

Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest
Doctoral School no. 28 in Art History and Cultural
Studies

Veronika Endrődiné Pásku

**The Change of János Zerkula's Violin
Performance Style in the Context of
Different Collecting Situation**

Theses of a PhD dissertation

Supervisor: István Pávai, PhD

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I. Subject and antecedents of the research

Since the beginning of Hungarian folk music research, not only has the technology for sound and visual recordings advanced significantly, but in many cases, the situations in which the music is collected have also moved away from the traditional rural context. The folk dance movement that began to take shape in the 1970s greatly contributed to this shift, as recordings were often made in urban studios, dance houses, or even on stage, rather than in the customary village environment. At the center of the collecting situation, there are primarily two main participants (the informant and the collector), and the success of the collection depends not only on the informant's knowledge and performance skills but equally on the circumstances of the collection: the collector's preparation, background knowledge of folk music and ethnography, and the planning of the collection itself. Since the traditional role of a professional musician was to serve the audience, this naturally involved adapting to new demands, meaning that their performance style was not always the same. Moreover, in folk music, differences in performance style can alter the musical fabric itself.

Although János Zerkula, the violinist from Gyimes, became well-known not only among folk music researchers but also among participants in the folk dance movement, a comprehensive summary of the collections made with him and a deep analysis of his performance style have been lacking until now. Considering that he was recorded for nearly five decades, it is possible to thoroughly examine not only the specific characteristics of his performance style but also how they evolved over time. The broader scope of the research also emphasizes that the retrospective evaluation of a collection should not be limited to the analysis of the musical material itself, but must also take into account the circumstances and context of the collection.

II. Sources and methods

János Zerkula was first recorded by László Gurka in 1960, followed by Zoltán Kallós and György Martin in 1962. By 2008, several hundred hours of recordings had been made with him. In my research, I aimed to study the sources necessary for a comprehensive interpretation of the topic in depth and broadly. However, it was not my goal to

gather all the available Zerkula collections, as a significant portion of these are likely to remain in private hands. The collections available in the databases of the Institute for Musicology and the Hungarian Heritage House provided sufficient material for conducting the current research and drawing conclusions. Using the available musical material, in the first phase of the research, I analyzed recordings of Zerkula's performance style that were made under circumstances where he was less influenced by unusual external factors. Through the analysis of melody examples from various vocal and dance music genres, I illustrated his violin playing and singing style, as well as the connection between the two, based on the available data. To explore his ornamentation style, I referred to the conceptual framework provided by Bálint Sárosi's study *The Gyimesi Csángó Violin Style*, which I expanded according to the characteristics of violin style of Gyimes and Zerkula's specific performance style.

For the examination of the relationship between the collecting circumstances and performance style, the book *Hungarian Folk Dance Music of Transylvania* by

István Pávai served as a starting point. In my research, I applied an interdisciplinary approach, combining folk music research with environmental psychology. This methodology aims to highlight the necessity of examining the social and physical variables of the environment in close relation to each other in every case.

III. Results

In my work, following an overview of the research on folk music of Gyimes, the methodology of collecting, and the theoretical background of folk music performance styles, I focused on the detailed examination of János Zerkula's performance style and its changes over time. During the analysis of different collecting situations, I examined in detail the social and physical environmental factors that may have influenced the informant's playing style, supporting the changes in his performance style with clear and measurable results. I aimed to make full use of the opportunities provided by the documentation of the collection and to evaluate each collecting situation as thoroughly as possible.

Although the focus of this research is on János Zerkula, the approach used can also be applied to the evaluation of other collections. Chapter 4.1 *János Zerkula's Musician Self-Image*, opens up further avenues for research, especially considering that many of the interviews conducted with him have yet to be comprehensively analyzed.

The study of Zerkula's performance style and the analysis of its changes revealed that the most significant influences on his violin playing came from social environmental factors. However, it is essential to note that due to his loss of sight, Zerkula was less aware of physical environmental factors. While his most fundamental musical characteristics did not change in response to situational influences – for example, he obviously continued to use the ornamentation typical of Gyimes – certain musical phenomena, both present and absent, could support the impact of unusual environmental factors on his performance style.

IV. The author's scholarly publications and presentations in the topic of the dissertation

Tanulmányok

- „Zerkula János, a Gyimesi Népzene Énekes-Hegedűs Előadója.” [János Zerkula, the Singer-Violinist Performer of the Folk Music of Gyimes] *Gramofon* 14/1 (2019), 24–27. 2019
- „Egy gyimesi keserves előadásmódjának változása a különböző gyűjtési helyzetek tükrében.” [The Change of a Plaintive Song's Performance Style from Gyimes in the Context of Different Collecting Situations] in *Amerre én járok. Tanulmányok a 70 éves Pávai István tiszteletére.* Budapest: Institute for Musicology, Centre for Humanities, Eötvös Loránd Research Network, 2021, 405–422.
- „A Zerkula Jánossal készült gyűjtések korszakai” [The Periods of the Collections Made with János Zerkula], *Gramofon* 18/2 (2023), 14–18.
- „A gyimesi népzene kutatástörténete” [The History of Research on Folk Music of the Gyimes region], *Gramofon* 19/2, 28–31.

„The importance of János Zerkula in the folk music of the Gyimes region” *Ethnomousikologion* 4/1 (2024) (megjelenés előtt)

„The change of the performance style of a fiddler from the Gyimes region depending on the collecting situations.” *Musicological Annual* 60/2 (megjelenés előtt)

Konferencia előadások

„Környezetpszichológiai szempontok a népzenei gyűjtések forráskritikai értékelésénél.” [Environmental Psychological Perspectives in the Source-Critical Evaluation of Folk Music Collections] *Táncház 50. A magyarországi táncházmozgalom fél évszázada. [Dance House 50: Half a Century of the Hungarian Dance House Movement]* 2023. 05. 23-24. Budapest, Institute for Musicology, Centre for Humanities (Conference Presentation)

„The importance of János Zerkula of the folk music of the Gyimes Region.” *Traditional Music – Folk Recoveries, Adaptations, Restitutions (Muzici*

tradiționale – recuperări, preluări, restituiri)

Cluj-Napoca, 2023.10. 23–24.

Pásku, V. 2023. 11.30-12.01. Zerkula Jánossal készült
gyűjtések a BTK Zenetudományi Intézet

Archívumában, *Évfordulók Konferencia*, Budapest: BTK

Zenetudományi Intézet, 2023. 11.30-12.01.