

THESES OF THE DISSERTATION FOR THE DLA DOCTORAL  
DEGREE

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THE RUSSIAN HARP SCHOOL.  
THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE  
RUSSIAN AND AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN HARP  
SCHOOLS

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Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music  
Art and art history doctoral program No. 28.

BUDAPEST

2009

I. GOALS OF THE RESEARCH

I started my studies in harp playing in Hungary where I was educated on the basis of the Austro-Hungarian technique. I continued my studies in the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow, where, in turn, I learnt the methods of the Russian harp school. The great skills and brilliant technique in handling the instrument of the Russian harpists using the Russian technique while performing the pieces I was working on introduced a completely new side of the art of harp playing to me. The virtuosity accompanied by rich and great sound had been unknown to me.

After my return to Hungary, as an educator I soon realized the need of studying the methodological differences between the Austro-Hungarian and Russian harp schools in details. As it turned out, however, literature on the history and the methodological development of the nearly 250-year-old Russian harp school was scanty at best. The only handbook on the Russian school available in Hungary was that of Parfenov, but only in Russian. This work is rather a thematic material, and has become widely known only as a collection of pieces at various difficulty levels. Parfenov does not make it sufficiently clear for harpists educated in schools other than the Russian school how the process of developing relaxed hand muscles is taking place, although he presents a succinct summary of the way the inexperienced hand is placed onto the instrument.

To fill the gap in the available literature, I conducted a research in order to present the main differences between the Austro-Hungarian and Russian harp schools, and introduce the advantageous technical features of the latter to a broader audience. In addition to an introduction of the history and methodology of the Russian harp school, my primary goal was to introduce harpists using the so-called open hand technique to the useful characteristics of the Russian school.

## II. SOURCES

In my research, I relied on literature related primarily to the Russian harp school. Works written by Russian harp educators and available only in Russian played a central part of it.

- Dulova, Vera: *Iszkusstvo Igrri na Arfe*. Moszkva: Vseszozjuznoe Izdatyelsztvo Szovjetszkij Kompozitor, 1975.
- Parfjonov, Nyikolaj: *Skola Igrri na Arfe*. Moszkva: Izdatyelsztvo Muzika, 1972.
- Renié, Henriette: *Complete Method for Harp*. Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1966.
- Rubin, Mark: *Metodika Obucsenyia Igre na Arfe*. Moszkva: Izdatyelsztvo Muzika, 1973.
- Samejeva, Natalija: *Isztoria Razvitia Otyecsesztvennoj Muziki dlja Arfi (XX vek)*. Moszkva: Natalia Hamidovna Samejeva, 1994.
- Tugaj, Ariadna: *Arfa v Rosszii*. Szankt Peterburg: Izdatyelsztvo Szudarinya, 2007.
- Zingel, Hans J.: *Neue Harfenlehre*. Leipzig: VEB Friedrich Hofmeister Musicverlag, w/o date.

I also used additional sources such as works on history, anatomy and muscle function, as well as the important literature on the education of playing stringed instruments, mainly concentrating on their theoretical and methodological approach.

- Donáth Tibor: *Anatómiai Atlasz*. Budapest: Medicina Kiadó, w/o date.
- Dr. Miltényi Márta: *A Sportmozgások Anatómiai Alapjai*. Budapest: Plantin-print Bt., 2002.
- Flesch Károly: *A Hegedűjáték Művészete*. Mosonmagyaróvár: Fejes Józsefné Zenei Alapítvány, 1994.
- Gerle Róbert: *A Hegedűgyakorlás Művészete*. Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1987.
- Havas Kató: *A Hegedűjáték Új Megközelítése*. London, England: Bosworth & Company Ltd., 2002.
- Juhász József, Szőke István, O. Nagy Gábor, Kovalovszky Miklós: *Magyar Értelmező Kéziszótár*. Budapest: Akadémiai kiadó, 1972.
- Bónis Ferenc: *Magyar Zenei Történeti Tanulmányok*. Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1968.
- Moravcsik Géza: *Az Országos Magyar Királyi Zeneakadémia Története 1875-1907*. Budapest: Athenaeum, 1907.
- Ujfalussy József: *A Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Főiskola 100 Éve*. Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1977.

## III. METHODS

In my research I used the comparative method. First I reviewed the history of the Russian harp school, and then I summarized the methodical characteristics of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian harp schools with an emphasis on their peculiarities.

I compared and analyzed the main technical elements of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian schools one by one. The central goal

in my analysis was to provide answers to the question of what technical solutions may ensure relaxed hand muscles during generating healthy and rich tones. In the comparison, I focused on the relationship between hand position and hand muscles, anatomical limits, and their effects on sound quality. To better illustrate the way muscles work, I used as analogous examples various forms of sport movements. I examined in details the important technical elements of harp playing, such as *scale*, *etouffé*, *flageolet*, *trill*, *tremolo*, and *glissando*.

I also studied the relationship between the area of the fingers touching the strings and sound quality. I examined and analyzed the role of wrist movement and its effects on hand muscles and sound making. I searched for relationships between direction of finger movement, distribution of hand weight and the quality of plucking.

I illustrated the differences between the two schools in various technical situations, in the moments just before and after plucking, and the surface area of the fingers touching the strings with several series of photographs.

#### IV. RESULTS

I found the following specific characteristics of the Russian harp school differing sharply from the Austro-Hungarian technique:

1. Blending the stylistic elements of the French and German schools, the Russian harp school arose after the development of a unique sound making technique.
2. The tone increases proportionally to the size of the area fingers touch the strings (and to the intensity of friction). Using the Russian technique, fingers are capable of touching strings with their greatest surface area.
3. The palm is kept in equilibrium by the second finger. The weight of the palm (bones, muscles, etc.) is distributed evenly over the fingers.
4. Gravity, as a central force, is built into the plucking mechanism, and therefore frees muscles from their load.
5. The bodily, well-separated sounds are generated by finger movement. Fingers are moved from the finger base, such that fingertips arrive at the palm. The first finger draws an oval arch while moving.
6. One of the most characteristic features of the Russian school is the motion of the wrist and palm resulting in prolonged sounds rich in overtones.
7. The movement of the wrist and fingers touching the palm also relaxes the muscles to 100 %. This mode of plucking ensures extraordinarily relaxed hand muscles.

In general, I can conclude that the results of my analyses provide a sufficient explanation to the exceptionally high artistic quality and virtuosity of the Russian harpists, and the worldwide

success of the Russian harp school. To my knowledge, this is the first and only comparative study on the Austro-Hungarian, so-called “open handed” and Russian harp schools. Thus, I am the first to demonstrate that all the above characteristics of the Russian school enable harpists to produce high quality tones for an extended period without exhaustion of hand muscles or even cramps. This technique also provides great advantages for players in difficult technical situations and at high tempos without compromising sound and the artistic quality of the performance.

## V. LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Recordings: LP:

Britten: Ceremony of Carols. Cantemus Choir, Nyíregyháza, dir.: Dénes Szabó

CD:

Mozart: Concerto for Flute and Harp. MMO. Hungarian National Philharmony Orchestra, dir.: Zoltán Kökényessy.

Weiner: Romance. Weiner Chamber Orchestra, dir.: Richard Weininger. Marcal Production, France. MA981101.

Liszt: Psalms. István Ruppert – organ, Melinda Felletár – harp. Do-La Studio DLCD 133.

Britten: Ceremony of Carols. Chamber Choir of Budafok. dir.: István Biller. BCC 30.

Weiner: Romance. Budapest Chamber Symphony, dir.: Tibor Varga .János Starker – cello, Melinda Felletár – harp. Tibor Varga collection No. 21.

Melinda Felletár – harp. Works of Debussy, Donizetti, Glinka, Tournier, Watkins, etc. Picton BCC 15.

Hungarian Harp Concertos. Works of S. Balassa, F. Farkas, E. Dohnányi, F. Hidas. Melinda Felletár – harp, Hungarian Symphony Orchestra dir.: Béla Drahos. Opusz1 CD 001.

Hungarian Harp Concertos. E. Dohnányi, S. Balassa, F. Farkas, F. Hidas. Melinda Felletár – harp, Hungarian Symphony Orchestra dir.: Béla Drahos. HungarotonClassic HCD 32467.

Selected concerts:

November 23, 2003. Hungarian Harp Concertos I.

Farkas, Ferenc: Concertino for Harp and Strings /Hungarian première/

Balassa, Sándor: Phantasy for Harp and Strings

Marble Hall of the Hungarian State Radio, Budapest

Melinda Felletár – harp, Weiner String Orchestra, dir.: Richárd Wéninger

February 1, 2004. Hungarian Harp Concertos II.

Járdányi, Pál: Concerto for Harp and Orchestra

Hidas, Frigyes: Concerto for Harp and Orchestra

Marble Hall of the Hungarian State Radio, Budapest

Melinda Felletár – harp, Weiner String Orchestra, dir.: Richárd Wéninger

April 20, 2004. Hungarian Harp Concertos III.

Weiner, Leó: Romance for Cello, Harp and String Orchestra

Dohnányi, Ernő: Concertino

Grand Hall of the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Katalin Sín – Cello, Melinda Felletár – Harp, Weiner String Orchestra dir.: Richárd Wéninger

December 10, 2005: An Evening to the Memory of Ferenc Farkas

Farkas, Ferenc: Concertino for Harp and String Orchestra

Grand Hall of the Academy of Music, Budapest

Melinda Felletár – Harp, Budapest Strings, concertmaster: Béla Bánfalvy

March 15, 2009.

Haydn, J.: Concerto in C Major /Hob. XVIII.5/

Lutry, Switzerland

Melinda Felletár – Harp, Liszt Ferenc Chamber Orchestra, concertmaster: János Rolla