

When "CORDS" Influenced "CHORDS"

by m.j. nelson

The great Hungarian composer Franz Liszt wrote 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies. He said that he was strongly influenced by Hungarian Gypsy music when he wrote many of these sometimes lively, dreamy, and frequently haunting melodies. A popular Gypsy tune of Liszt's era was titled "Vedlik a Pulikutya" or "The Puli Dog is Shedding His Coat." Whether or not portions of this particular piece of Gypsy folk music were incorporated in one of Liszt's Rhapsodies is not clear. What is clear is that the Puli has played an important role in Hungarian life and history. It is also clear that the long-ago Gypsy songwriter didn't know the breed very well as Pulik (plural in the U.S.) or Pulix (plural in Hungary) do not shed.

This rare herding breed tends to be intensely focused on their human family.

"One of the reasons I chose a Puli as my herding dog was because of their intense focus on the people they live with," says Nancy Kelly, who owns Ch. OTCH Bartok's Magyar Csardas UDX HSAs ("Pepper"). "They are also very eager to please, they are smart and quick to learn and they have a lot of energy. They are small enough to live comfortably in the house but big enough to enjoy the outdoors."

However, some Pulik fanciers have come to the breed by an unorthodox route. Don Gold, who owns Ch. Talisman's Barnabus Betyar CD PT JHD HTDI and II STDD HTADI and II NAJ TT CGC VPA Delta Society Therapy Dog otherwise known as "Barney," says it was actually a picture in NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC that prompted him to get a Puli. "I saw a picture in NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC of a Puli riding on a sheep in 1989 about the time my wife and I agreed it was a good time to have a dog with our children away at college," he says. "I decided that was the breed I wanted to own, although I had never heard of a Puli before I



Ch. OTCH Bartok's Magyar Csardas UDX HSAs ("Pepper"), Nancy Kelly's Puli, moves sheep in a Herding Trial.

saw that picture. Our first Puli was picked very 'scientifically.' Maxine, my wife, and I went to see a litter of curly little balls of fur. One of the pups walked over to us and Maxine said 'We'll take that one!' Then, the house door opened, and to our total dismay, we were confronted by what seemed like three miniature yaks. This was our introduction to the full-coated Puli. Anyway, 'Tasha' became our first, and while she was too tall, had a thin coat and a long nose, she was a wonderful, easily trained, sweet housedog. We loved her, even if she wasn't show quality. Five years later, a breeder friend asked if she could breed Tasha to one of her show champions. In view of Tasha's conformation shortcomings, I wanted to know why. Her answer was very short and simple. 'Temperament.' From that litter we got Barney, who has it all."

This is a breed that works quite differently than do

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Barney (Ch. Talisman's Barnabus Betyar CD PT JHD HTDI and II STDd HTADI and II NAJ TT CGC VPA Delta Society Therapy Dog), Don Gold's Puli, hustles an errant sheep back to the flock.

many of the other herding breeds. "The Puli is very fast and bouncy," says Patty Anspach and Barbara Edwards. "If they are fully corded, they look like a giant spider. They have much more body contact with the stock than do most herding breeds. They run at the sheep throwing their body at the shoulder of the lead sheep to move it back into the flock. They want to be more physical, and this is probably due to the fact that they were developed to handle large flocks often numbering 1,000 or more with only a shepherd and perhaps another Puli for help. Pulik are not considered an 'eye' breed like Border Collies, and they don't trot as do the Belgian breeds. Pulik herd with quick, darting movements."

Kelly adds that Pulik actually scare many sheep. "The sheep don't really know what to think about this little black creature and when they run and their cords fly, it can scare the sheep," she says. "We have been to trials where the sheep were so unsure of my Puli, there was no way we were ever going to get close enough to succeed. But, in many situations, if she would stay much farther back from the stock than would be the case with most herding breeds, she was able to move them successfully."

Training a Puli can be a very interesting project, especially if the dog has strong instincts to herd. "If they have strong herding instincts, Pulik do not require much training," says Gold. "However the same can't be said for their handlers. Puli handlers need a LOT of training! In Hungary, puppy training begins

right after they are weaned. They are taken from the mother and are fed and sleep in the barn with the sheep. When they advanced to actually herding, they not only moved the sheep but also protected them from predators. Not only does their coat protect them from the extreme cold of many Eastern Europe winters, but it also acts like a suit of armor to ward off attacks by wild dogs or wolves. As far as the actual training is concerned, Pulik are generally eager to please and can be taught to respond to verbal, hand, or whistle commands quite easily."

"The more drive a Puli has, the better they'll take corrections," says Kelly. "In herding, instinct is necessary. The more biddable they are, the easier it is to teach them and help them understand their job. On the other hand, the more natural instinct they have, the more difficult it is to make them understand the need for control. It is important to remember that instinct does not always show up the first time a dog sees sheep. It may take a few times before the dog really 'turns on' to sheep. But this is true of all herding breeds, not just Pulik. I have seen Border Collies that were not interested the first time they saw sheep."

This is a breed that will not tolerate heavy-handedness. "Corrections must be fair and then let go," say Anspach and Edwards. "They do not suffer a heavy hand. They are not soft but they are stubborn. If they don't like the way you correct them, they will quit on you. You must end each training session on a positive note leaving them to want to do more. Learning by repetition is not their forte. In Hungary, young Pulik are worked with an adult, and if they don't learn their jobs quickly, they are eliminated from the breeding program. This is the way it has always been since the time the breed was developed. If you plan to do herd-

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Don Gold and Barney move a trio of sheep along a Herding course.

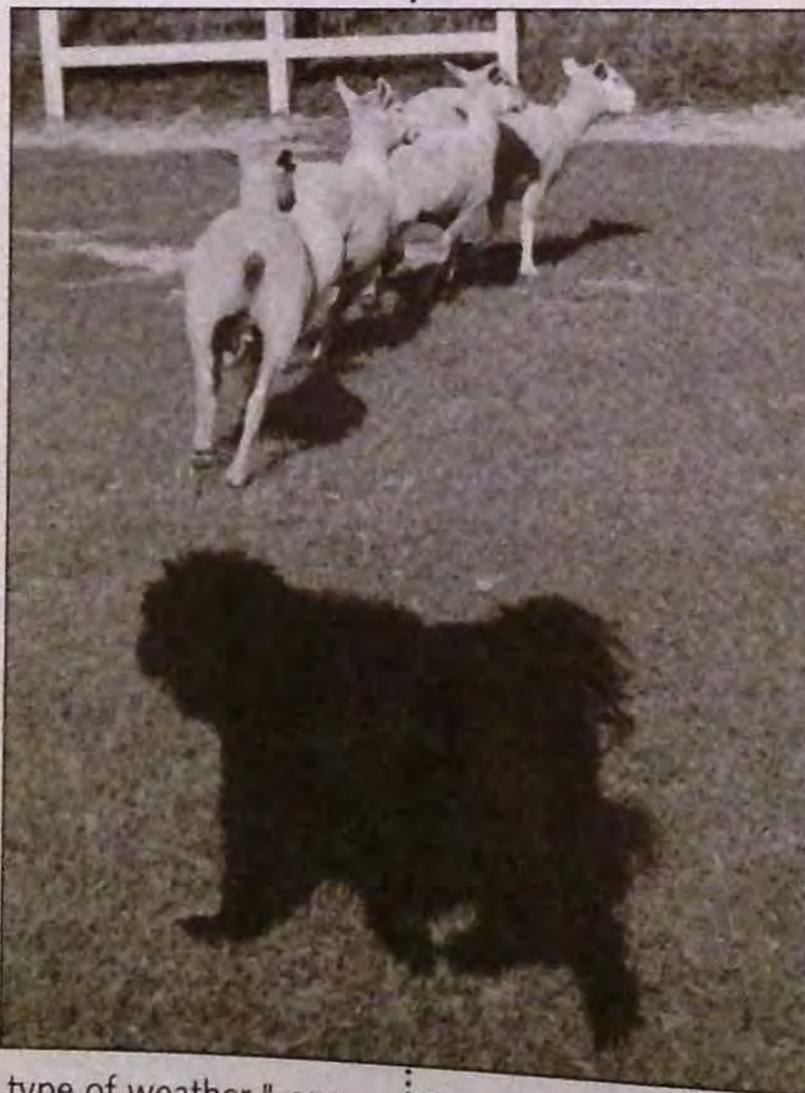
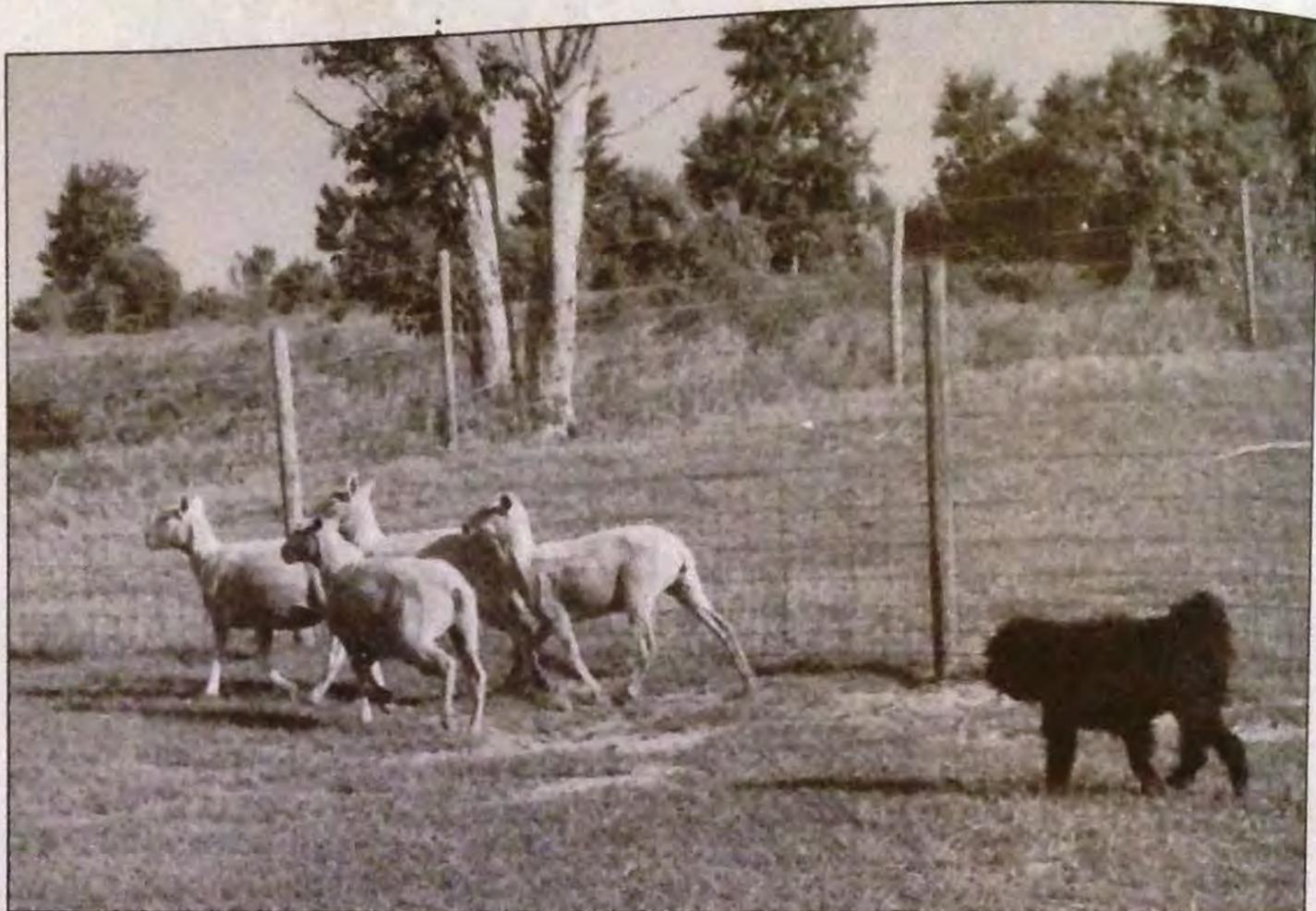
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ing trials with your Puli, you need to have great patience and a great instructor. They expect a smooth, flowing, steady pace in a trial and that's a completely foreign language to the Puli's brain. You need to be ever so careful slowing them down so they don't lose interest."

Herding is an important aspect of enjoying this breed, according to Kelly. "It is a lot of fun to see the natural instinct in these dogs and then to help channel it to do the job they were bred to do is even more enjoyable. Not only does herding keep their minds sharp but it also keeps them in great physical condition. This makes for a happier, healthier companion. Pulik need a job to do. While you can get them to be couch potatoes, they have a lot of energy and they need to be kept active. I think it is very important to not lose sight of what the breed is about and how it came to be. While it takes time and access to stock, something that's not available to everyone, herding forms a really strong bond between you and your dog."

All of these Puli owners ask that conformation judges keep the purpose of the breed in mind in the show ring. "The purpose of this breed is to herd stock tirelessly all day long in any type of weather," says Gold. Judges must learn to see with their hands for structure, angulation, alignment and proportion. These factors account for the distinctive movement that is essential to the Puli's herding style of fast movement and quick turns. Also, while conformation judges prefer dogs with softer temperament, we may be breeding out a desirable trait for the pasture—prey drive.



Anspach's Puli moves her flock toward the pen.

Ch. Szeder's Making Headlines CD, HX, AX, AOJ, CGC, Patty Anspach's Puli, drives sheep along a fence.

Anspach and Edwards add that overemphasis on cord length in the show ring was also creating problems for the breed. "In the show ring, we are seeing an overemphasis on the length of a dog's cords," they say. "This should not be happening if the judges were reading the breed standard which states, 'With age the coat can become quite long, even reaching to the ground; however, only enough length to properly evaluate quality and texture is considered necessary so as not to penalize the younger of working specimens.'"

Pulik fanciers face a situation that is becoming increasingly common with rare and unusual breeds—they become decorations for the "beautiful people."

"One of the things we need to do is make sure our dogs go to homes that understand the breed," says Kelly. "There seem to be an increasing number of people looking to get a Puli because owning one is 'cool.' The last thing this breed needs is to become the finishing touch for someone's interior design project." •