

TRANSYLVANIAN MUSICAL MANUSCRIPTS: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SOURCES FROM THE 17TH–19TH CENTURIES

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SUMMARY. The collection-type musical manuscripts preserved in Transylvania between the 17th and 19th centuries represent a significant yet insufficiently studied source for the history of music in Central and Eastern Europe. They document the coexistence of European art music with local aristocratic and folk traditions, reflecting the region's complex cultural, social, and confessional landscape. Transylvania's musical manuscripts from the 17th–19th centuries offer a fascinating glimpse into the region's rich cultural and musical life. Preserving works by Western European composers, anonymous local authors, and traditional peasant music, they reveal the coexistence of aristocratic and folk traditions. While some collections have been published, many remain largely unexplored, highlighting the need for further study to appreciate the full scope of Transylvania's diverse musical heritage. This article examines four representative sources: the Sfântu Gheorghe manuscript (1757), which integrates Western European chamber works with Hungarian and Polish dances; the manuscript of Count László Székely (1744), marked by Viennese galant idioms; the Miss Mihály manuscript (1689), containing instrumental, keyboard, and religious repertoire; and the Târgu Mureş manuscript, which combines Viennese Classical piano works with Hungarian songs. By addressing largely unpublished sources, this study seeks to contribute to the systematic recognition of Transylvanian manuscripts as a distinctive corpus within the broader European musical heritage.

Keywords: musical manuscript, Transylvania, cultural heritage, unpublished

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Introduction

The collection-type musical manuscripts preserved in Transylvania between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries constitute an exceptional yet insufficiently explored source for understanding both the cultivated and vernacular dimensions of musical life in the region. They reflect the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, and socially diverse character of Transylvania, while at the same time illustrating the penetration of European repertoires and performance practices into local aristocratic and educational contexts.

Much of this music was composed by both well-known and lesser-known Western European composers.

In addition, these manuscripts include works by anonymous composers, likely Hungarian aristocrats, as well as traditional peasant music from various communities, a unique phenomenon that distinguishes Transylvanian manuscripts within the European context. While some manuscripts have been studied and published, many remain largely unknown and unexplored. Among the published collections are the *Codex Caioni*, the most extensive compilation in Eastern Europe (1634–1671, published by the Union of Musicologists and Composers of Romania and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1994); the Songbook of *Bocskor János* (Leliceni-Ciuc, 1716–1739, ed. Kriterion, 2003); the Manuscript of *Fazakas Josephus Krizbancensis* (1738, Honterus Verlag, 2021); and the collections of Joannes Kajoni.

The following discussion provides a general overview of the manuscripts that have not yet been published. Writing about these sources presents a challenge, as many remain little-studied or entirely unresearched. Consequently, there is limited information regarding the provenance and identification of the musical material contained within these rare and valuable documents. This study represents a first step toward recognizing and valorizing the rich heritage of cultured music in Transylvania during the 17th–19th centuries.

1. Manuscript Case Studies

1.1. Musical Manuscript from Sfântu Gheorghe, 1757

Discovered by Pál Péter Domokos in the 1950s, the Sfântu Gheorghe manuscript contains ninety-one pages of instrumental music, most frequently notated for violin and chamber ensembles. In most cases, only the violin part is notated, without the accompanying voices. When two voices are indicated,

the first voice (like violin I) is placed on the left page of the manuscript, while the second voice (likely violin II or cello) appears on the right page, allowing two musicians to perform simultaneously using their instruments.

The manuscript shows evidence of contributions from three distinct “hands.” The first hand copied the majority of the musical material in a calligraphic and energetic script, comprising works by well-known European composers: Georg Philipp Telemann, Johann Adolphe Hasse, Carl Heinrich Graun, Francesco Maria Veracini, Pietro Antonio Locatelli, Pietro Castrucci, Gasparo Visconti, Antonio Vivaldi, Sebastiano Bodino (“del Signor Bodino”), and Cristophe Förster (“del Signor Förster”). Other composers are less certain: “del Signor Goebel,” “Signor Jacomelli” (likely Geminiano Giacomelli, Italian composer, 1692–1742), “del Signor Bach” (possibly Johann Sebastian or one of his sons), and one indecipherable name. The most identifiable composers were violinists active for varying periods at the Dresden court. Additionally, numerous works are anonymous, with titles such as sonatinas or Baroque dances, including minuets (over 30), rigaudons, gigue, and gavottes.

For the history of music in Transylvania, the melodies notated by the other two hands are particularly interesting. These less calligraphic annotations appear to have been added later in the blank lower lines of the pages, following the transcription of works by Western European composers. One copyist knew Hungarian, as indicated by titles such as *Magyar táncz* (Hungarian Dance) or *Lengjel Tántz* (Polish Dance). Five Hungarian dances, probably of folk origin, show a Balkan-Turkish influence with augmented seconds and were composed by anonymous authors without accompaniment. Notably, there are twenty Polish dances; some are titled in Hungarian (*Lengjel Tántz*), others as *Polonaise*, and one march is dedicated to the King of Poland, titled *Marsch de la Majesté le Roi de Pologne*.

Historical context explains the presence of Polish dances in Transylvania. Following a 1658 law passed by the Polish parliament, Unitarian believers were expelled from Poland. Many settled in Transylvania, where religious freedom was legally guaranteed (Turda, 1568), and significant Unitarian communities already existed.

The manuscript is preserved in the Széchényi National Library in Budapest. The following figure illustrates the two types of notation belonging to two hands, showing a work by “del Signor Goebel” and a Hungarian dance.

Figure 1



Manuscript from Sfântu Gheorghe, p. 52

1.2. Manuscript of Count László Székely, 1744

The leather-bound manuscript, written around 1750, contains 46 unnumbered sheets measuring 16x22 cm. The first page bears the inscription: "Comitis Ladislau Székely de Boros Jenő, Vienna, 29 February 1744," marking the day the musical material began to be notated.

Biographical information on Székely László comes from his autobiography³, begun in 1763 at age 46, published in 1887 in *Budapesti Szemle*, pp. 224–258. He was born on 4 September 1716 in Alămor, near Sibiu. His mother died when he was 13, and a year later, his father passed away, leaving him orphaned along with two siblings. In 1723, he began studies at Bethlen College in Aiud (German: Strassburg am Mieresch, Hungarian: Nagyenyed), completing them ten years later in 1733, after which he served as a chancellor. He married in 1742 and, in 1743, moved to Vienna, where he resided until 27 March 1744 with his family. The manuscript's beginning

³ Székely László: *Önéletírás* (transl. *Autobiography*), ed. Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2019.

coincides with this period in Vienna. In 1745, after the deaths of his wife and child, he frequented opera and theater performances⁴ and soon came under the attention of the Viennese court, receiving the title of chamberlain. Concurrently, he regularly donated to the Reformed College in Odorheiu Secuiesc⁵.

Vienna during this period had a very active concert life, with concerts often organized for social gatherings, where the Minuet was fashionable in aristocratic salons. Accordingly, most works in Székely's collection bear the title Menuet or Menuetto, alongside pieces titled Capriccio, Allegro, Andante, and Largo; many remain untitled. The breakdown of titles is as follows: 14 Menuets, 1 Prelude, 2 Capriccios, and 34 untitled works. No composer names are notated, and it is unclear whether the compositions are original or sourced from elsewhere. Of the 51 pieces, three are for a single voice without accompaniment (violin or flute), 33 for two voices - eight of which have the second voice in bass clef (likely for cello), the remaining 25 in treble clef for two voices, and fifteen works are incomplete. Two-voice works are arranged so that "Primo" is on the right page and "Secondo" on the left, facilitating performance by two instruments. While instruments are not specified, the treble clef notation makes the works playable on violin or flute, with a range between D1–E3. Tonalities favor flute performance: 26 pieces in D major, 14 in G major; others include C major (2), E major (1), E minor (2), F major (1), A major (3), B \flat major (1), and B minor (1). Keyboard or plucked string accompaniment may also have been used. Dynamics are minimal (one piano marking), articulations are rare, but ornaments are frequent, including trills and long or short appoggiaturas. Stylistically, the works can be categorized as galant, combining Baroque elements with traits of early Classical style.

No direct references exist to Székely's musical education, but as organ instruction was part of the curriculum at Bethlen College, he likely acquired musical knowledge during his school years. The manuscript was probably used for salon performances or personal enjoyment, consistent with aristocratic chamber music practice.

It is now held at the Reformed College in Odorheiu Secuiesc.

⁴ András, Benkő: *Székely László Kötéskönyve*, in *Zenetudományi Tanulmányok*, VI. kötet, Budapest, 1957, p. 345-348

⁵ Németh, S. Katalin: „*Bizony igazat írok, és úgy írom a mint volt*” (*Székely László önéletírása*)(transl. “*I write the truth and I write how it was*” (*Autobiography of Székely László*). In: *Irodalomtörténet* 18 (1986) p. 611-637

Figure 2



Manuscript of count Székely László, 1744, p. 27

1.3. Manuscript of Miss Mihály, 1689

This manuscript, with leather covers and two protective folios, contains 89 unnumbered pages and was written by at least three individuals, known only for Miss Mihály, after whom it is named. The first hand notated works for a melodic instrument (violin or flute) with or without accompaniment, placing voice 1 on the left page and voice 2 in bass clef (likely cello) on the right page, allowing two performers to read the score comfortably. The second hand wrote keyboard works in calligraphic script, with ornamental initials, likely a professional copyist. The third hand notated six Hungarian psalms for two voices, combining melody and bass as harmonic support, resembling figured bass.

The repertoire includes German, French, Italian, and Hungarian religious works, mostly anonymous. The first two pages appear to serve as protective folios, containing nearly indecipherable scores. The collection includes complete

works, fragments, and untitled pieces, many corrected or later supplemented. Frequent compositions are menuets, trios, preludes, arias, bourrées, toccatas, giges, and untitled works. Keys are mainly major (C, D, G, A, B \flat) with some minor (D, E, A), and 3/4 is the predominant measure, typical of menuets, with some in 4/4 or 12/8. Monodic and polyphonic works exist; in polyphonic works, one line is melodic, the other bass, consistent with Baroque accompaniment. Some works are grouped into suites (e.g., Praeludium, Allemande, Loure, Sarabande) reflecting French Baroque dance forms. Composer attributions are rare and often uncertain (e.g., G. Somers).

The manuscript shows corrections, missing titles, blank pages later filled with fragments, and titles appearing only after Trio sections, indicating usage for study or domestic practice. It also includes two arias (one with two variations), three giges, three minuets (two with Trio), one march, one allemande, and thirteen untitled solo treble pieces.

Miss Mihály was known to have been a student in Sighișoara. Like Count Székely's manuscript, it was held at the Reformed College Library in Odorheiu Secuiesc and transferred in 2013 to the Széchényi National Library in Budapest.

Figure 3



Manuscript of Miss Mihály, 1689, p.7, notated by the 1st hand

1.4. Manuscript from Târgu Mureș

This manuscript is the least documented. Written by a single hand in clear calligraphic style, it contains 22 pages without a cover. The first section contains piano works in the Viennese Classical style, followed by Hungarian love songs with piano accompaniment and lyrics. The first three pages serve as music theory lessons, presenting the chromatic scale with note names, enharmonic equivalents, and ornament execution (trill, gruppetto, mordent), written in parallel octaves for piano: right hand in treble clef (C1–B1) and left hand in bass clef (c–b).

Seven Menuets with Trio follow, in C, F, B \flat , and G major. In Trio 6, the right-hand measures 1–8 and 12–16 contain the marking “Fagotto Solo” in bass clef, suggesting piano arrangements from symphonic works. Other pieces include a March in C major (page 9), a theme with six variations (pages 10–13, Adagio in 2/4, four virtuosic variations followed by a final Presto variation), and another March in D major (pages 14–15), likely a symphonic transcription with a four-bar trumpet introduction. Pages 16–17 contain technical exercises for piano in D major, followed by a two-part D major piece (Adagio and Allegro). Page 18 has another March in D major, while page 19 contains a three-part piece: Landler (D major)–Trio (G major)–Landler (G major)–Coda (D major).

The final pages include three popular Hungarian love songs arranged for piano with text, one using a poem by Csokonai Vitéz Mihály (1773–1805):

“Oh nagy egek rátok apellálok
 [“Oh heavens, I appeal to you”]
Ez nap fénye már ezután rejtezzék a felhőkben
 [“Let the light of this day hide in the clouds”]
Zokoghatsz még egy betűtskét belőlem”
 [“You may still weep for my pain”]

In conclusion, the manuscript contains music theory lessons, piano technical exercises, thirteen Viennese Classical-style piano works (seven Menuets with Trio, three Marches, a Theme with six variations, a two-part untitled work, and a Landler with Trio), and three Hungarian-text songs adapted for piano.

Figure 4



Manuscript from Târgu Mureș, p. 12

Conclusions

The study of Transylvanian musical manuscripts from the 17th - 19th centuries reveal a rich and diverse cultural heritage that reflects the historical complexity of the region. Several key conclusions may be drawn:

1. Intercultural synthesis – The manuscripts testify to the coexistence of Western European art music with local aristocratic creations and folk traditions (Romanian, Hungarian, Saxon, Polish, and Balkan), illustrating a unique phenomenon of cultural permeability within Europe.
2. Religions - the presence of different religions such as Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestant and Neo-Protestant
3. Diversity of sources and genres – The examined manuscripts encompass chamber and instrumental works, vocal religious pieces, dances, and piano repertoire, ranging stylistically from late Baroque to Viennese Classicism. Their heterogeneity reflects both the private and social functions of music in Transylvanian society.

4. Unpublished and underexplored material – While a few codices (e.g., Codex Caioni) have been published, the majority of manuscripts remain unknown, requiring systematic cataloguing, analysis, and critical editions to make them accessible for further scholarship.
5. European relevance – Situated at the intersection of Central, Western, and Southeastern Europe, Transylvania functioned as a cultural bridge. Its manuscripts not only preserve local traditions but also document the transnational circulation of repertoire and performance practices.

In conclusion, these sources represent an indispensable part of Europe's musical heritage. Their study not only enriches our understanding of Transylvania's cultural identity but also contributes to a broader re-evaluation of the dynamics between art music and folk traditions in early modern Europe.

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