

A Calendar of Days The Pécs International Folk Days

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Article abstract

The first Pécs International Folkest took place in 1986 and was funded by the various state agencies existing in the years of socialism. Today the festival still continues, although like all festivals it has gone through some tricky patches over the years. This article examines, through newspaper cuttings, archive materials and the inaccurate memories of the many organisers, how it has survived the transfer from one state-dominated regime to another based on a new capitalism that has pushed cultural events, always an important part of the socialist political voice, into the background.

A CALENDAR OF DAYS

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The first Pécs International *Folkest* took place in 1986 and was funded by the various state agencies existing in the years of socialism. Today the festival still exists, although like all festivals it has gone through some tricky patches over the years. This article examines, through newspaper cuttings, archive materials and the inaccurate memories of the many organizers, how it has survived the transfer from one state-dominated regime to another based on a new capitalism that has pushed cultural events, always an important part of the socialist political voice, into the background.

In October of 1985 my folk-singing cousin Chris Foster came across from Britain to Hungary for a holiday. One afternoon three of us, Chris, myself and the English-speaking Lajos Bergics, then working in the town museum of folk art but now self-employed as leader and owner of the Hungarian folk ensemble *Zengő*, sat down to a beer in a newly-constructed pub at the high-rise end of town. Somewhere in the middle of the otherwise ethnographic conversation Chris said, “You know, this town would be the perfect backdrop for a folk festival.”

As it turned out, several of us had already been thinking along those lines, Lajos too, but primarily and importantly another local group, *Szélkiáltó*, which the previous year, 1984, had been celebrating its tenth anniversary (and in 1999, still active, celebrated its 25th!). *Szélkiáltó* had achieved national fame by winning a talent show; of its five members, three were qualified music teachers, of whom one was deeply involved in the city’s Cultural Centre and another making a name for himself as a very active teacher of music and a choral conductor¹. In 1982 the band had gone closest to becoming full-time professional with over 180 separate performances.

1. The band now has four members. The story goes that during a concert for children

The third strand in the process, also important, was another Pécs-based group, *Vizin*, which played the music of the various Southern Slavs living either side of the Hungarian border and beyond (in those happier days with both Serb and Croatian upon the same stage in the same concert), and the music of many of the villages of the surrounding countryside. Baranya County, of which Pécs is the administrative, intellectual, religious and cultural centre, has an older segment of the population that is often bilingual and fairly frequently trilingual, speaking Hungarian as the official language, but favoring their own Southern Slav (mostly Croatian) or Swabian dialect of German. Add to that the Romany population (and one stray Englishman, myself!) and you have a county that is already multilingual, that is, multi-ethnic². Not a bad setting for an international folk festival, not only from the ethnic, but also the financial angle — you don't have to pay lots of travel and accommodation for your foreign guests!

Pécs fulfills most of the qualifications for a healthy tourism. It has a history going back to the Romans, and the appropriate lumps of masonry to prove it. It has a four-towered Catholic cathedral³ in a beautiful chestnut-shaded park and a mosque converted into a Catholic church in the main square, both they and the picturesque part of the town locked inside a substantial remnant of a city wall. A second mosque, now a museum of Turkish history and art, is complemented with a minaret, one of only two in the country. Both are reminders of 150 years of Turkish presence and rule — and there are other architectural stamps of the Ottoman presence.

Pécs has a university. Habsburg architecture dominates the scene. Most of the streets are typical of the higgledy-piggledy arrangement of a settlement on a sloping hillside. The city begins where the Mecsek Forest ends. It abounds in the classic tour-operator's high-held umbrella procession from gallery to

the audience was told that all but one of the group were teachers. Could the children say which was not? The band were dumbstruck when a couple of hundred children pointed at the architect. How did they know? "He's the only one not wearing socks", was the answer.

2. The dancers of the village of Zengővarkony, for instance, dance in Hungarian costume, but to Hungarian folk music performed on very Germanic brass instruments. The village, which is part-Swabian, has naturally merged its two cultures in its dance.
3. Although there are certainly Calvinist enclaves, and proliferation of choice is one of the religious signifiers of the last ten years, Hungary is dominated by the Catholic Church.

museum. It has its own tradition of wine-growing, and it is close to the wine-growing areas of Villány and Siklós, part of the Germanic-Croatian part of the county. There is no river, but plenty of small lakes surround the city, as well as a host of villages and small towns. Though a pretty setting is not necessarily a requirement for a folk festival, it does no harm to have one.

It was *Szélkiáltó*, a group that specializes in interpreting poetry through their own musical arrangements (a genre more common in this part of the world than elsewhere), and especially their vibrantly active teacher and conductor Tamás Lakner, who got the machinery of the first Pécs folk festival going. The word “*Fesztivál*” was the organizers’ first problem. It transpired that the law would actually be being broken if the word was employed, because in Hungary at that time its sole permitted use was with reference to adjudicated events, the results of which would depend on performers, and especially on dance ensembles, receiving financial support for journeys abroad according to their being adjudicated as “silver” or “gold” level⁴. The word “*Fesztivál*” was therefore perforce dropped, and substituted with “*Nap*” or “*Day*”.

The other half of the name caused no less of a problem. The special word in the Hungarian language for “folk music” is *népzene*⁵. The purists among the organizers were adamant that this word should not be used to describe the event, since even the main hosts, *Szélkiáltó*, were not folk performers — although others, including *Vizin* and myself, were. But *Vizin* performed Southern Slavonic music, and I was an Englishman (and everyone in Central Europe has been fed the myth that the English have no folk culture, just as no Scot wears a bowler hat or carries an umbrella to work). And so, in place of the Hungarian word, the German-English word “folk” was substituted, so as not to defile the mother tongue! The use of the word was explained in an unpublished essay by the singer-songwriter Sándor Csizmadia⁶ distributed at the door of the first *Folk Nap* in 1986, in which he also appeared. The first

4. Participation in traditional dance ensembles was one way in which a Hungarian could get to visit Western Europe in decades past, so to join a folk dance ensemble and to place one’s child in its junior section was more than a statement of a love for folk music — though if you didn’t have that love, you didn’t last long!
5. So that the reader will be able to follow the linguistic turns of the present essay, I shall use the Hungarian vocabulary in italics whenever ambiguity is otherwise likely to occur, and especially where the two separate Hungarian words for “folk” occur side by side.
6. Sándor Csizmadia. *Folk-találkozó*. 1986. Unpublished.

sentence, the question, “What does the word folk mean to me?” is not the hoary old chestnut that we occasionally resurrect among ourselves in the English-speaking world. Its seriousness, which lies in its utter foreignness, perhaps become more potent if seen in the original Hungarian: Mit jelent nekem a folk szó?

At the beginning of the essay Csizmadia, not entirely accurately, informs his readers of how “in England and America there is a separate word, (traditional) for folk music [*népzene*] and another for modern songs that have entered the public domain.” He uses Joan Baez’s *Modern Ballad Book* as an example: “It contains folksongs such as Donna, Donna, Donna which has become an international folksong [*folk-dal*]. In other words, it isn’t a traditional, but a modern folksong [*népdal*]. Modern folk melodies also bear traces of national character” (1986: 1). The “folk” singers Csizmadia mentions in order to demonstrate what “folk” means include Igseito Fernandez, Daniel Viglietti, Merle Travis, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, Art Garfunkel, Donovan.

As a singer of the international repertoire, as well as being a singer-songwriter with lyrics of the same mold as those of the above, Sándor’s approach has a definite bias (or Baez?), but the sheer fact of the existence of the essay shows that it was felt to make a clear distinction between the music performed at the first of the Pécs folk events — something fairly novel even on a national scale — and the many *népzenei* events of various size and splendor that were a long-standing familiar sight around the country.

It also displays one characteristic which is of vital importance when examining the simultaneous revived interest in folksong both in the Anglo-Saxon/Celtic world and in Hungary (and, I suspect, other Central European countries although I am not qualified to make very informed comments outside of Hungary). Csizmadia’s essay mentions singers whose repertoire mirrors and announces loudly, if musically, their concern for human rights. They are outside of the state framework and critical of it. The politics of “folk” and “folkiness” has been one of protest, and protest has allowed the youngsters of the late fifties, sixties and seventies to sing the old songs alongside the new, so long as the comment was appropriate. In Hungary, there remains a very strong deference towards *authenticity*; far from a concern with Anglo-Saxon

7. Translation of the text my own.

8. dal ‘song.

terminology like “political correctness,” a song of any topic can be sung, just so long as it is *authentic*.

Each of the attitudes allows certain freedoms and imposes certain restrictions. The politics of *népzene* in Hungary has not only been part of the nationalistic side of Hungarian politics, but the core of the music education system. Kodály’s curriculum⁹ was until recently almost universally followed. Not only has folk music suffered a reaction, but so has music education. Other methods are being experimented with, especially that of Carl Orff with his concentration upon the use of simple instruments. The singing of folksongs in the home has greatly died out — although my wife’s family still indulges occasionally. Young people have greater exposure to youth’s music, as well as to discotheques and night-clubs, architectural phenomena largely non-existent a dozen years ago.

It was as much because of the purists as of the authorities — and possibly the Pécs University Young Communist League, who sponsored the event — that Csizmadia felt moved to write his essay:

[*Népzene*] must be introduced as a living, self-developing, self-cleansing cultural tradition, and not the museum exhibit of reproduced sound. It is not by accident that the majority of children do not enjoy *népzene*, for [today] they are unable to play with it or be creative with it whereas in the past it was one of their inviolable rights (1986: 3).

The four-page explanation of the difference between *folk* and *népzene* ends with author expressing his gratitude that despite his being a singer largely outside of folk circles, he has been invited to perform at the *Folknap*:

This event is timely. I am happy that I have been invited. Because I’m not a pol-beat performer. For pol-beat you don’t need to feel a duty towards your use of your national culture, or a musical conscious. Or even a political consciousness.

My songs have everyday topics?

At the moment that is held “shameful”. Outside the genre. But to be Dylan, Baez and Donovan never felt shameful. Seeger turned them into a program.

9. Zoltán Kodály’s teaching curriculum, until recently almost universally followed in Hungarian schools, leans heavily upon folksong. The stress upon singing can be seen in university departments, which are called Departments of Song and Music (Ének-Zene).

I have observed that in this country authentic *népzene* has been separated from poetry put to music, from folk and from pol. Yet they can only and should be performed together (1986: 4).

In the Hungary of 1986, Csizmadia's singer-with-guitar-doing-leftish-human-rights-songs-and-imitating-Pete-Seeger approach still earned political currency. Locally, "Csizi" was a well-known figure who performed regularly to adolescent audiences (another schoolteacher!) and up in the castle ruins on May Day and Bus Drivers' Day. His star was on the wane, though, and the messages contained in the words of his songs, and of the songs of Dylan, Seeger and the rest which he sang, were to suddenly lose popularity with the change in regime only two or three years after he wrote his four-page opus for the *Folknap*. Pol-beat was to become an obsolete expression.

At least nobody found fault with the third component of the name for the event: *Nemzetközi* or "International". It was, as we shall see later, a wholly accurate expression, both musically and geographically.

Politics aside, "Folk Day" was probably the most accurate description that could have been given to the event in its first year or two. The cinema of the college of education (no fixed seating!) was the venue, and the marathon of performances, at half-hourly intervals, went on from 6pm to midnight. The evening cost the organizers 80,000 Hungarian forints or thereabouts, in those days approximately ten months salary for a college lecturer¹⁰. The one foreign guest star, the Anglo-Irish musician and composer John Faulkner, cost almost exactly half of the total cost of the evening by the time we had shipped him across from Ireland. And he didn't even get paid, only transported, accommodated, and given other paid solo gigs around the country.

It was because of John that I became more deeply involved in the organization of the event. International phoning from a Hungary of the mid-eighties with practically no direct dialing facilities was no easy matter, and the "non-Festival" festival office was the office of foreign affairs of the college, with one of the few telephones in the institute which boasted an international line at all. The English Department, where I worked and which did not have such a line, was two floors above, tucked away like all English departments of the socialist era into the furthest and/or highest dead-end corner of the building, and so I spent my teaching breaks rushing down stairs in order to attempt to get through to John Faulkner, to explain how he could obtain his free ticket

10. There must have been about 50 forints to the Canadian dollar at the time.

from the Hungarian airline company's office at London's Heathrow Airport, preferably before the event had passed us by completely.

Meanwhile, at the next table, Éva, the head employee of the office, was busy arranging support for the event. In those days there was very little in the way of a business sector in which to do one's sponsor-hunting. Support came by persuading the various branches of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and its youth section, KISZ, and the teachers' trade union, which bore — and bears — no resemblance to a working trade union, its main activity seemingly being to sponsor such events from membership money. The closest to commercial sponsorship was the customary gift by the adjacent brewery (state-owned, but independently run) of a certain number of crates of beer which could then be sold to those attending the event. (The custom was abandoned a couple of years ago when the brewery was taken over by an Austrian firm to whom support of local cultural events was irrelevant and anathema!)

Apart from paying the artists and defraying their travel expenses, there were no extra overheads. All the telephone calls took place at the university, and the university cinema housed the event and even provided hostel accommodation for the players. The secretarial work, such as it was, was carried out by a full-timer as part of the daily workload, and the little sponsor-hunting that was done was carried out by the two or three individuals who would host the event. Students made and served the refreshments (bread and dripping with raw onion sprinkled with paprika, if I remember correctly, and soda pop and beer), and it was students who tidied up afterwards. Some overtime money was doubtless given to the late-shift porter, but in those days it would have been minimal and the fellow quite possibly did better out of beer and doorsteps of bread and dripping than out of cash. More important in social terms, this was still a pre-capitalist Hungary with a delightfully crime-free environment, and there were no security company gorillas patrolling the premises inside and out.

It can be seen that in the early days of the Days — the mid-eighties — it was relatively easy to organize a folk evening. It was also part of mainstream Hungarian culture. Young people were steeped in folk music, university students flocked in very large numbers to the weekly *táncház* [Dance House] as they do to discos today, and freshmen would break into folksong at the *gólyabál* [Freshman's — literally “storks” — ball], whereas today they demand a louder, more strident music. It is not that Hungary did not have a rock culture — it did and it does — but that folk music had not yet been relegated to the back

seat it has today, when by deciding not to have an inclusion policy, the national terrestrial television stations now follow an exclusion policy regarding their own folk heritage.

Things have changed drastically since my first taste of the country in 1975, as one of twenty British students who had traveled across Europe by train for the better part of two days, I was welcomed by a night of folksinging and dancing in the open air among the wine cellars, the dances being accompanied by the voices of the Hungarian college students. (The only disco I ever really enjoyed!) However, that Hungary of 25 years ago was still vibrant at the time of the first folk day in 1986, which could still be described as mainstream student entertainment. The event was by no means created to “save” folk music, but to sate a need.

The first *Nemzetközi Folknap* was the sort of success that organizers and fire brigades dream of — the latter as a potential worst nightmare. You could not have got another person in even with the help of a shoe-horn or a professional pusher from the Tokyo metro. There were twelve half-hour performances scheduled from six pm to midnight, but, like all festivals, it was late in starting and later in finishing, and then the chairs were taken away for the *táncház*, or dance house. The *táncház* movement in Hungary at that time was at least as vibrant as the English folksong club phenomenon, at that time holding its own against any other community dance forms, from Latin American to the ubiquitous disco — which as yet was not so very ubiquitous in Hungary, though on its way to the present situation, where there are half-a-dozen permanent big discotheques in the town.

A folk event is still unthinkable without a *táncház*, and the *táncház* movement was to have a strong political role in the formation of the event after the early years, for it meant sponsorship and significant extra attendance, as well as demonstrating popular taste. In 1986 the *táncház* was Hungarian Southern Slav, in 1990 Hungarian, Southern Slav and Roumainan. But after the outbreak of the Yugoslav civil strife which led to Slovenia and then Croatia becoming sovereign states, Pécs’s Serbo-Croatian Club became a Croatian Club, and Serbo-Croatians hitherto invited to appear at cultural events became Croatian guests of the city. Croatia, and not Serbia, borders on Baranya County, where children of Croatian origin can pursue their studies in their own language from the crèche to the university.

Before examining how the International Pécs Folk Festival — sorry, *Day(s)* — has been modified along with a drastically changing Hungary, I should just

point out the extent of the richness of the musical variety that was to be had, if you will excuse the pun, for a song. Apart from the multilinguality of the immediate region, Hungary, even before the changes in neighbours in the surrounding political geography that have taken place over the last decade or so, was bordered by five countries: Austria, Czechoslovakia, the USSR, Romania and Yugoslavia¹¹. Romania's Transylvania was and continues to be a rich source for Hungarian and other folk music, and Hungary itself abounds in groups that perform Slavonic music of one kind or another — often of one kind AND another. Earlier this century Greek refugees settled and created the settlement of Beloianisz, and at least three home-based groups performing Greek music of a high standard have come out of that village. Several distinct forms of Romany music are also to be found. And then there is always the rogue folk-singing Englishman, Scotsman, Irishman or Celtic Frenchman who arrives by accident to enrich the cultural mix.

Since the very first *Folknep* in 1986, there has never been a dearth of talent and variety. However, there have been considerable arguments about policy. After the first three years, subsequent organizers have wanted in turn to expand and contract the event, to “purify” it into a traditional festival with “authentic” singers and dancers, then to include rock music with vaguely folk motifs. The progress of the event can basically be divided into three major phases.

The first three *Folkneps* were held in the cramped venue of the university cinema. They were financed by state institutions, primarily the university's Young Communist branch, which of course was financed in turn by the party and, in a one-party environment, by the state. As the event became more and more popular, it was clear that something else would have to be done. The original organizers were in the throes of losing their vague autonomy as the cultural office of the Faculty of Education. New political parties were springing up. A democratic, multi-party election was imminent, in the Spring of 1989. The Young Communists were no longer in a position to make the large cultural donations that had over the years produced a myriad of quality events like the Sikonda Jazz Festival and Workshop, and which had incidentally drummed up the odd member or so, and neither were the “Old Communists” — that is,

11. Today the countries are Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia.

12. It is worth remembering that the word “Communist” did not appear in the main party name. The MSZMP was the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, and has successfully transformed itself into a new political democratic socialist force by deleting

the adult political party of which the Young Communists was a wing.¹² Both the venue and the support appeared inadequate, and the original host musicians, Székiáltó, were not interested in investing the energy required to expand the event.

In recognition of the fact that the major role of the nationally disintegrating KISZ had always been to provide cultural opportunities within the party framework, and that it had long ceased to be a primarily political entity, a university club was dreamed up by a number of people who had previously been involved in similar activities. The dream was ambitious, and involved tapping the vast underground cellar network as a cultural resource. The bubble eventually burst after much expenditure had been made, but one of those involved was Gyula Piroška, the double bass player of *Vizin* and one-time university KISZ secretary,

Gyula volunteered to take over the organization of the *Folknap*. His offer was accepted, and the consequence was the first deep sea change in the construction and profile of the event. It was removed from the small, now inappropriate cinema, and transferred to the considerably larger *aula* of the medical university. This would have been impossible had not a senior member of the university staff, now Honorary President of the University Club, written a letter to the Rector of Pécs Medical University requesting assistance in assuring the space. Hitherto the only music that had been allowed into the hallowed grounds of the university had been the Pécs Symphony Orchestra.

Permission came, but at a fabulous price — a quarter of a million forints for the venue and ancillary staff. More letters were written to try to have the rent waived. In a letter dated April 23, 1990, the president of the Pécs University Club [*Pécsi Egyetemi Klub*], Professor Gyula Zeller, requested that Professor Bauer, rector of the Medical University, provide the *aula* venue for a second time rent-free. This was for the fifth *Nemzetközi Folknapok*¹³, by which time the event was getting both longer and bigger, as we shall see.

The letter, in which it is stated that although the Medical University had waived rent for the Fourth International Folk Days the organizers still remained out of pocket, requests not only the *aula* but also six seminar rooms and the

the word “Workers”. However, the K in KISZ (Young Communist League) certainly does stand for Communist).

13. The *-ok* is a pluralizing suffix in the Hungarian language. Nap ‘day; napok ‘days.

large area in front of the *aula*, and not for one evening but two, October 12-13, 1990. The organizers undertook to pay overtime wages for the University warden, electrician, night porter, cleaners, etc. When I interviewed the main organizer Gyula Piroška in the Spring of 2000, he vehemently denied having received any financial assistance in the form of a rent-free venue for either the 1989 or the 1990 *Folknapok*. He was quite clear about this. Unfortunately, apart from the correspondence which I received from the university archives, there is no trace of a financial transaction either having taken place or being waived. The written evidence, which of course may contain an error of information on the part of the honorary president of the University Club, just as clearly thanks the rector for the previous rent-free venue as Gyula Piroška denied in 2000 that he had received it without having to pay rent. In fact, in a reply to the letter from the rector, dated May 7, 1990, the waiving of rent is granted a second time. This, too, was dismissed by Mr. Piroška in our early 2000 meeting; he told me that he had had to work hard to find sponsors to cover this exceptionally large percentage of the costs, and that he had to pay the venue rental for both the 1989 and 1990 *Folknapok*¹⁴.

While there seems to be no way of proving whether this is a case of myth becoming reality over a period of time and telling and retelling, two important facts do appear. Firstly, the *Folknapok* was certainly unprofitable. (Tell me something new!) Secondly, the new main sponsor that emerged to foot the lion's share of the bill was no longer political, but commercial. To be precise, it was a brand new commercial bank, the *Kereskedelmi & Hitelbank Rt.* The K&H, as it is known to most Hungarians, remained the main sponsor for both the years when Gyula Piroška was the organizer. It was joined in 1990 by the Hungarian Radio, which for the first time recorded the entire *Folknapok* live.

Payments aside, the correspondence also shows a considerable change in attitude. A provisional program is attached to the letter, with an explanation, unsigned but presumably written by Piroška, that the festival will depart from

14. On May 21, 2000, I read the 1990 correspondence out to Gyula Piroška on the phone. His attitude softened from the earlier stance, and he bowed to written evidence, though continuing to uphold that what he remembered was a 200,000 Hungarian forint bill. The amount tallies in size with what later organizers paid for renting the premises. This appears to be a classic example of how dangerous it is to reconstruct history from recollection, and how quickly truth can be embellished into myth and vice versa.

the *Folknapok's* traditional format, in which every branch of *folk* music, from the poetry given musical arrangements to country music, and from blues to authentic *népzene*, to modern arrangements of *népzene* to the inspirational compositions of jazz had been made comfortable bedfellows. Experience shows that there is an elemental demand from the festivalgoers for authentic *népzene*. Therefore, starting this year [1990], the main profile will change to the original music of Eastern Europe (including Hungary), the peoples and ethnic minorities of the Balkans and the Soviet Union¹⁵.

Amazing as it may seem, this is an attitude that I have encountered on a number of occasions and from various people: that there is something elemental and “authentic” in the Eastern European, but especially in the Hungarian folk heritage. The separate use of *folk*- and *népzene* is here displayed with the cultural snobbery which, five years earlier, Sándor Csizmadia had found so distasteful that he had been inspired to write a short essay and distribute it around the audience of the first *folk* meeting. The politics of purism and authenticity continues, and on an international scale.

One curious by-product of the attitude was the expansion of the Fifth *Nemzetközi folknapok* into the city centre. This was preceded by a meeting of the city's dignitaries, held in one of the town's first privately-owned bierkeller-type restaurants since the change of regime¹⁶, a novelty at the time. Things have changed a lot. The owner is now one of the vice mayors of the city. The idea of taking the festival — the word, as we have seen above, was now being used in correspondence if not in the title of the event — to the town I suppose I must take a certain amount of credit for myself. I had badgered all of the organizers since the first *Folknap* to share the event with the population instead of making it so very obviously a university-based entertainment.

The cultural section of the city council was there, as well as other of the “great and good”, but persistent questioning has led to an almost blank wall as regards who exactly was there and what their status was. There is no documentation, and while the matter would have had some importance for

15. Gyula Piroska (?) Letter, March 30, 1990, on University Club notepaper but without addressee or sender, attached to letter from Dr. Gyula Zeller to Dr. Miklós Bauer, rector of the Pécs Medical University, dated April 23, 1990 and with the reference number of the rector's office 8-2166 190. Author's translation.

16. When I arrived in Pécs in the 1970s there was only one privately-owned restaurant in the entire city — at the time Pécs had a population of about 160,000.

me, it appears that this was just one of very many meetings for the majority, and even those who should by all accounts have been present at the meeting have no memory of it at all. This includes Gyula Piroska, who invited them. There is no written record of the meeting, and although I was present at it myself, at that time I knew hardly any of the protagonists. But there were about 15 people there, and the upshot was that a stage would be set up below the round tower of the city wall, a focal point for tourists and weekend walkers, and that on the Saturday afternoon the festival would provide free performances for the city public, partly in the hope that some of them would pay to attend the evening performances.

Among those who performed in the afternoon were *Szélkiáltó* and myself, neither of whom performed “authentic” *népzene*. In the two evenings, traditional Hungarian, Gypsy, Bulgarian, Lower Carpathian Romanian, Armenian, Polish, Moldavian, Sardinian, Georgian and Southern Slavonic could be heard and danced to. An extra extension, a fusing of the English folksong club and the Hungarian *táncház* phenomena, was the introduction of a “folk pub”, where concert and other performers could do jam sessions or play both to each other and those drinking there.

For all of the prophetic-sounding words in the description of the new makeup of the festival — as I shall now call it since everybody else was beginning to do so —, this was to be the last time that Gyula Piroska was to organize the event. The University Club collapsed; he had to find a new job. In 1991 there was to be no *Folknapok*, and the future looked grim.

Resurrection came from unexpected quarters. Tamás Kovács was a young man newly employed by an education and cultural centre in the high-rise dormitory section of the town. He wanted to make a name for himself, and decided that he would embark on an ambitious project whereby he would organize a series of large-scale musical events, some of which would be so financially successful that the profits made from them would offset any losses incurred in the others. And so he produced a very successful blues festival, and decided in 1992 to resurrect the *Folknapok*. Of that particular event I can give only sparse information. It was held in the Education Centre and I did not attend it. Nor did most of those who had regularly participated in the previous five *Folknapok*. Some of us were simply not invited; others took umbrage at the change of venue and policy. And Tamás had his own circle of musicians whom he must have felt obliged to invite, and at the same time, as an outsider

he was not obliged to invite the same local groups as had performed in all the earlier festivals. He could sweep with a new broom without recrimination.

What is known or remembered is that the mixture of musics became even greater than in the first two years. A lot of Tamás's affinity with music genres came from jazz-rock-blues, and this must have been the first year that an electric bass guitar found its way into the event. The other factual detail is that Tamás must have received permission from earlier organizers to adopt the name of the event, because when he organized it for a second time in 1993, back at its previous venue in and around the medical university *aula*, the programs, posters and press dubbed it the Seventh *Folknapok*. As usual, the festival was held halfway through the autumn semester on a Friday, Saturday and till dawn on Sunday. A new element was the employment of "bouncers"¹⁷, in line with a change in personal safety in Hungary, possibly combined with a new kind of audience as a result of a new kind of music. In this, the second of the two festivals organized by Tamás, many of the "old" performers reappeared on stage.

Musically, this was quite possibly the most exciting and daring of all the *Folknapok*, with Romany, Greek, Celtic, Chilean, Southern Slavonic, Hungarian-in-Slovakia, Bretagne, "World", "Blues" and "Folk-Metal" following and interchanging with each other over the two days, interspersed with various interpretations of Hungarian *népzene* ranging from the wholly traditional to the riskily interpretative, the inevitable *táncház* or six, and professional storytelling. Financially, it was a personal disaster for Tamás, who, having parted company with the Education Centre, decided to go it alone and put himself up for security. Eventually he had to sell his car in order to pay all the performers and the Master of Ceremonies – me!¹⁸

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17. A profession which at that time was still amateur, but which now includes the big international security organizations as well as a number of Hungarian-made companies. While I have no way of proving the relative safety of Hungary 10-15 years ago as opposed to today, there is no denying that the Hungarians believed it to be a safe country, and one of the laments of fathers and grandfathers of teenage daughters is that they have to be far more concerned for their safety, for instance walking home alone late at night, than "when they were young" or "in their day".
18. This perhaps deserves a footnote. I was asked to be MC on three separate occasions, by three different organizers. It was considered a good idea to spice up the evening with an Englishman speaking bad Hungarian to introduce the acts. The purists didn't mind that particular impurity!

This was the first of two consecutive festivals — though divided by a dormant year — when the organizer, first Tamás, and then another young man called Ottó Juhász, decided to make the running of a folk festival a private proposition. As neither of them had a wealthy background, the only hope must have been they would at best make a profit out of the event or at worst break even and possibly gain a name into the bargain for organizational skills. Both of the people went broke; in fact, the second, for whom one *Nemzetközi Folknapok* was more than enough, ended up so insolvent that he could not pay all his performers — in 2000, there is still a Greek trio out for his blood! On the other hand, and vitally, both years were musical successes, well-attended, but not well enough for the ambitious size of the event.

Tamás's financial failure meant that the festival was put on ice. But it took another attempt and another personal bankruptcy on the part of Ottó Juhász to prove that this was not the time to invest in folk music. The old days of substantial financial support through the various state organs were over. Private enterprise was young and more concerned in making itself into a leading force than in taking on the role of cultural sponsors. And nobody really knew that this was the case. In a country which for fifty years had been in a process of discovery that culture was available and cheap and cared for by the state, it was strange to go begging cap in hand to anybody.

Overt beggary is entirely a product of the new Hungary, for in socialist Hungary there was by law both the right and the duty to work — one could be punished for evading work. Collection for charities was an unknown phenomenon, and is still looked upon by many with suspicion, being seen as beggary, which is seen increasingly upon the streets and looked upon with distaste, *bona fide* cases being lumped together with spongers. Organizers of festivals, folk or otherwise, have had to learn how to sponge, just as the capitalists have had to make the decisions associated with being potential sponges.

There is still no clear-cut alignment between the capitalist and cultural sectors, partly because the local, national and international state machinery is still active, though much reduced for a number of reasons. What appears to be a rather minor activity — a medium-sized folk festival in a central European provincial town — when examined in a wider, more complex light displays far greater ramifications. The political changes were rung something over a decade ago. (It must be remembered that, at least in the case of Hungary, even the socialist governments of the 70s and 80s were already beginning, tentatively, to ring those changes long before the sudden events of the late 80s.)

One of the earliest manifestations of change that semi-pro performing musicians such as myself experienced at first hand was a lack of places to perform, as many of the cultural centres, schools and other traditionally appropriate venues were being handed back to the Churches that had previously owned them many decades earlier, which meant that in some towns basic cultural activities could no longer take place. Consecutively, the new governments, both local and national, were inheriting a machinery unwillingly handed over with the minimum of assistance, which was very expensive. Money was also spent on political purges of all kinds, from the removal of socialist-type statues and symbols to a completely new vehicle registration system. Costs incurred from these and a myriad of similar quasi-necessary changes, as well as the pure matter of setting up a new country with a new constitution, new statutes, even new poetry and film, placed mass culture much further down the list of priorities than it had been for decades.

In Pécs, the city cultural centre was closed and its staff either made redundant, retired or sucked into a new cultural identity of bureaucrats. The city now has no permanent home for those wishing to participate in club activities. Instead, it receives via the cultural office of the city authorities three or four free cultural “events”. June is the time for the Gastronomic Festival. September into October provides the Pécs Days. Each lasts for an extended fortnight, and is remarkable for its similarity to the other.

Ironically, without the Pécs Days the International Folk Days would have died. After the debacle of the eighth folk event and the second personal bankruptcy, several of the original players in the game — founders and quasi-founders alike — began to discuss the possibility of reinstating the festival. The main objection was that the festival had suffered a considerable fall in prestige, mainly because a) performers had not been paid either part of or the entire amount promised them, and b) it was obvious that the event could not simply be resurrected. It would have to be overhauled.

Unexpectedly, help came from academic circles. Even more unexpectedly, in a stiff, formal Central European manner the changes began vaguely to resemble the multifarious character of other folk festivals of longer tradition, with their workshops and other non-performance events. However, the idea of taking the festival to the town, which had only happened once (the second time it was organized by Gyula Piroška) appeared to be ditched forever. Rather like medieval Oxford, it seemed that town and gown were not to mix. The event had started out in an institute of higher education; after having

experimented with bringing it into the town, it appears to be destined to end, or at least continue thus.

The venue for the last three festivals (1997-1999) has been an unfriendly combination of concrete and metal constructed as a club for the university students and adjacent to their central hostel (and the rector's administration!). The organizers are no longer apparent as individuals but as part of a cultural machinery in which individuals cannot become bankrupt — though presumably they could lose their jobs if it was ever considered that the event ought to be making money. This is not the case. The attitude is still — probably realistically — that such a festival could not possibly exist without sponsors who do not intend to see their patronage returned, other than in the draping of advertising banners.

The musical make-up of the festival has changed many times over the years. At the beginning, it was almost unique in character within Hungary for its variety in approach and tolerant, or rather all-embracing attitude towards vernacular music. Later, there was an attempt to “purify” the festival by placing a strong accent upon Hungarian and other Eastern European traditional music, not only traditional in age but also in stage delivery. Then there came a reaction which took at least some of the music further into the realm of rock and amplification than even the original organizers would have tolerated or enjoyed. Today, it has settled into more or less the mix of the first years; artists are chosen by a mixture of proximity, novelty, stage presence and musicality. Sometimes they are rejected as too expensive by outpricing the festival funding obtained from cajoling sponsors and writing successful applications for grants.

This brief description of a folk festival at the bottom end of a central European country with a smallish population of ten million has been as accurate as it has been in my power to make it. To a great extent, this has meant sifting out false information that has entered oral circulation, and in some cases wildly incorrect statements have been made by those closest to the organization of the Pécs International Folk Days. Such was the statement by Béla Fenyvesi that the first *Folkest* was to commemorate the Tenth anniversary of the band *Szélkiáltó*, of which he is one of the longest-serving members, when in actual fact it occurred two years later. Such was the claim by the organizer of the Fourth and Fifth *Folknepok* that he had received no financial assistance in the form of waived venue rental fees, when there is (rare) documented evidence that he did in fact receive it. Such was the sureness with which György Brandstatter, then as now part of the cultural machinery of the County Council,

stated that Baranya County *had* provided assistance, when in fact it had not. However, being in the oral tradition business, it would have been irresponsible not to collate their “evidence,” for it also reveals aspects of the festival.

And for those of you with a mathematical mind, who may have problems counting with their fingers and have moved on to their toes, such was the blitheness with which the present organizers celebrated in 1999 the Fifth *Folk Fesztivál*, that nobody, including myself, suspected until I had been digging into newspaper clippings, posters and programs for some weeks, that we had lost a festival along the way and that it was the Eleventh!

Between the first folk day in 1986 and the 11th (!) in 1999, Hungary has seen six governments: three prior to the change in the Central European regimes, and three since the advent of a multi-party system. So far, it seems to have survived all of the vagaries of each. It is no longer the youth wing of the socialist party but Hungarian companies that have recently supported the event. Many of the festivalgoers look fifteen years longer in the tooth than when they attended the first. The organizers are now part of the cultural team of the city council, or under its aegis. But through flexibility of organization the event seems likely to survive¹⁹.

19. Stop press: On November 10-11, 2000 the venue will continue to be the “University Club.” I have just (October 9, 2000) been informed by Antus Vizin, one of the present organizers, that due to lack of funding by sponsors, the customary 25 minutes of performing time will be extended, so that a smaller number of groups and soloists will cover a longer time span for less money. These will include many of the names mentioned earlier, who will probably receive the equivalent of 45-50 Canadian dollars per person.

Reference

The present essay could never have been written without the assistance of Béla Keresztény, the archivist of the group *Szélkiáltó*, who like a conscientious magpie has collected memorabilia of every performance of the group, which luckily for me appeared on nearly every occasion there was a *Folknapok*. Together, like a frustrating jigsaw, they have at once produced a picture of continuity and change.

I am also indebted to Gyuri Brandstatter, whose misplaced belief that the county “had something to do with the festival” led him on a detective hunt that eventually provided me with Pécs University documentation of the financial arrangements of the Fourth and Fifth Folk Days.

My thanks also to Sanyi Csizmadia, whose unpublished article of 1986 I have quoted, I hope accurately, in my English translation. Others have been kind enough to proffer assistance. Still others have disappeared into the distance. But if he sees a certain Greek trio on the horizon that he never paid because the festival had just bankrupted him, the organizer of the seventh had better move very quickly in the opposite direction.