MAURICE RAVEL’S TZIGANE:

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE AND THE “GYPSY” INFLUENCE

A Thesis in

Music Theory and History

by

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ABSTRACT

Maurice Ravel’s *Tzigane: A Concert Rhapsody for Violin and Piano* (1924) stands at the crossroads of Western art music and the diverse Romani musical traditions. While others have discussed the history and context of this work, the questions of what musical works informed Ravel’s compositional process and how instrumentalists should apply this framework in performance remain unexplored. This thesis begins with a history of the Romani people and their various legacies, including discussion of contemporary Roma and “Gypsy” styles as an outgrowth of their historical roots. The second chapter begins with a brief biography of Maurice Ravel, including some of the experiences that might have inspired his diverse compositions and a discussion of exoticism in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe. The final chapter investigates the *Tzigane*: its motivic inspirations and how these elements might shape decisions about performance practice. It provides thematic and formal analyses, giving contemporary violinists a historically grounded working manual addressing how they might craft a compelling performance of Ravel’s work.
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Introduction

Western Art Music and The Tzigane

Maurice Ravel’s *Tzigane: A Concert Rhapsody for Violin and Piano* (1924) stands at the crossroads of Western art music and the diverse Romani musical traditions. While others have discussed the history and context of this work, the questions of what musical selections informed Ravel’s compositional process and how instrumentalists should apply this framework in performance remain unexplored. This thesis seeks to answer these questions and to give performers an informed basis on which to build their interpretations.

Ravel’s *Tzigane* presents an interesting challenge to musicians, since the work was likely influenced by various folk styles including Romani and Hungarian music, in addition to works by Sarasate and Paganini. By understanding the historical sources of motives used in the *Tzigane* performers could have more informed and authentic interpretations, rather than imitating a particular instrumentalist or style (for example, the performer Jelly d’Aranyi). Such an exact imitation would likely become lifeless and unoriginal, while a performance that accounts for the diverse styles represented within the *Tzigane* could epitomize authentic and vivacious art.

Overview of Literature

The interrelations between Romani music and Western art music are the subject of a growing literature; one recent and valuable contribution is Anna Piotrowska’s *Gypsy Music in European Culture* (2013), from which I have derived much of the background information in this thesis regarding the Romani people and their culture, as well as their influence on Western art music. Two earlier sources of special significance are the anthologies of Hungarian and
Romanian peasant and folk tunes compiled by Béla Bartók (1926). These collections, though outdated in terms of their description and assessment of Romani culture, are nonetheless useful for their discussion of Gypsy musical styles and characteristics. Rollo Myers’ book *Ravel: Life & Works* (1960) provides accounts of the composer’s interactions with Jelly d’Aranyi and other performers, while Arbie Orenstein’s collection *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews* (1990) allows readers access to Ravel’s personal written correspondences. IMSLP.org is also useful for locating and referencing scores, although the quality of these musical examples often suffers due to the limited material available in the public domain. Barlow and Morgenstern’s *A Dictionary of Musical Themes* (1989) is useful in the comparison of the *Tzigane*’s motives with other classical works, while Becky Taylor’s *Another Darkness, Another Dawn: A History of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers* (2013) provides excellent historical context on the Sinti race, but includes relatively few examples of the Romani artistic scene. When seeking biographical information about composers of classical Western art music, Oxford’s *Grove Music Online* proves the most useful and widely applicable source.

**Organization of Thesis**

I have attempted to organize this thesis in a way that will allow readers to gain maximum context and appreciation for the interwoven nature of the material. I begin by providing a history of the Romani people and their manners of performance. Next, I provide a cursory view into the life of Maurice Ravel, touching upon musical exoticism in the late Romantic and early modern period. I also discuss other works by Ravel’s predecessors and contemporaries that draw material from Romani and pseudo-Romani sources. In the third chapter I analyze the *Tzigane*, noting its motivic relationships with other pieces of the time.
A Note Regarding Terminology

Although I realize that the term “Gypsy” often includes racist connotations, I use the term interchangeably with the words Roma, Romani (or Romany), and Sinti (particularly regarding race rather than culture) so as to aid in popular understanding and offer diverse vocabulary. I also attempt to fairly represent an often-subjugated people group, while acknowledging the opinions of individuals whom the Romani people have come into contact with.
Chapter 1

Romani History and Musical Style: An Overview

The wind whistles over the heath,
The moonlight flits over the flood,
And the gypsy lights up his fire
In the darkness of the wood.
Hurrah!
In the darkness of the wood.

Free is the bird in the air,
And the fish where the river flows;
Free is the deer in the forest,
And the gypsy wherever he goes.
Hurrah!
And the gypsy wherever he goes.

Gypsy Song, translated by Vassili Alexandri.¹

Introduction

Who are the Romani people, and from where do they come? What constitutes their musical style, if such a thing exists? This chapter addresses these issues from the standpoints of contemporary and nineteenth-century scholars, as well as through the analysis of modern Roma performers whose musical roots lie in Ravel’s time.

Anna G. Piotrowska, author of Gypsy Music in European Culture (2013), describes the Gypsy musician as a figure who rouses immense interest through his or her mythologized nature. As she notes, part of the Gypsy musician’s appeal lies in his or her romantic allure, and in the ability to improvise, emote, and even seduce listeners: “Within the framework of constructing an image of idealized Gypsy music both in literature and within musical works, the Gypsy musician

¹ Laura Alexandrine Smith, Through Romany Songland (London: David Stott, 1889), 9-10.
has been considered the embodiment of the inspired creator, possessing the specific features of the sensitive romantic artist. He was seductive while at the same time free and rebellious, and his separateness from bourgeois society was strongly emphasized.”

This idealization of Romani art and music, however, had little to do with actual Romani musical practices. It rather “fulfilled the romantic hankering after exotic, charming, and highly emotional music” that characterized one aspect of nineteenth-century musical taste.

Piotrowska’s words represent a nuanced perspective, starkly contrasting longstanding ideas about Gypsy musicians. Laura Alexandrine Smith’s *Through Romany Songland* (1889), for instance, presents a typically mythologized view of Gypsy music and musicians:

> Human in its sadness, twice human in its eloquence; now sighing as in *Miserere* from a cathedral at midnight; now flooded with the glory of a perfect day in June, —sometimes grand, sometimes simple; now poured from the lark-like throat of some Gypsy maid; now wooed from the tender strings of the violin, —often wild, always passionate, Gypsy music may safely be classes amongst the most interesting and diversified that is to be heard. We may go to the harvesters for choruses, whose regularity admits of no criticism, and whose beauty is apparent in every note, in every phrase; we may listen to the strains of the peasants of Tuscany, or the bead-stringers of Venice, and stand transfixed as some more than usually lovely *stradella* is wafted to us over the lagoons on a still, starry night…

Smith continues by suggesting that, for an authentic experience, individuals should seek out tent-dwelling Romani nomads, sharing Gypsy shelter and mannerisms in order to discover “the meaning of that science which, more than poetry, more than genius of all kinds, is a sublime instinct.” Although her language conveys beauty, Smith’s view represents as much about the author and her times as about the subject matter; popular opinion held that Gypsies were quasi-mystical figures with powers of fortune telling and theft, and as captivating musicians. Although it may contain some truth, this attitude stems from racist assumptions.

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3 Ibid, 1.
5 Ibid.
Early Roma History

Many early researchers of Gypsy culture in Europe focused on Romani origins and language rather than particulars of the musical style, although Heinrich Grellman (1756-1804) briefly touches upon musical issues. Still, the Arabic chronicle of Hamza Ispahani dates to around 950 CE and refers to Gypsy musical traditions. Piotrowska notes the tribe of Zott, referring broadly to those who had entered the Persian kingdom from the Indus valley region, probably including the Romani people. Also, various legends refer to thousands of poets and musicians traveling from regions of modern India. Some early Gypsies may have brought the lute with them to Europe; one name for the Roma is Luri, which many scholars associate with the word lute. Furthermore, Gypsy musicians often referred to themselves as Lautari. The term Tzigane enters scholarship and public use in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in the city of Constantinople, emerging out of a Manichean sect (the “Athinganoi” or “Hatsigganoi”). Even at this early stage, Gypsies were associated with magic, palm reading, astrology, acrobatics, and busking. Figure 1-1 gives a chart of likely Sinti migration routes from the tenth to eighteenth centuries.

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7 Piotrowska, Gypsy Music in European Culture, 4.
8 Ibid, 5.
While journeying through Europe, some Gypsies are said to have used the guise of pilgrims, forging onwards towards Western Europe and away from slavery in Romania; this ploy eased their travels as they were often protected from danger by assurances of safety and protection from local authorities. Although their main profession was often as smiths, the Roma were again perceived as entertainers: acrobats, fortunetellers, and musicians. The Gypsies embellished each of their performances with tales of perilous adventures; these performances were extremely popular, and non-Romani performers were known to have joined in. The Roma performers were further documented in 1469, performing on lutes and other plucked instruments for the Duke of Ferrara of Italy and the Royal Court of Hungary. Later, many Roma provided various types of entertainment over a large geographical area, a role initially shared with other (non-Gypsy) performers. However, the nineteenth century saw prohibitions enacted against many Europeans relating to music as entertainment, giving Gypsies more opportunity to become

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professional musicians. Several of these artists developed their families into musical dynasties; some extant families include the Robertsons of Scotland and the Lakatoses of Hungary.¹⁰

Roma in Society

Romani musicians were often hired for court performances; this association with the aristocracy minimized the impact of the social and ethnic stigma surrounding the Roma musicians, especially considering that most musicians were otherwise held in ill repute. In the late eighteenth century, dramatic musicality was seen as an intrinsic trait of Roma culture, and (as previously discussed) Gypsies were considered disreputable entertainers.¹¹ The quasi-modern stereotype of the Gypsy musician surfaced in the nineteenth century; the ‘lone Gypsy musician’ paradigm (which romanticized the Roma artist as a kind of anti-hero) caused some measure of appreciation for Gypsy musicians, and also caused some non-Roma composers to use Gypsy themes in their works. However, this treatment of Gypsy music tended to oversimplify diverse Roma cultures into a single marketable entity.¹² Thankfully, such generalizations were reconsidered in the early twentieth century. Piotrowska states that “rather than referring to all Romani people as a whole, authors and composers began recognizing nuance and diversity within various Romani cultures and within the people groups that the Roma have interacted with.”¹³

Sadly, much of the previous centuries’ racial prejudice remains, although scholarship regarding the Romani people and culture seems to have become more objective.

¹¹ Piotrowska, Gypsy Music in European Culture, 7.
¹² Ibid, 7-8.
¹³ Ibid, 1.
Modern Romani Studies

It remains difficult to extrapolate a dominant style of “Gypsy music”; some analyses of Romani musical style as a monolithic entity ignore variations among Gypsy groups. Many Roma living in Scotland take up the bagpipe, while Spanish Andalusian Gypsies play flamenco and Russian Roma perform in choirs. Central European Romani tend to give their young boys guitars, while the girls take up singing.\textsuperscript{14} This adaptability might help explain the extent to which Roma music has influenced and infiltrated Western art music and popular music.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, there does exist a common equation among Roma music scholars (in addition to those elements mentioned further below): improvisation plus virtuosity equals emotion.\textsuperscript{16} This represents a unifying element amid great variation in Roma styles: although Gypsy music readily borrows from various musical types, discerning listeners can identify it by its colorful nature.\textsuperscript{17}

Modern study of Roma music utilizes two methods. The first looks at Romani music as a unified whole, while the second analyzes particular groups of Gypsies; this duality exhibits the conflict between scholars who see uniformity between related people groups and those who treat each segment of the Roma diaspora as a discrete entity.\textsuperscript{18} Scholars of Romani music have illuminated its various strains, including Spanish flamenco, Russian Romani choirs, Bulgarian wedding-reception music, and Hungarian restaurant entertainment. As previously noted scholars have difficulty finding unified elements between all groups, and yet they can observe some historical commonalities such as embellishment, improvisation, amplified expressivity, rapid tempo changes, rubato, and texts that emphasize mundane existence, tragedy, lost love, and an end to discrimination.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{14} Piotrowska, \textit{Gypsy Music in European Culture}, 11.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 11.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 8.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 9.
Performance Practice

Addressing more specific elements, Laura A. Smith suggests that scales used in Gypsy tunes are often characterized by their augmented seconds. The Roma people also use traditional European major and minor scales, although these lack the commercially viable “Gypsy” brand of exoticism. Zoltán Kodály presents another perspective in his work *Folk Music of Hungary*; his disdain for the Roma people radiates throughout his work. Regarding contributions to Hungarian folk music, the “gypsy contribution was not very distinguished, with the possible exception of Pista Dankó (1858-1903).” Hungarian national folk style originated in the middle of the nineteenth century, and rhythmic motives were derived from elements of language and dance. Kodály continues by suggesting that all Hungarians were musically illiterate until the twentieth century, excepting a brief period of heightened learning in the medieval period. The Romani people’s musical livelihoods demonstrated characteristics of oral culture, without much written music. Most of the music, whether old or new, included unaccompanied solo songs that were orally disseminated. Where written music was used (for example, in male choirs) it was implemented only as a tool to aid in memorization. Kodály suggests that even hymnbook examples meant little to their users, beyond their role as reminders and memorization aids. This element of Romani musical tradition likely led to the diverse strains and variations among tunes in different regions.

The only feature Kodály credits as original to the Romani people is the “Gypsy” scales, which he suggest establishes an Indian or Arabic origin.

\[
\begin{align*}
G & \quad A & \quad Bb & \quad C# & \quad D & \quad E(b) & \quad F(#) & \quad G \\
G & \quad Ab & \quad B & \quad C & \quad D & \quad Eb & \quad F(#) & \quad G
\end{align*}
\]

\[20\] Smith, *Through Romany Songland*, 5.
\[22\] Ibid, 13-14.
He writes that Gypsies introduce augmented intervals from this scale into many of the folksongs they play, an uncommon practice for non-Roma peasants. Still, Kodály says, real Romani style includes the use of major and minor modes even more frequently than the stereotypical Gypsy scales mentioned above. Many Romani assimilated entirely into Hungarian culture, led by the prolific composer Pista Dankó, who was heavily influenced by Hungarian peasant music. Dankó also composed over four hundred songs using traditional Hungarian texts, contrasting the work of many other Roma composers who usually confined their work to the instrumental csárdás.23

Kodály continues by clarifying that “authentic” Gypsy music does exist, although “it consists of short songs in Romani, known and sung today, mainly by nomadic ‘tent-colonies’ and to a lesser extent by settled village gipsies; the civilized town-gipsies, and hence the musicians, do not know them at all.”24 He states that such songs are relatively unknown, and that they have little in common with Hungarian popular music or folksongs. Furthermore, he says that the Roma “…at best are never more than second-rate imitators of the true Hungarian style.”25 Kodály saw gypsies as thieves of “authentic” Hungarian music, a perspective that seems ungenerous at best considering the constant borrowing in which all interacting cultures participate. Regarding Hungarian tunes used in Western art music, Kodály suggests that one can usually identify the composers of tunes used by Brahms in his Hungarian Dances and by Liszt in his Hungarian Rhapsodies. These Hungarian composers seem to have lived in the nineteenth century, “…and the most outstanding were Hungarian of noble descent.”26 L. A. Smith carries this train of thought back further into the past by suggesting that the aforementioned Hungarian national music was

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23 Ibid, 6-7.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid, 5.
also not indigenous to Hungary, but instead mixes Magyar, Slav, German, Wallachian, Jewish, and Gypsy styles.  

Alternatively, a valued aspect of Gypsy music and the Romani people includes the preservation of the folk music of whatever society holds dominance in a particular region; Roma tend to use these tunes from surrounding cultures both in professional music-making and for their own entertainment, helping to solidify that repertory in the common consciousness. For example, Romanian lăutari sustained epic singing (cîntec bâtrînesc) through the twentieth century through the performance of epic songs at various celebrations, such as wedding feasts. These epics often address outlaws (haiduki) fighting for social justice, typically in opposition to the Ottoman Empire. Hungarian (“Vlach”) Roma songs often modify Hungarian folk songs’ harmonic structures, melodic figures, and instrumentation. “Dance-songs, even those from popular genres such as the tango, often receive an added accompaniment played on spoons, tables or metal water jug, as well as mouth-bass, ‘rolling’ and rhythmical shouts.” Some Roma extend this principle to all the music they encounter, including Western popular music.

Other elements that Gypsies use to individualize their renditions of popular tunes include alterations of timing such as pauses and elongated notes at cadences. Hungarian Roma often distinguish southeastern Vlach from northern Vlach through their variations in tempi; those of the north tend to take faster tempi than those of the southeast, while Roma performers from Budapest are said to take the fastest speeds among these groups. Romani performers from the British Isles and Finland often superimpose a fantasia-like freedom onto an otherwise metered tune, and in some vocal genres, they might alter the text to add distinctly “Gypsified” elements to the stories. “For example, at the end of one performance of *For my Name is Jock Stewart*, Jeannie Robertson added the lines, ‘So come, fill up your glasses of brandy and wine, whatever it costs I will

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pay’. “29 The Hungarian Vlach Gypsies who composed this tune may use this couplet to show generosity and instill the value of sharing money in their compatriots. Roma performers also tend to borrow much in terms of instrumentation from the dominant culture. “30

**Manush**

Another Roma-influenced style that developed in the 1930s was the Manush Gypsy/jazz fusion, propagated by the Belgian guitarist Django Reinhardt. Manush’s parent styles (such as the French musette) were previously dominated by banjo and bandurria; the former was introduced to the French nation aside minstrel shows following World War I. Eventually the guitar overtook the banjo in popularity due to its suitability in quick, fluid improvisation and the ease of musical dialogue between various performers on stage (this method was preferred over having a “lead” musician, in contrast with other forms of jazz). Reinhardt eventually blended additional styles, including American swing and Eastern European Gypsy music in the style of Stephane Grappelli. Later, German Sinti Roma took up the reins of Manush jazz so that they might acquire a new musical identity separate from Nazi Germany (the Sinti were impacted more greatly by the Holocaust than other Roma groups). This new mode of Manush jazz (the Sinti school) began in the 1960s with violinist Schnukenack Reinhardt; its characteristics include the addition of vocal parts, the subjects of which emphasize politics and Roma traditions. Eventually Roma musicians added instruments such as double bass, cimbalom, accordion, and harp. “31

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
An Example of “Gypsy” Music in the Twentieth Century: Sandor Lakatos, *Budapest at Night*  

Although after Ravel’s time, Sandor Lakatos’ music represents an extant strand of Romani music in its continued development through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Performers might see this as a surviving cousin of the types of music that would have inspired Ravel, inferring some stylistic nuances from it. This album features a diverse array of Hungarian, Romanian, and Roma-influenced works, although as previously noted scholars sometimes have difficulty discerning the peculiarities of each. Characteristics of this album include the following elements, which performers might implement when trying to recreate Lakatos’ (and other “Gypsy” performers’) mystical allure: traditional Eastern-European tunes, virtuosic improvisation, use of extended techniques, use of “Gypsy” scales, and Manush-influenced instrumentation.

The first tune on this album has become a popular Hungarian and Gypsy anthem. *Csárdás* by Vittorio Monti was written in the style of the Hungarian national dance, a form that developed out of the *Verbunkos* (recruiting dance) style. *Verbunkos* was characterized by its slow and stately opening melody in which a military leader would begin the dance, followed by the entrance of his subordinate officers as the dance accelerated. For the finale, all the youngest members of the squadron would enter for an exuberant finish. Despite their Hungarian natures, the *Verbunkos* and *Csárdás* were usually connected with Roma peoples; Gypsies were often hired to play, and would modify and “Gypsy” each selection.  

Another example of the appropriation of non-Romani styles includes the various Romanian “Hora” dances found within the album.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g316NbDudpQ  
http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/29184
Much of the improvised ornamentation in these works occurs during the slow introductions; swift runs amid flexible timing lend an exotic flair to these elegant yet mournful tunes. Capricious passages often emerge from within vocally conceived lines; paired with sudden variations in tempo, this blend creates drama and emotion. As noted by Smith, there exists a single “thing that Mendel admits with regard to all gypsy music, and that is the perfection of the rare gift of improvisation attains among them.”34 Also, many works on this album showcase the violinist’s use of daring extended techniques, such as prolonged sections of artificial harmonics (imitating birdsong, such as in “The Canary”), challenging double-stops, left-hand pizzicato, and longing slides with intense vibrato.

As previously described by Kodály and Smith, Roma musicians tend to use a scale of Do, Re, Me, Fi, Sol, Le, and Ti. This helps to “gypsify” many of the selections that Lakatos performs, and fittingly enough may represent one of the few elements of modern Gypsy music that harks back to its Indian origins (or at least back to some of the Roma people’s journeys through Arabia). Although some of the tunes—especially those of Romanian origin—use major or Lydian modes, a majority of the works performed do use the minor scale with augmented seconds between the 3rd and 4th as well as the 6th and 7th scale degrees.

This album features Sandor Lakatos on the violin, accompanied by cimbalom, upright bass, clarinet, and backup strings; this combination seems primarily Hungarian, with the possible exception of the clarinet (as previously noted, Roma music tends to thrive in amalgamation). Manush jazz may also have influenced Lakatos’ instrumental choices; the bass lines are often similar to a walking bass, and backup strings often “comp” to fill in the texture (this last characteristic also occurs in Hungarian and Romanian folk music, but not in American jazz).

34 Smith, Through Romany Songland, 208-209.
Conclusion

Gypsy music, like the Romani people themselves, has proven adaptable to a variety of cultural and geographical situations. Moreover, it has enriched “…the very cultures that for five centuries have been bent on excluding and eradicating the Gypsy presence from their midst.”  

Despite this longstanding social and ethnic stigma, Gypsy musicians have thus made significant contributions to a wide range of musical cultures. Smith romantically sums up the influence of such contributions in her description of Sarasate’s artistry:

Many of these tunes are probably familiar to lovers of music; Pablo de Sarasate, that most perfect master of the violin, has rendered them so by playing them on many a concert platform. The fire, and life, and soul of the true Spanish gypsy thrill through every note of this marvelous interpreter. In far-off lands we may hear them—these songs of freedom, love, hope, sadness, and despair…

Smith’s words ring true for the modern world as well as her own, just as Sarasate’s music lives on through contemporary performances. As Romani arts and culture have spread throughout the world, “Gypsy” music has gained greater influence, both in specific context of the Western concert tradition and more generally in Western social life.

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid, 86.
Chapter 2

Compositional and Biographical Influences on Ravel’s “Gypsy” Style

This chapter explores the development of Ravel’s “Gypsy” style by focusing on its possible compositional and biographical influences. Opening with a brief biography of the composer, it examines the influences of Classical and Romantic composers on Ravel’s compositional aesthetic, considering his music’s relationship with contemporary “exotic” works and styles as well as his interest in musical exoticism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As an exploration of the broad musical context in which Tzigane was composed, this chapter sets the stage for the analysis of relationships between individual works in Chapter 3.

A Brief Biography

Ravel was born in the village of Ciboure, France, on the 7th of March 1875.37 His mother was Basque (although raised in Paris) and his father was Swiss; these details elucidate Ravel’s multicultural context, even from birth. He felt connected to his Spanish Basque heritage, and seems to have shown this through various “exotic” works. His father, Pierre, was an amateur pianist and engineer, and encouraged Maurice’s musical education. At the age of 7, young Ravel began studying piano with Henri Ghys, and at 12 he was educated in harmony, theory, and composition with Charles-René. Early compositions included variations on a chorale by Schumann and other imitative endeavors. In 1889, Ravel began piano studies with Emile Decombres, and later was admitted to a preparatory class in piano at the Conservatoire. Although Ravel was an award-winning performer early in life, his divergences with authority seem to have

been displayed at the Conservatoire with his failure to win various competitions including the Prix de Rome. This might also exemplify his divergence from convention, in that his failure to achieve the award-winning status he desired did not dissuade him from pursuing non-traditional formats, forms, and aesthetics.

In 1889 Ravel and Debussy attended the Paris Exhibition, profoundly impacting both composers; they were moved by examples of Javanese gamelan and Russian nationalistic music by Rimsky-Korsakov. Ravel also engaged intensely in score study with his friend Ricardo Viñes; the two explored four-hand arrangements of works by Debussy, Satie, Glazunov, Borodin, Balakirev, Franck, Schumann, and others. Ravel’s education was bolstered by membership in a group nicknamed “Les Apaches” (“The Ruffians”) that met regularly to discuss contemporary literature, music, and art; this club eventually included the composers Schmitt, da Falla, and Stravinsky. Ravel was often criticized for his indebtedness to Debussy, although he reviled the notion of direct imitation. Debussy appreciated Ravel’s compositional skill, although the older composer shunned Ravel’s work later in life due to press controversy and quarrels between their supporters. After returning to the Conservatoire in 1897, Ravel studied composition with Gabriel Fauré.

Between 1907 and 1912 Ravel delved into several theatrical works, including L’heure espagnole and Daphnis et Chloé, after which his interest in traditional forms was renewed; this resulted in his composition of works such as Le tombeau de Couperin and Trois chansons. With the advent of World War I, he tried to enlist in the French air force, but was turned down due to health problems (he was later permitted to drive in the motor transport corps). Later, wartime illness and the death of Ravel’s mother affected him deeply. “The short piano work Frontispice, written immediately after the war, captures Ravel’s confused emotional and creative state in its lack of clear structure or tonal centre… Between 1920 and 1924 Ravel produced three works in
homage to predecessors: a Duo in memory of Debussy, the *Berceuse sur le nom de Gabriel Fauré* and *Ronsard à son âme.*"  

Ravel also composed his *Tzigane: Gypsy Rhapsody* in this period.

Following the death of Claude Debussy in 1918, Maurice Ravel was heralded as France’s foremost Western art music composer. After publicly turning down the Légion d’Honneur award offered by the French state, he found less favor in the eyes of some of his younger colleagues, such as the members of Les Six and Erik Satie. Ravel became increasingly isolated, relocating to Montfort-l’Amaury 30 miles west of Paris “where he lived with his cats and was looked after by his housekeeper until his final illness (his house, with its original furnishings, is now a museum to him).”  

Ravel died on December 28th, 1937 in Paris. He seems to have lived as a social outcast for a large portion of his life, much like the nomadic Roma people whose music he sometimes emulated.

### Ravel, Exoticism, and the Pseudo-Gypsy

In his article in *Grove Music Online*, Ralph P. Locke describes exoticism as the “evocation of a place, people, or social milieu that is (or is perceived or imagined to be) profoundly different from accepted local norms in its attitudes, customs, and morals.” He goes on to say that the evoked locale can exist nearby or in distant times or places, and is usually described by the composition’s title. This criterion applies perfectly to the *Tzigane*, the title of which refers to one possible name for the Romani people (as discussed in Chapter 1). The *Tzigane* also includes the subtitle *Rhapsody*, here referring to a work of disjunctive pieces. This matches even more closely to the exotic “Gypsy” aesthetic, as the idea of the eccentric, nomadic, and eclectically dressed Romani was common in popular culture.

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38 Kelly, *Maurice Ravel*.
39 Ibid.
Furthermore, Locke’s comments on the exotic aesthetic also perfectly describe much of the Tzigane’s finer details: alternative harmonic and modal structures rather than major or minor (including pentatonic scales, or in this case “Gypsy scales”), bare textures including open octaves or fifths, parallel octaves or fifths, harmonic stasis, drones, repeated rhythmic figures taken from dance music (as seen in Example 3-35), non-standard musical instruments (in this case Ravel uses the luthéal piano accessory), and extended techniques such as double stops, pizzicato, and slides. However, Locke also notes that many instances of European exoticism do not attempt to imitate the features of authentic ethnic music; therefore, performers and scholars can see much of these styles as “exotic” Western music rather than authentic folk music.

Nonetheless, methodological improvements in nineteenth-century transportation did allow musicians and audiences to experience various peoples and cultures more authentically than before; for example, Paris saw extended performances by Indian dancers and musicians in 1838. Some of these “exotic” dances later came into fashion, including the Spanish bolero and the Hungarian csárdás; this last entry seems particularly relevant to a discussion of Ravel’s Tzigane, which (as discussed in the following chapter) appears to draw much of its form and style from the Hungarian csárdás and from works by Niccolò Paganini, as well as from other “exotic” compositions from the Romantic period.

Regarding such music written in the late-19th century, David Malvinni suggests that around that time many composers were demanding greater emotional subjectivity in their works. Roma-influenced music filled this role well, and was “perceived as a repository of emotional states, quickly alternating between grief and happiness.” Gypsy music’s immediate reaction to various emotions attracted late-Romantic composers; perhaps the impact on listeners was similar.

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41 As seen in Example 3-23 and elsewhere.
42 Locke, Exoticism.
43 Ibid.
to the modern effect of quickly changing movie frames, as film trailers commonly use now.

Malvinni suggests that, since Gypsy music maintained such an emotionally turbulent aura,

“another strategy for understanding the Gypsy aesthetic would be as the constellation of a musical environment demanding immediacy or presence.”\(^{45}\) He suggests that Johannes Brahms characterizes the Hungarian Dance No. 5 (and the Hungarian Dances in general) through the use of a whimsical and “illogical” main theme:

> Already the tag ending’s sixteenth notes… propel us ahead, causing us to experience the time as rushed similar to an adrenaline burst due to an excess of emotional torment (note that this is also a standard czárdás move). The lower range of the theme is essential to the opening, giving the mood of intensity and darkness, perhaps foreboding.\(^{46}\)

These words resonate fully with Ravel’s *Tzigane* as well (as seen in examples throughout Chapter 3); the whimsical aesthetic of many of Ravel’s themes, the relatively illogical nature of the overarching form (with almost half of the *Tzigane* devoted to an improvisatory introduction), the spirit of emotional torment (again, especially in the opening fantasia), the opening G-string passages, and the leading runs of sixteenth notes (usually over barlines) all describe elements in both Brahms’ and Ravel’s work. Curiously, a distant link may exist between the two composers through the violinist Jelly d’Aranyi (1895-1966), who originally performed Ravel’s *Tzigane*; d’Arányi was the grandniece of the renowned pedagogue and violinist Joseph Joachim\(^{47}\), with whom Brahms was close friends and was known to have collaborated on several occasions.\(^{48}\)

Several “exotic” works of the period appear to have influenced Ravel’s compositional approach in the *Tzigane*, including Sarasate’s *Zigeunerweisen*, Bizet’s *Carmen*, Monti’s *Csárdás*, and Liszt’s *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2*, as well as authentic Romani and Hungarian tunes. Ravel

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\(^{46}\) Ibid, 73.


was likely influenced by Hungarian violinist Jelly d’Aranyi’s style and repertoire;\textsuperscript{49} these works in turn were likely drawn from Hungarian and Spanish dance music, some of which would have originally been performed by Romani musicians, who might have modified the folk melodies that inspired Monti, Liszt, Bizet, and Sarasate to reflect the performers’ “exotic” aesthetic.\textsuperscript{50} Also, as discussed in the following chapter, Ravel was likely influenced by the pure showmanship of Niccolò Paganini, whose virtuosity and technical facility remain legendary in the twenty-first century.

\textsuperscript{49} Arbie Orenstein, ed. \textit{A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 253.

Chapter 3

Maurice Ravel’s Tzigane: Motivic Inspirations and How To Use Them

This chapter analyzes Maurice Ravel’s Tzigane by detailing each section and its possible motivic inspirations. It begins with a study of the opening solo passages by detailing motives and ornamental nuances, while the later passages address possible influences from various types of dance music and song. Each section will suggest a historically justified method of performance practice for twenty-first century artists, reflecting upon classical traditions through Ravel’s time and beyond as well as Roma traditions. The purpose of this chapter lies in creating an effective and reasonable synthesis of these styles, fashioning a meaningful aural experience for performers and audiences alike. Rather than detailing all passages, this chapter will focus on the themes of each area, leaving broader application of these ideas to performers and their tastes.

Context

Maurice Ravel’s Tzigane: Gypsy Rhapsody was composed between 1922 and 1924, when much of Ravel’s creative energy was focused on the opera L’Enfant et les sortilèges. The Tzigane was originally written for violin and piano, although later versions included orchestra and a novelty piano attachment called the luthéal (which creates tone quality much like the Hungarian cimbalom— Daniel Hope’s album East Meets West demonstrates this accessory). Ravel was inspired to write the Tzigane after a rapturous performance by Hungarian violinist Jelly d’Aranyi; her dynamism and repertoire of “Gypsy” tunes enthralled the young French composer. Although Blair Johnston suggests that d’Arányi later gave Ravel an all-night private concert including a
great portion of her Roma-influenced repertoire,\textsuperscript{51} this report seems speculative and lacking in significant citation regarding the event, making confirmation difficult at best. However, there exists some additional anecdotal evidence that the event did indeed take place; according to author Arbie Orenstein,

Mme Robert Casadesus recalled a private musicale which took place in London in 1922, in which Jelly d’Aranyi and Hans Kindler performed the Sonata for Violin and Cello. Late in the evening Ravel asked the Hungarian violinist to play some gypsy melodies. After Mlle d’Aranyi obliged, the composer asked for one more melody, and then another. The gypsy melodies continued until about 5 A.M., with everyone exhausted except the violinist and the composer. That evening was to mark the initial gestation of \textit{Tzigane}.\textsuperscript{52}

This notion gives scholars another window into Ravel’s mindset before writing the \textit{Tzigane}; judging from David Milsom’s article on \textit{Naxos Music Online} as well as Joseph Macleod’s \textit{The Sisters d’Aranyi} (1969), D’Arányi was well versed in the music of Bartók, Brahms, and Joachim,\textsuperscript{53} at a time when the fame of Pablo de Sarasate might have only recently have begun to dim.\textsuperscript{54} Sadly, no recordings exist of Jelly d’Aranyi (the piece’s inspiration and dedicatee) performing this work, although YouTube sources contain extant recordings of d’Aranyi performing related works\textsuperscript{55} as well as recordings of Pablo de Sarasate performing his own compositions.\textsuperscript{56}


\textsuperscript{52} Orenstein, 253.


The composer’s mind seems to have been enraptured by the idea of exotic virtuosity; Ravel, as recorded in Orenstein’s *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews* (1990) wrote the following to d’Aranyi on March 13th, 1924:

Dear Mademoiselle,

Would you have the time to come to Paris in 2 or 3 weeks? If so, I would like to speak to you about *Tzigane*, which I am writing specially for you, which will be dedicated to you, and which will replace my sonata, temporarily abandoned, in the London program.

The *Tzigane* must be a piece of great virtuosity. Certain passages can produce brilliant effects, provided that it is possible to perform them—which I’m not always sure of.

If there is no other way, I will submit them to you by mail. Obviously, this would be less convenient.

While awaiting the pleasure of seeing you again, at the very least on April 26, dear Mademoiselle, please believe in my great artistic sympathy.

Maurice Ravel

Also, on March 25th, 1924 Ravel included the following in a note to Roland-Manuel: “Almost nothing of *Tzigane* is written. Yet I am convinced that it will be finished on time.” Ravel did indeed complete the *Tzigane* on time, although with hardly a moment to spare, and the first performance of the *Tzigane* took place on April 26th, 1924. In *Ravel: Life & Works* (1960), author Rollo H. Myers discloses how Ravel had Mademoiselle Hélène Jourdan-Morhange perform Niccolò Paganini’s 24 Caprices while he was composing the *Tzigane*.

Dating from the same period, 1924, and providing further evidence of Ravel’s interest in virtuosity for its own sake, is the *Tzigane* dedicated to the Hungarian violinist Jelly d’Aranyi who with H. Gil-Marchex at the piano gave the first performance in London on April 26, 1924, having had only two days in which to study it. The composer described it briefly as “a virtuoso piece in the style of a Hungarian Rhapsody”; on the title page it is described as “Rapsodie de Concert”. It is everything that its name implies, a virtuoso piece calculated to tax the skill and bravura of even the most accomplished technician, but is at the same time an extremely clever *pastiche* of the authentic Tzigane style. In writing it Ravel took as his model the 24 *Caprices* of Paganini which he asked Mme Morhange to play to him while he was composing it.

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58 Ibid, 253.
60 Ibid, 189
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
Judging from these statements compared to the score of the *Tzigane*, Ravel seems to have drawn certain motives and elements of the overall form of the *Tzigane* from Paganini’s notorious works, as well as a spirit of virtuosity for its own sake (see the commentary below regarding rehearsal number 6).

The overall form of the *Tzigane* seems most similar to the Hungarian csárdás; Ravel begins his work with a slow and improvisatory introduction, which lasts a curiously long time considering the relative brevity of the whole work. This imbalance shifts focus away from the full ensemble (violin and piano or violin and orchestra) and towards the individual violinist; perhaps Ravel was inspired by the virtuosity and mystery of Paganini’s legendary aesthetic, as noted above.\(^{63}\) The next section includes piano (or orchestral) accompaniment and the most distinctive theme of the *Tzigane*, which occurs in a minor mode and in theme & variation form; these iterations seem to evoke a band cycling through instrumental and vocal solos (see comments on rehearsal number 8). The final large-scale section of the *Tzigane* uses predominantly major modes and dance-like figures, pushing faster and faster until the end of the piece.

**Measure 1**

The *Tzigane* begins with a fiery entrance in B minor (Example 3-1); the violinist enters dramatically on a low B-natural, later surrounding that pitch with chromatic neighboring tones, accents, leading runs, and snapping rhythms. The rhythms in this section allude to Hungarian folk music, albeit stretched, compressed, and ornamented through rhythmic augmentation and diminution (see Example 3-3b for an original Hungarian folk song, according to Béla Bartók). For this material Ravel also seems to have drawn from the styles of Liszt (Example 3-2), Paganini

\(^{63}\) Myers, 189.
(Example 3-3), and Leoncavallo (Example 3-4). The Paganini Caprice shows a connection only in the opening motive; this association might seem specious if not for Ravel’s circumstances while writing the Tzigane, discussed briefly earlier. The Liszt example shows more literal inspiration: beyond the shared spirit of fierce improvisation, first-beat accents, and tonal structures, the two pieces share striking resemblances in their melodic and rhythmic structures.

With a comparison of the ornamentation in the Liszt to the 32nd notes in the Ravel, the rhythms become almost equivalent. The inclusion of fast notes just before a new measure begins (in the Ravel, 32nd notes leading into the second measure, and in the Liszt, grace note ornamentation) as well as the accents and points of emphasis within each phrase provides the same type of melodic and rhythmic gesture. David Malvini, author of The Gypsy Caravan: From Real Roma to Imaginary Gypsies in Western Music and Film, writes:

> The Second Rhapsody, dedicated to a connoisseur of Gypsy music, Count László Teleki, is the most performed of the set… it is the opening bars, before the Lassan, or the slow section of the piece, that Liszt realizes the impetus for Gypsiness… the Lassan is wistful, capricious, and pure nostalgia… we do not really know where it is heading, until the opening is reintroduced.64

A comparison of the two musical examples shows that Malvini’s passage could just as easily apply to the Tzigane as Liszt’s Rhapsody, especially regarding the works’ overall form and capricious mood.

More strikingly, the pitches of Ravel’s first theme adhere precisely to the melody of the introduction to Leoncavallo’s Intermezzo from Pagliacci (189265, Example 3-4). Although Ravel includes no harmony in this section of the introduction, the heightened level of chromaticism (especially the raised 7th and lowered 2nd scale degree) intensifies the “exotic” mood of the opening. Although Ravel wrote this section with dramatic articulation such as accents, successive

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64 David Malvinni, The Gypsy Caravan: From Real Roma to Imaginary Gypsies in Western Music and Film (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 104.
down-bows, staccato, and snappy rhythmic values, the material’s likely derivation from Hungarian peasant songs (because of first beat emphases, fast-slow, fast-slow rhythmic couplets, and leading ornamentation) could designate a milder approach to the articulation in what performers usually interpret as a bitingly vigorous introduction. Nonetheless, violinists still should perform the opening heavily considering the accent pattern and the sol-G designation (perhaps signifying the imitation of a deep male vocal line). Furthermore, the aforementioned improvisatory tendencies of Roma musicians should lend an air of spontaneity to the repertoire of any performer presenting this work (further evidenced by Ravel’s marking of *Lento, quasi cadenza* before the first musical phrase).


Example 3-2: Franz Liszt, Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2. (Amerikan Elite Series: Prochazka, 1884).
Measure 9

The next type of thematic material begins with the pickups into measure 9; the violinist’s line swoops upwards dramatically before holding on a high A, and the heavily chromaticized line draws audiences longingly through the anguish performers must demonstrate; the G-sharps pull all the way into the next measure, which begins with the resolution, A. The G-sharp also
influences the effect of the F-natural, causing it to pull downwards towards E, and the B-flat
draws downwards towards the A. In the following measure, Ravel shifts the tonal focus towards
the key of F-sharp minor. The melodic contour shows similarity to Vittorio Monti’s Csárdás
(Example 3-7), due to the octave leap from A3 to A4 and the key change to D minor within the
Ravel. Additionally, both introductions demonstrate stylistic similarity to the typical fantasia-like
beginning of a csárdás. Indeed, it seems that much of the Tzigane’s form draws inspiration from
the generic csárdás and its parent style, the Verbunkos recruiting dance (as articulated
previously); one might compare these opening phrases (and indeed the introduction of the
Tzigane in general) to the opening passages of a csárdás, before both styles grow faster and faster
as audience dance themselves into a veritable frenzy. Ravel marked this passage with both tempo
rubato and espressivo, also matching closely to the mood and character of the csárdás. Again
there exists a more literal reference on which Ravel might have drawn; from the pickups to the
fourth measure of Pablo de Sarasate’s Zigeunerweisen (Example 3-8), the first ten notes match
exactly to Ravel’s second thematic grouping (Example 3-6), and the sections’ characters closely
resemble one another.

Example 3-6: Ravel, Tzigane.
Example 3-7: Vittorio Monti, Czardas (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1904).

Example 3-8: Pablo de Sarasate, Zigeunerweisen (New York: Carl Fischer, 1895).
Measure 11

Measures 11 through 13 (Example 3-9) exemplify Ravel’s efforts to notate Romani improvisations, perhaps as he experienced through the music of Sarasate (possibly performed by d’Aranyi). Beginning in measure 11, a quarter note A gives way to a series of nine descending groups of four sixteenth notes each, plus an abrupt concluding group of only three notes. The four-note groups are articulated in slurred pairs, and the final group ends with a staccato marking on the third sixteenth note. Both the idiomatic finger pattern implied here and the increase in speed (“accelerando” in measure 11 leading to “vivo” in measure 12) suggest an improvisatory style and recall similar writing in Sarasate’s Zigeunerweisen (see Example 3-10). How did Sarasate play such material? Fortunately, scholars have at their disposal an original recording of Sarasate performing his Gypsy Airs (Zigeunerweisen); the world-renowned violinist incorporates many elements in his music that were likely drawn from Hungarian and Roma themes and performance practice. For instance, Example 3-11 shows a theme of which Kodály cites the original Hungarian song (Example 3-12). Furthermore, the final theme in the Zigeunerweisen appears to have been drawn directly from Franz Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsody No. 13 (Example 3-11). Both as a performer and composer, Sarasate seems to have no qualms about pushing extreme tempi in the improvised sections of the Zigeunerweisen (once again seen in Example 3-10), throwing notes away in a magical slight-of-hand gesture that demonstrates his technical prowess and musical ease. Sarasate also employs the stereotypical Gypsy scale of Do Re Me Fi Sol Le Ti Do (especially in the slower sections), adding to the exotic mood of the piece.

Example 3-9: Ravel, Tzigane.
Examples 3-11 through 3-14 show some of Sarasate’s influences from the folk music of Hungary. Example 3-11 includes a Hungarian dance cited by Bartók (seen in Example 3-12), which Sarasate has slightly modified for use in his *Gypsy Aires* (*Zigeunerweisen*). As noted earlier, although Sarasate was not borrowing from original Romani music, he was drawing on tunes that might have been performed and propagated by Roma within Hungary. Later, Example 3-13 links Sarasate’s last theme of *Zigeunerweisen* to the faster theme of Liszt’s *Hungarian Rhapsody* No. 13 (Example 3-14). Therefore, if Ravel was drawing from the music of Sarasate, he might also have been indirectly pulling inspiration from Liszt, who was using Hungarian folk music as his model. This Hungarian music, in turn, would have developed in contact with Romani culture; thus, the aforementioned long line of connections may represent the closest links between Ravel’s *Tzigane* and real Roma.
Example 3-11: Sarasate, Zigeunerweisen.


Example 3-13: Sarasate, Zigeunerweisen.
Example 3-14: Franz Liszt, Hungarian Rhapsody No 13 (Leipzig: Peters, 1854).

Rehearsal Number 1

Example 3-15 shows the most mysteriously original line in Ravel’s work; this phrase also characterizes the middle section of the Tzigane. Simple in mood yet nuanced in ornamentation, the figure hints at inspiration from Hungarian folksong and other classical works (later comments regarding Example 3-26 show more direct linkages). Ravel communicates this phrase’s mysterious nature through the use of open fifths, teasing ornamentation and slides, a flat seventh scale degree, and nuanced dynamics and articulation such as accents and staccato.

Example 3-15: Ravel, Tzigane.
Example 3-16 and 3-17 show another possible link between Ravel and Paganini; in the repetition of the first motive seen in the *Tzigane*, Ravel adds octave double-stops above the theme, greatly increasing the motive’s difficulty and intensity. Paganini uses the same technique in his 24th Caprice (Example 3-17), although he also modifies the theme to a greater extent.

Example 3-16: Ravel, *Tzigane*.


Example 3-18 (from the *Tzigane*) and Example 3-19 (from the *Zigeunerweisen*) contain identical arpeggios (transposed by a fifth); this detail should remove any doubt of the connection between Ravel and Sarasate. Beginning on the first note, both ascend by a 10th, then by a 12th, then by two octaves, and then proceed to flourish into the upper regions of the violin’s range. Another example of exotic “Gypsy” embellishment and improvisation, performers can play this
section with some rhythmic liberties, and yet without losing the fiery virtuosity of the gesture.

One might also note Paganini’s influence on this passage (see Example 3-20), in the primary faster dance theme (Example 3-26), and through the larger form of the work. Through the second main section of the work (the teasing theme from rehearsal 6), Ravel uses a theme and variation form much as Paganini does in his 24th Caprice. Furthermore, as noted earlier, many of Ravel’s variations use extended techniques that Ravel might have drawn directly from Paganini’s Caprices.

Example 3-18: Ravel, Tzigane.

Example 3-19: Sarasate, Zigeunerweisen.

Example 3-20: Paganini, 24 Capricci.
Rehearsal Number 3

Example 3-21 shows the finale to the opening section’s improvisatory fantasia; marked *espressivo* and on the violin’s lower strings, the section exudes passion and bravura, and performers would do well to avoid performing this area strictly metrically. The motives found in this section (rehearsal numbers 3-5) play only minimal thematic roles in the rest of the piece, yet these melodic lines seem to embody the climax of Ravel’s improvisatory thoughts in his opening material. Perhaps this denotes another rhapsodic element in Ravel’s work, in which not all segments need bear motivic resemblance to one another (as one might expect some sections of a Classical-era sonata to do). The closest connection to the works already discussed, although not strong, occurs between the techniques used by Ravel at rehearsal number 3 and those used by Sarasate during the slow portions of the *Zigeunerweisen* (as seen in Example 3-22).

Example 3-21: Ravel, *Tzigane*.

Example 3-22: Sarasate, *Zigeunerweisen*. 
Later, Ravel adds more and more flourishes to this quasi-improvisatory section; this may bear resemblance to techniques implemented by Sarasate (Example 3-24) and by Paganini (Example 3-25). The zeros written in Paganini’s score in the place of fingerings represent left-hand pizzicato, creating a virtuosic special effect (one that Ravel later uses, possibly in imitation of the cimbalom).

Example 3-23: Ravel, *Tzigane*.

Example 3-24: Sarasate, *Zigeunerweisen*.

Example 3-25: Paganini, *24 Capricci*. 
Rehearsal Number 6

Next, the piano (or orchestra) enters while progressing into a faster theme, where audiences can once again find the most unique and memorable theme of the Tzigane (see Example 3-13 for the clearest statement). Ravel frames this melody upon an ambiguous and haunting open fifth pattern, decorated with half-step grace notes and Hungarian snaps (a pattern of sixteenth-note/dotted-eighth-note pairs), combined with a flat seventh scale degree. A search of Harold Barlow and Sam Morgenstern’s A Dictionary of Musical Themes reveals minimal relations between this theme and others of Western art music,66 making this a challenging subject on which to draw thematic connections, and similarly, a review of Bartók’s anthologies of Hungarian and Romanian folk music illuminates little about the origins of this motivic area.67

It seems possible that Ravel again drew material from Paganini’s Caprice No. 24 (Example 3-27). The melodic content shows similarity through the focus on the pitches A and E, and the second variation of Paganini’s work (Example 3-28) includes ornamentation that looks suspiciously similar to the ornamentation used by Ravel. The composer appears to have used a variant of the 24th Caprice’s theme as his framework, and then modified it with Bartókian and Paganinian grace notes leading chromatically into the outlining notes. This last detail not only adds color and direction to the musical phrase, but also lends an exotic and teasing mood to what might otherwise sound like a sterile and empty melody. As stated earlier, Ravel was privy to a secluded performance of Paganini’s works by Hélene Jourdan-Morhange during the composition of Tzigane. What better way to devise an impressive Gypsy-style theme for this work than to “Gypsify” Paganini’s most striking tune?


67 Béla Bartók, Hungarian Folk Songs, volume I, ed. Sándor Kovács and Ferenc Sebő (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1993). Measures 5-7 of this theme represent an exception, since they show rhythmic influence from Hungarian folk songs.
If this hypothesis proves accurate, the term *capricious* (used here meaning unpredictable, mercurial, or quickly changing) could become a defining characteristic of this motivic area; performers might express this through quirky alterations and non-uniformity, particularly between repeated sections, and by emphasizing the half-step motion between grace notes and primary notes. Those desiring a more folky sound might choose to use open strings rather than fingered notes, embracing the twang of an open E string. Bartók’s *Rumanian Folk Dances* represent another possible influence; the first movement (Example 3-29) includes similar passages in the middle and toward the closing measures. Measures 33 and 49 of the Bartók include open-fifth motives based on A and E, as well as half-step ornamentation, a two-four meter, and an A-minor key signature.

Example 3-26: Ravel, *Tzigane*.

Example 3-27: Paganini, *24 Capricci*. 
Example 3-28: Paganini, *24 Capricci*.

Rehearsal Number 8

Beginning at *Un poco più moderato*, Ravel repeats the first dance theme interspersed with harmonics (Example 3-30); this creates layers of flute-like sound, punctuated by the open-fifth melody. Performers should emphasize the open-fifth framework of the theme clearly, lest it become lost in the dense texture of harmonics and accompaniment. Ravel might have learned this technique of combining a simple theme with harmonics as filler from Sarasate, who inserted the same idea into his *Zigeunerweisen*. Sarasate’s theme (as seen in Example 3-13) was borrowed in turn from Liszt’s *Hungarian Rhapsody* No. 13 (as seen in Example 3-14).

In one possible model for the overall organization of this middle section of the *Tzigane*, theorists might label each variation as a different instrument within a band. In this scenario, each “musician” takes a solo before passing on the melody to a fellow instrumentalist or vocalist. Example 3-26 would represent a line performed by the fiddle player, followed by a flute-type instrument in Example 3-30. Example 3-35 then becomes a vocal line, followed by cimbalom at Example 3-40, another flute line at rehearsal number 14 (Example 3-32), and a fiery tutti climax with off-kilter double-stops and trills (as seen in Examples 3-33 and 3-34).
Example 3-30: Ravel, Tzigane.

Example 3-31: Sarasate, Zigeunerweisen.
Example 3-32: Ravel, Tzigane.

Example 3-33: Ravel, Tzigane.

Example 3-34: Ravel, Tzigane.
Rehearsal Number 9

Another striking and mysterious theme appears after rehearsal number 9 (Example 3-35); this example uses D as tonic and employs the stereotypical “Gypsy” scale, minor with a raised 4th scale degree. Example 3-35 also tends to emphasize G-sharp, drawing every ounce of “Gypsyness” out of the passage and admitting for a possible parallel between this section and the third movement of Bartók’s *Rumanian Folk Dance* (Example 3-36), originally titled *Roumanian Folk Dances from Hungary*. The inclusion of both Romania and Hungary in the title arises from the fact that Bartók drew these tunes from Transylvania, a region that lies directly on the (frequently oscillating) border between the two nations, who were in dispute during the work’s composition. The Bartók example includes extra accents that the Ravel example does not, although violinists might draw on Bartók’s stylistic nuances by emphasizing and languishing on the G-sharp before moving on to the following A or F-natural. This version of Bartók’s work (Example 3-36, for violin and piano) uses fingered harmonics, possibly representing a flute solo (as Ravel seems to do later on; see Example 3-37). Scholars might extend the parallel between Bartók’s work and Ravel’s further by noticing the manner in which both pieces seem to cycle through the imitation of various instruments within a band, as noted earlier; Ravel’s work begins with a solo fiddle (rehearsal number 6, Example 3-26), then moves another violinist (perhaps showing off their virtuosity) at rehearsal number 8 (Example 3-30), followed by a vocally conceived line at rehearsal number 9 (Example 3-35). Next comes more virtuosic fiddle material at rehearsal number 10, followed by imitation of a cimbalom at rehearsal number 11 (Example 3-40), the flute at rehearsal number 14 (Example 3-30), and the whole band from rehearsal number 15 until 17 (Examples 3-33 and 3-34) pushing to a climactic end before moving on to a new type of dance. The Bartók shows this model less directly; the first two movements (in the orchestral

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version) use violin tutti, either representing themselves or peasant songs. The third movement uses piccolo solo, while the fourth movement seems like a song before the whole band reenters in the last three (attacca) movements.69

Example 3-35: Ravel, Tzigane.

Example 3-36: Bartók, Roumanian Folk Dances.

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69 Béla Bartók, Roumanian Folk Dances, transcribed for Violin and Piano by Zoltán Székely (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1926).
Example 3-37: Ravel, *Tzigane*.

Example 3-38 shows another area in which Ravel may have been inspired by the improvisatory fantasia-like sections that accentuate the first half of Sarasate’s *Zigeunerweisen* (Example 3-39); fast slurred runs rush towards climax, after which audiences are thrust back into one of the central thematic areas. Performers usually take great liberties in this section, treating it as a miniature cadenza; this seems to fit well with the Romani aesthetic (as earlier noted by L. A. Smith and Anna Piotrowska).

Example 3-38: Ravel, *Tzigane*. 
Moving on to Example 3-40, listeners can find an area of running sixteenth notes outlining the theme from rehearsal number 6. Ravel employs left-hand pizzicato much in the same manner as Sarasate (Example 3-41) and Paganini (Example 3-42). In particular, the Paganini represents a theme and variations form that uses this particular iteration to embellish the simple melody and demonstrate the performer’s left-hand virtuosity. Alternatively, Ravel includes contrast with the other two composers by writing the melody notes with right-hand pizzicato rather than with the bow. This phrase could represent Ravel’s efforts to imitate another Hungarian or Romani folk instrument, the cimbalom, which has among its many graceful qualities the ability to easily play continual 16th and 32nd notes with mechanically evenly rhythms (although this may present a daunting challenge to modern performers).

70 Discussed earlier: a hammered dulcimer.
Example 3-40: Ravel, *Tzigane*.

Example 3-41: Sarasate, *Zigeunerweisen*.

Example 3-42: Paganini, *24 Capricci*. 
Rehearsal Number 17

The next thematic area (beginning at rehearsal number 17, Example 3-43) features one of the most common rhythmic figures in Hungarian folk music. The area begins on a high D-natural, followed by an emphatic jump downwards to an accented and syncopated G-sharp. The figure then reverses in direction, driving chromatically upwards to the grace-note jump from B to G. The following two measures finish the phrase, rising upwards from B-sharp to F-sharp before arpeggiating quickly upwards then back down to D-natural. The phrase then repeats beginning in the subdominant (another common feature of Hungarian folk music, as a review of Bartók’s anthologies shows). The composer iterates this phrase a total of four times in the solo violin, followed by two times in the orchestra or piano. Ravel marks this section *sempre fortissimo* with accents and down-bows; this seems to indicate a heavy and emphatic manner of performance (performers might imagine a graceful yet hefty dancer). One can find this rhythmic figure in the works of Liszt (see Example 3-44), as well as in more authentic sources such as from Béla Bartók’s collection, *Hungarian Folk Songs* (1993) (see Example 3-45).

Example 3-43: Ravel, *Tzigane*.

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71 Bartók, *Hungarian Folk Songs*, 713.
Moving into the final section in the Tzigane (beginning at Example 3-46), performers arrive at a type of perpetual motion, with running sixteenth notes accentuated by various articulations and stress patterns. Ravel’s music seems once again to draw from Sarasate’s Zigeunerweisen (Example 3-48), and the two pieces may also share a common ancestor in
Hungarian and Russian Romani dance music (see Example 3-49, especially measure 4 of the listed example compared to measure 5 of the Ravel, Example 3-48). Later (Example 3-51) Ravel incorporates a variety of extended techniques used earlier in the Tzigane (in this case, harmonics and left-hand pizzicato), increasing the frequency of their use to build additional energy. The composer also uses this technique on the motivic fragments found at the beginning of Example 3-52 (the same phrase as found below in the first four measures of Example 3-46); Ravel accelerates and fragments these figures, increasing their motivic density and creating an almost frantic atmosphere, much like the mood of the final sections of a Hungarian csárdás. Brahms also commonly used these fast sixteenth-note passages in his Hungarian Dances, often with similar accompaniment. One might also see Vittorio Monti’s Csárdás (Example 3-50) as an inspiration, especially in the large-scale form’s progression from slow and brooding to a lively moto perpetuoso.

Example 3-46: Ravel, Tzigane.

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72 Smith, Through Romany Songland, 105.
Example 3-47: Pablo de Sarasate, Zigeunerweisen.

Example 3-48: Smith, p. 105.
Example 3-49: Monti, *Czardas*.

Example 3-50: Ravel, *Tzigane*.

Example 3-52 shows a return of the dance-like theme from rehearsal number 20 (Example 3-46), after which Ravel begins the semi-final accelerando towards the end of the piece. Ravel uses the phrase *Accel. poco a poco*, denoting a slow acceleration towards the blazing finish (much like a csárdás). This iteration occurs on the G-string, drawing a richer sound from
the violin and possibly evoking the Tzigane’s opening motive. The regular modulations found here might imitate Hungarian peasant tunes,\textsuperscript{74} while the fast-paced rhythmic values and melodic stricter can remind audiences of faster Russian Gypsy dances.\textsuperscript{75}

Example 3-51 - Ravel, Tzigane.

Rehearsal Number 32

Finally, Ravel returns audiences to the original Paganinian fast and teasing theme (Example 3-53; also seen in Example 3-26), intermingled with auto-accompanimental decorations and open strings. This A-minor phrase lends thematic unity to a work that otherwise exemplifies rhapsodic and through-composed form, drawing listeners into a musical journey which seldom returns to previous material; no other themes circle back as fully or as often as this one, and certainly not in each of the three main sections. The composer also cleverly amalgamates the major theme at rehearsal number 20 and the teasing theme from rehearsal number 6. From Poco meno vivo, Ravel draws the energy (which was previously ramping up through an increase in

\textsuperscript{74} Bartók, Hungarian Folk Songs.
\textsuperscript{75} Smith, Through Romany Songland.
tempo, as many csárdás’ do) back to a manageable level at rehearsal number 32; performers might take this at a speed that evokes the spirit of the same theme at rehearsal number 6 (Example 3-26), although the motive travels by at twice the original tempo. Also, although Ravel notates no accents in the theme at rehearsal number 32, those playing this piece would do well to emphasize those notes that outline the original theme.

Example 3-52 - Ravel, Tzigane.

**Conclusion**

Ravel seems to have drawn his inspirations for this striking, original, and exceptionally difficult work for violin from the following composers and works, among others: Franz Liszt’s *Hungarian Rhapsody* No. 2 (1847), Béla Bartók’s *Roumanian Folk Dances*, Ruggero Leoncavallo’s *Intermezzo* from *Pagliacci* (1892), Vittorio Monti’s *Csárdás* (1904), Niccolò Paganini’s 24 Caprices for Solo Violin (1805-1809), and Pablo de Sarasate’s *Zigeunerweisen*
(1878). Of these, Ravel seems to have borrowed elements of large-scale structure from the Liszt, Paganini, and Monti examples, while drawing nuances from the works of Sarasate, Leoncavallo, and Bartók.

This thesis has also attempted to provide a well-grounded approach for modern performers seeking to perform this work with authentic stylistic nuances. As noted earlier, performers may find it challenging to discern what approach to adopt; no recording of the original performer, Jelly d’Aranyi, exists for this work, nor do any recordings of this piece exist from early twentieth-century Romani. Still, Ravel has left detailed clues in the score and in his motivic inspirations. Since, as noted, Ravel seems to have drawn on the music of Sarasate, it seems that performers might imitate some of Sarasate’s style (preserved in numerous recordings) when performing this piece, as well as some characteristics of d’Aranyi’s extant recordings. Whatever approach performers ultimately choose, they should consider multiple possibilities in the execution of any work; a performer without knowledge of alternatives has no real choice and therefore remains subject to whatever circumstances he or she happens to have previously encountered. Knowledge can liberate artists and help them to realize the stylistic nuances that they select for a performance. The Romani aesthetic exudes beauty, nuance, and mysterious flair; performers who use these findings might develop a fuller interpretation, providing entertainment and enlightenment for listeners.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


