

Songs Along a Stony Road

A one-hour film by
George Csicsery and Chris Teerink



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SONGS ALONG A STONY ROAD follows 77-year-old Zoltán Kallós on his visits to musicians in villages around Transylvania and Romanian Moldova. In each village Kallós is a welcome distraction from the backbreaking manual labor of farming, and he easily coaxes the citizens to break out a bottle of homemade brandy and sing an old song, or dust off the violin and play. He has collected music in these places for half a century.

Transylvania is a land where several ethnic groups have lived in adjacent villages for centuries. The music reflects these proximities and the constant crossover between styles and cultures. For musicologists and ethnographers, it is a treasure trove as rich and diverse as any to be found in Europe. The 20th century's most renowned Hungarian composers, Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, developed their musical ideas by traipsing from village to village and collecting the folk songs, either in hand-notation or with the earliest recording tools available at the beginning of the last century. Their own compositions profited from the uniqueness of the music they found. While these composers are now household names, the folk traditions in music that inspired their work are less well known. Under the long rule of Romania's communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, the ethnic diversity of Transylvania was a non-subject, and western musicologists had little access to the villages where traditional music of any kind could be heard, be it in Romanian, Hungarian, or one of the Romany dialects. In many places, particularly among the Csángó people of the Gyimes Mountains and Romanian Moldova, the folk songs and the music itself might well have been forgotten; unusual musical instruments, like the furulya (a wooden flute), and the gárdon (a cello used as a rhythm instrument by hitting the strings with a wooden stick) might easily have disappeared, along with the knowledge of how and what to play. That the music is alive today is largely due to the efforts of one man to preserve, collect and record it, while encouraging the villagers to keep performing. At 77 Zoltán Kallós, of (Rascruți) Válaszút and (Cluj) Kolozsvár, Romania, is an international treasure, knowing thousands of songs and their lyrics by heart. For over 50 years Kallós has collected the music and folklore of his native land, gaining intimate knowledge of the remotest villages. He has published volumes of notations and lyrics, and released hundreds of his own recordings. Cassettes and CDs he recorded are available on the Fonó label.

In June 2000 we traveled with Kallós on a five-day research trip for this project. Two years later, with support from a CEC ArtsLink grant, we were able to shoot the bulk of the film. We revisited many of the places we had been to with Kallós in 2000, and several new ones—villages in Cluj, Mures, Harghita, and Bacau counties. We documented music played and sung by people Kallós has been supporting for years, both emotionally, and financially. They are people for whom music is a part of daily life. Woven into community rituals—weddings, funerals, and holiday feasts—their songs give voice to their own joys and sorrows, their loves and losses. And Kallós, a compelling storyteller with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, sparks music making wherever he goes. He is a one-of-a-kind protagonist, sustaining several musical traditions through his own passion and energy.



The older singers, violinists, and flute players in Kallós's world are a thinning breed. Following the end of the Ceausescu dictatorship, Romania opened up to the world, and villages that only a decade ago were without even a single radio, now are dotted with satellite TV dishes. Young people exposed to the latest pop music are less interested in the music of their grandparents. In another decade the handful of village musicians and singers who still know the old ballads and laments will be gone, and no one but the young people trained by Zoltán Kallós at his music camps can replace them.



Songs Along a Stony Road tells the story of Transylvania's living folk musicians, and of Zoltán Kallós, their guardian angel, intercutting musical performances, the stories in the songs, and personal histories. The first production expedition was completed in 2002, when we accompanied Kallós for nine days, filming with him and village musicians throughout the Mezőség, Kalotaszeg, Gyimes and Moldovan regions.

In 2002 our plans for shooting *Songs Along A Stony Road* came to the attention of *National Geographic* magazine writer Frank Viviano, who accompanied our videotaping

expedition as an observer. The following year I returned to Transylvania and Romanian Moldova to assist Frank as guide and interpreter for his story about the Csángó people of the region; his article appeared in the June 2005 edition of *National Geographic*.

With *Songs Along A Stony Road*, I am looking for a way to depict and preserve pieces of a vanishing heritage. With Hungary and Romania now very much a part of the global economy and culture, the people, music, and even the regional dialects used in the film, are fast receding into the past. I hope to capture some of it for posterity before it disappears.



The co-producer, sample reel, and production schedule

Songs Along A Stony Road is a co-production with Dutch filmmaker Chris Teerink. His interest in Transylvanian music originates with a desire to trace the roots of Béla Bartók's original musical research in the region in the early 20th century. Chris has worked as cinematographer and editor on the film.

A follow-up shoot of five to six days is planned for 2005-2006. We will film with individuals already documented, conduct interviews to capture their daily routines, and collect more visual material on the landscape and on the texture of life. Editing should be completed by July of 2006. *Songs Along a Stony Road* is scheduled for completion in late 2006.

