

DLA Doctoral Thesis

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Remnants of an Old-Style Fiddle Playing  
Technique in Transylvania

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## I. History of the Research

There have been numerous monographs, papers and melody collections published in the last decades, all of which present several segments of authentic Hungarian fiddle playing, as well as the unique technique and repertoire characteristic of individual Hungarian fiddlers. However, very little literature has been written on the topic of my dissertation, which examines a special part of folk violin playing.

The very first work to research traditional Hungarian instrumental folk music is Oszkár Dincsér's monography (*Két csíki hangszer. Mozsika és gardon*. [Budapest: Magyar Történeli Múzeum, 1943.]) In it Dincsér aims at elaborating on a specific region's characteristic features of instrumental music, including the technique of the fiddlers in Gyimes that use the second position as benchmark. Here players do not distinguish between the first and the second positions, and they use a special fingering that differ from the general violin playing method.

Bálint Sárosi analyzed the repertoire, ornaments, and figurations of the fiddle players from the Gyimes region (A

*gyimesi csángó hegedűstílus* (*Magyar Zene* XIX/2 [June 1978]: 176-183.) but unlike Dincsér, he did not write about their fingering.

Later, in 1989, Márta Virágvölgyi published her melody collection (*Gyimesi népzene I–II*. [Debrecen: Kölcsey Művelődési Központ, 1989.]), which describes Mihály Halmágyi's second position technique and repertoire.

Second position violin playing is thus a lesser studied segment of instrumental folk music, only mentioned in the latest publications as the playing technique of the fiddlers in Gyimes.

## II. Source Material

My research is based on Oszkár Dincsér's *Két csíki hangszer. Muzsika és gardon* (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Múzeum, 1943.), István Pávai's *Az erdélyi magyar népi tánczene* (Budapest: Hagyományok Háza – Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság, 2013.), Pál Richter (ed.): *Magyar Népzenei Antológia. Digitális összkiadás. DVD-ROM*. (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont – FolkEurópa Kiadó,

2012.) and István Pávai's *A Székelyföld népi tánczene szempontú táji tagolódása* (In: Pávai István – Sófalvi Emese [ed.]: *Énlaka-konferenciák V. Székely népzene és néptánc*. [Budapest: Hagyományok Háza, Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem, Énlaka: Pro Énlaka Alapítvány, 2018. 15–46.]).

Relying on the listed publications, I reviewed and systematized the playing technique of the informant violin players in the collections of the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Research Centre for the Humanities and the Folklore Database of the Hungarian Heritage House. I studied the institute's archive films, sound recordings, LP covers and collection reports. Additionally, I received useful information from the CD booklets of the *Új Pátria* CD series, made available from the collections of the *Utolsó Óra* program.

### III. Methodology

Having examined the collections, I established the fingering of fiddlers. Their birth data can be used to determine whether they belong to an older or younger

generation of musicians, and based on this approach it is easier to determine how their repertoire has been influenced by newer cultural trends.

I grouped the examined musicians based on the micro-regional division of Transylvanian folk dance music, and I analyzed their playing technique in the light of the traditional culture set of melodies and their changes. In the case of musicians using the second position playing technique, I determined, as possible, from whom they learned to play the violin.

#### IV. Research Outcomes

Due to their geographical location and natural endowments, the Székelys (Csángós) who moved to the Gyimes region in the second half of the 18th century were able to preserve the old Székely folk tradition that they brought with them. Therefore the question arises whether we can also consider their violin playing technique – which is different from the general one – as a remnant of an old tradition. To answer this question, it is not enough to examine only the violinist tradition of Gyimes. Due to

historical and geographical reasons, the traditional culture of different regions of Transylvania was influenced to different degrees by the influences of newer cultural trends, therefore it can be assumed that this playing technique can be found in other, more isolated parts of Transylvania.

During my research, I observed 363 fiddlers from Transylvania, Moldavia, and Bukovina. The results show that nearly nine percent of the musicians use the second position as benchmark, another two fiddlers probably use it, and yet another two violinists apply a combination of the general and second position techniques.

My finding, I believe, that the second-positioned, three-finger playing technique can be considered as an old phenomenon is an important and new result. Experience shows, however, that its oldness is not to be found in a tradition passed down from generation to generation, but rather in the fact that this mode of playing is much more comfortable and natural than the violin-playing technique known from classical musical practice. Therefore, the second position playing technique is an individual solution, which can be observed primarily at self-taught

village violinists. The possibility of the rise of individual solutions different from classical violin playing is determined by the degree of influences of newer cultural trends that have influenced the traditional dance and music culture of different regions and settlements. The most important instrumental representatives of the newer musical trends coming from the cities are the urban gypsy musicians, whose violin playing technique comes from the classical violin playing method. Therefore, the unifying effect of newer musical trends affected not only the repertoire of village fiddlers but also their playing technique. It is no coincidence then, that we can encounter the second position playing technique primarily in regions where the embourgeoisement took place later.

My research, so far, on the violin playing of other nationalities shows that the technique I have studied is not only characteristic of Hungarian folk violin playing, but this special way of playing has probably only survived in the Carpathian Basin, specifically within Transylvania up until the present day.

## V. Documentation of the Activities Related to the Subject of the Thesis

### Publications:

*A gyimesi hegedűjáték az 1940-es évektől napjainkig. Audiovizuális oktatóanyag.* (Budapest: Self-publishing, 2016.)

*A gyimesi hegedűjáték az 1940-es évektől napjainkig. Részlet.* (In: Virágvölgyi Márta: *Gyimesi népzene I.* [Budapest: Magyar Hangszermíves Céh, 2019.]

*A gyimesi csángó prímások játéktechnikája. I. rész.* (*Folkmagazin.* XXVIII/2 [April 2021]: 12-15.)

### Lecture:

*„In Search of Connecting Playing Techniques: Research Results on Hungarian Fiddle Tradition by a Professional Musician - Remnants of an old styled fiddle playing technique”* (11-17 July 2019, 45th ICTM Conference [Bangkok, Thailand])

### Records:

Mihó Attila és barátai: *Melyik úton...* (Budapest, Self-publishing, 2017.)

Vizeli Balázs és Mihó Attila: *Összehegedült Kárpátok* (Budapest, FolkFest Kulturális Egyesület, 2019.)

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