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The *Cimbál* (Cimbalom) and Folk Music in Moravian Slovakia and Valachia

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Soon we were in the small towns of the picture region of Moravian Slovakia, Honza's "one whole piece of folklore," where they are not content with colour-washing their cottages in delicate blues, pastel pinks and yellows, but make garlands of the windows by framing them in painted flowers, and decorate the sides of the doorway in the same gay fashion. . . . Every village has its duck-pond, the natural centre from which everything else radiates.

—*Edith Pargeter, The Coast of Bohemia*¹

Though published in 1951, Edith Pargeter's description still rings true for many villages in present-day Moravia, a region comprising the eastern third of the Czech Republic. A musical ensemble consisting of fiddle, bass, cimbalom, and clarinet would not have been out of place playing outdoors next to the duck-ponds and flower-bedecked cottages. Related ensembles—now called *cimbálové muziky* or "cimbalom bands" (fig. 1)—have a long history in the region. This article presents an English-language introduction to the cimbalom, known in Czech as *cimbál*, as it is played in the Czech Republic, with a focus on the cimbalom's presence in Moravia.² Though the instrument's antecedents have waxed and

1. Ellis Peters [Edith Pargeter], *The Coast of Bohemia* (London: William Heinemann, 1950), 110, cf. 23. Pargeter's observations, taken from a travelogue account of a year spent in Bohemia, come from her description of a trip to Brno; the quotation comes from her Bohemian friend Honza, who made the remark while watching a parade of Moravian workers in Prague.

2. Jiří Plocek, a contemporary editor and folklorist, is adamant that the term cimbalom be used in English rather than the term dulcimer, which carries English and Appalachian connotations. Writing in the liner notes to a Moravian cimbalom recording, he states: "in our English translation, we use the unique term cimbalom. . . . The term is a current component of the English vocabulary, as defined in [standard dictionaries] . . . —'a complex zither of Hungary.' . . . We use the term cimbalom band for *cimbálová muzika*, and never dulcimer band"; Jiří Plocek, notes to *Prameny / Sources*, performed by Dalibor Štrunc (cimbalom), Gnosis compact disc G-Music 017, 2000. Somewhat cryptically, this note appears only in the Czech version of the liner notes. Since the comment also adopts a didactic tone, I suspect that it is aimed toward Czech-speaking *cimbál* players who may call the instrument a dulcimer in English. It shows,



FIGURE 1. Cimbalom Band with Jura Petrů (*cimbalista*), performing in Osvěti-
many, December 2006. Photo by the author.

waned in popularity since the eighteenth century, the cimbalom occupies a central role in Moravian folk music in the present.³

Moravian versions of the *cimbál* have not received much attention from English-language scholars.⁴ This article, therefore, provides an

nonetheless, that terminology regarding instruments is contentious and an issue to which musicians are attuned. I follow Plocek's usage whenever possible, but in quotations I have used the spelling and terminology of the source. Although the name cimbalom is most widely accepted in English, I use the term *cimbál* when referring to the instrument in specifically Moravian contexts, and *cimbalom* when referring to the instrument type more generally. Translations from Czech and German are mine unless otherwise noted.

3. The instrument is typically classified in Czech with the term *lidový hudební nástroj* or "folk music instrument." This term was favored by post-1945 European ethnologists, particularly the Study Group on Folk Music Instruments, organized in 1962 under the auspices of the International Folk Music Council and spearheaded by Erich Stockmann and Ernst Emsheimer. See Margaret J. Kartomi, *On Concepts and Classifications of Musical Instruments* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 198, and esp. Erich Stockmann, "Zum Terminus Volksmusikinstrument," *Forschung und Fortschritte* 35, no. 11 (1961): 337–40. Much of the group's work has been published in German, and it has been widely influential among Czech ethnologists.

4. Overview studies of the cimbalom in English, and more generally of the dulcimer instrument-type, include *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), s.v. "Dulcimer,"

introduction to these instruments. I present a holistic perspective on the cimbalom in Moravia, including basic organological description; historical, iconographic, and ethnographic evidence; an overview of musical style; and the instrument's role in instrumental ensemble music. The discussion begins with a description of types of *cimbály* played in Moravia.⁵ This is followed by an overview of the instrument's historical presence in the region, with particular attention to iconographic evidence and accounts from folklorists gathered in the late nineteenth century. I conclude with an account of the instrument's continuing importance in Moravian musical performance. In light of this investigation, it is clear that while the cimbalom's significance in Moravia has changed over time, the instrument has been central to Moravian traditional music in the twentieth century and beyond.

Moravia, along with Bohemia and Silesia, is historically part of the Bohemian Lands. At present, these regions fall largely within the borders of the Czech Republic. Most residents of these regions today have a sense of shared ethnicity, a sense that is strengthened by the use of Czech as a common language. Historically, however, the region has been multi-ethnic and multi-lingual. As early as the sixteenth century, German-speaking nobles and governments ruled the Bohemian Lands, and it was not until the independence of Czechoslovakia in 1918 that a Czech government held sovereignty. Among nineteenth-century intellectuals, Czech language and culture became markers of nationalist sentiment, but the area became predominantly Czech speaking only after the expulsion of most German speakers after the Second World War. In light of these histories, the music and musical instruments of the region were certainly influenced by a range of musical cultures. In order to avoid as much as possible the nationalist implications of "Czech Lands," I have followed the recent usage by historians, referring to the region as the "Bohemian Lands" to emphasize ethnic plurality rather than linguistic nationalism.⁶

by David Kettlewell; Paul M. Gifford, *The Hammered Dulcimer: A History* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001); and John Leach, "The Cimbalom," *Music & Letters* 53, no. 2 (1972): 134–42. Czech-language studies of the *cimbál* are cited throughout.

5. I have used the Czech plural form throughout the article. Thus, *cimbál* (sg.) becomes *cimbály* (pl.) and *cimbálová muzika* (sg.) becomes *cimbálové muziky* (pl.), etc.

6. Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), iv; see also Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948*

Even today, though under one national aegis, Moravia encompasses within its borders a number of folkloric regions. Although the cimbalom is played throughout the Bohemian Lands, my discussion focuses on the two Moravian regions that are most often associated with the cimbalom today. The most well-known of these is *Slovácko*, a region on the Czech side of the Czech–Slovakian border also called Moravian Slovakia. The second region is *Valašsko*, a region in north Moravia close to the Czech–Polish border.⁷

The Cimbalom in Moravia

The *cimbál* is a chordophone with multiple courses of strings stretched parallel to the attached resonator, typically sounded by hammers. Thus, it may be basically described as a board zither with an attached resonator. English-speaking organologists generally group this type of trapezoidal box zither in the dulcimer family.⁸ Cimbaloms are found in various parts of central Europe, particularly in Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic.

Many theories have been suggested to explain the widespread existence of seemingly related box zithers throughout central Asia, Europe, the British Isles and North America, and east Asia. Seeking its origins, Curt Sachs suggested that the instrument type originated with the Persian *santūr*. His observation that “the migration of the dulcimer was strange enough” was based on diffusionist thinking.⁹ Sachs wrote that the instrument initially spread throughout the Middle East and was later distributed by musicians and traders via North Africa and Spain into Europe. More recent research suggests that the instrument was carried via maritime routes to east Asia in the seventeenth century.¹⁰ This model

(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); a musical viewpoint on ethnicity in the Bohemian Lands is offered by Bruno Nettl, “Ethnicity and Musical Identity in the Czech Lands: A Group of Vignettes,” in *Music and German National Identity*, ed. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 269–87.

7. This study is based on research carried out during 2005 and 2006 through fieldwork in north and south Moravia.

8. See Kettlewell, “Dulcimer.”

9. Curt Sachs, *The History of Musical Instruments* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1940), 258.

10. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Yangqin,” by Alan R. Thrasher; Edward Ho and Xu Pingxing, “The Manchurian Yangqin,” *Chinese Music* 18, no. 3 (1995): 50–55.

has been represented in maps that suggest lines of diffusion throughout the world based on the current dispersion of the instrument type.¹¹ Ivan Mačák proposed the concept of “human geography” as a rubric to map the presence of the cimbalom throughout central Europe; the theory posits that material objects may be studied as trace indicators for the movement of groups of people in the region.¹² Research into instrument construction, however, suggests that hammered dulcimers may have developed independently in Europe.¹³

Small and Large Instruments. Two basic types of cimbalom are found in Moravia today. The most common is the *velký cimbál* (large cimbalom), usually referred to as the *cimbál*. This instrument is based on a nineteenth-century design that originated in Budapest. The instrument stands on legs of its own, is about one-and-a-half meters wide, and a meter deep. Also played is a smaller, related instrument called the *malý cimbál* or *cimbálek* (small cimbalom). This instrument measures about one meter wide and half a meter deep. Both instruments are used in similar ways and in similar ensembles, though the *velký cimbál* is much more common. The larger instrument produces a louder sound and also has a wider chromatic range, which makes it more suitable for arrangements calling for complex harmonies.

The *malý cimbál* (fig. 2) is the older instrument. It is a medium-sized trapezoid that represents a section of an equilateral triangle.¹⁴ The bottom (long) edge typically measures between 100 and 120 cm, the top between 57 and 70 cm, and each side (at the right and left) from 45 to 60 cm.¹⁵ The instrument is often described as “portable” (*portativní* or *přenosný*) since players can play while standing, by bracing it against the

11. See Kettlewell, “Dulcimer,” 684.

12. Ivan Mačák, “Zur Entwicklung der Musikinstrumente im westpannonischen Raum aus der Sicht der geographischen Determination,” in *Dörfliche Tanzmusik im westpannonischen Raum: Vorträge des 17. Seminars für Volksmusikforschung, Eisenstadt 1988*, ed. Walter Deutsch (Wien: A. Schendl, 1990), 189–207.

13. Herbert Heyde, “Frühgeschichte des europäischen Hackbretts (14.–16. Jahrhundert),” *Deutsches Jahrbuch der Musikwissenschaft für 1973–77* (1978): 135–72; Gifford, *Hammered Dulcimer*, 26–40.

14. Ludvík Kunz, *Die Volksmusikinstrumente der Tschechoslowakei*, ser. 1, vol. 2, part 1 of *Handbuch der europäischen Volksmusikinstrumente*, ed. Ernst Emsheimer and Erich Stockmann (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1974), 61.

15. Kunz, *Volksmusikinstrumente*, 60; Jaroslav Nehýbl, “Cimbalista Jan Myška,” *Kravařsko* 12, nos. 5–7 (December 1949): 50.



FIGURE 2. Nineteenth-century Moravian *cimbálek*; item no. 23 in the permanent exhibition “Folk Music Instruments in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia” at NÚLK (Národní ústav lidové kultury / National Institute of Folk Culture) in Strážnice, Czech Republic. Photo by the author, courtesy of NÚLK.

abdomen or supporting it with a leather strap slung about the neck.¹⁶ Two depictions of eighteenth-century traveling musicians in a group of violin, bass, and *cimbál* show the instrument being held by the left arm and played only by the right hand.¹⁷

Despite such illustrations, it is difficult to imagine the instrument being played for extended periods while standing. I estimate that most of the small instruments weigh at least thirty pounds (ca. 14 kg), and some are recorded at more than sixty pounds. Ludvík Kunz suggests that by the nineteenth century, the *malý cimbál* was most often supported on a chair or on the player’s lap; alternatively, it was placed on a tabletop.¹⁸

The design of the nineteenth-century *malý cimbál* appears to have been relatively consistent throughout Bohemia and Moravia.¹⁹ Kunz, working with data from a group of six nineteenth-century “museum exemplars” of *malé cimbály* from Moravia and western Bohemia thought to date between the years 1827 and 1888, reported similarities in playing style, size, and range.²⁰ He suggested that instruments were often placed on tabletops or the player’s lap because this allowed the player’s forearms

16. Although *přenosný* is the term widely used in everyday speech, the archaic term *portativní* is used in some organological writing.

17. See Pavel Kurfürst, *Hudební nástroje* (Prague: Togga, 2002), 448–49.

18. Kunz, *Volksmusikinstrumente*, 64.

19. *Ibid.*, 59.

20. *Ibid.*, 63–64.

to be freely used to dampen strings if immediate quiet was desired. He also described a three-fingered hold in which the mallet was balanced between the index and middle fingers while kept in place by the thumb. (Currently, mallets are held similarly but without involving the thumb, which creates a looser grip; see fig. 11.) The range of the instruments varied, typically averaging two-and-a-half to three octaves (since older instruments are often missing strings at the top or bottom of the register, it is not always possible to confirm exact ranges).²¹ These instruments are generally not fully chromatic and could often play in only a few keys.²² In 2006, I noted museum displays featuring similar *malé cimbály* at the “Valachian Museum in Nature” in Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, the Zither Museum in Ostrava, and the musical instrument exhibit at the National Institute of Folk Culture (NÚLK) in Strážnice.²³

The central strings of these instruments are laid out around a C-major scale (fig. 3), a design that may be due to physical convenience. This diatonic scale is easily produced by four courses of strings divided in 3:2 ratios, which produce perfect fifths.²⁴ The arrangement of these pitches seems to be a core layout that has remained constant on Moravian instruments at least since the nineteenth century.

The larger concert cimbalom developed in the nineteenth century (fig. 4). This is the instrument usually described as *cimbál* in modern Czech, though differentiated from similar instruments as the *velký cimbál*. The central strings of the instrument follow the schema outlined above. Thus, Kettlewell notes that the large cimbalom, despite its “plethora of notes” is still “essentially based on a C major scale.”²⁵ This shared layout means that switching between the two sizes does not present a great challenge to the player.

Josef Václav Schunda, an instrument maker of Czech origin working in Budapest, developed the modernized design from the smaller instrument around 1874. Schunda expanded the cimbalom’s range, added

21. Kurfürst, *Hudební nástroje*, 450; Kunz, *Volksmusikinstrumente*, 64.

22. A listing of small cimbaloms that fit this description and are held in Moravian museums is found in Kunz, *Volksmusikinstrumente*, 59–64.

23. The Rožnov museum is an outdoor museum. The NÚLK exhibit is discussed in Ludvík Kunz, ed., *Nástroje lidové hudby v Čechách, na Moravě, a ve Slezsku* (Strážnice: Ústav lidové kultury, 1993).

24. One defining feature of the modern *cimbál* is the complex series of bridges that divide strings, sometimes into three sections. Pitches on either side of the bridge are typically separated by five, six, or seven half tones; that is, perfect fourths, augmented fourths, and perfect fifths.

25. Kettlewell, “Dulcimer,” 682; see also Gifford, *Hammered Dulcimer*, 29.

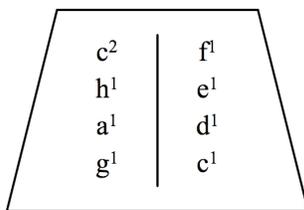


FIGURE 3. Central strings divided at 3:2 ratios produce a C-major scale.



FIGURE 4. Schunda cimbalom displayed with the instruments of a *cimbálová muzika*, item no. 24 in the permanent exhibition “Folk Music Instruments in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia” at NÚLK in Strážnice, Czech Republic. Photo by the author, courtesy of NÚLK.

dampers and a pedal, and incorporated four legs, which allowed the instrument to stand on its own.²⁶ A single-piece, cast-iron frame placed between the boards holding the tuning pegs allowed the range to expand to four-and-a-half octaves: the instrument could now support greater

26. These changes are often described in Czech as *zlepšení* (improvements).

string tension, thereby enabling strings to be added in the upper and lower registers. The greater tension also allowed the instrument to be much louder, but the heavier construction sacrificed portability. Richard Spottswood suggests that Schunda's design was perhaps inspired by the piano, which his cimbaloms "rivalled in size and importance in nineteenth-century Hungary and Romania."²⁷ Czech players recognize that Schunda was working in Budapest; however, they are quick to emphasize his Czech roots. Plocek writes that "throughout the first half of the 20th century, some larger instruments arrived in Moravia from Hungary. Their maker was J. V. Schunda, from Budapest, but of Czech origin."²⁸ Instrument historian Pavel Kurfürst specifies that Schunda was from Říčany u Prahy, suggesting that the maker was familiar with Czech *malý cimbál* designs, since he grew up near Prague.²⁹

In the 1920s, the Bohak company in Budapest, a successor to Schunda's workshop, developed a lighter metal frame.³⁰ At the same time, the sound holes in the upper surface of the resonator were eliminated in favor of openings to the side of the string area. The range was also expanded due to the stronger frame, which enabled more pitches in the high register and a completion of the chromatic series in the low register. Schunda's Budapest workshop still produces instruments under the name Bohak, although the brand was known as *Kozmosz* during the Communist period in Hungary.³¹

The large concert cimbalom (*velký cimbál*) was not noted in Moravia until the twentieth century. A folklore group in Strážnice (near Slovakia) was photographed with one as early as 1914, but the large instrument did not become commonplace throughout the region until after 1945.³² Since that time, the large cimbalom has predominated in cimbalom bands throughout Moravia. By 2006, the small cimbalom was something of a historical rarity.

27. Dick [Richard K.] Spottswood, notes to *The Art of the Cymbalom: The Music of Joseph Moskowit, 1916–1953*, Rounder CD 1126, 1996.

28. Plocek, notes to *Prameny / Sources*.

29. Kurfürst, *Hudební nástroje*, 453.

30. The innovations developed in the Bohak workshop are discussed in more detail in Gifford, *Hammered Dulcimer*, 140–41.

31. My understanding of the twentieth-century developments comes from interviews with the instrument maker Vladimír Holíš in Kozlovice (June 8 and November 5, 2006), and my visit to the Budapest workshop in December 2006.

32. Kurfürst, *Hudební nástroje*, 453.

Organography of a Standard Moravian Cimbalom. The instruments described here, which I played in Moravia in 2006, were from the Holak workshop in Kozlovice, north Moravia.³³ They were modeled after the large concert cimbaloms manufactured by Bohak since the 1930s, but with special modifications and improvements by the instrument maker Vladimír Holiš.³⁴ Although his instruments look much like Bohak models, Holiš has strived to achieve brighter tone and crisp articulation on the highest strings (*c'''* and higher). Bohak instruments (fig. 5) were the most common cimbaloms found in Moravia during my fieldwork. Many Bohak instruments, however, have been refurbished by Moravian instrument repairers. When I visited Holiš in June 2006, he suggested that while refurbishing old or damaged instruments brought in less money, it was a good way to learn about how the instruments were made.³⁵

The Bohak cimbalom is a Hungarian concert instrument.³⁶ Such instruments are recognizable by their natural wood finish (usually stained honey, light brown or dark brown), decorative leaf and floral side-panel carvings, and wooden legs with elaborate carving that bulges outward toward the top (see fig. 5). The carvings seem to be most typical of the large Hungarian cimbalom, since smaller nineteenth-century *cimbáleks* from Moravia lack similar decorative elements. These older instruments do, however, feature six-petal rosettes covering two sound holes in the cover of the resonating chamber (fig. 6). Schunda's instruments simplified this design into six small, round holes surrounding a larger hole (fig. 7). The sound holes were eliminated in the 1920s in favor of narrow side-slits (placed between the top resonator board and tuning blocks at the right and left edges of the frame) in an attempt to make the instrument louder (fig. 8).³⁷

33. Although the name appears to be modeled on the Hungarian brand Bohak, Holiš explains that it is actually an acronym of his surname (Holiš), nickname (Lád'a), and his hometown (Kozlovice). The Holak workshop has maintained a website at <http://www.holak.cz/> since 2004.

34. Lucie Uhlíková, "Hudební folklor: Hudební nástroje, nástrojové seskupení," in *Lidová kultura na Moravě*, ed. Josef Jančář, Vlastivěda moravská země a lid, n.s., 10 (Brno: Muzejní a vlastivědná společnost, 2000), 286–303; Boleslav Navrátil, "Od tance a valašské muziky k hudebnímu řemeslu," *Moravskoslezský den*, May 28, 1997, p. 9.

35. In addition to Holak, other brands found in Moravia in 2005 and 2006 included *Primas*, instruments made during a short period during the 1950s by the Lídl Company, and *Všiansky*, made by Pavel Všianský in Brno. Also present were instruments made and repaired by Jiří Galuška from south Moravia.

36. János Pap, "The Acoustical Characteristics of the Concert Cimbalom," *Systematische Musikwissenschaft* 6 (1998): 189–206.

37. *Ibid.*, 190.



FIGURE 5. A Bohak cimbalom. This is the instrument design seen most often in Moravia. Leaf and floral carvings are visible on the front and side panels. Collection of KB (Konzervatoř Brno / Brno Conservatory). Photo by the author, courtesy of KB.

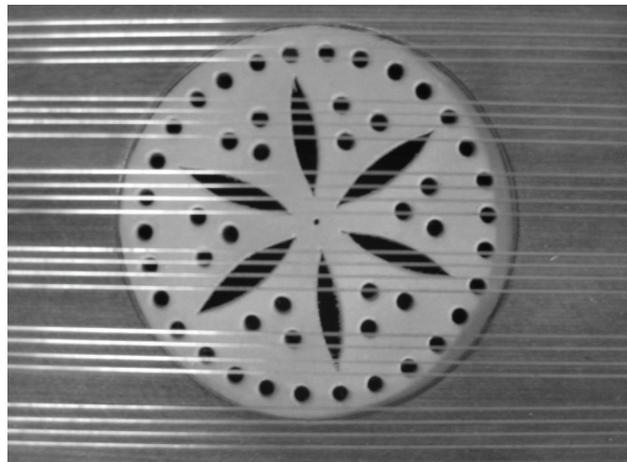


FIGURE 6. Nineteenth-century six-petal rosette covering sound hole on a Bohak cimbalom; leather, about 6 cm in diameter. Reproduction based on Josef Kotek's instrument (ca. 1906); the reproduction was made in 2005 by Vladimír Holiš, in Kozlovice, Moravia. Photo by the author, courtesy of V. Holiš.



FIGURE 7. Sound holes on the resonating board of a Schunda cimbalom. At the time of the photo (June 2006), this instrument was undergoing extensive renovation at the workshop of Vladimír Holiš in Kozlovice, Moravia. Photo by the author, courtesy of V. Holiš.

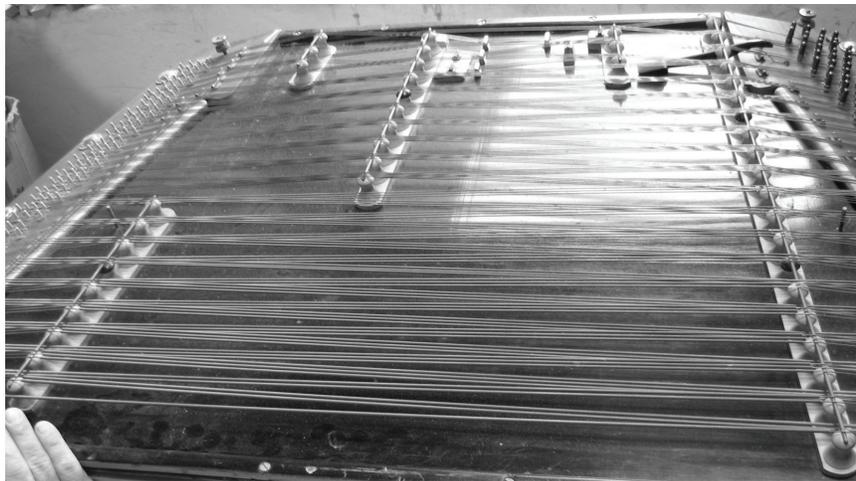


FIGURE 8. The playing console of a modern Moravian cimbalom from the Holak workshop. In this photograph from June 2006, taken of an instrument in the final stages of construction, the right and left of the soundboard and the side-slit sound holes are more easily visible since the outer case has not yet been installed. Photo by the author, courtesy of V. Holiš.

The interior of the instrument is a hollow resonating chamber (fig. 9) that amplifies the vibrations of the metal strings. The high tension of the strings necessitates the use of a supporting frame (*pancíř*) that prevents the instrument from collapsing or bending inward over time. For this frame, Holiř uses two aluminum braces anchored against the tuning blocks by two steel plates at either side. Twelve to twenty cylindrical wooden soundposts (*duře*) support an upper resonating surface (*rezonanční dřevo*). This soundboard, formerly the site of the sound holes, is smooth on the top but reinforced on the underside by thin maple strips. According to Holiř, the location of the soundposts was a matter of great secrecy among nineteenth- and twentieth-century manufacturers in Budapest.

The instruments are about one-and-a-half meters wide and one meter deep. The strings are stretched over the soundboard at inclined planes approximately 2–4 cm above the resonating surface. Strings pass over saddles at each side of the instrument, then over raised bridges at the center or opposite side, so that they are raised at one end or in the center. The effect is to create two different planes for the strings, which aids the player in differentiating between strings when striking them with the

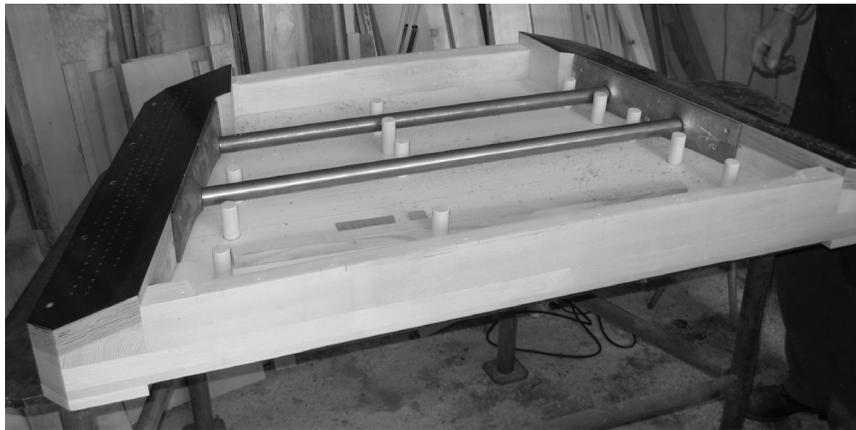


FIGURE 9. Interior of a Holak cimbalom in the middle stages of construction (June 2006), showing oak soundboard and tuning-peg blocks, metal supporting frame, and soundposts. (The soundposts in this photograph were set only for demonstration, as most instrument makers are secretive about where they place them in completed instruments.) Photo by the author, courtesy of V. Holiř.

hammers. The lowest pitch is *C* and the range extends chromatically upward in half-steps to *a'''*. The low *C* is a single string, pitches *C#–D* are courses of two strings, *D#–f#* have three strings, and all pitches from *g–a'''* are courses with four strings.

The bridges are chessmen-type posts glued atop thin wooden base-board strips (see figs. 8 and 10). Brass rods (4 mm in diameter) line the top of each row of bridges and provide the saddle point where the strings cross the bridges. The strings are anchored at the left side of the instrument and adjusted with tuning pegs at the right side. The strings from *C–f#* are not divided; however, each string from *g* upward is divided at least once by a bridge, which means that each course of strings produces two pitches (or three in the extreme upper register). A central row



FIGURE 10. Chessmen bridges and dampers in the upper register of a Holak cimbalom. The detail is of the upper right-hand corner of the instrument. At the top, metal tuning posts are visible, the horizontal wooden bar in the middle is the damper bar, immediately below this is a row of chessmen bridges topped by a brass rod, and below this is the reverse damper for *a'''*. This instrument is owned by KB (see FIGURE 5). Photo by the author, courtesy of KB.

of bridges divides the strings in the mid-range of the instrument. The highest course of strings is held down by inverted metal saddles in the center of the soundboard that create the shortest string sections and highest pitches.

Another distinctive feature is the damping mechanism (see fig. 10). The system is based on two bars of felt dampers (at the left and right edges) that stop the strings from vibrating. The dampers are held against the strings by metal springs. When the foot pedal is depressed, the damper bars lift to allow the strings to resonate. Some pitches in the high register are not damped since they are played on a middle portion of the string that is not reached by the side dampers. The course for *d'''* uses a reverse damper mechanism connected to the main bar by a lever, which dampens the strings from below rather than above.

According to Holiš, his instruments are highly valued for the quality of materials and workmanship. He uses wood from forests in the Beskydy hills around Kozlovice, which is prepared and then cured for several years. He prefers trees cut from shaded groves and harvested ideally when they are 90 to 110 years old. After being cut and sawn into planks, the spruce wood is aged outdoors for at least four-and-a-half years but not more than seven. Red oak is the optimal wood for the blocks that anchor the strings and the soundboard. The soundboard is a laminate of spruce wood (about 6.5 mm thick) that is strengthened by strips of maple. The cylindrical soundposts are typically spruce; the chessmen bridges and bridge baseboards are maple. The instrument contains nearly thirty kilograms of metal hardware (strings, tuning pegs, frame, and screws), about twenty kilograms of which is the metal support frame.³⁸

All the Moravian players I met during my research used Hungarian-style hammers (*paličky*) with fitted handgrips (fig. 11).³⁹ These are not interchangeable between hands, and thus hammers are kept in pairs.⁴⁰ Many professional Moravian players order custom-fitted handgrips from woodworkers who carve hammer shafts to individual specifications.

38. This paragraph is based on my interview with Vladimír Holiš, Kozlovice, June 8, 2006.

39. A more diverse array of hammer designs was common up until the 1950s; see Kunz, *Volksmusikinstrumente*, 63.

40. Cf. Laurence Kaptain, "The Hungarian Cimbalom," *Percussive Notes* 28, no. 5 (1990): 8–14.

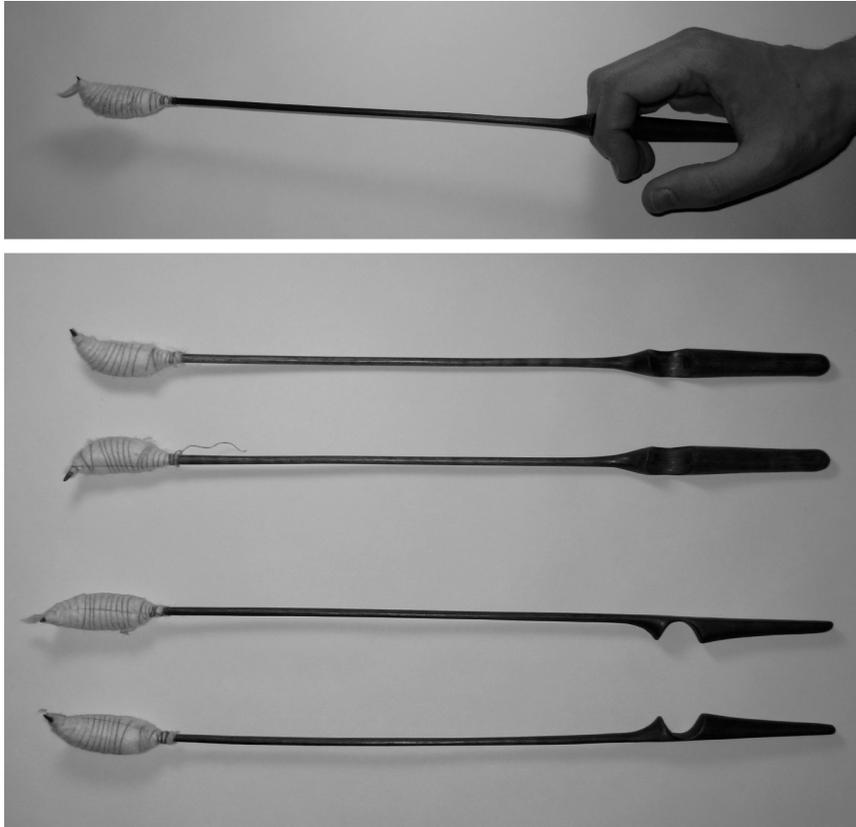


FIGURE 11. Typical Moravian hammer handhold and design. The upper photograph illustrates a handhold for the right hand: the hammer is grasped loosely between the index and middle fingers, allowing it to rebound easily from the strings. The hammer is balanced against the palm for control. The lower photograph shows the typical hammer design used by Moravian *cimbál* players interviewed in 2005 and 2006. The wooden shafts of both sets pictured were created by Vladimír Holiš in his Kozlovice workshop. The cotton batting is usually wound by players themselves to the desired thickness and density. Photographs by the author.

Hammers are made of wood, and they typically range from 25 to 33 cm in length and are about 4 mm in diameter. This design is very slender and long, which allows the shafts to bend significantly when the hammers

strike the string.⁴¹ The wood of the hammers is usually stained gray, dark red or dark brown. The tip of each hammer's wooden shaft is curved in a hook, which is usually wrapped with cotton. The cotton is secured by wrapping it with thin cotton thread. Players wrap each hammer individually and usually carry multiple sets. The hardness of the cotton can be manipulated during wrapping, and since hammers of varying hardness and weight produce different timbres, they are often tied with different colors of thread to differentiate between them. Hammers with unwrapped tips, or tips covered with thin sponge or thread, are sometimes used to produce a more brittle, metallic sound.

Although I focus in this article on the historical roots of the cimbalom in Moravia and on instrumental ensembles, it is worth noting that the instrument has seen a resurgence in recent years. In particular, the cimbalom band *Hradišť'an* has toured internationally and collaborated with non-Czech musicians. Contemporary composers and performers have used the instrument outside of traditional genres: pianist Emil Viklický and cimbalom player Zuzana Lapčíková compose and perform jazz fusion rooted in Moravian traditional music, and the Brno-based musician Dalibor Štrunc has included cimbalom in his "folk" group.⁴² In addition, the number of cimbalom bands has exploded: from an approximate seventy-five in the entire region of Moravia in 1983, in 2010 almost two hundred separate groups were registered in the same region.⁴³

The manufacturing of instruments has also grown in Moravia. The first major instrument maker was a collective workshop that produced

41. The cotton-wrapped ends bounce readily off the strings, but the length of the hammers also causes the tip of the mallet to remain in contact with the string before rebounding. This feature of the playing style gives the Moravian cimbalom style its distinctive mellow tone, which is often less strident than that of players in Hungary or Romania.

42. The group is "folk" in the singer-songwriter tradition (e.g., Bob Dylan), rather than in the sense of traditional Moravian music. Ambiguity arises in translation since the genre is often referred to with the adjective *folkový* in Czech, while traditional "folk" music is usually referenced by the adjective *lidový*; details on the history and development of this *folk* style are offered in Helena Pavličková, "The History of Czech Modern Folk Music," *Musicologica Olomucensia* 5 (2000): 113–20.

43. The 1980s figure is from Ludvík Kunz, ed., *Musica per Salterio: 2nd World Congress of Cimbalomists, 26–30 November* (Brno: Moravian Museum, 1993; pamphlet of conference proceedings, 60 pp., author's collection), and the 2010 figure comes from my tally of registered folklore groups on the website of the *Folklorní sdružení České republiky* (<http://www.folklornisdruzeni.cz/soubory>). Presumably, the total number of groups, including unregistered groups, is even greater than two hundred.

about one hundred instruments under the name *Primas*. The brand entered production in Moravský Krumlov in 1957, but it was cancelled in the 1960 economic plan for “lacking future business outlook.”⁴⁴ Until the 1990s, most instruments were imported from Hungary.⁴⁵ A generation of three instrument makers began creating cimbaloms in Moravia in the 1990s: in Brno, the workshop of Pavel Všianský; in Uherské Hradiště, Jiří Galuška; and in Kozlovice, Vladimír Holiš. All three create instruments based on Schunda’s large cimbalom design. As noted above, much of the research for this article was conducted with Holak instruments created at Holiš’s workshop.

Historical Representations of Dulcimers in the Bohemian Lands

Paintings, icons, and book illustrations are the primary sources of knowledge about the cimbalom in the Bohemian Lands prior to 1900.⁴⁶ They indicate that the cimbalom was most likely used in church music and for entertainment among educated nobility and landowners.

Precursors of the cimbalom had probably been played in central Europe, including Moravia, for centuries. No evidence, however, indicates that the instrument was played outside of elite circles, primarily landed nobility, until after 1700. Czech organologist Pavel Kurfürst points to the psaltery as the most obvious precursor in the region: “The first depiction of a psaltery from Bohemia is dated in the year 1320. We meet with a highly perfected construction of the instrument in the Czech lands through an icon [*ikonogram*] from the year 1359. The construction of the European psaltery hardly changed until the last third of the seventeenth century.”⁴⁷ A “three-cornered musical instrument”

44. Kunz, *Musica per Salterio*, 59.

45. Jan Rokyta, interview by Jesse A. Johnston, Zlín, November 11, 2006.

46. Many of the mentioned iconographic representations were gathered in Tomislav Volek and Stanislav Jareš, *Dějiny české hudby v obrazech: Od nejstarších památek do vybudování Národního divadla* (History of Czech music in pictures) (Prague: Editio Supraphon, 1977). The book reproduces copies of illustrations available in the Czech National Library and National Museum in Prague. The images in this book do not include those reproduced by Gifford, who suggests that the *cimbál* was played in Bohemian Jewish communities before the 1800s (Gifford, *Hammered Dulcimer*, 105–10). An explanation may be that the images available to Gifford were not available to Czech scholars in the 1970s; alternatively, it may be an attempt to downplay Jewish presence in the Bohemian Lands.

47. Kurfürst, *Hudební nástroje*, 448.

(*nástrog hudebný tréhranný*), also suspected to be a psaltery, was noted by a writer from Veleslavín in 1598.⁴⁸ Psalteries are similar in construction to the *cimbál*—both are box zithers, often in square or trapezoidal shapes, with multiple courses of strings. By 1650, some European psalteries reached a range of three octaves.⁴⁹ There is, however, a key difference in playing style. The term “psaltery,” at least in scholarly usage, typically connotes an instrument plucked with the fingers or a plectrum; in contrast, “dulcimer” indicates a box zither sounded with hammers.⁵⁰

Even considering other pictorial evidence, information about the instrument’s existence in the Bohemian Lands prior to the nineteenth century is scant. A woodcut by Jonáš Bubenka, appearing in the first Bohemian edition (1685) of philosopher, linguist, and educator Jan Ámos Komenský’s language textbook *Orbis sensualium pictus*,⁵¹ shows a zither with two round sound holes on a table among various other instruments, including plucked and bowed strings, a bell and a rattle, panpipes (*organo pastorito*), a Jew’s harp, trumpets, drums, bagpipes, a clavi-chord, and organ. Notably, the illustration in this edition of the book features an instrument at the right side of table (no. 8) that represents the *cimbál* rather than the dulcimer shown in versions published in England (fig. 12).⁵² The illustration offers little information about the setting in which the instrument was played, although it suggests that the

48. Kunz, *Volksmusikinstrumente*, 64.

49. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Psaltery,” § 3: “Baroque, Classical, and Modern,” by Beryl Kenyon de Pascual.

50. Kettlewell, “Dulcimer,” 678.

51. First published Nuremberg, 1658; first Bohemian edition: Levoča, 1685, with Latin, German, Hungarian, and Czech. Komenský (1592–1670), better known in English as Comenius, is recognized as a major figure in Czech intellectual history despite having lived much of his life in exile: he left Bohemia in response to the suppression of Protestantism in 1627, and lived the rest of his life outside the Bohemian Lands. Nonetheless, he is recognized in Moravia as a Moravian, and a museum in Uherský Brod commemorates his birthplace.

52. The image, which I have consulted and present in figure 12, comes from a reprint of *Orbis sensualium pictus* (Levoča, 1728), a copy of which is now held in Prague at the National Library of the Czech Republic, Division of Manuscripts, number 45 D 9, p. 169. Bubenka prepared his illustrations from the initial 1658 edition, which may account for the woodcut’s similarity to earlier editions. An English version of the book was published in London by Charles Hoole in 1659, just a year after its initial publication; an informative facsimile edition of the Hoole printing (showing the illustration of the dulcimer) is Joannes Amos Comenius, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus: Facsimile of the Third London Edition 1672*, introduced by James Bowen (Sydney, Australia: Sydney University Press, 1967).

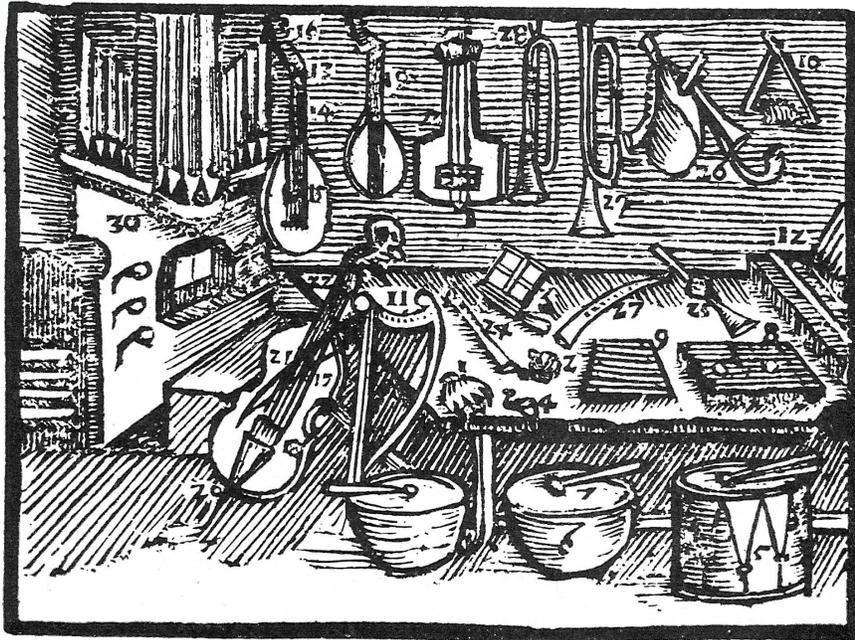


FIGURE 12. Jonáš Bubenka, “Música instrumenta sunt, quæ edunt vocem,” woodcut with trapezoidal zither, in Jan Ámos Komenský’s language text *Orbis sensualium pictus* (Levoča: S. Brever, 1685). The instrument is on the table. This reproduction comes from a 1728 reprint of the book in Levoča, held in Prague at the National Library of the Czech Republic, Division of Manuscripts, number 45 D 9, p. 169.

instrument might be supported on a table and was probably similar in size to the nineteenth-century small *cimbáls* recorded in Moravia. The accompanying text groups the instrument among those that make a sound when struck, which indicates the playing style for a dulcimer rather than for a psaltery.

The *cimbál* was a “fashionable favorite” in central European “high” music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵³ A pen-and-ink drawing of a band from 1745 shows the instrument in a seven-person

53. Kurfürst, *Hudební nástroje*, 448. “High” music (*vysoká hudba*) suggests music among the elite: royal courts, the estates of landowners, and perhaps monasteries. The term suggests a growing gap between “learned” (high) and popular (low) cultures during this period; see Andrew Lass, “What Keeps the Czech Folk ‘Alive?’” *Dialectical Anthropology* 14 (1989): 7–8, and Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 270–75.

band including strings, trumpet, clarinet, and drums. The band is playing for couples dancing a quadrille at a landowner's manor house, indicating the typical position of the instrument as a courtly instrument up until the eighteenth century.⁵⁴

Czech scholars have suggested that the instrument was exclusively played among the educated nobility prior to 1700 since there is no known evidence to suggest that it was played in the popular sphere.⁵⁵ It seems likely, however, that the instrument would have been known by people in all classes of society since it was played for entertainment.⁵⁶ By 1700, images suggest that the *cimbál* was probably being played in towns and villages around the Bohemian Lands by traveling musicians, outside the sphere of court music. One depiction on a decorative dartboard (fig. 13) shows a singing man holding aloft a beer stein, presumably in an inn or public house. Behind him sits a three-man musical ensemble of violin, *cimbál*, and three-string bass. The example has been dated to around 1780.⁵⁷

Another depiction of the instrument comes from an early collection of Czech songs (fig. 14), the 1825 *České národní písně* (Czech folk songs) edited by Jan Ritter von Rittersberg.⁵⁸ The first volume presents song texts—three hundred in Czech and fifty in German—and the second offers melodies for the texts plus an additional fifty tunes for folk dances. A color lithograph featuring a small *cimbál* appears as the frontispiece to the collection's second volume; the lithograph was realized by Antonín Machek from a drawing by Josef Bergler.⁵⁹ In the picture, a four-man band with a trapezoidal zither and what appear to be a reed instrument, a horn, and a bagpipe accompany a lively couple-dance in a pub.⁶⁰ The *cimbál* is supported on a table and played with two hammers held be-

54. Volek and Jareš, *Dějiny české hudby v obrazech*, no. 187.

55. Kurfürst, *Hudební nástroje*, 448.

56. See Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 270.

57. Ludvík Kunz, "Zur Ikonographie der Hanna: An der Wende vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert," *Lětopis* Reihe C, nos. 6/7 (1964): 109–23.

58. Rittersberg's collection is part of the earliest recorded song-collection activities in the Bohemian Lands, as pointed out by Zdeňka Pilková, "Eighteenth Century Folk Music in the Czech Lands: Comments on the State of Research," in *Janáček and Czech Music: Proceedings of the International Conference (Saint Louis, 1988)*, ed. Michael Beckerman and Glen Bauer (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1995), 159; see also the critical edition, Jaroslav Markl, ed., *Nejstarší sbírky českých lidových písní* (Prague: Supraphon, 1987).

59. Markl, *Nejstarší sbírky*, 90n9.

60. *Ibid.*, 198.



FIGURE 13. Three-man *cimbal* ensemble from Haná, ca. 1780. Painted on a wooden shooting target with oil paints, 88 cm in diameter. The text at the top reads “Na rozlauenú” (Farewell). The man in the center appears to be singing. Courtesy Vyškov Provincial Museum, Vyškov, Czech Republic.

tween the thumb and index finger. Rittersberg describes the *cimbal* as an “old favorite national instrument” in the text.⁶¹

The image has been critiqued as an unrealistic depiction of folk music, and this has caused it to be dismissed by Czech scholars. Discussing the Rittersberg collection, Jaroslav Markl notes that the “all but grotesque instrumentation of the band simply does not answer to reality, and in the illustration of individual instruments there are mistakes.”⁶²

61. Quoted in Kunz, *Volksmusikinstrumente*, 65.

62. *Ibid.*



FIGURE 14. Antonín Machek, “České národní písně” (color lithograph, 21 by 28 cm), frontispiece to Jan Ritter von Rittersberg’s collection *České národní písně / Böhmische Volkslieder* (1825). The banner is in both Czech and German. At right, a small instrumental ensemble features the *cimbal*. From a copy of the book in Prague, National Library of the Czech Republic, Music Department, number 59 A 6391.

The *cimbal* appears to lack any bridges and may be “upside down” since the player typically sits at the longest side (the lowest pitches are usually closest to the player); yet, the manner of playing appears correct—the instrument is being sounded by hammers and it is supported on a table or stand. Markl objects to the image since it does not accord with what scholars assume to be the nineteenth-century reality of folk music. Given the scene—festive dancing and drinking in a pub—it seems possible that the *cimbal* is included for appearances only, since it would likely remain unheard in this setting. If this is the case, then the instrument may be present to evoke the realm of popular folk music. The lithograph may represent a composite of various “folk” images—dancers merrymaking, bagpipes, the *cimbal*—meant to evoke multiple facets of folk traditions. Presumably the artist was not a *cimbalista*, or based the illustration on

second-hand observations; nevertheless, the general appearance is convincing. Whatever the artist's knowledge of contemporary folk music was, the instrument's inclusion is an important indication that something approximating the *cimbálek* represented an essential feature of popular music.

By the late nineteenth century, the *cimbál* was connected to nationalist imagery. A major venue for the establishment of folk arts in nationalist ideology was the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition held in Prague in 1895. The summer-long exhibition attracted over two million visitors to grounds north of the city, replete with re-creations of traditional Czech farmsteads, village buildings, exhibits of peasant dress, and local arts.⁶³ One highlight was the "Moravian Days" (August 15–18), which featured a parade of folk costumes through the city, a Moravian wedding celebration, and food at a Valachian pub. At the pub, music was provided by a cimbalom band led by Jan Pelár.⁶⁴ This festival certainly linked the image of the *cimbál* with nation, but other links were created in visual art and literature.

An illustration by the artist Mikoláš Aleš (1852–1913) in the literary journal *Květy* (Flowers) from 1898 represents the instrument in a scene filled with folkloric imagery and nationalist symbolism (fig. 15).⁶⁵ The *cimbál* is played here by two hand-held hammers. Instead of being supported on a table, however, the instrument is held by bracing the long edge against the player's abdomen and supporting it with a strap slung around the neck.

The instrument's presence here indexes the late nineteenth-century consciousness of folk traditions as a national heritage, a concept largely due to associations between Aleš, Czech nationalism, and "folk" subjects. A major dictionary of Czech artists describes Aleš as "the founder of the national tradition in painting, our most Czech [*nejčestější*] artist,"⁶⁶ and a biography of 1912 published by Mánes, a Prague artistic association,

63. Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 124–27.

64. Reactions of visitors and the nationalistic implications of the exhibition are well described in Stanislav Brouček et al., *Mýtus českého národa aneb Národopisná výstava československá 1895* (Prague: Littera Bohemica, 1996). Songs associated with the celebration are reprinted in Zdeněk Mišurec, ed., *Výstavní zpěvník Jana Pelára: Z rukopisné sbírky Jana J. Nymburského* (Prague: Folklorní sdružení České republiky and Hudební nakladatelství Kneifl, 1995).

65. Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia*, 119.

66. Quoted in *ibid.*, 103.



FIGURE 15. Mikoláš Aleš, drawing of a *cimbal* player, printed as a frontispiece in the journal *Květy* (1898, no. 2). From a copy in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the University of Michigan Library, call number AP 52 .K96 v. 41 1898.

establishes his importance by identifying him with the “pure” Czech countryside:

Aleš comes from the people, that is from the countryside, from the region which we call South Bohemian not merely in the geographical but in the ethnic and ethical sense. The country is here as it were an opposite pole to the big city. . . . Aleš’s birthplace Mirovice is . . . a South Bohemian small town in that it is entirely Czech in its surroundings, undisturbed by any for-

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eign elements. . . . Everything disquieting and dangerous [in Mirovice], which was usually short-lived, arrived from outside and abroad.⁶⁷

“Foreign” elements might have included German-speakers, “Gypsies,” Jews, and other ethnic minorities. Though all these were present, it was German culture that was generally seen as opposed to Czech culture in the view of nineteenth-century nationalists. In Aleš’s illustration of the *cimbál*, the instrument appears likewise associated with the countryside, as indicated by the rustic frame surrounding the verse and the flowering vines sprouting upward, another typical motif of folk design. Although apparently reclining demurely in a nightgown, the maiden at the top of the illustration appears to be under an open sky of moon and stars.

Significantly, the ideology of Czech nationalism presented in the accompanying short verse or nursery rhyme indicates a folk ethos. The text is a simple prayer uttered by the maiden in the upper half of the drawing:

Dej mi pán Bůh synka, co na cimbál cinká: on mně bude cinkávati v noci u vokýnka.	Lord God, give me a lad That plays on the <i>cimbál</i> : He will play for me At night by the window.
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The language of the prayer suggests a Bohemian dialect of the folk rather than elite or educated language; the verse is suggestive of a nursery rhyme or children’s poem, and the language is unpretentious. *Okno*, the standard Czech word for window, becomes *vokýnko*, a poetic index of rurality: a diminutive form is created with the addition of “nko,” while the added “v” at the beginning and use of the vowel “ý” rather than “é” indicate a dialect. (The standard spelling would be *okénko*.) The verb *cinkat* is onomatopoeic and would suggest a more evocative verb in English like “tinkle” or “jingle.” Finally, the print was anthologized in Aleš’s popular *Špalíček* (two volumes, 1907, 1912), a collection of “national songs and rhymes,” which has been likened to a Czech *Mother Goose*.⁶⁸

The *cimbál* is also mentioned in Moravian verses. In his 1859 song collection *Moravské národní písně*, the priest František Sušil presents what appears to be a children’s rhyme, under the heading “Joys and Sorrows of the Animals.” An extended series of verses describes the encounter of

67. Quoted in *ibid.*, 104.

68. *Ibid.*, 113–14.

a hunter with animals in the forest, who at one point have formed a musical group that appears to symbolize a harmony among the animal kingdom.⁶⁹

<p>Srna gajdovala dál, jeleň při tom husle hrál, vlk na píščelky tudlikal, a nedvěď hrál na cimbál.</p>	<p>The doe bagpiped on, The stag played on the violin, The wolf piped a whistle, And the bear played the <i>cimbál</i>.</p>
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Another Moravian verse was recorded by Ludvík Kunz:⁷⁰

<p>Já půjdu do šenku, vhodím do cimbála, muzika bude hrát, do bílého rána.</p>	<p>I will go to the pub, I will drop into the <i>cimbál</i>, The band will play, Until the white morning.</p>
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This verse implicates the *cimbál* in social music making, and it suggests a south Moravian locale by placing the musician's performance in a bar-room or wine cellar for an evening of merriment. Assuming that the singer has enough money to "drop into the *cimbál*," the musicians will continue playing for the evening's singing and dancing until dawn. Some historical instruments include a small door on the player's side of the instrument, which is thought to be a hatch to extract coins that were thrown into the instrument via the sound holes as payment for the musicians.

Documenting the Cimbal: Ethnographic Evidence in Moravia

Written documents offer another source of historical information about the instrument's existence prior to the twentieth century. For example, in 1729 a story of a group with bagpipes, violin, and *cimbál* was recorded in a description of a market in Valachia.⁷¹ Further written accounts witness *cimbálové muziky* in areas of north and south Moravia be-

69. František Sušil, *Moravské národní písně*, 3rd ed. (1941), 5th reprinting, with commentary and index by Robert Smetana and Bedřich Václavek, which is based on Sušil's 1859 revision (Český Těšín: Mladá fronta, 1999), no. 2058 (p. 621).

70. The verse is presented in the musical instrument display at NÚLK (National Institute of Folk Culture, Strážnice), described in Kunz, *Nástroje lidové hudby v Čechách, na Moravě, a ve Slezsku* (1993) (see n23 above).

71. Karel Vetterl, *Lidové písně a tance z Valašskokloboucka*, vol. 2, *Písně milostně a rodinné* (Prague: Nakladatelství československé akademie věd, 1960), 418n86.

tween 1800 and 1910.⁷² At this time, most cimbaloms in Moravia were the smaller type (called *cimbálek*).

The primary source of information about the *cimbál* in the nineteenth century, however, is the material concerning Leoš Janáček's ethnographic expeditions and "folk concerts" of the 1880s and 1890s. Janáček (1854–1928), better known outside his homeland as a composer of operas, was also active as a folklorist early in his career. He poetically described a *cimbálová muzika* in 1901, writing in his foreword to the song collection *Národní písně moravské v nově nasbírané*: "The fiddler *primáš* wraps up the blossoming melody; the *kontráš*, second violin, fills out the harmony; and the *cimbál* enshrouds the melodies with undampened ringing, as when an evening mist, gleaming with the gold of the setting sun, blankets the hilltops."⁷³ These ensembles are associated with local folklore and commonly presented as exemplars of traditional Moravian music.

The *cimbál* has acquired iconic status for local Moravian musics, especially in the region of Valachia (*valašsko*); near the towns of Kyjov and Strážnice in Moravian Slovakia (*slovácko*); and around the town of Velká nad Veličkou in the upland region now identified as *hornácko*. This association with folklore and local culture was established by Janáček himself in the late nineteenth century. Janáček's most intensive years of field collection were between 1888 and 1912, a period when he frequently visited towns and villages in the Moravian countryside. While he made his first transcriptions of musical material on summer trips from Brno in the 1880s, the precise time and place of his earliest collections is unknown. Jiří Vysloužil suggests that Janáček's "living relationship to musical folkloristic problems" predates a trip to Valachia and Lachia in July or August 1888; however, Procházková notes that the 1888 trip is the first occasion possible to verify according to surviving sources and that Janáček's field notes only survive for excursions from 1891 onward.⁷⁴

72. Vetterl, *Lidové písně a tance z Valašskokloboucka*, 2:418–19; Kunz, *Volksmusik-instrumente*, 64–65; Pavel Petržela, "Když hraje malý cimbál," *Malovaný kraj* 27, no. 1 (1991): 16.

73. František Bartoš and Leoš Janáček, *Národní písně moravské v nově nasbírané* (Prague: Česká akademie císaře Františka Josefa pro vědy slovesnost a umění, 1901), lxxvi.

74. Jiří Vysloužil, ed., *Leoš Janáček o lidové písni a lidové hudbě: Dokumenty a studie* (Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění, 1955), 39; Jarmila Procházková, *Janáčkovy záznamy hudebního a tanečního folkloru*, vol. 1, *Komentáře* (Brno: Etnologický ústav Akademie věd České Republiky, 2006), 18.

While it is impossible to gauge exactly what Janáček thought about the *cimbál*, it is obvious that he considered it a key instrument during his most intensive periods of field study and folk-music collection. During a trip to Ostravice in Lachia, he wrote to his wife Zdeňka on July 25, 1906, that he had “discovered treasures of *cimbál* playing.”⁷⁵ It is also apparent that his thinking about folk music changed over time. His view of the *cimbál*, and his conviction about its importance to Moravian traditional music may have wavered as well. Nonetheless, he recorded and preserved the earliest known transcriptions of *cimbál* playing, identified key tradition bearers in the 1890s, and saw the instrument as a nexus of traditional music in Moravia. Janáček recorded a range of *cimbál* players in Valachia and Silesia (*slezsko*), and most particularly in Lachia (*lašsko*), a small region near the village of Hukvaldy, where he was born and spent his childhood. (Table 1 summarizes Janáček’s trips and the *cimbál* players that he visited.)⁷⁶

One exemplary moment was Janáček’s visit of August 5, 1889, to a *cimbalista* named František Klepáč, at his home in Kunčice pod Ondřejníkem, a village near Hukvaldy. Klepáč (1835–1898) worked as a miner until 1890, when he bought his own cottage, where he lived as a pensioner with his wife and six children.⁷⁷ The information from this trip and a subsequent visit on September 6, 1900, provide a detailed description of the *cimbálek*, which exhibits the “exceptional diligence” of Janáček’s observations.⁷⁸ The second visit occurred two years after Klepáč died. Janáček was aware of Klepáč’s death, having noted in his diary sometime in fall 1899, “Old Klepáč, *cimbalista*, died in 1898, ‘second week’ after Easter.”⁷⁹ The 1900 trip was likely made specifically to prepare a photograph of a *cimbál* that appeared in Janáček’s 1901 essay on folk song for his collection with František Bartoš.⁸⁰ Although he could

75. Leoš Janáček to Zdeňka Janáčková, July 25, 1906, sign. A 3 778, Janáček Archive, Brno: “Nalezl jsem poklady hry cymbalové”; also quoted in Procházková, *Janáčkovy záznamy*, 1:149, 151.

76. An extended discussion of Janáček’s fieldwork involving the *cimbál* is found in Jesse A. Johnston, “The Cimbál (Cymbalom) in Moravia: Cultural Organology and Interpretive Communities” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), 119–55.

77. Procházková, *Janáčkovy záznamy*, 1:139.

78. *Ibid.*, 137.

79. Leoš Janáček, diary, sign. Z 20, p. 91, Janáček Archive, Brno: “Starý Klepáč, cymbalista, zemřel r. 1898 po velkonocích ‘druhý týden’”; also quoted in Procházková, *Janáčkovy záznamy*, 1:139.

80. Bartoš and Janáček, *Národní písně moravské v nově nasbírané*, lxxii.

TABLE 1. Leoš Janáček's ethnographic excursions (between 1888 and 1906), during which he noted the *cimbálek*.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Player</i>
1888, July/August	Petřvald	Jan Myška (1830–1912)*
1888, July/August	Kozlovice**	[František Klepáč]
1889, 5 August	Kunčice pod Ondřejníkem***	František Klepáč (1835–1898)*
1890, July/August	Horní Sklenov (Hukvaldy)	Manek Peterek
1891, July/August	Košatka nad Odrou	Jiří Mikeska (1828–1903)*
1892, 8 September	Březůvky	Tomáš Kaláč (1842–1903)*
1893, ca. 30–31 August	Valašská Polanka	Jan Míček (1844–1919)*
1893, early September	Janová	Jan Mikuš
1900, 6 September	Kunčice pod Ondřejníkem	František Klepáč*
1906, 23 July	Ostravice	Jan Lhot'an (1849–1915)
1906, 30 July	Lubno	Ignác Kotek (1839–1924)*
1906, 3 August	Trojanovice	Jan Jurek (table maker)

Information in brackets is assumed, but unconfirmed.

* denotes that Janáček transcribed some solo playing or accompaniment rather than just ensemble playing.

** this trip was primarily to collect dances, but the “U Harabiša” pub in Kozlovice was a frequent destination for merrymakers from Hukvaldy; the pub was less than 3 kilometers from Janáček's summer home in Hukvaldy, and he frequented the pub while visiting Hukvaldy; the atmosphere is evoked in his feuilleton “U Harabiša” (*Lidové noviny*, November 30, 1924).

*** field notes from this trip are the oldest-known dated ones by Janáček to have survived.

have visited a living player, it seems likely that he chose to photograph Klepáč's instrument because it was the closest to Hukvaldy, where he often vacationed during the summers.⁸¹

The notes, sketches, and photograph of the Klepáč instrument provide detailed information about a Valachian *cimbálek* of the period. The range of the instrument covers three octaves plus a major third, stretching from *G* to *b*". The instrument was missing its top string, so presumably it had been designed to cover a slightly larger range. Janáček noted that the instrument was able to play chromatic melodies; however, this would have been possible only in the range of pitches between *e* and *f*" an ambitus of two octaves and a half-step. In his rough sketch of the

81. Klepáč's instrument is further described in Bartoš and Janáček, *Národní písně moravské v nově nasbírané*; reprinted in Vysloužil, ed., *Leoš Janáček o lidové písni a lidové hudbě*, 315–18, 319–21.

instrument, Janáček noted that Klepáč had to “sharpen” (tune) the instrument (*brusit’* [*sladit’*]).⁸² He also noted that Klepáč played in D major and minor as well as in G major.

Following Janáček’s work, it appears that the instrument gained a new prestige, and that other folklorists in north and south Moravia paid it closer attention. A 1954 book by František Svoboda suggests that the instrument was quite common in villages around Brno during the 1870s. Describing a dance in Líšeň, a village just outside the city, Svoboda recalls:

In Líšeň they played on both the large and small *cimbál*. The Střelec family sold its last *cimbál* to some unknown place. Older people told me that Líšeň employed more capable musicians and writers, excellent violinists, *cimbálistas*, and bagpipers. I myself heard the *cimbalista* and *primas* of grandfather Střelec from Klajdovská street. They richly improvised during singing and dancing then. My mother danced before the *cimbál* eighty years ago, and in the pub “U Křížů” next to the Vybral family’s place they played on *cimbál* sixty years ago.⁸³

Likewise, the folk revivalist Joža Ország Vranecký Jr. suggests that musicians were playing the *cimbál* in north Moravia throughout the early twentieth century.⁸⁴ Vranecký’s father, Joža Ország Vranecký Sr. (1866–1939), took a lifelong interest in folk customs and musical culture around his home in Nový Hrozenkov. In the late nineteenth century, he bought a *malý cimbál* from a musician identified as Smetaník, and he also recorded his experiences learning to play the instrument from Smetaník.⁸⁵ Upon finding the small instrument unable to live up to the musical standards he desired, he decided to purchase an instrument from Schunda’s Budapest workshop in 1910.⁸⁶ Vranecký recalled: “I wrote to Mr. Schunda’s factory in Budapest (in German) and conveyed my purpose: to maintain the old-time music of Valachia. An answer arrived in perfect Czech, handwritten by Mr. Schunda, with his personal wishes of success and with greetings for Bohemia.”⁸⁷ This was the first

82. Notes by Leoš Janáček, sign. A 1 468, f. 2 and f. 3, Etnologický ústav Akademie věd České republiky, pracoviště Brno (EÚB); photograph, pozitiv 1 580, EÚB. Reproductions of both sketches and the photograph appear in Procházková, *Janáčkovy záznamy*, 1:136, 138.

83. Quoted in Kurfürst, *Hudební nástroje*, 447.

84. Joža Ország Vranecký, *A měl sem já písčalenku: O lidových hudebních nástrojích, dětských hříčkách a hrách na Moravském Valašsku* (Ostrava: Krajské nakladatelství, 1963).

85. Bronislava Schoříková, “Cimbál: význam nástroje ve 20. a 21. století” (master’s thesis, Philosophy Faculty of Masaryk University, Brno, 2004), 7.

86. Lucie Uhlíková, “Nástroje lidové hudby na Moravě,” in *Proměny v čase: Tradiční lidová hudba na Moravě ve 20. století / Transitions in Time: Traditional Folk Music in Moravia in the 20th Century*, ed. Jiří Plocek (Brno: Gnosis, 2001), 29.

87. Quoted in Schoříková, “Cimbál,” 7.

Schunda instrument known to have been used in Moravia. Vranecký Jr. (1913–1977) learned to build *malé cimbály* for local musicians and continued to play them until 1951.⁸⁸

During the First Republic, the period of the first independent Czechoslovak state (1918–1939), interest in the cimbalom grew. The painter Antoš Frolka (1877–1935) fueled enthusiasm for the instrument when he bought a Schunda instrument and played it in folkloric bands in Brno. Frolka claimed to have purchased his instrument from the Slovakian bandmaster Samko Dudík (1880–1967), who had been much admired by Janáček, and it seems likely that this transaction occurred around 1927 or 1928.⁸⁹ In *hornácko*, the violinist Joža Kubík (1907–1978), a musician of Romani heritage, incorporated the *cimbál* into his band in the town of Hrubá Vrbka. Although he was familiar with the small cimbalom in various local groups, he chose the large cimbalom he knew from his participation in army music groups in eastern Slovakia during the early 1930s. The instrumentation of Kubík's band was set by 1938, and Kubík is credited with broadening the Moravian cimbalom repertoire and introducing the Hungarian-style virtuosity that he learned while in the army.⁹⁰

These episodes mark the significant transition from the *malý cimbál* (or *cimbálek*, small cimbalom) to the *cimbál* (large cimbalom). The similar layout of strings on the two instruments allowed players to make a relatively smooth transition between them. Likewise, in Moravian folk music generally, the instrument retains its power as a symbol of Moravian traditional music. This tradition largely survives today through performance in string ensembles known as *cimbálové muziky*.

The Cimbál in the cimbálová muzika: Musical Roles of the Cimbalom

The primary instrumental ensemble for the Moravian *cimbál* is the *cimbálová muzika* (cimbalom band). The compound term is occasionally simplified to *cimbálovka* or *cimbálka*. These are small ensembles of cimbalom, violin, and bass, often augmented by clarinet and viola. Typically,

88. Schoříková, "Cimbál," 7n1.

89. I have not found a definite record for the date of Frolka's purchase, but Dudík's group called the *Myjavští hudci* (Myjava musicians) played in Brno in 1927 and may have had contact with or inspired Frolka. Schoříková, "Cimbál," 8; see also Antoš Frolka, *Mezi paletou a písní: O malíři Frolkovi a jeho rodině*, ed. Dušan Holý and Ludmila Holá (Brno: Host, 2000).

90. Dušan Holý, *Mudrosloví primáše Jožky Kubíka* (Prague: Supraphon, 1984), 23–25.

only one player covers each part, though in some settings this may expand to two or three players per part. The ensemble often accompanies solo and group singing. The lead violinist, called *primáš* or *primas*, typically directs the ensemble. A second violin or viola covers a second part, or *kontráš*, which usually interlocks with the bass to form an accompaniment in which the bass plays on downbeats and the *kontráš* on upbeats.⁹¹ The *cimbál* player is identified as a *cimbalista*. The *cimbál*'s musical role in the ensemble alternates between supporting the rhythm established by the bass and *kontráš*, and improvising patterns that elaborate the harmony.

Many Moravian musicians consider the *cimbálová muzika* ensemble to be related to the string bands common throughout the "Carpathian crescent," the series of interconnected mountain ranges that form an arc from northern Romania through Ukraine, Slovakia, and Poland into the eastern Czech Republic.⁹² Musical cultures, including string-band ensembles, are thought to have traveled through the mountains from Romania northward and westward toward Moravia, the western tip of the arc.⁹³ This is often described as the "shepherd's migration" into Valachia because the culture is thought to have slowly dispersed throughout the Carpathian region as generations of mountain shepherders moved throughout the region over a period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.⁹⁴

These historical and cultural connections are part of the local understanding of Moravian musical culture. They play an important role in the conception of the *cimbálová muzika* as a musical ensemble that links Moravia to the rest of eastern Europe, more so than to central or western Europe. These connections are also made through musical repertory.

91. Dušan Holý, *Probleme der Entwicklung und des Stils der Volksmusik: Volkstümliche Tanzmusik auf der mährischen Seite der Weissen Karpaten* (Brno: Universita J. E. Purkyně, 1969), 83.

92. *Ibid.*, 82. Gifford, however, suggests that small string bands featuring the small cimbalom probably originated with Italian Renaissance chamber music groups. These became popular in the seventeenth century among urban Jewish populations in Prague and elsewhere in Bohemia, and eventually became popular farther east, including in Budapest (Gifford, *Hammered Dulcimer*, 104–15). Later, after Schunda's development of the instrument, the ensemble was found again in increasing numbers in Moravia.

93. Jiří Plocek, *Hudba středovýchodní evropy* (Prague: Torst, 2003). The string ensembles of violin, viola, and bass are usually described as *hudecká muzika* (fiddle band, or string band).

94. *Lidová kultura na Moravě*, 24 (see n34 above).

Cimbalom bands today play mainly a repertory of folk songs and energetic dance songs, most of which are taken from the “New Hungarian” repertory played by Slovakian and Hungarian Roma groups.⁹⁵ Czech scholars often classify songs by the subject matter of the texts, a system that likely dates to the nineteenth century. Sušil, for example, divided songs into historical songs, wedding songs, love songs, and drinking songs, among others.⁹⁶ Further subdivisions of this classification may be made through regional dialects or association with seasonal or life-cycle rituals.

In my observation, however, *cimbál* players—whether playing in folklore groups or classical music ensembles—tend to group songs according to the musical role of the instrument. There are two major roles (*funkce*) for *cimbál* in this view: as an accompanying instrument (*doprovodný nástroj*) and as a solo voice (*sólový nástroj*). Accompaniment roles are typically limited to traditional music and can be further subdivided into the rhythmic patterns for folk dances and the more lyrical realization of a harmonic background for a singer. The former is described as “harmonic and metro-rhythmic” (*harmonická a metrorytmická funkce*), and the latter is distinguished by the *cimbalista* Jaromír Nečas as “melodic” (*melodická funkce*).⁹⁷

The rhythmic role of the instrument is usually heard in dances. Foremost among these are well-known European forms such as the waltz and the polka (ex. 1–2). Other local Moravian forms, which the *cimbalista* Horymír Sušil describes as “turning dances” (*točivé tance*), include a group of duple-meter figure dances for male–female couples that often are associated with specific regions, including the *ověňžok*, *točená*, *gúlaná*, *vrťená*, and *sedlácká*.⁹⁸ These dances often feature an uneven rhythm described as *dúvaj*, which is usually accompanied on the *cimbál* by accenting the second note in each pair of duple subdivisions, giving the impression of an uneven rhythmic stress (ex. 3).⁹⁹ A final Moravian dance form

95. See Petr Macek, ed., *Slovník české hudební kultury* (Prague: Supraphon, 1997), 633.

96. František Sušil, *Moravské národní písně*.

97. Jaromír Nečas, “Cimbál a jeho příbuzní” (script for lecture, broadcast on Czechoslovak Radio Brno, March 25, 1969, author’s collection), 7–8.

98. Horymír Sušil, *Moravské cimbálové etudy* (Ostrava: Krajské kulturní středisko, 1987), 10–11.

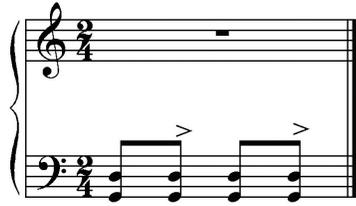
99. The rhythm has been analyzed in detail by Dušan Holý in an examination of the playing of fiddlers in South Moravia. Holý concluded that the rhythm is essentially based on a triple rather than quadruple subdivision of each beat in a duple meter: “the

EXAMPLE 1. Sample *cimbal* accompaniment for a polka-type song (duple meter).EXAMPLE 2. Sample *cimbal* accompaniment for a waltz-type song (triple meter).

is the triple-meter *starodávnyj*, also called the “folk polonaise” (*lidová polonéza*). The dance is characterized by a lilting rhythm (an eighth note followed by two sixteenths) on the first beat that echoes the dancers’ steps (ex. 4).¹⁰⁰ Other regional dances in this category that are often

conclusion was reached that the length of the second half of the bar—the second quarter note—is variable” and that the agogic stress varied according to various regions throughout Czechoslovakia (Holý, *Probleme der Entwicklung*, 67). Romanian ethnomusicologist Constantin Brailoiu analyzed similar rhythms across areas of eastern Europe that have been influenced by Turkish culture, which he describes under the rubric of *aksak* (limping) rhythm; Brailoiu, “Aksak Rhythm” (1951), reprinted in *Problems of Ethnomusicology [Writings of Constantin Brailoiu]*, ed. and trans. A. L. Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 133–67.

100. The dance has been associated with North Moravia, where it may be related to the triple-meter Polish *mazurka*. The *mazurka*, however, places the characteristic rhythm on the second beat.

EXAMPLE 3. *Dúvaj* rhythm.

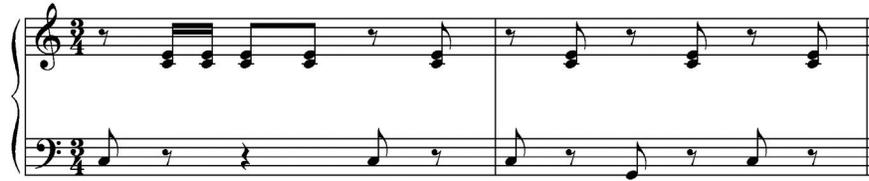
heard in Moravia include the virtuosic Hungarian-derived forms of the *verbuňk* (a male solo display dance, derived from nineteenth-century army recruitment practices) and *čardáš* (named after dances at Hungarian roadside inns; developed into a nineteenth-century virtuoso display genre for the *cimbál*).¹⁰¹

The melodic role of the instrument is usually featured in the *táhlá* sections of songs. The name *táhlá* derives from an adjective meaning a “drawn out” song in rubato tempo. *Táhlá* often describes a free-flowing, unmetered section that introduces a faster section, or it may be the primary style throughout for melodies associated with deep feeling, particularly when paired with sad or introspective texts. These sections feature dramatic rubato and often give the impression of an unmetered song. Such passages are said to convey feeling or introspection (*cít, pocit*), to which the emotional depth of Moravian folk song is attributed. As Moravian music critic, folklorist, and record producer Jíří Plocek describes it, “Moravian folk song is calm, deeply felt.”¹⁰² In these songs, the melody is usually carried by a singer or violinist, and its flow seems to be determined by the flow of the text. The *cimbál* is responsible for providing underlying harmonies and filling out the melodic spaces that are left in the soloist’s delivery. These responses are described as “little answers” (*odpovídky*), during which the *cimbál* fills in with short, improvised scale patterns or harmonic arpeggios.¹⁰³ The use of the *cimbál* as an accompanying instrument for these songs is thought to have become increasingly more common throughout the twentieth century, as instrument ranges

101. More information on the development of the *verbuňk* and *čardáš* as Hungarian “Gypsy” genres is found in Bálint Sárosi, *Gypsy Music* (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1978), 85.

102. Plocek, *Hudba středovýchodní evropy*, 40: “Moravská lidová píseň je klidná, hluboce pocitová.”

103. Horymír Sušil, *Moravské cimbálové etudy*, 48; see also Jaromír Nečas, *Pisničky na cimbál* (Uherské Hradiště: Okresní kulturní středisko, 1988).

EXAMPLE 4. Sample *cimbál* accompaniment for a *starodávny*.

expanded, instruments were able to play more loudly, and more complicated harmonies became possible.¹⁰⁴

During the 1940s, the *cimbál* appeared more and more frequently as a solo instrument. The first Moravian player to gain recognition as a soloist was Antoš Frolka Jr. (1910–1986), who led a well-known folkloric musical group, produced many radio shows about folklore during the 1940s, and often played *cimbál* in the Brno radio orchestra from the 1950s until the 1970s.¹⁰⁵ Since Frolka's time, the instrument has gained stature in Moravia as a solo instrument. Like the piano, the *cimbál* is able to harmonize with itself and so create the impression of a full musical texture. However, as Jaromír Nečas noted, the *cimbál* suffers a "certain handicap" in solo situations since the player must approximate a complex musical texture with only two hammers, rather than ten fingers and the mechanical apparatus of the piano. This "handicap" is particularly felt in quick sections that require the instrument to imitate the instrumental bass and *kontráš* combination while also playing an elaborate melody—a texture normally covered by three or more instrumentalists must in this case be approximated by one player.¹⁰⁶

Bouquets of National Songs

Two vignettes serve to illustrate the *cimbál*'s role in the early twenty-first century. On June 2, 2004, I attended a chamber concert of students from the Brno Conservatory at the *Besední dům*, the premier concert hall

104. Jan Rokyta, interview by Jesse A. Johnston, Zlín, November 18, 2006.

105. Jaromír Nečas, interview by Jesse A. Johnston, Vřešovice, October 15, 2006. See also *Od folkloru k folklorismu: slovník folklorního hnutí na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, ed. Martina Pavlicová and Lucie Uhlíková (Strážnice: Ústav lidové kultury, 1997), 29–30.

106. Nečas, "Cimbál a jeho příbuzní," 9.

in Brno.¹⁰⁷ The concert, a year-end capstone performance by the winners of the Conservatory's concerto competition, featured *Vábení*, a three-movement concert piece by Bohuslav Řehoř for *cimbál* and string orchestra (composed in 1991). I noted with interest that a follow-up review in Brno's *Rovnost* newspaper observed that "the sound of the *cimbál* always evokes folklore a bit."¹⁰⁸ It was clear that the association of the instrument with the world of "folklore" and "folk music" was deep, even at a concert unequivocally framed as an art music performance. The reviewer's observation confirmed the long-standing association of the *cimbál* in Moravia with "folk music."

The *cimbál* was more clearly connected to folklore, and particularly to nineteenth-century Moravian song collectors, at the final evening of the 16th Annual International Festival of Musical Instruments and Folk Ensembles on October 7, 2006. The concert was held in the modern *kulturní dům* (cultural house) of Uherské Hradiště, but the performance evoked the pastoral idyll of Pargeter's cottages and duck-ponds. A three-page note in the program booklet explained that the 2006 festival honored František Bartoš, a nineteenth-century ethnographer who had gained prominence as a dialectologist and folk-song collector. The festival's theme had been chosen in homage to Bartoš, and the concert was titled *Kytice z národních písní* (A Bouquet of National Songs) after Bartoš's major published collection of folk songs. Available for sale in the lobby was a recent reprint of Bartoš's major song collections issued with support from a local museum and institute for folklore in recognition of the centenary of Bartoš's death. The program note was quick to point out that Bartoš had been born in a nearby village and was thus a *rodák* (local). Behind the stage, a prominent banner displayed the festival logo (fig. 16), which depicted a clarinetist holding his instrument parallel to the ground, suggesting that he was playing music meant to get your attention. The figure was drawn in an impressionistic, modern style, but appeared to be dressed in *kroj* (regional folk costume). Although the clarinet is typical in Moravian instrumental ensembles, it is rarely played as a solo instrument. Thus, the figure suggested a musician in a *cimbálová muzika*.

107. The hall is the home of the Brno Philharmonic, Brno's primary orchestra. Designed by Theophil Hansen and built between 1869 and 1873, it resembles the architect's larger *Musikverein* in Vienna.

108. Věra Lejsková, review of the Moravian Chamber Orchestra (Brno Conservatory) and Conservatory Soloists, *Rovnost* (Brno), June 8, 2004, p. 21.

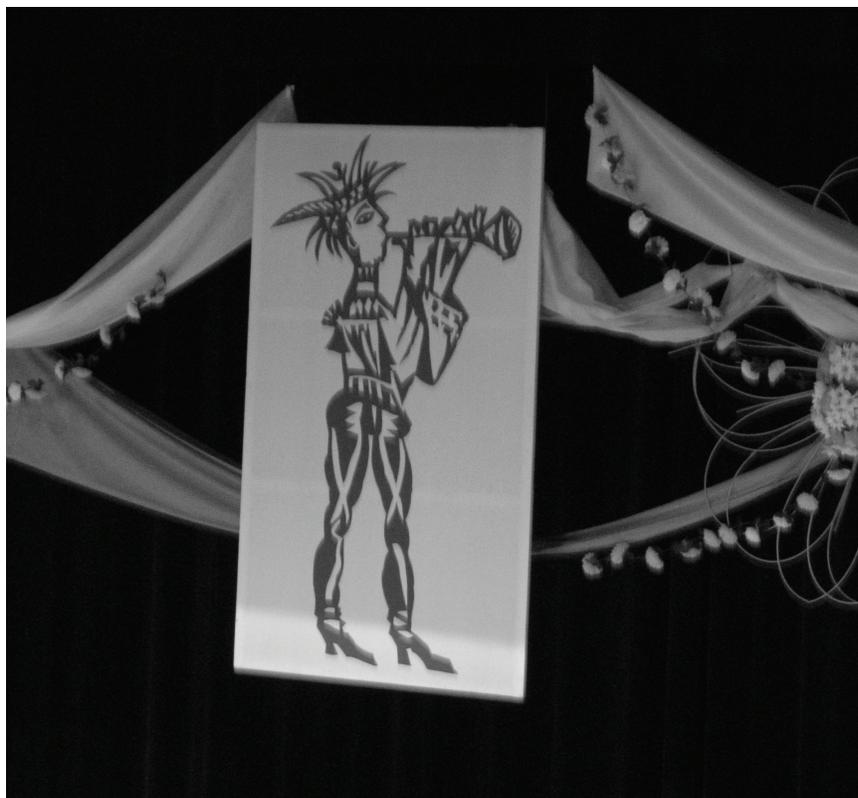


FIGURE 16. Festival logo of the 16th Annual International Festival of Musical Instruments and Folk Ensembles, Uherské Hradiště, October 6–8, 2006. This photograph, taken during the Festival's concluding concert, shows the logo hanging above the stage in the *kulturní dům* (cultural house), Uherské Hradiště, October 7, 2006. Photo by the author.

Conclusion: Centering Traditional Music

The *cimbál* has a deep history in Moravia and throughout the Bohemian Lands. Though its popularity as a solo instrument has grown in recent decades, it has gained importance in Moravia primarily through ensembles and its connection to traditional music. This latter association was cemented by the nineteenth-century work of folklorists and composers. It would, figuratively speaking, be appropriate to describe the *cimbál* as occupying a central role in Moravian folk music. As a

large instrument that cannot easily be moved, it more or less anchors the musical group in physical space during performances.

In symbolic terms, the cimbalom is one of the instruments most clearly associated with Moravian traditional music. In fact, the instrument's nineteenth-century associations with folklore and Czech nationalism may even serve to mitigate the association of the instrument with large, orchestral folk ensembles during the communist period. In her performances, the cimbalom player Zuzana Lapčíková often invokes the writing of novelist Milan Kundera in discussing folk songs. In a particularly Romantic passage from his novel *The Joke*, which takes up questions about the validity of folk expression in a period of totalitarian state control, Kundera wrote that "folk song or folk rite is a tunnel beneath history, a tunnel that preserves much of what wars, revolutions, civilization have long since destroyed aboveground."¹⁰⁹ In reaffirming the *cimbál*'s link to nineteenth-century folk culture, the Festival of Musical Instruments in Uherské Hradiště effectively used the cimbalom as a tunnel under the recent period of local communist history by emphasizing a deeper past. Thus, musical instruments may serve to efface social memories.

But the cimbalom's Moravian centrality is not merely symbolic. The *cimbál* also plays a central musical role: it occupies the middle register of the ensemble, and it plays accompanimental material that at its most effective is not meant to stand out but to provide an underlying harmonic and rhythmic layer that grounds the entire ensemble. Finally, like the duck-ponds that Pargeter observed at the center of many Moravian villages, the *cimbál* sits at the center of the *cimbálová muzika*. Because it is the largest instrument in most ensembles and is not easily portable, the other musicians congregate around the *cimbál*. Thus, the *cimbál* literally centers Moravian traditional music.

109. Milan Kundera, *The Joke* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 133. Originally published as *Žert* (Brno: Československý spisovatel, 1967).