

Abstract of the DLA Dissertation

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Meaning and Relevance of Fingering in the Light of the First and the  
Revised Editions of Béla Bartók's *For Children*

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## I. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In my experience, the cycle *For Children* is not considered such a significant piano piece as the later and larger compositions of Bartók's piano literature. It is rarely performed as an individual cycle, predominantly it forms part of the elementary piano instruction curriculum. It was a great pleasure for me when it came to my knowledge that the cycle *For Children* would have a place in the first volume of Béla Bartók Complete Critical Edition<sup>1</sup>, which was then still under preparation. I have been very pleased that it has a place in such a way that the first and the revised editions are next to each other, so incidental differences, similarities are clearly visible, and in the introduction, we can also read about the notation and Bartók's fingering.

There is almost no previous, relevant literature – except for István Szelényi's writing<sup>2</sup> - dealing with the first edition and the comparison of the two editions. Ferenc Bónis's study<sup>3</sup> focuses on the pieces that have been left out during the revision. Oszkár Frank's study<sup>4</sup> takes the revised version as a basis and deals with issues about fingering and comparison only tangentially. In the elaborated literature, research on fingering has not presented itself as a main topic anywhere. The reason behind might be the general approach to fingering as a written instruction, a simple and common practice. This realisation has led me to the idea of the topic of my dissertation. With my writing, I would like to back up my firm opinion that fingering is an organic and inseparable part of musical performance.

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<sup>1</sup> Béla Bartók: *Pieces for Children. Early and revised edition*. László Vikárius and Vera Lampert (eds.): Béla Bartók Complete Critical Edition, Volume 37. (München: G.Henle Verlag Editio Musica Budapest, 2016)

<sup>2</sup> István Szelényi: *Textual Criticism on the Original and the Revised Editions of Bartók's "For Children"*. Budapest: Music Publishing Company, 1960.

<sup>3</sup> Ferenc Bónis: „Pieces left out from Bartók's For Children”. *Hungarian Music* 6/4 (1965.) 347-356.

<sup>4</sup> Oszkár Frank: *Bartók and the children. Analysis of "For Children" Piano Piece-Cycle*, Budapest: National Schoolbook Publishing, 1994.

## II. SOURCES

For research on fingering, it has been necessary to outline a model about Bartók's piano playing and teaching method to get a picture – even if it is vague - about what components were essential for him to perform a piano piece and to teach. For this topic, there has been ample accessible literature. For the concert reports, I have relied on writings by Ferenc Bónis and János Demény.<sup>5</sup> I have read about Bartók's teaching in Júlia Székely's writing<sup>6</sup> and László Sztachó's dissertation<sup>7</sup>. In my historical overview of fingering, I have used facsimile editions<sup>8</sup> as well as the Grove Music Online Dictionary. For the section discussing the relationship between notation and fingering, I have used László Somfai's interpretations.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ferenc Bónis: *Aladár Tóth's Selected Music Criticisms*. Budapest: Music Publishing, 1968.  
Ferenc Bónis: *The Way We Saw Bartók*. Budapest: Püski, 1995.

János Demény: „Bartók's School Years and Romantic Period”. In: Bence Szabolcsi, Dénes Bartha (eds.) *Musicological Studies*. (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1954), 323-487.

János Demény: „Béla Bartók's Years of Artistic Development Part II”. In: Bence Szabolcsi, Dénes Bartha (eds.): *Musicological Studies*. (Budapest: Akadémia Publishing, 1959), 5-427

János Demény: „Béla Bartók During his Artistic Meridian”. In: Bence Szabolcsi, Dénes Bartha (eds.): *Musicological Studies* 10 (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1962) 189-727.

János Demény: *Béla Bartók the Pianist*. Budapest: Music Publishing, 1973.

<sup>6</sup> Júlia Székely: *Bartók as a Teacher*. Budapest: Móra Publishing House, 1978.

<sup>7</sup> László Stachó: *Bartók's Performer Models and Ideals*. PhD dissertation, Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, 2013. (manuscript)

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Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* William J. Mitchell (ed. and transl.) New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1949.

Francois Couperin: *L'ART de toucher le Clavecin*. Anna Linde (ed.): Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel Musikverlag, 1933.

Daniel Gottlob Türk: *Klavierschule oder Anweisung zum Klavierspielen*. Erwin R. Jacobi (ed.): Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1967.

<sup>9</sup> László Somfai: *Béla Bartók's Compositional Method*. Budapest: Akkord, 2000.

László Somfai: „19<sup>th</sup> Century Scoring Principles in Bartók's Piano Notation between 1907-1914” In: Somfai László (ed.): *Score View and Artwork. Thirty Studies from Bach to Bartók*. Budapest: Rózsavölgyi és társa, 2015. 293-322.

In the main section of my writing, for the classification and evaluation of fingerings and the examples I have used the original score published by the Károly Rozsnyai Music Publishing Company, for the revised edition I have used the version published by Boosey and Hawkes.

Primarily, the above-mentioned scores, as well as the first volume of Béla Bartók Complete Critical Edition<sup>10</sup> have helped me with the comparison of the two editions of *For Children*.

In the section about the significance of Béla Bartók's remainders of records, I have relied on works by László Somfai<sup>11</sup>, Virág Büky<sup>12</sup> and László Sztachó<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Béla Bartók: *Pieces for Children. Early and revised edition*. László Vikárius and Vera Lampert (eds.): Béla Bartók Complete Critical Edition, Volume 37. (München: G.Henle Verlag Editio Musica Budapest, 2016)

<sup>11</sup> László Somfai: „Evening in the Village: Four Types of Bartók Performance”. In: László Somfai (ed.): *18 Bartók Studies*. Budapest: Music Publisher, 1981. 117-132.

László Somfai: „Two Bartók Records of Allegro Barbaro”. In: László Somfai (ed.): *18 Bartók Studies*. Budapest: Music Publishing, 1981. 133-149.

László Somfai: „On the Importance of the Author's Audio Records”. in: László Somfai (ed.): *Béla Bartók's Compositional Method*. Budapest: Akkord Music Publishing, 2000. 283-300.

<sup>12</sup> Virág Büky: „Bartók örökében”. *Hungarian Music* 50/3 (August 2012): 282-302.

<sup>13</sup> László Stachó: *Bartók's Performer Models and Ideals*. PhD dissertation, Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, 2013. (manuscript)

### III. RESEARCH METHODS

The concept of the structure of my dissertation follows the principle of narrowing. This manifests itself so that the thought structure of my writing starts from the distance and progresses to the narrowed main topic. It is necessary because for assessing the meaning and the significance of Bartók's fingerings we have to get familiar with him as a performer and piano teacher. I have based knowing him on criticisms about him, furthermore, on reminiscences of his students. Based on the reminiscences it started to unravel what could be the primary devices of musical composition and performance for him. Based on this, I was able to place Bartók's fingerings into the context of the development of fingering, the transformation of its rules and the notation. It follows from this that I have interpreted the existing result referred to *For Children*, which is, in fact, the main theme of my dissertation. It also corroborates the claim explained in the introduction, according to which "the original fingerings of *For Children* predominantly aid the musical performance, hence it ought to be interpreted as part of music notation, and practice or aiding the performer are only secondarily aimed."

I have studied the core section about fingerings in my dissertation by breaking it down into categories. These categories as follows:

- Fingerings aiding declamation
- Repetitive fingerings
- Fingerings aiding accent
- Special fingerings

I have projected the conclusions drawn onto the two versions of *For Children*, that is the first and the revised editions, intending to strengthen the claim already mentioned above about Bartók's approach and consciousness to fingerings.

The elaboration of the topic would not be complete if we did not mention the objective research on fingering with the help of the remainders of the audio records. Eventually, I have tried to search the answer whether it is possible to detect the fingerings discussed solely by listening.

#### IV. RESULTS

One of my former teachers, Jenő Jandó has drawn my attention to Bartók's scoring, including the unheard refinement of the notation of *For Children*. Jandó, just like Bartók himself too, is very watchful and detailed regarding subtleties in scoring. He has made me realise that reading sheet music – not only in the case of *For Children* but also in every other composition – should comprise every small detail, which means that the performer is obliged to conform to them completely and without exception. Hence, when I had to choose a dissertation topic at the doctoral school, it was obvious to me that the topic of *For Children* would be the most appropriate choice.

Later – when I myself was also teaching – did I begin to take on the thought; namely, to what extent consciousness about children's hands and the adaptation to their abilities can be detected in his *For Children* pieces. Initially, this thought was just an experiment, whose main point was to have my piano students observe every symbol (agogics, declamation, articulation, fingering). Because of this, I have understood: fingering should be regarded as musical instruction in *For Children* since it serves the materialisation of music in its completeness just like any other instruction. I have not found any answer to this question in the elaborated literature, so my entire dissertation attempts to do so.

## V. DOCUMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE ANALYSED TOPIC

I can profit by the results of my research principally in teaching. I consider it important that conscious piano fingering and its conscious instruction – especially on an elementary level - should get higher emphasis in piano education.

I have included *For Children* pieces in my performances several times.

On III. International Béla Bartók Piano Competition on 20 March 2008 I was rewarded with a special prize for performing *For Children*.

On 10 November 2018, I gave a lecture on the characteristics of the fingering in Bartók's *For Children* to the teachers of Leó Weiner Secondary and Music School.