INTRODUCTION

It’s an odd pairing at first glance: Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 (covered in its own Music Teacher resource, February 2016) with Kodály’s Dances of Galánta. And yet these prescribed works for IB’s music diploma (for first examination in June 2017, through to 2019) invite some cunning comparison.

Both works involve dance music that draws on elements of national styles, and both rely on ingenious scoring for effect. They also offer a useful wormhole into each composer’s mind. The Galánta dances epitomise Kodály’s nationalist principles and are a brilliant example of his absorption of Hungarian folk style and particular brand of classicism.

This investigation into Kodály’s masterpiece starts by setting some context:

- Who was Kodály and why is he so interesting?
- What did nationalism mean for Hungarian composers?
- What are the key features of the Hungarian folk style?
- How are these features reflected in the Dances of Galánta?

This is followed by a detailed analysis of each section of the Dances of Galánta, where possible addressing the objectives given by IB in their specification for both Higher and Standard levels of the diploma. In the listening paper on music perception and analysis, students are expected to demonstrate:

- knowledge, understanding and perception of music in relation to time, place and cultures,
- appropriate musical terminology to describe and reflect their critical understanding of music,
- comparative analysis of music in relation to time, place and cultures.
- critical-thinking skills through reflective thought.

Resources

There are comparatively few books in English dedicated to the analysis of Kodaly’s work. The best insight is given by his own writings – Zoltán Kodály and Ferenc Bónis, The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály (Boosey & Hawkes, 1974).

The score used for this resource is from Universal Edition, the authoritative version. A Spotify playlist accompanies this resource, available here. It features a thrilling account of the Dances of Galánta by Iván Fischer and the Budapest Festival Orchestra, as well as other pieces that will be referred to later.

For an immediate comparison, you could show this version by a Rajkó folk orchestra, which is raw at the edges but brings out the folk spirit of the dances very well.

WHO WAS ZOLTÁN KODÁLY?

Kodály is often pictured next to his beloved phonograph, no doubt transcribing another Hungarian folk tune. His first calling was as an academic, and as a child he was often to be seen in the library, his head bent over scores. It seems that whatever he did, he did with tremendous enthusiasm.

His father was a railway official and this led to a peripatetic family life, with the young Kodály being shuttled between different homes and schools in Hungary and countries we now refer to as the Czech Republic and
Slovakia. This included a seven-year stint in Galánta, which he remembered with fondness, not least because he first encountered gypsy music there in the form of the virtuoso violinist János Mihók and his band.

As a child, Kodály learnt violin, piano and viola, and taught himself the cello. This ability to self-teach was typical of his intellectual appetite, as was his lifelong passion for languages. In 1900 his first degree in Budapest was in foreign languages, not music.

**Linguist and ethnomusicologist**

We should pause here, because this fact is not incidental. Kodály’s passion for music could be seen as an extension of his linguistic curiosity. For him, music was a language that could be dissected and reconstructed in the same way as his mother tongue, as well as used to reveal and convey the Hungarian identity.

The call of music proved equally as strong, though. Kodály had started writing works for orchestra and shown considerable flair as a composer while still in shorts. In 1906, Kodály entered the Academy of Music in Budapest, and it was there that his pursuit of ethnomusicology took root. As part of his field research for his PhD on ‘The Strophic Structure of Hungarian Folksong’, he went out into the Hungarian villages and fields to record and transcribe peasants singing and playing. He was often joined by his compatriot and fellow enthusiast Bela Bartók, and their friendship was to last his lifetime.

**Educationalist**

Bartók praised Kodály for his ‘unshakeable faith and trust in the constructive power and future of his people’. Kodály’s music is a testimony to this, as was his championing of music education, which in the early 1900s was in a ropey condition.

A typical Google search for ‘Kodály’ will yield the top results for him as an educator, not a composer. He is often refered to as the most important and influential music educationalist of the 20th century.

This video shows Kodály being interviewed about his educational principles, and he reveals himself as a shrewd academic with an excellent command of English. When asked at what point a child should start learning music, he quips: ‘At about nine months before he is born.’ This is then modified to ‘nine months before his mother is born’.

For Kodály, music was intrinsic to life and to successful community, and he often put the learning of music on a spiritual plane. He famously wrote:

‘Teach music and singing at school in such a way that is not torture but a joy for the pupil; instill a thirst for finer music in him, a thirst that will last a lifetime.’

**DON’T CALL IT THE ‘METHOD’**

Kodály’s educational work is often referred to as the ‘Kodály Method’, but this is a misnomer. He actually came up with a collection of well-defined principles that were then put into practice by his disciples, eventually creating a methodology and set of teaching techniques. The principles were around encouraging sight-
singing, creativity and a fluent musical understanding in young children, using folk songs that were already familiar to them.

Another common misunderstanding is to attribute Kodály with the creation of the hand signs that accompany relative solmization, or sol-fa based on a movable Do:

These signs were actually developed by John Curwen, a British priest and music educator. Kodály made use of them along with other physicalisations of musical language to help young children pitch and embody rhythm. He was equally keen on dance as a means of grounding abstract concepts in the body and physical experience.

Kodály the composer

Kodály’s various professional identities intertwine effectively in his outlook as a composer. As an educator he was focused on singing, and he excelled at choral composition (a trait shared with JS Bach, the other composer on the IB specification). For his deft touch with choral forces, listen to ‘See the Gypsies’ on the Spotify playlist that accompanies this resource.

His natural touch with choirs translated to instrumental composition as well, through the vocal contours and speech rhythm that shape his melodies. Compared to his contemporaries, his harmony is straightforward. It is melody that carries his music.
His many years of collecting, categorising and absorbing Magyar and Roma folk music was also inevitably reflected in his music. In 1923, his major breakthrough came in the commission to celebrate the union of the two cities of Buda and Pest. For that he composed the *Psalmus hungaricus*, a short expert of which is given here.

If you listen to this tenor aria, you’ll immediately think of Debussy and the Impressionists. With its shimmering textures, chromatic harmonies and luminescent instrumental colours, it shows the influence of Kodály’s brief spell studying under Charles Widor in Paris a few years earlier. In some of the choral writing there is also evidence of his love of Palestrina, and of well-organised counterpoint, although the main tone of the work is bold, even brash in places.

**THE HUNGARIAN TRILOGY**

Three works followed that were to cement Kodály’s position as a nationalist composer of international reach:

- The suite taken from the singspiel *Háry Janós* (1926)
- The *Dances of Marosszék* (1929)
- The *Dances of Galánta* (1930)

Unlike Bartók, Kodály was not a modernist. His music remains tonal and accessible, reflecting his deeply held conviction that music should be universally appreciated and enjoyed, and not a ‘high-brow pursuit’ (his phrase). Ernst von Dohnányi shared the same outlook, as can be heard in his *Symphonic Minutes*, which were premiered at the same time as the *Dances of Galánta*. This is earthy, rousing music you can tap your feet to.

**WHAT IS MUSICAL NATIONALISM?**

In the 1860s, Western music was dominated by Teutonic influences, and the repertoire in European concert halls would be headlined by Austrian or German composers. Naturally, composers from other countries were keen to assert their national identity through their music and seek a different path, often drawing on folksong and the lore and legends of their country to guide them. As Europe fell into war, this mission took on a more political edge and urgency.

In Hungary, Ferenc Erkel (1810-93) had established a strong tradition of opera with his *Bánk bán* of 1861, a national classic. Prior to that, the ‘gypsy music’ of Roma musicians had already been imitated by many 18th-century composers including Mozart and Haydn, often to give their finales exotic colour.

In the Romantic period this imitative practice was refined by Brahms, Schubert, Weber and Liszt as they included more subtle elements of Hungarian style in their own work. Listeners warmed to it immediately, as did publishers, as the works attracted excellent sales. Well-known examples include:

- Schubert’s *Divertissement à la hongroise*
- Brahms’s *Hungarian Dances*
- Liszt’s *Hungarian Rhapsodies*

Even in the case of Liszt, who was himself of Hungarian descent, this writing demonstrates how the approach at this stage was limited to the use of stereotypical features of Hungarian style. Composers were still adding Hungarian spices to an otherwise traditional German stew.

Kodály and Bartók changed that: their deep knowledge of folk culture and idiom enabled them to fashion a new musical language. In the case of Bartók, it would open the door to a radical departure whose legacy would be picked up by fellow Hungarian György Ligeti and others.
What are the features of the Hungarian folk style?

Traditional Magyar folk music comprises many different styles, from songs sung by shepherds on the plains of Transylvania through to Roma bands playing at weddings. Certain dances feature more than as others, such as the verbunkos, which were so rousing they were used to encourage soldiers to enlist.

The verbunkos alternate between slower, freer song-like material (called lassú in Hungarian) and faster dances marked frist: ‘fresh’ and in strict time. Kodály speaks of the ‘parlando rubato’ of the lassú, and the isometric, ‘tempo giusto’ of the frist sections. In the lassú, the solo violin or clarinet would typically have long, free-flowing cadenzas to show off their technical prowess.

The csárdás followed a similar structure of going from a slow, beguiling introduction into a wild dance to finish. Roma musicians picked up these styles and were renowned for the ability to improvise over the structure, causing some Hungarian purists to bemoan their overly florid, indulgent playing.

By the 1900s a typical Hungarian gypsy band could comprise:
- violins and violas, often played fiddle-style, at the chest
- a double bass
- a cimbalom (a chordophone laid on the lap or table and hit with soft hammers)
- a zither (another chordophone, also laid horizontally, but plucked with a plectrum and with a higher, narrower register)
- a clarinet or tárogató, the folk equivalent
- a bagpipe
- flutes
- a hurdy-gurdy (a drone instrument with rotating handle and keys for the melodic line)

The material in a verbunkos has certain recurring features, and all of these are reflected in the Dances of Galánta:
- The music is episodic, sometimes in ternary form but also adding short new episodes according to the performers’ preference and musical memory.
- The scales used are mainly pentatonic or modal, often featuring an augmented 2nd.
- There is often an ambiguity between major and minor, with the 3rd being different on the ascent to the descent (or vice versa).
- Harmonies are basic and functional, slipping chromatically when transitioning between sections and with some idiosyncratic, non-functional chords.
- The violins and violas often use portamento to express yearning, and double- or triple-stopping when accompanying with repeated chords.
- As a device to build tension, the violins often play busy stepwise semiquavers over a pedal point.
- The main solos are given to the violin or clarinet/tárogató.
- Syncopated rhythms are common in the faster dances, with the ‘short-long-short’ figure being a favourite.
- Dramatic dynamic contrast often features in the frist sections.
- As with any folk music, there is much repetition of melodic and rhythmic ideas.

As an introduction to the Kodály dances, play the finale from Dohnányi’s Symphonic Minutes, written in the same year (1930) and featuring a lot of the elements listed above.
Investigating the Dances of Galánta

Inspired by his pleasant childhood experiences there, Kodály returned to Galánta in 1905 and transcribed at least 150 melodies from the region. These, together with an album of old Hungarian folksong that was compiled in 1800s, comprise the main source material for the Dances of Galánta. They were written as a follow-up to the successful Dances of Marosszék of a year before (1929), which were composed initially for piano and then orchestrated.

On one level, the Dances of Galánta are a medley of folk tunes, skilfully wrought into a suite lasting around 15 minutes, making it the perfect filler for a typical concert programme. On another, more symbolic level, they form a symphonic poem celebrating the resurgence of a Hungarian nation after years of Austrian oppression.

Orchestration

By the 1930s, composers such as Schoenberg, Scriabin and Mahler had been using a vast orchestral palette and dreaming up ever more exotic and lavish instrumentation. So why, for both the Dances of Galánta and their immediate predecessor, the Dances of Marosszék, does Kodály opt instead for a paired-down, almost Classical scoring of double wind, modest brass and percussion and strings?

First, it might be a reflection of Kodály's temperament. Bartók wrote:

‘Kodály works in a concentrated fashion and despises sensation, false brilliance or any extraneous effects.’

It seems that Kodály was happier working with smaller forces, organising his planes of sound carefully and with restraint.

The second, most compelling, reason could be that he was trying to stay close to the sound-memories of the Galánta gypsy band, and a Romantic orchestration would be too lavish, an over-kill. Throughout, the colours are light and nimble, just like a street band. The trumpets are used sparingly and the trombones are replaced by two horns, to give a horn quartet. The percussion section reflects a similar lightness, with triangle, small side drum and glockenspiel.

Why No Cimbalom?

If you were to pick an instrument that represents the very essence of Hungarian folk music, a sound that evokes that whole world in a couple of seconds, then it would be the distinctive twang of a cimbalom.
So why didn’t Kodály include one in his scoring? Perhaps its connotation was too unsubtle, or not fitting for a concert hall setting?

### Structure

There are many different sections to this piece, so it’s useful first to step back and get some bearings.

In overview, the dances follow the traditional form of a *lassú* (slow, free section) followed by an extended *frist* (faster, strict tempo). The slow introduction is in two parts and grows in intensity, with the weightiest orchestration kept for the end. The fast section comprises five dances, with three reiterations of the main Andante maestoso theme from the slow section. It looks like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Bar numbers</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Character</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lassú</td>
<td>1-49</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Fantasia-style introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50-92</td>
<td>Andante maestoso theme: AB verse, repeated with variation</td>
<td>Clarinet solo leading to defiant, tutti statements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frist</td>
<td>93-150</td>
<td>First dance: AB AB (with variation and extension)</td>
<td>Playful 2/4 dance with some rubato</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>151-172</td>
<td>Maestoso interruption</td>
<td>Strongest version yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>173-228</td>
<td>Second dance: AB, B2</td>
<td>The lightest dance of the suite, marked grazioso</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>229-235</td>
<td>Maestoso interruption</td>
<td>Least stable version of this theme, shortened this time</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>236-334</td>
<td>Third dance: episodic, starting with ABACA, then variations</td>
<td>Most syncopated and exciting yet, to be repeated in finale</td>
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<td>335-420</td>
<td>Fourth dance: AB, with codetta bringing in elements of the next dance</td>
<td>Meno mosso, recalling the jaunty character of the first dance</td>
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<td>421-565</td>
<td>Fifth dance and finale with three main themes, reprising the third dance from bar 490</td>
<td>Fastest dance yet, with thrilling accelerando</td>
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<td>566-579</td>
<td>Final maestoso interruption</td>
<td>Pianissimo and mysterioso. A great theatrical touch</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>580-end</td>
<td>Final rush to the end, using main idea from fifth dance</td>
<td>Orchestra goes berserk!</td>
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### Detailed analysis

Now we have got our bearings, the following analyses drill down into each of the above sections, considering the following guiding questions:

- What are the ‘Hungarian’ elements on display?
- How does Kodály use his modest orchestral forces to maximum effect?
- What are the key melodic, harmonic and rhythmic features that contribute to the style and character of the dances?
### OPENING: LASSÚ PART ONE

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<th>Bars</th>
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| 1-5  | • Kodály taught himself cello while a child, so it’s apt that a work commemorating childhood memories should start with the cellos.  
• The solo line is in tenor range and has a vocal quality, moving stepwise. It’s a proud call to attention, a good example of the ‘parlando rubato’ style of rhetoric.  
• The double dotted rhythm is typically Hungarian. |
| 6-10 | • Are these upward-rippling strings an imitation of strums on a zither, perhaps?  
• Over a tonic pedal in the cellos, the upper strings colour the tonic and dominant (A and E, in A minor). |
| 10-18| • This pattern of bold statement and hushed response is repeated, this time in D minor and using the extra colours of horn and piccolo. |
| 19-33| • The two ideas are now in counterpoint, almost as an argument, and passed between different instruments.  
• The harmony beneath is based on a series of dominant 7ths: G7, B flat 7, G flat 7, D, E7, and so on.  
• The violas give a sneak preview of the maestoso theme in bars 28-30, in augmented rhythm.  
• Notice the prevalence of augmented 2nds in the melody, a distinctive feature of several Hungarian scales.  
• In bar 28 the extended chord (essentially an F/G) helps expand the sound. |
| 34-36| • The first glimpse of the solo clarinet here, perhaps impersonating its folk cousin, the tárógató. The string chords beneath are non-functional: held breaths. |
| 37-44| • This passage recalls Stravinsky’s Firebird, suddenly very light and busy.  
• The clarinet states the main motif with fine tracery around it derived from the second, accompanimental figure.  
• In bar 43, spot the main motif in diminution. |
| 45-49| • The clarinet now has as a longer cadenza, as if it’s enjoying the limelight.  
• The strings give a II-V preparation for E minor, with a suspension on B7 in bar 48. |

### ANDANTE MAESTOSO: LASSÚ PART TWO

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<th>Bars</th>
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| 50-57| • An eight-bar antecedent phrase in the clarinet with characteristic short-long unit, accented on the third beat.  
• The descending bassline gives good direction.  
• A slow, swaying accompaniment in the strings gives the first element of dance in the piece. |
| 58-65| • The consequent phrase with more rubato, starting unexpectedly in D major (the previous bars suggested a return to E minor).  
• Notice the perfect voicing in the bassoon, bar 60-61. |
| 66-82| • The 16-bar phrase is repeated in the full orchestra with a new defiance, this time over different harmonies.  
• Strings, horns and oboes have rustic open 5ths and 4ths, with grace notes.  
• The sudden dip in dynamics at bar 70 gives drama, and is a typical folk feature. The strumming on the violas, though, is still forte as the ‘guitarist’ in the band continues unabashed.  
• Some performances, such as the Fischer/Budapest Festival Orchestra one on the Spotify playlist, have the violins give a characteristic portamento when the slow down at bar 75.  
• A nice harmonic touch of a C minor 7 in bar 78.  
• The G flat in bar 79 turns enharmonically to F sharp in bar 80 to allow a II-V into C major in bar 82. |
| 83-92| • Contrary to expectation, the consequent part to the initial phrase is repeated here, going through a cycle of 5ths (C-F7-B flat-E flat-A flat) and with a strong countermelody in 3rds in the violins.  
• Over a drumroll and G pedal, falling triads alternate between G and A flat major, setting up a modulation to C – which doesn’t happen. |
**DANCE 1: LENTO – ALLEGRETTO MODERATO**

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<th>Bars</th>
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| 93-109 | • We’re unexpectedly in A flat minor. Aside from being a tricky key to play in, it’s a surprise following the set-up for C major in the preceding section. These less orthodox key shifts between sections are typical of folk music.  
  • The A section starts after a gentle setting of tempo in bars 93-96. Clipped dotted rhythms and off-beat accents keep the mood light.  
  • D flat/E flat gives a nice colour in bar 95, with a more ‘classical’ German 6th in bar 100. |
| 109-122 | • With the 1/4 bar missing out a beat, the entry to the B section feels impulsive.  
  • True to folk style, the harmonies fluctuate easily between minor and major (A flat minor in bar 109 to A flat major in bar 112).  
  • The characterful augmented 2nd in the melody is given emphasis in the middle of a four-bar phrase.  
  • A quick venture into the subdominant, D flat major, in bar 116.  
  • The timpani player is asked to strike the rim from bar 119, as a street drummer would.  
  • Octave leaps have been a feature throughout, eg bars 120-121. |
| 123-133 | • The A section is varied on, with the melody now in strident 4ths as the piccolo joins in, and with ornamentation. The ‘um-cha’ accompaniment carries on unaffected. |
| 133-150 | • An appassionato version of the B section here, with a new countermelody in the horns in contrary motion and a more agile bassline.  
  • Bar 139 features an unusual discord in the approach to D flat major.  
  • The closing triadic gesture is now extended, moving stepwise up from D flat to E flat.  
  • The C flat in bar 149 changes enharmonically to a B, suggesting a return to E minor for the Maestoso. |

**INTERLUDE: ANDANTE MAESTOSO**

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| 151-172 | • This is the most intense statement of this theme in the piece, this time in A minor, not E minor. It’s as if someone is crying: ‘Never forget me!’  
  • Note how everyone is marked to play ‘appassionato’.  
  • The horns are the only ones on the off-beat, fighting with the rest of the orchestra.  
  • The timpani rolls are a new element here, along with the octave jumps in the bassline.  
  • The quaver motion that sets in in bar 159 is also new and adds, at this tempo, an extra weight.  
  • A new harmonic twist happens in bar 167, with two unsettling chords: first one based on A flat, and a Hungarian scale with its augmented 2nd and flattened 7th (A flat – B – C – D – E flat – F – G flat).  
  • Then whole-tone harmony from bar 169 over B flat (B flat, C, D, E, G flat, A flat). |

**DANCE 2: ALLEGRO CON MOTO, GRAZIOSO**

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<th>Bars</th>
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| 173-188 | • The air clears with D major and the lightest dance of the set, in complete contrast to the Maestoso that has just preceded it.  
  • The second clarinet brings in a lilting short-long-short rhythm that is so typical of Hungarian folk music.  
  • The flute restates the oboe tune in piccolo range from bar 181, this time with most delicate accompaniment: artificial harmonics on open strings, grace notes in the wind and a charming figure in the clarinet. It sounds like a music box. |
| 189-228 | • The B section starts at bar 189, with very similar shapes to the A section, almost a variation.  
  • The glockenspiel (‘campenelli’) joins at bar 197 for extra sparkle.  
  • The child-like quality of this dance is reinforced at bar 209, with playful bursts of animato.  
  • Note the interrupted cadence in bar 212 and the shift suddenly up to E flat…  
  • … before cheerfully being knocked back down into D at bar 217.  
  • Bar 220 is a codetta with upward scales, to counter the downward motion that has characterised much of this dance.  
  • Tension is built through close canon over Lydian and diminished harmonies. |
INTERLUDE: ANDANTE MAESTOSO

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<tr>
<td>229-235</td>
<td>In keeping with the tension in the preceding harmonies, this Maestoso statement is over an unstable B flat 7, with the added feature of trumpet triplets.</td>
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DANCE 3: ALLEGRO

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| 236-267 | The B flat 7 ‘resolves’ unconventionally to A minor.  
This is the most exciting dance yet, driven by long passages of syncopation.  
Notice how quiet it is kept until bar 260, between pp and p, to hold suspense.  
A feature derived from folk music here is the alternating between accidentals on the ascent and descent, eg G sharp to G natural in the first four bars.  
The motor rhythm intensifies with semiquavers in the violas from bar 252, with the melody thickening in 6ths.  
Wind and strings play tag with the horn, in canon (bars 258-265).  
Underneath, open 5ths prevail.  |
| 268-282 | A new idea comes in at bar 268 with similar scalic patterns, now in semiquavers and emphatically on the beat.  
The strings suddenly burst in forte for dramatic contrast.  
The original material surges back in at bar 276, this time with the trumpets in canon.  |
| 283-298 | A third idea appears at bar 283 in the violins and cellos, heavily accented.  
Meanwhile, the first idea returns in counterpoint in the violas and second bassoon.  
The pulse of the timpani here helps to drive the music on.  
Another new descending four-note figure is introduced by the horns at bar 291 as the orchestra expands, stamped on the off-beat when in quavers.  |
| 299-334 | A shrill, very strident variation here, with high-pitched trills and the initial idea in 4ths in the trumpets and second violins (non divisi for extra weight).  
Yet another short idea in playful pp, pizzicato in bars 303-306 before the main idea thunders back in.  
First and second ideas join together at bar 315 in furious counterpoint.  
An exhilarating build-up from bar 322 based on three devices: a crescendo from a subito p; a stringendo; and a three-note figure that creeps chromatically upwards.  
As so many players are off the beat, this is a hard passage to execute neatly.  |

DANCE 4: POCO MENO MOSSO

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| 335-361 | A moment of comic bathos after that exciting build-up, as a pair of lone horns teeter across the stage, searching for a key to be centered in.  
The clarinet has a light-hearted tune from bar 356, dotted and emphasising the tonic and dominant, B flat and F.  
The bassoons and cello join in from bar 345, answered by oboe in bar 357.  |
| 362-384 | A middle section starts here, with an idea that again emphasises the tonic and dominant, with octave leaps and the familiar short-long-short rhythmic motif.  
An interrupted cadence with the G flat in the bass at bar 369. This G flat is persistent, like a spanner in the works preventing a neat return to B flat major.  
The music seems to get stuck, turning on itself from bar 377 and petering out.  |
| 385-420 | The original material returns, this time with a piccolo in a comic duet with the bassoon.  
From bar 391 we are in the very unusual key of C flat major, which steps up to a C from bar 397 (as part of an E flat minor 6 chord).  
From bar 405 a new idea enters, which heralds the final dance. The harmony here is bitonal, C minor clashing with F sharp minor a tritone above, then A minor against E minor.  |
DANCE 5: ALLEGRO VIVACE

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| 421-442 | • This idea is now taken up in earnest in a four-part texture. The moto perpetuo line above is a device that both Dohnányi and Bartók also liked to use, creating an exciting bustle.  
  • The idea is presented in close canon and in discordant keys as the F pedal continues on regardless beneath.  
  • This whole section serves as a build-up into the finale proper. |
| 443-489 | • With a chime on the triangle, the finale is launched in A minor. Again, notice how similar the constituent units here are to previous ones: the octave leaps, the familiar rhythms, and so on.  
  • All the orchestra joins in the fun here, with fanfare-like flourishes on brass and timpani from bar 466.  
  • The opening material returns from bar 471 for four bars, which flash by at this vivace speed. |
| 490-524 | • Dance 3 is reinstated here, first in 6ths and then in harsher 4ths (as before).  
  • The shift to F major at bar 518 is unexpected and gives extra brilliance. |
| 525-565 | • Another long build-up, the final in the piece. Both ideas from Dance 3 are brought in here, first augmenting a C7 chord before going bitonal again, with F sharp 7 clashing against C7 from bar 534.  
  • After a slight hiatus, Dance 5 returns at full pelt at bar 543, requiring extremely nimble playing from the whole orchestra. |

FINAL MAESTOSO INTERRUPTION AND LAST FLOURISH

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| 566    | • The final surprise card is played here, and it’s the most theatrical moment in the piece. After a grand pause, a soft triad in the distant key of G sharp minor is given in the strings, transforming the mood.  
  • Like a distant memory, the open two-bar fragment of the Maestoso theme is passed between the woodwind, ending up on the clarinet as before.  
  • The chords beneath pass through Lydian harmony to C sharp minor before settling on C7 (bar 573).  
  • The clarinet repeats its gestures from before, this time fading out to pp over an F sharp 7 chord, the perfect question mark. |
| 579-end | • Predictably, a breathless rush to the final bar ensues, using material from Dance 5.  
  • The final four bars reference the closing remarks of the scherzo from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. |

SUMMARY

It should be clear from this analysis how much skill and craft has gone into these dances. However accessible and enjoyable, they are not simply a lightweight medley of folk tunes, but a heartfelt commemoration of the composer’s homeland – and this depth of feeling and commitment to his Hungarian heritage is key to their impact. There is an authenticity and an intellectual integrity to them that remain with the listener, and ensures the Dances of Galánta’s enduring appeal.

Further listening

Other related works, all available on the Spotify playlist:
- Bartók’s Romanian Folk Dances, arranged for orchestra
- Bartók’s Concerto for Orchestra
- The Epic of Gilgamesh by Martinu
- Janáček’s Sinfonietta, a tribute to his own childhood home of Brno