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The Scientific Legacy of György Martin

György Martin and his nearest colleagues, following Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, set off on their scientific path with similar goals. They intended to discover the traditional dance culture of Hungarian peasantry and place it on the map of European cultural history. The folklorists who graduated from university in the 1950s, however, such as Martin, Ernő Pesovár, Ferenc Pesovár, Bertalan Andrásfalvy, and László Maácz, found themselves caught in a temporal lag in comparison with their predecessors in musicology. Their investigations focused on identifying, recording, and, not least, saving those elements of the peasants' dance culture that were regarded as traditional within the contemporary folkloristic approach. In the middle of the twentieth century, peasants' traditional dances were vanishing or transforming as a consequence of the changes generated by World War I. The communization of agricultural properties after World War II, the accompanying aggressive reorganization of rural society and the impact of modernization intensely accelerated that process. The small number of people involved in research and the poor technical quality of available recording devices both contributed to the fact that dance researchers were not able to gather ethnographic data of the same quality and quantity as had earlier ethnomusicologists.

The lag between folk dance research and musicology is even more striking concerning the discovery and analysis of historical sources.¹ It is no surprise that Martin draws our attention to the importance of researching dance history in some of his works.² We know that the geohistorical paradigm of Martin and his colleagues could have been more successful if they had managed to accomplish a source analysis embracing the entirety of European dance history in parallel to their investigations in the Alpine-Carpathian Region. Without that, the dialectology of Hungarian folk dance research frequently relied on the results of folk music research that were

¹ The vast majority of relevant historical data on European dance folklore still derive from Marián Réthei Prikkel's long-outdated summary from 1924, and that of Curt Sachs published in 1933 (Réthei Prikkel 1924; Sachs 1933); whereas significant newer disclosure of sources has not occurred in Hungary since the 1950s. We regard it as a remarkably serious problem for instance, that we have almost no data at all on dance history in the area of the Orthodox church's distribution. This may be the reason that investigations took, almost exclusively, the influence of Western European dance trends into account when studying historical impacts in the Hungarian speaking territories.

² Martin 1966: 201; Martin 1968: 100.

far more established in terms of sources, alongside their continuous and remarkably intensive collection of relevant ethnographic data on dance culture.

Another problem is the comparability of historical and contemporary ethnographic data. We must add that both historical particularist and functionalist approaches beginning from the 1920s expressed their critique against universalist models of ethnography and cultural anthropology. In accord with the statement above, I think that disciplines researching cultures cannot ascertain kinship between two temporally or spatially distant phenomena based only on formal similarities and without a clear understanding of historical processes.³ Consequently, we think that the cultural-historical eras of Hungarian and Transylvanian peasants cannot be compared with each other without deep and thorough microhistorical surveys, or with their European context, nor can they be easily adapted to each other.⁴

The abovementioned scientific objectives and the archaizing and aestheticizing attitude of early Hungarian dance folkloristics encumbered the accurate dating of studied data and did not make it possible for Martin and his colleagues to record those significant transformations in detail that were happening in dance culture at that moment. As a consequence of the approach favoring historical aspects, the majority of phenomena taken as representative of contemporary peasant tradition was derived from informants among older age groups that were no longer taking an active part in dance life. We are talking here about dances and customs of an area that were not in use anymore, or only very rarely so, at the time of the fieldwork. These practices were frequently being recorded in a reconstructed state, together with those dances that were part of the contemporary dance life. Therefore, we have only sporadic data about dance trends emerging coincidentally with the fieldwork in the period between the 1950s and 1980s because these did not align with the concept of research mentioned earlier. Only in rare cases were notes written during surveys and scientific works consisting of information regardless of any preconception for selection and actual selection during fieldwork.

³ “[...] the cognition of cultures should not be based on the universal law of evolution designed by evolutionists, neither on its characteristic, predetermined forms and schemes nor on the research of their determinant rules. According to Boas, every culture is a separate complex ‘universe,’ whose understanding is only possible by means of its own terms: individual cultures imply the ‘key’ to their understanding according to the thesis of cultural relativism” (Biczó 2014: 16). For the argument between universalist and particularist approaches to cultural phenomena, see Eriksen 2001: 5–6.

⁴ In case we intend to study temporal and spatial diffusion of dance culture, we have to significantly amend the far too static and simplifying scientific models (e.g., geo-historical paradigm). One must investigate peasants’ dance culture as part of a larger social unit, in such a way that, besides internal cultural dynamics, considers every sociocultural impact with which the study group is able to ascertain. Thus, in addition to influences mutually affecting different social strata, we have to deal with transnational and interethnic relationships, too.

Given the lack of microhistorical investigations focusing likewise on changes, Martin and his colleagues could not undertake the local socio-historical analysis of peasants' dance culture in the Alpine-Carpathian Region. Such projects were also hindered by the political context. By the 1950s, the socialist ideology characterizing the Hungarian regime had banished new paradigms in cultural research that were sensitive to societal changes from the scientific world; thus, these could not incorporate into the ethnographic curriculum.⁵ During the interwar period, the state diverted scholars representing the functionalist stream in ethnography away from folk dance investigations, thereby contributing to the rejection of functionalism in the dance research emerging in the 1950s that was supported institutionally.⁶

It should be noted that, besides the ideological obstacles limiting its purview, the topics of Hungarian dance folkloristics shared in the prevalent perspective of Eastern European ethnography in the mid-twentieth century; a perspective that did not concentrate on cultural micro-processes or social, political, and economic contexts. Accordingly, elements adopted from bourgeois culture were understood to integrate into the traditional culture of a given community only through a folklorization process. This view necessarily presumes the existence of communities that lived more or less in isolation. The approach that investigated traditional culture separated from its larger social context was rooted in a model applied by predecessors in ethnomusicology. This approach most frequently studied cultural transformations at the macro level of European or Hungarian cultural history. Consequently, working in this paradigm, Hungarian dance folkloristics did not pay enough attention to continuous changes in culture. Its focus on material considered to be of Hungarian origin reaffirmed the high aesthetic value placed on so-called archaic phenomena that emerged in the era before the bourgeois transformation of the mid-nineteenth century. Accordingly, and in compliance with the classical ethnographic perspective, it strove to classify peasants' dances into two fairly inflexible historical categories ("old style and new style"), relying on data selected on the basis of these preconceptions.

⁵ In his programmatic article of 1949, Gyula Ortutay, a leading personality in Hungarian ethnography and coincidentally a central figure in communist cultural policy, stigmatized functionalism as being a "mean" theory which was subordinated to colonial interests (Ortutay 1949: 13, 17–18); thus he practically banished it from Hungarian scientific discourse.

⁶ Martin urged in his study titled "Beszámoló a Népművészeti és Népművelési Intézetben végzett tánckutató munka eredményeiről" ("Report on the Dance Research Accomplishment in the Institute of Folk Art and in the Institute of Public Education") that the reinterpretation of functionalist analyses, which he thought to have been misinterpreted, was a necessity, and that structuralism would have to be favored subsequently (Martin 1965: 256). Accordingly, one should pose the question of whether or not that was the reason why Martin and his colleagues did not regard Márta Belényesy's writing on the sociocultural embeddedness of the changes in the dance culture of Bukovina Székelys as a sample (Belényesy 1958).

As a consequence, Hungarian dance folklorists almost entirely neglected analysis of the social dances of the bourgeoisie. However, these dances were already part of the rural dance culture under investigation as early as the end of the nineteenth century.⁷ Hungarian dance research regarded these dances as alien, as opposed to old and new strata of dances⁸; frequently not of Hungarian origin, these resembled several international parallels.⁹ The frequently ethnicizing and archaizing attitude also resulted in a biased distortion of the collected material that underwent analysis. For a long time, ritual dances such as *boricatánc* or dances imitating the movements of animals¹⁰ were almost completely excluded from the focus of Hungarian ethnochoreology; as these were difficult to fit into the classifying paradigm employed by Martin and his colleagues; this distinction in the repertoire was also supported by the historical analysis of folk music. The rather general statement by Martin and Pesovár that, “in Hungarian folk dances the body weight is carried by the legs,”¹¹ for example, do not apply at all to several of the ritual and animal imitating dances (frequently performed in body positions out of upright). Retrospectively, we consider that the exclusion of certain phenomena of the dance culture from the investigation should have been reasoned more exhaustively, and their banishment from the category of folk dances also explained at a theoretical level.¹² Folk dance researchers of the twentieth century subordinated the formal and structural approach, which can be related to historical eras, to preconceptions that set out from the national horizon and rested on aesthetic categories, whose unelaborated ideology were taken over from musicologists.

Few of Martin’s supporters and colleagues possessed his scholarly discernment, widespread intelligence, and commitment to work that often went beyond concern for his health. And those few—primarily for political reasons—were not able to concentrate exclusively on dance research.¹³ This may have been the reason why aca-

⁷ See Martin 1982: 184 (Martin 2020/16: 703).

⁸ See Martin–Pesovár 1963: 295, footnote 4 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/9: 404, footnote 4); Martin 1990: 402 (Martin 2020/6: 231–232).

⁹ See Martin 1982: 188–189 (Martin 2020/16: 708–709).

¹⁰ See for example, the *gúnárjáték* in Mátá (ÁNE.59), or *rókatánc* in Bekölce (Ft.733.8). Csilla Könzei was the first who tried to break out of Martin’s narrow structural analytical approach when she analyzed the *borica* dance of the Hétfalu Csángós as a nonverbal rite (Könzei 2009).

¹¹ Martin–Pesovár 1963: 299 (rephrased in Martin–Pesovár 2020/9: 408).

¹² In relation to the latter, we can read several instances of evaluating on aesthetic grounds in the twentieth-century texts on dance folkloristics. See, for example, Martin’s paper on Gyimes in this volume, in which he writes about art *csárdás* melodies. Appearing beside new style, these melodies are regarded by him as *cliché*, stereotypic (Kallós–Martin 1970: 215; Martin 2020/17: 738).

¹³ Two of Martin’s colleagues could only get work status in rural museums after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 as a consequence of their political views opposing communist ideology. See Andrásfalvy 1985: 23.

democratic debates contributing to necessary corrections to the course of scientific development gradually decreased after the 1960s, and indeed, practically terminated after Martin's death. One may conclude that ignored criticism occurring in the fields of ethnography and folkloristics in the 1980s.¹⁴ The critique of classification grounded in the archaizing and ethnicizing perspective as inflexible and unable to accommodate all the phenomena relevant for the analysis of cultural processes, accepted in ethnography and folkloristics in the 1980s, was largely ignored by Hungarian dance folkloristics. Even Martin was unable to entirely rid himself of this heritage from early folkloristics, even though he often approached cultural transformations clearly and sensitively in his works.¹⁵ In my opinion, dance folkloristic research continues to be characterized by a conception of culture as static and the idea of a "golden age."¹⁶ These attitudes toward folk dance were reinforced by the strong ties between dance researchers and the folk dance movement in this period.

Moreover, the folkloristic dance research of the 1960s and 1970s did not fully abandon the national paradigm. It did often take similarities with neighboring peoples into account but without the vision to study such relations in a properly comprehensive manner. The shift of paradigm toward a multi-ethnic perspective was significantly hindered in the Eastern European context by nationalist conflicts¹⁷ that were veiled by the ideological system. The differences among various cultural poli-

¹⁴ Péter Niedermüller, among others, highlights that the discipline inventing and researching folklore selected only certain elements from a cultural system independent of its own lifeworld—in other words, those elements of the folk culture that were applicable for a given goal, namely the creation of the national culture—and utilized them during the analyses (Niedermüller 1987: 60). Similar problems are discussed by László Kürti in his article (Kürti 1995) looking at the mostly historical perspective of Hungarian dance folkloristics. His critiques hadn't been addressed by his Hungarian colleagues.

¹⁵ Several references can be read in our volume, for instance, in the case of the Gyimes *keringő* (Kallós–Martin 1970: 230, footnote 114; Martin 2020/17: 756, footnote 89).

¹⁶ See an article by a leading researcher of contemporary Hungarian in dance folkloristics, in which the author contrasts the "principle values" of folk culture with the ever-changing world of modernity and regards the "inherent value system" of traditionalism as a timeless continuity, a kind of earthly representation of the "Divine Order" (Ratkó 2001). After the death of György Martin, besides László Kürti, Csilla Köncei was perhaps the only one who was critical of earlier paradigms in dance folkloristics and sought to introduce new theories into Hungarian folk dance research. See Köncei 2007–2009.

¹⁷ We have to interpret this situation in the political context of the eastern European socialist countries. The restriction of scientific thinking and frequently its violent control by application of the instruments of power did not provide a scientific and social sphere that could accommodate shifts of paradigm and perspective. The everyday presence of nationalism veiled by the ideology of internationalist slogans in Eastern Europe caused that international scientific cooperation was also occasional. The violent transformation of peasantry augmented definite national commitment and traditionalist attitude that influenced even the posing of academic issues in ethnographers, many of whom directly witnessed the happenings. For more of this context, see Andrásfalvy 1993: 42–43; Fél–Hofer 1997: XXI–XXII.

cies concerning folk dance research in European countries also contributed to this pattern. Differences in policy likely contributed, as well, to a lack of consistent dance folkloristic data, comparable to that amassed in Hungary, that would have made it possible to arrive at a better understanding of the temporal and spatial diffusion of folk dances. Martin was aware of this; he strove—as much as he could—to pay attention to the investigation of interethnic relationships and was continuously looking for opportunities for international cooperation. The scientific objectives of the Study Group on Ethnochoreology of the International Council for Traditional Music, within which the major European folk dance researchers worked, changed after Martin's death; instead of analytical models enabling comparisons at a European level universally, it gradually began to favor paradigms that focus on local dance cultures.

Martin was also familiar with the problematic situation in which he worked and its consequences for scientific work in dance folkloristics. This is shown in his continual efforts to renew his knowledge and revise his previous standpoints and is reflected in the treatment of issues that guide this volume. He reconsidered the content of his impressive summarizing work published at the beginning of the 1970s (*Hungarian Dance Types and Dance Dialects*)¹⁸ on several occasions and amended its later republications with the latest data. This publication is one of the most frequently referenced works in Hungarian dance folkloristics; nevertheless, we can admit that he had not the time to complete and finalize it with the scientific rigor to which he aspired.¹⁹ Neither does the dance folkloristic data, on which it is based, represent each ethnographic region and dance type to a similar degree and in the same profoundness. We still have very little information about the peasant dance culture of several regions, and these were therefore placed into their dance-dialect category out of necessity (e.g., regions of Vas, Zala, and Veszprém Counties). The external and internal boundaries of certain dance dialects were also uncertainly determined, a feature of the analysis in which we can also see the static perspective that encompasses cultural changes with difficulty.²⁰

Critical perspectives in dance studies that appeared in Hungary in the middle of the 1990s and the dance folkloristic research revived in the 2000s revealed that previous analyses were often based on hastily drawn hypotheses due to the inadequacy

¹⁸ Martin [1970–1972].

¹⁹ This is also indicated by the fact that the first edition of the *Hungarian Dance Types and Dance Dialects* has no referencing (Martin [1970–1972]). Tracing of the works of Martin and his colleagues is also hindered by the fact that their summarizing texts have been published since 1990 without an accurate definition of the guiding editorial concepts (Felföldi–Pesovár eds. 1997, Martin 1995).

²⁰ Martin classified the Transylvanian Mezőség area into five subdialects. I emphasized in one of my earlier writings that we have to consider six subdialects as a consequence of the changes taking place around WWI (Varga 2011: 56–59).

of historical sources and the folkloristic data concerning the spatial and temporal dispersal of certain dances.²¹

It can be concluded that more local investigations and their comparative analyses could have highlighted aspects of the correspondence between dance music and dance motions differently. The categorization of types applied by Martin is definitely based on musical features, but they have not been elaborated properly in terms of the set of motions; thus, the accurate classification of dances is often questionable.²² The series of changes in the genre of *legényes* from *sűrű legényes* through *ritka legényes* and *lassú magyar* to the *verbunk* for which Martin did possess enough comparative data can be investigated in musicological terms.²³ Many conclusions similar to those of musicology, however, were drawn too early mainly because comparative research considering the European dance tradition had still not been implemented. A precise delineation of the historical changes in dance fashions has still not been worked out. However, it is clear that based on the larger body of dance folkloristic movement data together with relevant verbal recollections now available, we cannot be certain that the set of motion forms was changing in parallel with musical trends. It seems, rather, that new fashions influence the dances' accompanying music more quickly than they do the system of motion.²⁴ The determination of various dance types and subtypes is also complicated by the lack of specialist terminology developed by scholars independent from the peasants' expressions.²⁵

Nevertheless, we must acknowledge the wide scope and meticulousness of the work that Martin completed, as well as the wide knowledge of European dance culture at a macro-historical scale and encompassing perspective that he applied, which only a few contemporary European dance researchers possessed. Through reading

²¹ This applies to the presumed historical relationship between the medieval *hajdútánc* and the dances with implements still existing in peasants' dance practice at the beginning of the twentieth century. For relevant criticism, see Kürti 1983; Varga 2010: Epilogue.

²² The Gyimes *lassú magyaros* and *lassú csárdás* discussed in the present volume are good examples for that. The difference between the two is primarily related to music and not to their actual movements. It is hard to determine on what basis Martin made this categorization (Kallós–Martin 1970: 215–216; Martin 2020/17: 738–739). Martin regards the distinction between accompanying music determinant during the comparison of the Gyimes *verbunk* and *féloláhos* (Kallós–Martin 1970: 212; Martin 2020/17: 734–735).

²³ Martin 1980: 189.

²⁴ Distinctions between the dances of minor areas can be detected based on the slight modification of basic dance repertoire—particularly in the names of dances and melodies—as Martin remarks on the dance culture along the Maros and Küküllő Rivers (Martin 1982: 190; Martin 2020/16: 710–711). This also verifies that the melody set relating to dances changes faster than do the body motions composing dances.

²⁵ For example, there is too much confusion concerning the dances of the Mezőség, and the Maros–Küküllő Regions. See Martin 1982: 188, 197–199 (Martin 2020/16: 708, 718–721).

Martin's studies, we come to know a researcher who interpreted the available scientific paradigms well and applied them rigorously to the dance material he knew, while at the same time was able to think beyond those approaches. His remarks have ripened now to indicate directions for further research; hardly has any scientific issue been raised since his death, which he—if even for only one sentence—has not touched upon. This attitude characterizes only the most impressive researchers. The studies he completed before his death, especially the one discussing the new style in Hungarian dance, represent excellent syntheses of the relevant knowledge.²⁶ In the light of subsequent history, we may say that death snatched György Martin before reaching the scientific peak of his career and the accomplishment of great summaries.

Despite the questions and critiques posed above, we agree with Lajos Vargyas's statement that the new discipline of Hungarian dance folkloristics, which evolved over the course of thirty years, between the 1950s and 1980s, primarily owes its existence and international recognition to Martin's unparalleled achievement.²⁷ We can add that it is also to his credit that one of the most significant dance collections of the world was launched in that short period. During their analyses, Martin and his colleagues touched upon almost every single region and dance type of the Alpine-Carpathian Region, a scope that makes the Traditional Dance Archive of the RCH Institute for Musicology unique.

Martin the scientist, whose excellence is acknowledged internationally, as well as in his home country, became an iconic figure in the Hungarian folk dance life due to his tireless efforts in public educational activity, which took place under the aegis of the folk dance movement. From its start, the huge amount of work undertaken by Martin in both scientific life and public education would have benefitted from the existence and coordination of several parallel workgroups, as well as the involvement of university students aware of the basic research methods of data processing. Unfortunately, Martin could not train recruits systematically, perhaps as a consequence of his limited time and the lack of opportunity to teach at the university level.

Considering the state of our knowledge at Martin's death and developments since then, it is clear that work remains to be done in the critique and rethinking of Martin's dance folkloristic project, prematurely cut short, leaving only the torso of a fully formed body of work. We are challenged now to build on his legacy.

(Translated by Valér Bedő)

²⁶ Martin 1977; Martin 1984 (Martin 2020/5).

²⁷ Vargyas 1985: 9, 16.

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