

PALATKAI TÁNCREND  
(DANCE CYCLE FROM PALATKA)

Palatka, in the Mezőség region of Transylvania (in Romania), is a small village about 17 kilometers from Szék and about 40 kilometers from Cluj-Napoca. The village is so small that even on most maps of Romania you will not find it.

Despite the very close distance of Szék to Palatka, the dances are very different in structure and type. Even when there is a common motif, the styling is very different. The reason for this is rather simple, but hard to understand or accept in our society of easy transportation. The geography allows for no simple route between the two villages and, in general, people have no reason to travel from one small village to another.



A dance cycle (táncrend) is an order that a series of dances would be done in. Parts can be deleted, but the order cannot be altered. Example: a full meal will start with a before-dinner drink, continue with an appetizer, a soup, the main course with salad, and an after-dinner drink. This is a dinner cycle. You do not have to have all of these for any given meal, but it would not be proper to mismatch the order of such a meal (i.e., the appetizer after the main course or the main course before the before-dinner drink).

There are four dances in the Palatkai Táncrend: the Lassú Magyar (slow Hungarian), Sűrű Magyar (thick/dense Hungarian), Lassú Cigány Tánc/Akasztos (slow gypsy dance/hanging dance), and Mezőségi Gyors (fast dance from Mezőség).

The first two dances, the Lassú and Sűrű Magyar, are men's slapping dances of the Legényes type. Although they both are very unstructured in pattern, they are very structured, like all Legényes, in relationship to the music. In the Lassú Magyar, four to six men will walk in a small circle as a group CW or CCW until someone begins a slapping pattern and all the rest join in (with their own motifs) until a series of rhythmic patterns are completed. Then the walking continues. In the Sűrű Magyar, which has a faster tempo, the men walk in a CCW circle until they begin the slapping motifs. The many slapping and fancy footwork motifs continue until the music ends.

The couple dancing begins with the Lassú Cigány Tánc. This dance is basically one for the couple (standing side by side, facing the musicians) to feel out the music and perhaps for the man to mellow out from the strenuous activity of the former dance. Although there is no change in the music, the man will lead his partner into a change of position and begin the Akasztos. This dance consists of the couple, turning/throbbing around each other. Although simple in form, there is an elegance to this dance that is beautiful to see and do.

At one point the musicians will change from the 5/4 music of the Lassú to the 4/4 music of the Mezőségi Gyors. The Mezőségi Gyors is interesting when compared to the Lassú; in the Lassú there are two distinct dances despite the fact that the music does not change whatsoever while in the Gyors, the music does change a considerable amount although the dance is continuous in type throughout. The music starts at a medium tempo and slowly speeds up. Then, just before the tempo gets too fast, the music drops to a slow pace. From here, it picks up in tempo getting somewhat faster than before. Now, instead of reverting to a slow tempo, the musicians burst into a fast tempo, gradually increase this tempo until only the best dancers can keep up, continue a bit longer until the dancers are worn out, and then end.

## NOTES ON THE RECORDING

There are three different examples of the Palatkai Tancrend in this album. The longest one is one of typical length and what you would expect to find in the village. Naturally, the word "typical" does not mean "exact", for the six and one half minutes for the Lassú Cigány Tanc/Akasztos could have been three minutes or ten. In a live music situation there can be that unspoken communication between the musicians and the dancers as to when the dance changes. This recording was made in a Tancház in Budapest. I am sad to say that if the very end of this music sounds funny and/or bad, you're right. The musicians played some 2-3 minutes longer than my tape. This particular recording happened to be the best one I had otherwise. I had to choose between adding on closing chords at a suitable place at the end or use a "not as good" recording. I felt the former idea was the better choice.

There is another problem that one encounters when trying to obtain music for use in recreational dancing and that is one of time. Since the average recreational dance group has a limited number of hours per week to dance, most groups cannot use a dance that goes on for 17 some odd minutes. For this reason, I have provided two shortened examples of the couple dances. As I mentioned before, there is a typical-length version, which is included both to allow people to be aware that it exists and to allow people who wish to dance a more typical length to do so.

The reason that two short lengths are provided is simple -- both had merits and faults. When I saw that there was room to include them both, I did. As the music speeds up, the dance gets proportionally more difficult. For many a dancer this can become frustrating to the point of finding the dance at fault, and not doing the dance any longer. One version, a private recording made of some musician friends, is included because it is slow. The speeds of this recording should be well within the abilities of most groups. The second short recording was of a demonstration performance that a small group of dancers and musicians were giving to a small crowd of Hungarian youth and has the excitement of a live recording. Its disadvantage is that all too quickly it goes into faster and faster tempos. So, in a nutshell, what I have done is provided a choice for groups to select the type of music that best fits their dancers and their moods. I sincerely hope that this does not lead to too many or too difficult internal disputes. If it does, go back to the matter at hand -- go dance.

I wish to thank Richard Langsford (of Folkdance Underground fame) for his aid in making this record possible. Also, I thank Sandy Wodicka for typing up these notes.

I should add that my notes for these dances will be provided to any group where I teach. The styling of these dances is quite different from the styling of most of the dances that are currently done in the U.S. today. Therefore, I feel it best that these dances be learned from me or any other qualified teacher and the notes be used for review.

Dance descriptions and notes  
by Gary Coyne