

Analyzing Traditional Hungarian Dance and Music: Developing a Framework from the Needs of Performance

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Transylvanian instrumental music exists primarily in relation to dance and is played by musicians, usually Roma, hired for dance parties and events. The improvised “performance” that evolves results from the interaction of musicians and dancers, often responding to what they know of each other from previous events.

This discussion explores basic form and characteristics of traditional Hungarian dances noting signposts within the dances and a range of appropriate choices. Rhythmic nuance is often distinct by village, and musicians map out tempo areas and sustain them according to what they observe dancers need. Within these areas, songs signal the dancers and providing context for their interaction with the *Primás*. Many local-level musical devices—bowing, ornamentation, actions of supporting instruments—are brought to bear to support dancers at a moment in time.

The *Kalotaszegi legényes* is a men’s dance in strict form (although variable length). Individual dancers may actively choose tempo, melody, and rhythmic emphasis, directing the musicians by their motions. In couples dances, the band takes the lead in structuring the dance, but the band and dancers actively interact on content and timing.

Examples will be from archival films of traditional dance and many videos taken over the past 15 years.