

Romani Reinvention: Modernism and the Gypsy Influence in the First Movement of Brahms' Cello Sonata, Op. 99

NICHOLAS KENNEDY

Romantic composers were naturally drawn to gypsies. Dwelling right across Europe, these nomadic people captured the imagination of Western artists across a variety of genres and media, their lifestyle and perceived characteristics of seductiveness and devil-may-care freedom fitting perfectly into an era that so prized the exotic and fantastic. The crowning jewel of the gypsies' appeal, though, was their irresistible music.¹ Perennially fresh and catchy, the distinctive sounds and bravura style of gypsy musicians are utterly infectious, and their influence on art music favourites such as Bizet's *Carmen* and Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* is obvious. Indeed, Jonathan Bellman, Shay Loya and other scholars have identified a standard vocabulary of musical elements constituting an identifiable gypsy or Hungarian style, or *style hongrois* in Western art music. This does not necessarily involve direct quotes from Romani music, but rather an array of stylised musical features widely acknowledged as "evocative of the Hungarian-gypsy context."²

The gypsy style is an important facet of the works of Johannes Brahms (1833–1897). Brahms' music combines supreme compositional rigour in the Viennese Classical tradition with an endearing respect for the music of the people, and light-hearted works such as the *Hungarian Dances* and *Gypsy Songs* strongly point to *verbunkos* as an inspiration for his own compositions.³ Moreover, Bellman identifies Brahms' Clarinet Quintet, *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel* and other pieces among "serious" works in which

¹ Jonathan Bellman, "Toward a Lexicon for the *Style Hongrois*," *The Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 2 (1991): 214–15.

² Jonathan Bellman, *The Style Hongrois in the Music of Western Europe* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 6.

³ George S. Bozarth and Walter Frisch, "Brahms, Johannes," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, accessed November 28, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51879p63>.

verbunkos-inspired elements are present.⁴ However, no commentator yet has explored the role of Hungarian-gypsy music in Brahms' Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 99 (1886), a piece which exhibits Brahms' mature style and, as will be shown, a convincing array of signifiers of the *style hongrois*.

But to what ends did composers invoke the gypsy style? Often it was merely to provide *couleur locale*, which could last anywhere between a few bars and an entire piece; sometimes, as in the libretto of *Carmen*, the *couleur* was central to the subject of the work. But in other instances, the gypsy style served a larger compositional agenda. Indeed, Loya postulates that in Liszt's works the *style hongrois* functioned as a modernising tool, by which Liszt expanded and updated the art music vocabulary.⁵ In this essay, I demonstrate the application of Loya's thesis to the first movement of Brahms' F-major Cello Sonata. I argue that Brahms not only employs the *style hongrois* in this movement, but uses it to recast standard features of Austro-German art music. After a brief note on terminology, I will firstly examine Brahms' personal connections to the music of the Roma, and set out in general terms the issues of exoticism and the Western *style hongrois*. I will then outline typical signifiers of the gypsy style as identified by Bellman and others, and show how many of these can be seen in the Cello Sonata movement. Next, I will deal briefly with some critical opinions on modernism and the context for invoking folk styles within art music, looking at commentaries by Joseph Auner, Shay Loya and Peter Gay. Finally, I will explore in detail the relationship between the gypsy and learned styles in the movement: how Brahms invites us to reconsider canonical German elements as Hungarian-gypsy ones, and how the two styles overlap, extend and reinforce each other, forming an integrated whole.

Before embarking on this discussion, however, it is important to establish some of the political issues surrounding the terminology we use to refer to the Roma. Among others, the terms "Rom" (plural "Rom" or "Roma"), "Romani"/"Romany" (also an adjective; plural "Romanies"), "tzigane," "gitano" and, most commonly in English, "gypsy" have all been used to denote members of the diaspora of nomadic Caucasian peoples who came

⁴ Bellman, *Western Europe*, 208–12.

⁵ Shay Loya, *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian-Gypsy Tradition* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 3ff.

firstly from north India but settled in Europe and across the globe.⁶ Today, however, the majority of these people prefer the designations “Rom” and “Romani,” and many of the alternatives are considered offensive.⁷ Therefore, in this essay, I adopt Herbert Heuss’ practice of using “gypsy” only as “a reference to sources or where the image of ‘Gypsies’ fabricated by the [Western] majority and its institutions is meant,” and “Roma” and “Romani” “to denote the actual members of the minority concerned.”⁸ An additional issue is that, as I will discuss in more detail later, the music of the Roma and the music of Hungarians, Turks and other groups outside of Western Europe — who may or may not be ethnically Romani — have often been conflated by Western Europeans. Consequently, when discussing Western works inspired by Eastern European folk music, it can be difficult to tell Romani elements from Hungarian ones, Hungarian ones from Turkish ones, and so on, as in many cases the composers themselves did not make such distinctions.⁹ Given the strong Hungarian influence I perceive in the Brahms Cello Sonata movement, I generally refer to the actual folk music evoked as “*verbunkos*,” a common generic title for Hungarian folk and dance music.¹⁰ Alternatively, if discussing this folk music through the lens of its Western European reception, I use Catherine Mayes’ double-barrel “Hungarian-gypsy.”¹¹ Lastly, to describe the Western *topos* of music which evokes Hungary or Romani peoples, I use “gypsy style,” “Hungarian style” or “*style hongrois*.” Care in using appropriate terminology is vital in affording the Roma appropriate respect.

⁶ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Johannes Brahms,” accessed December 17, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Johannes-Brahms>.

⁷ Loya, xv.

⁸ Herbert Heuss, “Anti-Gypsyism Research: The Creation of a New Field of Study,” in *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies*, ed. Thomas Acton (Hartfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2000), 53. Loya adopts the same terminological approach; see Loya, xv.

⁹ Richard Taruskin. “Stereotyping the Other: ‘Orientalism,’” In *Music in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford University Press. (New York, USA, 2009). Accessed December 14, 2017, http://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/view/Vol_ume3/actrade-9780195384833-div1-007014.xml.

¹⁰ Again, I follow the example of Loya. See Loya, 61.

¹¹ Catherine Mayes, “Reconsidering an Early Exoticism: Viennese Adaptations of Hungarian-Gypsy Music around 1800,” *Eighteenth-Century Music* 6, no. 2 (2009): 161ff.; and Loya, xv–xvi.

Brahms had several encounters with the music of Hungary, so it is hardly surprising that his music should reflect its influence. The Hamburg master first heard ensembles of Roma as a young man, when Hungarian refugees bound for the United States came through his hometown in the wake of the Revolutions of 1848.¹² He thus came into contact with Romani performance techniques and elements of Hungarian folk-music, and drew particular inspiration from mid-century tunes by Béla Kéler, Elemér Szentirmay, Miska Borzó and others.¹³ It was also at this time that Brahms first met the Hungarian-born violinist Eduard Reményi, with whom he became friends and performed extensively. Reményi introduced Brahms to the *verbunkos* music of his homeland, possibly including the pre-existent folk melodies which appeared in Books 1 and 2 of Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* for four-hands piano in the 1860s. Further, on a tour with Reményi in 1853 which took the duo to Göttingen, Brahms befriended another Hungarian violinist, Joseph Joachim, whose performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto in 1848 had made a lasting impression on him. Joachim not only collaborated with Brahms in performance but advised him on the composition of many of his works, and seems to have particularly influenced Brahms' compositions in the Hungarian style.¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, Joachim was the dedicatee of Brahms' Violin Concerto, whose finale Bozarth and Frisch describe as "one of Brahms's greatest essays, and certainly his most virtuoso, in the *style hongrois*;"¹⁵ indeed, Brahms had worked closely with the violinist in developing the concerto.¹⁶ Besides, Joachim himself confirmed that the *Rondo alla Zingarese* ("rondo in the gypsy style") from Brahms' G-minor Piano Quartet bore the stamp of *his* music, humorously remarking to the composer, "In the last movement you beat me on my own turf."¹⁷ Thus Brahms had close, personal connections to authentic Hungarian music, which naturally predisposed him to incorporate the gypsy vernacular into his own works.

¹² Bozarth and Frisch, *Brahms*.

¹³ Max Peter Baumann, "The Reflection of the Roma in European Art Music," *The World of Music* 38, no. 1 (1996): 119–20; and Bozarth and Frisch, *Brahms*.

¹⁴ Much of this discussion draws on Bozarth and Frisch, *Brahms*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ James Keller, *Chamber Music: A Listener's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 96.

The gypsy vernacular — but not necessarily real Romani music. Brahms' appropriation of *verbunkos* reflected broader trends of exoticism and orientalism, in which the invocation of “other” musical cultures in art music could be nothing more specific than the suggestion of a generic “other.” In his *History of Western Music*, Richard Taruskin observes that certain standard signifiers of the exotic could be used as all-purpose representations of *multiple* non-Western cultures and supposed cultural traits, all blended into a single stereotype.¹⁸ Hence “augmented seconds... can evoke Arabs or Jews or Gypsies *ad libitum*... or orgiastic excess.”¹⁹ Consequently, as Edward Said put it, “Orientalism overrode the Orient.”²⁰ realistic, specific imitation of a particular Eastern country and its people was valued less than the broad Western stereotype of them.²¹ As such, one finds a considerable amount of cultural mingling in Western musical representations of these cultures, even when the composer specifies the national style he is invoking.²² For instance, Bellman points out that one of the quintessential forays in the *style hongrois*, the rondo “In the Gypsies’ Style” from Haydn’s Piano Trio in G, Hob. XV:25, “is a thoroughgoing mixture of Turkish and Gypsy elements.”²³ Stock features of the Turkish style are foregrounded right from the start of the movement: persistent, driving sequences, melodic lines in broken thirds and upper neighbour-note figures. Juxtaposed with these, though, are signifiers of the Hungarian style, namely the *alla zoppa* or limping rhythm — a common feature of Hungarian folk music — and string *pizzicati* associated with gypsy fiddlers.²⁴

In the same vein, it is important to note that the *style hongrois* was a Western creation. It was a standard vocabulary developed by Western composers, combining common formulae of Hungarian folk tunes with imitations of the Roma’s perceived unique way of performing.²⁵ For the most part, however, it did not entail

¹⁸ Taruskin, “Stereotyping the Other: ‘Orientalism.’”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1978), 196, cited in Taruskin, “Stereotyping the Other: ‘Orientalism.’”

²¹ Taruskin, “Stereotyping the Other: ‘Orientalism.’”

²² Bellman, “Lexicon,” 218–19.

²³ Bellman, *Western Europe*, 50.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

substantial quotations from actual Romani music.²⁶ Béla Bartók, who was Hungarian himself and spent much time collecting Eastern European folk tunes in the field, was quick to make the distinction: “The music that is nowadays played ‘for money’ by urban gypsy bands is nothing but popular art music of recent origin... This phenomenon is but a variant of the types of music that fulfil the same function in Western European countries.”²⁷ Of course he was referring to compositions in the *style hongrois*. To label these works “gypsy music,” he wrote, was patently “incorrect.”²⁸ Bartók was indignant, and rightly so, because underlying such music was a strong undercurrent of Western snobbery. The gypsies themselves were viewed as dangerous and mysterious,²⁹ and, as Bellman observes, “to communicate such deep, dark, forbidden associations, a music has to be off-limits, or at least disturbing and indecipherable, to at least some segment of the musical world.”³⁰ Moreover, just as people outside of Western Europe were often considered primitive and inferior, so their music was construed as simplistic, unnuanced and lacking sophistication.³¹ As such, many of the elements of the *style hongrois* were not only stereotyped and othering, but inherently denigrating. In most cases they signified a distinctive style either because they were markedly different from “normal” or “correct” Western practices of pitch organisation, texture or other musical parameters, or because they were so banal that they would otherwise be scoffed at by Westerners (for example, insistent drones). These elements will be discussed in depth in the following section. Thankfully, respect for forms of music outside the Austro-German canon has increased considerably, but the much-marginalised Roma and their music remain politically sensitive topics.

In any case, scholars have identified a variety of musical elements which invoke the *style hongrois*, many of which are applicable to Brahms’ F-major Cello Sonata. Arguably the most detailed taxonomy of the gypsy style in art music is Jonathan Bellman’s article “Toward a Lexicon for the *Style Hongrois*,” later

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁷ Béla Bartók, “Gypsy Music or Hungarian Music?,” *The Musical Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1947): 241–42.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 241.

²⁹ Bellman, *Western Europe*, 218.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

³¹ Bellman, “Lexicon,” 218.

expanded in the book *The Style Hongrois in the Music of Western Europe*. Bellman posits that the *style hongrois* frequently involved stock figures imitating the typical instruments of Romani bands: in particular, the cimbalom.³² The cimbalom is a Hungarian, hammered dulcimer which by Brahms' day involved a sustain-pedal mechanism, and is common in ensembles of Rom. It characteristically plays broken-chord and repeated-note figures, and its distinctive sound is frequently mimicked in Western art music by pedalled *tremolandi* on the piano.³³ The effect was codified by Liszt, who used it in the opening of his Hungarian Rhapsody No. 11 (Example 1). Liszt explicitly marks this passage *quasi zimbalo*, or "like a cimbalom."³⁴

Example 1: Liszt, Hungarian Rhapsody No. 11 in A minor, S. 244/11: bars 1–2.³⁵

The image shows a musical score for Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 11, bars 1-2. The score is in A minor, 3/4 time, and marked 'Lento a capriccio'. It features a piano part with a 'quasi zimbalo' (quasi cimbalom) effect, indicated by a 'p' dynamic and 'una corda' marking. The piano part consists of a series of broken chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The right hand part is marked 'una corda' and 'una corda'.

Brahms was similarly inspired by the instrument.³⁶ Cimbalom evocations are a recurring feature of Op. 99's first movement, and *tremolando* figuration occurs extensively in both the cello and piano parts (see Examples 3a and 3b). In fact, a real cimbalom is sometimes used in modern performances of Brahms' *Hungarian*

³² Bellman, *Western Europe*, 106–10.

³³ David Kettlewell, "Dulcimer," *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, accessed May 23, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/08294>; and Bellman, "Lexicon," 227 and 230.

³⁴ Bellman, "Lexicon," 227.

³⁵ All examples have been typeset by the author using Sibelius notation software.

³⁶ Interestingly, Brahms was uncomfortable with Liszt and his Hungarian-inspired works. See Loya, 2–3; and Walter Frisch, *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 47.

Dances, especially those by “authentic” ensembles such as the Budapest Gypsy Orchestra.³⁷

Other instruments were imitated too. Bellman argues for the importance of drones, and especially drone fifths, in *verbunkos*-inspired music as an evocation of bagpipes, a standard component of Romani ensembles.³⁸ In the Cello Sonata movement, these occur at the end of the development — creating an especially bracing effect — and in the coda (see Example 10). Fixed-pitch, bagpipe-like effects have been widely used to evoke “primitive” music more broadly, and this is one of the many cases in which the cultural signification revolves around a presupposition of Eastern backwardness: drones encapsulate a certain crudeness attributed to folk music, as they imply blind repetition of the same chord. Furthermore, they recall the percussion instruments and percussive effects ubiquitous in ensembles of Rom.³⁹ Moreover, Bellman observes that the horn-like Hungarian *Kuruc* fourth figure, moving between the dominant note and the upper tonic, often featured prominently in compositions invoking the *style hongrois*.⁴⁰ Accordingly, a proud, dominant-tonic melodic cell begins the opening theme of the Cello Sonata (see Example 3a), which returns in various guises throughout the movement. We should remember, though, that pinpointing references like these as Hungarian-gypsy signifiers can be difficult: the fourth can have nationally-unspecific connotations as well, such as heroism, or indeed no extra-musical significance whatsoever. After all, our perception of a musical element as a topical reference depends largely on context. As Bellman rightly points out, when we hear several Hungarian-gypsy elements in close succession, their significance is cumulative.⁴¹

Moreover, Bellman and other scholars contend that it was not just the instruments but the way in which the gypsies performed on them which enthralled Westerners and inspired Western music. Bellman explains that gypsy musicians, whilst often unable to read musical notation, were traditionally perceived to possess the ability to see deep into a person’s psyche, expressing whatever worries and

³⁷ David Malvinni, *The Gypsy Caravan: From Real Roma to Imaginary Gypsies in Western Music* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 77.

³⁸ Bellman, “Lexicon,” 232.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁴⁰ Bellman, *Western Europe*, 48.

⁴¹ Bellman, “Lexicon,” 232.

woes they saw evidence of through their legendary instrumental wizardry.⁴² Naturally, spontaneous playing was the order of the day, and quasi-improvised, cadenza-like material is *de rigueur* in compositions invoking the *style hongrois*.⁴³ This is exemplified in the brilliant, concerto-like piano writing throughout the first movement of the Cello Sonata, as in Examples 3 and 6. Even so, such bravura is influenced just as strongly by the Western concerto genre as by *verbunkos*: again, the context of other musical elements which may invoke the Hungarian-gypsy idiom is what leads us to identify it as a signifier of the *style hongrois*.

Sometimes, however, the gestures are instrument (or voice)-specific. Shay Loya observes that parallel thirds, sixths and octaves may invoke a simple harmony-singing style as well as the double-stopping of gypsy fiddlers.⁴⁴ These, too, occur in the Cello Sonata movement, and at the end of the development they create terrific suspense and concatenating energy (see Example 9). Even more evocative of fiddle-playing technique is the idea of the “gypsy swoop.”⁴⁵ Nancy Handrigan defines this as “a phrase which is interrupted abruptly on a high note,” as “the bow [is] swept up and off the string, continuing with a strong down-bow.”⁴⁶ The upward leaps after long notes in the opening theme of the sonata would seem to be perfect examples (see Example 3a). In its improvisatory nature, the *style hongrois* depends on the whim of musicians at a particular moment and is difficult to replicate. Nevertheless, by inserting characteristic signifiers of the style, Brahms imbues his work with the perceived electric atmosphere of a gripping gypsy performance.

Many commentators have remarked on how the Hungarian-gypsy influence may also be perceived in certain characteristic approaches to pitch organisation. As Ralph Locke identifies, authentic *verbunkos* melodies, and the harmonies they imply, are frequently based on the harmonic minor mode with a sharpened subdominant, known as the “gypsy scale.” Consequently, their characteristic, often melancholy sound involves many augmented

⁴² *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Loya, xvi and 53.

⁴⁵ Nancy Handrigan, “On the ‘Hungarian’ in Works of Brahms: A Critical Study” (Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, 1995), 84.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

and diminished intervals, especially augmented seconds.⁴⁷ In just this way, it is the exotic melodic and harmonic colouration which makes the Cello Sonata movement's virtuosic, diminished-seventh piano cascades (Example 6) sound so stereotypically gypsy-like. Further, Bellman observes that *verbunkos* melodies often exhibit a wandering or "bifocal tonic."⁴⁸ This can be replicated in art music by modulating themes, such as the second theme of Op. 99 when it appears in the cello (see Example 5). In addition, it is not difficult to connect non-standard harmonic progressions to gypsy music which did not follow Western functional procedures;⁴⁹ here again, there is a pejorative undercurrent to the perception and musical portrayal of gypsy culture. Thus the Cello Sonata movement exemplifies the "habit of passing suddenly to a remote key" which Liszt cited as a tendency of performing Roma in his book, *The Gipsy in Music*.⁵⁰ It features several wide-reaching modulations revolving around diminished seventh chords, as in Example 2.

Example 2: Brahms, Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 99, I: bars 87–90.

The musical score for Example 2 consists of two systems. The first system (bars 87-88) shows the Violoncello (Vc.) and Piano (Pno.) parts. The Vc. part has a melodic line with a fermata over bar 87. The Pno. part features complex rhythmic patterns with triplets and sixteenth notes. The second system (bars 89-90) continues the Pno. part with similar rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings like *cresc.* and *sfz*. Harmonic analysis below the Pno. part shows: bar 87: G# (ii) and F (iv); bar 88: IV; bar 89: Ger (iii); bar 90: vii (vii).

⁴⁷ Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 142–43.

⁴⁸ Bellman, "Lexicon," 235.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁵⁰ Franz Liszt, *The Gipsy in Music, Volume 2*, trans. Edwin Evans (London: W. Reeves, 1926), 298. Admittedly, claims in this book have been regarded as problematic in recent years.

Examples like this typify how the distinctive voice of *verbunkos* could be incorporated in the Romantic art music canon. Admittedly, however, modulations to distantly related keys occur in many pieces with no connection to the gypsy style. Once again, it is the context of a range of more conclusively *verbunkos* elements which leads us to interpret a musical feature as a signifier of the *style hongrois*.

Yet these signifiers sometimes did more than merely connoting a national style. Joseph Auner, although discussing modernism of the twentieth-century rather than the nineteenth, proposes some general reasons why composers integrate folk elements into art music. In its earthy nature, folk music can embody “the deepest levels of human experience,” as in Sibelius,⁵¹ and bespeak that experience with a profound genuineness and directness.⁵² It may also have biographical significance to the composer: Auner cites the example of folk tunes like “My Old Kentucky Home” in Charles Ives’ works, which metonymized the composer’s boyhood. In the case of Ives, of course, the effect is one of yearning for days gone by.⁵³

Auner begins his article by identifying a crucial irony surrounding the incorporation of folk elements in art music: “folk music, whether heard in remote corners of the contemporary countryside or summoned up from distant regions of the past, seemed to provide a catalyst for music that was truly new.”⁵⁴ Adopting just this viewpoint, Shay Loya’s book *Liszt’s Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian Gypsy Tradition* reveals that such devices were tools by which composers could not only imbue their work with a dash of national colour, but modernise their musical vocabulary more generally. Focusing on Liszt, Loya writes in the introduction that “*verbunkos*... provided the means for transforming familiar tonal and thematic processes,” and explores in the book how the Hungarian elements in Liszt’s music and personal makeup do just that.⁵⁵ Deviating from the approach of Bellman, who focuses on the elements which differentiate Hungarian-gypsy music

⁵¹ Joseph Auner, *Music in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2013), 61.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁵ Loya, 3ff.

from traditional Austro-German formulae, Loya adopts a transcultural perspective, looking at how the two traditions were integrated and supported the development of a new, integrated language and style.⁵⁶ In this light, he proposes that Liszt's brand of modernism involved a mingling of cultural languages which, importantly, did not impose any hierarchy, any implicit treatment of one style as superior to the other.⁵⁷ Such a viewpoint is interesting and arguably problematic, because it does not consider the presumption of Western supremacy underlying the *style hongrois*: the cultural appropriation involved is a one-way transaction, furthering Western art alone. At any rate, recuperating ancient folk music and creating ground-breaking art music do not seem entirely compatible, and the twentieth-century modernists — including Bartók, modernist and Eastern European ethnomusicologist *par excellence* — looked scornfully upon such borrowing.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Loya's thesis that appropriating *verbunkos* elements brought about a widening of Western musical vocabulary is vindicated by the music itself. The introduction of the “gypsy scale” and its associated harmonies into Liszt's music are prime examples: they created fresh sounds and provided a context for experimenting with non-standard harmonic and melodic formulae. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate, Brahms' music exhibits the exact same phenomenon.

Whilst Liszt pioneered the so-called Music of the Future, Brahms has traditionally been considered the flag-bearer of the conservatives in late nineteenth-century music.⁵⁹ Yet Peter Gay's article, “Aimez-vous Brahms? Reflections on Modernism,” makes a convincing case for Brahms as a modernist through reception studies of the composer's oeuvre, aligning with Schoenberg's view of Brahms as a progressive. By examining concert programs and reviews from Brahms' lifetime, Gay shows that Brahms' music was respected but did not enjoy real popularity among musicians and audiences in the long nineteenth-century: it was considered commendable in its intellectual rigour yet too challenging for the average listener, requiring repeated hearings to be comprehended.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5–16.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3ff.

⁵⁹ Peter Gay, “Aimez-Vous Brahms? Reflections on Modernism,” *Salmagundi* 36 (1977): 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

Gay makes this point in contrast with the conservative image of Brahms and the view at his own time of writing (1977) that Brahms' music was too obvious: in a sense, not difficult *enough*.⁶¹ But Gay does not link Brahms' innovative impulses to the composer's use of Hungarian-gypsy music. That, indeed, is precisely what the next section of the present essay aims to do. I will now examine the interaction in Brahms' writing of the *style hongrois* and the so-called learned style, a Classical topic involving conscious betrayal of extensive compositional study and the influence of music of the past, especially Baroque polyphony.⁶² I will explore the modernising function of the Hungarian-gypsy music, insofar as it influences and reshapes the more traditional, Austro-German elements and how we perceive them.

In the first movement of Brahms' Cello Sonata, Op. 99, the very elements which most strongly invoke the Austro-German art music tradition double as signifiers of the *style hongrois*, inviting the listener to reconsider "learned" elements as Hungarian-gypsy ones. Brahms establishes from the beginning his knowledge of the Classical canon before him by alluding to two important earlier works by Schubert and Beethoven. The opening recalls another monumental duo for piano and string instrument: Schubert's C-major Fantasy for Violin and Piano, D. 934 (1822). Both Brahms' and Schubert's works begin with *tremolando* figuration in the piano and harmony moving from chord I to chord V via an applied *vi*:⁰⁷. They both feature modal mixture and a metre with a triple component: Brahms' 3/4 is simple triple, and Schubert's 6/8, though nominally duple, features a compound beat subdivided in three. Moreover, the string instrument lines in both works feature long, sustained notes and ascending leaps. These openings are reproduced in Examples 3a and 3b.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶² I use the descriptor "learned style" as does Ratner in his taxonomy of Classical topics. See Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form and Style* (New York, NY: Schirmer Books, 1985).

Example 3a: Brahms, Op. 99, I: bars 1–7.

Allegro vivace

Violoncello

Pianoforte

Pte.

F: I (vii^{o6} /V) V vii^{o4} I⁶ vii^{o7} /ii ii⁶

I⁶ (dominant pedal) vii^{o7} /V V⁴ I⁶ (v⁶ /V ii^{o8} /V)

Example 3b: Schubert, Fantasy for Violin and Piano, D. 934, bars 1–9.

Andante molto

Violin

Piano

C: I vii^{o6} /V Fr⁴ ii^{o4} V⁷ 3

I vii^{o6} /V Fr⁴ ii^{o4} V⁷ 3 I

Incidentally, further parallels with the older piece reveal themselves as the movement progresses, including cadenza-like

piano writing, a canonic exchange of a dotted figure between the instruments a beat apart, and a primary subject featuring the **q q. e** rhythmic pattern. Looking further back in time, the pulsating accompaniment figuration and dotted leap figures also call to mind the opening of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, albeit in a different sonic and emotional world. Moreover, the virtuosic piano writing, which takes centre stage right from the outset, recalls countless piano concerti and other works showcasing the instrument's bravura capacities: dare one say it, even Liszt.⁶³

This opening foregrounds Brahms' status as an erudite composer in other ways, too. First, Brahms' characteristic rhythmic play is on show in the apparent displacement of the melody within the bar. The cello's long notes put a natural agogic accent on the third beat of the bar, strengthened by the implied V-I cadence onto beat three. Reinforcing this further, the harmony changes on each third beat, and Brahms even puts an accent on the third beat of bars 1 and 2. In fact, with the accents positioned in this way, the notes in bars 5–8 align with dotted crotchet beats, as in 6/8 time. Example 4 illustrates first how the opening of the cello melody is written, and then how it sounds.

Example 4a: Brahms, Op. 99, I: bars 1–8, cello melody as written.

Example 4b: Brahms, Op. 99, I: bars 1–8, cello melody, rewritten without syncopations.

⁶³ See note 35.

The list of “educated” elements continues. Brahms demonstrates his contrapuntal technique, acquired through extensive study of Handel and J. S. Bach, in the imitative passage in bars 20–33, preceding the second subject group. More broadly, the very genre of a duo sonata brings with it an established tradition and certain expectations on the part of the listener in terms of a standardised, rigorously planned form and serious character.⁶⁴ Indeed, these “traditional” factors are all icons of Germanness, of a canon which is proudly Teutonic. Musical erudition and Germanness had long been proudly yoked by Germanic musicians: the axiom, attributed to J. J. Quantz, that Germans could assimilate the fruits of other national styles to develop their own unparalleled art is well known.⁶⁵ In just this way, the interval of a fourth with which the melody begins is, in its associations with the horn, redolent of the idealised German pastoral.⁶⁶ Similarly, the leaps of an ascending sixth after a long note in bars 6–7 and following could evoke a yodel, connoting alpine regions of Germanic countries, especially Austria and Switzerland.⁶⁷ In these ways, Brahms comprehensively establishes his credentials as an educated Germanic musician.

Yet many of these “learned,” Germanic elements can also be seen to signify the *style hongrois*. As discussed earlier, the *tremolando* figuration which recalls Schubert often served as an imitation of the cimbalom, and in this role was a typical component of piano music in the gypsy style. The modal mixture creates exotic harmonic colours and progressions (see the harmonic analysis in Example 3a), featuring “gypsy-like” augmented and diminished intervals. In addition, the dotted rhythms are a standard trope of the Hungarian style,⁶⁸ while the bravura piano writing is as

⁶⁴ The tradition of chamber music as *Hausmusik* should not be overlooked, but I am referring here to the line of sonatas designed for and rightly belonging in the concert hall: Beethoven’s duo sonatas, for instance.

⁶⁵ Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute* (1752), tr. Edward R. Reilly (New York: Schirmer, 1975), 341, cited in Michael Vaillancourt, “Brahms and the Historical Sublime,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 46/1 (2015): 77.

⁶⁶ Weber’s *Der Freischütz* presents an iconic example of this use of the horn in the “Jägerchor.”

⁶⁷ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Yodel,” accessed December 19, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/art/yodel>.

⁶⁸ Loya, 74.

resemblant of (stereo)typically unbuttoned gypsy virtuosity as it is of piano concerti. Besides, the ascending leaps after long notes in the cello strikingly echo the “swoop” violin effect. There is a sheer virtuosic exuberance on show in both instruments, of just the kind a Westerner might associate with a real gypsy performance. Yet again, our identification of topical references is contextual; hence, the Hungarian-gypsy effect of these elements is cumulative.⁶⁹

As a result, we naturally reconsider some of the traditional elements we hear. German music begins to sound Hungarian, and this invites us to think of Brahms’ Western models in a Hungarian-gypsy light. The radiantly calm *tremolandi* in Schubert’s Fantasy for Violin and Piano sound brilliant, spicy and exciting; we become aware of the exotic qualities of the opening of the earlier piece.⁷⁰ Returning to Brahms’ Cello Sonata, in the context of the Hungarian-style music, we begin to see the virtuosic piano writing as a mingling not just of concerto and chamber music genres but — in its spontaneous undertones — of notated music and virtuoso extemporisation. Brahms’ counterpoint comes across as a nod not just to Bach and other polyphonic masters but to “primitive” call-and-response singing, and his musical evocations of the yodel and post horn-call become the “gypsy swoop” and *Kuruc* fourth. Even the complex rhythmic displacement could plausibly be viewed in this context as imitating the soloistic freedom of a gypsy *primas* (in Hungarian, the lead player of a Romani ensemble) who is — whether for expressive reasons or because of limited rehearsal — somewhat out of time with his band.⁷¹ By extension, we as audience members may well look differently on these “traditional” or German elements when they occur outside this piece considering how we have heard them here. Moreover, our expectations of the work to come, its structure and style are disrupted by the rhapsodic, out-of-doors quality of the Hungarian-

⁶⁹ See Bellman, “Lexicon,” 232.

⁷⁰ This makes sense, because Hungarian qualities feature elsewhere in the Fantasy: the A-minor Allegretto section features many percussive grace notes and accents, a driving duple metre, extensive melodic and harmonic repetition and an unusually prominent focus on the augmented second between the submediant and leading note. In this light, Bellman observes that this Fantasy “opens with a stylised Gypsy improvisation: soloistic violin roudades are accompanied by cimbalomlike [*sic*] tremolos in the piano.” See Bellman, *Western Europe*, 169.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 98–101.

gypsy music. In this way, Brahms lets *us* do the “transcultural modernising,” as the recasting of standard Classical procedures comes in our reinterpretation of these structures in the *verbunkos* context established.

In fact, the second and third subject groups enact the process of modernising Austro-German music in light of the Hungarian-gypsy influence. As the exposition progresses, the gypsy-style music not only becomes more and more pervasive, but actually directs the form. The second theme, based on a Sarabande rhythm, initially appears in the piano clearly in C major, moving from chord I to chord V. It is a relatively balanced theme of 2+4 bars, and exotic sounds are cast aside in favour of Schumann-esque majesty, nobility and triumph. But when the cello takes up the theme in bar 40, the atmosphere soon changes: the melody swerves to E minor, the piano writing becomes increasingly chromatic and the two-against-three offbeat accompaniment is rather disorienting, echoing *verbunkos esztam* (bass-chord) patterns (Example 5).⁷²

Example 5: Brahms Op. 99, I: bars 30–45.

⁷² Loya, xvi and 74, defines the *esztam* pattern as “a typical ‘oom-pah’ bass-chord accompaniment,” “characteristic of the oral tradition.” Admittedly, the case for a conscious *esztam* reference here is a relatively weak one, since there are no bass notes on the beat.

The music suddenly sounds exotic, and in fact it has a *verbunkos* precedent: the wandering tonic, which is arguably replicated here by the swift modulation to the mediant. This encapsulates the process of recasting a well-behaved, “Classical” theme in a culturally “other” context, bringing with it fresh harmonic and textural colours.

This transformation presages in microcosm the trajectory of the music to come. In bars 46 and 47, the music returns briefly to C. But in bar 48, stormier, minor-key music appears to win over with turbulent cascades in the piano, based on a descending chromatic incomplete neighbour-tone pattern, outlining diminished seventh chords (Example 6).

Example 6: Brahms, Op. 99, I: bars 46–52.

The musical score for Example 6 consists of two systems. The first system covers bars 46 to 48, and the second system covers bars 49 to 52. The Violin (Vc.) part is written in a single line in bass clef. The Piano (Pfte.) part is written in two staves (treble and bass clefs). Dynamics include piano (p), forte (f), and mezzo-forte (mf). The Pfte. part features numerous triplets and sixteenth-note patterns. The Vc. part has a melodic line with some rests and a tritone interval in bar 51.

The diminished intervals and virtuosity recall the Hungarian-gypsy idiom, and the cello melody in bars 51–55 reinforces the exotic colouration with two leaps of a tritone, an interval used only sparingly in much Western tonal music. Additionally, it is not difficult to connect the cello figure beginning in bar 56 to the cimbalom. Besides, the cellist’s bowing here (one semiquaver-three semiquavers) articulates the Lombard rhythm, accented short-long, which corresponds with natural emphases of speech in Hungarian

(as in the name János).⁷³ This culminates in a perfect authentic cadence in A minor and arguably the most explicit Hungarian-gypsy music in the movement so far (Example 7).

Example 7: Brahms, Op. 99, I: bars 57–65.

The musical score for Example 7 consists of two systems. The first system covers bars 57 to 61, and the second system covers bars 62 to 65. Each system has a Violin (Vc.) part on the top staff and a Piano (Pfte.) part on the bottom staff. The Vc. part in the first system features a melodic line with a 'simile' marking above it. The Pfte. part provides harmonic support with chords and a bass line. The second system shows the continuation of the Vc. part with first and second endings, and the Pfte. part with a bass line that includes a chromatic descending line on the D string.

Here, the simple, repetitive harmony accentuates the Hungarian-gypsy flavour, as does the modal mixture: the cello line features a subtonic and alternates a sharp and normal minor (that is, flat) submediant. Furthermore, the cimbalom evocations — perhaps the most striking, iconic representations of Hungarianness in the movement — have hitherto been used only as accompaniment patterns, but in bars 60–65, they become the melody. In these bars, an inverted pedal tone on the open A string alternates with the notes of a chromatic descending line on the D. The cimbalom’s characteristic pedalled sonority comes from the overlaps of notes — momentary double-stops — created when crossing strings so rapidly. This section marks the end of the exposition, which all the music beforehand has been leading up to: for fear of hammering a tired and — today — problematic stereotype, it is as if the gypsies have permeated the courtly abode of the Sarabande theme.

⁷³ Loya, 74.

This has had a very notable structural effect, but one directly relevant to the Austro-German Classical tradition: it has created a three-key exposition. Pioneered by Schubert, three-key expositions appear in many of Brahms' sonata-form movements, and their occurrences in the Hamburg master's work have been catalogued in Roger Graybill's dissertation, "Brahms and the Three-Key Exposition." In the present movement, the third subject group is this unabashed moment of Hungarian-gypsy music in A minor, although as Graybill notes, the exact point at which the subject begins is difficult to determine.⁷⁴ As such, sonata form — arguably the primary structural basis of Classical music — has been adapted to accommodate the Hungarian-gypsy material. Yet this has the effect of modernising the Hungarian music too, giving it a sense of tonal direction which it may have lacked (though more than made up for in flair and excitement) in live performances which were largely extempore.⁷⁵ In this way, there exists in this movement a mutual stimulation of *verbunkos*-inspired and "learned" structural elements, such that each kind is understood anew in light of the other.

In the development, Hungarian-inspired music not only shapes the form, but outlines and articulates it, even strengthening its telos. In bars 74–91, the cimbalom imitation is converted into a conventional Western off-beat accompaniment trope in C# minor. *Pianissimo* broken-chord figuration in the piano serves as a shimmering backdrop to the long, sustained lines in the cello and creates a hint of agitation. The otherworldly sound this creates reminds us how far we are from the home key and principal theme: rightly so, because the cello melody here is difficult to trace back to material in the exposition. However, the motivic cimbalom evocations also connect this otherwise remote passage texturally with the rest of the movement. They imply that a return home is imminent, and the quivering nature of the figuration imbues that imminent return with suspense (Example 8).

⁷⁴ Roger Graybill, "Brahms and the Three-Key Exposition" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1983), 277ff.

⁷⁵ Liszt, 298.

Example 8: Brahms, Op. 99, I: bars 74–78.

74

Vc. *pp sempre*

Pfte. *molto piano sempre e legato*

76

Vc.

Pfte.

Example 9: Brahms, Op. 99, I: bars 112–129.

112

Vc. *pp*

Pno. *pp dolce*

118

Vc. *poco cresc.* *f*

Pno. *poco cresc.*

125

Vc. *f*

Pno. *sf*

Later in the development, in bars 104–111, stereotypically gypsy-like drone basses sustaining the dominant — also featuring cimbalom-like *tremolandi* — maintain an inexorable pull towards the tonic and the recapitulation, providing a stable harmonic underpinning for the chromaticism in the upper voices. As a result, by bar 111, the tonic and recapitulation seem overdue. But Brahms deviates briefly back to the tonic and tonicised supertonic before inserting, as if by way of correction, a passage which makes the return of F major seem more inevitable than ever (Example 9).

What creates this inevitability, though, is a cornucopia of techniques related to gypsy music-making as nineteenth-century Western Europeans might have perceived it. Indeed, despite the political issues surrounding such a stereotyped comparison today, the passage could be connected to a very imaginable scenario in live gypsy music. One member of the band states an idea. Two more, or one double-stopping, repeat this in (mostly) parallel sixths — melodies in parallel being another *style hongrois* trope — while someone else offers a new idea in thirds, an appropriate “tail” for the first. Another voice imitates the original idea, now extended to include the figure in thirds, and yet another plays the thirds only. Then, a low voice begins the first idea with new resolve on the dominant. Cimbaloms start playing and a low voice intones an emphatic, rhythmically augmented version of the first idea. There is a general crescendo as the band joins together, and finally we reach the tonic at bar 128, with an accented, arpeggiated roll suggestive of percussion instruments.⁷⁶ This scenario is fictitious, of course, but the *style hongrois* elements unarguably keep the piece moving forward towards its structural and tonal goals. The sense of multiple parts joining in creates a terrific suspense leading into the recapitulation, just as any gathering for a common cause adds weight to whatever that cause might be. The effect, one may say, is as thrilling to Western audiences as a live gypsy performance.

The recapitulation is essentially a truncated version of the exposition with the second subject transposed to F major, and most of the procedures from the earlier section apply. However, one further example of *style hongrois* recasting in the reprise bears

⁷⁶ In this vein, Liszt describes how one gypsy would “improvise” a “musical poem” and then “impose on others the duty of surrounding him, sustaining him, even guessing him in order to sing the same funeral hymn or give himself up to the same mad freak of joy.” See Liszt, 312.

mentioning here. The especially Hungarian-sounding third subject group appears in the relative minor in bars 159–177 rather than the tonic or parallel minor, as we might expect, meaning that the tonal “otherness” of this music is preserved. The sonata structure, therefore, has been adapted to retain this otherness, which is interesting in a movement otherwise so concerned with integrating Hungarian-gypsy and more traditional art music. Admittedly, however, the practice of reprising one subject group outside the tonic key in the recapitulation had precedents in Brahms’ other three-key expositions, such as that in the first movement of his F-minor Piano Sonata, Op. 5.

In any case, the coda of the Cello Sonata movement apotheosises the interaction of the gypsy and learned styles. The two languages are now juxtaposed so extensively that they meld into one integrated, seamless whole. After modulating, minor-mode iterations of the opening theme in bars 178–183, a bagpipe-like drone on the cello’s open C string begins an augmented version of the principal theme over a dominant pedal — just as one might find at the end of a Bach fugue. Cymbalom figuration continues in the piano. Next, the cello takes up both the cymbalom figure and the drone, playing low *tremolando* octaves on C, while the piano continues the archaic-style music with a sustained passage of fourth-species counterpoint in close harmony featuring quasi-Baroque hemiola. Following a calm, homophonic interlude in the subdominant, bars 203–206 present a final appearance of the cymbalom figure in the cello’s lowest register, combined with a quintessentially Brahmsian, “erudite” hemiola, *un poco sostenuto*, in bars 205–6. Then, bars 207–211 round out the movement with a contrapuntal exchange, proudly in the learned style. The piano states the rising fourth motive, the cello imitates, and the left hand of the piano imitates that, before the two are finally united in a rhythmically simplified version of the idea. Again, there is a hemiolic effect (Example 10).

Example 10: Brahms, Op. 99, I: bars 199–211.

The image shows a musical score for Example 10, Brahms, Op. 99, I: bars 199–211. The score is in 3/4 time and features a Violin (Vc.) and Piano (Pno.) part. The first system (bars 199-211) shows the Violin playing a melodic line with a 'poco cresc.' marking and a 'p' dynamic. The Piano accompaniment features triplet patterns and a 'p dolce' dynamic. The second system (bars 204-211) shows the Violin playing a more rhythmic line with 'un poco sostenuto' and 'Vivace' markings, and a 'p' dynamic. The Piano accompaniment features block chords and a 'Vivace' marking.

In a happy coincidence — which given Brahms’ superb compositional planning may be no coincidence at all — this intricately-planned procedure is not far removed from a common effect in live *verbunkos* music: one member of the ensemble performs a solo while the others wait patiently and join the soloist right at the end, so that all the musicians finish together.⁷⁷ In any case, Brahms has comprehensively linked the Hungarian-gypsy and “erudite” elements, and acknowledged their symbiotic relationship in this movement symbolically as far as is possible in purely musical terms. With that said, Brahms is a Western composer, and his integration of Hungarian music is still a form of Western cultural appropriation.

Nonetheless, Brahms indisputably makes innovative use of Hungarian-gypsy music in ways that recast older music and its standard practices in the first movement of his Cello Sonata, Op. 99. Throughout the movement, the gypsy and learned styles not only coexist, but overlap, oppose, answer, reshape, support and complete each other. This is hardly surprising, as Brahms was not only familiar with both folk and art music spanning centuries, but also possessed one of the greatest musical and assimilative minds in history. His blending of musical influences typifies the balancing of innovation and conservation which has won him affection and adulation from his own time to the present.

⁷⁷ Bellman, “Lexicon,” 221–22.

In this paper, I have demonstrated the application of Bellman's and other taxonomies of the *style hongrois* to the first movement of Op. 99, and shown how a similar, modernising phenomenon to what Loya observes in Liszt operates in this movement by Brahms. Thus, I have extended the discussion of exoticism and folk influences in the art music canon, as taken up by Taruskin, Auner and others, and thrown new light on the modernist impulse in the composer's work identified by Gay, which is often overshadowed by Brahms' historicist tendencies. Further, by illustrating the overlaps between the gypsy and learned styles, I have begun to challenge widely-held notions of the separation of musical vocabularies in folk-inspired art music. It remains to be explored how these issues play out in the context of other works by Brahms and his contemporaries, and what the implications of this might be for performance. There is work to do, but it is surely a fascinating field.

ABSTRACT

In an age which prized the exotic and fantastic, Romantic composers were naturally drawn to gypsies, their perceived characteristics of seductiveness and freedom, and most of all, their irresistible music. The so-called gypsy style or *style hongrois*, an established *topos* in Western art music, is a key element of such Romantic favourites as Bizet's *Carmen*, and was particularly salient in the works of Johannes Brahms (1833–1897). This article examines the role of the *style hongrois* in the first movement of Brahms' Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 99, hitherto unrecognised for its Hungarian-gypsy undertones in scholarship. Applying Shay Loya's ideas about the modernizing *verbunkos* idiom in works of Liszt, I contend that Brahms not only makes extensive use of the *style hongrois* in this movement, but does so as a means of recasting standard features of Austro-German art music. I show that Brahms had numerous personal connections to real Romani music, and that many of the typical signifiers of the gypsy style can be seen in the Cello Sonata movement. I then explain how this reflects broader patterns of problematic cultural appropriation and the invocation of folk styles for purposes both musical and extra-musical; here I discuss commentaries by Auner, Loya and Gay. Finally, I propose a close relationship between the gypsy and learned styles in the movement: that Brahms invites us to reconsider canonical German elements as Hungarian-gypsy ones, and more broadly, that the two

styles overlap, extend and reinforce each other, forming an integrated whole.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Nicholas Kennedy is a scholarship student on the BMus (Performance Honours) program at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and in Spring 2018 an Associate Student of RNCM Manchester. Trained as a Classical pianist and cellist, his teachers have included Clemens Leske, Helen Krizos and Julian Smiles. He is a prize-winner of the Lev Vlassenko Piano Competition and Australian Concerto and Vocal Competition, and won the 2017 Mary Greville Scholarship for overseas study. He has performed with the Australia Piano Quartet and the Hutcheson Trio. Nicholas' academic achievements have been recognised with the Frank Albert, Felix Switzer and John Cassim Awards from the University of Sydney, and the University Academic Merit Prize for 2016–17. He is currently completing his Honours thesis under the supervision of Dr David Larkin.