Brahms and the *Style Hongrois**

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Abstract
The focus of this essay is Brahms's use of the so-called style hongrois in his piano music. Style hongrois is a problematic concept, because the real practitioners of the style were not ethnic Hungarians but rather Hungarians Gypsies. The style hongrois denotes both a repertory and a performance tradition, wherein Gypsy musicians freely incorporated outside influences into their own music. Moreover, composers such as Brahms adapted features of the style to their own creative ends. In order to better define Brahms's style hongrois, then, I shall compare it with that of earlier composers – such as Schubert and Liszt – and offer biographical and analytical evidence for such a definition.
Keywords
Exoticism – Nineteenth-century – Romanticism – piano music – Johannes Brahms

Resumo
O foco deste ensaio é o uso de Brahms do assim chamado style hongrois em sua música para piano. O style hongrois é um conceito problemático, pois os reais praticantes do estilo não eram húngaros étnicos, mas sim ciganos húngaros. O style hongrois denota tanto um repertório quanto uma tradição de execução musical em que músicos ciganos incorporaram livremente influências externas a sua própria música. Além disso, compositores como Brahms adaptaram características do estilo para os seus objetivos criativos individuais. Para melhor definir o style hongrois de Brahms, então, deveremos compará-lo ao uso deste estilo por compositores anteriores – tais como Schubert e Liszt – bem como oferecer evidências biográficas e analíticas para tal definição.

Palavras-chave
Exotismo – século XIX – Romantismo – música para piano – Johannes Brahms

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As early as 1849, Brahms had become acquainted with the music of then revolutionary Hungary.[1] This knowledge he acquired by making potpourris, pseudonymously, of Hungarian and other national airs for a Hamburg publisher. As I hope to show, the young man's artistic compensation for this hackwork greatly outweighed the monetary. Such work led him to create a personal *style hongrois* which deeply affected the music he would publish under his real name.[2]

Brahms's interest in Hungarian music was apolitical, as one would expect of a sixteen-year-old, even a precocious one. Since Brahms left us no opinions, written or verbal, on the Hungarian Revolution, Jan Swafford's view on this subject makes good sense:

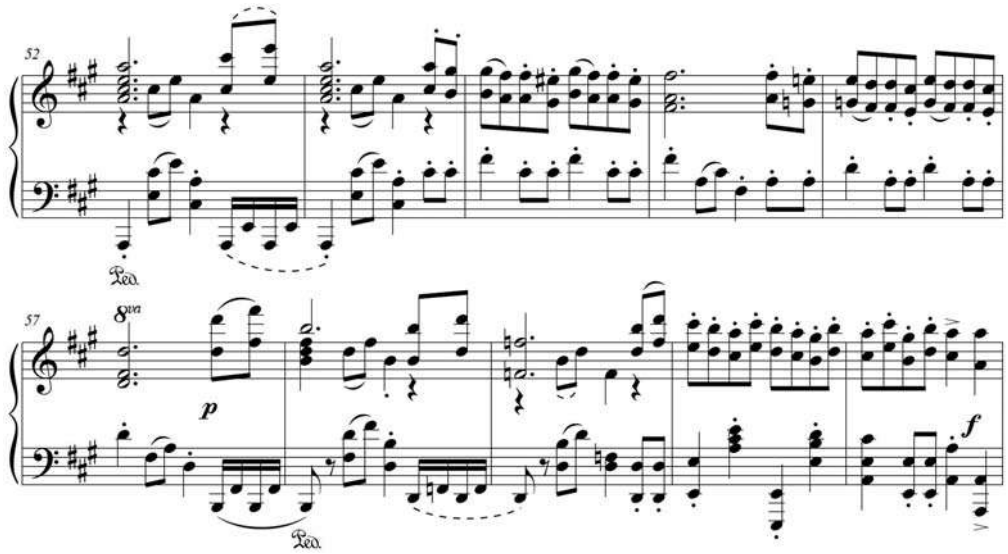
> From Reményi and later from Joachim, he absorbed not only the style but the spirit of "Hungarian" folk music. Unlike these two colleagues, however, Brahms took no interest in the Hungarian nationalism that underlay their devotion to the music […] Brahms shared that indifference with many enthusiasts of gypsy style: he simple liked the music. (Swafford, 1997, p. 61)

Brahms liked the style so much, in fact, that he often performed his own version of the *Rácóczi March* in public.[3]

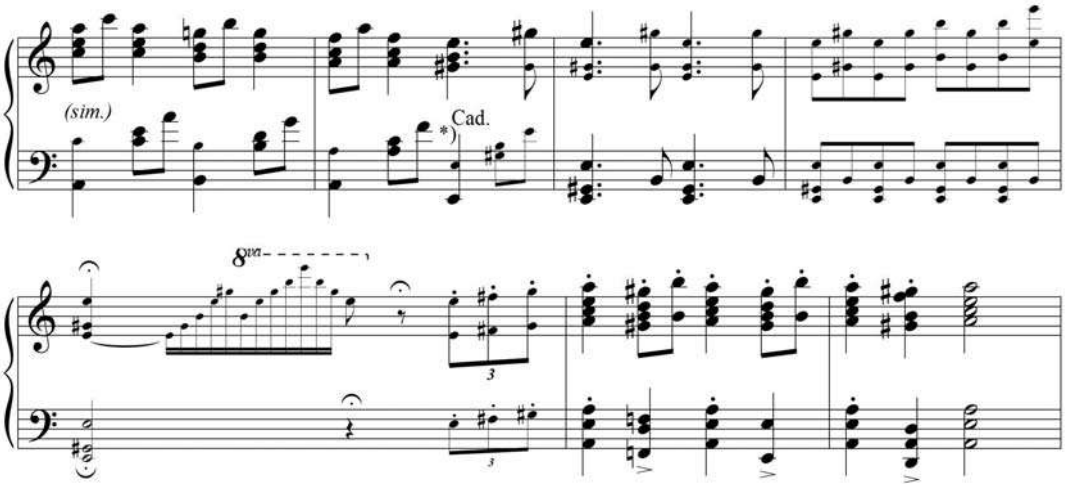
Two "Hungarian" touches appear in Brahms's arrangement, see examples 1a and 1b. These are the *kuruc*-fourth[4] figure in the left hand, and what appears to be an improvised cadenza. The latter is suggested by the small note heads in mm. 122-25 supplied by the editor; the same notation also occurs during the last five bars of the piece.

During the early 1850s, Brahms's first authentic piano works came out, the sonatas and early variation sets. The influence of Reményi resounds most clearly in the *Sonata in F sharp minor*, op. 2.[5] In the finale of op. 2, one hears both a sonata-allegro-form with slow introduction as well as a Hungarian *lassan* and *friss*. Example 2a quotes theme "A" (mm. 25-28) and the first sixteen measures of the finale, where

[1] The young Brahms may have read contemporary Hungarian poetry as well. His personal library contains several volumes by or about the celebrated national poet, Sándor Petofi, though they date from after 1860. See Hofmann, 1974, p. 84-85.
[2] Further background on Brahms's youthful occupation as arranger is presented in Topel, 1994, p. 3. Swafford, 1997, p. 54-55 comments: "The piece is entirely self-possessed for its genre, as prettily innocuous as it was paid to be. If the work is in fact by Brahms [this six transcriptions piece was pseudonymously published under a collective nom de plume 'G. W. Marks'] it displays in some pages his early interest in the 'Hungarian' style".
[3] The manuscript resides in the Robert Schumann House, Zwickau, and was first published by Bärenreiter in 1995, cf. Topel, 1995, p. 31-361.
[4] Bellman (1993, p. 122) defines *kuruc*-fourth as "a rebounding figure that alternates between the fifth scale degree and upper prime."
[5] Brahms completed the *Sonata in F sharp Minor*, op. 2, in November 1852. The *Sonata in C Major*, op. 1, was composed in 1852-53.

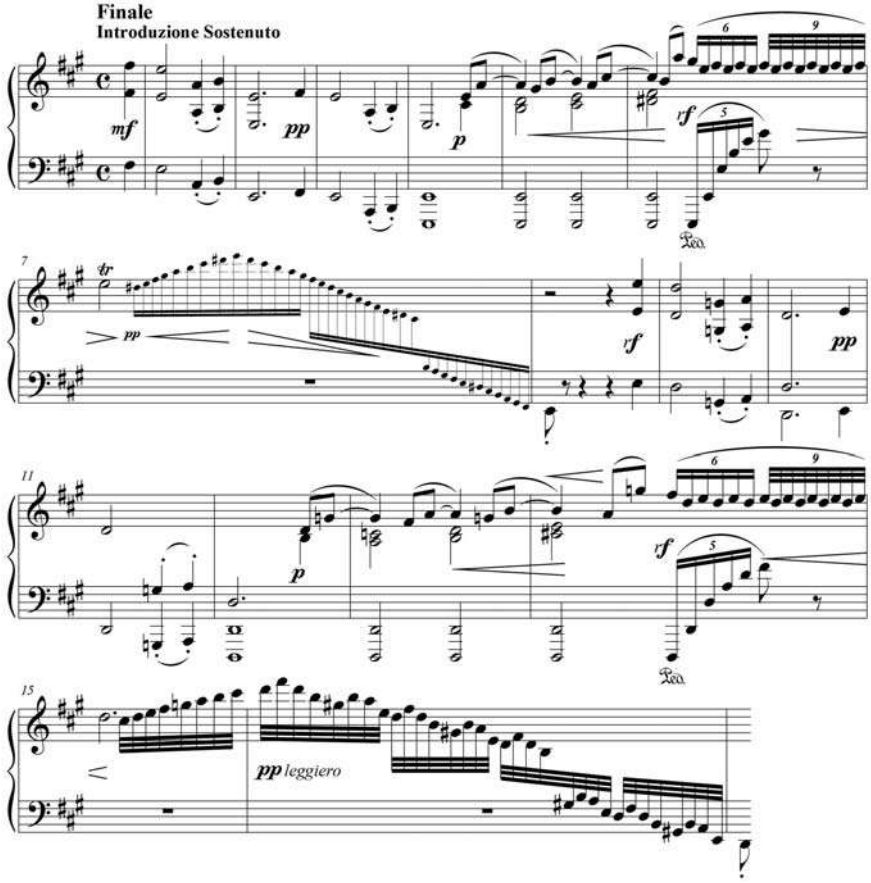


Example 1a. Brahms, *Rácóczi-Marsch*, mm. 52-61.

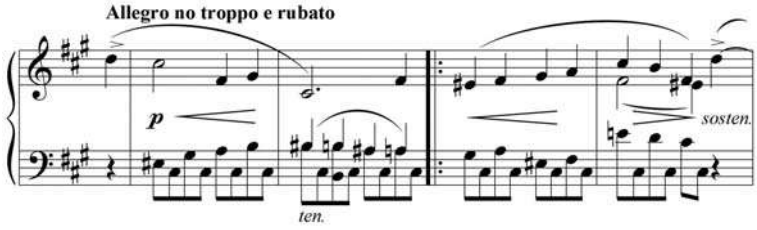


Example 1b. Brahms, *Rácóczi-Marsch*, mm. 121-127.

the "A" theme appears in augmentation and the cadences are decorated *cimbalom*-style.



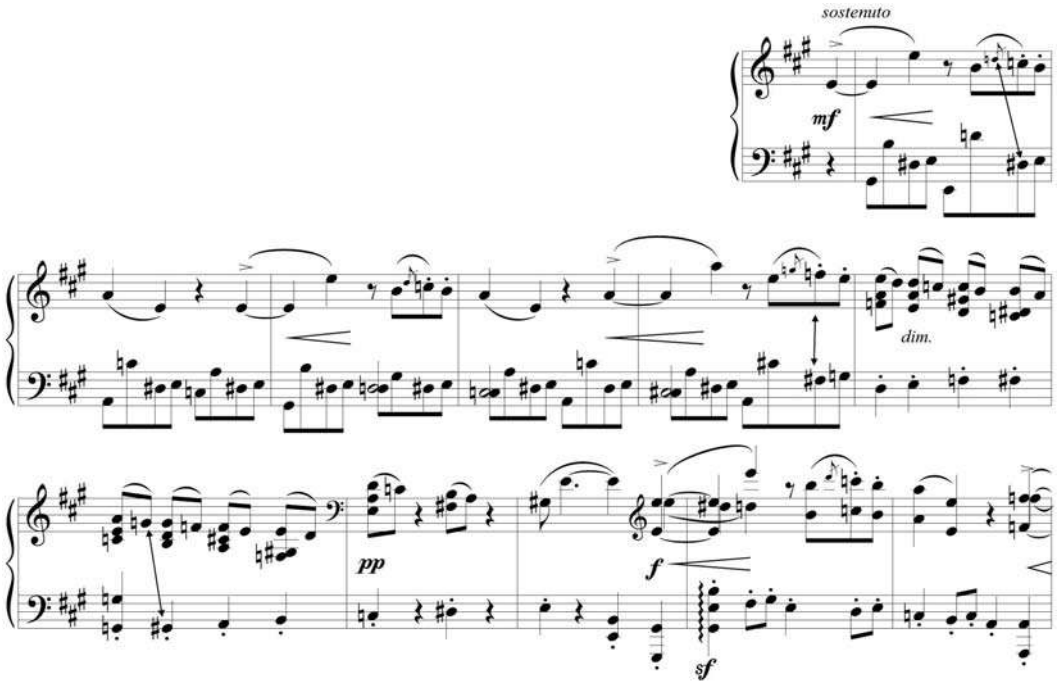
Example 2a. Brahms, Sonata op. 2, IV, mm. 1-16 and 25-28.



Example 2a. Theme "A"

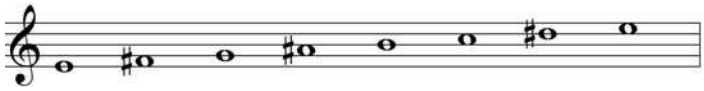
Other details of melody, harmony, and rhythm in this work display features of the *style hongrois*, that Brahms would revisit in later works. As shown in example 2b, the second period of the "B" theme, the right hand plays grace notes; *kuruc*-fourths, and octaves leaps. With respect to the last feature, the *sostenuto* and *crescendo*

markings suggests a *glissando* or *portamento* feel, as one might hear in Hungarian or Gypsy performance practice.[6]



Example 2b. Brahms, Sonata op. 2, IV, mm. 71-79. Cross-relations are arrowed.

Harmonically, one finds in op. 2 a dense chromaticism, resulting from the so-called Gypsy scale and from cross-relations. The Gypsy scale, example 2c, is a harmonic minor with raised fourth degree.[7] If we start the scale on E, for instance, the pitches are E F# G A# B C D# E.



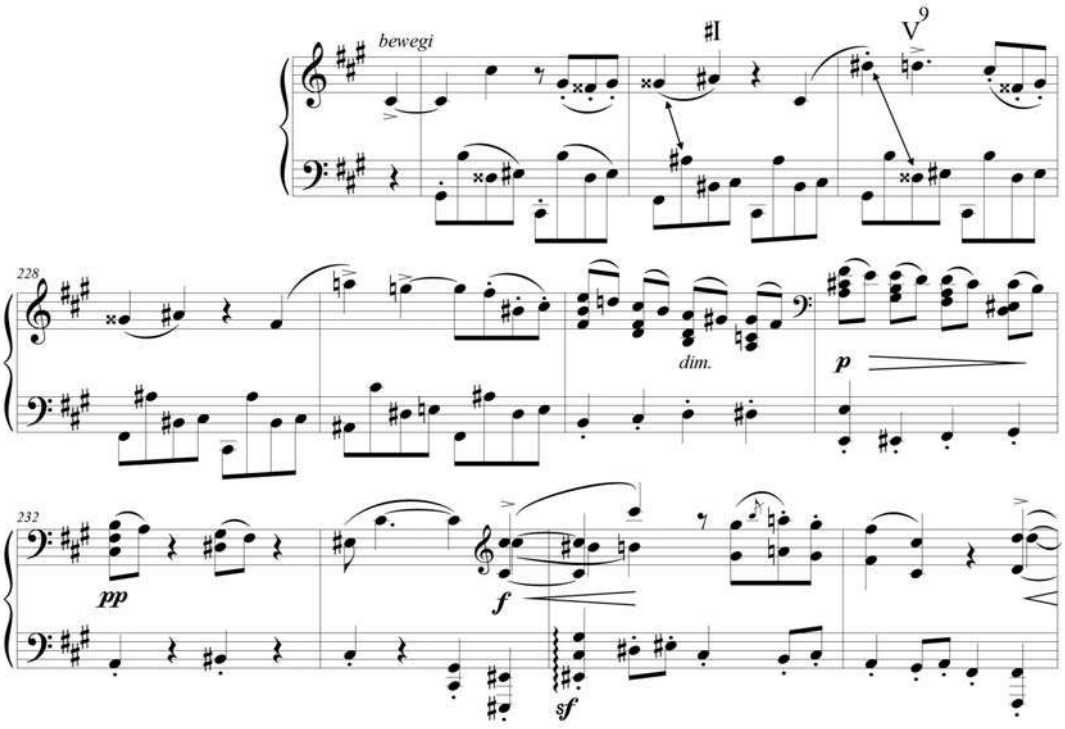
Example 2c. Gypsy scale.

[6] Mahler and Bartok realized such *portamento* in their scores, notating it with slanted dashes.
[7] According to Bellman, 1993, p. 120: "James Huneker, one of Liszt's early biographers, describes it [Gypsy scale] as a harmonic minor scale with a raised fourth degree, but he says that others read the same pitch sequence differently by starting on the dominant, which results in a major scale with a flatted second and sixth".

So the critical intervals would be the augmented seconds on scale-steps 3, 4 and 6, 7, the latter of which Brahms uses to mark the half-cadence (F#: V of III) in the second period of the "B" theme; see example 2b, mm. 77-79, left hand.

Cross-relations, successive and simultaneous, result from clashes between the pitch classes D-D#, F-F#, and G-G# respectively (see example 2b). But when the "B" theme is recapitulated (m. 225) Brahms steers the cross-relations towards the tonic, deferring to classical sonata form, example 2d. In what may be the most dissonant five bars in all of Brahms, he transforms the earlier V-I of A major (example 2b) to V-I of F# minor (example 2d) by:

1. expanding the original octave leaps (r.h.) to outline the #I (tonic major) and V9 of F# (with cross-relations G## - A# and D# - D## respectively);
2. contracting the earlier *kuruc*-fourth (A-E) to the minor second (G## - A#) to favor scale-degree #3 of F# minor.

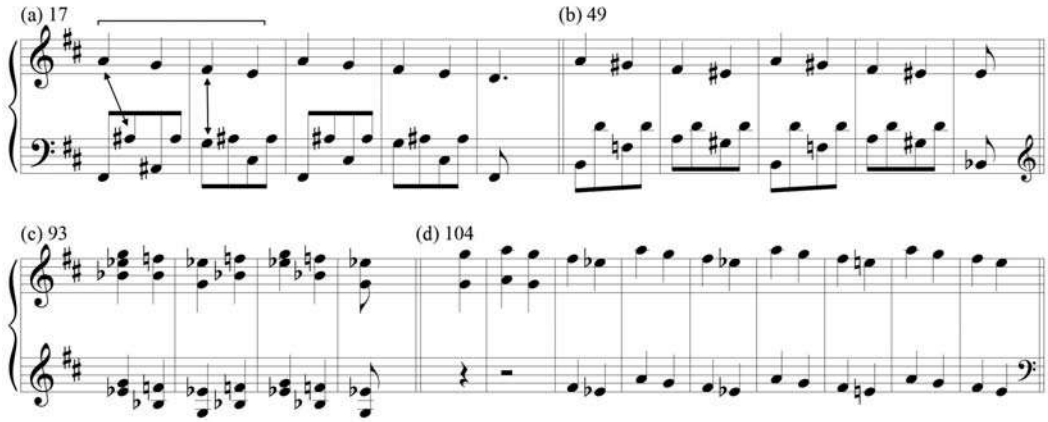


Example 2d. Brahms, Sonata op. 2, IV, mm. 225-235.

Interestingly, these transformations foreshadow late Liszt works, such as the *Csárdás Obstiné* (1886), example 2e, which quotes example 17 of a essay by Ramon

Satyendra (1997, p. 219-252). In 2e, the cross-relations A-A# and F#-G arise from changing chromatic inflection of a motivic tetrachord. Satyendra writes:

> The 'Csárdás' is almost entirely based on a dominant pedal point and, except on the last beat of the entire piece, no tonic harmony in root position appears. Against this neutral harmonic backdrop, a four-note motive is obsessively repeated. Ex. 17 shows some of the occurrences of the four-note motive. The main form of the tetrachord, which corresponds to the main thematic statement, is bracketed in Ex. 17a. Whereas formal functions such as departure (17b), contrast (17c) transition (17d) are more typically signaled by harmonic moves, in the 'Csárdás' they are signaled by inflections of the A-G-F# -E tetrachord (the contrasting section uses a truncated. three-note version of it, G-F-E flat). (Satyendra, 1997, p. 239-240)

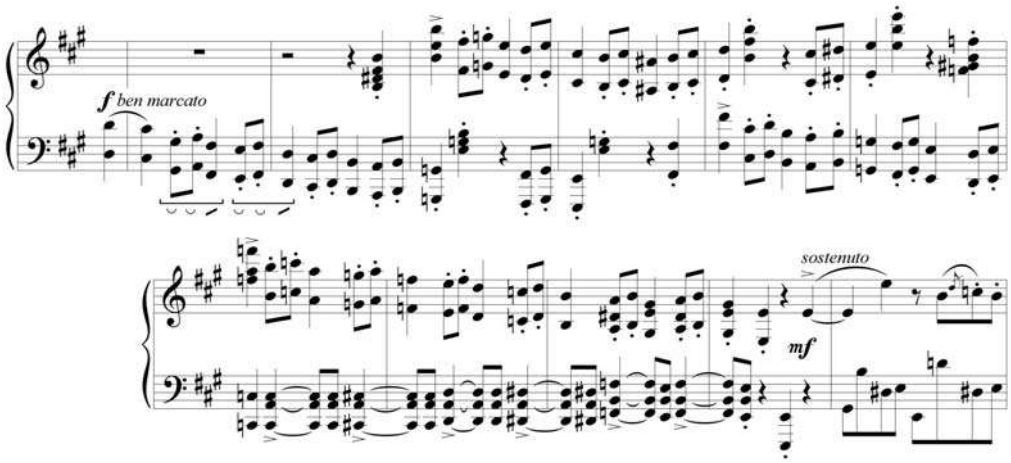


Example 2e. *Csárdás Obstiné*, mm. 17-21, 45-53, and 104-112.

We see that Brahms's cross-relations drive the structural harmony of sonata form, and Liszt's, an episodic structure based on "syntactical use of inflected repetition" (Satyendra, 1997, p. 239). Interestingly, this commonality brings to light two opposing aesthetics, as well as two different styles hongroises.[8]

[8] Brahms clearly disliked Liszt's music, as one reads in the following letter to Joachim: "[…] Since no one has singled out Liszt as a particularly good composer, something further must be said by way of explanation. His compositions grow increasingly horrible, for example, Dante [Sonata]! […]. My fingers itch to start a fight, to write anti-Liszt. But I [of all people?]! I, who cannot even write a greeting to his best friend, because he has nothing worth writing […]". In Brahms, 1908, 8/7/1859.

As regards rhythm, the main "Hungarian" feature in op. 2 is the anapestically grouped figure ()[9] saturating the first period of the "B" theme, mm. 61-70.



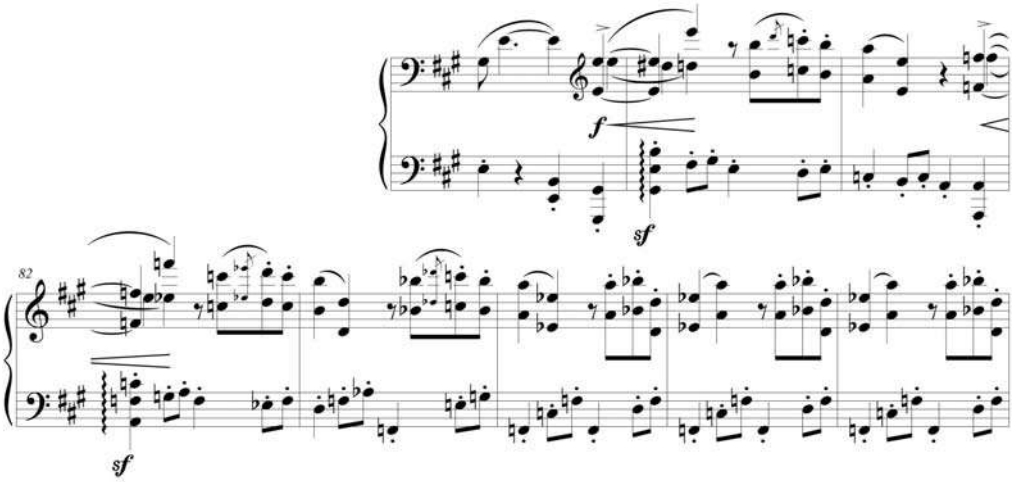
Example 2f. Brahms, Sonata op. 2, IV, mm. 61-71.

As can be gleaned from example 2f, this *verbunkos*-like idea both foils the lyrical "A" theme and supports the big modulation from F# minor to E major (V of III) by way of the French sixth , m. 69. Moreover, in the third period of the "B" theme. mm. 79-86, the *kuruc*-fourth motives are superimposed upon the anapest figures, now progressing to III by way of the German sixth (equals V^7 of the Neapolitan) m. 82 example 2g.

Here Brahms's contrapuntal texture marries the *style hongrois* with the "learned style" as eighteenth-century writers would have described it.[10]

His first explicity "Hungarian" piano work, however, is the aptly titled *Variations on a Hungarian Song* op. 21 no. 2. Though the work was first published in 1861,

[9] Bellman maintains that the anapestic foot can be scanned either as long-short-short or short-short-long, the second being more common in the *style hongrois*. See Bellman, 1998, p. 52.
[10] Ratner, 1980, p. 23, quotes Heinrich Koch IS *Musikalisches Lexikon* (1802): 2. The strict style [and learned style], which is also called the bound style or the fugal style […] is distinguished from the free style principally by a serious conduct of the melody, using few elaborations. The melody retains its serious character partly through frequent closely-bound progressions which do not allow ornamentation and breaking-up of the melody into small fragments […]".
[11] See Swafford, *1997, p.* 168; Frisch, 1990, p. 64, and Sisman, 1990, p. 143-144.



Example 2g. Brahms, Sonata op. 2, IV, mm. 79-86.

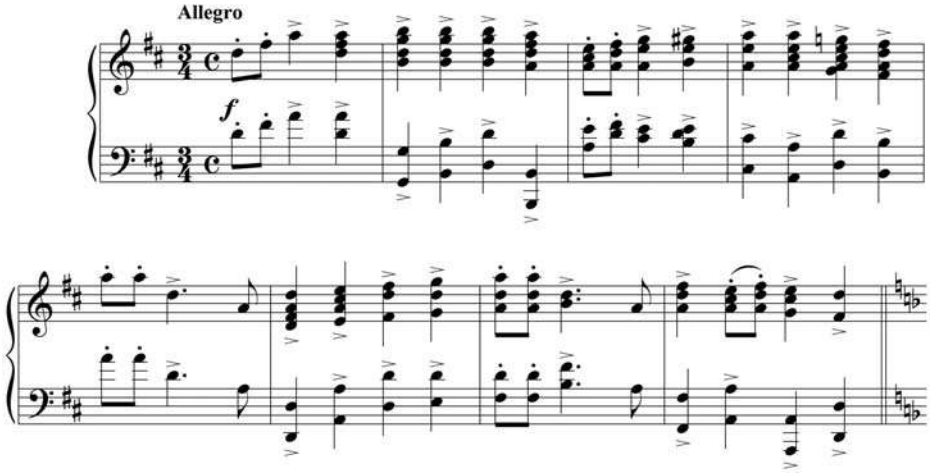
Swafford, Frisch, and Sisman think it was finished in 1856.[11] Malcolm MacDonald dates the work as early as 1853, alluding to its entry in the most recent Brahms Werkverzeichnis.[12] Writes MacDonald:

> In April 1853 he sent Joachim piano settings of three Hungarian tunes obtained from Reményi, with a friendly dedication from Reményi and himself. This manuscript still exists in Leipzig – and the second tune proves to be the theme of these Variations: a rugged eight-bar melody rhythmically enlivened by its alternating bars of 3/4 and 4/4.[13]

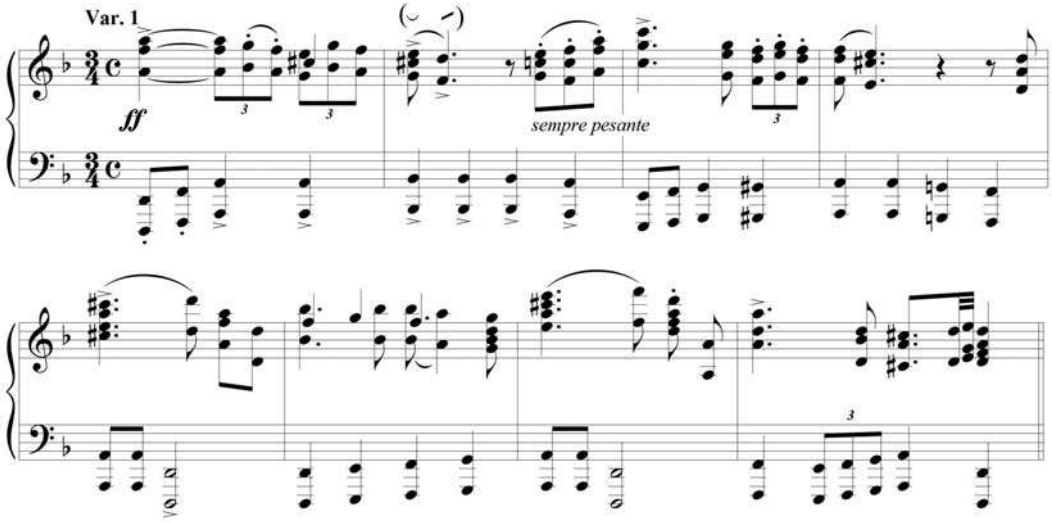
In example 3a, one sees that the eight measures of 3/4-4/4 meter actually reduce to four of 7/4, a pattern that governs the first eight variations as well. If MacDonald's date is correct, Brahms's interest in such rhythm may have been fired by Clara Schumann's account of local musicians she heard while visiting Buda-Pesth, early 1856 (Sisman, 1990, p. 143, fn 43).

Four passages from op. 21, No. 2 show Brahms's continuing efforts to personalize the *style hongrois*. First, variation 1, example 3b, skillfully blends contrapuntal rigor with the Hungarian folk idiom. This Brahms does by shifting the melody to the bass,

[12] See MacDonald, 1990, p. 80 and McCorkle, 1984, p. 73-75.
[13] MacDonald, 1990, p. 80. Kurt Von Stephenson quotes the song's original text: "*Akkor csinos a bakkancsos, ha gatyája végig rongyos, tergye kilóg a gatyabol, mint a rozsa bimbójatol*." In English: "So the peasant is handsome, when his trousers are ragged and his knees peek out like a rose from the bud". Von Stephenson notes that the meter of Hungarian text exactly fits that of the theme. See Stephenson, 1962, p. 523. I thank Gabor Viragh of Hartt School for supplying an English translation.

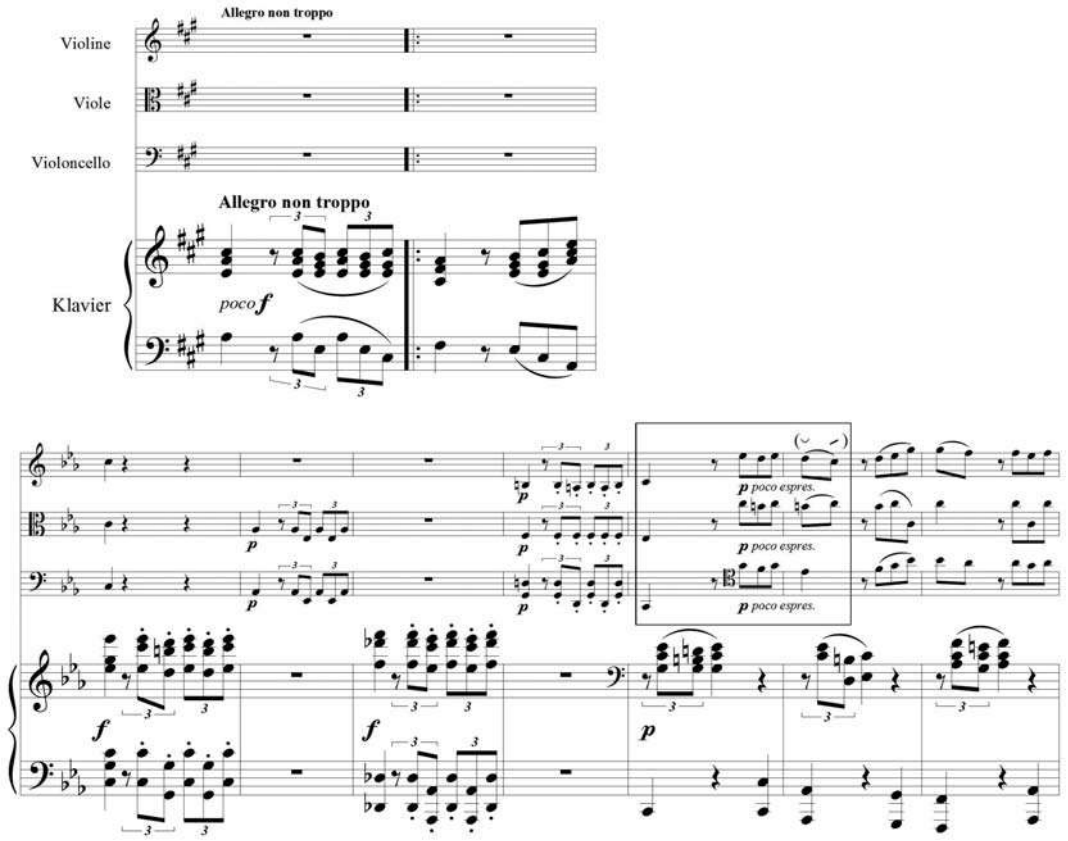


Example 3a. Brahms, *Variations on a Hungarian Song for Piano*, op.21, No.2, opening theme.



Example 3b. Brahms, *Variations on a Hungarian Song for Piano*, op.21, No. 2, variation I.

which right-hand countermelody foretells, of all things, the opening theme of the
60 *Piano Quartet in A*, op. 26; this theme, we note, is extended by a "short-long" rhythmic

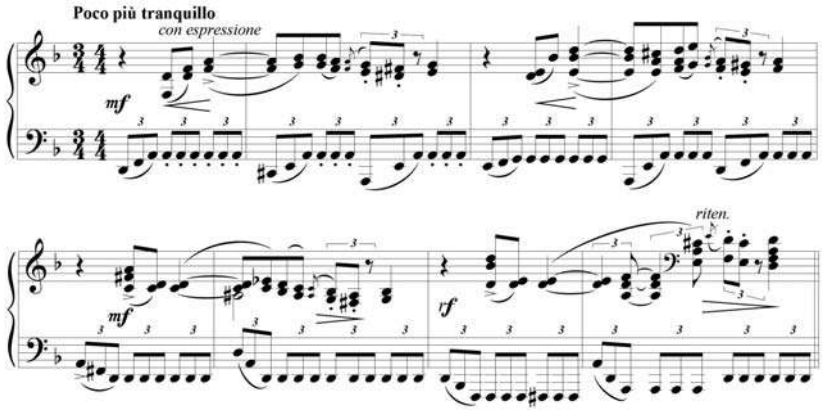


gesture in the development section, example 3c.

Example 3c. Brahms, *Piano Quartet No.2*, op. 26, I, mm. 1-2 and mm. 142-146.

In variation 5, example 3d, one hears echoes of the *hallgató*, a slow rhapsodic "song for listening to" (Sarosi, 1978, p. 191). MacDonald speaks of the variation as having a:

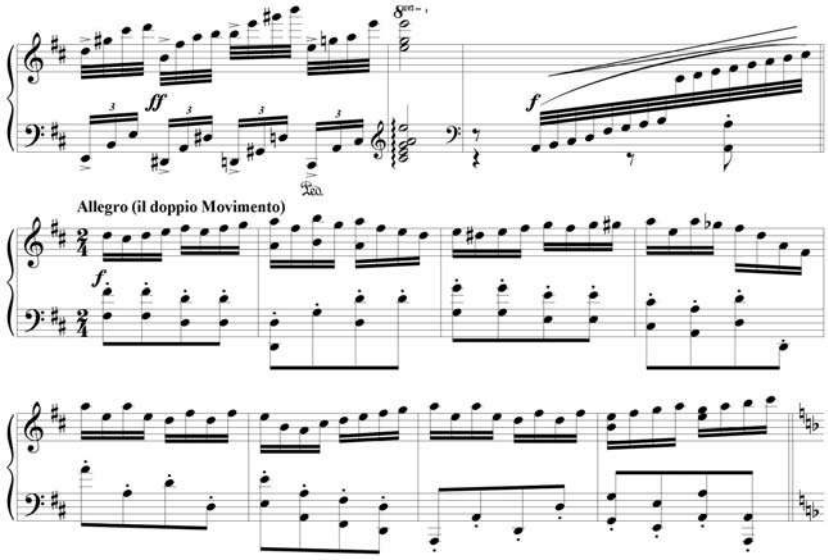
> […] 'gypsy' colouring of variation 5, whose repeated notes and rhythmic hesitations evoke the sonority of the cimbalom and (perhaps only from similarity of inspiration) passages in the Hungarian Rhapsodies of Liszt. (MacDonald, 1990, p. 80)



Example 3d. Brahms, *Variations on a Hungarian Song for Piano*, op.21, No.2, variation 5.

A characteristically Brahmsian touch here is the downward reversal of the bass triplets, mm. 5-8, paralleling the downward turn of the melody.

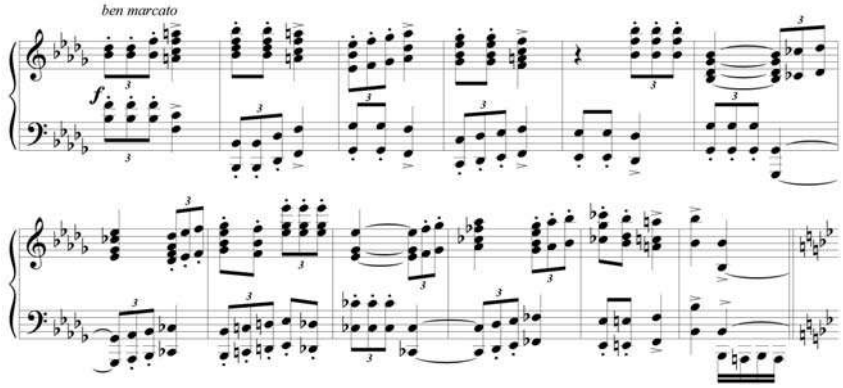
Our third excerpt example 3e quotes the opening of the finale, a czardas launched by an anacrustic V^7 scale. Here, the angular 7/4 contracts into a neat 2/4, which material, a modified rondo theme, interlinks several episodes passing through the keys D major, D minor, D major, Bb major, Bb minor, Bb major, and finally D major.[14]



Example 3e. Brahms, *Variations on a Hungarian Song for Piano*, op.21, No.2, finale, opening.

[14] These episodes comprise sequences and reharmonizations of motives found in the main body of the work.

The last segment of op. 21, No. 2 to be examined is the Bb minor section (mm. 62-73) example 3f.

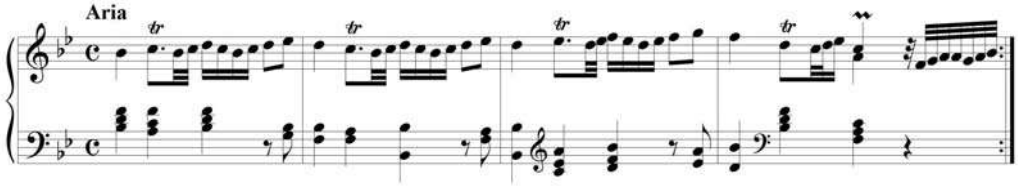


Example 3f. Brahms, Variations on a Hungarian Song for Piano t op.21, No.2, mm. 62-73.

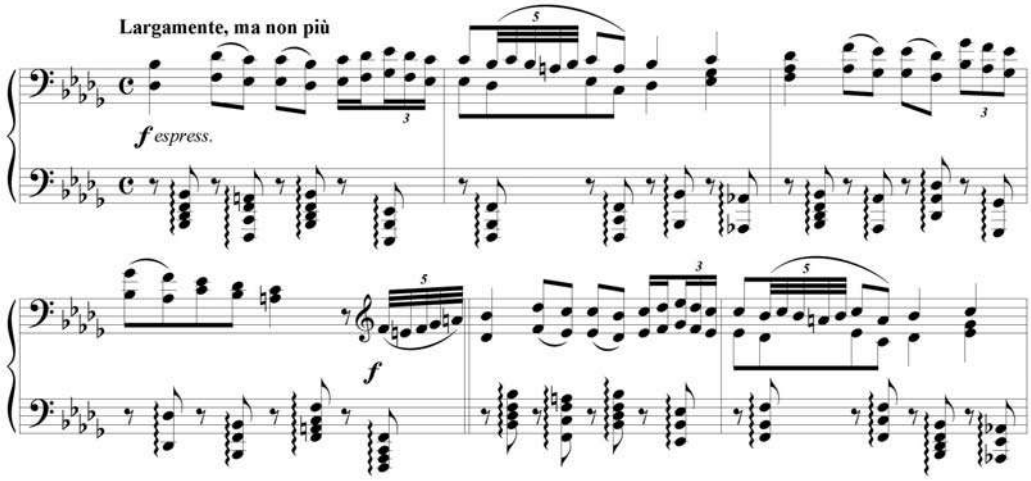
This part recalls the explosive first variation, now with more development (Sisman, 1990, p. 145). We find here continuous motivic dialogue between the hands, intensified by a prolonged Neapolitan harmony (C-flat major). The young Brahms's striving for composerly discipline and restraint in this work is voiced in a letter to Joachim:

> Particularly in the Finale a nasty youth is simply raging, and I'd very much like to fashion a more respectable fellow, not raising a racket as sometimes [happened] in the sonatas. (Quoted in Sisman, 1990, p. 145)

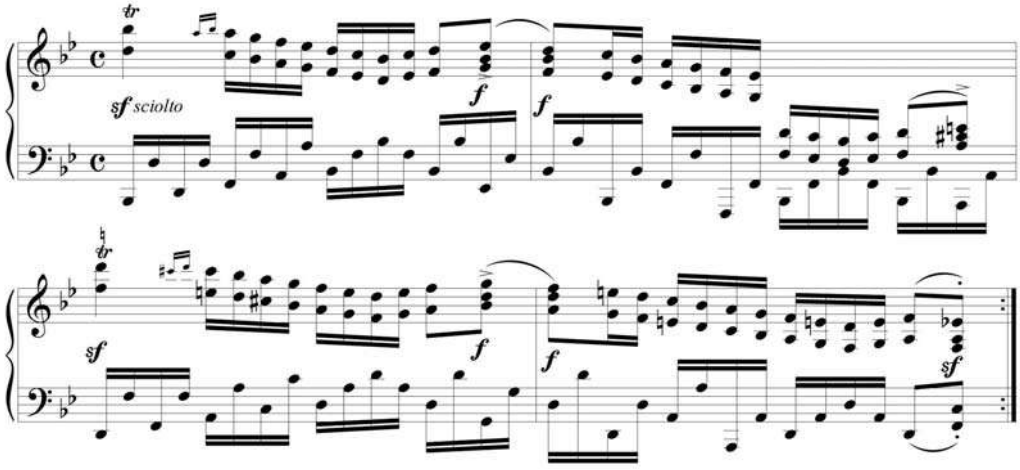
Further signs of Brahms's evolving *style hongrois* appear in the very respectable *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Handel*, op. 24, which theme is partially quoted in example 4a. Walter Niemann correctly hears a *lassan* in the brooding strains of the thirteenth variation, example 4b (Niemann, 1937, p. 234). Jonathan Bellman adds further that the thirteenth and fourteenth variation (example 4c), taken together, form a tiny *csárdás* within the work as a whole (Bellman, 1998, p. 208-209). In both variations, Brahms recasts the theme's "English" character by shifting Handel's embellishments metrically and also supporting their melodic lines with accompanimental figures idiomatic to the *cimbalom*.



Example 4a. Brahms, *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Handel*, op. 24, Aria, mm. 1-4.



Example 4b. Brahms, *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Handel*, op. 24, variation 13, opening.



Example 4c. Brahms, *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Handel*, op. 24, variation 14, opening.

Of signal import to this study are the two volumes of *Hungarian Dances*. Although the first set, for piano duet, was published in the 1860s,[15] Brahms played earlier versions of the *Dances* as solos on the Reményi concerts of the 1850s.[16] Michael Musgrave says of these works:

> […] the first set contained material dating from his tour with the violinist Reményi of 1853, which Reményi regarded Brahms as having no authority to use […] Like Liszt and others, the interest was not in genuine Hungarian peasant music, as, for example, later to be explored by such a figure as Bartók, but in popular composed music of recent provenance played by gipsies as café entertainment. In this sense, the dances stand in considerable contrast to the 'Hungarian song' of the earlier variations, with its alternation of 2/4 and 3/4 metres, a feature never explored in these works or the later *Zigeunerlieder*.[17]

Musgrave's theory that the Hungarian material in music after op. 21, no. 2, was of doubtful authenticity echoes Reményi's, who reports:

> I happened to be in Vienna, and by accident went into a music store for the purpose of learning what new publications had appeared […] a series of Hungarian dances […] were making a sensation all over the civilized world. It is true that in the first editions made by Simrock, the titlepage contained the words, 'Hungarian Dances,' followed, in very small letters, by the words, 'transcribed by (*gesetzt*),' and then the words, in large letters, 'Johannes Brahms'; but since that time new editions have appeared as 'the compositions of Brahms himself, and he must be aware of the fact.[18]

Brahms evidently *was* aware of this, since he wrote Simrock in 1868 that the Dances were "genuine gypsy children, which I did not beget, 'but merely brought up with bread and milk" (Goldhammer, 1963, p. 93). Happily for modern Brahms scholarship, a recent (1990) Editio Musica publication matches the *Dances* with facsimiles of their sources (Brahms, 1990). This edition amplifies earlier work by one Joseph Mueller, who, writes Carol Ann Roberts Bell, compiled a list of the original

[15] The second group of *Hungarian Dances* for piano duet, Nos. 11-21, were issued in 1880.
[16] May (1981, vol. III, p. 445) informs us that Brahms published orchestral versions of Nos. 1, 3 and 10 in 1874, which he frequently conducted at this time.
[17] Musgrave, 1994, p. 60: Brahms arranged only the first ten Dances for solo piano, publishing them as a set in 1872.
[18] Published first in the New York Herald, Saturday, January 18th, 1879, 10, then as part of a book by Kelley and Upton, 1906, p. 92-94.

dances in 1874 (Bell, 1990). Bell asserts that Mueller's research was read by at least one contemporary, the critic G. Lichtenstein, who wrote in 1876:

> Brahms' *Ungarische Tänze* having become so deservedly popular all over Europe, it seems but just to say something of the original composers of these beautiful melodies, the clever setting of which as pianoforte duets by Herr Brahms has been justly admired by all who are familiar with the Hungarian National Style. With the exception of Liszt and Volksmann, no other musician has caught the spirit of the music and peculiar harmonies with a keener and quicker ear than Brahms has done, and that without making any additions of his own . What Brahms did was simply to put to paper what he had heard played by the canes, who in their fancy had mixed up different melodies, performing them with their own harmonies, embellishments, arabesques, etc. Almost all the melodies that Brahms here treated are taken from the "Csárdás" – the national dance of Hungary. (Bell, 1990, p. 42-43, quoted from Lichtenstein, 1876, p. 22)

Mueller's listing anticipates that of Editio Musica and, to a lesser extent, that of Reményi, whose envy of Brahms's monetary success with the *Dances* forces one to question his credibility on the sources' authenticity.[19] In this connection, we must quote a letter Brahms wrote to Simrock, upon submitting the *Dances* for publication. The *Hungarian Dances* were, in Brahms's words, "[…] perhaps the most practical article so unpractical a man as myself can offer" (Murdoch, 1933 and 1978, p. 301).

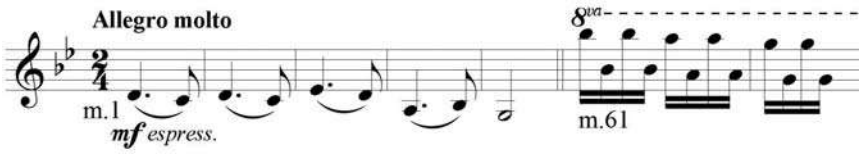
The *style hongrois*, as one would expect, colors the *Hungarian Dances* from first to last. To be sure, these works distill their Magyar themes. And though peripheral to Brahms's opus-numbered works, they exerted considerable influence on the latter. The remainder of this article will examine the *Dances* with respect to *style hongrois* precedents and to their significance for Brahms's later music.

For the sake of clarity, I shall henceforth designate Brahms's published settings as *arrangements* and the Editio Musica's facsimilies as originals. Let us begin our survey of Brahms's *Hungarian Dances* by inspecting Numbers One and Eight which contain structural similarities. Examples 5a and 5b respectively present the two dances as follows: 1) thematic germ; 2) *original*, and *arrangement*. In No.1, Brahms omits the *lassú* but enriches the csárdás melody with syncopated counterpoints and

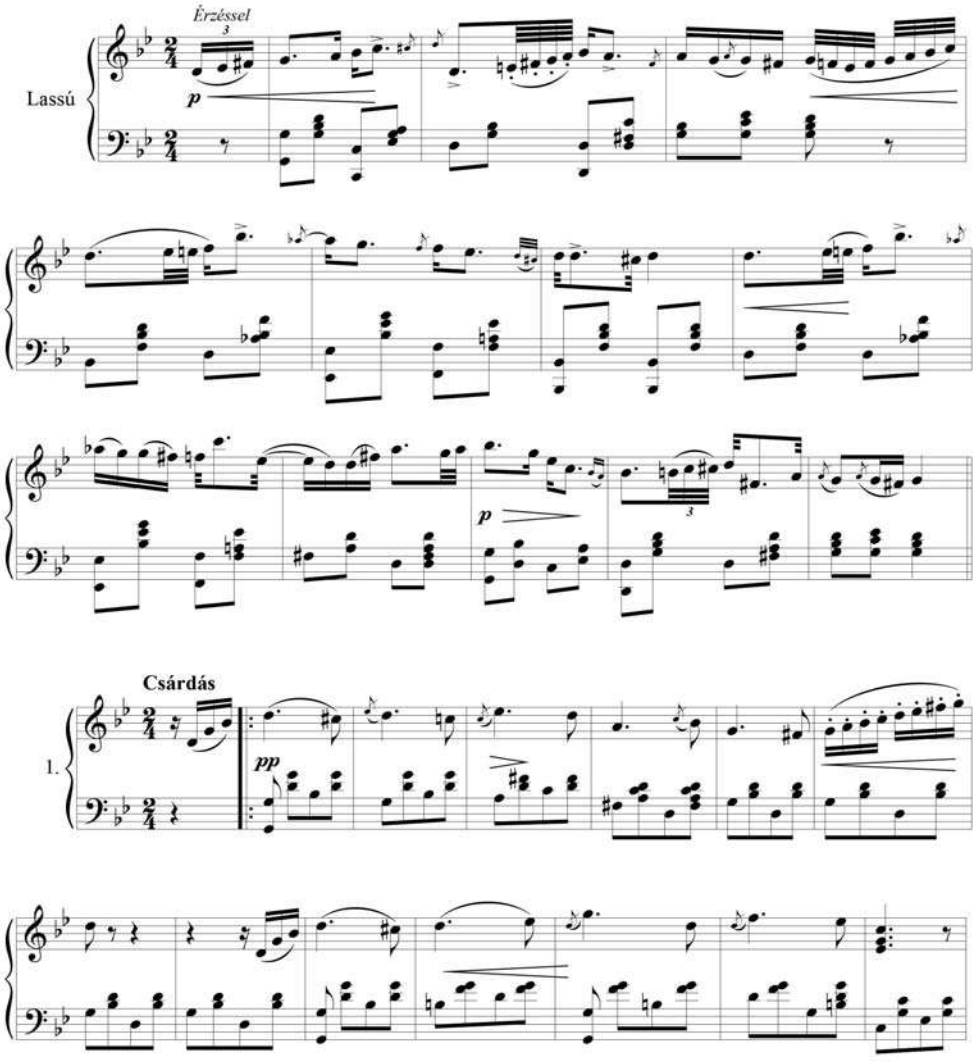
[19] The thematic material (and a good deal more) of *Hungarian Dances Nos. 3 and 7* were inspired by Reményi pieces, according to O. Goldhammer's article (1963, p. 89-100). Katatin Szerzo, referencing a new source of these pieces, adds: "The Bayreuth manuscript, bearing evidence in this respect [Reményi authorship] is unpublished: it is a task of the future research of Brahms' sources to make this document available." See his commentary in Brahms, 1908, Introduction, p. VIII.

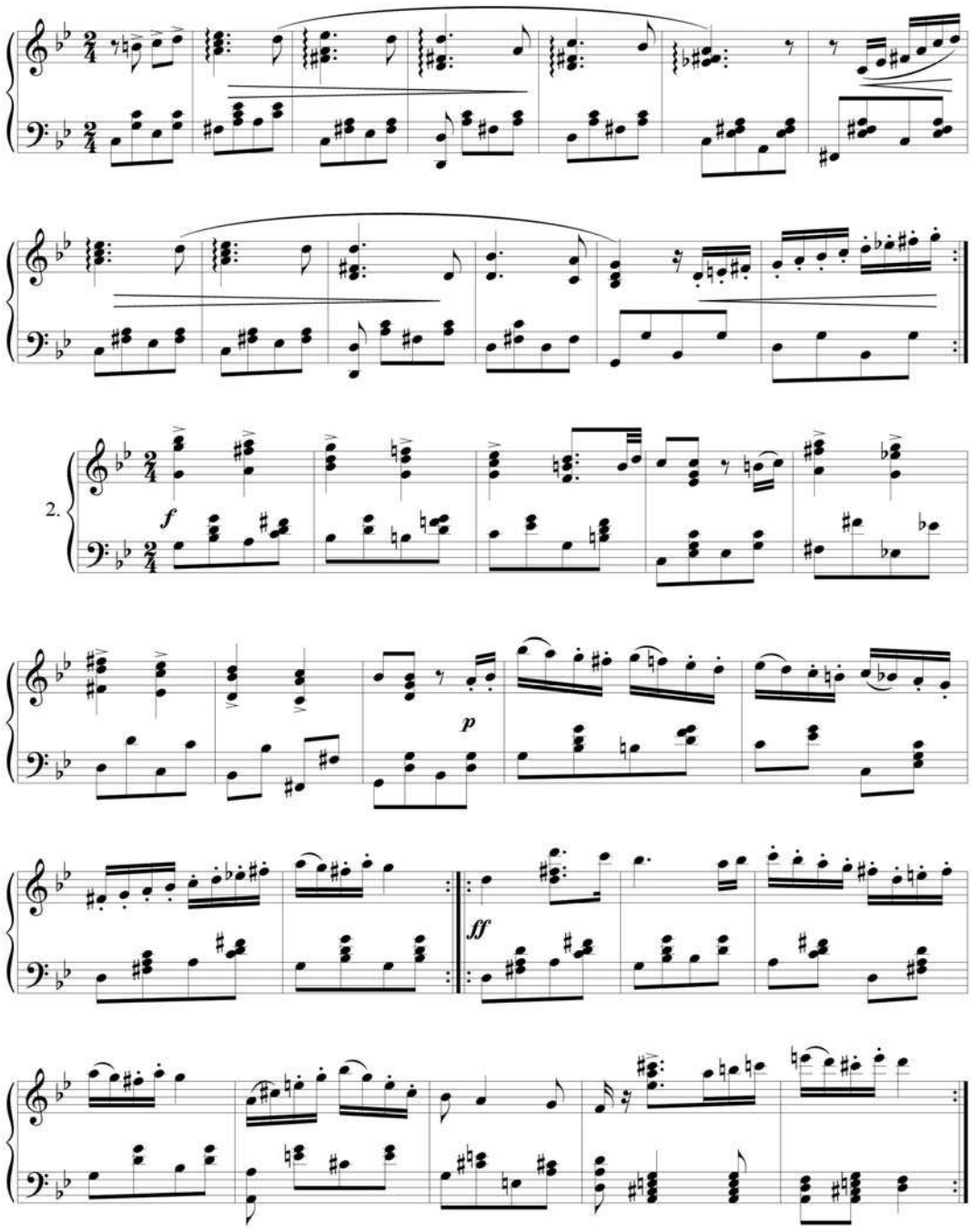
rich chordal textures. He does the same for No. 8, which upper parts feature eight-six chords, a *style hongrois* cliché.

Sequence of examples 5a: *Hungarian Dance No. 1*

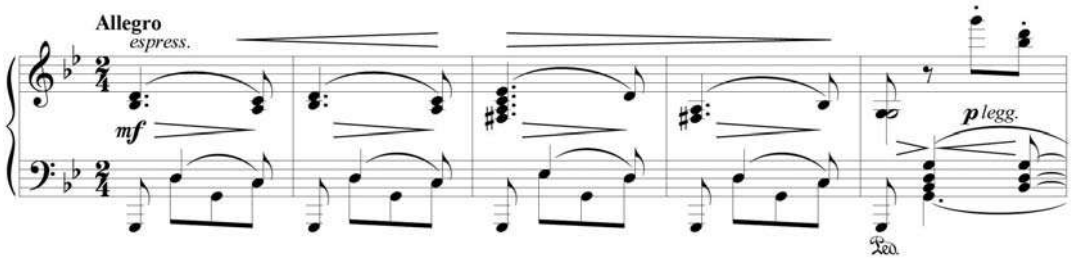


Thematic germ of Brahms's *arrangement*:

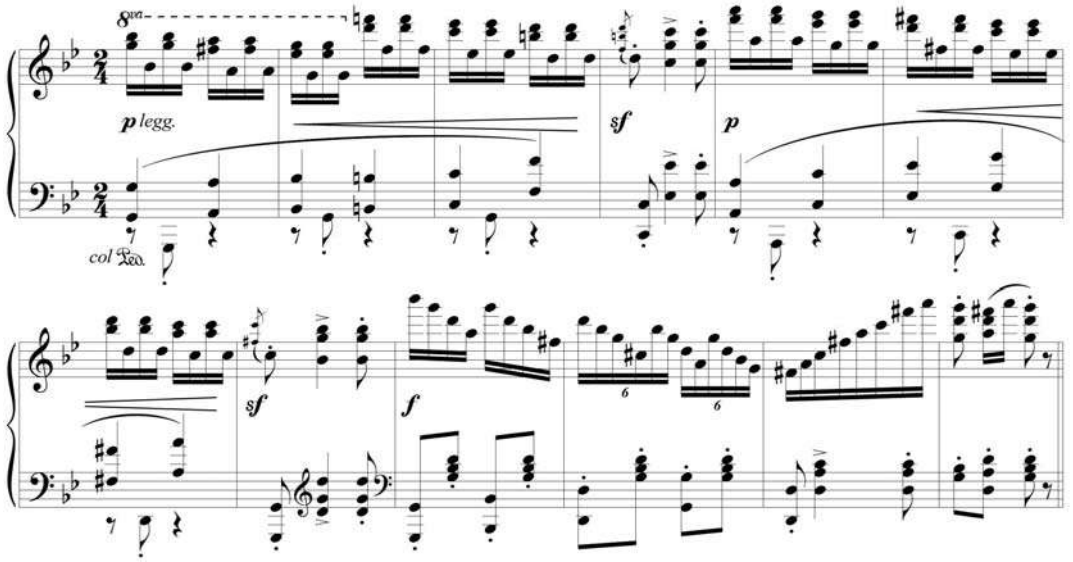




Isteni Csárdás/Hattyú-Hangok, probably composed by Miska Borzó.



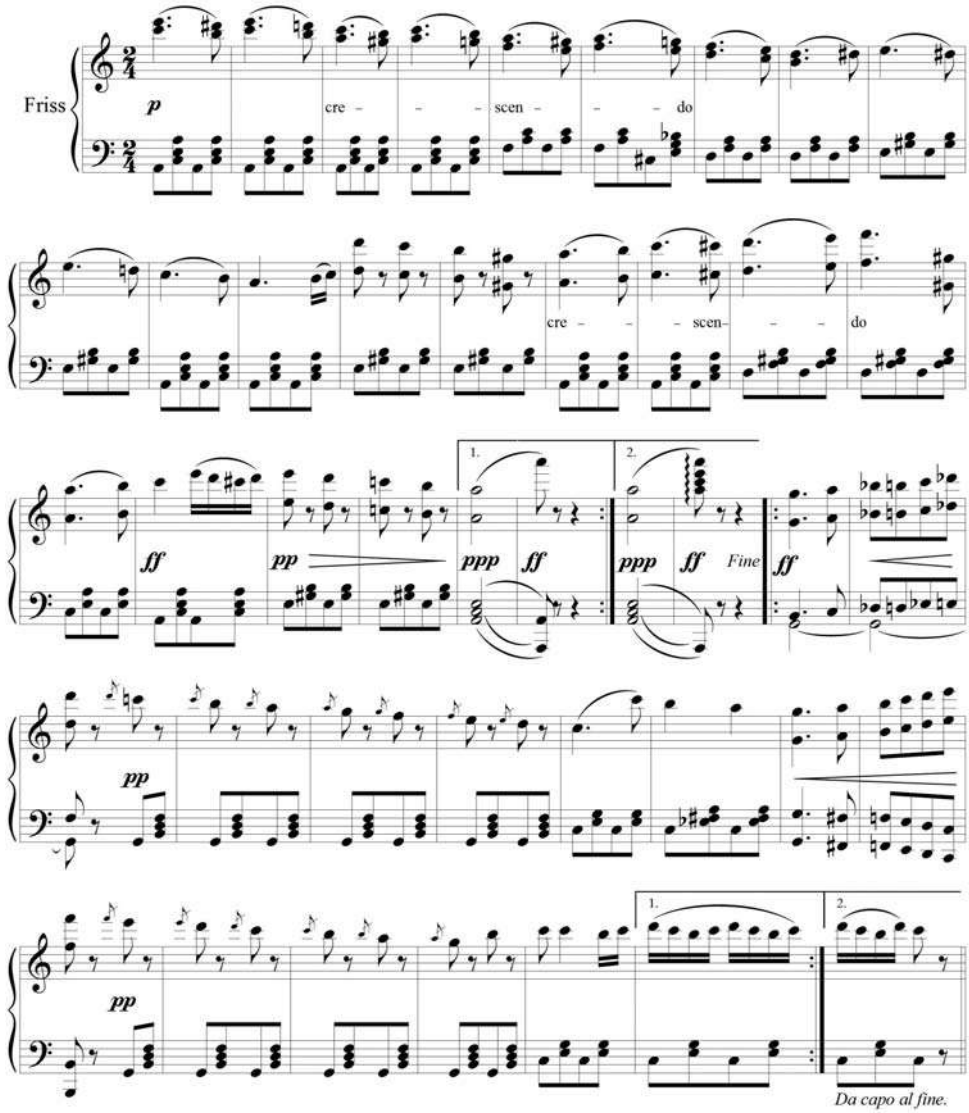
Hungarian Dance No.1, mm. 1-5.



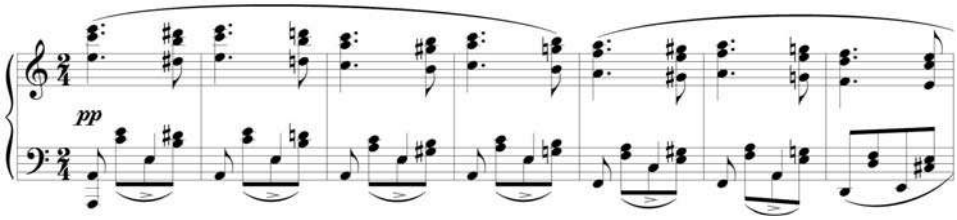
Hungarian Dance No.1, mm. 61-72.

Sequence of examples 5b: *Hungarian Dance No. 8*

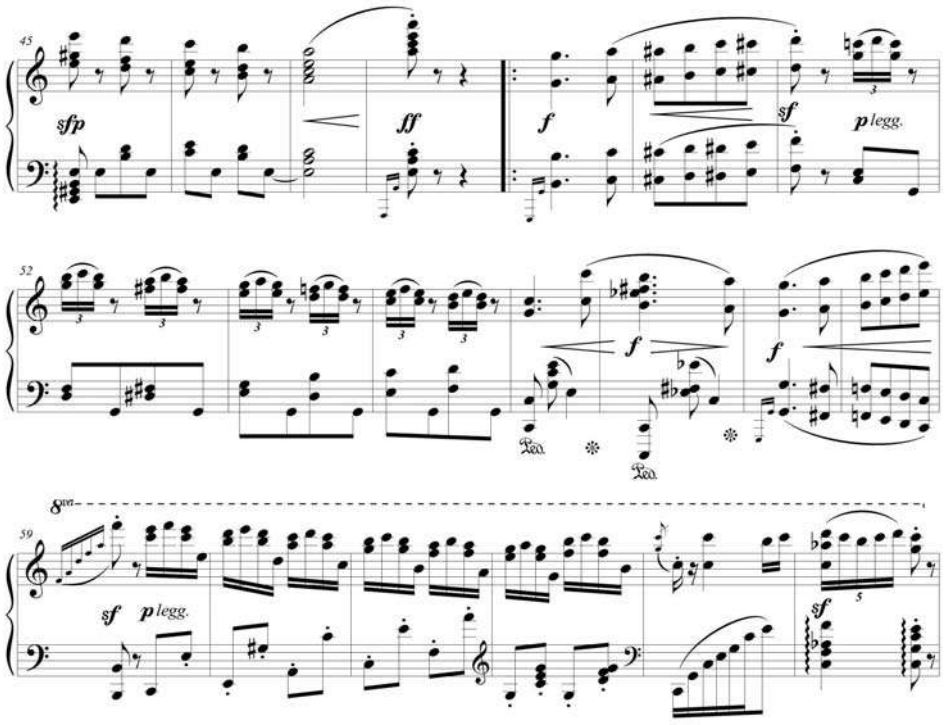
Thematic germ of Brahms's *arrangement*



Original dance: *Luiza Csárdás* by Frank Ignác (1825-?), published in 1859.

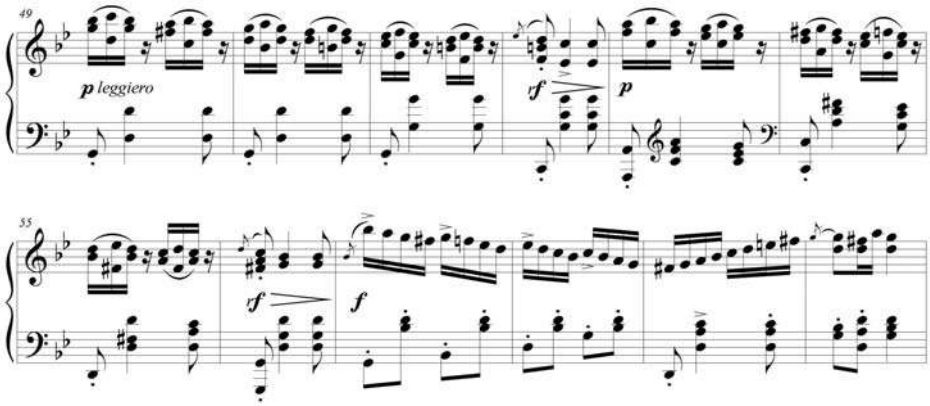


Hungarian Dance No. 8, mm. 1-8.



Hungarian Dance No. 8, mm. 49-64.

Brahms's multiple indications for accents and expression marks (see example 5a, m. 64) fit the idiom he chose to represent, the Gypsy *csárdás*. Katalin Szerzó says of No. 1 that it "[…] has not come to form part of the Hungarian rural traditions, but its urban versions are widely popular even today". And of No.8, "Owing to its foreign character and waltz-like features this tune could never strike roots in rural tradition" (Brahms, 1908, Introduction, p. VIII). The *alla zoppa* syncopations and sixteenth-note arabesques found in No.1, example 5c, rather evoke Gypsy music. Indeed, such gestures may be fruitfully compared to those informing Haydn's *Piano Trio*, Hob. XV, 25.



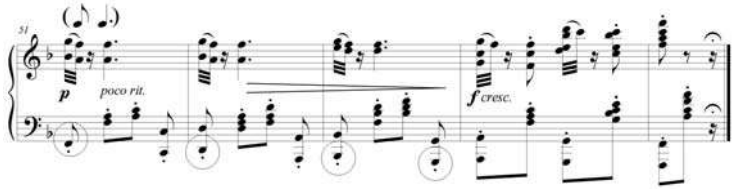
Example 5c. *Hungarian Dance No. 1*, mm. 49-60.

Thanks to modern recording technology, one can now hear Brahms's own performance of this music. His rendition of the first *Hungarian Dance* was recorded in 1889 on an Edison cylinder machine brought to Vienna by one of the inventor's agents. Musicologist-critic Will Crutchfield writes:

> The syncopations are done very emphatically [referring to example 5c above]: with an agogic accent and a loud punch. (This *rinforzando* really comes on the syncopation chord: not until the fourth time the syncopation comes around does Brahms put special emphasis on the first beat as well.) The runs are taken at a distinctly increased tempo: in the high 80s on the metronome; this, too, is a dashing effect, and the best moment in the whole cylinder is the cadence[20] at the end […] which is tossed off with a fiery snap, faster yet than the tempo of the runs. (Crutchfield, 1986, p. 15)

Crutchfield's account calls to mind yet another syncopated figure peppering the *Hungarian Dances*, the "Scotch snap,"[21] a short-long pattern. This violinistic gesture appears most prominently in No.3 (mm. 68), No.4 (mm. 73 and 91), and No.7 (mm. 6, 8, etc) of the *arrangements*.[22] The ending of No.7 demonstrates how Brahms uses the gesture motivically, reharmonizing each of its repetitions by way of his signature third-chain in the bass, example 5d.

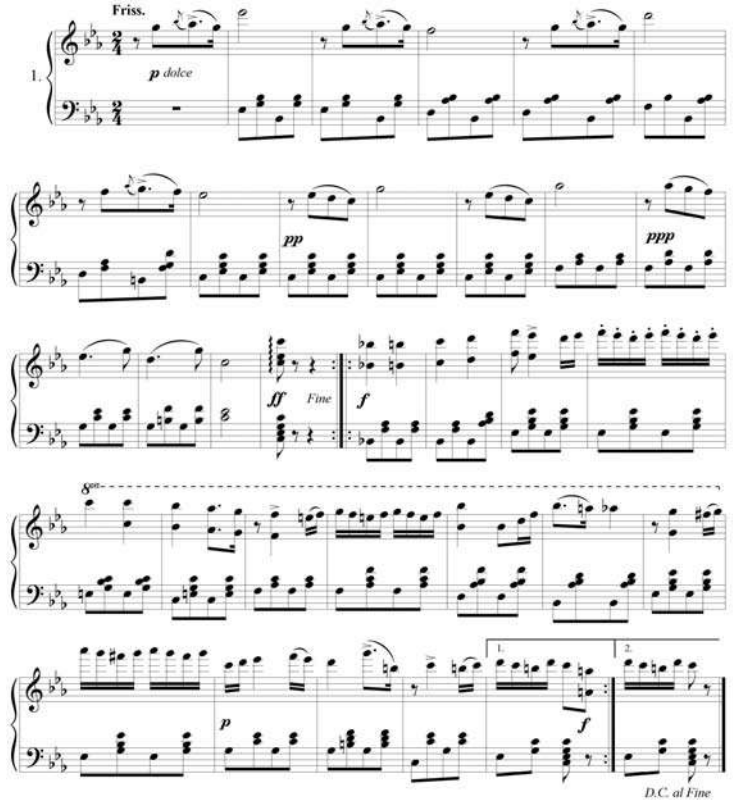
[20] Crutchfield (1986, p. 13-21, 60) is referring to the *bókazó* figure which appears here in example 5c m. 60.
[21] Starkie (1937, p. 100) comments: "Gypsy fiddlers take an obvious delight in playing the snap rhythm with exaggerated sharpness. The rhythm draws back ponderously and the audience begins to stamp its feet, so irresistible is the effect produced by the Marcato".
[22] Reményi said of the third that, "[…] the first part of it is my own" and of the seventh that it "[…] is entirely my own and very generally played", in Kelley, 1906, p. 93. MacDonald (1990, p. 11) writes: "Few biographers can bring themselves to give Reményi a good character, and he does seem to have been a boastful, temperamental, opportunistic person".



Example 5d. *Hungarian Dance No. 7*, mm. 51-55.

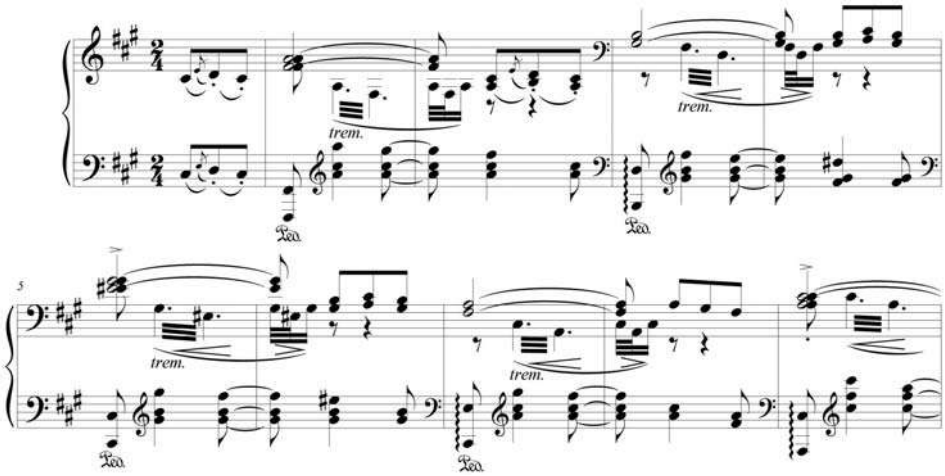
What is perhaps the most colorful textural aspect of the *Hungarian Dances* is their *cimbalom* figuration. We have already encountered such figures in Opp. 2, 21/2, and 24. *Hungarian Dance No.4* features *cimbalom* tremolos[23] in the lyrical *Poco sostenuto* (F-sharp minor) that precedes the rousing *Vivace* (A major) section . Example 5e gives the *original* with corresponding segments of the *arrangement*.

Sequence of examples 5e: *Hungarian Dance No. 4*.

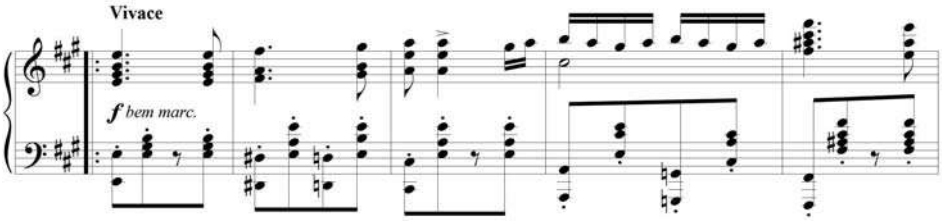


Original dance: *Kalocsai emlék* by N. Merty, published in 1865.

[23] The left-hand crossovers in the *Poco sostenuto* call to mind Willy von Beckerath's famous caricature of a cigar-puffing Brahms so positioned at the keyboard.



Hungarian Dance No. 4, mm. 1-9.



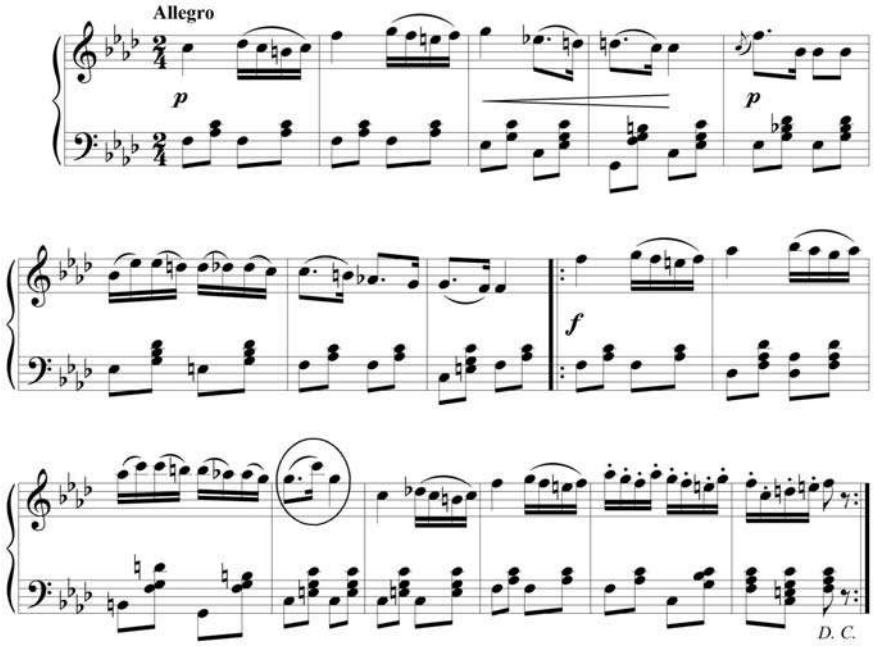
Hungarian Dance No. 4, mm. 33-37.

Hungarian Dance No. 4, mm. 49-52.

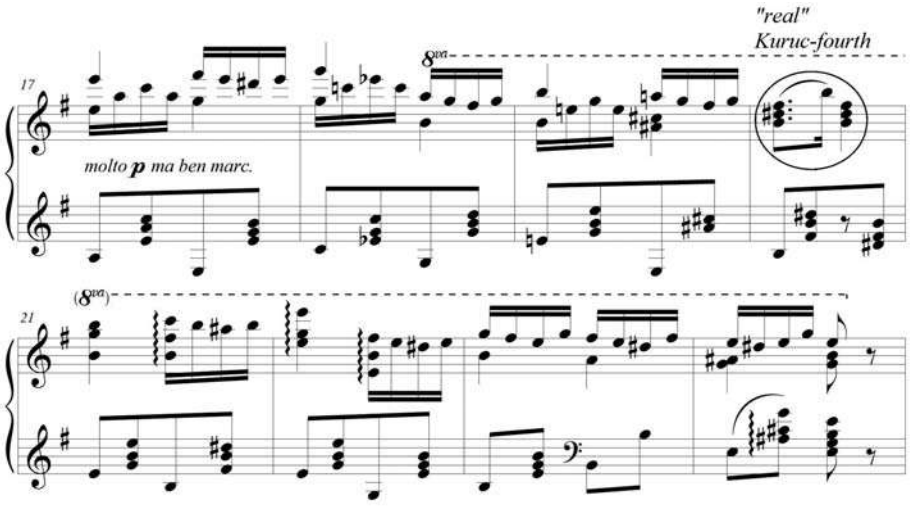
There are three noticeable differences between the *original* and the *arrangement* in the above example. First Brahms changes the *friss* to a *lassú*.[24] Second, he changes the key from E-flat major to F#-minor. Third, and most characteristically, he reworks the bland homophonic accompaniment into a motivically saturated one. The *Vivace* section is especially dramatic in this *Dance*, since the original theme returns (mm. 49-65) supported by continuous tremolos marked *passionato*.

[24] Says Reményi: "No. 4 is not a Hungarian air at all, but a bad imitation of Schubert's world-renowned serenade, travestied into a czardas." See Kelley, 1906, p. 93.

Hungarian Dance No. 9 exploits yet another pitch feature of the style hongrois, the *kuruc*-fourth. Example 5f again displays the *original* and *arrangement*.



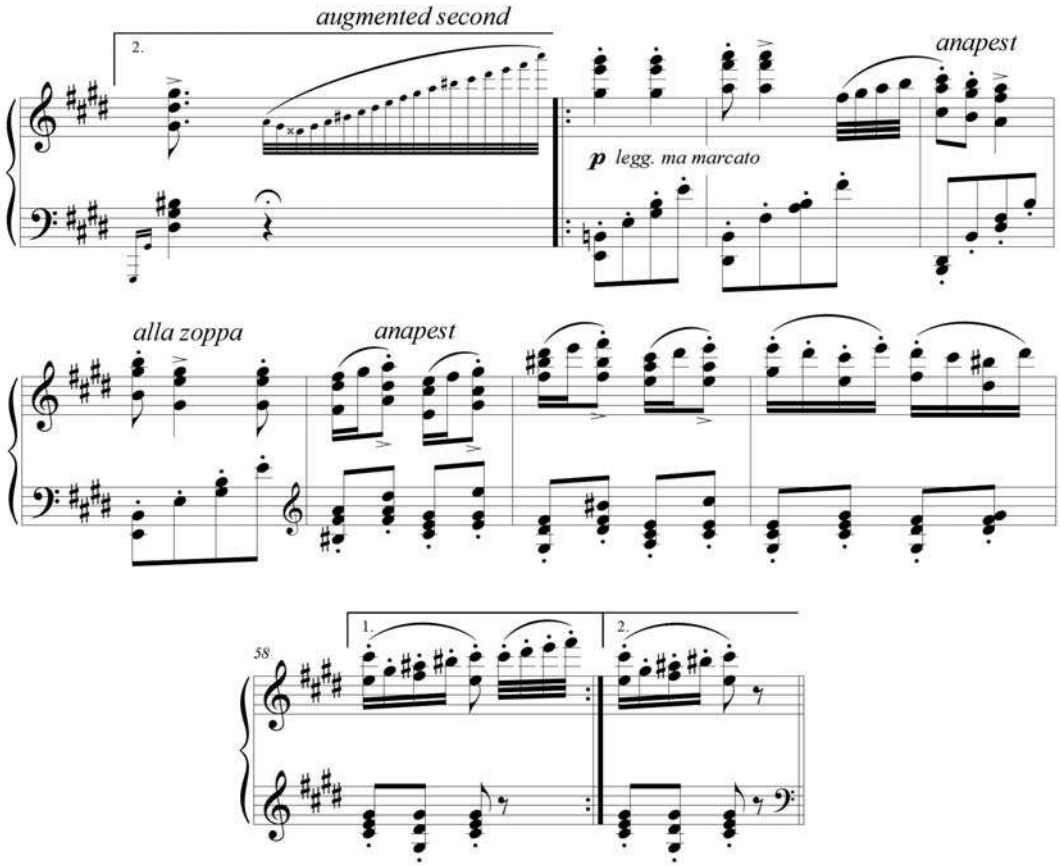
Exemple 5f. *Hungarian Dance No. 9*: *Makai Csárdás*, published around 1850, version for solo piano by János Travnyik (1816-1864).



Hungarian Dance No. 9, mm. 17-24.

Brahms expands the single *kuruc*-fourth in the original (m. 12) into a motivic chain of fourths supported by modally mixed harmonies. He prepares the "real" *kuruc*-fourth (m. 20) then, by *Vorimitation* of fourths.[25]

Our survey of *Hungarian Dances* concludes with *Dance No. 6* a piece that mixes several stylistic features at once, example 5g. The *arrangement* exhibits: augmented-second inflection of the G# scale in m. 50; *alla zoppa* and Hungarian anapest rhythm, mm. 55-56; and the mixed legato-staccato articulation (right hand) suggesting a *rubato* style not unlike that found in the Haydn's Rondo.



Example 5g. *Hungarian Dance No. 6*. mm. 50-58.

[25] I thank Dr. Ira Braus for alerting me to the technique of *Vorimitation* here.

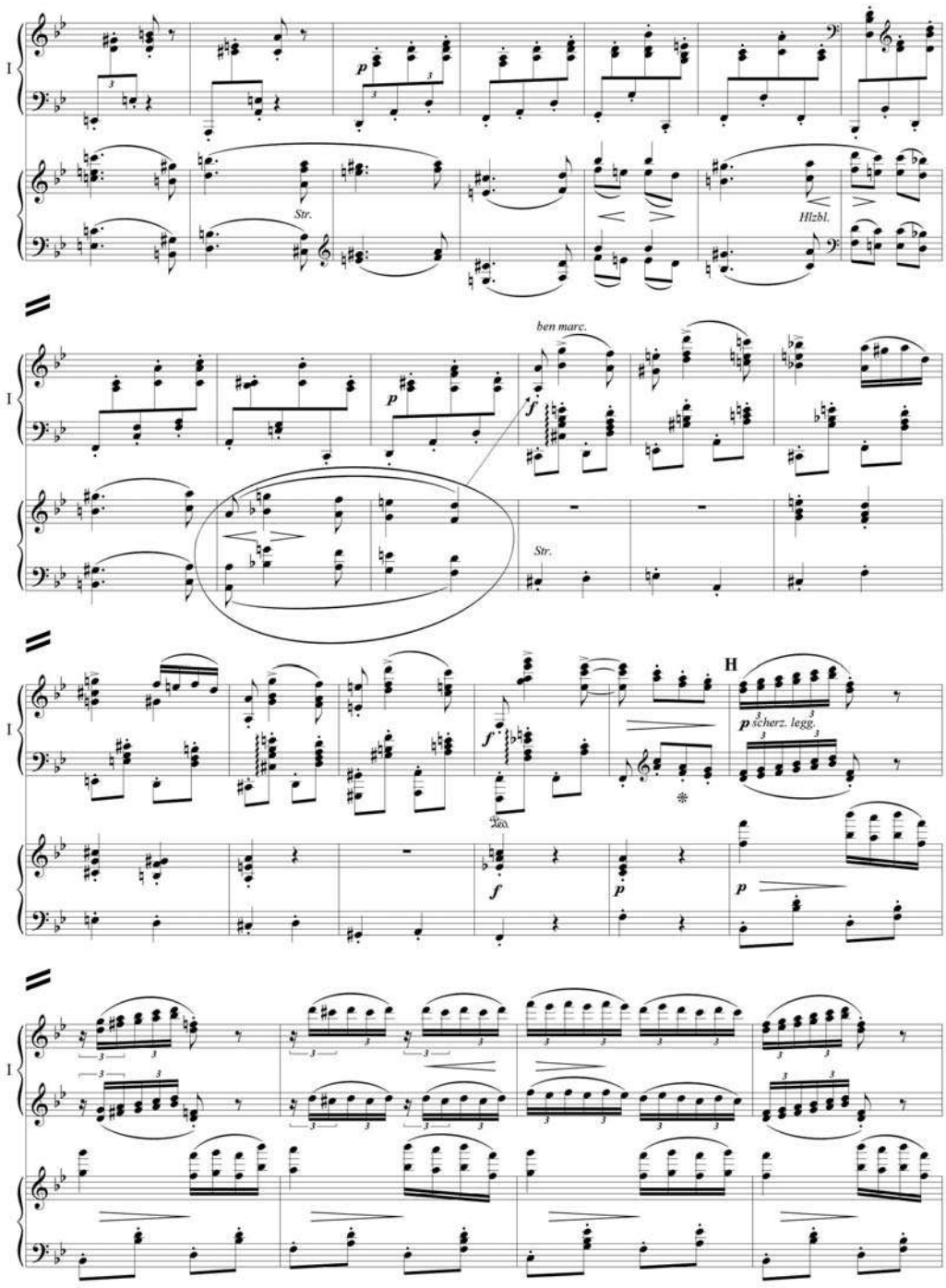
There is no question that the *Hungarian Dances* have withstood the test of time. During the centennial year of Brahms's birth (1933) W. Murdoch wrote of these works:

> They may not be as pretentious as the more famous Hungarian Rhapsodies of Liszt, nor as full of technical bravura, but they contain more genuine Hungarian spirit and colour. Their melodies are finer, and their rhythms subtler; and I think that their popularity will outlast the more glittering and shallow effusions of the semi-Hungarian Liszt […]. I wish that they were performed oftener in public as solos – they are so jolly and invigorating. (Murdoch, 1978, p. 302)

Murdoch's wishful prediction that the *Hungarian Dances* would outlast the *Hungarian Rhapsodies* has proven false, and rightly so: both composers created viable and lasting *styles hongroises*. Indeed, each composer brought to the *style hongrois* his own personality. What matters is that Brahms drew from the *Hungarian Dances* a wealth of unique ideas that would inform and enliven subsequent works. How, then, did the *style hongrois* color his mature (post-1880) works? In simple terms, he used Hungarianisms with greater art in the late pieces than in the early ones. The mature Brahms had personalized the *style hongrois* to the extent that it had become inseparable from the creative process itself.[26]

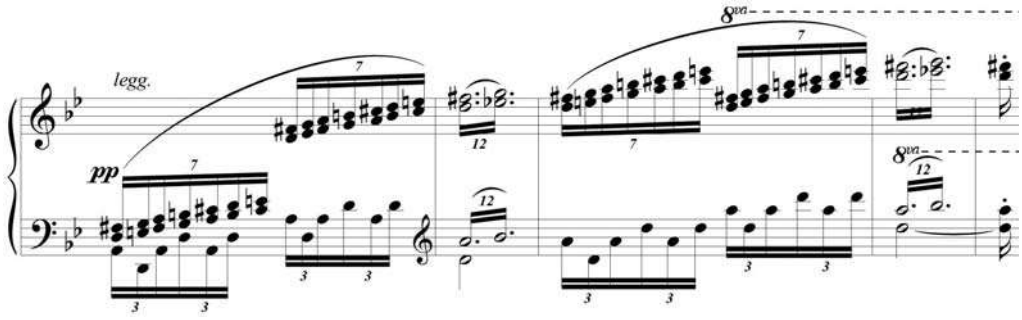
The finale of Brahms's *Second Piano Concerto*, op. 83, premiered 1883 in Buda-Pesth, embodies this idea. As will be shown in example 6, his Hungarianisms helped to articulate a modified sonata-rondo form.

[26] Interestingly, the same can be said for Bartók, though he used more "authentic" sources. Benjamin Suchoff (1956, p. 11) tells how the *Mikrokosmos* transmutes peasant into art music. Suchoff remarks that Bartók used folk music less literally in his most abstract composition. At a 1941 Columbia University lecture, the composer grouped his folk-influenced music into three categories: first, where folk melody is the more important part of the work; second, where both melodies and the added parts share equal importance; and third, where the folk material is used merely as a "motto". An edited transcript of the lecture can be found in Bartók, 1976, p. 352.

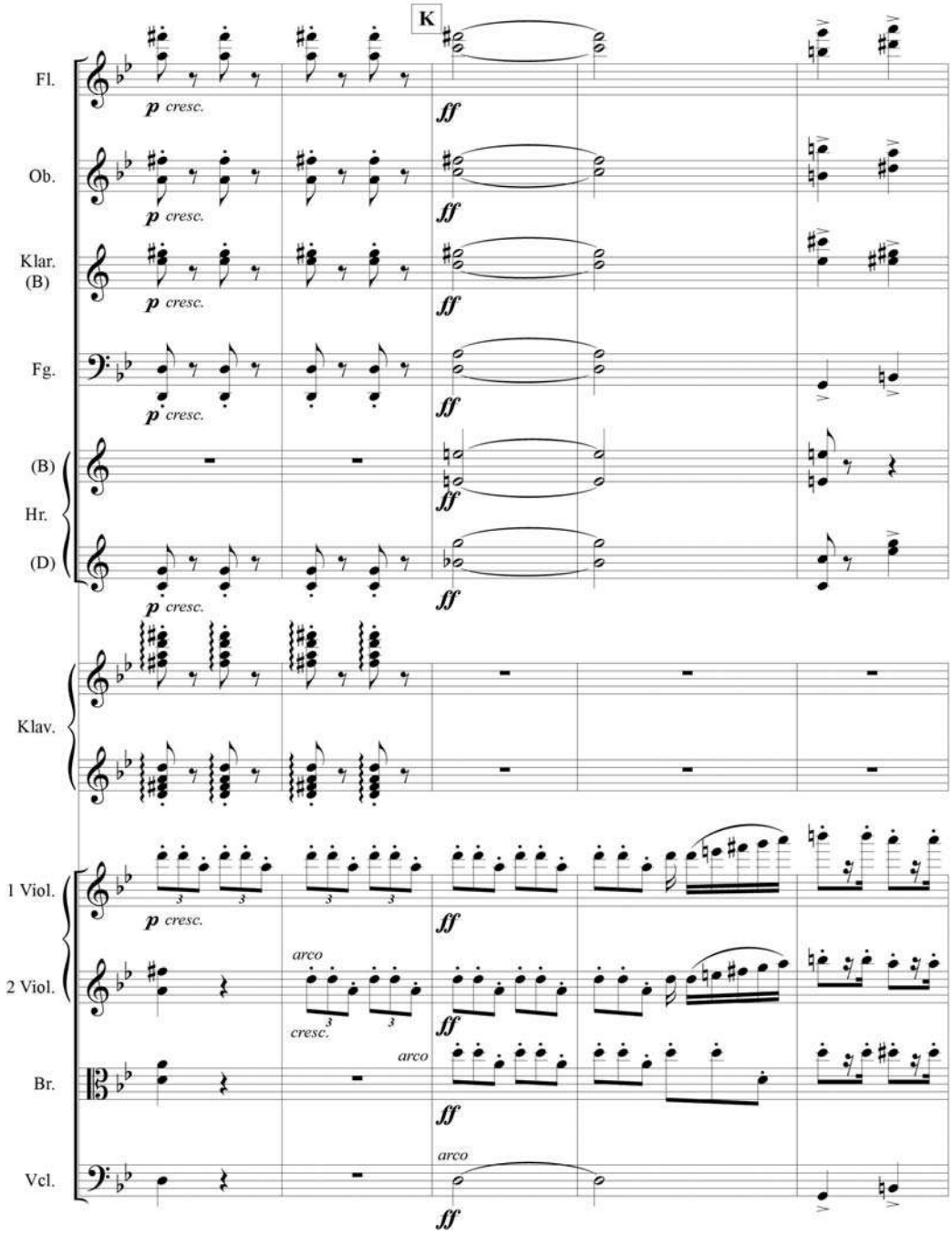


Example 6a. Brahms, *Concerto No.2 in B-flat Major*, op. 83, IV, mm. 315-337.

Example 6a above contains two "Hungarian" elements, the dotted melodic figures (mm. 315-322), recalling *Hungarian Dances Nos. 1* and *8*, and a *csárdás* (mm. 325 ff.) which powerful rhythm evokes *Nos. 6* and *9*. Both elements cohere by way of "developing variation technique." That is to say, the *csárdás* simultaneously develops and varies the *alla zoppa* cadence of the lyrical D minor theme. On a higher structural plane, the *csárdás* links the first two melodic ideas of the second theme group. Additional touches of the *style hongrois* are the *cimbalom*-tremolos of mm. 361-364, example 6b, and the repeated *kuruc*-fourths of mm. 398-408, example 6c (violins and violas); both work also to extend cadences and bridge larger sections thematically and harmonically. Clearly, these features show that the *style hongrois* had enhanced Brahms's admired art of transition.



Example 6b. Brahms, *Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major*, op. 83, VI mm. 361-364.



Example 6c. Brahms, *Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major*, op. 83, IV, mm. 398-402.

In contrast to the robust *csárdás* of op. 83, the Eb-minor *Intermezzo*, op. 118/6 (1892-93), is a brooding *lassan* or *lassú* if there ever was one.[27] The opening, quoted in example 7a, is among Brahms's most eloquent statements,[28] perhaps a cry of remorse addressed to Clara Schumann after one of their frequent quarrels. "If Brahms's style of torturing loved ones was hit-and-run," writes Swafford, "Clara's was a slow, relentless assault that wore you down" (Swafford, 1997, p. 581).The following letter from Brahms to Clara is revealing:

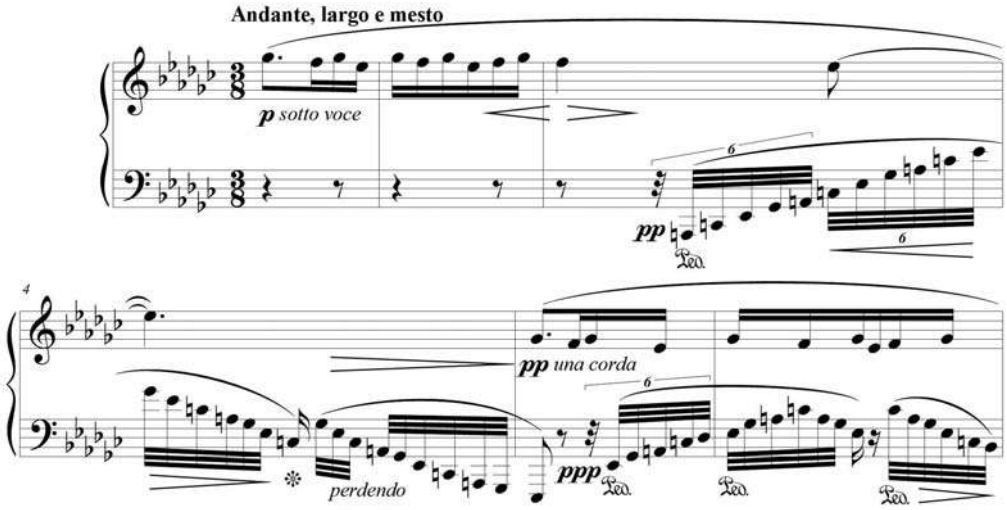
> Please allow a poor pariah to tell you to-day that he always thinks of you with the same respect, and out of the fullness of his heart wishes you, whom he holds dearer than anything on earth, all that is good, desirable and beautiful. Alas, to you more than to any other I am a pariah; this has, for a long time, been my painful conviction, but I never expected it to be so harshly expressed. (Litzmann, 1973)

The pariah, in any case, did send the manuscript to Clara for perusal, as was his habit. She reacted, oddly enough, by querying the tempo marking, *Andante, largo e mesto*. Brahms replies:

> […] *mesto* means sad. You would not have played the piece in a lively manner, even without this instruction – but it is not "sad" in any other sense? (Litzmann, 1973)

[27] Starkie (1937) alluding to his fielf research, shares this anecdote about the *lassú*: "During my month there I never ate a meal without the accompaniment of Gypsy music. 'Tell me what you are eating, and I will tell you what I'll play,' said a roguish 'primás' [band leader] to me. 'If you are at the "gulyás" stage I will play you languid waltzes to aid your digestion: if you are at the sweets I will play you hot jazz, but when you order a bottle of Tokay [also spelled Tokaji] then I'll begin to play you a slow, sad "lassú," for then the orgy of music may begin.' Tokay, as it happens, was Brahms's preferred table wine at the "Red Hedgehog" in Vienna. See Lienau, 1934, p. 32. I thank Dr. Ira Braus for this bit of gastromusicological lore.

[28] Murdoch (1978) writes of the piece in *Brahms*, 277: "I have often thought how well it would score - the wail of the oboe, the sigh of the clarinet, the full orchestra thundering out the magnificent middle section […]. It is one of the greatest of all short solos – an epic, in a very few minutes, on one instrument". Schauffler (1933, p. 221) informs us that the composer spoke of his last piano pieces as *Wiegenlieder meiner Schmerzen* ["Cradlsongs of My Sufferings"].



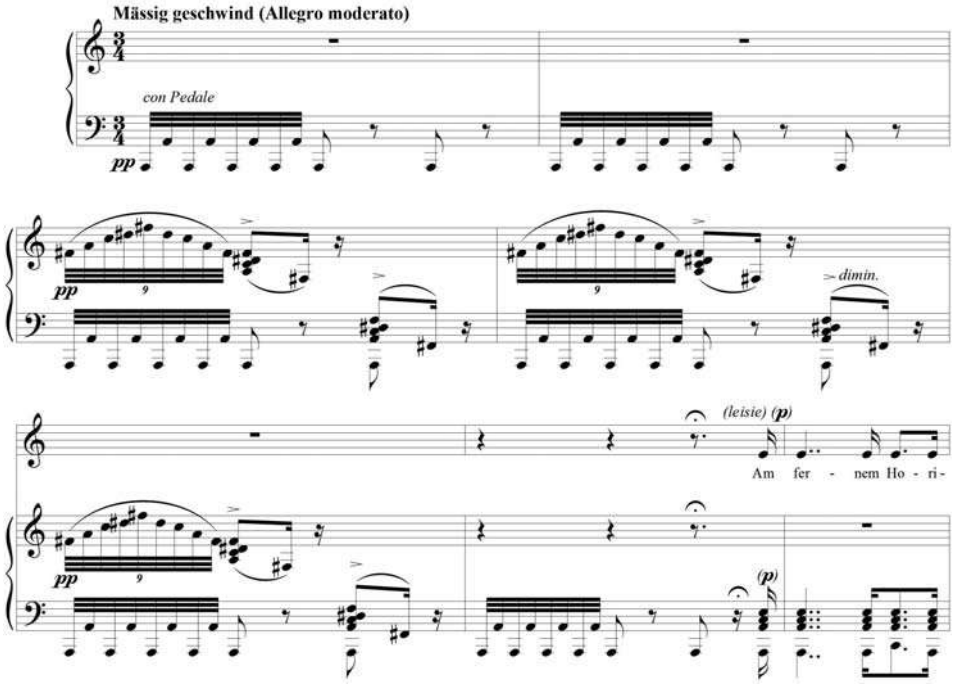
Example 7a. Brahms, *Intermezzo in E flat Minor*, op. 118 No. 6, opening.

Several scholars have pondered this interpretative marking, rare in Brahms's music.[29] Niemann subtitles the Intermezzo, "Roman Elegy," commenting: "it is charged of premonition of death and of the transiency of life, full of autumnal atmosphere […]" (Niemann, 1937, p. 242). MacDonald, for his part, hears "[…] a distinct affinity to the 'Dies irae' chant" (MacDonald, 1990, p. 360). And Musgrave comprehends Niemann's imagery thus:

> The 'autumnal' character arises more deeply from the remarkable synthesis of elements which reveal the composer in his technical and expressive essence. Even such a distinctive element as the gipsy idiom is expressed in new ways as part of the language, as in the slow movement of the Clarinet Quintet – or even more subtly, the first subject, whose turning shape like that of the Intermezzo in E flat minor op. 118 no. 6 can be traced back to the improvisatory shapes of the Hungarian Dances. (Musgrave, 1994, p. 242)

The thematic material of Op. 118/6 is fragmentary, improvisatory. It consists of a plaintive *lassan* chant, supported by diminished-seventh arpeggios similar to those pervading Schubert's *Die Stadt*, example 7b. Brahms's arpeggios, however, symbolize more than nocturnal *Angst*.

[29] The third movement of Brahms's *Horn Trio*, op. 40, is also in Eb minor and marked *mesto*. MacDonald (1990, p. 176) says that the melancholic tones of the horn create "an unmistakable mood of funereal lament."

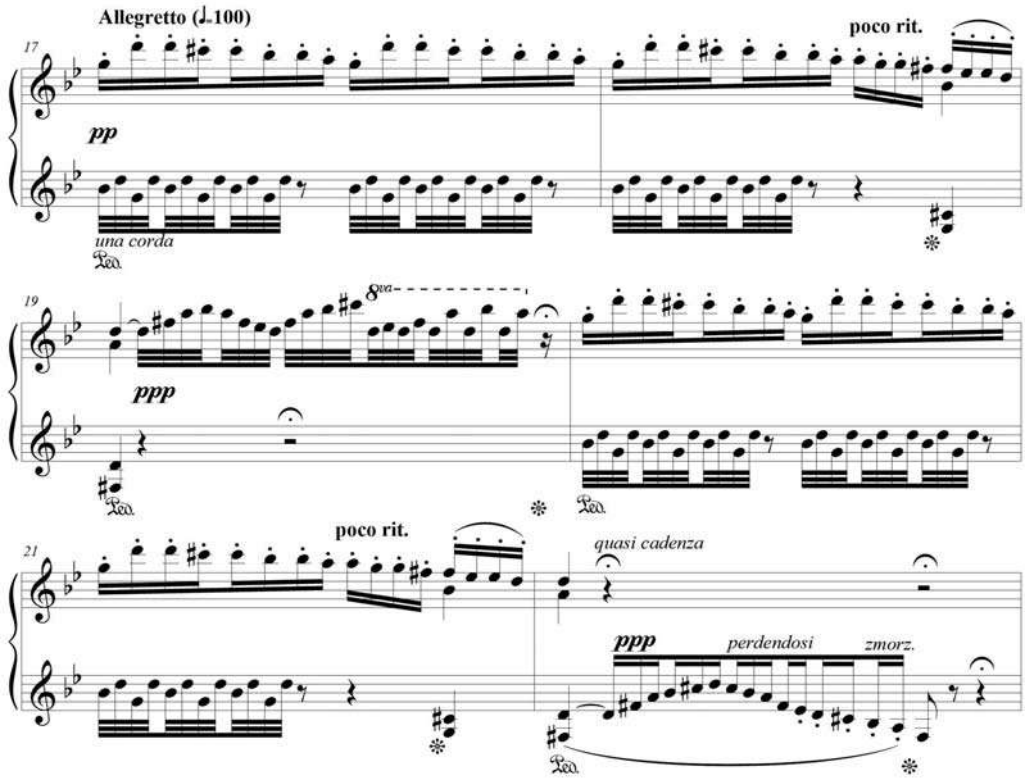


Example 7b. Schubert, *Schwanengesang*, Book 2, No. 11, *Die Stadt*, D. 957, mm. 3-6.

If the performer accurately follows the composer's pedal markings, the arpeggios will evoke the timbre of a well-played *cimbalom*. Sarosi explains:

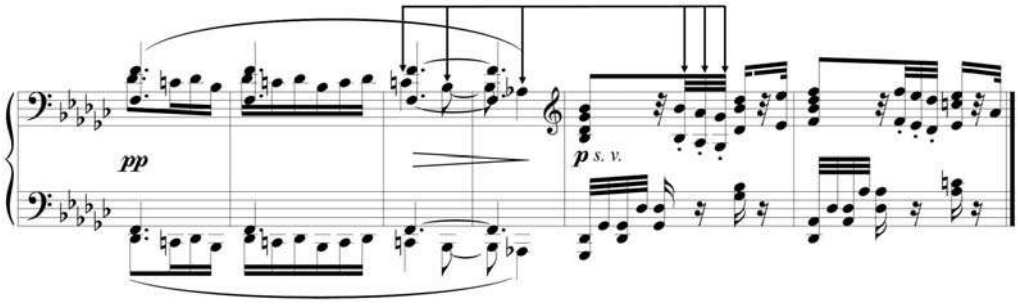
> Lacking a damper pedal, the strings continued to resonate longer than desirable, and so the performer would press his arms across the strings at times to prevent the dissonant simultaneous sounding of different chords. (Sarosi, 1986, p. 135)

Moreover, pedallings (especially in mm. 5-6, see above example 7a) project the work's harmonic structure by segregating the tones of the III-chord (Gb-Bb-Db) from those of the diminished-seventh chord (A-C-Eb-Gb) which dominate, literally, the opening period. Mm. 1-54, the "A" section of the piece, are in the dominant key of B-flat minor. The III, as will be seen, does not become structural until the arrival of the work's "B" section. Interestingly, these arpeggios bear a likeness to m. 22 of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 3*, example 7c. Though Liszt exploits the Gypsy scale here, his "quasi cadenza" anticipates example 7a, in its diminished-seventh sonority, contour, *perdendosi* dynamic, and "damping" at the end. Once more, the *style hongrois* reveals a contact point between two opposing aesthetics.



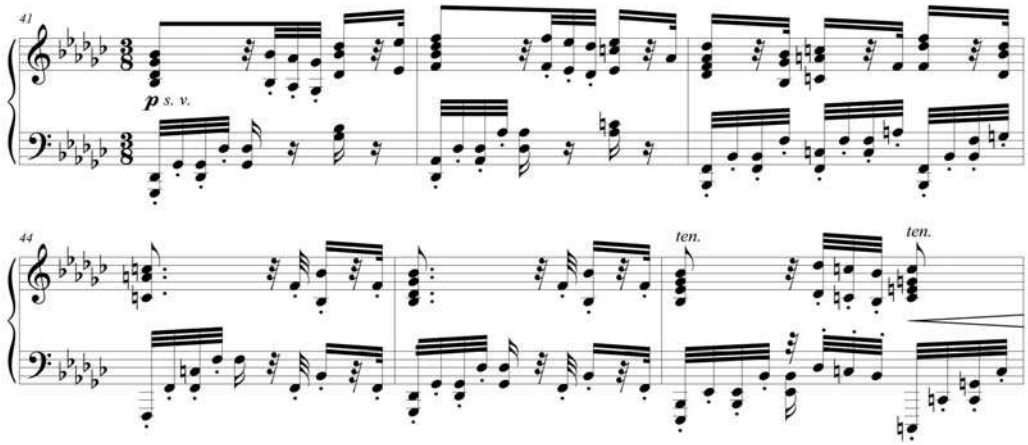
Example 7c. Liszt, *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 3*, mm. 17-22.

The work's "A" section makes a cadence on the hemiola figure C-Bb-Ab (mm. 39-40) which subsequently engenders the melodic germ of "B," Bb-Ab-Gb (m. 41); example 7d graphs this derivation.



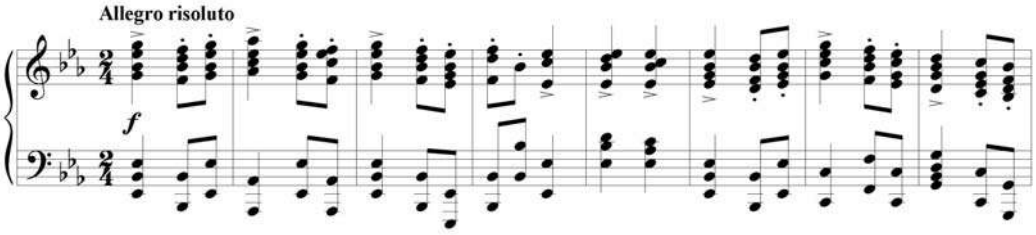
Example 7d. Brahms, *Intermezzo in E flat Minor*, op. 118 No. 6, mm. 37-42.

In the "B" section, one discovers three Hungarian elements articulating the texture. These elements, exposed in example 7e, are drone fifths in the bass (mm. 41-46, cf. II – 1b, II – 3b), *kuruc*-fourths in both hands (mm. 44-45), and eight-six chords in the right hand (mm. 41-44). One sees that Brahms masterfully imbues his *friss* music with symphonic intensity. The reappearance of the opening diminished-seventh arpeggio, now in thundering octaves, announces return of the "A" theme (mm. 53 ff.) thereby showing the composer's deft use of the *style hongrois* to build forms.



Example 7e. Brahms, *Intermezzo in E flat Minor*, op. 118 No. 6, mm. 41-46.

We close our survey, fittingly, with Brahms's last *Klavierstück*, the *Rhapsodie* in Eb, op. 119/4, (c. 1893). Its salient "Hungarian" feature is the pervasive five-bar phrasing.



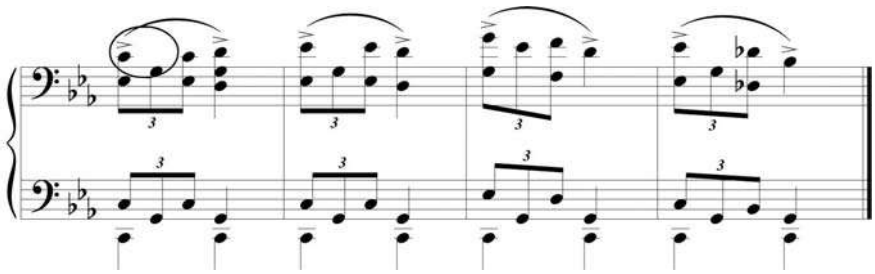
Example 8a. Brahms, *Rhapsodie*, op. 119 No.4, opening.

Clara Schumann, upon receiving the manuscript, wrote Brahms:

> But now to return to the allegro [referring to op. 119/4], how powerful the first motif is and how original, and I suppose Hungarian, owing to the five-bar phrases. It is strange, but otherwise this five-bar arrangement does not disturb me here at all – it just has to be so. (Litzmann, 1973)

Indeed, "it just has to be so," because the five-bar rhythm subtly integrates the work's phrasing and meter. Since every fifth bar provides a "singing" upbeat to the next five-bar phrase, moreover, the "fifth bar" works both as a beginning and as an ending gesture, an elision.[30] And the two "longs" (quarter-notes) of the fifth bar recall also the spondaic rhythms in Schubert's *Divertissement*. In contrasting this phrasing to the four-bar periodicity of op. 21/2, for instance, we can readily grasp the profound differences between the pre- and post-1880 Brahms styles.

Further evidence of the Hungarian style in op. 119/4 appears in mm. 65-68, where Brahms exploits the *kuruc*-fourth melodically and harmonically. Example 8b shows how the *kuruc*-fourth announces the soprano of the "second theme" (C minor/major) and colors the supporting tenor line.

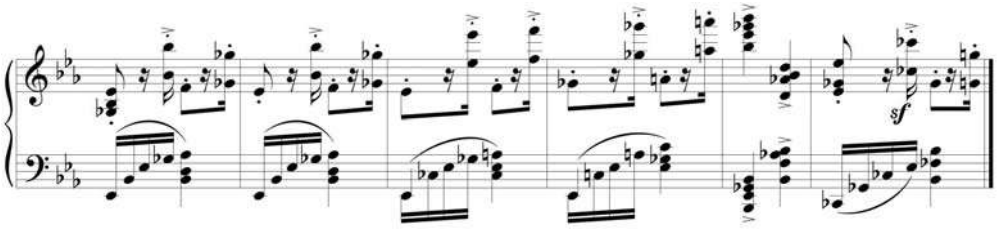


Example 8b. Brahms, *Rhapsodie*, op. 119 No. 4, mm. 65-68.

In the Eb-minor coda (mm. 237 ff.) Brahms bids adieu not only to the piano but to a collective *style hongrois* he has so profoundly reinterpreted, see example 8c. Readers familiar with the Romantic piano literature will relive the fiery coda of Schubert's *Impromptu No. 2 in Eb*, D. 899. Here, Brahms transforms both Schubert's

[30] The aesthetic behind such phrasing is treated in Arnold Schoenberg's essay (1975). On p. 416-17 we read: "Asymmetry, combinations of phrases of differing lengths, numbers of measures not divisible by eight, four or even two, i.e. imparity of the number of measures, and other irregularities already appear in the earliest works of Brahms […]. Though these irregularities do not measure up to the artfulness of the Mozart examples, they still present a more advanced phase of the development toward liberation from formal restrictions of musical thoughts, because they do not derive from a baroque feeling , or from necessities of illustration , as is the case in dramatic music". In op. 119/4, the asymmetrical phrasing indeed creates a formal restriction, but one that also permits grater fluency of line.

coda and the *Rhapsodie*'s thematic germ by way of the Gypsy scale, dotted rhythms) and right-hand octave displacements, more idiomatic to the violin than to the piano.



Example 8c. Brahms, *Rhapsodie*, op. 119 No.4, mm. 237-241.

The *Rhapsodie*'s ending, a real *tour-de-force*, proves that the *style hongrois* was as vital to Brahms as it was to Haydn, Schubert, Liszt, and countless others. Like many of his predecessors, Brahms could not have created his music, "Hungarian" or not, without a personal *style hongrois*. The *style hongrois*, in short, links his personal history with that of the individuals, institutions, arts, and events of a rapidly changing Europe.

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