

DANCE: FOLK PERFORMERS OF HUNGARY, IN BRONX

By ANNA KISSELGOFF JAN. 13, 1987



THE Hungarian State Folk Ensemble is not still another folk group. It is marvelous -crackling with dancing that snaps like a whip in a program framed successfully by a sophisticated context.

Sandor Timar, the company's director since 1981, has taken a cue from Hungary's noted modern composers. Zoltan Kodaly and Bela Bartok did not merely incorporate folk music into their own compositions, they also pioneered research into folk music.

This marriage of high art and popular sources was always felt on the program presented by the Hungarian dancers, singers and musicians Sunday night at the Lehman Center for the Performing Arts in the Bronx.

Last here in 1984, this unreservedly brilliant company can be seen again in the New York area when it performs tonight in West Islip, L.I. (St. John's High School); on March 27 at C. W. Post College in Greenvale, L.I., and on April 4 and 5 at Brooklyn College.

The format is shrewdly paced. There is a gypsy orchestra to warm the soul, along with several musical interludes - either instrumental or sung by a fine polyphonic chorus - to alternate with the dance entries.

Franz Liszt's familiar Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 gets a spectacular outpouring from the orchestra onstage under Laszlo Berki's direction. The percussionists on the cembalom, with their rapid-fire virtuosity, have a special opportunity to shine and do.

The same musicians, occasionally spelled by a smaller group, also accompany most of the dance numbers in the pit. Tamas Daroci Bardos is the conductor.

Music and dance are closely linked in these Hungarian dances - the accent in this program is on those from Transylvania - and dancers frequently sing. The extra touch is possibly needed. The dancing hews strongly to a reduced vocabulary. More often than not the men slap their feet or thighs, clap, stamp and shoot out a leg while twisting the knee.

This may seem like a prescription for limited repertory. Yet nothing is more surprising than the infinite variations that the men embroider upon these basic steps and the fantastic speed with which they do it. They are terrific.

Since most of the dances are couple dances - as opposed to the many circle and chain dances from other parts of Eastern or Central Europe - the women have plenty to do as well. Deceptively, they look subdued - all the while moving just as quickly, their feet closer to the floor.

The 14 entries on the program are seen against a huge lace doily on the backdrop. The opening "Dances of Kalocsa" introduce the men, hopping and stamping in boots and fedoras, followed by the women in flowered costumes. The rhythms are staccato but steady.

The mixed chorus then sings songs by Bartok, Kodaly and Lajos Bardos. Margit Feher was the fine soloist on this occasion. The first of the Transylvanian dances highlighted a group of stamping men who have thought up previously unsuspected ways of clicking their heels. Partnering the women, who are lifted feet together in Elizabethan style, they perform each packed movement phrase with throwaway assurance.

In another Transylvanian dance, Attila Adorjan was the superbly macho cavalier to Erzsebet Nagy, a young woman who so willingly allowed herself to be spun around by him. The slow rhythm of their first dance was full of twists of the body while the fast twirling "Forgatos" dance built up in complexity. An ensemble suite from Sovidek, also Transylvanian, was earthy, with the dancers often at a tilt, and featured a czardas full of jitterbug-like yanks and pulls for the couples.

If the company is obviously made up of professionally trained dancers, they look less balletic under the surface than many other folk groups. One could imagine real folk doing their dances, and it is a tribute to Mr. Timar that this essence is preserved.

Among the other numbers, one should single out the floor-slapping first dance in the second half of the program, the women's dance with bottles on their heads, and a spectacular clapping dancing for the men, who strut out in white culottes, black jackets, black boots, spurs and black peaked caps and who then proceed to clap in various rhythms - all in a no-nonsense manner.

A more bravura encounter in the "Herdsman's Dances" presents stick dances among several units of herdsmen, their social standing identified by the kind of stick or stave they wield. The horse herders are at the top of the hierarchy - the swineherds at the bottom. In all, a program to feed the eye and the mind.

A version of this review appears in print on January 13, 1987, on Page C00014 of the National edition with the headline: DANCE: FOLK PERFORMERS OF HUNGARY, IN BRONX. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)