

Sándor SZABÓ

THE MYSTERY OF THE LOST AND FOUND HUNGARIAN MAJOR SCALE

Abstract

In 1980, an American-published handbook turned up introducing exotic music scales for jazz musicians and I was surprised to discover a special sounding scale called Hungarian Major in the book. However, this scale is unknown in the Hungarian folk music and is also unknown to the modern Hungarian composers. In the last 100, years many researchers worked to collect all the Hungarian folksongs and now we can say we have a uniquely rich collection, but in spite of this treasure of songs, the Hungarian Major scale does not occur in any collections. The scale surfaced in the Western culture and this fact raises a few questions.

-What is the origin of the Hungarian Major scale? A few Western musicologists were asked about the origin of the Hungarian Major, but they referred to the South Indian Melakarta system.

-What is the relationship between the Melakarta system and the Hungarian Major scale? How and when they did the scale get into the Western culture?

In the last centuries, many books have been published containing collections of exotic scales to help modern composers and creative musicians. Almost all of them include the Hungarian Major scale.

-Who named the scale as Hungarian Major? -Was its name Hungarian Major originally or someone named it later when it turned up in the Western culture?

When the Hungarian Major is compared with other similar scales used in ethnic music and analyzed, further questions are raised, like:

- How did the knowledge of higher culture filter down into the lower level of the association?

One of the mode (VII.) of the Hungarian Major scale is the Japanese Nohkan.

-What is the relationship with the Japanese Nohkan scale?

Many questions are raised in this study. We have limited knowledge but we have more suppositions in this topic.

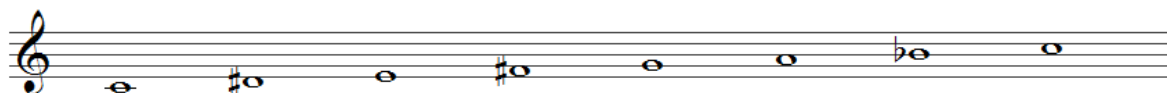
The aim of this study is to raise the attention of Oriental and Western music scientists to discuss this topic and to help to unfold this mystery.

Sándor SZABÓ, Vác, Hungary

What we know and what we suspect about the Hungarian Major scale.

Hungarian Major

The notes of the scale is the following: C Eb E F# G A Bb C



The oldest Hungarian folksongs are mainly constructed of the Minor Pentatonic scale; only the newer songs due to foreign cultural influences use other 7-note scales.

To step ahead, we have to look back to the times when the Nashikabushani scale was already known and used. From Indian sources we know that in the 16th century, a musicologist named Venkatamakhi collected all the known raga scales and incorporated them into a logical system. This system is known as the Melakarta system. It is possible that the scale was used before it was cataloged, so it originates from earlier times.

How the Nashikabushani scale get to India?

In the present culture, we tend to think that life on Earth started with our present civilization, and that the music started to appear and develop together with this civilization. There is much unofficial research to unfold the mystery of previous civilizations; however, the paradigm of the present civilization is so strong that the existence of the earlier civilizations is not formally recognized in the public culture, yet somehow we inherited knowledge and fragments of ancient

cultures. In this way, musical scales and systems may have been inherited from other, previous civilizations.

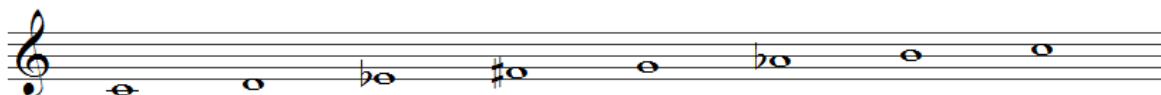
It is theorized that the Hungarian ancestors had a refined instrumental music culture in the Hunnic Empire that has now been forgotten. The origins of the Huns can be traced back to Ancient Mesopotamia through the Sumerian-Scythian-Hun-Avar-Magyar ethno-linguistic continuity, which, together with the evidence of the archeological artifacts of Sumerian origin, supposes that the ancestors of the Hungarians had a high level of musical culture. Consequently, the history of the ancient Hun music goes back more than 4000 years. The Hungarian Major may have originated from the higher culture of the Hunnic Empire.

It is possible that the scale was named by fault, however there are some facts which conflicts this supposition.

Concerning the naming of scales, the most obvious way to name a scale is to use the name of the geographical place and/or the name of the ethnic group where it occurs. There are some scales which has Hungarian in its name, like the Hungarian Minor scale:

C D Eb F# G Ab B C, which is the 3rd mode of the North Indian Raga Bhairav.

Hungarian Minor

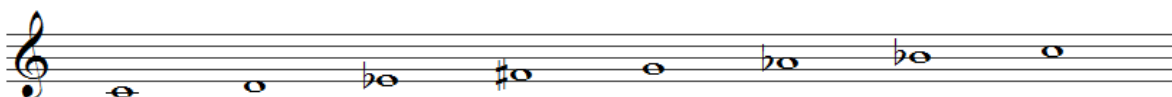


This scale is used in the Transylvanian ballads and this is why the name as a Hungarian Minor is evident.

There is also another scale called Hungarian Gypsy:

C D Eb F# G Ab Bb C

Hungarian Gypsy



The difference between the two scales is only the leading note: Bb and B.

We have some theories about the origin of the Hungarian Gypsy scale. The gypsy (roma) nationality originates from the area of North India, and they probably brought this scale with their music culture which can be found in the more than 2500-year long North Indian music tradition as the Raga Kirvani. **How did the higher culture of raga filter down to the nomadic gypsies?**

There can be a better explanation if we suppose that the scale originates from an earlier time. The gypsies appeared in the territory of Hungary about in the 13th century. It is also possible that they heard that scale from the Hungarian music and the scale got the name as Hungarian Gypsy. Both the Hungarian Minor and the Hungarian Gypsy scales surely originate from the East.

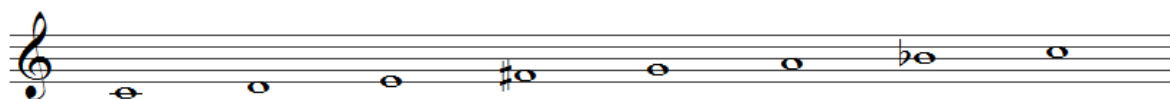
Why this special scale was named as Hungarian in the Western culture?

It is strange that the Hungarian Minor and the Hungarian Gypsy and the Hungarian Major scales have a very definite and precise distinction. This suggests that the name giver could well distinguish these scales.

If we try to imagine how Hungarian music sounds to a Western man, we can also imagine that he could find similar sounds in the Transylvanian and Romanian folk music. In the Hungarian Major scale, the notes of the so-called Overtone scale appear which was used by Bartók so frequently:

C D E F# G A Bb C.

Overtone scale



When compared to the Hungarian Major scale, this scale differs only in its 2nd degree. The man who could distinguish these similar scales had to know the audible differences between Hungarian and Romanian music. He could name the Overtone scale as Hungarian Major, yet the two scales are distinguished precisely. The Overtone scale is often named as the Natural scale because the natural laws, the notes of the natural overtones are included in the scale so, its sound is not foreign to our ears.

It is still a mystery how and when the scale got to the Western culture?

Based on what we know so far, we can logically reason that the scale could get to the Western world (Europe) not by a national or ethnic group, but by an individual person who was a well-trained and educated musician using this scale and played the music which was composed using this scale. This could have happened around the 8th-9th century when Hungarian groups started to settle in the Carpatian Basin. This could be one explanation, but we can also suppose that the scale could get to Europe even earlier, because the name of the scale has existed in manuscripts for the later culture, which can be one way we know about it in the present day.

Migration always happened. Talented, well-educated people left countries with the hope of a better life. The decent life of court musicians in old times was possible only in a safe and supporting environment. The termination of the optimal living territory causes people to move to foreign places, not only the simple stockman or worker, but also educated people and musicians. More than 100 years ago when the Western culture became interested in exotic oriental cultures, an Asian court musician possibly emigrated to the Western part of Europe where they could find a developed urban culture and blooming musical life. Such an emigrating Asian musician could bring his knowledge to Europe. There were some determining musicians, like Ziryab who could make a big change in the European music and created a completely new style the Andalusian music. This scenario is just one of many possibilities but it would deserve deeper researches. If the scale was rediscovered within the last 100 years, it may be possible to search for the person who first mentioned the Hungarian Major scale in a publication.

Why we cannot find the traces of Hungarian Major scale in the Hungarian folk music?

In old times the folk music did not use music notation. The people kept their tradition in their memory they maintained it in the practice and they transmitted it to the new generations. The Hungarian Major scale has no traces in the Hungarian folk tradition, which means that the scale cannot get to the Western world by the migrating Hungarians. The scale originates from a higher and older culture, and was taken to Europe by educated people.

Analyzing the structure of the Hungarian Major scale shows some new aspects. It is simple to create this scale of an artificial scale consisting of half notes and whole notes by removing the

second note of it. The result is a scale which starts with a minor third, then a half-step, then a whole tone interval and so on. It has a minor and major tonal feeling at the same time.

It is very interesting to discover that the Hungarian Major includes all the important intervals which gives the scale a certain Hungarian character. In the following examples, the bolded notes shows the notes which are common in other scales used in the Hungarian folk music.

C Eb E F# G A Bb C 4 notes of the Minor Pentatonic scale

C Eb E F# G A Bb C 6 notes of the Overtone scale

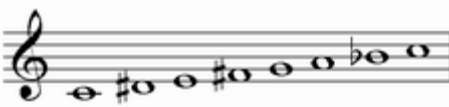
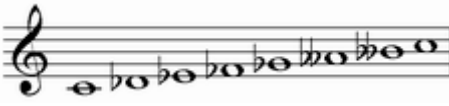
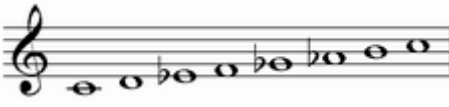
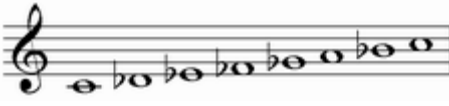
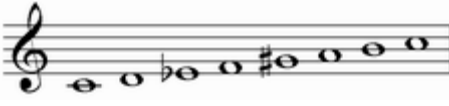
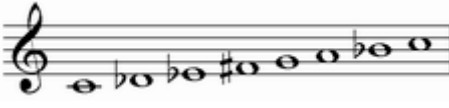
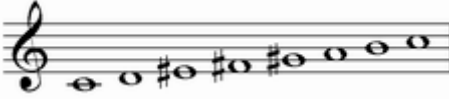
C Eb E F# G A Bb C 4 notes of the “csuvas” Major Pentatonic scale

C Eb E F# G A Bb C 5 notes of the Hungarian Gypsy scale

C Eb E F# G A Bb C 4 notes of the Hungarian Minor scale

The person who gave the Hungarian Major name to this scale and recognized all these Hungarian characters in the sound was probably educated and knew all these relationships between the different scales. The person must have a connection with higher culture. It can be theorized that this scale existed well before it was named Hungarian Major and someone simply recognized it. Such a strange scale conveying “multi-layer” harmonic moods could not originate in a natural way like the pentatonic or diatonic scales. All these scales are “imprinted” into the soul of the human. Its structure suggests that it is an artificial scale created by an intuitive educated musician and originates from an ancient culture, possibly no longer extant.

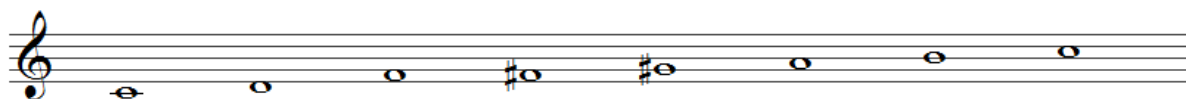
And here is another relationship of the Hungarian Major scale. In the following chart, the modes of the Hungarian Major can be seen. The names of the modes are created as alterations of other known scales. These modes might be used by Western contemporary composers and jazz musicians.

Modus	Name	Scale	Note
I.	Hungarian Major		South Indian Nasikabhushani
II.	Super Locrian $\flat\flat 6 \flat\flat 7$		
III.	Harmonic Minor $\flat 5$		
IV.	Super Locrian #6		
V.	Jazz Minor #5		
VI.	Dorian $\flat 9 \#11$		
VII.	Lydian Augmented #3		Japanese Nohkan

This shows how the Hungarian Major is processed theoretically, all its 7th degree is known, has a name but only two of these scales have an ancient name. The VIIth degree is also known as Nohkan. The Nohkan is an ancient scale from the Japanese gagaku music culture. The modal relationship between the Hungarian Major and the Nohkan cannot be accidental. The Nohkan scale has the same mystery, and it can be theorized that the Nohkan came from an older culture of an ancient civilization.

The notes of the Nohkan: C D F F# G# A B C

Nohkan



The Nohkan is the name of the bamboo flute used in the music for old Japanese theater called *nohkan*. The flute has a mysterious history because due to its unusual structure the basic scale in the lower octave is C D F F# G # A B C, and a different scale can be played in the higher octave by overblowing. The Nohkan scale got its name from the flute, and the flute got its name from the theater. Musical instrument makers attempted to recreate the original Nohkan flute, but the slightest difference in its dimensions resulted in a totally different scale. This proves that the original Nohkan flute is based on very exact calculations and acoustic principles. There are legends and stories of its origin, but very likely the Nohkan flute originates from the culture of a much earlier civilization which had the knowledge to make such a special and sophisticated wind instrument. The modal relationship of the Nohkan and Hungarian Major scale is more than strange.

Source: <http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~dl1s-ymgc/nohkan-e.htm>

The preceding theories can be summed up with a simple conclusion: an ancient music scale vanished, and many years later was rediscovered. How is this possible?

Higher cultures always existed in every civilization. Some of their knowledge got to the lower level of society. Nobody knows how a civilization collapses and how the knowledge survives and descends into a new civilization. This is very exciting, especially as it concerns music.

It is a wonder that the Hungarian Major scale has been found, and time will prove what this culture can do with this scale.