

Sándor SZABÓ

EXPLORING THE HUNGARIAN MAQAM

Abstract

It is theorized that the Hungarian ancestors used to have a refined instrumental music culture in the Hunnic Empire that has now been forgotten. The origins of the Huns can be traced back to Ancient Mesopotamia through the Sumerian-Scythian-Hun-Avar-Magyar ethno-linguistic continuity, which, together with the evidence of the archeological artifacts of Sumerian origin, supposes that the ancestors of the Hungarians had a high level music culture. Consequently, the history of the ancient Hun music goes back also to that age to more than 4000 years. In the 13th Century AD, based on an ancient music tradition a new music form the Maqam grew in the Mid-East, which now still exists as a living music tradition from the Far-East to West Africa. 1000 years ago the condition for the Hungarian people of remaining in the Carpathic-Basin was to take over the catholic religion and adopt Latin as their official language. The new culture also brought new music. After a few generations, the ancient music tradition vanished. Music fragments of the ancient Hun music can be found in the oldest layer of Transylvanian folk music, as well as in some Eastern music. Béla Bartók also researched Arabic music, because he had the suspicion that all the Oriental music originated from the same source.

The manner in which the old music were recalled is similar to that of archaeologists finding fragments of a pot. They are able to assemble the fragments and recreate the pot, by their prior knowledge and experience of ancient pots. By intuition it is possible to reconstruct the ancient music, and its concept of composition. By now, the music is recreated on the name as the Modern Hungarian Maqam, which creates an open and broad tonal universe, and can integrate this music into the family of the present eastern and western contemporary music.

Sándor Szabó - guitar artist, composer, musicologist was born in 1956 in Törökszentmiklós, Hungary, he started his studies with a private teacher of classical guitar. After trying different styles in the mid-seventies, he began to focus on jazz and improvisation. His career started in 1980. He was the first to play solo acoustic guitar music in Hungary. In the beginning of the eighties, he continued his studies in Budapest with the jazz faculty of Béla Bartók Music Conservatory. At that time he already felt that he should approach improvisation not by one certain style, but rather by utilizing his sensitivity and openness, and making a synthesis of all the musical influences he had ever experienced. Immersing himself in Far Eastern music was an ideal breeding-ground to achieve this. By his deep interest and magnetism for the Oriental musics, one part of his compositions sound like modern western contemporary pieces with a hint of Oriental influence and the other part of his pieces are closer to the Central-Asian maqams and other Far-Eastern instrumental musics.

His playing techniques of different stringed instruments, his modern pieces, and deep spirituality earned him credits, though mainly abroad. His records have been released in England, Italy, USA, Venezuela, Norway, Germany and Hungary. In the last decade, Sándor Szabó has regularly collected music and written articles about the Central-Asian and Far-Eastern instrumental music to study its similarities, as well as historical and geographical connection with Hungarian folk music. As a result of this long-term research, he launched a new website devoted to the Modern Hungarian Maqam to recall and recreate a possible form of that ancient Hungarian classical instrumental music. The website offers some articles and essays about the history and structure of the theorized Hungarian Maqam; as well as some musical samples. His researches and activity in Oriental music was received with accolades by some Central-Asian and Far-Eastern musicologists, and as a result, in 2013 Sándor Szabó was invited to the Shark Taronalari international music festival as a musicologist and also as a musician to introduce and share his research and his modern Oriental music at the conference in Samarkand/Uzbekistan.

His first book called *The Metaphysics of The Music* was published in 2010 by the Püski Kiadó press.

How it began

Many years ago some questions were raised in my mind: Why we do not know more about the ancient Hungarian music? What music could our ancestors play before the current Hungary was established? What would be our music be like here in the Carpatic Basin if the Huns did not come back to their ancient brothers, the Scythians? What would be the music of Huns and Avars like if they stayed in their Central and East-Asian homeland?

These question then led me to start a research project of my own and which finally became a kind of music mission. This spread out as an artistic music project which became known as The Modern Hungarian Maqam.

Brief introduction of the current Hungary

Current Hungary is situated in East-Europe and surrounded by Ukraina, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, and Slovakia. Hungary is culturally integrated into Europe and in general into the western world. Hungary was a huge country before WWI. The prevailing powers divided Hungary into parts, and shared 2/3 of its area and population between the surrounding countries.

Historical background

The Hungarian State was established about 1000 years ago and together with the new state Hungarians took up the Christian religion. The language, the culture was too foreign for them and the surrounding big countries always wanted to get the natural resources of the country. That is why Hungary from the beginning was a target of geopolitical ambitions. The history of the world, not only the Hungarian, has been adulterated by certain powers and persons. Hungarian history has also suffered a lot of adulterations. In the 19th century, our origin has been overwritten and modified at many points. This created a very special situation: the present Hungary have had two histories: an official, written by foreign powers, and a true history which is hidden and many Hungarian historians started extended researches to unfold our real history. In the communist era, there were many taboos concerning the real origin of Hungarians. Official research was legal only in the finno-ugric topic. The finno-ugric origin is an artificial theory and there was no evidence to prove it. In spite of this, the official education in Hungary still teaches that. 20 years after the communistic period, there are more and more historians, and archeologists who do extended research for the Hungarian origin collaborating with foreign countries which are related in this topic. By now it seems that we have the chance to get back our true history.

The real history of Hungarians can be understood of the Sumerian-Scythian-Hun-Avar-Magyar relationship. This is why it is important to unfold which were the neighbor countries to the ancient Hunnic Empire. As the Hunnic Empire extended from the Far-East to Europe, the cultural

influences were very strong. We can suppose that the ancient Hungarian music was not so much different from the neighbor cultures as they are now. The constant secrecy about the real Hungarian origin made many researchers to unfold our true history. The research is legal by now; however, the results are not acknowledged officially by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. After this brief introduction we can understand why we have not heard about the Hungarian maqam so far. Some countries still keep back documents of our ancient history. They do not want to recover them because their content is not "compatible" with the official history. The question is raised: What could have been the music of our ancestors? To answer to this and the previous questions, we have to begin research to know what is currently available as sources to get a deeper knowledge.

Sources:

- The most obvious source is still our ancient folk music which shows characteristics of Oriental music. For example, the old layer of Hungarian folk songs which are constructed of minor pentatonic scales with rich ornamentation which can be found now only in the eastern music. By now, beside the still-living folk music we have very detailed archives, books, recordings, and scores to study the old Hungarian folk music.

- Other sources are the music cultures of countries where Hungarians had historical connections dating back to ancient times. In this topic, the most important relationships are maqams existing in countries which acknowledge their historical and cultural relationship and common origin with the ancestors of Hungarians.

Countries where the maqam music is played

It is known that in all Arabic countries, in Iran and Middle-Asian countries like Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkey, the maqam still has a high level of living culture, but the influence and the direct traces of ancient music culture can also be found in the music of the following countries: South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya, Turkcountries, and Armenia. In Europe it is found in the music of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, the traces of the maqams can be found in fragments. Maqam fragments can also be found in Malaysian and Indonesian music. Today we can add Hungary to the list of places where the ancient music exists even if in fragments, because the image of the ancient music culture would not be whole without it.

The ancient relationships

The first task in the research was to find ancient relatives of the Hungarians. There are many of them. One of the closest relatives are the Uyghur people. Uyghur people consider the Hungarians also as their ancient relatives. Though the Uyghur nation took the Islam religion, they

managed to reserve the main properties of their ancient music. When listening to the Uyghur music, we can discover astonishing similarities between Hungarian folk. Their music has changed quite a lot in the last centuries, but the old maqam form is still alive. Uyghur use the term muqam to mean a "suite of compositions" or in some cases to mean "classical music." Even if there is modal coherency between different pieces in each suite, modulations occur as the suite unfolds, completely obscuring the initial mode. That is why the Uyghur muqams sound so organic. For the Uyghur, the term muqam implies that it has a muqam heading (bash), and a suite of pieces whose structure correspond to certain modal and rhythmical requirements, which must follow the introduction.

About the Uyghurs

Xinjiang-Uyghur is currently an autonomous region in China's extreme northwest. It is sometimes called "Chinese Turkestan." The Uyghur homeland is a region of oasis towns separated by great distances and, until the last few decades, accessible only by arduous journeys by camel train through deserts and over mountains. In times of peace, the oases dwellers of this region traded in the goods which passed along the Silk Road from China to the Near East and to Europe. Contemporary Uyghur trace their ancestry back to the Uyghur Turks and ancient Hungarians, whose steppe kingdom flourished on China's north-western borders during the eighth and ninth centuries. After the fall of this kingdom, a portion of its people fled westwards into the region now called Xinjiang, where their descendants mingled with the indigenous inhabitants and established a series of local kingdoms and khanates. Islam first arrived in this region under the Qarakhan khanate in the 10th century. Historically, Sufism has been a strong influence amongst the Uyghur, as it has across Central Asia.

Uyghur Music and the Twelve Maqam

The Twelve Maqam (On Ikki Muqam) are a prestigious set of musical suites in which the Uyghur trace in their present form back to the sixteenth century and the court of the Yarkand Khanate, though they also claim continuity with roots of considerable antiquity. Each of the Twelve Maqams is characterised by mode, melodic patterns, and modulations, but that maqam is basically a suite structure which comprises a series of vocal and instrumental pieces. Tracing their heritage back to Central Asian Turkish people, the Uyghur's music owes much in terms of structure to Arabic-Persian maqams (modes and melodic patterns). The strings and woodwinds are also obviously descended from Middle Eastern instruments. In Uyghur music is also found some harmonic and melodic elements from the music of the neighboring Hans and Mongolians.

The oldest known relationship: the Sumerians

The Sumerians lived in ancient Mesopotamia, where modern Iraq and part of Iran are now located, from 5300BC to 1940BC. They were the first in many different areas. They had schools, a strong mathematical system, geometry, astronomy, cuneiform writing, calendars, were credited with the invention of the wheel, and many other signs of a strong civilization. By now we have enough evidence to suppose that the Hungarian language goes back to many thousands of years to the most ancient times, even to the stone-age. Philological and linguistic researches prove that the Hungarians have thousands of common words with the ancient Sumerian language. Archeological research discovered many cultural objects which were common with the Sumerians and the ancestors of Hungarians. Research manuscripts provided important evidence that the runes that the Hungarian ancestors used was almost identical with the Sumerian runes. These facts raise the question that if they had a lot of common in the other part of the culture it is obvious that they must have the music in common as well. In these days we can know a lot about the ancient Mesopotamians, and about their music. Their music centered around the heptatonic-diatonic scale, which is currently used in western music today. It had been believed that western music got its origin in later period Greek music, but scholars are now taking a closer look at Sumerian origins as a distinct possibility.

One must keep in mind that what could be attributed as musical Sumerian firsts could have very well been inherited from previous civilizations. We have little to no record of these prior civilizations, and are therefore unable to conclude concretely as to the origins of Sumerian instruments and scales. It is just simply fascinating though, to contemplate music from a civilization so incredibly ancient, yet so reflective of our very own modern civilization.

After the collapse of the Sumerian civilization around 2000 BC, we might think that all this knowledge had been lost. The Babylonians, and all the other cultures inherited the knowledge gained from the Sumerians; this is why these traditions still can be found in the maqam culture of Iran and Iraq.

Béla Bartók, the famous Hungarian composer, made extended research into ancient Hungarian music. He travelled to Arabic countries to collect folk music to study the obvious similarities with the Hungarian music. These materials were hidden from the public for more than half a century and have been made available to the public only recently. Many maps illustrate the places where Hungarian ancestors lived. Some of them are more than 2000 years old. These maps are direct evidence for the assumption and research of Béla Bartók.

Hungarian ancient music and the maqam

When we go back so deep in time and history using the word maqam can sound strange. Concerning the Mesopotamians, we speak about very ancient times and cultures when the so called maqam did not yet exist. It is better to use *ancient Hungarian music* in this case. The reason why I used the word maqam is that the current maqam music can lead us back to the ancient Hungarian music. The Hun Empire was huge and strong. The alliance of different tribes of Hungarians lived in a close cultural aura of the the countries where later the so-called maqam music was born. In all the countries where there was urban culture and the ruler kept a court, there was also developed court music culture. We do not know how the court music was called before the islamic influenced maqam, but there is continuity in the history of court musics. In the Hunnic Empire there were big cities where the ruler and the lieutenances were resident. In such a huge empire, consequently there had to be any kind of court music culture, as well. In ancient times, the music of the people and the court did not differ so much. The difference started to be greater when a new outer influence, for example a new religion, appeared in a given culture.

Before the spread of islamic maqam music, the Central-Asian countries had their prior own music. In some countries where mainly nomad people lived they managed to reserve their ancient folk music culture. Where there were courts, they managed to reserve their court music, like China, Japan, beside their folk music. At that ancient times the Hungarian music influenced other music and it received influences from other music. Though part of the population of the Hunnic Empire remained in their original places (Uyghurs) , others (Huns and Avars) emigrated to other places. People like the Uyghurs took over the Islamic religion and because of this, the Arabic maqam spread and made a great influence on their ancient music. Since the Huns and other tribes emigrated to western territories, the islamic maqam did not appear in their court music.

In the 9th century A.D., when the Huns and other remaining people of the Hunnic Empire arrived at the Carpatian Basin, there they found their ancestors, the Scythians. They understood each other's language since they had common ancient culture from the Scythian Empire. However, the surrounding western countries (Romans and Germans) could not accept the presence of the ancient Huns and Scythians, which together are called Hungarians. So 1000 years ago, the main condition for the Hungarians of remaining in the Carpatian Basin was to take the catholic religion. Together with the new religion, Hungarians had to take Latin as an official language. The new culture also brought new music. After a few generations the ancient music, together with the ancient music culture, vanished. Some fragments were inherited only by folk music. Hungarian folk music, especially the old singers in Transylvania, uses a special ornamentation while singing. They sing in a non-tempered system. Their bending of notes, of how one note moves to another, is a typical property of the Eastern music.

How can we recall the ancient Hungarian music?

Now we can see that the present Hungarians who now live in the Carpathic Basin did not have the so-called Islamic-originated maqam, but could have been if the Huns, Avars, Magyars and other tribes remain in the ancient homeland in Central and East Asia. If these people had remained in their original homeland, they would probably be strong and resistant to keep their ancient culture and religion. As we know, they could keep only their ancient language. This is the current Hungarian language. The reason why Hungarians have a very special folk music which cannot be compared to any other folk music is that the ancient Hun, Avar music, was mixed with the ancient Scythian music 1000 years ago.

I believe that this music still exists somewhere in its primordial state, and we can access it by proper initiation in an intuitive way. People, who are very sensitive and have a special instinctive ability, are able to recall the ancient collective experiences of nations and cultures. This is what we can consider as the deepest mental roots. By this instinctive music recollection, it is possible to invoke music. Many of us have that kind of talent. This is the intuitive, pure and honest improvisation. The improvisation is not the invention of the modern world. The intuitive creation is the most important property of mankind. The composer goes deep in his soul to extract the music. The practiced improviser does the same only in real time. Improvisers always existed in all the cultures of any civilizations. The intuition links different cultures together and the main source of knowledge. All the music cultures have a primordial archetype. These archetypes then can be manifested in a culture as a tradition, and creates such great music forms like Indian classical music, the maqam, or any other great Oriental music. This is why it is possible to bring up and recall ancient music from our collective unconscious.

All the happenings of the past can be tracked by studying and comparing other histories, cultures, and music. This is like a puzzle. We can put it together finding the proper parts. This is possible in the music research, too. I studied and listened to many styles of Oriental music which are related to the ancient hypothetical Hungarian ancient music. Broken, disorganized smaller systems built into each other, can be restored again by knowing the larger systems which include the fragments. I attempted to recall, restore, and recreate the ancient music in a new modern way, and that is why I named it as Modern Hungarian Maqam. Besides studying and collecting music from other cultures, another way also exists to recall music from the far past. In my research, I did not try to find the forgotten maqam pieces, but the archetype of the maqam, which is rooted in a deeper reality. I felt credibility for this work because as Hungarians at the back of our mind we can access them because in the depth of our mind a little piece of the Ancient East still exists.

The image of the maqam as a musical form and culture is deficient. To get the widest possible image of the Eastern court music, we have to suppose the existence of the ancient Hungarian and also the ancient Bulgarian court music. Avars who are later called as Bulgarians also lost their original culture by the strong Byzantine culture. They lost not only their ancient music and religion, but also their language. The present Bulgarian language is Slavonic; however, their ancient language was a kind of Oriental language which was close to Hungarian.

If we consider the maqam music in general as a court music of the East and Central-Asia, the question is not whether the ancient Hungarians maqam existed, but rather what the Hungarian Maqam was like. However for countries where they still maintain the tradition of the maqam the word *maqam*, *maqom*, *muqam* has a more complex meaning, and using the word *maqam* for Hungarian music can cause confusion and misunderstanding. That is why when I use the term *Hungarian Maqam*, it always means ancient court music without the content of Islamic tradition. There is a way to use a new name of this music project in the future as Modern Hungarian Oriental music.

Brief summary of composing methods in the Modern Hungarian Maqam

The Modern Hungarian Maqam project provides continuity of traditions in contemporary music and creates a bridge between the Oriental tradition and the modern contemporary way of composing. The following methods as a concept are used:

1. Using all possible traditional modal music scales in the traditional way
2. Creating bipolar and tripolar tonality inside a scale
3. Using mathematical approaches in the melodic variations
4. Using distance symmetries in the melodic variations
5. Using synthetic scales
6. Creating modes by exchanging the tetrachords of different scales
7. Extending the modulation to all 12 keys
8. Extending the music to pentonality (chromaticism)
9. Extended use of variation of the above methods
10. Improvisation in the above methods

Conscious use of these methods as compositional tools together, with the intuitive and fertilizing improvisation, creates a new approach in the contemporary music.

Results

Being aware these historical facts, supported by the results of extended research, a special compositional concept and improvising method has been created. By the use of this concept, several modern makam-sounding piece were composed, recorded, and performed in many European countries from 2009 to the present. In 2009, a web page was launched dedicated to the Modern Hungarian Maqam project, and is in Hungarian and English. There are also sound files of the recorded pieces. Since 2009, several lectures were held on the topic of the Hungarian Maqam Concept, and was illustrated by live instrumental music. In 2010, the first Hungarian maqam CD was released. As a result, I had the opportunity to introduce the result of my research and share the composed modern Hungarian maqam music at a scientific music conference which was held during the IX. Sark Taronalari music festival in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

Future plans

I would like to go on visiting other Central-Asian countries to study their maqam concept, like Azerbaijan, Tadjikistan, Uyghurs, etc. I would also like to study the folk music of these countries, including Kazakhstan. I continuously compose new modern Oriental music pieces, and I would like to take part in further conferences held in maqam and Oriental music subjects, and last but not least I would like to introduce my live Hungarian Oriental music in solo or with my trio in Central-Asian, Far-Eastern and western countries in music festivals. I am working on further new compositional methods to develop the Modern Hungarian Maqam to integrate into the modern eastern and western contemporary music.