

## FOUNDATIONS OF HUNGARIAN ETHNOCHOREOLOGY

### SELECTED PAPERS OF GYÖRGY MARTIN

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#### I.

*Selected Papers of György Martin*, with its 824 pages, is a considerable volume to impress the reader at first sight. It has been published as the first piece of the series *Foundations of Hungarian Ethnochoreology* by the Research Centre for the Humanities Institute for Musicology and the Hungarian Heritage House. Four decades after the premature death of György Martin, Hungarian ethnochoreologists took a symbolic step forward: publishing this volume counts as paying tribute to the emblematic figure of Hungarian traditional dance research, as well as it helps them position their own professional identity in the light of the predecessor's oeuvre.

Presenting a representative selection of György Martin's papers in English was the main motivation behind the birth of this volume. The selection contains some papers of Martin which were already published in his lifetime in English and some additional pieces which are the first translated versions of Hungarian texts. This compilation intends to ensure an overview of the oeuvre as a whole; therefore, texts earlier published both in Hungarian and English are an organic part of this volume. The work of selection and proofreading was done by members of the Hungarian Association for Ethnochoreology: János Fügedi, Vivien Szőnyi and Sándor Varga, who are affiliated with the Institute for Musicology Research Centre for the Humanities, the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Szeged and the Department for Folk Dances at the Hungarian Dance Academy. Colin Quigley has joined the editorial team from the University of Limerick. Considering the range of the selected papers that have been collected and translated some forty years after their author's death, the reviewer believes the main task is to highlight the purpose of this volume. The following question may arise: what intentions can one find behind this ambitious enterprise, except that a synthesis of György Martin's oeuvre in English was a debt Hungarian ethnochoreology had from long ago. Who was this volume published for, and who are the expected readers? Martin was a leading figure of Hungarian dance folkloristics and a predecessor of Hungarian ethnochoreology, using the term after the recent self-identification of the discipline. Since he published a wide range of studies in the international sphere and he was one of the most recognized Hungarian dance researchers beyond the national scientific community, the question seems appropriate: what is the point of publishing papers again, a large percentage of which already exist in English.

In my short review, I argue that publishing this volume in the *lingua franca* of the international academic world has a dual purpose. On the one hand, it aims to elucidate Martin's oeuvre to scholars beyond the borders of Hungary from multiple viewpoints, with various aspects and meticulous contextualization. On the other hand, it endeavours to establish a foundation of references for contemporary Hungarian traditional dance research (ethnochoreology), thereby building a strong identity of the discipline. In this sense, the series has received a suitable title: *Foundations of Hungarian Ethnochoreology*. According to the editors' intention, this volume is going to be the first and a model-creating piece of the series. Moreover, this book is meant to be a useful textbook in university education, as the editorial board emphasizes it in the *Preface*. Since they are all concerned with *Choreomundus – International Master's Program in Dance Knowledge, Practice, and Heritage*, one can assume that the requirements of this program were taken into account during the editorial work.

The volume will probably fulfil these expectations, it ensures a proper insight into the oeuvre of Martin, as well as into the history of Hungarian ethnochoreology for international students.

The structure of this volume comprises four main sections. The *Prolegomena* introduces Martin's writings in the light of Hungarian and international research history. It is followed by three thematic chapters that illustrate the oeuvre's most significant directions: historical and comparative dance research, theoretical basics for structural analysis, and traditional dance research in Transylvania, exemplified in case studies.

## II.

The writings of prolegomena (*Prolegomena: György Martin's Role in Ethnochoreology and Dance Folkloristics*) intend to introduce the reader to the oeuvre from a varied corpus. They approach Martin's program from different points of view. Furthermore, they differ from one another in their context and time of genesis. Texts of Lajos Vargyas and Tamás Hofer date back to the decade after Martin passed away. For this volume, further papers, such as Colin Quigley's, Katalin Paksa's and Sándor Varga's texts have been written.

This thematic part opens with a paper by Colin Quigley (*The Anglophone Reception of György Martin's Work: 1960–1990*), which presents the reception of György Martin's works in the English-speaking scholarly world. The dichotomy of anthropology – choreology was evident in the self-identification and approach of the discipline and also meant a real spatial division. Quigley focuses on the question of what exactly scholars, mainly trained in the field of anthropology, in the English-speaking West knew about and perceived from Martin's outcomes, who was identified by them as an Eastern-European dance folklorist. Moreover, did they understand Martin's works properly? Could they have embraced Martin's significance through some highlighted papers published in English without having any overview of the oeuvre's integrity? The author argues that Martin's papers were important references for the first generation of dance anthropologists starting their careers in the 1960s and for some of their followers when they were writing about the structural analysis of dances. The successes of Martin in

the field of structural analysis have become well-known in the form of papers presented at international conferences in their own time, and these are the ones that were published in English in the first place. Therefore, the figure of a structuralist researcher has become dominant in Martin's image, while the corpus as a whole, which served as a foundation for his structural analysis, has remained unknown to readers in the international arena until our times.

The thematization of reception history is followed by the first summary of the oeuvre, which was published two years after Martin's death in Hungary (in 1985) (*György Martin, the Scholar*). Lajos Vargyas' study, a summary for domestic scholars and the public alike, is the closest in time to Martin's own lifetime, providing a synthesis of his three-decade-long career. Tamás Hofer's paper was published ten years after Martin passed away (in 1993) (*Historical Strata and European Relations of Hungarian Folk Culture in the Context of György Martin's Dance Research*). The author, referring to the last conference paper Martin had in his lifetime, reveals in which ways Hungarian traditional dance culture is embedded in Hungarian peasant culture. Through this aspect, Hofer emphasises that the international debate of those times about popular culture penetrating into the international scholarly sphere had a significant impact on the last period of Martin's oeuvre. Katalin Paksa's paper pays attention to the relevance of Martin's works in the field of ethnomusicology (*The Ethnomusicological Significance of György Martin's Works*). She presents the way how Hungarian folk dance research has become an equal partner and an inspiring co-discipline for ethnomusicology, affected mainly by Martin's program, considering that it was highly influenced by an ethnomusicological approach and methodology at its birth.

The final paper in this introductory chapter is a piece by Sándor Varga, written with a relatively strong critical attitude with regard to the oeuvre (*The Scientific Legacy of György Martin*). Varga primarily endeavours to contextualise Martin's work. Evaluating Martin's entire generation in a broader sense, the author presents a detailed picture of Hungarian dance folkloristics' history, focusing particularly on features that have characterized the approach and methodology of traditional dance research on an Eastern-European scale. Some deficiencies, for instance, the ignorance of micro-scale processes, as well as the lack of social, political, and ecological contexts during fieldwork, are highly emphasized in Varga's criticism. However, ascertaining deficiencies and debts is not an assertive act in this article: summarizing the oeuvre from a critical point of view is a necessary step to take in order to mark new directions in recent Hungarian ethnochoreology.

### III.

The first block of Martin's writings contains historical and comparative studies (*Historical and Comparative Studies: European Cultural Relations among Dance Traditions in the Alpine-Carpathian Region*). A strong claim for the geographical and historical contextualization is characteristic of these papers: traditional Hungarian dance culture is interpreted within the frames of the Alpine-Carpathian Region's dance tradition and is examined through a cultural-historical approach. Vivien Szőnyi offers a detailed introduction to this section by revealing the most significant theoretical trends that had an influence on Martin's point of view and methods. In her

paper, Szőnyi presents which effects of cultural evolutionism, cultural diffusionism, the geographic-historical method of the Finnish school or the Hungarian individual-centred research school can be identified in writings published in this part of the volume.

The second part of the thematic chapters offers an insight into Martin's theoretical works of structural dance analysis (*Theoretical Works: The Structural Approach*). The two introductory papers in this section are written by János Fügedi and Zoltán Karácsony. When looking at the entire volume, this section is mainly composed of previously published articles translated into English in Martin's lifetime. In his study, János Fügedi explains the historical background, as well as the theoretical contexts of György Martin's and Ernő Pesovár's structural approach. The author pays attention to structural linguistics and ethnomusicology as disciplines which meant inspiration and a theoretical basis for Martin's and Pesovár's interest when searching for the structural units of folk dance. By characterizing the evolution of the humanities at an international level, Fügedi presents an explanation for the increasing popularity of the structural approach in the 1960s and 1970s in dance studies and also its decline. Incidentally, he confirms the statements of Colin Quigley about international reception history in this volume. Zoltán Karácsony mainly provides the reader with practical information to understand Martin's structural analysis. His paper makes it comprehensible that structural analysis served as a foundation for the genre structure Martin has created.

The last thematic chapter is built on Martin's most detailed and suggestive case studies which present the characteristics of a dance dialect or a dance type (*Case Studies: Traditional Dance Research in Transylvania*). The main directions of the oeuvre are explained in previous chapters, such as the historical and comparative research of traditional dance culture and the structural approach, alongside its theory – which intermingle with one another in this section. This part of the volume illustrates the complexity of the corpus expressively, revealing the huge empirical experience that has been accumulated during Martin's fieldwork as the real foundation of his work. Behind the figure of a researcher who considers cultural processes on a European scale, the image of a structural analyst is also portrayed. Sándor Varga's paper introduces further information for the proper understanding of the chapter's essence.

#### IV.

The reviewer strongly believes that this volume surpasses an English language selection of Martin's studies. Its value lies in the introductory papers, which explain and interpret Martin's oeuvre and make it the first piece of a new canon in Hungarian ethnochoreology. Texts written by Martin's contemporary scholars, as well as experts on Hungarian ethnochoreology of our times, create cohesion of the volume as an entity. They provide basic information about Martin. Furthermore, they contextualize his oeuvre within international research history, and in line with this, they present the evolution of traditional dance research in Hungary while explaining its main directions to international readers. In addition, these writings provide an insight into the life and *ars poetica* of recent Hungarian ethnochoreology. Based on these factors, this volume may serve as a real foundation of Hungarian ethnochoreology.

Fügedi, J., Quigley, C., Szőnyi, V., & Varga, S. (Eds.) (2020). *Foundations of Hungarian Ethnochoreology: Selected Papers of György Martin*. Research Centre for the Humanities Institute for Musicology, Hungarian Heritage House, Budapest. 824 pp. ISBN 978-6155167324