

The Csíki collection of Imets Dénes

Zoltán KISKAMONI-SZALAY¹

Abstract: *This study presents the works of Imets Dénes (1929-2011), music teacher, folk music collector and playwright. His folk-music collecting activity took place between 1962 and 1972 in Csík. In his 1972 study he talks about his collecting activity of the previous decade. He recorded his collections. These contain more than 100 hours of music material. Except for one volume his entire collection is still unpublished, because under the communist system they were not allowed to be published. He called upon me in 2010 with the intention of publishing his collected material. He entrusted his manuscript to my care. This contains 278 tunes (One little bird, Csíki folk-song collection) (Egy kicsi madárka. Csíki népdalgyűjtés), and unfortunately at the present time remains unpublished.*

Key-words: *Folk music, customs, Csík, old folk songs, change*

Imets Dénes (1929-2011), music teacher, folk music collector and playwright, completed his schooling in Miercurea Ciuc. He obtained his teaching qualification in Reghin in 1954, and later qualified as a music teacher at the Gheorghe Dima Music Conservatory (now Academy) in Cluj Napoca, 1964.

From 1949 onwards he taught in village schools in the Csík basin: in Újtusnád (Tuşnad), Csíkszentmárton (Sânmartin) and Csíkszentimre (Sântimbru). Later he became Head Librarian in Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciuc), and finally music teacher at the Mathematics and Physics Lyceum (now Márton Áron) and the 12th General School (Now the Nagy Imre school) in Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciuc).

Imets Dénes' folk-music collecting activity mostly took place in the late 1960's/early 70's, reaching a peak between 1968 and 1970. In later years he still made some additions to the material. His folk music collection was published in instalments in the Hargita daily paper (Imets 1968, 1969b, 1970b) and the Művelődés (Arts Review magazine, Imets 1969a). The collection was used in music folios, dramatic writing and musical/poetic stage productions (Imets 1972b, 1973, 1978).

His collecting work was carried out in a deliberate and systematic manner: „My work is structured according to Bartók and Kodály's collection entitled *Erdélyi Magyar Népdalok (Transylvanian Hungarian Folksongs)*, published in 1923, and then formulates the following question for posterity: What is the result of a century of stormy decades, rapid societal change, wars, the consequences of national

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, Faculty of Music, zszalay@upcmail.ro

dismemberment, and generations prematurely cut off from the original nourishing basis of their folk culture and way of life?”, he writes in *Egy kicsi madárka. Csíki népdalgyűjtés (A Little Bird. Collection of folk songs from Csik, manuscript, 4.)*, and he adds: „What remains from the rich fabric of folk music illuminated in *Erdélyi Magyar Népdalok?* (At the end of the seventies a respected young student wrote down the songs he knew and their titles. Of the two hundred songs he wrote down, including their first lines, the only songs belonging to the layer of old Hungarian folksong treasures, were the ones he had been taught at school. This speaks for itself.)”

He was well acquainted with his illustrious predecessors’ collections of Csik folk-songs, and the published examples of these. „In Csik, they found all that they had hoped for: they came upon an endless source of musical traditions, and they were primarily interested in the deeper strata of this material.” – he wrote in a study entitled *Bartók és Kodály nyomában Csíkban (In the footsteps of Bartók and Kodály in Csik, Imets 1972a, 105.)*. He began his paper with 25 folk songs. Of these, he writes: „These are some of the most beautiful folk songs in our collection. Each one is worthy of careful protection and even today would be of great interest to any collector who had the opportunity to work in the field.” (Imets 1972a, 106.) He compares his own folk-music knowledge with the collections from the beginning of the century. „If you took Bartók and Kodály’s catalogue around with you today, you wouldn’t be very successful. In many places they would just about remember the songs, but they wouldn’t be able to sing them to you.” (Imets 1972a, 107.) In the study quoted above, Imets shows through detailed analysis how the tradition had become eroded and corrupted.

He questioned his respondents thoroughly. He took seriously Kodály’s recommendation to collect not only the music, but also information about the tunes, instruments, folk-music life and customs, and details relating to the musicians themselves. „Bartók and Kodály searched for, and found, the ancient traditional musical mother-language. Considering the perspectives and possibilities available to them at that time they achieved the maximum, because through them we have been introduced to this musical mother-language’s grammar and thesaurus. Our experience shows that even here there are more things to complete. For example, they didn’t have the chance to pay attention to instrumental music. There is still much work to do on the culture of songs. Kodály said: ‘we need to examine the role and the meaning of some songs and types of song in people’s everyday lives. In other words, it’s not enough just to know the songs. We also need to know how, when and for what they were used. We have insufficient information about this. In future, folk-song research should make this a priority.’ Today we are not only looking for this musical mother-tongue, but for the people in the music; for everything that is related to musical life, i.e. the way in which folk-music is built into people’s lives.” (Imets 1972a, 115.)

In the sessions everything was recorded on tape. The original recordings and their digitalised versions are now held in the Hagymányok Háza (Tradition House)

in Budapest, and in total there are more than 100 hours of material. „If we carry on using the language metaphor, then we can say that language is not just composed of grammar and vocabulary, but that sound-formation, accent, modulation and rhythm are also important features. We need to explore these aspects with the technology we have available today. (The tape/cassette-recorder, camera and video-camera represent a great improvement on the phonograph).” (Imets 1972a, 115.)

He deliberately conducted his research in those areas where Bartók and Kodály and their students had collected at the beginning of the last century – in the territory of the old Csik County, with the exception of the Gyergyó [Gheorgheni] basin. „... it was no accident that after Kodály’s first big collecting trip to Felvidék [Hungarian area now in Slovakia], Bartók’s first main collecting expedition took him amongst the Szekler people of Csik (in 1907). The success of Bartók’s collection was proven by the fact that in 1910 and 1912 Kodály came to this area as well (though from the beginning they divided the collecting areas between each other. Kodály collected in the North and Bartók in the East).” (Imets 1972a, 105.) Imets Dénes’ collecting area began in the Kászon (Casin) basin, around Lower Csik, the Úz valley, through Middle Csik to Upper Csik and the Gyimes (Ghimeş) valleys. He was born in Újtusnád (Tuşnad), so it is understandable that he recorded the most material in the Lower Csik area. One of his favourite places was Ménaság (Armăşeni). From the material that he collected there he published the collection entitled *Repülj madár, repülj... Menasági népdalok és népballadák (Fly Bird, Fly... Folk Songs and Ballads from Menaság)*, which contains 95 folk-songs and ballads. (Imets 1970a) The 1st example is sang by 66-year old respondent Ferencz István from Ménaság (we do not know the exact date of this recording, but it was probably made in 1968). (At the conference I had illustrated Imets’s collection with a few musical tracks.)

There is a lot of material from the Kászon Basin in the legacy of Imets Dénes. Firstly he chose this area because of the antiquated conditions that still persisted thereabouts at that time. Secondly, Kodály’s 1912 collection from Kászon prompted him to prioritise this area. The 2nd example comes from Nagy Kászon (Big Kászon), though there is currently no village with this name. It is sung by 36-year old Bara Mária in 1969.

From the further reaches of Imets’ collecting area I have chosen two more tunes, one from Upper Csik and the other from Gyimes. The 3rd example is a spinster’s lament from Csikjenőfalva (Ineu), sang by the widow of Gabor Áron, who was 60 years old in 1968. The 4th example is an instrumental from Kosteleg (Coşnea). Almási Demeter, 48 year-old violist and Vaszi István, 47 year-old gardon player, performed this in 1970. According to (Imets’ collecting companion) Sárosi Bálint’s voice on the recording, „This is a leaving-song that is played when leaving the bride’s house for the groom’s.” So it’s an instrumental that was played at weddings.

In Imets Dénes' collection we can find every folk-music genre – childrens' songs, songs for specific occasions (feast-days, rites of passage), folk songs and instrumental pieces. From the songs sung on fest-days I have chosen the Jewish evening-song from Méнасág. This used to be sung on Shrove Tuesday after midnight, as 65-year old respondent Szenyes István explains on the 5th *example*. The recording was made in 1968. The rite-of passage example is the above-mentioned Wedding Tune from Kosteleg. (see the 4th *example*).

In the collection – as one might expect – there are more songs that are not related to any specific occasion. According to their words, they can be divided into two categories: epic ballads and lyrical songs (the latter group includes the above mentioned *example 1* and *2*). *Example 6* is a ballad sang by Nyisztor Ferenc, a 67-year old respondent from Bánkfalva (Bancu) in 1971.

From the genre of instrumental pieces I have chosen the example of 58 year-old Duduj Lajos and his band from Csikszentdomokos (Sândominic Ciuc) with their 1970 recording of 'Cepres' music (*example 7*). The following examples of instrumental music that I have selected (three of these also feature singing) clearly demonstrate that Imets Dénes didn't just record musicians playing at traditional musical events, but he exploited every opportunity that arose, if someone could play any kind of instrument. On the 8th *example* we can hear a performance by the 66 year-old dulcimer player Gábor Antal from Csatószeg (Cetățuia) in 1970. *Example 9* features zither-player Ferenc Gyula, 56 years old and from Méнасág. This was probably recorded in 1968. On the 10th *example* there is a voice and whistle performance by 80 year-old Vitális Ignác from Csikszentimre. Finally, on *example 11*, 41 year-old priest Farkas Márton plays in Csikjenőfalva (Ineu) in 1970.

In addition to folk-music, other traditional genres are also represented in the collection. These include wedding rhymes, New Year blessing verses, name-day greetings, etc. From these I've chosen a name-day greeting recited by 35 year-old respondent Csiszér Ignác from Kászonaltiz in 1970. (12th *example*).

From the csik collections Imets Dénes drew the following conclusion in his 1972 paper and in the forward of his unpublished manuscript.

„In the first decades of the century many of the songs that were collected in this area got lost from the collective consciousness. Nobody knows them any more, The ones that exist and are still alive have become very simplified and their rich ornamentation has faded. ... There are fewer songs related to special occasions such as the winter solstice and New Year blessings and these are only known and sang by a few gypsy women. Name-day greetings have been simplified to rhymes coupled to a familiar tune. The Christmas (winter solstice) greeting songs have given way to church Christmas carols spiced up with some rhymes. Laments have been lost; only at Antalok valley in Gyimesközéplak (Lunca de Jos) I have heard a husband being mourned in this way. Old wedding rituals have been lost – the preparation of the wedding guest cake and the ritual carrying of this only survives in Menaság and Csikszentdomokos.” (Imets manuscript, 4.).

„In terms of the birth, development and dissemination of folksongs, these things have changed in the last decades because spinning parties, work-gatherings ending with communal suppers followed by singing, feather-trimming parties and garden-play afternoons have all finished. But there are still weddings, friend-honourings and soldiers' leaving ceremonies. These events are occurring less and less frequently. ... We only know from memory the bridal dances, and the bridal mother's dances. The songs we can listen today are very varied; they include new style songs and urban songs and dance tunes. The situation varies according to the location; for example at a wedding in Menaság and Karcfalva (Cârța) three-quarters of the songs would be folk songs, but in 1969 in Tusnád the weddings guests only sang urban and new style songs. Yet In Csikszereda, cultured people only wanted their musicians to sing folk songs.

The damage is less in the Gyimes valleys, in the Eastern part of Csík. From how the songs were sang, from the function of these songs, and from the laments and the instrumental accompaniments, we can imagine how it used to be 100-150 years ago in all of Csík.” (Imets 1972a, 114., 115.)

„What happened to our folk-songs in the last decades of the last century and the years after the millenium? The generation who sang the old songs in the 1960s and 70s and were recorded on tape have now passed away. Now we only have the recorded versions. Modern life has sped up and all kinds of musical influences are coming here: different fashions are coming and putting their imprint on the music. It is a fact that many of the songs in this collection are not known and are not sung any more.” (Imets manuscript, 5.)

I could add a little more with respect to this last comment owing to the fact that I collected songs in Upper Csík after the year 2000. It is true that the 50-60 year olds at that time (now 65-75) only know many songs as a passive repertoire, but even today some of them can be refreshed and brought out, especially if there are a group of people together who can help each other to remember. This particularly applies to the old style of songs. From the 1st 100 songs of Imets Dénes' manuscript, the old-style songs, I selected those that I could not find myself in Upper Csík. There are 46 of these. This means that the majority of the songs from the collection are still known and sang, especially if there are groups of tradition-keepers who are deliberately trying to bring these back. In many villages in Upper Csík in recent decades there have been such groups. The situation with the new style songs is much better. It is true that the old traditions, the events when people would sing the proper folk songs have gone, and the way that the songs were traditionally used has all changed, but in many villages the communities are very consciously trying to resuscitate the songs and their value for the benefit of future generations.

Imets Dénes' collection could help a lot with this endeavour. It is a folk-song and ethnographical map, which gives a very good view of the Szekler village people's traditional world, celebrations and everyday life. I see it as a folk-music

monograph of the Szekler people from Csik. It's intellectual and spiritual value is priceless.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words about the story of his mentioned collection. In the early 2000's I was studying another manuscript of Imets Dénes' (*Szivárvány havasán. Népdalok.*) I discovered that for many decades it had been lying in a desk drawer, because under the communist system it could not be published. I encouraged him to try again for publication but he did not respond. After many years, in 2010, he changed his mind. He came to me and said that he would like to publish it. Following this encounter he entrusted the manuscript to my care. (Imets, manuscript)

The collection contains the backbone of our folk music – the main folk songs that not related to specific occasions. There are 278 tunes, of which 100 are from the old style, and the rest are in the new style. In 2011 the Gutenberg publishing house from Csikszereda applied for a grant to publish this manuscript but the application was not successful. The manuscript is back in the drawer again, still unpublished.

References

- Imets, Dénes. 1968. *Repülj madár, repülj* [Fly bird, fly]. Hargita, I, 200. 3.
- Imets, Dénes. 1969a. *A Csiki Medence népdalköltéséből. Népballadák* [Folk poetry of Csiki Basin. Folk ballads], Művelődés, XII, 10. 31-33.
- Imets, Dénes. 1969b. *Újtusnád*. Hargita, II, 212. 3.
- Imets, Dénes. 1970a. *Repülj madár, repülj... Menasági népdalok és népballadák* [Fly bird, fly... Folk songs and ballads of Menaság]. Csikszereda: Népi Alkotások Háza.
- Imets, Dénes. 1970b. *Csikszentimre*. Hargita, III, 185. 3.
- Imets, Dénes. 1972a. Bartók és Kodály nyomában Csíkban [In the footsteps of Bartók and Kodály in Csik]. In V. András János (ed.), *Árkos - 1971: A Művelődés baráti körének zenei találkozója* [The musical gathering of the friends of Művelődés], pp 105-117, Sepsiszentgyörgy, A Kovászna Megyei Népi Alkotások és a Művészeti Tömegmozgalom Irányító Központja.
- Imets, Dénes. 1972b. *Csiki fonó*, Művelődés, XXV, 1, Műsormelléklet [Repertoire notes] no. 34. 24-29.
- Imets, Dénes and Szilveszter Kosz. 1973. Kádár Kata. *Napsugár*, XVII no. 201. 2-7.
- Imets, Dénes. 1998. Gál Sándor éjszakái (Történelmi játék 9 pillanatban) [Nights with Gál Sándor (Historical plays in 9 moments)]. *Székelyszékelyföld*, 2, March. 24-49.
- Imets, Dénes. *Egy kicsi madárka. Csiki népdalgyűjtés* [A Little Bird. Collection of folk songs from Csik], manuscript.