

MEZŐSÉGI TÁNCOK - DANCES FROM MEZŐSÉG

Between the rivers Someșul Mic (Hungarian Kis Szamos) and Mureșul (Hungarian Maros), northeast and east of the Transylvanian city of Cluj-Napoca (Hungarian Kolozsvár), lies the ethnographic region known to Hungarian-speaking peoples as the Mezőség (Mező = field or farmland). Although situated within Romania's political boundaries, there is a large Hungarian-speaking population living both in strictly Hungarian-speaking as well as in villages of mixed populations (Hungarian, Romanian, and Gypsy).

When speaking about the Mezőségi Táncok, I am referring to a set of dances or "dance cycle" which has become popular in the "Táncház" (dance house) movement in Hungary and among Hungarian-speaking youth in Erdély (Transylvania). This particular cycle is based on the songs and dance forms originally performed in Mezőség villages such as Magyarpalatka, Mezőkeszű, Vajdakamarás and others. The dance cycle, as it is done in the "Táncház", was originally introduced by Sándor Timár. Research and publications about Mezőség dance have also been written by Zoltán Kallós and György Martin, to mention a few.

The Dance Cycle

The dance cycle, as it is popular in the "Táncház" and presented here, is made up of four dances: "Akasztós", "Ritka csárdás", "Szökős", and "Sűrű csárdás". The "Ritka csárdás", "Szökős" and "Sűrű csárdás" are structurally the same but different in style, tempo, and melody.

Martin and Kallós mention the "Ritka magyar", a men's solo "verbunk" or "legényes" type dance, which precedes the "Akasztós" but seems to be dying out, as is the case with other men's dances in the Mezőség region. Another popular form is the so-called "Szaszka" or Saxon dance performed in groups of three, usually one man and two women, but not unknown with three women. This form utilizes the same steps and forms as the above-mentioned "Csárdás", "Ritka", "Szökős", and "Sűrű".

These dances belong to the general Transylvanian "whirling" or turning dance family, the closest relatives being the Romanian "Învîrtita", "Hațegana", "Hartaș", "Măruntelu", "Bătuta", "Ardeleana", and "De-a Lungul."

"Akasztós", the first dance of the cycle, has been translated as "limping" or "dragging" but is also known as "Lassu" (slow), "Cigánytánc" (Gypsy dance), or often by the name of the song being played or person, family, or guest in whose honor the dance is being played.

"Akasztós" is characterized by its very slow asymmetrical rhythm. In both the music and the dance there is a definite lengthening of the second beat, giving a limping or dragging feeling to the dance. Not unlike the "Pajduško" or "Rustemul", the dance has a quick-slow musical beat, often in 5/8 or 6/8. The dance begins with couples singing opposite the band. Gradually they begin to dance, continuing to sing, with slow walking turning steps, occasionally accelerating the turn with a "dragging-limping" step. The content of the songs for the "Akasztós" deal generally with the frustrations of love.

As the music speeds up and the beat becomes more regular, a transition into the following "csárdás" forms occurs. This transition is a simple walking "rida" couple turn in either direction, starting with the outside foot, evolving eventually into the "Ritka csárdás" (slow "csárdás"). As mentioned previously, the "Ritka", "Szökös", and "Sűrű csárdás" are structurally the same. They differ in tempo ("Ritka" = slow: "Sűrű" = fast) and style ("Szökös" = jumping) and melodies or songs. These dances, although strict in form within the given regional vocabulary, allow for many variations, both individual and couple, including whirling, stamping, boot-slapping, and jumping.

It is important to note, however, that this improvisation has a basic set of rules for construction based on signals from the man to his partner. During these dances the singing continues, and as the music speeds up, witty dance calls or rhymes ("csujogatás" or "ujjogtatás") are interjected spontaneously.

Occasions for Dance

The tradition of "Táncház" (dance house) or "Tánc" (dance) in Mezőség was very common and popular in many villages until quite recently. This use of the word "Táncház" should not be confused with the "Táncház" movement in Hungary, although the Hungarian "Táncház" movement was, to some extent, modeled on the Széki "Táncház".

In Mezőség, young unmarried men would rent a house and convert it into a small dance hall. The walls would be lined with benches and the musicians would be provided with a small, raised stage. The musicians, usually gypsies, played as often as three times a week for their "get-togethers". The young unmarried women would take turns preparing meals for the musicians, and the young men chipped in enough money or favors to pay them.

The "Táncház" became the central meeting place and constituted much of the social life for the young unmarried adults. To attend "Táncház" meant a degree of acceptance and maturity within the community. Therefore, the "Táncház" was the most important stage for social and economic interaction as well as for choosing a mate.

There were as many as three dance houses in some Mezőség villages. This basic social structure existed throughout the Mezőség and also among other Hungarian-speaking populations in Romania.

Although "Táncház" was restricted to unmarried young adults, on other occasions such as weddings, religious holidays, sewing bees, work parties, etc., dancing for the whole community, young and old, took place. Dances also were held outdoors, in barns, or even in large tents erected solely for this purpose.

The musicians for the dancing were mostly gypsies living in the village. A typical orchestra consisted of three musicians; a "prímás" playing hegedű (violin), a "kontra" or "gordon" (viola), and a "bőgő" (double base).

During the dance, each couple tries to get to the space in front of the musicians for a short solo to "show their stuff". They then move off to let the next couple have their turn.

Continued:



MEZŐSÉGI TÁNCOK

Record: Hungaroton SLPX 18031-32, 18042, Folkraft-Europe LP-52

Formation: Couples scattered freely about the dance floor (generally a very small area). Since there are many possible positions, each will be described as it occurs in a particular pattern.

AKASZTÓS

Music: The music differs in meter and tempo according to the performance, but does keep a basic "quick-slow" musical beat. For convenience, I have written these dance notes in 6/4 meter. The basic musical beat is:

d o
1 2

but the dance beat is in groupings $\downarrow\downarrow\downarrow\downarrow\downarrow\downarrow$ according to step and variation.
1 2 3 4 5 6

MEAS COUNT

ACTION

BASIC WALK

In side-by-side position, couples move freely about the floor. It does not matter which partner is on which side, nor which foot either starts with. M's arm is at small of W's back, her nearest hand on his nearest shoulder. Outside hands free. Though this description is written beginning with Rft, it could equally well be written for Lft.

MEZŐSÉGI TÁNCOK (continued)

MEAS	COUNT	ACTION
<u>AKASZTÓS (continued)</u>		
1	1-2	Step fwd with Rft.
	3	Close Lft to Rft.
	4-6	Pause.
This step can begin with either foot and serves to get the couples on to the floor and select a place to dance, as well as get into the beat of the music.		
<u>BASIC TURNING STEP</u>		
Couples in closed position: R hips are adjacent, M's R hand at small of W's back, his L hand on her R upper arm (just above elbow), W's R hand on M's L shoulder, her L hand on M's R upper arm.		
1	1-2	Step Lft fwd into CW turn.
	3	Step Rft fwd continuing CW turn.
	4	Having brought Lft around fwd in a CW arc skimming floor, end the arc at a point sideward out to L.
	5-6	Pause.
This step is also done CCW with opposite footwork.		
<u>Variation 1 on Turning Step - BUZZ</u>		
Before doing this variation, moving out of CW turn, dancer shifts wt onto Lft on the last ct 4 of the turn so that Rft is free to begin this buzz.		
1	1	Cross and step Rft in front of Lft, flexing R knee slightly.
	2	Step on ball of Lft to L side, straightening knees slightly.
	3	Repeat mov't of ct 1.
	4-6	Repeat mov'ts of meas 4-6 of Basic Turning Step.
<u>Variation 2 on Turning Step - LEAD-AROUND</u>		
1	1-2	Taking W's R hand in his L hand, M leads W around him CW and back to place, both doing 2 Basic Turning Steps.
<u>TRANSITION STEP (CHANGE OF DIRECTION)</u>		
1	1-2	With feet apart, shift wt onto Lft bringing both heels down, turning body R.
	3-6	With feet apart, shift wt onto Rft bringing both heels down, turning body L.
2	1	Step Lft to L side turning body to R.
	2	Step Rft bkwd past L heel.
	3-6	Step Lft bkwd past R heel as M reverses hand positions.
This step is, of course, done with opposite footwork when appropriate.		

(continued)

continued...

MEZŐSÉGI TÁNCOK (continued)

MEAS	COUNT	ACTION
AKASZTÓS (continued)		
<u>Variation on Transition Step</u>		
1		Same mov'ts as meas 1 of regular Transition Step, but M takes W's R hand in his L hand (off his shoulder) as they shift wt onto Rft on meas 3.
2	1-3	Both M and W do "cifra" step, i.e. 3 steps LRL, M doing his "cifra" very slightly sideways L as he spins W R (CW) once in place under his L hand; she does her "cifra" to execute the spin.
	4-6	Pause.
3		Reverse footwork and direction of meas 2; hand hold remains the same.
4		Same mov'ts as meas 2 of regular Transition Step above.

A musical transition takes place signaling the beginning of the "csárdás" phase of the dance. During this transition dancers continue turning with walking steps as the music shifts into 2/4 time. After "X" number of these walking steps, the couple opens out into side-by-side position (M sends W over to his side).

"CSÁRDÁS" PHASE

Meter: 2/4

BASIC STEP - WOMAN'S SIDE-TO-SIDE

For ease of description, it will be assumed that W is on M's L side to begin. She can, of course, also begin on his R side, in which case the description below would be reversed.

Arm positions vary, according to personal style, momentary feeling, size and the M's "signaling" the sequence of movements. Sample positions: W's arm always at M's back, using it to "brace" herself against him during her side-to-side movements. He can have his hands on her shoulders, or his L hand at the back of her neck, his R hand held out to side, etc.

Man's Basic Step (as woman moves side-to-side)

1	1	Step Lft diag back/L (to keep clear of W as she passes)
	2	Step Rft slightly in front of Lft.
2	1	Close Lft (with wt) beside Rft.
	&	Step Rft in place.
	2	Step Lft in place.
3-4		Repeat mov'ts of meas 1-2 with opposite footwork and direction.

(continued)

MEZŐSÉGI TÁNCOK (continued)

MEAS	COUNT	ACTION
<u>"CSÁRDÁS" PHASE (continued)</u>		
<u>Woman's Basic Step</u>		
1	1	Turning 1/4 R, step Lft fwd in front of Rft.
	2	Continuing turn across in front of M, step Rft in front of Lft.
2	1	Continuing turn, step Lft fwd.
	&	Close Rft to Lft to complete full turn at M's R.
	2	Step back onto Lft with full weight.
3-4		Repeat mov'ts of meas 1-2 with opposite footwork and direction.
<u>Man's Variation 1 during side-to-side figure</u>		
1	1	Facing slightly and moving L, step Lft.
	&	Scuff Rft fwd beside Lft.
	2	Continuing in this direction, step Rft fwd.
	&	Scuff Lft fwd beside Rft.
2	1	Step Lft to L.
	&	Step Rft close to Lft.
	2	Step Lft slightly forward.
3	1	Facing slightly and moving R, step Rft.
	2	Continuing in this direction, step Lft.
4	1	Click Rft to Lft.
	2	Step Rft fwd with accent.
<u>Man's Variation 2 during side-to-side figure</u>		
1	1-2	Facing slightly and moving L, step L-R.
2	1	Swing L leg fwd high in preparation for scissors.
	2	Land on Lft, passing R leg up high and slapping R inside boot top with L hand.
3	1	Facing slightly and moving R, step Rft.
	2	Continuing in this direction, step Lft.
	&	Raise R ankle to side and slap it with R hand.
4	1	Step Rft fwd.
	2	Raise L leg in front and slap R hand agains inside L boot top.
<u>BASIC WOMAN'S TURN</u>		
In preparation for this figure, M sends W over to his L side as in a normal Woman's Side-to-Side step, but in doing so he grasps her L hand with his R hand.		
1-2		Both using Basic Side-to-Side step, M sends W over to R side, at same time thrusting joined hands fwd
3-4		Man takes 4 steps R-L-R-L more or less in place, leading W into two turns CCW. Each of her turns has the following footwork: Step fwd on R heel (1) beginning to bring Lft fwd to a position beside Rft; pivot on Rft, shifting full weight onto full Rft and bringing R toe down as Lft reaches its position beside Rft on its way fwd (no wt on Lft) (&); step Lft fwd (2), finishing the Lft's movement fwd.

(continued)

MEZŐSÉGI TÁNCOK (concluded)

MEAS	COUNT	ACTION
------	-------	--------

MEN'S "CSAPÁS" FIGURES (concluded)

Figure 3

- | | | |
|-----|---|--|
| 1-2 | 1 | Step on Rft in place, raising Lft forward. |
| | 2 | Slap R hand on inner <u>or</u> outer L boot top. |
| | 3 | Step Lft, raising Rft forward. |
| | 4 | Slap R hand on inner <u>or</u> outer R boot top. |
| | 5 | Step Rft. |
| | 6 | Pause |
| | 7 | Slap R hand on L boot top. |
| | 8 | Pause. |

Figure 4

Done with both hands free.

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 1-2 | 1 | Slap L hand on L thigh. |
| | 2 | Slap R hand on R outer ankle. |
| | 3 | Step on Rft, raising Lft. |
| | 4 | Clap hands in front, raising L leg diag back/L. |
| | 5 | Leap onto both ft together, having brought Lft in from raised position. |
| | 6 | Slap L hand on side of L thigh. |
| | 7 | Slap R hand on R inner boot top. |
| | 8 | Close ft together. |

Figure 5

Done with both hands free.

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 1-2 | 1 | Jump on Lft to R, at same time clicking Rft against L ankle into closed position. |
| | 2 | Chug fwd on both ft. |
| | 3 | Slap R hand on front of R thigh. |
| | 4 | Slap R hand on outer R boot top. |
| | 5 | Step fwd on Rft. |
| | 6 | Raise Lft diag back/L. |
| | 7 | Slap R hand against L inner calf. |
| | 8 | Pause. |

Presented by Steve Kotansky

MEZŐSÉGI TÁNCOK (continued)

MEAS	COUNT	ACTION
<u>"CSÁRDÁS" PHASE (continued)</u>		
<u>BASIC THROW</u>		
<u>Woman's Step</u>		
1	1-2	Leaving R side of M, W steps fwd R-L.
2	1&2	W does one Basic Turn as described under meas 3-4 of the Basic Woman's Turn, CCW.
<u>Man's Steps</u>		
1		Man makes a 1/4 turn R with a "cifra" step RLR as he "flicks" the W past his L shoulder into her movement; his "cifra" is done leading with heel.
2		Man may do either a step with Lft and close Rft or a LRL "cifra", completing a 225-degree turn CW.
The Basic Throw may be done a number of times in a row.		
<u>DOUBLE CIFRA</u>		
1-2		M takes W's L hand in his R hand out to his R side. They dance 2 "cifra" steps, RLR (turning face-to-face with partner) and LRL (turning back-to-back). Hands are thrust, rather than "swung", fwd and back during these movements.
3-4		M backs up in 4 steps RLRL, helping W to turn twice moving forward CCW under joined hands (M's R, W's L) with two Basic Woman's Turns.
<u>MEN'S "CSAPÁS" ("SLAPPING") FIGURES</u>		
<u>Figure 1</u>		
1-2	1	Jump onto both ft in "frog" position: ft apart, toes out, trunk bent forward.
	2	Slap both hands against inner boot tops (or, if L hand is occupied holding partner, slap only R hand on R boot top).
	3	Straighten body and raise R hand.
	4	Slap R hand against outside of R heel
	5	Step fwd with Rft.
	6	Raise L knee forward.
	7	Slap R hand on upper L boot top.
	8	Pause.
<u>Figure 2</u>		
1-2	1	Step Lft in place, simultaneously raising R knee fwd.
	2	Slap R hand on inner R boot top.
	3	Step Rft in place.
	4-6	Repeat movements of counts 1-3
	7	Step Lft in place, simultaneously raising R knee fwd.
	8	Slap R hand on inner R boot top.

(continued)