

Expressing Vojvodina Hungarian Identity Through the Music of the *Sógor Együttes*

Agatha Schwartz and Robert Svarc

Abstract: This article analyzes the music of the Vojvodina-based *Sógor Együttes*, active between May 1986 and the end of 1990 in both Yugoslavia and Hungary. The innovative musical fusion that became known as "*sógorism*" blended Hungarian folk songs and popular music ("sláger")¹ from different periods, Hungarian rewrites of American rock'n'roll and Balkan folk songs with original compositions by band members. This blend became an immense success in the final decade of multinational and multiethnic Yugoslavia. The authors argue that the music of *Sógor Együttes* was an expression of the Vojvodina Hungarian minority's unique and hybrid identity, which is defined in this article as a tripartite identity. In a time of rising ethnic nationalisms both in Serbia and Croatia, when even music became ideologically manipulated along ethnic division lines, the music of *Sógor Együttes* promoted the fading ideals of Yugoslav civic nationalism (Ignatieff) based on inclusion and equal rights while debunking any claim of ethnic and cultural purity. The violent breakup of the Yugoslav state in the early 1990s sadly coincided with the end of the band's activity, yet the legacy of their music lives on.

Keywords: *Vojvodina Hungarians; music, civic nationalism; ethnic nationalism; cultural hybridity*

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¹ "Sláger" refers to light, popular "hit" tunes usually sang by solo performers, going back to the interwar years but there were popular "slággers" in post-World War II Hungary as well.

Introduction

The Vojvodina-based band *Sógor Együttes* was active on the musical scene of former Yugoslavia and of Hungary between May 1986 and the end of 1990, with band members (listed in alphabetical order) Eduárd Balázs (guitar), János Kazimity (drums, vocals), Tibor Kudela (drums), Imre Pogány (bass guitar), and Jenő Schwartz (keyboards). Within this short period, they released five albums: *Sógo Rock* (1986, platinum record); *Vörös bort ittam az este* ("I drank red wine last night," 1987, gold record); *Rólad álmodom ma éjjel* ("I dream of you tonight," 1988, silver record); *Az a rendes iparos, aki mindig italos és sohasem részeg* ("A decent craftsman is always tipsy but never drunk," 1988); and *Ne várj az életeredől száz csodát* ("Don't expect miracles from life," 1989). With the exception of the first album's title, the other albums were all named after one of the featured songs. Four of the albums were produced in former Yugoslavia: the first three by the company Jugoton in Zagreb, Croatia, the fourth one by PTP in Belgrade, Serbia. The fifth and last album was produced in Hungary. The musical genre of the band, along with similar music that gained huge popularity in the same period and beyond, was initially labelled "*sógorism*" in Vojvodina and later "lakodalmás rock" (rock music for weddings) in Hungary. In recent years, the term "muskátli" ("geranium") music was coined in Vojvodina. This paper critically engages with the latter labels and argues that they only partly relay the unique musical fusion present in the *Sógor* songs, a fusion that combines Hungarian folk songs, American rock'n'roll, Hungarian popular music from different periods, original compositions by band members, and even Hungarian folk-rock versions of Balkan folk songs. The paper further argues that this unique musical expression, which manifested itself in the final decade of multinational and multiethnic Yugoslavia, in which minorities enjoyed full cultural and political rights, is an expression of the Hungarian minority's unique and hybrid identity. We define Vojvodina Hungarian identity as a tripartite identity: politically, they were Yugoslavs; culturally, Vojvodiners; and ethnically and linguistically, they were Hungarians.² In addition to being an expression of Vojvodina Hungarian cultural hybridity, the fusion of musical motifs and genres that resulted in the specific *Sógor*-sound was also motivated by said hybridity. This hybrid identity soon came under threat with the violent breakup of the Yugoslav state, a tragic political development that coincided with the gradual demise of the band's activity.³ In the following, we discuss the development of a Vojvodina Hungarian identity within the context of political changes in Yugoslavia and Serbia along with reflections on music as an expression of ethnic identity, to be followed by a presentation and analysis of the *Sógor* band and their music.

² The concept of a tripartite identity is inspired by Marsha Rozenblit and her analysis of Jewish identity in Habsburg Austria during the Dual Monarchy. Rozenblit argues that the Jews, loyal to the Emperor, identified politically as Austrians; culturally as German, Czech, Polish, etc. depending on the respective land; and ethnically as Jews, recognizing their common historical and religious background (Rozenblit 2001: 3–4).

³ The band's music was mainly enjoyed by a mature Vojvodina and Croatian (Baranya) Hungarian-speaking audience that had grown up with the Yugoslav idea of a trans-ethnic identity and equal rights.

Vojvodina and the situation of the Hungarian minority

Due to its specific geo-political location and historical developments, the region that became known as Vojvodina/Vajdaság following the Treaty of Trianon has been characterized by a remarkable ethnic diversity that had formed over several centuries. As stated by prominent Yugoslav linguist Ranko Bugarski, Vojvodina is "one of the most multiethnic and multilingual regions of Europe" (Bugarski 2004: 192)⁴ where pure ethnic homogeneity is more the exception than the rule. In fact, ethnic and linguistic mixing has been a key feature of Vojvodina and has also defined Vojvodina Hungarians: "Due to their peripheral situation, Vojvodina Hungarians have had contacts with several linguistic groups throughout their history" (Göncz and Vörös 2005: 196). After part of the territory of southern Hungary became Vajdaság/Vojvodina within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia after 1929), Hungarians in this region gradually developed a distinct identity expressed in the literary works of numerous writers known beyond the Yugoslav borders as well, such as Kornél Szenteleky, János Herceg, Ervin Sinkó, László Végel, Ottó Tolnai, Erzsébet Juhász, Éva Harkai Vass, to name but a few (Bori). The interwar years brought about numerous challenges for ethnic minorities, including the Hungarians (but also the large ethnic German population), which impacted their linguistic and cultural survival in a country dominated by tensions and strife between its majority Slavic groups, most notably the Serbs and the Croats.

After a particularly cruel theater of war in the territory of occupied and dismembered Yugoslavia during World War II, in which all parties involved became guilty of murder, rape, and torture of the civilian population, a new federal Yugoslavia was established under an independent communist regime run by Josip Broz Tito, one that was not governed from Moscow. Following the brutal reckonings of the postwar period directed mostly at the ethnic German ("Swabian") but also the Hungarian population,⁵ in the subsequent decades Vojvodina Hungarians would gradually be endowed with numerous minority rights. The 1969 Constitutional Law gave the already autonomous province of Vojvodina legislative autonomy, recognizing four of the largest minority languages (Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Rusyn) as official languages beside Serbo-Croatian ("Ustavni," Article 68). In 1974, the new Yugoslav Constitution further expanded the province's autonomy, giving it the status of an independent autonomous province within the Yugoslav federation while still defining it as part of Serbia. This autonomy would be taken away after 1988 under the Serbian nationalist government of Slobodan Milošević.⁶ With the new 1990 Serbian

⁴ Bugarski mentions twenty-five ethnic groups in Vojvodina, although some are numerically very small, a number corroborated by official census statistics.

⁵ According to various estimates, about 60,000 ethnic German were murdered after 1945. The vast majority of the remaining ethnic Germans was driven out of Yugoslavia. The number of ethnic Hungarian civilians executed is estimated at around 20,000 (Jankov 2005: 104–06; Schwartz 2022: 115–30).

⁶ Slobodan Milošević (1941–2006) entered politics full-time in 1984 as head of the local communist party organization in Belgrade. He introduced a new, populist style of politics in Serbia. In 1987, he became leader of the League of Communists in Serbia (then still the only political party in Yugoslavia) and began voicing the abolition of the autonomy of Vojvodina and Kosovo as provinces within the federation. For his role in the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia, he was brought to the International Criminal Court in The Hague where he died in 2006 ("Slobodan Milošević").

Constitution, Vojvodina was stripped of its status as an autonomous province of Yugoslavia, retaining only a limited level of autonomy.

Post-World War II Yugoslavia operated on the basis of civic rather than ethnic nationalism, a distinction developed by Michael Ignatieff. Miroslav Mavra and Lori McNeil explain Ignatieff's definition of civic nationalism as one that "maintains that a nation should be united through a common political creed that all people, regardless of race, religion, gender, language or ethnicity can form a community of citizens with equal rights, brought together by their shared belief in a set of political values" (Mavra and McNeil 2007: 5). The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ), which was the country's official name, was a prime example of an attempt to create such shared identity and belonging for all its national and ethnic groups. Its constitution allowed the largest ethnic minorities to participate politically and culturally on an equal footing with the majority groups. Following the death of Josip Broz Tito on 4 May 1980, the cracks in the fabric of a unified country began to widen, a process to which an economic crisis and inflation that spiralled out of control by 1989 contributed in important ways. All this became a fertile breeding ground for ethnic nationalism, which in Serbia helped the ascent to power of Slobodan Milošević. It led to a drastic reduction of Vojvodina's autonomy (along with Kosovo) ultimately resulting in the relegation of the official use of minority languages (including Hungarian) from federal and provincial to municipal level.⁷

In stark contrast to civic nationalism, ethnic nationalism breaks up the possibility of a shared belonging by emphasizing ethnic difference markers such as religion, customs, and traditions that allegedly hinder peaceful cohabitation and serve as a platform to fuel the flames of division. Such a process began in Yugoslavia in the mid-1980s when ethnic nationalism labored to undermine the idea of Yugoslavism and hammered away on the very fabric of "brotherhood and unity" ("bratstvo-jedinstvo"), the official slogan of Titoist Yugoslavia. It was a time when the two largest national groups of the country, Serbs and Croats, building on unfinished business going back to the interwar years and World War II, began to draw separation lines "in order to create an 'us' versus 'them' mentality" (Mavra and McNeil 2007: 6). In this process, the mobilization of music along ethnic lines also played an important role. In stark contrast, Vojvodina Hungarian music, most notably the music of *Sógor Együttes*, went the opposite path: it expressed a belonging beyond ethnic division lines and cultural hybridity. Hybridity did not only characterize the band members themselves but could be applied to a large number of Yugoslav citizens as well.

⁷ The reduction of minority language rights in Serbia has continued since the 1990 Serbian constitution. In Vojvodina, attendance of mother tongue education and production of mother tongue media for minorities (Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Rusyn) has been dropping dramatically as a result of population shifts and emigration. Beside changing the name of the language from "Serbo-Croatian" to "Serbian," the Serbian Constitution from 1990 departed from earlier regulations in giving preference to the Cyrillic alphabet (Bugarski 2004). The 2006 Serbian Constitution further worsened this situation. The Venice Commission notes that the linguistic rights of minorities are even less well protected than in the 1990 Constitution. The use of the Latin script no longer receives legal protection, although the new Constitution explicitly rejects any form of discrimination. As a consequence, "[f]ewer and fewer people speak the Hungarian language, in fewer and fewer communicative situations" (Göncz and Vörös 2005: 198).

Music as expression of ethnic identity

Whereas Vojvodina Hungarian literature is well known beyond its geographic borders and has inspired serious academic scholarship,⁸ Vojvodina Hungarian music, if at all mentioned, becomes associated with traditional rural folk music or tied to the so-called "muskátli" genre, a term that took over in discussions of this particular musical trend that dominated the 1980s. The designation "muskátli" was concocted by Novi Sad-based Hungarian journalists so as not to offend other bands with the term "sógorizmus" initially used in the press (*Muskátli*). The genre is also referred to as "lakodalmas rock" ("rock music for weddings"; Rose Lange 1996; Dömötör 2021), but the latter term was born in Hungary. The use of "muskátli" was meant to emphasize the link to Vojvodina Hungarian rural communities given the popularity of this flower (*Muskátli*). It also highlights the mushrooming of this type of music in Vojvodina (and later in Hungary), which ultimately led to a watering down of its quality. "Lakodalmas rock," as explained by Rose Lange, "is the rendition on electronic instruments of rural Hungarian popular music" (Rose Lange, 1996: 78). It is therefore not suited to adequately describe the music of the "sógorizmus" genre that included many more other musical elements.

While both ethnic Hungarians in Yugoslavia and Hungarians in Hungary readily and en masse embraced this new hybrid music, it has also been met with some scathing reviews, particularly in Hungary that called it "kitsch" and "peasant music" (Szerbhorváth 2001). There is no doubt that among the numerous copiers of this rock-and-folk-inspired musical style there were, and continue to be, individuals and bands of rather dubious quality, even songs with lyrics that border on pornography. However, we argue that the first bands of this new musical trend, in particular *Sógor Együttés*, rose above such assessments. Not only was their music of artistic quality but it also carried an implied message about Vojvodina Hungarian and, by extension, Yugoslav identity. Their music conveyed this meaning without, however, openly engaging in political advocacy.

Music can be a powerful tool in creating identities, ethnic or otherwise. Traditional music is often seen as a marker of national or ethnic identity (White 2014: 277) and can be used to erect boundaries between ethnic or national groups. Such boundaries are often manipulated by political players to justify, create, and maintain distinctions between "us" and "them" (Mavra and McNeil 2007: 7). On the other hand, umbrella concepts in ethnomusicology such as "Celtic music," for example, have been criticized as a "historical construct" (White 2014: 276) and as an attempt to establish a "master narrative" of a people's (in White's case study, the Irish) psyche. Hence the distancing from the "authenticity quest" (for White rooted in European Enlightenment and Romanticism) with its desire to seek "purity" (White 2014: 281). The forces that attempt to reinforce boundaries between national or ethnic groups, however, promote precisely this narrative of the recreation of an authentic national identity from the past. In 1980s Yugoslavia, such a process began (and continued more aggressively after the armed conflict was unleashed in 1991) both in Serbia and in Croatia. As demonstrated by Mavra and McNeil, the nationalist authenticity

⁸ László Gerold's *Vajdasági magyar irodalmi lexikon* (1918–2014), published in 2016 in a revised edition by Forum in Novi Sad, offers a comprehensive overview.

quest was expressed not only in an arbitrary and factually incorrect definition of what musical instruments were allegedly typical for Croatian and Serbian music, but also in the outright combative pushing by the mass media of bands that glorified a heroic fight for a new, "pure" Croatia, free of any cultural or other association with Serbia or the rest of the Balkans (Mavra and McNeil 2007: 10-11). In Serbia, a similar process took place beginning in the mid-1980s, which saw the city centre of Belgrade filled with booths that exhibited reimagined Chetnik paraphernalia while blasting and selling tapes with Serbian war songs.⁹ As argued by Ljerka Vidić Rasmussen, such developments were geared toward creating an East (Serbia) versus West (Croatia) divide in an attempt to draw arbitrary cultural (and by extension, political) frontiers between two groups that had previously coexisted within the country sharing numerous connections (Vidić Rasmussen 1996: 100).

In stark contrast, the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina began to produce a new hybrid music as an articulation of an equally hybrid identity. This hybridity can be understood as an inadvertent reminder of what stood to be lost with the destruction of the idea of a multiethnic and inclusive Yugoslavia. The music of *Sógor Együttes*, while certainly an authentic expression of Vojvodina (and, more broadly, Yugoslav) Hungarian identity, definitely elides any claims of purity. We argue that this music conveys the unique identity of Yugoslav Hungarians which became threatened particularly following political developments in Serbia and Yugoslavia in the 1980s.

Unlike other bands that are usually bundled under the umbrella category of "muskátli" and "lakodalmás rock," *Sógor Együttes* was an urban phenomenon despite the fact that it appealed to rural audiences as well. This urban identity is emphasized, for example, by the image the band adopted after their first album. While on the first album's cover the band members appear dressed more casually, on all following albums and during their live performances they wear elegant matching suits and bow-ties. Their connection to the city of Sombor/Zombor is also featured in two videos.¹⁰ One of these was shot with the band members taking a fiacre ride on the "ring road" ("körút") in Sombor with a view of dilapidated house façades in a mixture of monarchy and socialist architectural styles in the background while the song "Zombori rózsák" ("Sombor roses") is being played. The other video, featuring the title song of the album *Rólad álmodom ma éjjel* ("I dream of you tonight") was filmed in the city park around city hall. We can see some beautiful old trees (the city being famous for its lush greenery) and the façade of the city hall built in the early nineteenth century in neoclassical style. These videos express the band's belonging to the city and its rich cultural identity that spans different historical periods.

⁹ In its original meaning, Chetnik referred to members of a Serbian royalist guerrilla army led by Draža Mihajlović that fought the Axis forces during World War II while also attacking the communist Partisans led by Josip Broz Tito. The term "Chetnik" was subsequently revived in the early 1990s and took on a twofold meaning. While the Serb nationalists associated the term with the defense of the Serbian nation during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, for the Croatian and Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) sides it took on negative associations and hence all pro-Serb armed units were described by their opponents as Chetniks ("Chetnik"). The description of the Chetnik displays in 1980s Belgrade is based on the personal experience of Agatha Schwartz who at the time lived in Belgrade.

¹⁰ Zombor had acquired the title of "free royal city" ("szabad királyi város") back in 1749.

The band's members were either all born or lived in Sombor/Zombor, a medium-size city in West Bácska.¹¹ Unlike other towns in Vojvodina with a significant Hungarian population (i.e. Senta/Zenta, Subotica/Szabadka, Ada, Temerin), Zombor did not have an absolute majority of any single ethnic group either in the period of the Hungarian Kingdom, nor later in the Yugoslav era.¹² The relative ethnic harmony typical for this region encouraged interethnic marriages and resulted in a hybrid Vojvodina identity. In addition, given the ethnically heterogeneous environment, most Zombor Hungarian speakers grew up fluently bilingual with Serbo-Croatian, which is often not the case in towns and villages with a Hungarian majority population. The members of *Sógor Együttes* reflect this hybridity. They are all Hungarian speakers but most of them are also ethnic hybrids (blending Swabian, Slovak, Czech etc. identities into a common Vojvodina identity) who identify as Hungarians and also speak fluent Serbo-Croat in addition to other languages (i.e. German). They embody Homi Bhabha's definition of hybridity as a challenge to the illusion of a homogenous identity: "the hierarchical claims regarding the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable" (Bhabha 2006:156)

The fact that the *Sógor* band's members grew up in Tito's Yugoslavia and in Vojvodina as ethnic Hungarians exposed them to multiple cultural and musical influences. Yugoslavia had a thriving and innovative pop and rock musical scene in the 1970s and 1980s with important and flourishing musical centers such as Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo. Additionally, given Titoist Yugoslavia's partly pro-Western orientation, the members of *Sógor Együttes* were also familiar with both the international and the Hungarian pop and rock musical trends. All of the band's members had extensive previous musical careers in local and regional bands. Singer (and in the beginning also drummer) János Kazimír was one of Vojvodina's most prominent drummers who played in the well-known Novi Sad-based rock band *Griva*. Additionally, several of the band's members, most notably Jenő Schwartz and Imre Pogány, received years of formal musical training at the local school of music that enjoyed an excellent reputation in the country and produced numerous talented musicians. Yet despite the existence of such highly trained musicians with a Hungarian background, until the 1980s the Yugoslav musical scene had not produced anything in Hungarian proper beyond some traditional folk music.

¹¹ Zombor was the seat of Bács-Bodrog county during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. It had been gradually stripped of its political and cultural significance after Vojvodina became part of Yugoslavia, with the Hungarian cultural center shifting north to Subotica/Szabadka and the political center south to Novi Sad/Újvidék (Bori).

¹² In the first half of the twentieth century, Hungarians in Sombor made up about one-third of the city's population, in addition to a significant German (Swabian) population. Only about one-third of the inhabitants at the time were Serbian, Croatian, Bunjewatz etc. With the genocide and exodus of the Swabians after World War II and the two major waves of pro-Serbian colonization since, this population balance has shifted. Today, Hungarians (or those who declare themselves as such) make up only about 10% of the city's population.

Popular music in Yugoslavia and the birth of a new Vojvodina Hungarian musical genre in the 1980s

Before asking why this new Hungarian language music appeared in the 1980s, it is important to understand developments on the Yugoslav popular music scene. The political orientation of Titoist Yugoslavia as a country between East and West also impacted the musical market of the country. As explained by Vidić Rasmussen, "Yugoslavia's early moves toward a decentralized, consumer-oriented economy impacted expressive culture in ways that were atypical for the state-managed cultural systems of its ideological neighbors;" as a consequence, Yugoslavia had "the strongest popular music market in Eastern Europe" (Vidić Rasmussen 1996: 101). Not only was music from the West not censored but it was distributed by local record companies. Thus, unlike in neighboring communist countries, pirate cassettes were not necessary. Additionally, an impressive plethora of local musicians and bands that produced both original and high-quality music existed all over the country. Some of these bands began to integrate Balkan folk tunes in their rock and jazz compositions already in the 1970s, thereby blending East and West. One example is the hugely popular Sarajevo-based *Bijelo dugme* ("White Button") that grew into the most successful Yugoslav pop-rock group. Lead guitarist and composer of most songs, Goran Bregović, additionally gained an international reputation as a composer of film music. The Macedonia-based jazz-rock band *Leb i sol* ("Bread and Salt") is another example of the popular and equally artistic amalgam of local folkloric rhythms and harmonies with Western music, producing a unique new style. Parallel to these musically sophisticated and innovative fusions of various Balkan folk music elements with rock and jazz, another musical genre increasingly gained popularity all over Yugoslavia, namely, NCFM ("newly composed folk music," *novokomponovana narodna muzika*). While this genre also relied on elements borrowed from traditional Balkan music, it lacked the sophistication of the previously mentioned examples in that it reproduced pre-existing musical patterns and used lyrics of dubious quality (very different from the lyrics of bands like *Bijelo dugme* rich in poetic imagery), making such music easily qualifiable as kitsch (Vidić Rasmussen 1996: 102).

This musical background can help us better understand the development of a new Hungarian-language musical genre in the 1980s. Endre Dömötör borrows the term "lakodalmás rock" in his discussion of the new musical phenomenon which he attributes to the band 3+2 that produced their first album, *Halvány őszi róza* ("Pale autumn rose") in March 1986. It garnered instant success. Then Újvidék-based producer and former musician Károly Kovács approached some of the members of what would very soon become known as *Sógor Együttes* (often referred to as "Sógorok"),¹³ and they came out with their first album, *Sógo Rock* within a record time. The name "sógor" (meaning brother-in-law or simply chum), according to band leader Jenő Schwartz, was chosen for its potential appeal to Hungarian audiences as it denotes family and friends, in short, community (Schwartz, Interview). Released in May 1986 by the renowned Zagreb-based record company *Jugoton*, it reached golden status (50,000 copies sold) in just two weeks, soon to become

¹³ The name *Sógorok* has been appropriated in more recent years by a completely different band that essentially reproduces Hungarian folk songs by using some electronic instruments.

a platinum record (with over 100,000 copies sold by December). It was after the *Sógor* band that the new musical genre was named *sógorism* ("sógorizmus"), promoted by Kovács himself and adopted by the media at the time. Dömötör describes this new musical phenomenon as follows: "music that is based on Hungarian songs, songs composed in folk style, folk songs proper, Gypsy music, operetta and light music, film music, chansons from before World War II, playful songs, dance songs from the 1950s and 60s, local folklore and other bagatelles, in short, music that is simple, an immediate ear-tickler, with a light melody *that ensures easy identification*" (Dömötör 2021, translated by the authors, emphasis added). We would like to highlight the "easy identification" aspect of this new musical genre and ask the question: What made it so easy in this music for so many people to identify with? The memory of a shared regional Austro-Hungarian and interwar past whose culture lived on in many Vojvodina (and not only Hungarian-speaking) families, certainly played an important role. Operetta, chansons, and Gypsy music are popular genres in Vojvodina, and numerous songs exist in Hungarian and Serbo-Croat versions alike. One example of this is the melancholy song "Zombori rózsák" ("Somborske ruže", "Sombor roses") from the *Sógor* band's second, gold record *Vörös bort ittam az este* ("I Drank Red Wine Last Night," 1987). The same song was also used in the band's video mentioned above with the musicians taking a fiacre ride in Sombor. In addition to this urban nostalgia intersecting with local interethnic memory, the band intertwined international musical influences in their compositions as well.

While the music of *Sógor Együttes* had some general similarities with 3+2 in that it blended Hungarian folk tunes with rock rhythms and added some rearranged popular "slágers," already the first *Sógor* album contained not only a wider variety of musical influences in the songs but the arrangements, too, displayed more sophisticated harmonies and performance techniques. Their first album, *Sógo Rock* features, in addition to some rock-infused csárdás arrangements, several re-written versions of popular songs (e.g. by János Bródy), as well as a new adaptation of "Szeretlek én" by György Fekete, which was initially a version of the famous Spanish song "Besame mucho" written by Consuelo Velázquez. Furthermore, there is a playful variation composed by Jenő Schwartz on Chuck Berry's "My Ding-A-Ling" entitled "Dingilingili;" and another Hungarian adaptation, also by Schwartz, of a Bosnian neo-folk song by the iconic Yugoslav-Bosnian singer Halid Bešlić, "I zanesen tom ljepotom" ("Enchanted by such beauty") under the title "Kisgalambom, gyöngyvirágom" ("My little dove and flower").¹⁴ The songs on this *Sógor* album thus create a new, hybrid, and transcultural musical genre which fuses national (Hungarian and Balkan) and international (Spanish, American) musical influences into a Hungarian-language, Vojvodina-based Yugoslav musical expression that can be culturally situated between East and West.

While the later albums continued to fuse folk elements with rock rhythms, an increasing number of original songs were composed by band members, first and foremost by Schwartz and Kazimity. The third, silver album, *Rólad álmodom ma éjjel* ("I dream of you tonight") features six original compositions out of a total of eleven. "Kisvirág" ("Little flower" by Schwartz and Kazimity)

¹⁴ This idea to exploit Balkan folk songs would soon be taken up by other "muskátli" bands such as *Szivárvány*.

borrowed a waltz rhythm while "Ne sírj, szívem" (by Schwartz) is written in a nostalgic "sláger" style. It uses a wide range of chords, including diminished chords while relying on a smooth transition between major and minor chords, as well as a rich array of sound effects. The lyrics of the songs, too, are noteworthy. For example, the title song, "Rólad álmodom ma éjjel" (by Schwartz and Kazimity) is a poetic text in rhyme that confesses the writer's romantic feelings for his beloved.

The quality of the musical arrangements was additionally made possible due to the band's state of the art instruments that produced a highly professional sound. Guitarist Ede Balázs played on Gibson and Framus guitars amplified by Marshall and Fender amplifiers; drummer and vocalist¹⁵ János Kazimity used Ludwig and Simmons drums as well as a Yamaha drum computer; Imre Pogány played an Ibanez bass guitar; and keyboard player Jenő Schwartz used a Yamaha electric grand piano, a Hammond C-3 organ, and a Yamaha DX7 synthesizer.¹⁶ The same brands of instruments were used at the time by some of the most popular rock bands worldwide and in Yugoslavia, which reflects the *Sógor* members' long-standing musical experience and careers in rock music and their familiarity with leading trends in the field.¹⁷ In sum, *Sógor Együttes* cannot be qualified as a jumped-up band composed of pub musicians who decided to mix together a few chords into some easy-listening kitsch.

Reception of the music of *Sógor Együttes*

Interviews with band members and articles discussing this new musical phenomenon appeared not only in every Hungarian-language periodical in Vojvodina and Croatia (i.e. *7 Nap*, *Magyar Szó*, *Magyar Képes Újság*, even the avant-garde *Új Symposion*) but also in major Serbo-Croat, Novi Sad (*Dnevnik*), Belgrade (*Politika*, *TV Novosti*), and Zagreb-based (*Start*) dailies and weeklies. Despite the phenomenal success and enthusiastic reception from the audiences, there were also negative critiques. Against some more skeptical views, already in their first interviews band members emphasized that their music was aimed at filling a neglected niche for a different cultural expression of the Yugoslav Hungarians in particular, an expression undervalued for decades by both the cultural institutions and the creators themselves (Tóth 1986.3: 16). Their success can also partly be attributed to new technological developments. By the 1980s practically every household owned either a turntable or a cassette player or both, not to mention a radio. In the words of István Tari: "Like a thirsty person in the desert, the audience lapped up this new music that was simple, even trivial, but after the long silence it caressed the audience's ears like the most beautiful music of the spheres" (Tari 1987: 60, translated by the authors). The band's first concert in Zombor was very well received and they were soon performing in other Vojvodina towns as well, for example Topolya/Bačka Topola, Szabadka/Subotica, Zenta/Senta, and others (Tóth 1986.1: 5). They soon capitalized on the success of their record sales by going on tours, first in Hungarian-majority

¹⁵ On the subsequent albums Kazimity will be replaced on the drums by Tibor Kudela, while Kazimity will remain the lead singer.

¹⁶ Information found on the back cover of the first album, *Sógor Rock*.

¹⁷ For instance, a Hammond B3 organ was used by bands such as Deep Purple, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, and Led Zeppelin.

villages near Sombor (as in Bácskertes/Kupusina in August 1986; Tóth 1986: 5). Their popularity quickly led to larger tours throughout Vojvodina (mostly in Bácska and Banat) and in Baranya, Croatia as well as in Hungary.

The band's success in Hungary merits special attention because eventually they became almost more popular there than in Yugoslavia. For example, at the time when their first album *Sógo Rock* was already reaching platinum sales by the end of 1986, the band's first official live concert in their hometown filled only about three-quarters of a smallish venue (fekete 1986: 6). By contrast, they took Hungary by storm, likely via pirated records or TV and radio broadcasts from Yugoslavia. Subsequently, *Sógor Együttes* was often on tours in Hungary, with several concerts as far as Budapest, and they remained popular there until their dissolution. Their success in Hungary may be partly due to the fact that larger concert halls were available, which could be filled with larger audiences (Tari 1987: 60).

Thanks to its diverse musical spectrum, *Sógor Együttes* appealed to various age groups so that everyone could find a song to their taste. The fact that their music was easy to dance to further boosted their popularity. Producer Kovács said that it was meant to be a return to traditions and Hungarian popular songs from the interwar years, with new elements added, as explained above (Dvizac 1987: 20). The live performances were usually followed by dance parties late into the night. Even representatives of Yugoslav record labels admitted that although this popular style of music appealing to a large audience had been pushed into the background for years, a tacit demand for such music had existed for decades (cs-ts 1987: 12). The demand referred here to Yugoslav Hungarian audiences as the music was not very well known outside of the Hungarian-speaking community.

Criticism of the "sógorism" genre

The earliest criticism of *Sógor Együttes* was directed at what some saw as their music's one-sidedness (Tóth 1986.3: 17). There were also voices that thought that folk music should be performed only with folk style instruments, such as tambourines, not in a hybrid rock style with electric guitars and synthesizers. But such voices were in a minority (Krekovics 1986: 18). Perhaps the fairest and most well-established criticism of this musical style in general, not directed in particular at the *Sógor* band, concerned its repetitiveness (Tari 1987: 60). With the rapid emergence of new bands that embraced a similar musical style, they all seemed to regurgitate the same songs. By 1987, owing to the immense popularity of the pioneer bands 3+2 and *Sógor Együttes*, an incredible number of over fifty new albums by various new groups was released, which necessarily led to market oversaturation, not to mention to music of dubious quality. This, however, can mainly be linked to the fact that the record labels were interested in a quick profit (during a period of high inflation) and opted for the safe option of covering already famous songs over and over again. The members of *Sógor Együttes* had anticipated this development from the beginning. After the release of their first album, they pointed out that the A side contained rewrites of famous songs, but that the B side was dedicated to new material they hoped to further develop (Krekovics 1986: 18). The band embraced innovation by composing more and more of their own songs. While the second album *Vörös bort ittam az este* (1987) was still a mix of the same type, already their third album

Rólad álmodom ma éjjel (1988) consisted mainly of songs composed by band members themselves. Unfortunately, this evolution was not as well received by the audiences because the band was trying to do something different than what they had initially set out to do. As a consequence, their last two albums did not reach the initial sales levels.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of *Sógor Együttes*'s innovative music, we argued that the story of this band and their music that came to life in the last decade of socialist Yugoslavia can be interpreted as a lasting testimony to how multi-faceted Yugoslav Hungarian, and especially Vojvodina Hungarian identity was (and is even today despite dramatic shifts). The band's music expresses the fallacy of any ethnic nationalism that seeks to divide and exclude rather than include complexity, as opposed to civic nationalism based on universal rights and a shared belonging to the same multiethnic state. We demonstrated that the music of *Sógor Együttes*, as reflected in their multiple musical influences spanning the twentieth century, illustrates the destroyed Yugoslav ideal of a hybrid identity in a political and cultural space between East and West, an ideal built on the official "brotherhood and unity" ideology that was a lived reality for the generations born after World War II.

Economic uncertainty coupled with the rise of Serbian and Croatian ethno-nationalism in the 1980s largely contributed to the dissolution of *Sógor Együttes* (as well as, temporarily, of the group 3+2). The "muskátli" bands that continued to operate, unfortunately, did not come near the musical level of *Sógor Együttes*. The tripartite Yugoslav Hungarian identity came under threat with the rise of violent ethnic nationalisms in both Serbia and Croatia. The combination of popular and folk songs (familiar to most Hungarians in the entire Carpathian basin), melancholy and nostalgic sounds with playful elements, Western rock'n'roll and Balkan influences made the music of *Sógor Együttes* easily accessible to a large audience. The use of rhythms and instruments from rock music appealed to younger people, although most fans came from the 30+ age group. It was this age group that would be hit hardest by the roaring Serbian and Croatian nationalist movements as they had grown up in relatively liberal socialist Yugoslavia with their formative and early career years tied to the tripartite Vojvodina Hungarian identity. Not only would they have to redefine this suddenly and violently lost identity but often fear for their lives from verbal and physical attacks by nationalist fanatics. Moreover, once the war broke out in the summer of 1991, many Vojvodina Hungarian men left the country or went into hiding to avoid the aggressive drafting policies of the Serbian-dominated Yugoslav army that often targeted ethnic Hungarians.¹⁸

We cannot know what would have happened to *sógorism* if Yugoslavia had continued to exist, if the state had survived and continued to embrace its diverse population, giving everybody equal chances. The only conclusion that can be drawn with certainty is that many of the upbeat as well as melancholy songs popularized by *sógorism* some forty years ago continue to be played at Vojvodina Hungarian radio stations, weddings, celebrations, social gatherings, and balls. This cultural legacy has thus survived both the region's destruction and its ethnic divisions.

¹⁸ See László 2021; Schwartz 2024.

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