

The history and development of the tárogató

By Dr. Milan Milosevic

In this chapter I briefly examine the origins of the tárogató, outlining the technical advances of various period instruments related to the emergence of the modern instrument as we see it today. For clarity, I will divide this historical overview into periods before and after 1900 AD.

The tárogató before 1900

The Hungarian tárogató is believed to have descended from the Persian *zurna*. Old Romanian chronicles often mention the *surla*, an ancient wind instrument related to, or identical with, the middle-eastern *zurna*, which is a kind of shawm with a double reed (Alexandru 1980, 99). The Hungarian name tárogató is derived from that of the unrelated Turkish instrument the *töröksip*, synonymous with the later-adopted name *tarogoatã* in Romanian:

The Turks introduced the tárogató to Eastern Europe in the late seventeenth century, discovered by West Europeans in 1683, when the Turkish troops were defeated near Vienna. The tárogató was left behind in Austria along with Turkish coffee in abandoned Turkish belongings. (Welsh 1929, 46)

Instruments by the name of *zurna* can still be heard in Macedonia, Bosnia, and Kosovo; the name of *sournas* in Greece; the name of *surla* in Romania; and the name *surle* in Albania (Jansen, 2007). Examples and structural similarities of the tárogató predecessor based on the Turkish instrument the *zurna* can be observed in figure 2.1.

The (proto) tárogató's particularly loud sound was used by the army of the Kingdom of Hungary, led by Prince Francis Ferenc Rákóczi II, in the *kuruc* soldiers uprising against

the Austrians in a war that lasted eight years (1703-1711). The instrument was used effectively as a psychological weapon in battle; its sound was so intimidating that when the Austrians crushed the Hungarian uprising and resistance movement in the battle of Zsibó (current-day Oradea, Romania) on November 15, 1705, Austrian Habsburg Emperor Leopold I and his successor Joseph I, King of Hungary (henceforth known as Holy Roman Emperor from 1705) forbade the continued existence of the double-reed tárogató. Joseph I demanded that all known tárogatós from that period be destroyed, and instrument production factories and manufacturing tools burned to the ground as a symbolic act of a new imperial rule. A reproduction of this instrument is found in figure 2.2

However, some tárogatós were hidden and survived in rural parts of Hungary. János Pap writes about the characteristics of the historical instrument and its further innovation in the late nineteenth century:

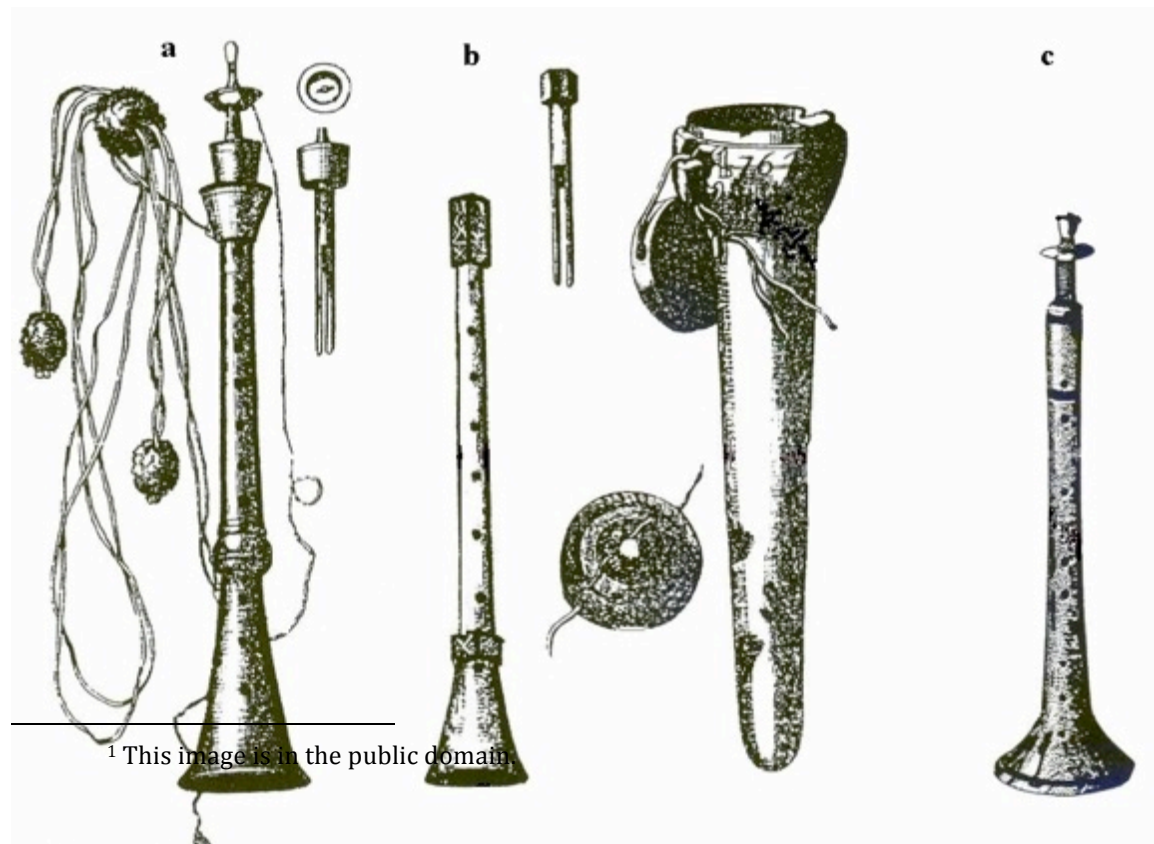
The historical tárogató was a double-reed conical-bore instrument similar to a shawm or a Vienna oboe. Since all living traditions of playing the historical tárogató in Hungary had died out by the 1830s, the name was recycled.... If we were to truly reform the ancient tárogató, we would end up with the classical oboe or the piccolo heckelphone in their most authentic forms. (Pap, 1999)

Similar extant instruments include two shawms (the *zurla* and the *sopile*) from the former Yugoslavia, and the Spanish instrument the *tiple*, the somewhat more sophisticated keyed relative of the basically same type of double-reed instrument. The tárogató's influence spread to Western Europe in the French region of Breton, with the instrument named the *bombarde*. Also, we can find a similar instrument further south in Italy, called the *piffaro*. Other than the Hungarian proto-tárogató, we find a related instrument in the city of Tashkent, former USSR, under the name of *surhaj* (Anonymous 1976, 44).

The *tarogoatǎ* (or *tárogató*), closer to what we see today, is the perfection of such an instrument made at the end of the nineteenth century in Budapest. The motivation behind such a change was to reconstitute and modify the famous instrument of the legendary Hungarian *kuruc* soldiers. It was not uncommon to use a modified clarinet mouthpiece and a single reed, adapting it on a conical body like that of a soprano saxophone and using German fingering similar to the oboe.

The *tárogató* sound and nostalgic character was well suited for mellow and lyrical *doina* songs. It was also performed with astonishing virtuosity in fast dances in certain parts of Romania, which promoted its spread to other provinces during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, most notably in the Romanian region of Transylvania (Alexandru 1980, 99).

Eastern *tárogatók* and *zurna*: a) Beliczay *tárogató*; b) Bethlen' *tárogató*; c) Turkish *zurna* (Vasárnapi Ujság, 1859)¹



¹ This image is in the public domain.

The double-reed *tárogató*, Hungarian shawm-like instrument (Kuruc *tárogató* avagy *töröksíp*)²



Today, preserved instruments from various historical periods are displayed in the Boosey & Hawkes collection of the Horniman Museum in London, and in the Sir Nicholas Shackelton Edinburgh Musical Instruments collection. Other exemplars exist in various private collections, and are sometimes presented at the International Tárogató Conference in either Eger or Vaja, small historical towns near Nyíregyháza in Hungary.

² This image is in the public domain.

The reformed tárogató after 1900

After 1900 the name tárogató was recycled to define a new type of instrument. This reformed tárogató can be compared to a soprano saxophone, as both Venzel József Schunda and János Stowasser designed the bore proportion similar to the modern soprano saxophone design, and they were probably previously influenced by it. However, unlike the soprano saxophone, the tárogató body was made out of wood, and key work was modeled on a simple German fingering system. János Pap has described these changes:

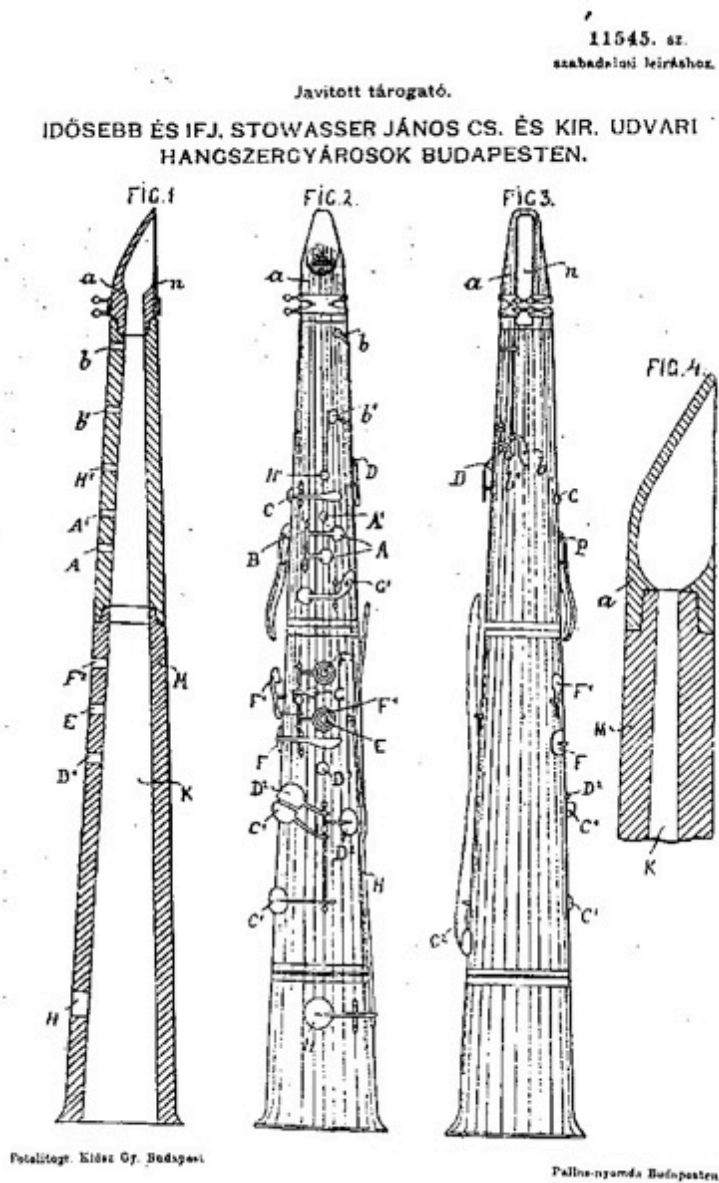
Schunda V. József built a 65- to 70-cm-long, conical instrument made from palisander wood with a clarinet-like mouthpiece, that is, a soprano saxophone with contemporary German oboe key work. Schunda called his modified tárogató an "improved" tárogató and designed it for the millennial festivities in Hungary – the thousandth anniversary of Magyar settlement... I should also mention that the name "schundaphone" would have been more accurate for the instrument, since only the bore of this modified tárogató is related to the ancient tárogató...The clarinet was the most popular woodwind instrument at the end of the last century in Hungary. We can thus understand the application of the clarinet mouthpiece on the modified instrument. Moreover, it can be supposed that Schunda and János Stowasser wanted to build a German-style wooden saxophone for the musicians of central Europe... The "schundaphone" *tárogató* gained success quickly thanks to its perfect acoustic features (for example, good responsiveness), to its name and its publicity. (Pap, 1999)

Others manufacturers have tried their own versions of the reformed tárogató based on similar specifications. One notable example is the French manufacturer of the tárogató, Jerome Thibouville Lamy, who made a copy of the instrument — stamped 'Jetel-sax' (i.e., "J-T-L-sax") —in the 1930s. These copied instruments were regarded as experimental curiosities, rather than mainstream instruments of the times (Baines 1992, 331).

Figures 2.3 and 2.4 illustrate the tárogató instrument schematics as part of Schunda and János Stowasser's instrument patent application. The basic model, still unperfected but reformed, shows many obvious acoustical design trials. Later designs would improve upon these schematics by adding the alternate fingering relative to the Böhm fingering system,

and by adding additional vent holes at the bottom of the instrument (missing on these first patent charts). Two-rowed five acoustic holes were added, designed to stabilize the timbre as well as to refine the intonation balance of the tárogató. Images of both instruments are reproduced in figures 2.5 and 2.6.

János Stowasser patent of September 15, 1897³ (Jansen, 2007)



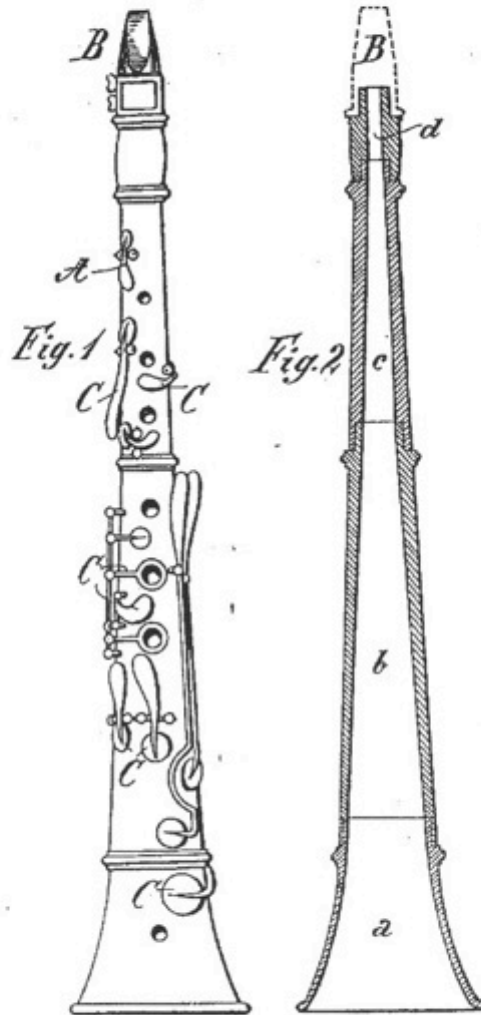
³ This image is in the public domain.

József Schunda patent of September 17, 1897⁴ (Jansen, 2007)

13545. sz.
szabadalmi leírásból.

Javitott tárogató.

SCHUNDA JÓZSEF HANGSZERGYÁROS BUDAPESTEN.



Fotolitogr. Klösz Gy. Budapest.

Falás-nyomda Budapest.

⁴ This image is in the public domain.

The tárogató quickly assumed a prominent (if not brief) role in the elitist rituals of Hungarian high society. The tárogató received its premiere in 1900 at the Paris World Expo, soon to gain a symbolic status in Hungarian aristocratic circles as the instrument of choice for Governor Miklós Horthy's (Hungarian regent between World Wars I and II) ceremonies and entertainment (Pap, 1999). And in the 1920s the tárogató was brought to Banat (Romania), where it became very popular under the name taragot. Comparative use of the tárogató and saxophone (the tárogató's later main competitor) in Romania after 1920, until approximately the early twenty-first century.

Through newly established political measures after World War II, the Hungarian government effectively discontinued the trade of German woodwind instrument making. This resulted in the discontinued manufacture of the tárogató in Hungary for many decades to come. In fact, until the fall of the Berlin wall in the late 1980s, state policy suppressed the creation and use of the tárogató. János Pap describes this time:

This current phenomenon is interesting because after World War II until the 1980s, the modified tárogató had been practically silenced by those governing official musical life in Hungary. It was proclaimed by communist regimes to be a nationalistic musical instrument for irredentists...it was forbidden to play it publicly, radio recordings disappeared, the instrument making companies were nationalized, etc. Thus, it was not accidental that the instrument's rebellious character survived in the folk music of Hungary. (Pap, 1999)

Regardless of such ideological and post-WWII Hungarian communist regime cultural oppression, however, the reformed modern tárogató continued to be manufactured in the neighboring Eastern European countries of Romania and in the Northeastern part of Serbia, then part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It was adopted most readily into the folk music of Hungary, the Serbian region of Banat, Vojvodina, and the Romanian rural region of Transylvania. In the late twentieth century,

however, the tárogató's function within the ensemble has begun to be substituted with more readily available clarinets or more readily accessible saxophones (Fox, 2004). The difficulty of playing the instrument is certainly a factor in such substitutions. According to János Pap, "Because playing the clarinet is easier than playing the double-reed tárogató – the former uses a simpler blowing technique and more active breathing and has a large dynamic range and pitch range" (Pap, 1999).

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, and following the significant political changes resulting from the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, manufacturing of the tárogató returned at the beginning of a twenty-first century. This includes the original Stowasser J. Tárogató factory in Budapest, Hungary, and by Josef Töth, a handcrafted manufacturer located in Hungary. Both of these small factories are producing high-quality tárogató instruments based on the original blueprints and detailed specifications of the reformed instrument.

Today, many contemporary western performers are interested in developing performance techniques related to folk, klezmer, jazz, and other forms of world music. In North America, some performers have adopted the tárogató, though generally only as a tool for satisfying their artistic and expressive curiosity, rather than integrating the instrument into more mainstream orchestral or band settings. This problem is amplified by the scarcity of published traditional Romanian and Hungarian folk music. The tradition of performing folk songs in Hungary and Romania is still passed down from generation to generation through an oral tradition. Prof. Michele Gingrass noted this in her research on the tárogató:

One way musicians get to exchange different pieces is by traveling from town to town and playing for each other; moreover, folk musicians who learn their skills by ear early on from their parents or relatives, often find score reading unnecessary, and memorize countless pieces easily. (Gingrass 1999, 45)

During the course of my research I worked with performers who successfully integrated very different tárogató performance techniques, of both Romanian folk and traditional Hungarian tárogató music, into their own performances to expand and enhance their own clarinet performance techniques. Notable efforts to promote this rarely used and uncommon instrument in the west include the work of Dr. Marc B. Naylor, who established The British Tárogató Association in 2005; and Mr. Nagy Csaba from Hungary, who founded the Rákóczi Tárogató Association and International Tárogató Congress, on February 2, 1992.

The tárogató manufacturing apprentice and craft-master, Ferenc Pécsi (1913-1992), took the tárogató tradition mantle under his leadership after the passing of the famous tárogató inventor, János Stowasser, Pécsi's former apprentice, Miklós Szabolcsi, continued in this production line from 1992, to lead the tárogató's progressive innovation and production into the twenty-first century. Twenty years later Szabolcsi partnered with Dr. János Barcza establishing the factory's new direction in 2012.⁵

Inspired by double and triple tonguing (also known as a multiple articulation clarinet technique), otherwise commonly used in Romanian folk tárogató music, Prof. Charles Neidich and Prof. Ayako Oshima developed the interchangeable technique of playing a single-reed multiple articulation teaching method for the clarinet. It was a quite significant leap to transfer the multiple articulations onto the clarinet from the tárogató.

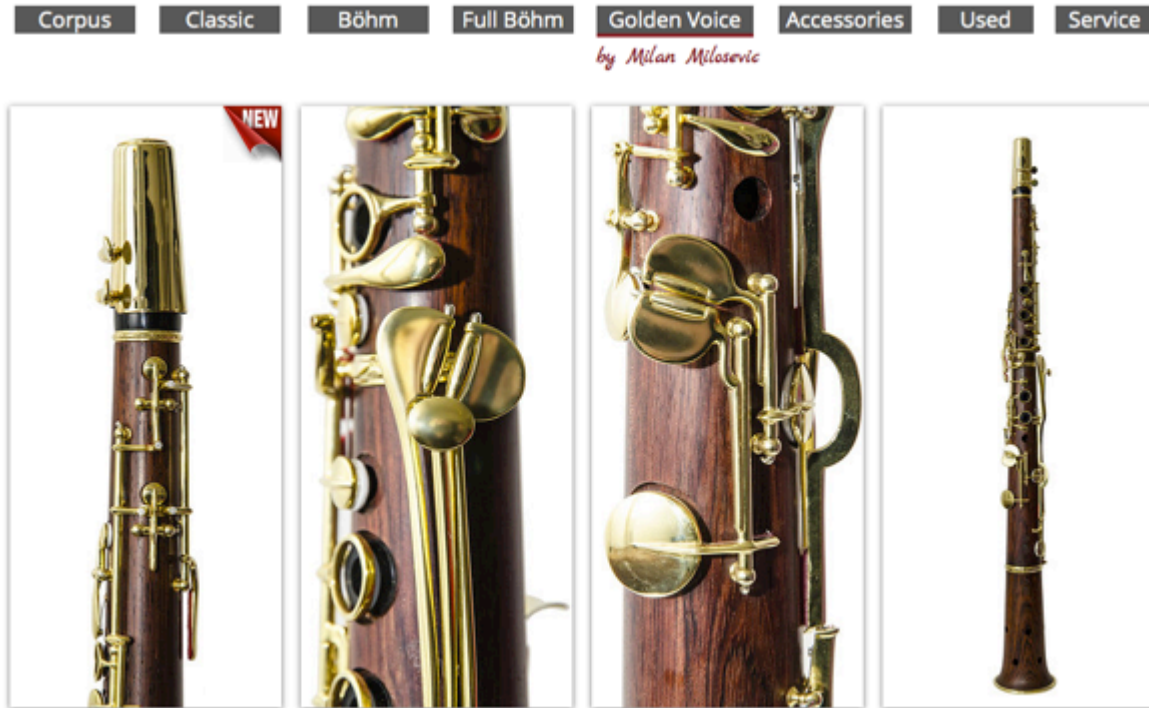
⁵ Dr. Barcza was previously a co-founder of the "Tarogato Műhely Kft, Tóth és Társa," a small independent maker of the tárogató established in 2002 in Budapest, Hungary. Accessed July 12, 2014. <http://www.tarogato.hu/!history/c1wlf>.

This common tárogató technique, used in the Banat region of Romania and Serbia, is much easier to perform on the tárogató than on the clarinet, mostly for its lower air-column resistance.

Most recently, new tárogató production lines and models have emerged. In the spring of 2013, the first North-American Stowasser J. Tárogató was manufactured. It was a significant outcome of my research into ornamentation models. The design of this instrument, officially nicknamed the *Golden Voice* (figure 2.8), is based on technical and specific tuning requests as a result of my doctoral research.

Notable changes to the instrument include ergonomic adaptations, customization relative to the ornamental hand posture performance settings, and the tuning of the tárogató at ISO 16, 440 Hz, the North-American concert A tuning standard. The discrepancy between earlier Eastern European tuning (442-444 Hz) and the standardized pitch in North America and the United Kingdom made the tárogató previously unsuitable for performances in ensembles, therefore driving the instrument into relative obscurity and depriving it of a significant presence in the repertory known to performers, researchers, composers, educators, and conductors.

Stowasser J. Tárogató - *Golden Voice*, 2013. Dedicated North-American tárogató, made in part through the University of British Columbia graduate research project collaboration (Szabolcsi, 2013)



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Today's new and vastly improved Stowasser J. Tárogató & Tóth és Társa modern instruments are made from cocobolo and granadilla wood. Cocobolo is used for the newly revamped and Hungarian made Stowasser J. Tárogató North-American production model. In the late 1990s, Canadian manufacturer Mr. Stephen Fox constructed several handcrafted tárogátós in very small order numbers, but of very high quality and true to the original specifications (Fox, 2004).