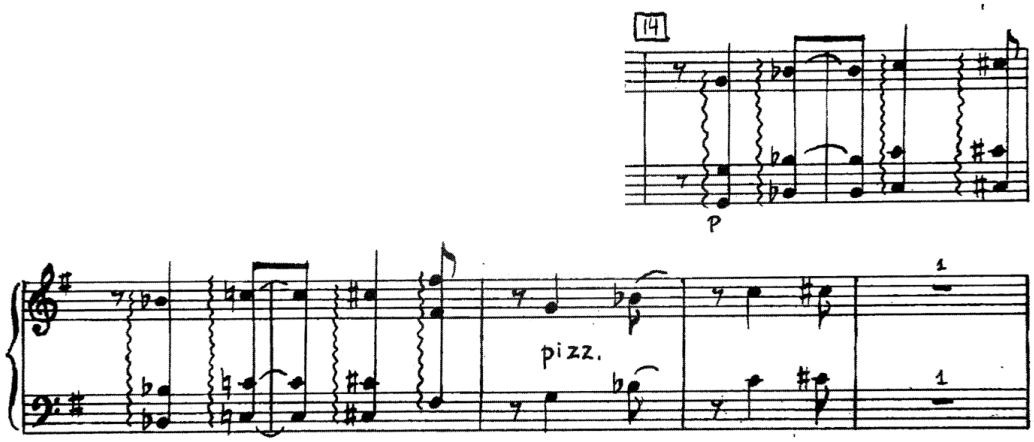
2006, 216). The opening theme in the solo violin finds it source from a Romanian folk song known as a "De ciuit" (translates as *calling to the dance*). Bartók transcribed the De ciuit melody in 1914 after hearing a "peasant" violinist perform it in rural Transylvania. The composer notated numerous other "peasant" melodies at this time (while in Romania and Transylvania), some that appear in other sections of the *First Rhapsody*.[91] When it comes to problems with performance practice in the cimbalom part, mallet switching is the main one. The use of "wooden handles of the hammers," starting at one measure after rehearsal number 2, becomes a problem at seven measures after rehearsal number 2 when the performer is asked to turn the mallets back to play the tremolo. One measure later the player is expected to switch back to the mallets wooden ends, but again, an impossibility with the way the part is written. Rehearsal number 3 is another problematic area with the removing of the mallets in time to play the pizzicatos. This extended passage must have been what Rácz had flagged as "unplayable?" Example 6–12 shows exactly where Bartók wants the player to make all these mallet switches (also see composer's footnote at the bottom of the example).

[91] Bartók's methodology in ethnography worked as follows, 1). Record and notate folk melodies verbatim as a means of preserving them. 2). All documented melodies are considered as source material for future works. There is a movement within academia today that takes the view that this approach (the Bartókian "method") is considered to be an act of cultural appropriation at the highest level.



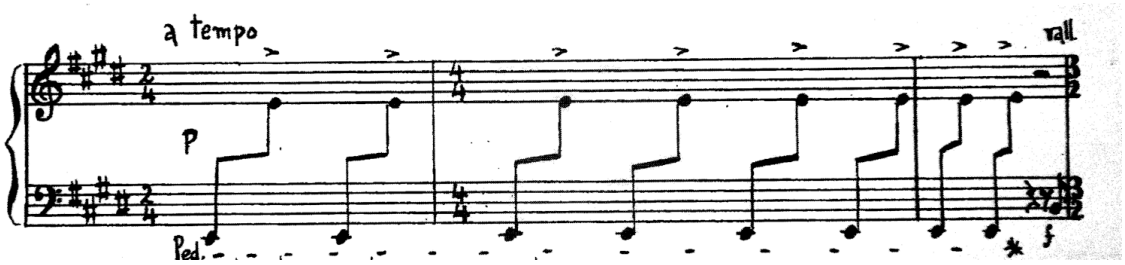
Ex. 6–12 Belá Bartók *First Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra*, Movement I, cimbalom and piano part, rehearsal number 2 to 3.

One measure after rehearsal number 12, the performer is asked to pick up the mallets again. The "*In modo ordnaro*" refers to regular (cotton) ends of the mallets. Rehearsal number 14 is another example of what Rácz would have deemed "unplayable." The "rolled" octaves span such a great distance that the player would find it challenging to stay in time. Three measures after rehearsal number 14 is another example of the problematic switch from mallets to pizzicato (see Ex. 6–13).



Ex. 6–13 Belá Bartók *First Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra*, Movement I, cimbalom part rehearsal number 14.

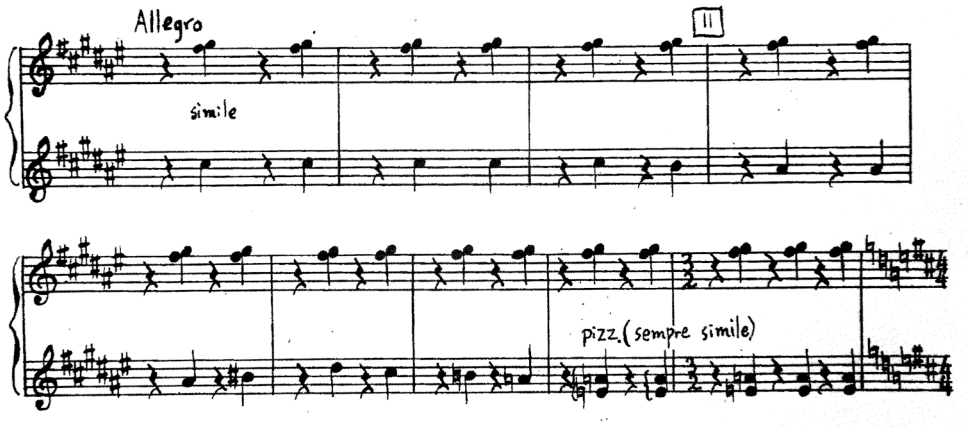
At three measures after rehearsal number 6, Bartók employs the same system Stravinsky used with the hands separated by staves (see Ex. 6–14).



Ex. 6–14 Belá Bartók *First Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra*, Movement II, cimbalom part, three measures after rehearsal number 6.

Starting at six measures after rehearsal number 10, the *Allegro,* two problems with playability appear in the part. The three-note chord "c–f–g," a suspended chord, again would require two mallets in the one hand. While this stretch is possible on the *upper* bridges of the cimbalom (the proximity of the "f" to "g" being close), the sounding result would be less than ideal in terms of its weak volume and projection.[92] The second problem, starting at 5 measures after rehearsal number 11, is the pizzicato in the lower stave and the simultaneously sounding double-stop in the upper stave (see Ex. 6–15). It is not clear as to whether or not the composer would have wanted another instrument (perhaps a piano?) to take the one stave, and for the cimbalom to take the other. Since no indication is given, we can reason that it was to be performed by just the one player, in other words, only the cimbalom. Rácz surely would have flagged this section as problematic.

[92] What is known as the traditional grip in cimbalom performance practice positions the mallet between the index finger and the middle finger. While a modern grip does exist—here being closer to a percussionist's keyboard style mallet grip—the majority of players prefer the older, traditional style grip. A two-mallet grip in the one hand forces the player to abandon the traditional style grip and adopt a pseudo percussion mallet type of grip. Based on personal experience, the author considers the two-mallet-in-one-hand grip less than ideal due to its awkwardness of movement, and, as previously mentioned, its inability to produce enough power in volume.



Ex. 6–15 Belá Bartók *First Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra*, Movement II, cimbalom part, *Allegro* to six measures after rehearsal number 11.

Starting at rehearsal number 28 and going up to one measure before rehearsal number 32, we encounter a similar set of problems previously mentioned. Again, if Bartók had made an indication in the score that another instrument would be needed for the division of labor, then the part writing works. Otherwise, the cimbalom scoring in the *First Rhapsody* is quite unplayable in many of its sections.

6.4 Conclusion

The *Háry János* opera remains a milestone in the Hungarian operatic tradition that began with Ferenc Erkel in the nineteenth century. Kodály's opera, written in the twentieth century with its narrative set in the early 1900's, pays homage to both the folk song tradition and the art song tradition in Hungarian opera. Hints of the Hungarian Gypsy musical style are present with the use of one of its primary markers, the cimbalom, as heard in Gypsy bands from the nineteenth and twentieth century. Kodály's use of the verbunkos form is another way in which the composer honours Hungary's musical past.

Schneider sums up Bartók best when looking at the scoring for the cimbalom in the *First Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra* as follows:

> His [Bartók] integration of the cimbalom into the orchestra with the aid of Schunda's innovations was thus a continuation of a Hungarian tradition; as the history of the cimbalom demonstrates, however, this was not a tradition of purity, but one of importation and change. (Schneider 2006, 216)

Schneider's quote can be seen as both complimentary and critical of the composer. He seemingly applauds Bartók's inclusion of the cimbalom in the orchestra as a way of carrying forward the "Hungarian tradition," but it also can be easily argued that Bartók's interest in maintaining any tradition with the art of cimbalom performance was, for the most part, non-existent. Bartók's compositional approach and scoring and for cimbalom in the *First Rhapsody* is essentially a *modernist* one. Any adherence to "tradition" would be one of a Western art tradition rather than a Hungarian Gypsy tradition. His problematic scoring of the cimbalom can be seen as sloppy at best, or indifferent at worst. From another perspective Bartók's use of the cimbalom as a continuo, and, probably for the first time in Western art music, the use of cimbalom pizzicatos in the *First Rhapsody*, was groundbreaking.

Chapter Seven

7.1 György Kurtág

Hungarian composer György Kurtág (b.1926) comes from Lugoj, the Banet region of present day Romania. He taught piano and chamber music at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music from 1967–1993. Kurtág composed music for the bulk of his active career under the tight control of Soviet rule in Hungary. After the demise of the Soviet Union, Kurtág lived abroad from 1990 to 2001. Since 2002 he and his wife have resided in the south of France. His compositional output consists of works in the solo, chamber, and symphonic categories. Of his fifty plus works, just under half (nineteen) are scored for cimbalom. Compared to other twentieth and twenty-first century Western art composers, Kurtág's output remains the most prolific for the instrument.

Kurtág's body of works can be viewed as uniquely individual, while also being informed by a modernist aesthetic. His use of quotation is often fragmented to the point of non-discernibility, and yet the label of "post-modern" would not be a fitting one. His compositional approach can generally be described as forward looking, and yet one that honours specific traditions. The influence of Webern, Schoenberg, and Bartók[93] are obvious, along with the other more experimental composers Kurtág would later come into contact with outside of the Iron Curtain.[94] The ties to Webern's music would prove a lasting one—especially when it comes to pitch set theory and the reductionist aesthetic. In this respect Kurtág's music arguably picks up where the Second Viennese School left

[93] In the case of Bartók, more for his modernist approach rather than a folk influence.
[94] György Ligeti was the person who introduced the works of Karlheinz Stockhausen to Kurtág.

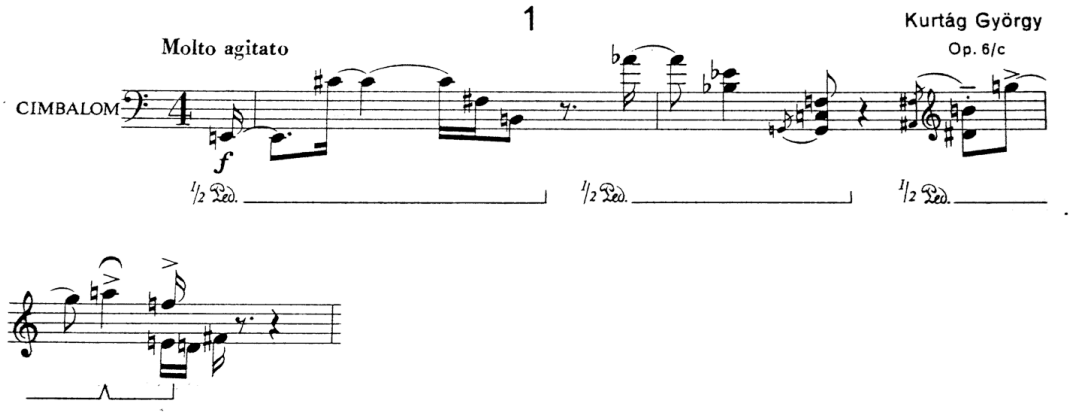
off. Of his nineteen works scored for cimbalom, two of them, *Splinters, op.6c* and the *Scenes from a Novel, op.19*, are significant in revealing the cimbalom's functionality to be inextricably connected to the text. The first work mentioned, *Splinters*, a solo work for cimbalom, finds the music acting as narrative for its source material, a poem. The *Scenes from a Novel* is scored for a quartet comprised of soprano voice, violin, contra bass, and cimbalom (a close marker for a "standard" Gypsy ensemble). The text, sung in Russian, is a setting of fourteen poem fragments (one of the poems is repeated making up a fifteen a movement work). The preceding analysis of both works will examine the relationship between text, music, and the function of the cimbalom.

7.2 Splinters

Splinters, op.6c (1973) is Kurtág's only work for solo cimbalom, dedicated to the cimbalom virtuoso, Mártá Fábián. The four-movement work takes its title from János Pilinszky's poem, *Szálkák* (*Splinters*).[95] János Pilinszky (1921–1981) was a Hungarian poet who was deeply affected by the concentration camps of World War II (he was a prisoner during the war), and also by the Soviet occupation of Hungary after World War II. Pilinszky lived in isolation for most of his life, in part due to his estrangement from the Soviet regime. Kurtág was drawn to Plilinszky's works for three main reasons: his modernist aesthetic, use of fragmentation, and his use of time and space. "Splinters" refers to Jesus' crucifixion, but Pilinszky prefers the reductive term "splinter" (of the cross) for his poem's title. Kurtág's mirroring of Pilinszky's modernist approach at reductionism results in short musical gestures in the first and second movements. The

[95] Published in 1972.

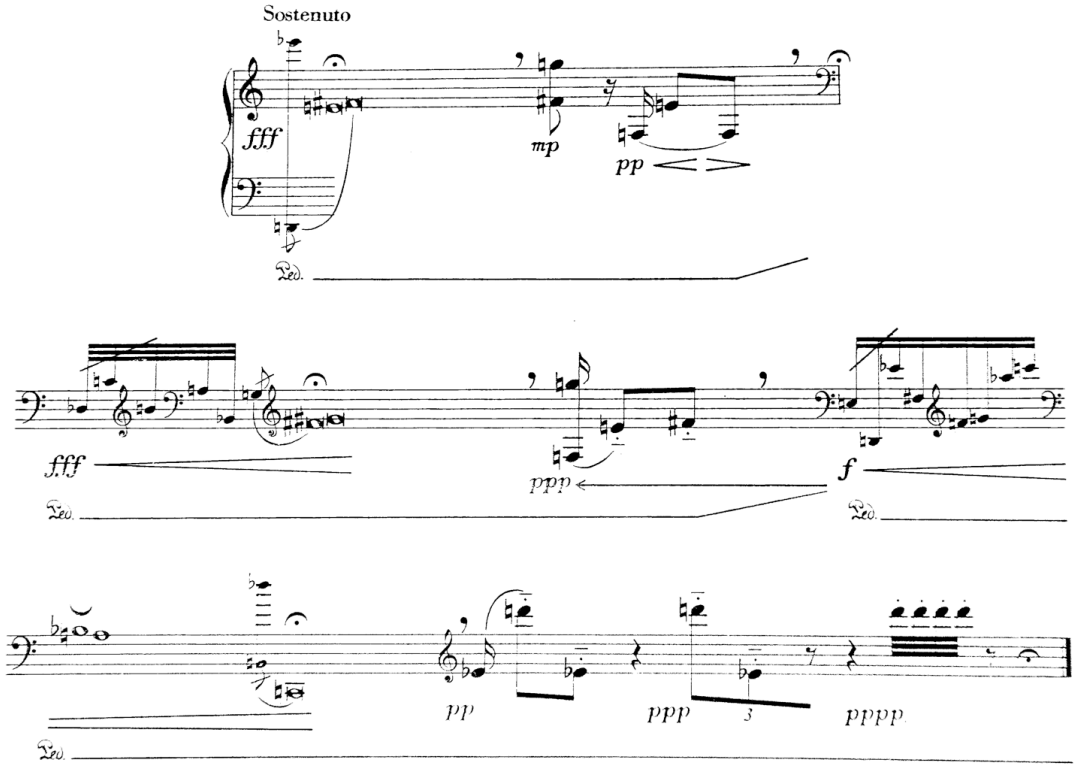
pitch set used in the first long gesture (made up of a series of shorter gestures) comprises eleven pitches in a twelve-tone set, "c" being the only pitch left out of the series (see Ex. 7–1). While not strict serialism, the Second Viennese approach here is evident.



Ex. 7–1 György Kurtág *Splinters*, op6c, 1st movement (version for cimbalom), mm. 1–3.

In the second movement, the pedal is held down throughout, and yet the effect is pointillist. The attack sound on the strings (obviously more audible in a solo work) has the aurals effect of a series of short, sharp splinters of wood. Kurtág's use of extreme dynamics (*fff* to *pppp)* represents Jesus' pain inflicted on the cross (*f –fff)*, and his mute suffering, here in the form of whimpers (*p–ppp*). In her book, *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music during the Cold War*, Rachel Beckles Willson references the three loud sections in the second movement of *Splinters* as being representative of the three violent blows of the hammer on the cross (Willson 2007, 146). The "three violent blows" are heard on the first, third, and fourth fermatas (see Ex. 7–2). Kurtág's use of the reductive gesture is exaggerated here when comparing the second movement to the first.

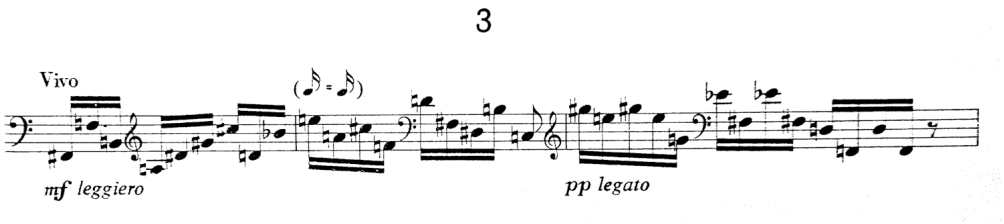
2



Ex. 7–2 György Kurtág *Splinters*, op6c, 2nd movement.

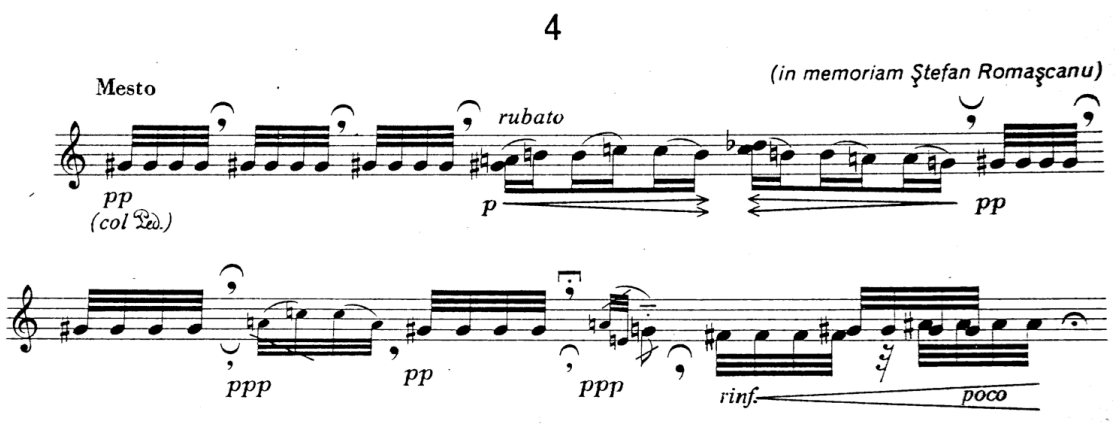
The third movement is a *moto perpetuo*. Six measures of unspecified metre changes to seven lines of unmeasured time, here making up approximately two thirds of the movement. Two added measures as a refrain, end the movement with a musical palindrome (last beat of final measure = first beat of first measure), on a three note motif: "f#-f-b/b-f-f#." Pitch-class sets consisting of "leaping" thirds and sevenths dominate the first half of the movement. The opening pitch set consists of eleven pitches up until Kurtág repeats the "c#." A new set begins at this point until reaching the repeated "g#," now making a pitch-class set of nine. A break in the middle of the movement, a reprieve, suspends the moto perpetuo's rhythmic grid. At this point Kurtág employs the use of tremolos—a musical device he rarely uses on the cimbalom—consisting mainly of major

7th intervals ("db-b#/f#-f-e") followed by a two beat rest. Ascending and descending chromatic scales, in fast rhythm, also marked with a soft dynamic (*ppp)*, contrast the previous section's *fff* tremolos before the "coda" marks a return to the perpetuo moto idea, now in diminutive form. The score's pedal markings indicated in the first and second movements are for some reason absent in the third movement. Kurtág's indication for the *staccato, leggiero, maracto,* and *legato* is perhaps a subtle suggestion to the performer to use the pedal with discretion? The one exception, a *Prestissimo,* is marked with a *col Ped.* (pedal down) until the "coda" section arrives.

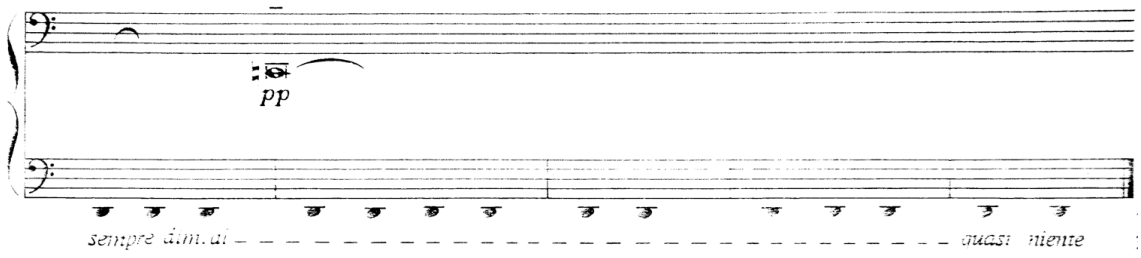


Ex. 7–3 György Kurtág *Splinters,* op.6c, 3rd movement, opening pitch set, mm.1–3.

Willson points out that opening gestures on the "g#" in the fourth movement (see Ex. 7–4) are "weeping figures typical of folk laments" (Willson 2007, 146). Approximately half-way through the movement an ostinato appears in the bass on the pitch "D_2"—a tolling figure—that fades to a "quasi niente (see Ex. 7–5)." The musical effect is one of resolution and release, or a release of the soul from the body.



Ex. 7–4 György Kurtág *Splinters* op.6c, 4th movement "whimpering gestures."



Ex. 7–5 György Kurtág *Splinters*, op.6c, 4th movement, "tolling figure."

It is an interesting question to ask why Kurtág would have chosen the cimbalom to musically represent the image of a crucifixion cross. Up until this point in time the cimbalom was perceived in a more codified way as an instrument of Gypsy or folk belonging. Kurtág's scoring of the cimbalom in his *Splinters*, while highly effective in its power and imagery, is scored in a modernist's aesthetic. The cimbalom gestures one typically associates with the Gypsy musical tradition are clearly not evident here.

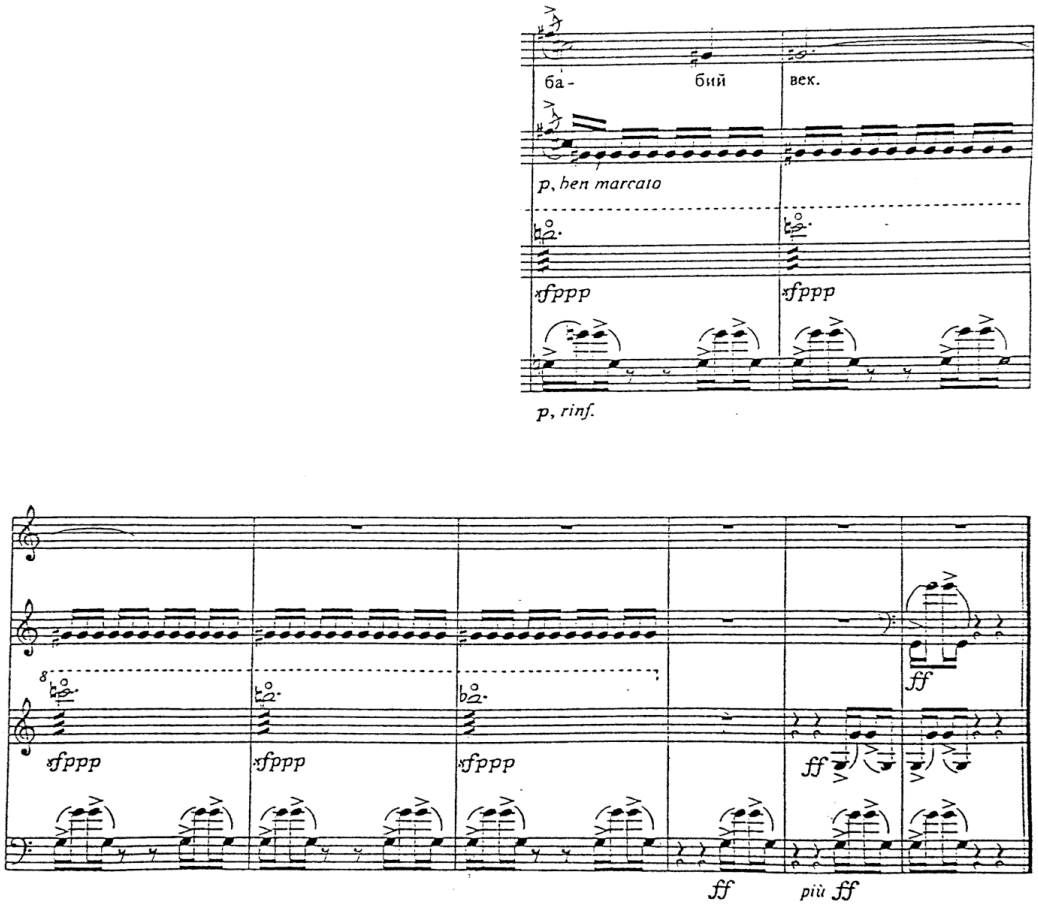
7.3 *Scenes from a Novel*

Kurtág's *Scenes from a Novel, op.19* is a scored for soprano, violin, cimbalom, and contra bass in fourteen poem fragments by the Russian poet, Rimma Dalos. The pairing of instruments is a marker for what is today considered the standard "Gypsy ensemble."[96] Gypsy music, while not being an aesthetic that aligns itself with Kurtág's body of works, parallels the deep emotional suffering of the Roma, and, at least on the abstract level, with the protagonist in the *Scenes from a Novel*. We will attempt to unravel what the composer was thinking in terms of the relationship of text to music, and Kurtág's choice in instrumentation for its effective delivery. For purposes of this study we will concentrate on the movements where the cimbalom is present. Passing comments about the movements without cimbalom will be kept to a minimum.

Movement one, "Come", is scored for soprano and violin. Diana Lentsner refers to "Come" as a "condensed synopsis" of the whole work rather than its introduction (Lentsner 2002, 100). The vocal line consists of a pitch-class set termed as "pseudo-dodecaphonic" (Kurtág also uses this technique in the *Splinters,* op6c). The pitch set changes with each phrase, and the phrases (clearly marked in the score with commas in the vocal line) rise and fall in a "question-and-answer" manner. The violin line juxtaposes the vocal line with its open fifths, fourths, and thirds. The overall emotional/harmonic effect is static in austerity.

[96] Gypsy ensembles often have two violins—a solo violin, also called the "prima," and a second violin for accompaniment. Sometimes a guitar is added.

Movement two, “From Meeting to Parting,” is only twenty-three measures long. Often referred to as “fragments” rather than songs (Lentsner 2002, 24), the cimbalom’s first entry is then in “fragment two,” or simply “From Meeting to Parting.” The harmony/pitch-class in this fragment centres on a “g.” The three instruments dovetail with each other in the form of “answers” that doubling up in the part writing. The metre, while not indicated, is a triple rhythm with an implied 12/16 division. Repeated use of hemiola’s releases the tension in the rhythmic phrases at measures 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9 (see example 7–6). The hemiola rhythm takes over the pulse (in the form of duplets) starting at measure 16 in the bass against the cimbalom’s triplet rhythm. The violin and cimbalom join with the bass’s duplets in the last three measures, thus creating a rhythmic-unison-cadence. The vocal line, starting at measure 7, begins and ends on a “g.” The soprano’s contained range (“g – f#”) is a pitch cell that chromatically moves back and forth to its “g” centre. The penultimate measure in the vocal line (measure 15), an anacrusis to the tritone “c#,” leads us to the climax/central meeting point, again on the pitch centre of “g.” The cimbalom reinforces the vocal line at measure 16 with grace notes that are in a perfect fourth intervallic relationship to the tritone (“f#” and “g#”), and stays on the “g#” for a total of six measures, acting as a V chord to the tritone. The insurmountable tension created between the “g#” in the cimbalom, the bass’s “g” natural, and the chromatic movement in the violin (“Bb – C”) finally “breaks” when the violin and cimbalom join the double bass, all resolving on the pitch “g.”



Ex. 7–6 György Kurtág *Scenes from a Novel*, op.19, "From Meeting to Parting," score, mm. 16–23.

The tri-part structure of Dalos's poem is supported in the music with its emphasis on the "leaving/parting" middle section—a woman's grasp at hope turned to empty longing.

"From meeting

to parting,

from leaving-taking

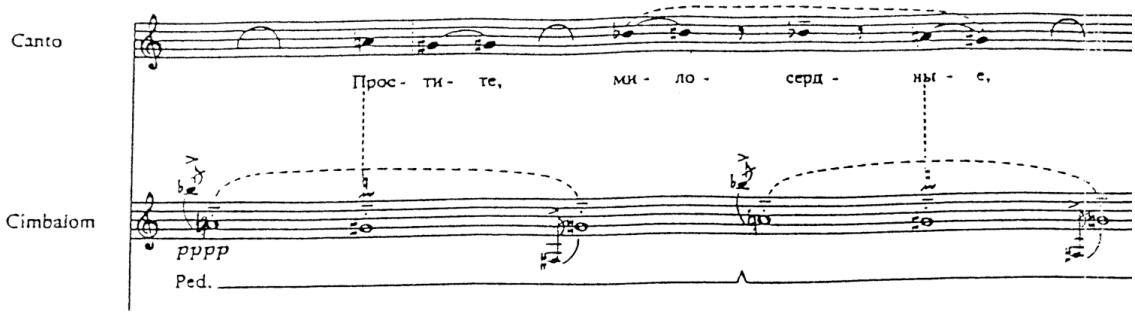
to awaiting

- that was my woman's lot."[97]

In movement three, "Supplication," the voice and cimbalom are in the foreground as one unit, with the violin and contra bass coupled together as the second unit. The two groups act somewhat independently of each other, but a canonic relationship exists between the two in their pitch cell groupings. The violin and contra bass's repeated glissandi figures have an inverse relationship to one another with the violin's up/down contour, and the contra bass's down/up contour. The violin's pitch-set on "f#-c-b" is mirrored by the bass's "f-b-c." The cimbalom repeats a descending three-note pitch cell in the first section with a "a–g#–g." The first and third notes of the set, the "a" and "g," are preceded by grace notes ("b-flat" and "f#"). At first glance, the phraseology between the voice and cimbalom appears random: the cimbalom's figures in the first section begin, end, or punctuate the vocal line in the middle of the phrase. The cimbalom here functions like an isorhythm in relation to the voice. Therefore, function and form are likened to a baroque recitative with an added isorhythm. The cimbalom's pitch cells consist of major 7th dyads (wide) and "tight" pitch-class sets (close) that span either a

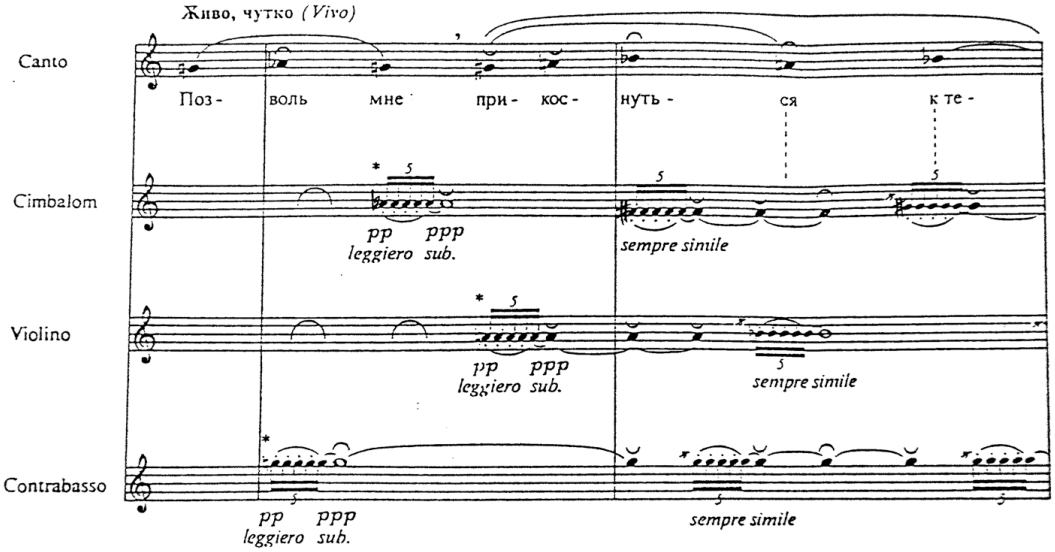
[97] Rimma Dalos "From Meeting to Parting."

major 2nd or a minor 3rd. In the second section, the harmonic rhythm in the cimbalom's line moves quicker than the voice's (diminutive form). The cimbalom's function switches to a lead voice, yet still being subservient to the text. The imitation that occurs between the cimbalom and voice at the first two phrase endings in the second section, has the same pitch and contour. The sparse texture is reminiscent of Webern in its gesture and use of pitch material. The extreme dynamics (*ppp -pppp)* in the cimbalom create a distant, haunting effect. The instrument's intrinsic "out-of-tune" character also lends the listener a whole series of sound images (signifiers) that in a general way can be summed up as "other time and place." It is hard to speculate on whether or not Kurtág is counting on these subjective associations of the listener. However, as is often the case with his other pieces, the work at hand (in this context, the text), combined with Kurtág's modernist aesthetic, always takes first order. The instruments' Kurtág chooses (soprano, cimbalom, violin, et cetera) is a means to that end. At this juncture it can be argued that, for Kurtág, any instrument's signified meaning bears little interest for him: each work's creation is unique for its form, function, purpose, and the means to achieve this end.



Ex. 7–7 György Kurtág *Scenes from a Novel,* op19. "Supplication" excerpt.

Movement four, "Allow Me," parallels the 2nd movement with its hocketing between the three instruments, this time in groupings of five note figures (see example 7–8). The ricochet effect creates a sense of confusion and agitation in the listeners mind. Each instrument independently anticipates or imitates the voice's pitch content with a chromatic assent in each one of its phrase-sets. The tension is subtle with each instrument marked *leggiero* and *pp.* The cimbalom is the only instrument to break free from the hocket pattern with grace notes that lead into a trill that sets up the third and fourth phrase in the vocal line. The pitch-sets between all four parts span either an interval of a second or a third, and they maintain that intervallic relationship in the chromatic descent of the vocal phrases. The last six measures are like a coda—a dying away after the last vocal phrase (*calando e perdendosi*). The cimbalom alternates pitches on a C major chord against a "db" in the contra bass. The violin imitates the voice with ascending phrases that eventually end on a "c#," here against the cimbalom's "c" and "e" natural.



Ex. 7–8 György Kurtág *Scenes from a Novel,* op.19, "Allow Me," score, mm.1–3.

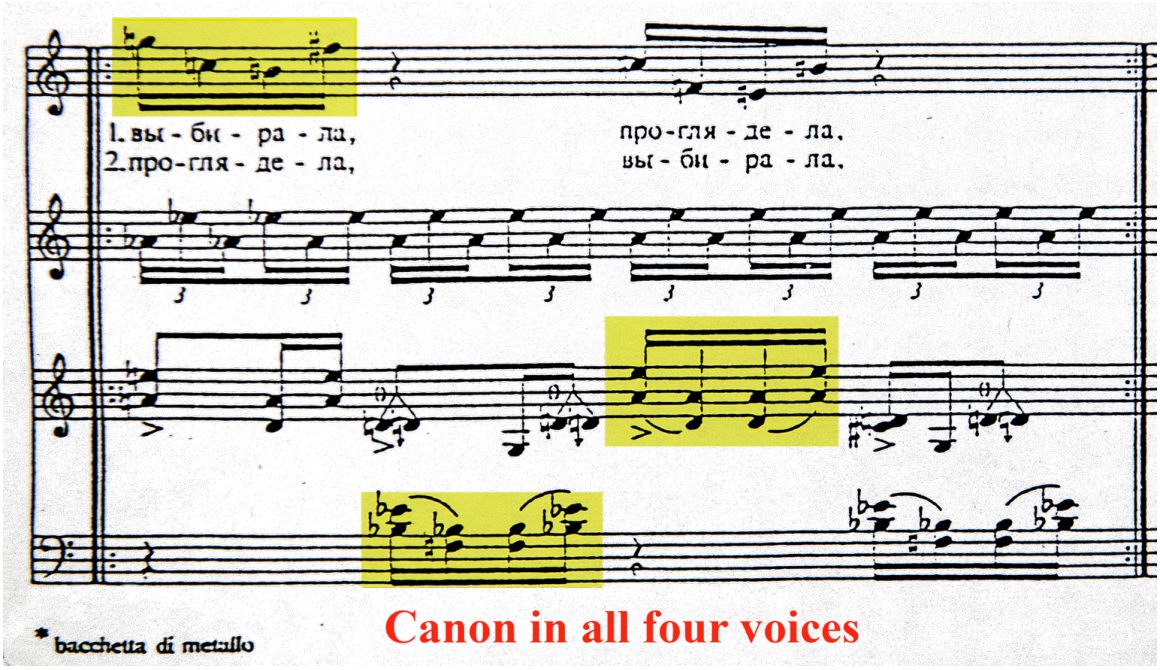
In movement five, "Counting Rhyme," the text reveals to us the protagonist's bitter state of mind. Dalos' poem reads:

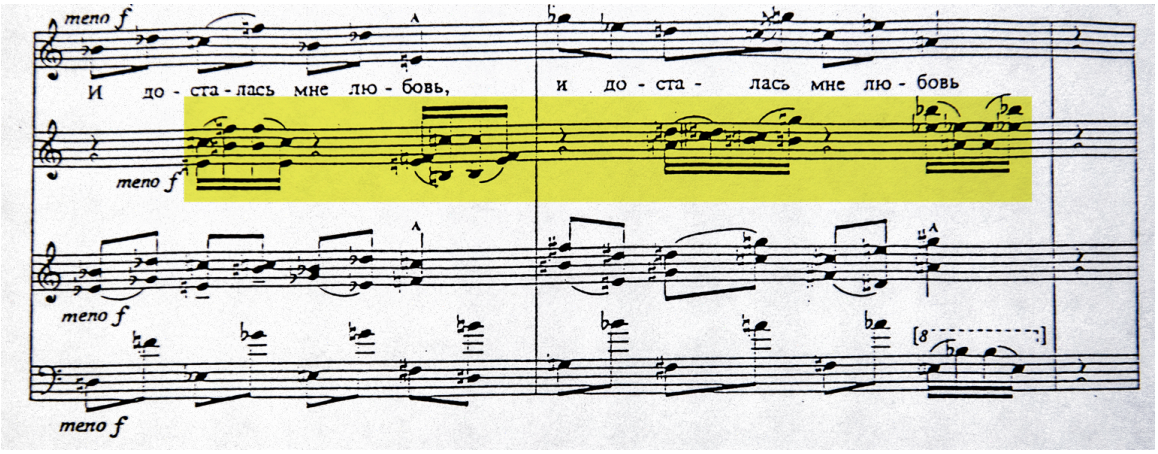
"Here and there I picked up and chose
till all my chances slipped away
and I was left here with this love
so ragged and tattered, torn and frayed."[98]

The cimbalom scoring conjures up adjectives like "brittle" and "icy." A footnote in the score/part indicates for the use of "bacchetta di metallo" (metal mallets) on the instrument throughout the entire movement.[99] The cimbalom's attack of the metal-on-metal timbre closely matches the mood in the text. The open fifths in the cimbalom and violin ("a – e") sets up measure one with the contra bass, here creating an open tuning sound in contrast to the "tight" intervallic relationship of the preceding movements. Each figure resolves on a tension note, a minor second, but then returns to the open fifths with each repeated sequence. The last sequence, down a minor second, alternates on open fifths ("ab – eb") in a sixteenth note triplet rhythm. The hocketing patterns return, but now with the violin and cimbalom. The short middle section (two measures long) has the cimbalom imitating the contra bass's patterns in the last parts of the first and third sections (see Example 7–9). The third section returns to the open sound of fifths, in canon with the violin, that are a minor second apart from each another. The last chord in the

[98] Rimma Dalos "Counting Rhyme."
[99] Most cimbalom performers use triangle beaters for metal mallets in this work. The author performed the work twice using triangle beaters.

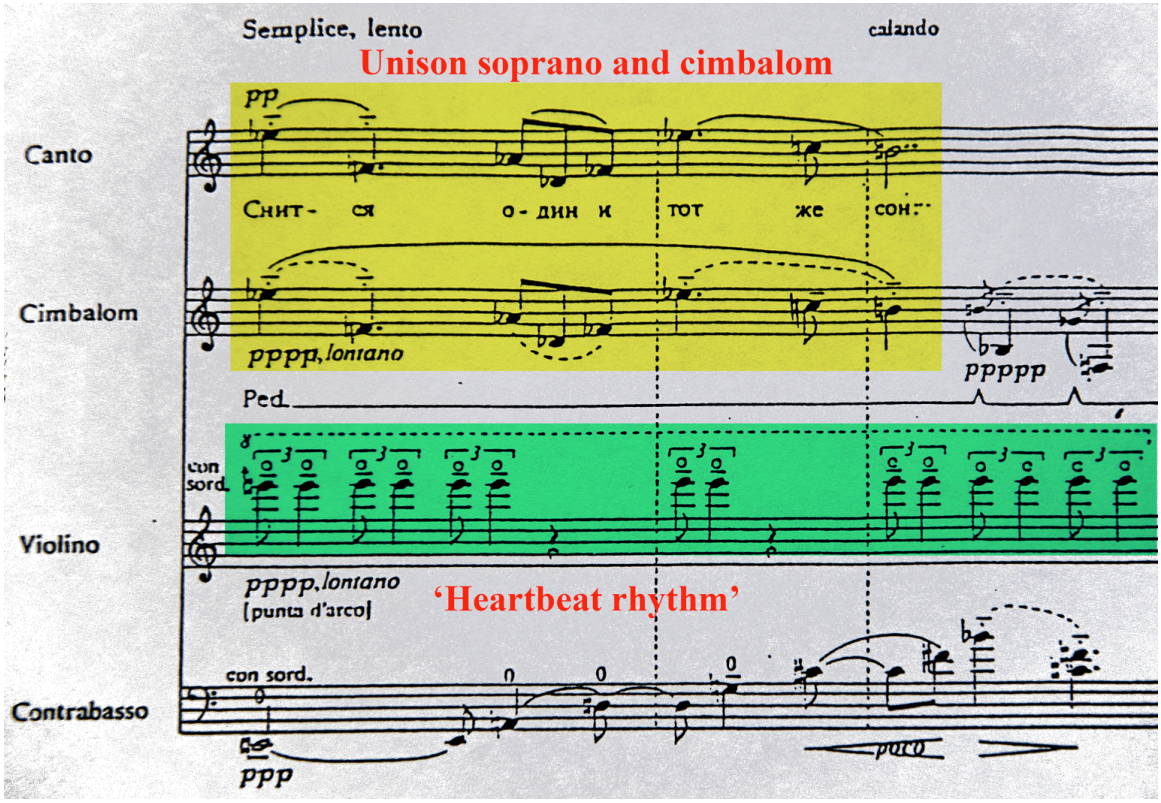
cimbalom breaks up the sound of the preceding open sonorities, ending on a “f/f#-g/d” chord with a high ”g” in the bass and “g/d/a/bflat” in the violin.





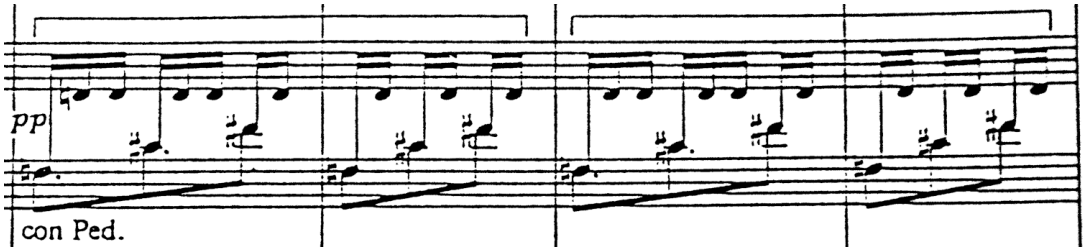
Ex. 7–9 György Kurtág *Scenes from a Novel,* op.19, “Counting Rhyme,” score, mm. 8 and mm. 10–11.

In movement six, "Dream," Kurtág sets the vocal line to four phrases that matches the four lines of Dalos's poem. The first phrase has the voice and cimbalom in a perfect unison to one another in both pitch and rhythm. Underneath this the violin pulsates on a high "g" harmonic figure in a triplet rhythm. The effect is one of a pulsating heartbeat, reminding us of the protagonist's longing for her lover: "Every night the same dream: I beg you to come near." (See Ex. 7–10). The second phrase breaks away from this pattern with the voice singing in sustained notes over the violin and cimbalom's pairings in rhythmic unison. Kurtág uses the following pitch-class set: "eb-f-ab-b-flat-c-db." The pitch-class set in the last phrase is slightly altered. The final measure ends on an explosively abrupt *fff* ascending figure in a rhythmic unison.



Ex. 7–10 György Kurtág *Scenes from a Novel,* op19*,* score, "Dream," mm. 1–3.

In movement seven, "Rondo," the title takes its name from the movement's rondo form: an ABABAB form set in mixed metre. The metrical changes are not indicated in the score/part, but its pulse can be described as a "jagged" waltz with its one-two-three-pattern frequently being disrupted. The metrical unevenness creates an instability that mirrors the text's contradictory feelings of "bliss" and "parting." The cimbalom's entrance at measure 82, or the ninth measure of the *Più calmo, grazioso*, is a pedal point that propels the pulse forward underneath the violin's open fifths and long tones in the contra bass (see Ex. 7–11). The pedal note on "d" in the right hand is rhythmically woven into the ascending line "f-c#-f#" in the left hand. The pitch-set class can be analyzed as a minor third within a perfect fourth, or two groupings of minor seconds. Long tones in the contra bass support the cimbalom's pitch set that eventually dissipate with the thinning out of the text. The pedal tone pattern comprises a two-measure phrase set in a 4/8 + 3/8 rhythmic pattern that reverses the pattern to a 3/8 + 4/8. The 4/8 is further subdivided into a 3+3+2 pattern. A 2/8 pattern is introduced at measure 95 that jars the listener into any feeling of regularity of pulse. The composer's indication for the cimbalom's use of pedal (*con Ped.)*, in combination with the open fifths of the violin and long tones in the contra bass, creates an ethereal effect that eventually "floats" away with the text.



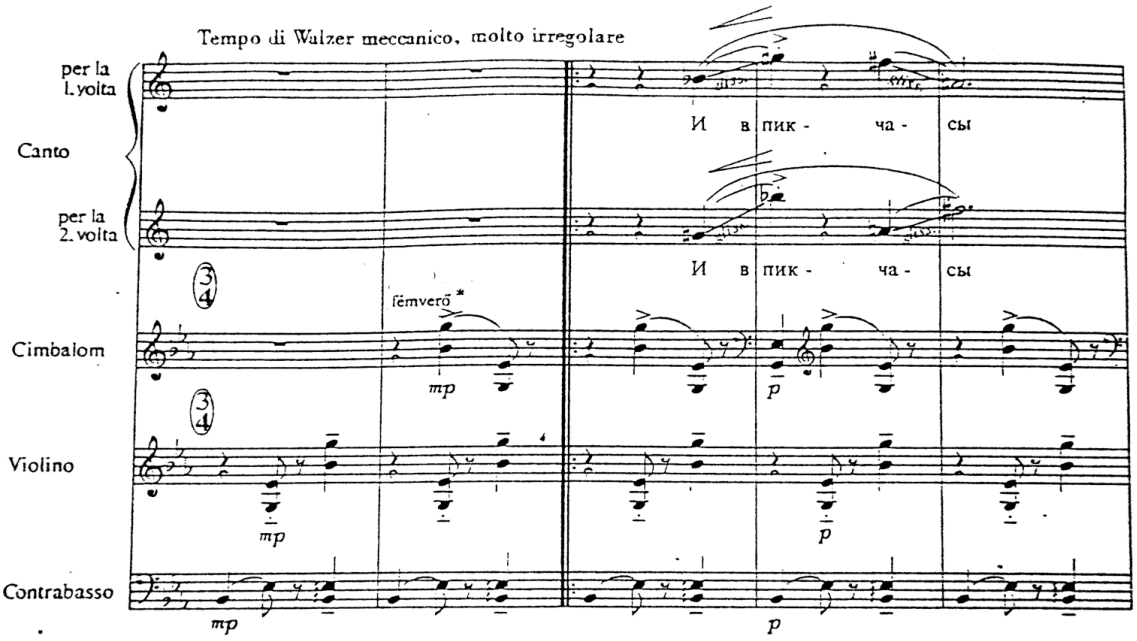
Ex. 7–11 György Kurtag *Scenes from a Novel,* op.19 cimbalom entrance (pedal point) in "Rondo", score, mm. 82–85.

Movement eight, "Nakedness," is a short fragment for solo soprano. Movement 9, "Waltz for Barrel Organ," is the most tonal of the fifteen movements. A 3/4 "barrel waltz" in E-flat major, its an emphasis is on the second beat of the measure. The 2/4 measures function as cadence points that contract the symmetry in the second half of the movement. The composer's indication for the use of metal mallets once again creates an effect that is likened to a wind-up musical box, or perhaps a hurdy-gurdy. Key words in the text are "rush-hour" and "tramcar." Kurtág's astute imagination musically plays off of these words.

"Even in the rush-hour
the tramcar of my soul
cheerfully rolls along."[100]

The dyads in the cimbalom are alternating inversions of the E-flat major chord: "b-flat/g" and "g/e-flat." (See Ex. 7–12). The violin uses the same set of dyads that alternate in a reverse pattern to the cimbalom's, thus filling out the chord on each beat. The contra bass plays a three beat pattern that solidifies each downbeat with the fifth of the chord.

[100] Rimma Dalos "Nakedness."



Ex. 7–12 György Kurtág *Scenes from a Novel,* op.19, "Waltz for Barrel Organ," score, mm. 1–5.

In movement ten, "Tale," we see a parallel to the fifth's movement conflicted duality with our protagonist.

"I wanted you to see me

like some goddess in the glory

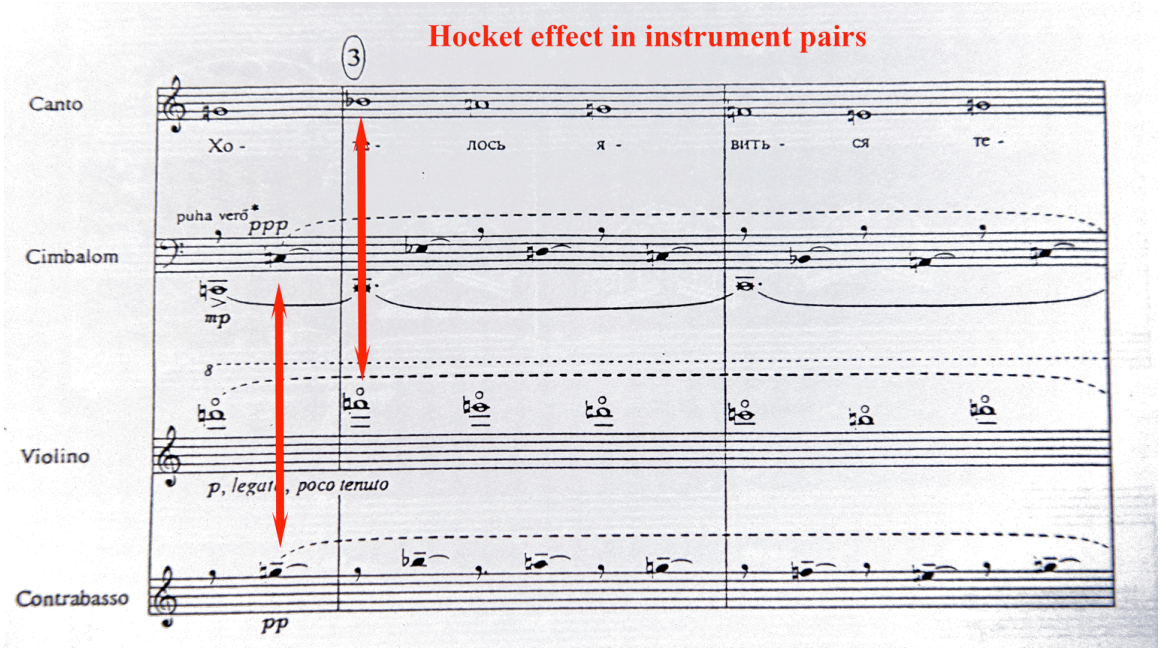
of the starry sky:

but then I opened the door

all ragged, a broom in my dirty hand."[101]

[101] Rimma Dalos "Tale."

The first part of the poem is set in pairs consisting of soprano voice + violin and contra bass + cimbalom. A paired hocketing sequence has the soprano and violin on the downbeats and the cimbalom and contra bass on the off beats (see Ex. 7–13). Like the irony that is imbedded in the text, a musical role reversal is at work with the higher pitched instruments acting as the rhythmic foundation (downbeats), and the lower pitched instruments "answering" them. The effect of distanct stars, creating by the violin's harmonics with "answers" in the cimbalom, are atypical for an austere composer like Kurtág. The score's indication for *pusha vero* (regular mallets) in the cimbalom is an interesting choice. Given the extreme dynamic range (*ppp* – mp), a performer would typically choose a softer mallet—especially in the first section. The composer then indicates for the metal mallets to be brought back. The cimbalom's re-entry on a soft dynamic (*pp*), anticipates the angst that is to come with its "steely" sound of metal-on-metal. The protagonist has now slipped back into her world of self-doubt with its image of the lowest order (text literally translates from Russian as a "soiled person") ending on a "tragic" note—a chord that has no harmonic underpinning (seven unison notes of "c").



Ex. 7–13 György Kurtág *Scenes from a Novel,* op19. "Tale," score, mm. 1–3.

Movement eleven, "Again," is one of the shortest poems in the set:

"I'm waiting for you again.

how slowly comes

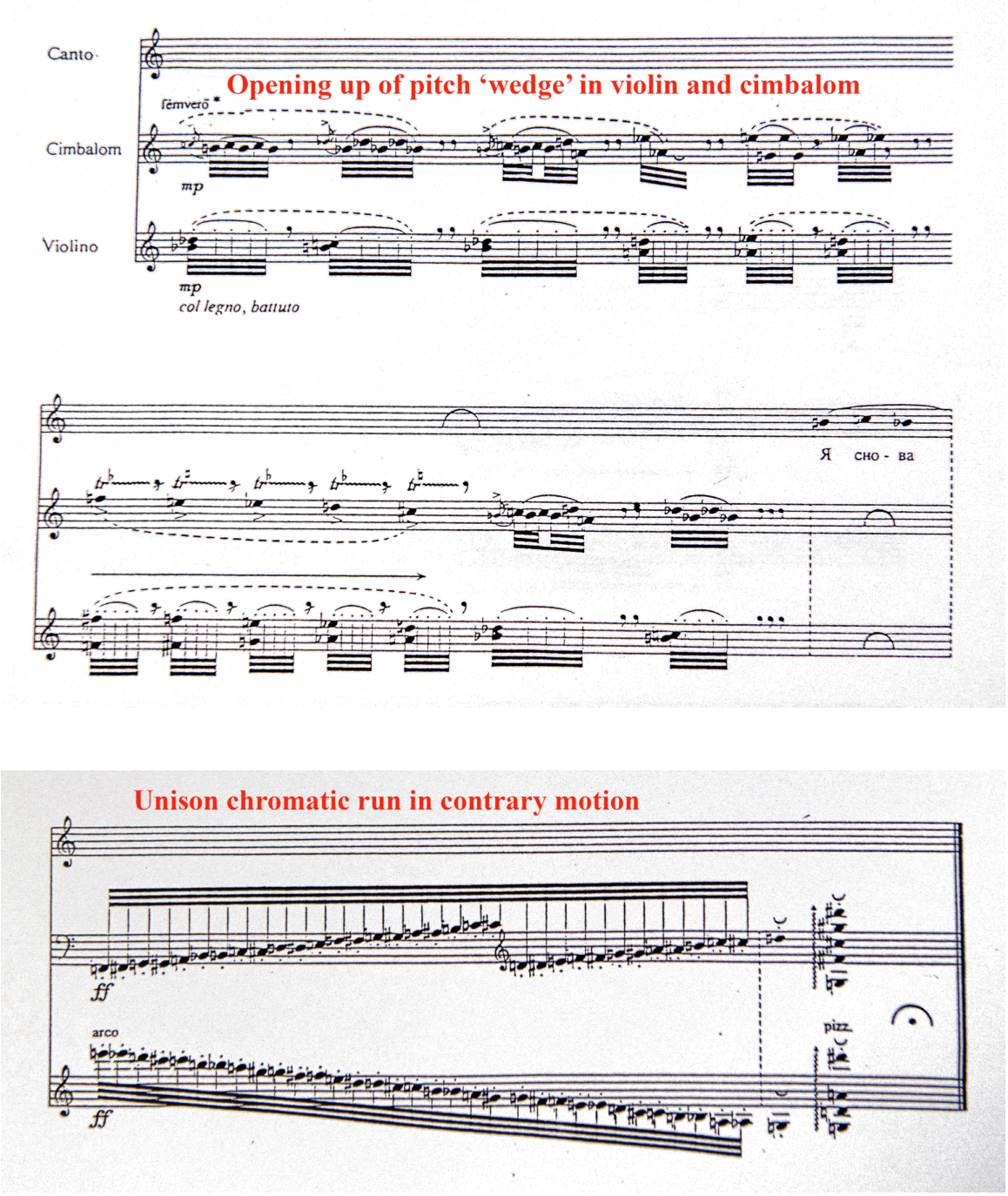
tomorrow."[102]

The compact text of "Again" is sung over large chunks of musical space in durations of sustained whole notes or longer. The short musical cells "grow" in a wedge-like pattern of seconds to thirds, fourths, fifths, then in sixths (see Ex. 7–14, first example). Note values are in groupings of four, five, or six notes, all played in quick succession. A descending chromatic figure with tremolo leads us back to the two-celled figures that

[102] Rimma Dalos "Again."

form a short wedge consisting of minor seconds and minor thirds. The pattern is repeated (A^2), this time with text, forming an AA^2B form. The final (B) section is a series of unison chromatic runs in the violin and cimbalom that are in contrary motion: the first two are with text; the final one is an intense instrumental gesture (*ff)* spanning over a four-octave range (see second example of Ex. 7–14). The indication to use metal mallets makes for difficult navigation with the chromatic runs. Kurtág may not have been aware of it initially, but the metal-on-metal sound makes musical sense when considering the text and our protagonist's angst for a tomorrow that never seems to come.[103]

[103] When performing the work live the challenge I had encountered was keeping the metal mallets (or triangle beaters) at a constant upward angle. Even playing at a flat or ninety-degree angle would run the risk of having the thin metal beaters slip underneath the strings.



Ex. 7–14 György Kurtág *Scenes from a Novel,* op.19, "Again." score, opening wedge progression and final unison chromatic run.

Movement twelve, “Endless Succession of Sundays,” is another short poem fragment with elements common to the preceding movement. The use of sparse text over a longer musical segment, and the “angst-building” chromatic runs in the final section, are two common elements to the preceding movement’s, “Again.” However, Kurtág uses a different rhythmic grid in “Endless Succession of Sundays” that represents the passing of time: a rhythmic grid set in a triplet rhythm that has a clock-like effect in its repetition. The pattern gets broken up at certain points into duplets, but the integrity of the rhythmic feel is uncompromised. The triplet figure in the violin is a chromatically ascending cell made up of a semitone and a sixth. The cimbalom’s first entrance at measure 11, again using the metal mallets, consists of a chromatic ascent with a variation of the rhythmic grid, and set on a pitch-set class of: “b, b-flat, d, c#, a, a-flat, c, g, f, f#, e, and e-flat,” in other words, a 12-tone row. In measures 13 to16, the cimbalom imitates the violin’s pitch set (a semitone and a sixth) from its opening measures, but is displaced and contracted rhythm. The final section, marked as *string. al fine*, have all three instruments in a unison rhythm (triple figure) with their pitch cells in contrary motion (ascending/descending semitone and a sixth). The cimbalom breaks away from the other instruments after the final portion of the text is sung: first in a contracted version of the cell, then with a four octave chromatic run from “e_2” to “e_6” that crescendos in a similar manner to Movement 11.

In movement thirteen, “Visit,” Kurtág sets seventeen measures of music to three lines of text. Dalos’s poem fragment translates approximately as:

"In a cold blanket of snow

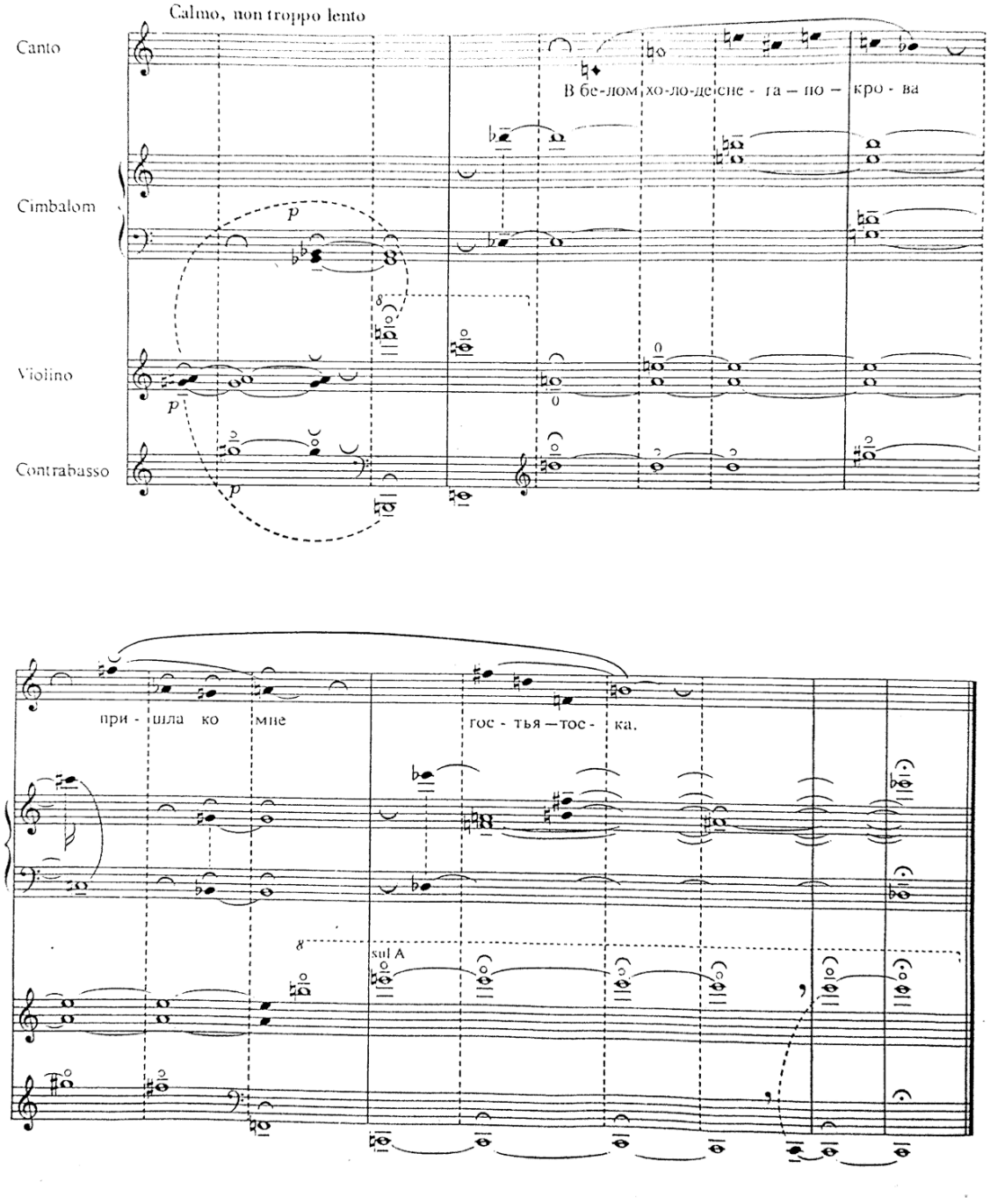
a visitor called:

sorrow."[104]

The movement's opening up of a "tight" pitch set built on "e-flat, f, g-flat, g#, a, and b-flat"—what Letnsner calls a "wedge"—"cadences" on the chord, a first inversion c minor/major chord (using traditional harmonic analysis) that spans over four octaves. The cadence in measure four, starting on an "e_2" in the contra bass and going up to a "db_6" in the cimbalom, sets up a vertical (harmonic) expansion with open fifths in the violin and the cimbalom's "wedging" in an outwardly progression. In the second line we hear a blooming effect in the cimbalom's dyads, and the sustained open fifth between the contra bass and violin at the double octave. As Lentsner points out, these open fifths and wide dyads relate to the "cold" feeling of separation in the first line of the text (Lentsner 2002, 55). There is also an implied harmony in each phrase of the vocal line and instrumental parts: the first phrase in the soprano is built on A major, the has violin open fifths on "a" and "e," and the contra bass has a tritone relation on "d" and "g#." The "g#" can be heard as major/minor tonality on the macro level, but the pitch set with wedging effect is what takes "harmonic" precedence here. The tonality that is established between the voice, violin, and contra bass pairing, is harmonically destabilized by the cimbalom's preceding ("answering") dyads in each of the phrases. The micro/macro principle of pitch layering continues through to the next two phrases on f minor (second phrase) and D major/minor (third phrase) tonal centres with the cimbalom's destabilizing effect. When all three phrases are heard in reverse macro order, the progression can be analyzed as D (maj/min)

[104] See Lentsner, p.52

– F – A, in other words, a large-scale triad built on "D." The harmonic effect comes through on a subconscious if not conscious level. It is in this respect that Kurtág's formal plan matches perfectly the symmetry of the poem. To summarize, the cimbalom's function in "Visit" can be seen as twofold: 1) to create a sense of doubt with "pitch tension" destabilization (represents the protagonist's struggle), and 2) to evoke an atmosphere of emotional coldness that is felt in the instrument's timbre (steel strings), and its melodically spread out dyads (open space, distance).



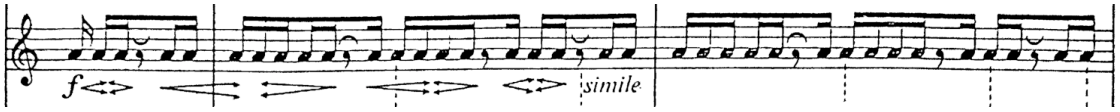
Ex. 7–15 György Kurtág *Scenes from a Novel*, op.19, "Visit," score of entire movement.

Movement fourteen, “How it Goes,” is what Lentsner labels a “lament” and “self-blaming” with the text’s protagonist. The poem fragment reads:

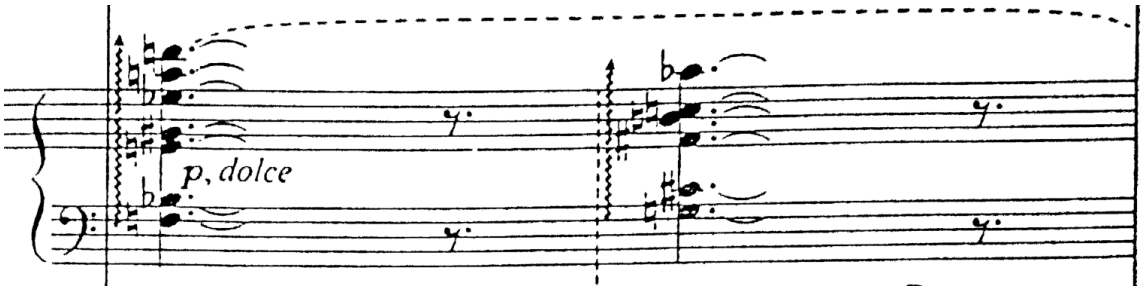
“The love,
conceived
amid
the haste
of spring
is dying.
But in your garden
grows
the grass
of oblivion.”

Lentsner also points out that the word order gets changed around in translation, but for our purposes the key words here are the fragment’s three verbs (in the cycle of life): “conceived,” “grows,” and “dying” (Lentsner 2002, 56). The three sections of the movement correspond to life’s tri-part cycle. The cimbalom takes on the lead role in creating a centre of gravity with pitch that also acts as a springboard to each of the phrases in the voice, violin, and contra bass. The canonic phrases start on the pitch “a” and move inside a minor third pitch set that rises and falls in an arc form, ending on an “f#.” The cimbalom’s pedal markings are indicated with arrows to represent the “short bursts” (points of accelerando and ritardando between comma phrases), thus creating a sense of unpredictable phrase lengths (see Ex. 7–16, first example). The cimbalom’s phrases are out of sync with the other instruments phrase groupings—the cimbalom acts independently (an analogy to life’s struggle) perhaps representing the struggle between a mother and the will of her newborn? The pitch-class set, when written out in ascending order, looks like: “f#-g-a-flat-a-b-flat.” The compact set, contained to the octave, moves

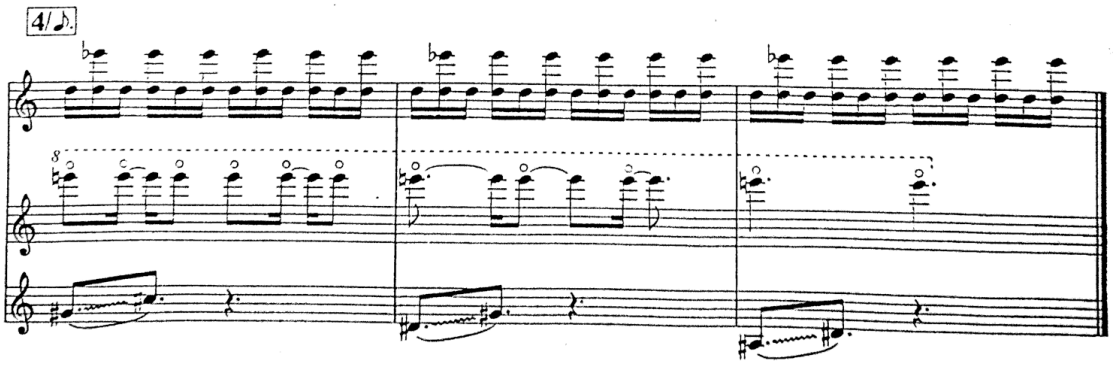
outwardly in both directions from its tonal centre on "a." Phrases that end on "f#" are like incomplete sentences against the cimbalom's relentless ostinato pedal. The *piu calmo ma sempre con moto* marks the beginning of the second section. Although no metrical divisions are indicated, the pulse is felt in a triple rhythm that could be written in a 9/16 metre. Eleven measures of a bustling (rhythmic) section leading to an understated (*p-pp* dynamic) second section maps out the "growth" portion of the life cycle. The cimbalom's arpeggios, marked as *dolce*, foreshadows a broadening of the pitch spread (blossoming in the growth cycle) with its pitch sets contained to intervals of a fifth or sixth, but spanning over two and half octaves (see Ex. 7–16, second example). The pitch sets in other sections gradually increase their spread and climax with the soprano's glissando—a glissando that spans almost two octaves (''$c\#_4$ – b-$flat_5$"), in measures 16–18. The melodic leaps (two octaves) in the contra bass and cimbalom (measures 12–19) set up the third and final section, the "dying," with a downward glissando in the contra bass ("b-$flat_6$ – $g\#_4$") over a "d/e-flat" pedal in the cimbalom. The contra bass's glissando imitates and overlaps the soprano glissando (measure 19/20)—a "dying away," as it were. Measures 22 – 28 (final measures of the movement) has the contra bass's pizzicato figures moving in fourths under a repeating figure in the violin, an "e" harmonic note (last three measures), with the cimbalom's "d/e-flat" pedal. The painful reminder of death's certainty is reinforced by the cimbalom's timbre, pitch centre (tone cluster), and ostinato—a "death toll" (see Ex. 7–16, third example). The last movement of *Scenes from a Novel,* op.19*,* "Epilogue," has no cimbalom.



Cimbalom pedal point motif.



Cimbalom arpeggios.



“Dying” away motif.

Ex. 7–16 György Kurtág *Scenes from a Novel,* op.19, “How it Goes,” score.

7.4 Conclusion

Kurtág's body of works remains one of the most prolific for its inclusion of the cimbalom. Both his orchestral and chamber works treat the instrument on equal footing with the other instruments in the ensemble. The *Scenes from a Novel, op.19* and *Splinters, op. 6c* are two exceptions where the instrument is more in the foreground and takes on a functional role that is interwoven with the text. Kurtág's aesthetic is a complex one that works in layers and is informed by a multiplicity of approaches. He is a modernist in the traditional sense (an exponent of the Second Viennese School), but is also guided by the principles of reductionism and the spoken word. Orchestration and instrument combinations are less traditional from the standpoint of any "inherent" image or sound association with its codification. For Kurtág, the instrument (in this case the cimbalom) is the medium for the art and is chosen for its register, dynamic range, and other intrinsic features, like pedaling options and range of mallet choices. He elevates the cimbalom in such a way to become a standardized instrument in the Western art music canon, on par with all instruments of the orchestra. He does not conceive the instrument in any "exotic" sense (as an accessory to the music)—for Kurtág the cimbalom becomes both the *medium* and *the music*. Although never stated openly in print, one cannot help but to think that the cimbalom holds some special kind of attachment for the composer, one that is steeped in a *national pride*.

Chapter Eight

8.1 Works by other composers since 1950

This chapter will look briefly at the selected works by composers (other than Kurtág) who have written for the cimbalom in some significant way since 1950. I have purposely omitted the works of many other composers and base my selection on the works that I have either performed, and/or are intimately familiar with.[105] From the 1950s onward, the divide between any folk music reference and art music typically widened with the instrument. The cimbalom's folk tradition continued on within the Roma community, but the connection established earlier between Roma performers and non-Roma composers like Liszt, Bártok, and Kodály, had gradually been replaced by the next wave of cimbalom players, most of them being Hungarian (non-Roma) in descent. The passing of Aládar Rácz in 1958 was significant in many ways. Rácz, a musician of Roma ancestry, was the first musician to arrange, record, and perform classical works for the cimbalom. His recordings of Bach, Corelli, Lully, and Scarlatti were legendary at the time.[106] Rácz also became famous for the premieres of works by Stravinsky and Bartók (see Chapters 3 and 4). The next cimbalom player to be elevated to the level of Rácz was a Hungarian woman by the name of Márta Fábián (b. 1946). Fábián began playing the cimbalom at the age of eight. She received her diploma from the Cimbalom Department at the Béla Bartók Secondary School in 1964, and a diploma from the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in 1967. Fábián soon gained a solid reputation among classical composers who were interested in scoring for the cimbalom. Since the late 1960s, she has worked with a long

[105] Appendix B is a master list of works written for the cimbalom by composers since 1950.
[106] See *Aladár Rácz at the Cimbalom.* Bartók Records, BR 1929.

list of composers of stature, composers like Pierre Boulez, György Kurtág, Heinz Holliger, and Henri Dutilleux. It is significant to point out that Marta Fábián picked up where Aladár Rácz had left off—she was the first lady of the cimbalom, and the first soloist of non-Roma descent to garner an international reputation on equal footing with Rácz.

8.2 Stockhausen's *Carré*

The composition *Carré*, by German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928–2007), was composed over a two-year period (1959/60). It is one of the first pieces from the avant-garde composed for the cimbalom. The large-scale work is scored for an orchestra consisting of eighty musicians and large choir. These two large units (orchestra and choir) are further divided into four smaller orchestras and four choirs, each requiring their own conductor. Stockhausen assigns a solo instrument to each one of the orchestral groups: a piano, harp, cimbalom, and vibraphone (the amplified cimbalom is situated in "Orchestra 3"). He chose these particular "solo instruments" for their similarities in timbre and attack. Stockhausen's musical principle of organization in *Carré* is twofold: spatial distribution and the treatment of pitch, rhythm, dynamics, density, and register within these spaces. The pitch material comes from a tone row built on two chromatic scales, one ascending and the other descending. When looking at the rows odd numbered sequence of pitches (the ascending scale), and then the even numbered sequence of pitches (descending scale) the tone row is written as follows: "e flat, d, e, c#, f, c, f#, b, g,

b flat, a-flat, a." The work's guiding principle is its "101 Moments," or what Stockhausen refers to as "Moment Form."[107] He defines Moment Form as:

> A formal unit in a particular composition that is recognizable by a personal and unmistakable character. It can be either an indivisible gestalt, a structure with clear components, or a mixture of the two; and it can be static, or dynamic, or a combination of the two. Depending on their characteristics, they can be as long or as short as you like (Stockhausen 1963, 189).

The composer's instructions in the score for the placement of the four orchestras and choirs are indicated with four arrows. The "X" markings in the diagram below are indications for the placement of the four conductors (see Figure 8–1).

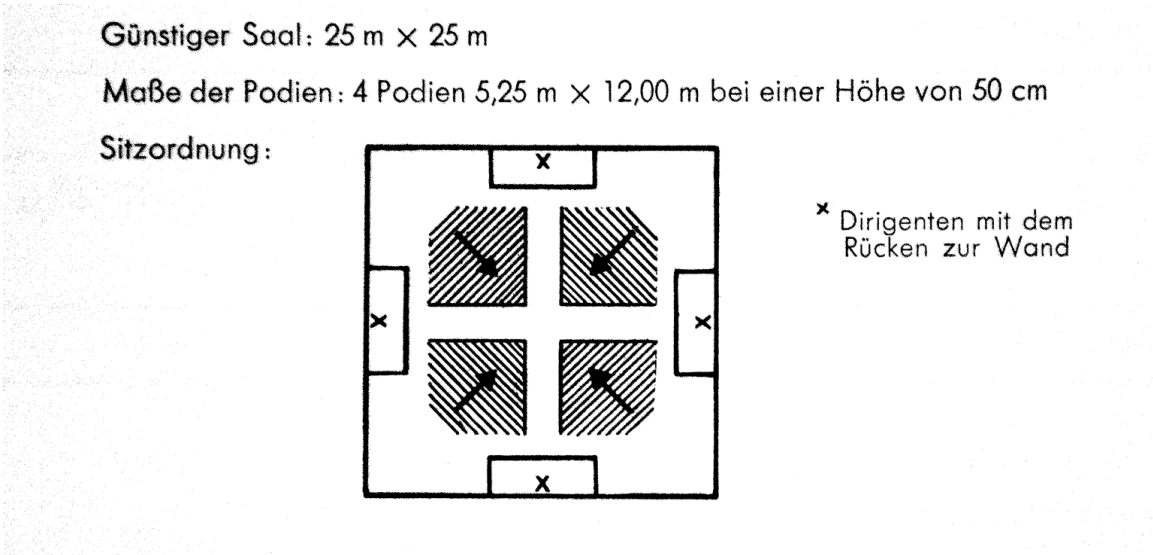


Fig. 8–1 Karlheinz Stockhausen *Carré*, diagram for placement of orchestras, choirs, and conductors.

[107] See Karlheinz Stockhausen 1963a. "Momentform: Neue Beziehungen zwischen Aufführungsdauer, Werkdauer und Moment." In his *Texte zur Musik*, vol. 1, pp. 189-210.

Technical problems at the first set of rehearsals, mostly speaker hiss and feedback from the four solo instruments (especially the cimbalom and harp), were so audible that a temporary solution was needed fast. Early experimentation resulted in the placing of the loudspeakers underneath platforms, in other words, below the cimbalom and harp. At a later date, Stockhausen revised his diagram to include *eight* loudspeakers in order to hear the cimbalom and harp properly. The loudspeakers are to be resituated in pairs of twos, one on each side of the conductor (marked by the "X" in the diagram), and at a height of four metres.

Stockhausen's aesthetic by the late 1950s was a bridging between modernism and experimentalism. For Stockhausen, any codification of the cimbalom as a "folk instrument" would have been non-existent. However, it can be inferred that he considered the instrument of significant importance for its role as one of four a solo instruments in the work *Carré*.

8.3 Boulez's *Éclat*

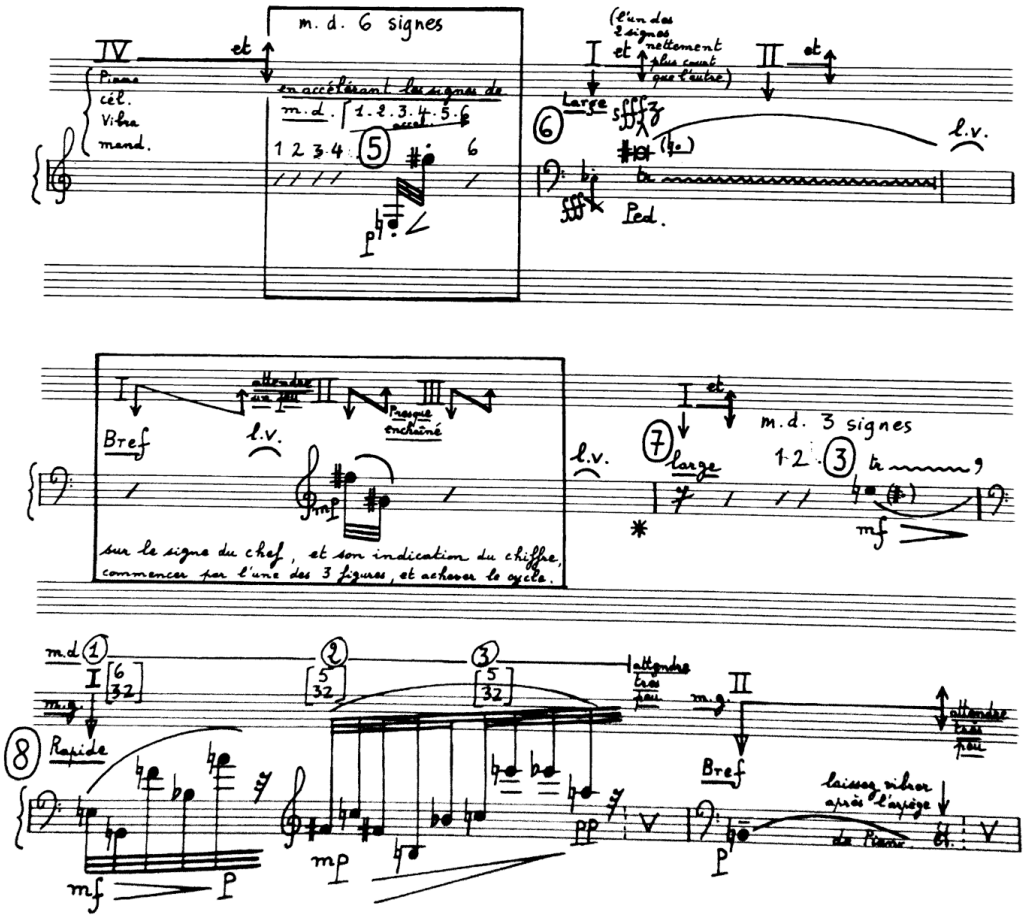
Pierre Boulez (1925–2016) composed two works for the cimbalom: *Éclat/Multiples* (1970) for chamber orchestra, and the symphonic work, *Répons* (1985). Originally completed in 1964/65, *Éclat* was a stand-alone piece that was later expanded to include a second movement, *Multiples*. Scored for fifteen instruments, *Éclat* organizes its instrumental groups by their rate of decay: piano having the longest decay, harp and cimbalom in the middle, guitar and mandolin having the shortest decay. The remaining instruments are situated in-between these ratio-of-decay groupings. The composer states

that the title refers to "fragments" or "splinters."[108] However, the word "Éclat" literally translates as "burst." Upon closer look, the work has all three of these elements at play. The piano's function as lead instrument states an idea in the form of a sound "burst," usually a chord that is sustained throughout a section, immediately followed by the musical figures (fragments) of the remaining fourteen instruments, each cued by the conductor in any order. Boulez refers to these fragmented events as "controlled chance": controlled by being precisely notated; chance by being chosen freely based on what the conductor might hear in any given performance. Paraphrasing Michael Chan in his article "Boulez's Éclat/Multiples," *Éclat* is the shifting interaction of instruments with their sustained sound and how they are modified by this interaction. Later on in the article, Chanan quotes Boulez on this very point: "The multiple reflections of the original musical images interfere with each other and create divergent perspectives, such as Paul Klee imagines in certain of his paintings" (Chanan 1970, 30–33).

The cimbalom in *Éclat* was chosen by the composer for its sustaining properties and to be placed in the "middle group," between the piano and the guitar/mandolin. Like the harp, the cimbalom has a longer rate of decay in the bass register, and a shorter one in the upper register. All the hammered and plucked stringed instruments function as a solo instrument when their particular fragment is cued or sounded. The winds and bowed stringed instruments role is a subservient one that enters towards the end of the work, mostly in the form of long tones or trills. Example 8–1, taken from the cimbalom part, shows the large-scale musical events that are indicated with circled numbers. These

[108] There is no connection that the author is aware of to György Kurtág's solo cimbalom/piano work, *Splinters.*

events can occur inside or outside of the boxes. Figures within the boxes are numbered, but are to be determined by the conductor's choice-selection. Between the boxes, Roman numerals are events that are only sounded when the sequence in the boxes have been completed. Large-scale events are sub-numbered with the smaller circled numbers. The cimbalom's musical fragments extend from short staccato figures (m.g. III, small circle 5 in box), to sustained trills (large circle 6 and small circle 3 within large circle 7), to rapid figures (large circle 8).



Ex. 8–1 Pierre Boulez *Éclat*, cimbalom part, large-scale event number 5 to 8.

The second movement of *Éclat* was given its own title: *Multiples.* Composed at a later date (1970), it expands the work from fifteen to twenty-five instruments. Composed as a moto perpetuo, its form and approach is opposite to that of the first movement. The cimbalom writing is very challenging to perform with its continuous playing and rapid musical figures.[109]

8.4 Boulez's *Répons*

Répons is a large-scale orchestral work scored for six soloists, orchestra, and real time electronics. Boulez scores for the six solo keyboard-like instruments as follows: cimbalom, harp, vibraphone, glockenspiel/xylophone, and two pianos. All six instruments have microphones that are closely placed not only allowing for amplification, but also real time electronic manipulation. The idea of including electronics came about as a result of Boulez's experiments at IRCAM in the 1980s.[110] The six performers' instruments each have their sound "fed" into a computer's processor that manipulates their sound in real time, and in sends it back to a series of loudspeakers. Like Stockhausen's *Carré,* the loudspeakers are spatially placed throughout the large performance venue. Unlike Stockhausen, Boulez places the six instruments at the outskirts of the orchestra, the orchestra being situated in the centre (see Figure 8–2). The cimbalom (written as cymbalum in the score) is placed at the "12 o'clock position" in the diagram (diagram is provided by the composer in the score). The harp is at the "six o'clock position," and the

[109] A third movement to *Éclat* was conceived by the composer but never completed before his death.
[110] Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique.

remaining four solo instruments are each positioned in the four corners of the performance venue.

The six loudspeakers are placed at the outer reaches of the venue between each soloist. As is the case with Stockhausen's *Carré*, composed almost thirty years prior, *Répons* is a spatially organized/sounding work with a layer added in composed realization: real time electronic processing.

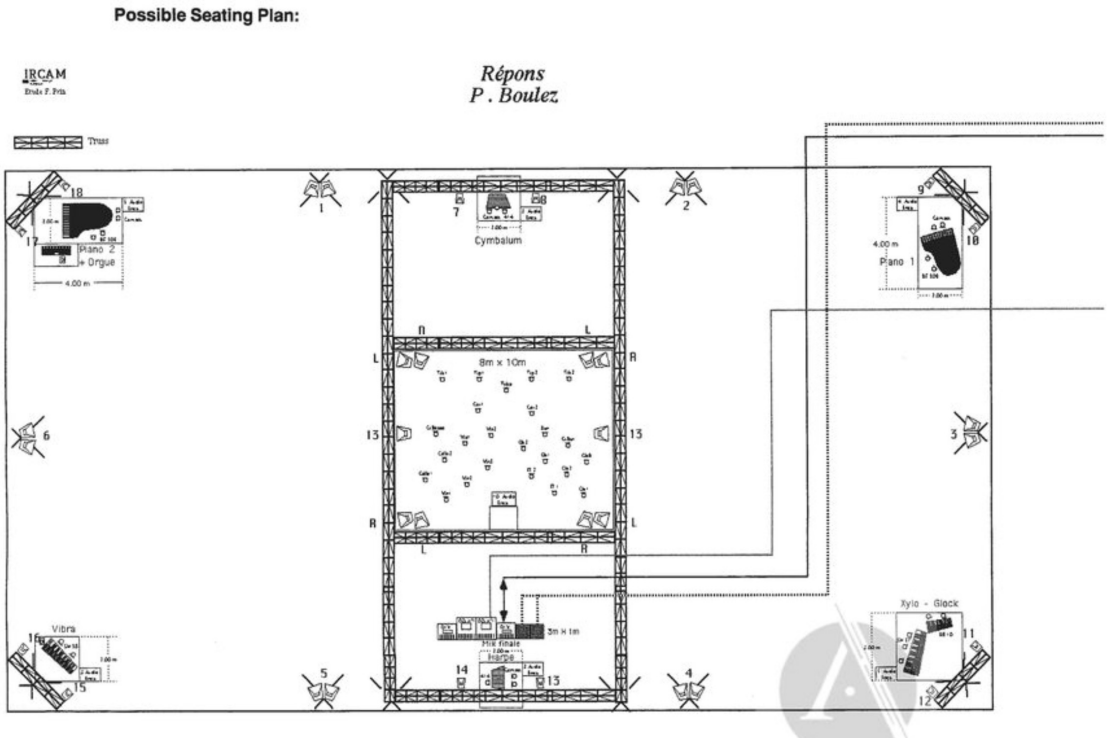
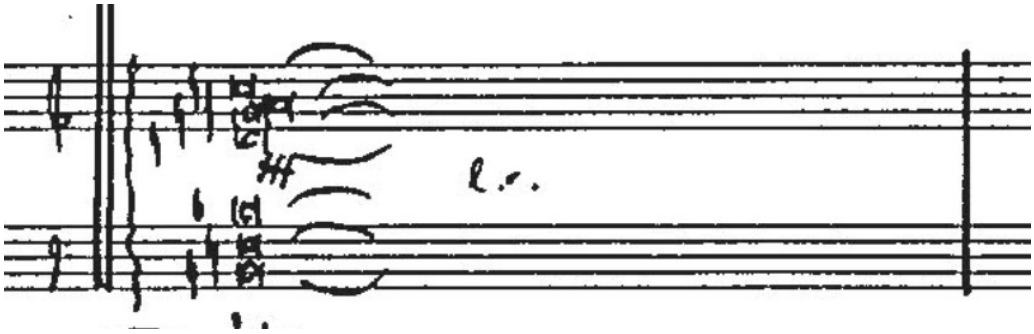


Fig. 8–2 Pierre Boulez *Répons*, placement diagram of soloists, orchestra, conductor, and loud speakers.

The score order places the six soloists at the bottom of the page in the following sequence: Piano 1, Harp, Piano 2, Vibraphone, Glockenspiel, and Cimbalom. The cimbalom's first entrance, at rehearsal number 21, is a unison arpeggio with the other five

soloists. The complex chord is a tone row built on: “b, f, b-flat, d, g, a, c” (see Ex. 8–2). Parts of the tone row are taken from what is known as the *Sacher Hexachord*—this being the primary row used by Boulez in *Répons.*[111]



Ex. 8–2 Pierre Boulez *Répons*, score, rehearsal number 21, cimbalom tone row (b, d, b-flat, d, g, a, c).

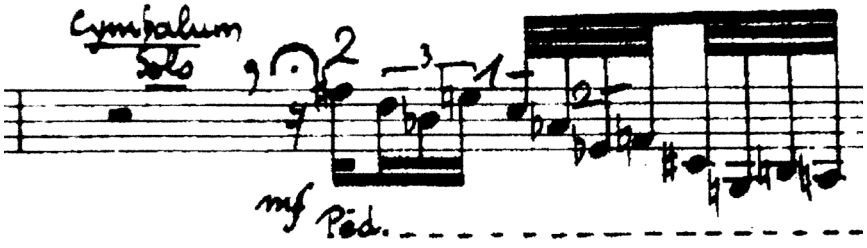
As the work evolves, the cimbalom, the other five solo instruments, slowly becomes indistinguishable by the filtering of the computer’s processor. The filtering, being randomly set, at moments can sound like a transformed gamelan percussion section that wavers back and forth with the “source” instrument’s natural sound. Boulez recommends the following electronic processing equipment in his score to be used with the six solo instruments. The list reads as follows: 2 Yamaha 02r mixers, 2 Yamaha 01v mixers, 3 SGl computers, 3 MIDI interfaces Studio +2, Booster and MIDI cables, 2 DSP reverb PCM 80 or 300 Lexicon, Yamaha DA8X (Digital analog converter, Yamaha DX7, ADAT player, MIDI interface for pianos, microphone splitters.

111 The “Sacher Hexachord,” named after Swiss conductor Paul Sacher, is a musical cryptogram that uses the letters of the conductor’s last name to form a six-note row or chord.

8.5 Duttileux's *Mystère de l'instant*

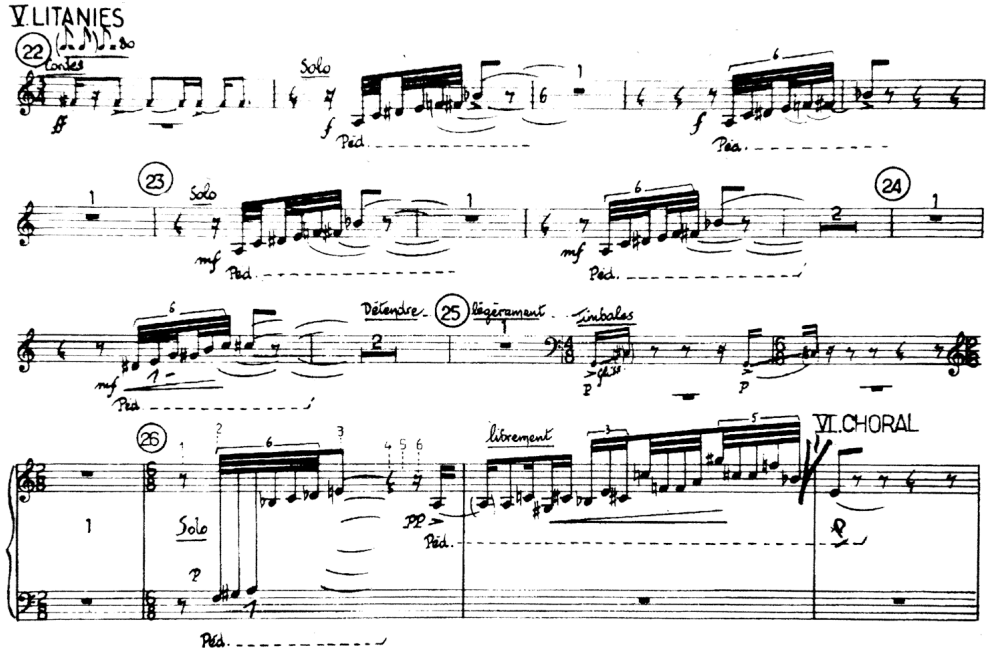
Henri Duttileux (1916–2013) composed only one work for the cimbalom, his *Mystère de l'instant* (1985–89). Commissioned by the conductor Paul Sacher, the work prominently features the cimbalom with large chamber orchestra comprised of twenty-four strings and percussion. The ninth movement, titled "Métamorphoses (sur le nom Sacher)," is dedicated to Sacher and uses the *Sacher Hexachord* as its pitch foundation, the same hexachord used in Boulez's *Répons*. The cimbalom appears in six of the ten movements, each movement being treated as an isolated musical event, but played in sequential order without interruption. The title of the work refers to each one of its movements as fragments or musical "snapshots" strung together to make up a greater whole.

When first listening to the *Mystère de l'instant*, one can draw a parallel to Debussy's arrangement of *Le Plus que lente*, also scored for cimbalom and strings (see Chapter Two). Dutilleux's handling of instrumental timbre and the sensitive balance he strikes between the cimbalom, strings, and percussion is remarkable. The bulk of the cimbalom's entrances are indicated in the score as *Cymbalum Solo*—a header that is in a way superfluous since the cimbalom rises out of the texture in a natural way as if the composer "painted" his background carefully to let the foreground come through. The cimbalom's descending pattern in thirds in the first and second movements ("Echos" and "Prismes"), whether intentional or not on the part of the composer, signifies a Gypsy style cadenza that is both an accompaniment and a solo break.



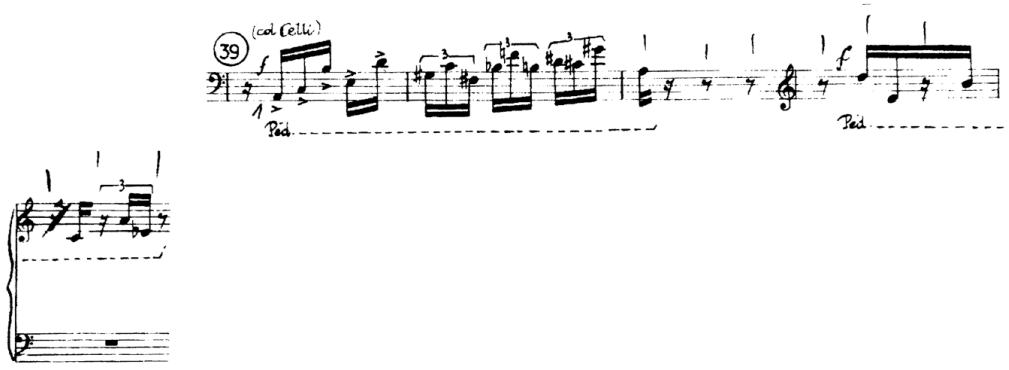
Ex. 8–3 Henri Dutellieux *Mystère de l'instant*, Movement II "Echos," cimbalom part, descending solo figure.

In movement V, "Litanies," the cimbalom's six entrances are "answers" to the strings "question" phrases. As seen in the movement "Echos," the cimbalom's rapid ascending figures are Gypsy music signifiers. Dutilleux uses the same tone row, built on: "a, c, d#, e, f, f#, b-flat"—but its sounding result is rapid (ascending) flourish that function as textural colouring.



Ex. 8–4 Henri Dutellieux *Mystère de l'instant*, Movement V "Litanies," cimbalom part, "arpeggio figures."

Movement IX, "Metamorphoses (sur le nom Sacher)," is the most demanding movement to play for the cimbalom. The string writing and opening timpani solo is pointillist in its expression. Set in a 4/8 metre, the cimbalom joins in at rehearsal number 39 with a rhythmic unison figure with the cellos. Although the composer indicates for the cimbalom's pedal to be held down, the musical effect and articulation is still marcato. Using pitch fragments from the Sacher row, the cimbalom leaps the octave in a disjunctive manner that alternates back and forth with ascending figures in thirds—an echoing of the previous movements.



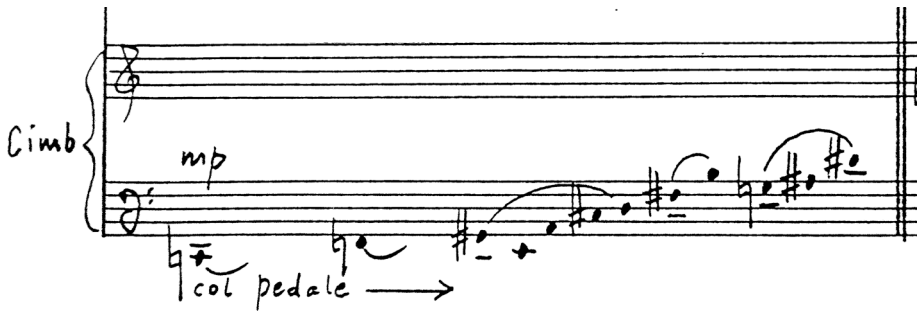
Ex. 8–5 Henri Dutilleux *Mystère de l'instant*, movement IX "Metamorphoses," cimbalom part, alternating figures.

8.6 Eötvös's *Psy*

Composer, conductor, and educator, Peter Eötvös (b.1944), was a founding member of the *New Music Studio* from 1970–81, based in Budapest, Hungary. He also performed with the Stockhausen Ensemble from 1968 to 1976. As conductor, he directed the *Ensemble InterContemporain* from 1979–1991, and has been a guest conductor with many orchestras including the BBC Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic. Eötvös spent the better part of the 1960s scoring for film before directing his efforts to composing concert music. His aesthetic today is informed by many elements: film, modernism, extended techniques (experimentalism), and modern poetry.

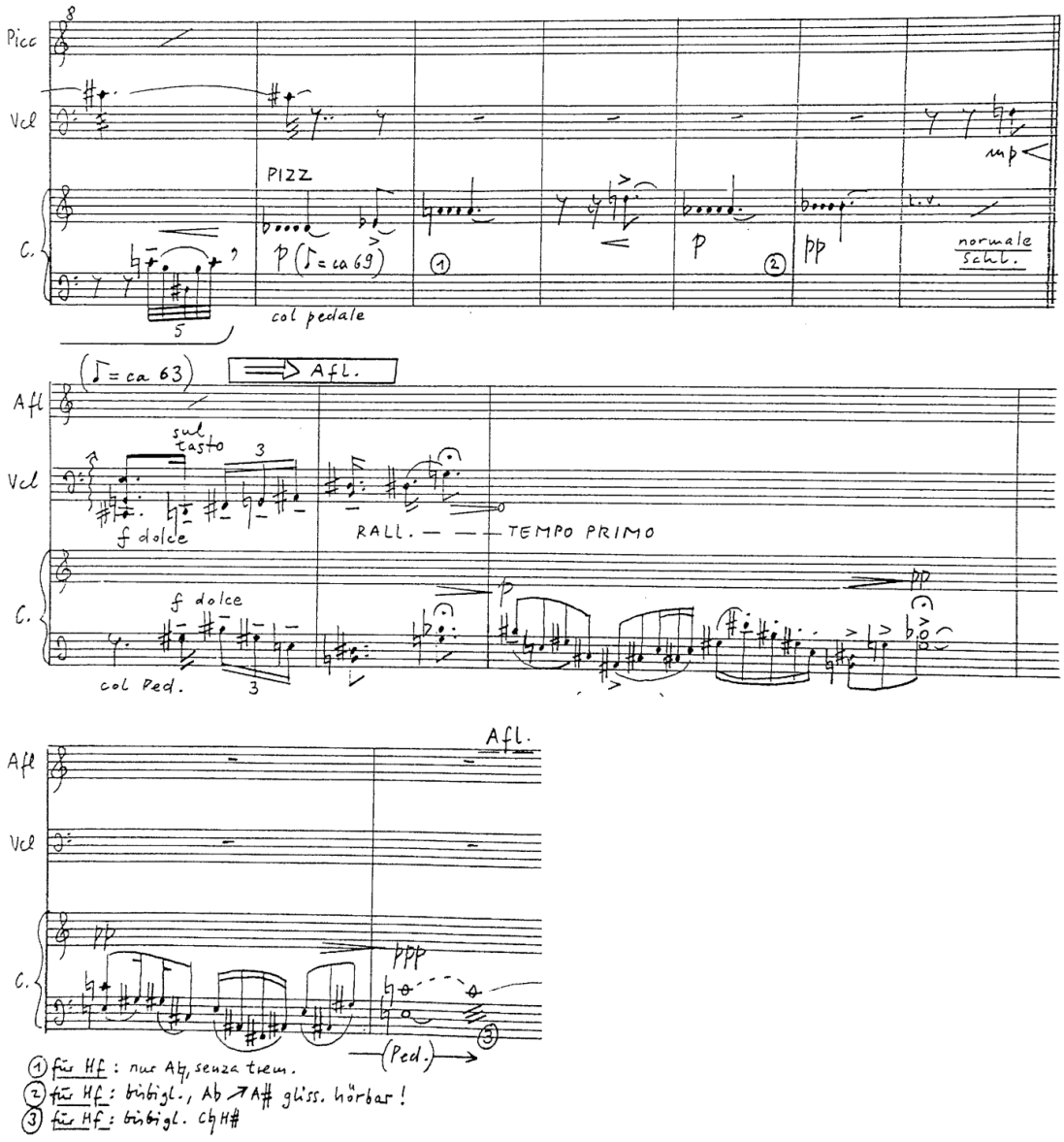
Psychokosmos, a concerto for cimbalom and orchestra, was completed by Eötvös in 1993. A significantly reduced version of the concerto was completed three years later, retitled *Psy* (an abbreviation of the larger work's title). An analysis of the cimbalom writing from the reduced version's score (a trio for cimbalom, flute, and cello) will be my focus since the part writing is the same in both versions.[112] The cimbalom's opening gesture is built from a tone row that uses all twelve notes of the scale. Starting on "c_2" and ending on "$d\#_{4,}$" the cimbalom is mirrored by the cello in sustained whole notes (set in a slower rhythm) that emphasizes pivot certain points in the cimbalom's ascending row (see Example 8–6).

[112] Having performed the trio version of *Psychokosmos* in 2015 (under the composer's direction), I am more familiar with this arrangement rather than the full orchestral version.



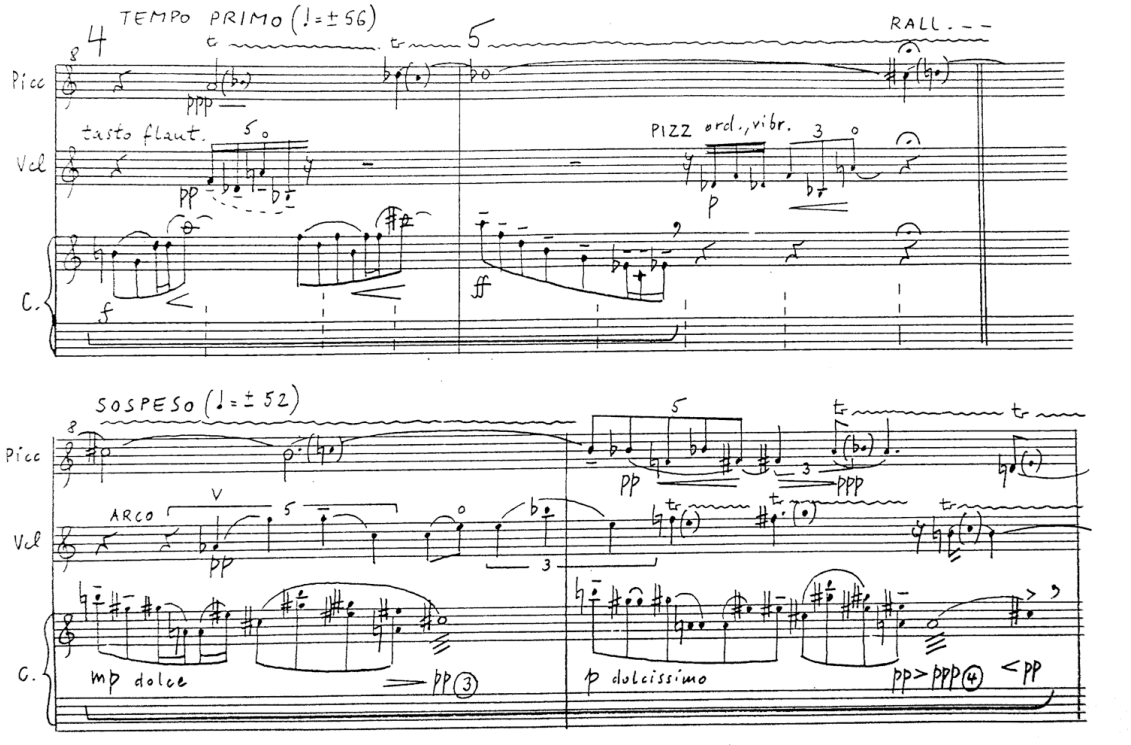
Ex. 8–6 Peter Eötvös *Psy*, score, opening gesture and tone row in the cimbalom.

Each of the three instruments in *Psy* act somewhat independently of each other, but must also conform to a strict tempo and meter as is indicated in the score/part. The composer provides detailed musical markings in the cello and flute parts (pizz, sul tasto, pizz molto vibr, con sord, etc.), as well as clear instructions for when the cimbalom needs to change pedaling, and when to switch from "pizzicato" (with the fingers) to mallets ("weiche Schlägel" or "normale Schl.")



Ex. 8–7 Peter Eötvös *Psy*, score, cimbalom pizzicato figures changing to regular mallets before the cadenza.

The cimbalom cadenza borrows pitch material taken from previous sections of the piece. Tone rows are broken up in to smaller units of fragmented augmented, minor, and diminished triads, and their inversion (sixths). The overall approach Eötvös uses with respect to the cimbalom is a gestural one: he establishes a model on the cimbalom with gestural patterns made up of a constant ascending and descending of figures (tone rows), and these are in turn are heard over top of the cello and flute's slower rhythm in sustained notes or trills. Imitation occurs throughout the work, but only two instruments at a time, and often with different rhythmic proportions or densities.



Ex. 8–8 Peter Eötvös *Psy*, score, example of imitation, sustained trilling (accompaniment), rhythmic density (augmentation/diminution).

8.7 Film and Television

No discussion of the cimbalom is complete without looking at the impact the instrument has had on film and television composers. We will examine three blockbuster films in particular from the twenty-first century: the *Lord of the Rings* Trilogy, *Gladiator,* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. The soundtracks from all three films feature the cimbalom in a prominent way. Before we can consider these three musical soundtracks and the cimbalom's role in them, we need to touch on some historical lead-up with the cimbalom's emergence in film. The first known film where the cimbalom appears in the score is director Michael Curtiz's, film, *Captain Blood* (1935). A swashbuckler set in the West Indies, it propelled the career of a young Errol Flynn.[113] Curtiz's 1935 film employed the services of an established Hollywood film composer, Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897–1957). Korngold was born in Brünn, Moravia during the reign of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. At first glance, it may seem odd to find an instrument with a Hungarian and Roma affiliation showing up in a 1935 Hollywood film score that is set in the Caribbean. However, it can be deduced that Korngold would have: 1) been familiar with the works of Igor Stravinsky's (*Renard, Ragtime for Eleven Instruments, Les Noces)* via personal relations (Korngold, the son of an important music critic in Vienna studied with Alexander von Zemlinsky), and 2) he might have known about the cimbalom from his birth country (Moravia) since a tradition had already been flourishing there, albeit a tradition that was somewhat isolated from Hungary.[114] Korngold's use of the cimbalom,

[113] An earlier version of the film was released during the silent era (1924).
[114] See Jesse A. Johnston's article: "The Cimbál (Cimbalom) and Folk Music in Moravian, Slovakia and Valachia," *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society 3* (2010): 78–117.

while being out of time and place with the film's historical narrative, would not have been that unusual for a Hollywood film coming out of the early part of the twentieth century. Hollywood's "appetite" at the time for anything "exotic" would result in either the misrepresentation or the misappropriation of any given cultures appearance (and their music) in many of its genre films.[115] While outside the scope of this dissertation, it is interesting to note that this sense of the "exotic" was still being used in film scores up until the 1970s. Nonetheless, Korngold was a gifted composer and arranger who went on to score sixteen motion pictures before his untimely death at the age of fifty. In addition to these achievements, he is credited as the first composer to include the cimbalom in a Hollywood film score.

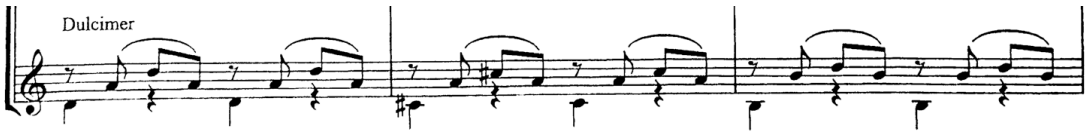
A short list of other films from the 1930s and 40s with its soundtracks scored for cimbalom include: *The Divorce of Lady X* (1938, music by Miklós Rózsa), and *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* (1943, music by Frank Skinner). Miklós Rózsa (1907–1995) was a Hungarian composer who relocated to the United States (Los Angeles) in 1940. Rózsa went on to score numerous works for film and the concert stage. *The Divorce of Lady X* is a romantic comedy set in Britain with no connection to Eastern Europe other than the composer's heritage. Frank Skinner (1897–1968) was an American composer who scored for more than 200 film soundtracks. While his career began with film musicals, he quickly made a name for himself in the drama and horror film genres. The cimbalom's timbre, often considered to be a signifier of rural (peasant) Eastern Europe, began to take on a different sonic connotation when placed in different musical

[115] "Blackface" and the casting of "tanned" skinned or Asian actors to portray American Indians are two well-known examples of cultural misrepresentation and perhaps even exploitation.

contexts. Descriptive words like "mysterioso" and "haunting" quickly became tied to the cimbalom's timbre. Skinner's scoring for the *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* is innovative in this respect for his reimagining of the cimbalom's function in sonic possibilities.

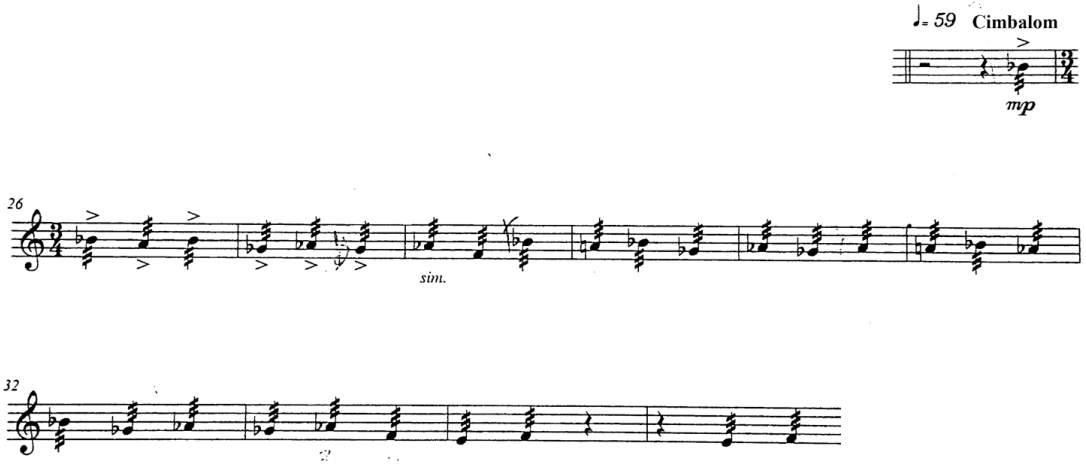
Film composers since the 1960s began to notice the cimbalom and hear it in a different way then perhaps they were previously accustomed to. The instrument became less codified and the distinct timbre associated with the Eastern European/Roma music soon took on a path that became more generalized in its usage ("other worldly," "another time and place," scenes of "suspense," "horror" moments). Film composers like John Williams, James Horner, and Andrew Desplat would make sparing but effective use of the instrument in films set in the fantasy or sci-fi genres, films like: *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984), *The Golden Compass* (2007), and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008). Howard Shore's use of both the cimbalom and the hammered dulcimer in all three films from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–2003) would soon become part of the cimbalom's repertoire. The "Hobbit Theme," used in all three films, makes prominent use of the British/American hammered dulcimer as a folk instrument. Along with the guitar, accordion, and tin whistle, the hammered dulcimer becomes a signifier for the Hobbits homeland, the *Shire*. The British/American hammered dulcimer, while not a chromatic instrument, is known for its bright percussive sound when compared to the more dark "robust" sound of the cimbalom. Shore's imaginative use of the hammered dulcimer makes for images of festive joy and the endearing innocence of the Shire. Shore carefully chooses his key centres (D major, F major, and C major) for the instrument, and not just for their color, but also for their

playability on the instrument's string configuration.[116]



Ex. 8–9 Howard Shore "Hobbit theme" *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, hammered dulcimer part.

The second film in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *The Two Towers*, Shore chooses the cimbalom as the character "voice" of Gollum. The distinct melody used to express Gollum's sneaky yet conflicted persona becomes contextualized by the cimbalom's haunting timbre, always heard in anticipation to Gollum's entrance.



Ex. 8–10 Howard Shore "Gollum's theme" *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, cimbalom part.

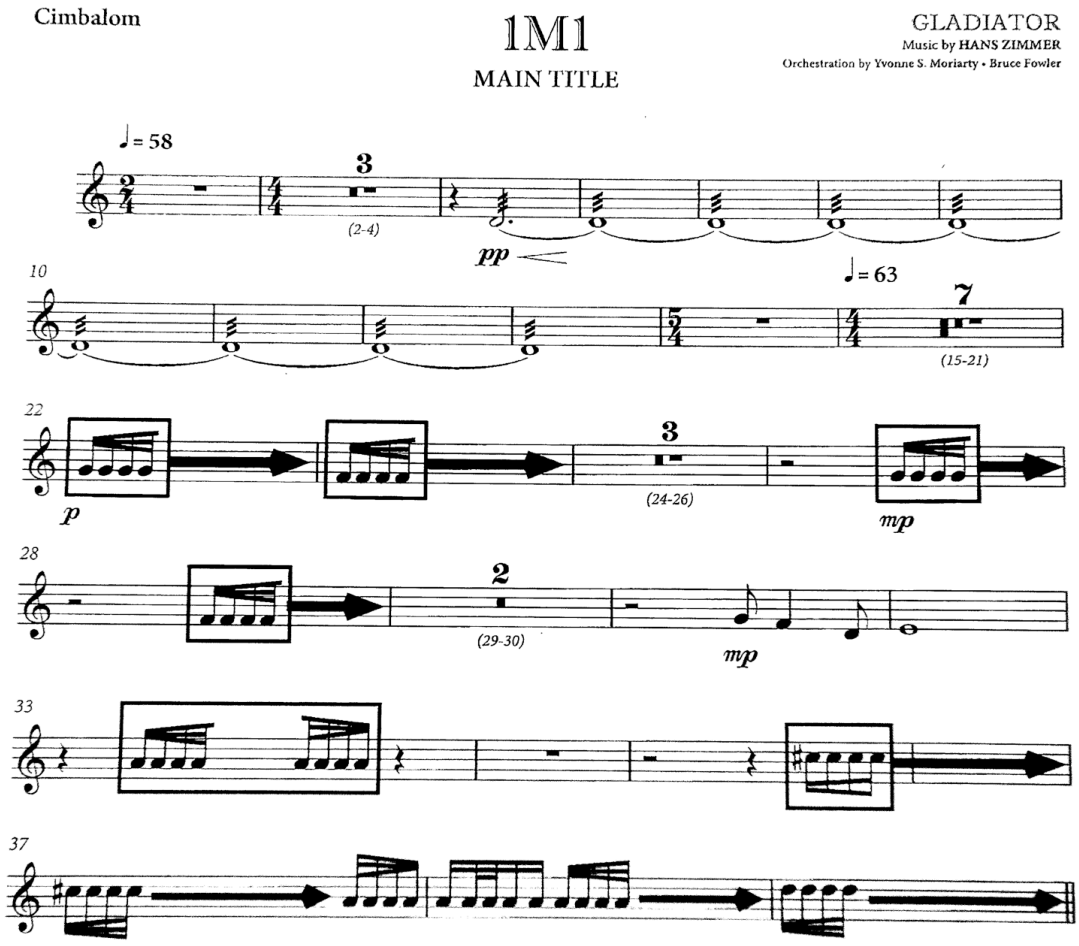
116 The traditional hammered dulcimer (12/11 bridging) is a diatonic instrument that plays in the following keys: C, D, F, and G major, and some a minor.

Approximately four years after the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Howard Shore completed a six-movement suite for orchestra, choir, and soloists—the *Lord of the Rings Symphony*. The suite's "musical scenes" are selected from the scores of all three films and are compiled into two movements each per film. In addition to the symphonic suite, touring versions of all three films are currently being performed throughout the world on a projector screen with live symphony orchestra, chorus, and soloists.[117]

Hans Zimmer's soundtrack to Ridley Scott's film *Gladiator* (2000) scores for a large orchestra, soloist (soprano), choir, and a cimbalom. Along with co-composer, Lisa Gerrard, Zimmer reimagines the cimbalom's function in a multitude of contexts throughout the film. The opening scene, simply titled "Main Title," has the cimbalom's first entry joining in with a drone. The cimbalom's gestures, although stated in a delicate manner, come out of the texture as the solo "voice." The "mysterioso" effect is powerful and transports the listener to another time and place, in this case, second century (AD) Rome. Zimmer uses boxes in the cimbalom part to indicate when the figures are to be solo-like. In the "Main Title," the cimbalom's accelerandos phrases are out of time with the rhythm of the orchestra. The boxed motifs, combined with the unique timbre of the cimbalom, help to reinforce the film's narrative, in other words, the politically mounting tension in Rome between the Senate, the Emperor, and his son, Commodus. The modal harmony, with support from the drone, underpins and supports the cimbalom's motifs that are built from a pitch set of "d-f-g-a." The tension note, "c#," acts as the leading note in the pitch set. The cimbalom's powerful musical gestures that are set up in the film's

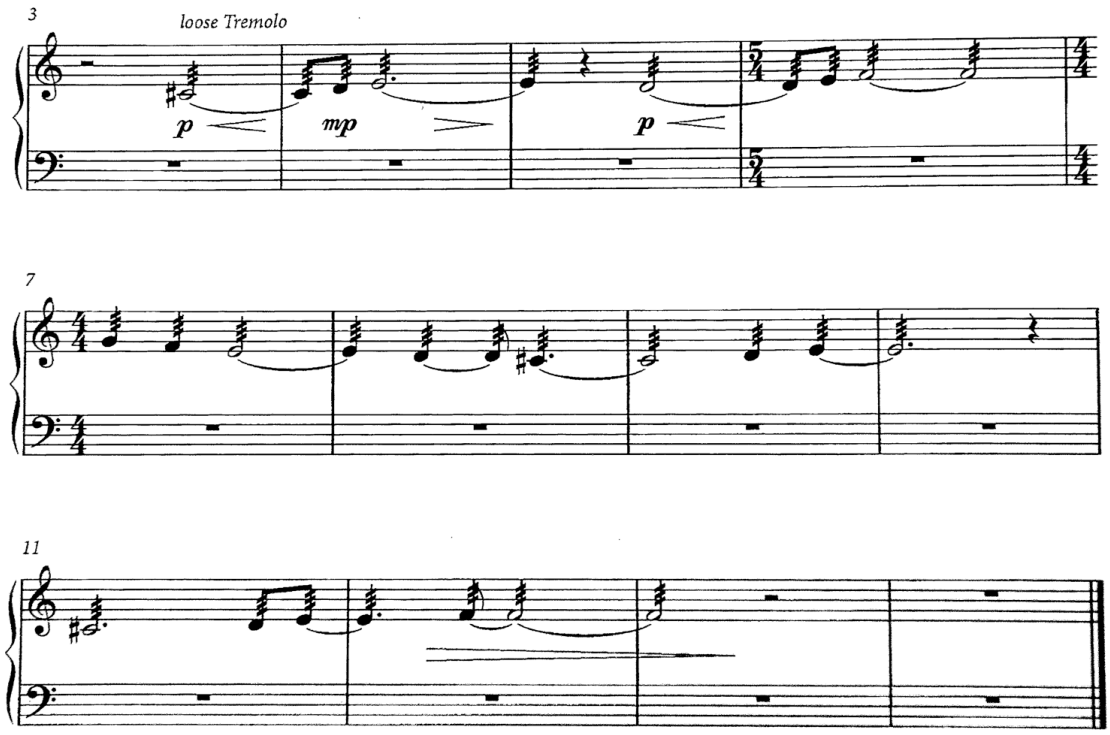
[117] I have performed both the cimbalom and hammered dulcimer parts in the LOTR *Symphony* and *The Fellowship of the Ring* on three different occasions.

early scenes, jump out of the texture and become powerful symbols—signifiers—whenever appearing throughout the film. In this way the instrument functions as a symbol-character in the narrative.



Ex. 8–11 Hans Zimmer *Gladiator,* "Main Title," cimbalom part, measures 5–39.

In the scene/musical cue, "Tell Me About Your Home," the cimbalom doubles the soprano line. The soprano voice, sung in a period style (no vibrato), is pure in tone and comforting to the listener with its sentiment. The cimbalom closely follows the vocal line that adds a rustic quality to their combined texture. Hard mallets work best in this scene to approximate the sound of a middle-eastern dulcimer, like a *santur.*[118] The effect once again is "another time and place"—but this time as a signifier for General Maximus's reoccurring mental images of his family home. The cimbalom and voice motifs are built on three, three-note modal pitch sets: "c#-d-e," "d-e-f," and "g-f-e."



Ex. 8–12 Hans Zimmer *Gladiator*, "Tell Me About Your Home," cimbalom part, measures 3–13.

118 Zimmer makes no mention of mallet types to be employed in either his score or part. Having played the piece on a two different occasions, it was asked of me, by way of the conductor, that I use the "hardest mallet" available.

During the sequence (with musical cue), "The Emperor is Dead," Zimmer reimagines the cimbalom's function in creating an unsettling effect for the mood of the scene. The political mounting tension in Rome, leading up to the murder of the Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, starts out with a drone (men's voices) as the textural underpinning for the cimbalom's subtle yet intense entry. Zimmer's instructions are to the play the tremolos as "loose rolls," thus creating a spatial openness in the motifs. The emotional "weight" of the scene—a profound mourning of loss—is effectively set up by Zimmer's imaginative use of the cimbalom. The film's market scenes, "To Marakesh" and "Back to Marakesh," are full of images with bustling streets, vendors, and their prospective buyers of goods. Zimmer chooses a quasi middle-eastern ensemble for these sequences—an ensemble comprised of doumbeks, duduk's, and the cimbalom. The drums and duduk dominate the texture with a driving rhythm and polyphonic melodies. The cimbalom functions mostly as harmonic support with the occasional solo passage that leaps out of the texture. Hans Zimmer and Lisa Gerrard's *Gladiator* score, with respect to the cimbalom's function, stands apart from many of its predecessors in its re-contextualizing of the instrument.

Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) features a star-studded cast with character names of a Central and Eastern European background. The film's protagonist, Zero Moustafa (played by F. Murray Abraham; the younger version of the character is played by Tony Revolori), is clearly a character of Roma decent, although that is never outwardly stated in the film. The film's narrative is the classic "story-within-a-story," with the "The Grand Budapest Hotel" as the epicenter of action, set in a fictitious town called Nebelsbad, in the Republic of Zubrowka (also fictitious). Composer Alexander Desplat composed the film's score along with the musical supervision of Randal Poster.

Along with Desplat, Poster employs the help of Öse Schupp, Siegfried Behrend, and Vitaly Gnutov, all three composers known for their expertise in the Russian folk song genre. Besides a full orchestra, the Osipov State Russian Folk Orchestra, Saint Georges Balalaika Orchestra, and the State Academic Russian Folk Ensemble are also heard on the soundtrack. In addition to the regular orchestral passages, Desplat makes use of non-western instruments like the balalaika, alphorn, whistles, and the cimbalom. The film's title, despite having "Budapest" in it, makes use of Russian folk melodies for the most part. The cimbalom, however, does play a limited role on the soundtrack.

Chapter Nine

9.1 Conclusion

The Hungarian cimbalom's basic design and string layout has changed little since Józef Schunda's patented concert cimbalom of 1874. Since the 1920's, Lajos Bohák Sr. improved on Schunda's design with a two-pipe internal support system (to better support the pin blocks), a new soundboard design with sound holes at the two sides of the instrument, and a slightly extended range in the bass and treble registers. Unfortunately, there are fewer builders today than previously. At one time cimbalom builders were found in various countries outside of Hungary. In North America, Rudy Toth and Belá Somsak, both now deceased, were two builders from Canada and the United States respectively. However, Ákos Nagy and Balázs Kovács are currently building cimbaloms in Hungary that are superior to their predecessors. In some ways these instruments are built better than the much-coveted Bohák instruments from the 1970's and further back. The current support systems and multiple sound holes with Nagy's and Kovac's instruments are the most up to date. The extended bass and treble range, from "A1" to "A6," gives the performer and composer more options. Generally speaking, these instruments feature increased dynamic range and a brighter tone quality and are often preferred for symphonic settings. None-the-less, Bohák instruments are still sought after for Bohák's unique craftsmanship and his instruments' dark robust sound, which is hard to replicate with newer woods.

The cimbalom's repertoire remains very thin when one considers the production of content in Western art music has come since 1874. Its most innovative phase was

between 1875, when Franz Liszt first wrote for the instrument, until the late 1920s, when Stravinsky, Debussy, Bartók, and Kodály ceased writing for the instrument. The cimbalom's "underground phase" (1880s to 1916) was unfortunate since no known repertoire was being developed or circulated in the Western art music canon. We can deduce that the cimbalom's Gypsy music performance practice must have increased and developed during this period due to the arrival of virtuosos like Aladár Rácz. Unfortunately, there are no extant recordings or documentation from this period before Rácz's interactions with composer Igor Stravinsky. Although there have been works written for cimbalom since the 1930s, they are mostly chamber and orchestral works that feature the instrument in a limited way. Very few solo compositions exist for the instrument, and concertos are rare. György Kurtág continues as one of the few composers who champions for the instrument into the twenty-first century. His catalogue of works remains the most extensive for the instrument, and his idiomatic scoring of the cimbalom, while not being Gypsy a music inspired aesthetic, is second to none. Since the new millennium, film and television composers have helped moved the cimbalom (and other dulcimers) further into the spot light. This has resulted in a small "boutique" revival for the instrument. On the flip side, their scoring of the instrument is often superficial (representing aspects of exoticism) and re-contextualized in unique and strange as a means of invoking some sense of "other," the "supernatural," or "old world Europe." While there are fewer players today than previously—both in the Roma and Magyar community—the cimbalom is still holds on its tradition by a thin thread. A popular convention in the last twenty or so years is to find musicians picking up the instrument as

a “doubling instrument.” This is most often seen with a few percussionists from around the world, but pianists too have been known to choose the instrument as a double.

Personally, I continue to champion the instrument and its repertoire and continue my career as a percussionist who doubles on the cimbalom. The future of the cimbalom remains uncertain. Seemingly the instrument is being taken up less and less by the younger generation in Hungary and other parts of the world. It can be argued that this might also be the case with future generations’ interest in classical music in general, and the art of learning a musical instrument in particular. I continue to be moved and intrigued by the cimbalom’s unique timbre and every time I hear of play the instrument it seems as if I am once again hearing it for the first time.

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Appendix A

List of works with cimbalom by György Kurtág

Orchestra

Four Capriccios, op.9 (1959–1970, rev. 1993)

Grabstein für Stephan op.15c (1978–1979, rev. 1989)

Messages of the Late Miss R.V. Troussova, op.17 (1976–1980)

…Quasi Una Fantasia…, op.27 (1987–1988)

Double Concerto, op.27 no.2 (1989–1990)

Samuel Beckett: What is the Word, op.30b (1991)

Stele, op.33 (1994)

Messages, op.34 (1991–1996…)

New Messages, op.34a (1998–)

Chamber Music with Voice

In Memory of a Winter Sunset, op.8 (1969)

Four Songs to Poems by János Pilinszky, op.11 (1975)

Seven Songs, op.22 (1981)

Scenes from a Novel, op.19 (1979–1992)

Songs to Poems by Anna Akhmatova, op.41 (1997–2008)

Chamber Music (Instrumental)

Eight Duos, op.2 (1961)

13 Pieces from Játékok (1982)

Three Pieces for Clarinetto and Cimbalom, op.38 (1996)

Three Other Pieces for Clarinet and Cimbalom, op.38a (1996)

Solo Works

Splinters, op.6c (1973)

Appendix B

List of works for cimbalom by other composers since 1970

Brian Ferneyhough (b.1943)

Transit (1972–75)

La Terre est un Homme (1976–79)

Peter Maxwell Davies (1934–2016)

Image, Reflection, Shadow (1982)

Sonatina for Violin and Cimbalom (1985)

Mauricio Kagel (1931–2008)

La Trahison Oral (1981–83)

Zoltán Jeney (b.1943)

Omaggio (1996)

Halotti Szertartás (1994)

Wei Wu Wei (1968, rev. 1996)

Les Adieux (Two Mushrooms) (1997)

Compliments (1976)

Songs to Poems by László Márton (1986–1987)

Marie's Lament (1995)

Movements from the Funeral Rite (1987)

László Dubrovay (b.1943)

Concerto for Cimbalom and Strings (1994)

Miklós Csemiczky (b.1954)

Fantasia Concertante for Two Cimbaloms and Winds (1988)

Attila Reményi (b.1959)

Al tramonto del mondo (At the Twilight of the World) (1984)

György Ránki (1907–1992)

Concertino for Cimbalom (1978)

Kamilló Lendvay (b.1928)

Concertino semplice (1986)

John Adams (b.1947)

Scheherazade.2 (2014)

The Gospel According to the Other Mary (2013)

Louis Andriessen (b.1939)

Vermeer Pictures (2005)

Haags Hakkûh (2008)

Te Tijd (1979–81)

Mausoleum (1979, rev. 1981)

Odysseus' Women (1988)

The City of Dis or: The Ship of Fools (2007)

La Girò (2010–11)

Alexander Timofeev (b. 1983)

Concerto for Cimbalom and Orchestra, op.3 (2005/2013)