



## THE CIRCLE SYMBOL IN MUSIC EDUCATION

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**SUMMARY.** In this paper, we examine whether the use of the circle symbol can enhance achieving this flow state, thus achieving deeper knowledge, and also, how the circle can be present in musical education. Through content analysis, we examine how the theory is put into practice, looking for the presentation of the circle symbol in dances, songs and other musical pieces. We reveal how and in what form, context and association the circle symbol appears in musical education. Our aim is to draw attention to the secrets of our surrounding world, the secrecy of the circle symbol in music. The circle, as a design in space, has a distinctive role in acoustic communication, which opens up the infinity of the musical cosmos through its individual and community building force. The ancient circle walks and dances are joint experiences of wholeness. The relevance of the research is the better understanding of the musical projection of the circle symbol, which can broaden perspective in school education.

**Keywords:** symbol, kindergarten, music education, circle, circle games, singing games, folklore, personal development

### Introduction

The circle is one of the oldest symbols of mankind. It represents the notions of totality of time, resumption, the Sky, being closed and protected, therefore human warmth, eternity, harmony and the infinite. Historian of religion Mircea Eliade, psychiatrist-psychologist- psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung, cultural anthropologist Lajos Boglár and ethnographer Vilmos Tánczos examined the effects of symbols in depth. During their research, they came to the conclusion that the collective unconscious creates meaningful symbols, which – while giving perspective and meaning to the individual's life – provide

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a large scope for the fulfilment of one's personality. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, researcher of creativity and the psychology of the perfect experience, sees the way of development in experiencing the state of 'flow'.

In this paper, we examine whether the use of the circle symbol can enhance achieving this flow state, thus achieving deeper knowledge, and also, how the circle can be present in musical education.

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### **The role of symbols in understanding the world**

Today, when the notion of 'value' is uncertain and value systems are going through a crisis (Vitányi, 2002), it is important to understand values inherited from cultures and ages past. With these values becoming conscious, the individual acquires a 'compass' to direct his/her behaviour. Values manifest themselves in symbols (Rezsóhazy, 2006), which symbols live in our myths, customs and traditions. But what is their role, and where do they originate from? To answer these, we have to turn to the findings of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung.

Sigmund Freud's works showed a world that cannot be brought under the control of the logical and rational: the unconscious. In his works he explained that our life, which we have considered conscious, is determined by an irrational and vague thing – our unconscious. His discovery makes it clear that the world that cannot be known by the pure reason reveals itself through mysterious images.

Carl Gustav Jung proved that the unconscious psyche is not the rejected part of the conscious psyche: its images hidden form an integrated part of the personality; they are the bridge between the world of instincts and the conscious, rational world. The most important finding in Jung's theory may be that - as the Freudian 'archaic remnants', 'ancient notions' and 'mythological motifs' seem to be inherited and universal elements of

the human psyche – they are related not to the personal, but rather to mankind's collective unconscious. Bringing up the notion of the collective unconscious, Jung moves the Freudian model of psychology in a metaphysical direction. He creates the concept of 'archetype' for the images naturally present in the collective unconscious. These archetypes exist in every culture, they are universal. As archetypal symbols are images of universal concepts, their communicative force is boundless. (Tánczos, 2007)

Symbols are as old as mankind. The word itself (originating from the Greek word *symbolleîn*, to bring together, to put together) originally meant a token of identity. Symbolism is based on our need to express the invisible or intangible by means of visible or sensuous representations. More or less consensually, symbols can be characterized with four features: first, beyond being perceptible, characteristic of all types of signs, a symbol is not only a figurative linguistic expression – like a metaphor –, but a real image or act. Second, the signified is transcendent, hence the symbol's analogue feature. Third, a symbol is community-based, it is well-understood within a community. Finally, symbols address not only the reason, but man as a whole, their understanding is experimental. (Brugger, 2005)

Symbols reveal the deepest layers of reality. According to historian of religion Mircea Eliade, images, symbols, myths are not unnecessary creations of the human psyche: they fulfil a need and have a function, which is to reveal the most hidden modes of existence. The richly structured images carry several meanings (Eliade, 1997). This symbolic universe, similarly to ritual symbolism, gives rules and examples how to express the mode of given life situations, to solve given problems and to understand social phenomena correctly. Thinking in symbols – as a particular mode of existence (the state of being within) – can be the way of understanding the surrounding world, because the symbolic terminology articulates the fundamental questions of community life; the community identifies itself with the help of these symbols, the individuals are grouped together with the common language, thus enhancing cooperation. (Hoppál, Jankovics, Nagy and Szemadám 1995).

### **The potential in the application of the symbol**

According to Carole Sédillot, researcher of symbols and dancer Elisabeth Zana, a symbol is like a footbridge between the human and the divine, which footbridge can be crossed and this crossing is like an initiation for the individual. This bond originates from the collective memory; it is like Ariadne's thread, which enables us to reach the personal treasure cove, as getting into the world of symbols means harmonising the adventures of the opening unconscious. This rare experience propels one to get in touch with the significant. A symbol cannot be learned, explained or transmitted - it is

an experience that has to be lived through, which is a creative and development process (Sédillot and Zana, 2007). This means that the symbol is the 'apparition' of the significant, in which apparition this significant unfolds and 'declares' itself (Rahner, 1980 p. 681).

In René Alleau's *La Science des symboles* – in which book the author examines the role of symbols in the history of science, arts and religions –, the symbol is a kind of communication that drives the human towards the divine. He thinks that it is the symbols that keep the world of the Mystical Ancients and Divine Beings available, as they do not depict this non-human world with allegories, but rather update it dynamically. This means that a symbol does not signify a predetermined thing, its meaning is revealed in the very moment when one meets it (Alleau, 1976 p. 292-293.). To understand reality, the rational, logical road is not the only way, there is another known, proven, but neglected way. According to Bergson, one has to move into the inner being of an object to grasp what is unique and ineffable within it. Spiritual facts can only be grasped through the act of intuition (Simonfi, 2011).

In the millennia of mankind, symbols have had an important role; beyond festivals, they have regulated everyday acts as well. According to Eliade, ancient myths and symbols live on in today's world, in our religions, and keep influencing us unconsciously. The form of the symbols in the unconscious of today's man may have changed, but its function remains the same (Eliade, 1976, 1997).

Due to the experience-like nature of the symbol, it is possible to reach the flow-state in the process of intuitive identification with symbols. According to Csíkszentmihályi, flow is the engine of evolution and it can show the way to a deeper understanding of life on Earth. Pleasure is taken when we extend the Self – and reach planetary consciousness. In the flow-state, we experience a kind of transcendence, which results in inner harmony and urges us to revive the experience. (Csíkszentmihályi, 2011)

The symbol therefore has a multi-layered function: prepares to adult-life, connects generations (helps transmitting the experiences of the old), creates a community, forms a value-system, conveys transcendent experiences and heals.

The use of symbols, as an 'alternative' is already in therapeutic practice. Symbol therapy, horse therapy, fairy tale therapy, music therapy, dance therapy, adventure therapy and different types of art therapy are being increasingly recognised. It might be worth integrating the use of symbols in the pedagogical process, as - according to the developer of development strategies Zoltán Csörgő – the so-called 'alternative' teaching and learning methods helped by an open-minded organization might show the way of the future. (Csörgő, 2010, p. 23.) During the pedagogical process, archetypical symbols can appear in lighting a candle, planting a tree, singing along, making masks etc.

## The 'circle' as symbol

The 'symbol' is one of the most defining archetypes. According to the archaic man, the cycle of Nature is nothing but mimicking the fate of the gods. Nature continually repeats birth, life, death and resurrection because it cannot and does not intend to get rid of the divine fate. The perspective and thinking of the archaic man is based on analogy. This analogy means that everything is different, yet the same. This sameness appears in variedness. We find analogy in the movements of stars and human fate, in colours and sounds. They are different, yet the same.

The cycle is the symbol of the totality of time and restart in all its forms. It is a magical emblem, a summary of cyclic change, which, by giving shape to time, gives one power over it. Symbols that depict cyclicity are very strong as we are talking about images that are of strong interest to human imagination. Mythologies, philosophies of religion and history have been formed around symbols of cyclicity. The mythological canon of every civilisation is based on the possibility of the repetition of time. 'Thus the gods did; thus men do.' (Taittiriya Brahmana in Eliade, 1993 p. 41.) – this is in the background of every ritual-liturgical repetition. The repetition of the divine acts of earlier times is a sacral act in itself. These 'memories', the repetitions of the cosmogonic divine acts are always new creations as well. In most of the great religions, the law of cyclicity prevails. In Eliade's ontology, continuous repetition leads to the repetitious renewal of time. Imagination grabs time in years, so it gets the form of the circle. In Latin, the word *annus* (year) is closely related to *annulus* (ring). The geometrical rule over time is realised by its spatialization, which patches the tear between time and space. During the year, the cosmogonic acts of ritual creation occur again and again. In these customs, the grandiose communal rites aim to recreate the new harmony of the world. (Tánczos, 2007)

The circle, which is more 'motherly' than the pointed square, soothes, protects and radiates warmth. Literature circle, circle of friends, family circle – all phrases to describe groups of people. The stars of the European Union flag are also arranged in a circle to show unity. (N. Gardin, Olorenshaw, J. Gardin and Klein, 2009)

Above all, the circle is the symbol of Heaven, the original unity, and also of spherical celestial bodies (e.g. the Sun, the Moon), of the visible and invisible circles (e.g. the Milky Way, orbit of planets), of movement (the camps and tents of nomadic tribes are usually circular), periodic time, eternity, harmony and the infinite. The circle is a continuous curve returning to its origins, its animal symbol is a serpent biting its own tail. It symbolizes Nothing, closure (magical circle, ring), unity (of space and time), homogeneity, equivalence and equality (the Round Table of King Arthur).

The centre of the circle represents God, the beginning and the end; while the circle the created world. The practical relevance of the magical circle is that the circle is the most natural form of defence. This image is represented in the floor plan of ancient settlements, sacred buildings, circle games and dances and ritual circle walks. (Hoppál, Jankovics, Nagy and Szemadám, 1995)

### **The role of games in the relationship between the individual and the community**

During the kindergarten years, circle games play an important role in the children's music education. Their abilities and skills develop in a complex way with the help of traditional games. Games accompanied with singing help overcome difficulties that arose when leaving kindergarten and starting school, as during these games anxieties may ease and it makes integration into the new community easier.

'Playing is one of the most ancient and most universal peculiarities of human existence'. (Dömötör, 1990. p. 531.) Playing is the most important activity for children, as it helps them know the culture of a given community. During playful activities, the interference between the individual and the group (community) occurs in its most natural way. In their games, children imitate the adult world, this long phase in their development prepare them for the 'real' adult world.

Singing games play an important role in music education, they develop personality, social relations and aesthetic sense. The unity of lyrics, rhythm, melody and movement develop abilities and skills in a complex way. The lyrics and the melody of many songs and rhymes originate in ancient times. Magic rhymes and songs follow the intonation of normal speech, the melodies have small ambitus and short, repeated motifs. The secretive nature is embodied in the children's simple and natural movement, depicting symbolic content. By playing singing games appropriate to their age and abilities, children gradually acquire the kinaesthetic heritage of their community, expressing the contents symbolically.

In different geographic regions, the same symbolic content can be expressed in different ways. In the song 'Fehér liliomszál' (White Lily), the accompanying movements to the line 'Prop your waist' vary: hands akimbo, arms hanging and side bends. The last line, 'Towel yourself with someone's apron' has the symbolic meaning of choosing a partner. Although this song is well-known throughout the Hungarian-speaking areas, mimicking the lyrics of a song is rare with traditional singing games; it usually comes from other nations and popular songs (Dobszay, 1984).

The Sun is summoned with the song 'Süss fel nap, Szent György-nap' (Rise, rise, Sun on Saint George's Day), with hands reached towards the sky, flowers raised towards the Sun or twigs being waved. When reciting rhymes welcoming the rain, the children look at the sky while they are spinning around. (Borsai, Hajdu and Igaz, 1977)

The events and customs of everyday life are reflected in these singing games, in which the children's creative imagination can soar free, and different roles can be experienced and realised. These games reflect the culture and values of the community, the hidden messages of which are expressed in symbols.

### **Interpreting the circle in singing games**

In the beginning, children prefer individual games, the goal of which is the observation and discovery of the environment. Movements do not presuppose other participants, the songs and rhymes are about animals, plants and the weather. Then these individual games are replaced with pair games, during which accompanying movements are exchanged or performed together. In these games the mode of connection is important, not the attachment with the partner; motivation comes from the realia and the teacher. (Szarkáné, 1998)

The succession of movements accompanying singing games is determined according to their relative difficulty. First, children perform movements tailored to their abilities, then they learn how to join the coordinated movement of a group. First they walk around without holding hands, then they can do so holding hands, which is more difficult as it requires a small twist of the waist while walking. The concept of the circle is present in kindergarten education from the first year. As it represents continuity and infinity, it naturally represents belonging together.

The circle-form is drawn by its members, who usually stand facing the centre point, or form a walking chain. Shaping and keeping the form develops spatial orientation and awareness. The curiosity of these games comes from the wide variety of the tasks the player (or players) has to perform. Inside the 'stands in the centre of the circle', 'walks within the circle'; outside the 'walks around the circle' and 'joins the circle' phrases are used. There are both walking and standing circles; one or two children may walk around inside or outside the circle in reverse direction. When there are two 'walkers', they often hold hands above the heads of the members of the head. In swapping roles games, the child in the centre of the circle swaps positions with one of the children around, which can be accompanied with a rhyming or singing dialogue.



The song 'Koszorú, koszorú' (Wreath, Wreath) is a role-swapping and voice recognition game at the same time. A singing dialogue is conducted by the child squatting in the centre of the circle and the ones around: 'Wreath, wreath, why are you so sad?' – 'I am sad because my name is Wreath.' At the end of the song, one of the children around knocks on the back of the child in the centre and asks: 'Knock, knock. Guess who I am.' If the child in the centre is right, they switch places.

The song 'Komatálat hoztam' (I've Brought a Meal Train) is related to the customs around the Octave of Easter. On the first Sunday after Easter, the young, especially girls, made new friends ceremonially, which act was sealed with the exchange of food and drinks. They greeted each other saying 'I've brought a meal train, covered in gold. A friend has sent it to a friend, if you turn it down, I'll take back the same road I've come'. If the chosen person accepted the gift, she exchanged the food on the plate with other delicacies. (Tátrai, 1997 p. 106.) During the game, the child walking within the circle imitates holding a plate. At the end of the song, they greet each other with one of the children around, exchange plates and switch places.

The song 'Tüzet viszek, ne lássátok' (I'm Carrying Fire, Don't Notice It?) is related to a Holy Saturday ceremony, the Blessing of the Fire. Due to its difficulties, the fire was lit once a year and the authorities forbade carrying the ember. This ban is expressed in the lyrics 'I'm carrying fire, don't notice it. If you saw it, you'd put it out and burn your clothes'. The children are standing around, not holding hands, one of them walks around with a handkerchief in her hand. At one point the handkerchief is dropped. The child behind whom this happens picks it up and starts chasing the former child. If she cannot catch up, they switch places and roles. Whoever fails to notice the handkerchief was dropped behind her has to stand or squat in the centre of the circle, and is the 'rotten egg' until another 'rotten egg' takes her place. (Dobszay, 1984)

### **The symbolic meaning of the circle in music education**

The symbolic meaning of the circle appears in the rhymes of the youngest. 'I made a little garden, planted peony. It's blown by the wind, hit by the rain – whoa!' (Forrai, 1983) Encirclement is the most natural method of defence, and it's aim is the exclusion of Evil, too. In singing games one child is usually in the centre of the circle, the others draw the circle around. This gives magical defence and symbolizes the exclusion of Evil. The children walk around following the course of the Sun, from right to left.

Circle walks are common elements in rites. St. George's Day is the traditional beginning of the spring, the cattle are driven to pasture for the first time in the year. Walking around the herd was thought to protect them from wild animals and prevent scattering.

During wedding, the newly-wed are walked around. In the new household, the woman walked around the fire; later, when fireplaces were placed to the wall, she walked around the table, this way expressed that she belonged to the centre point. (Pál és Újvári, 2001)

Circle games the lyrics and activities of which are related to defence circle walks are remains of old proposal customs. These games are played by nubile girls. The girls standing around represent the fort (the bridal house), the standing in the centre is the queen (the mother of the bride), and the suitor walks around. This walk represents courting. First, the suitor walks alone, then along with one, two and more companions; by the end of the game all the members of the circle join him and form a chain.

In these waxing-waning games the task is different from that of role-plays, the stress is not on physical but on leadership skills, the participants organize the transformation of the group. Dialogues play an important role, the repeated completion of the game relieves tension in reserved and shy children that are otherwise less often chosen to play with. Didactically, these waxing-waning games illustrate the notions of more and less. (Szarkáné, 1998)

Coupling circle games are the remains of an old wedding dance, the Pillow-dance. The adolescents are standing around, one of them in the centre, holding a pillow. Checking around, he chooses a girl he likes, puts the pillow on the ground in front of her and kneels down. She kneels down as well, accepts his kiss, then goes to the centre with the pillow and she starts the game from the beginning.

The circle game 'I Lost My Handkerchief' is played by girls. One is standing in the centre, holding a handkerchief. Reaching the line 'I'll give a kiss to whomever finds it' she drops it in front of somebody; they knell on it, exchange kisses, stand up and dance. (Dobszay, 1984)

The song 'I'm Curling the Next-door Lady's Hair' is also a wedding game, it refers to the bun that replaced the corolla of the women after they got married. In the game, the children stand around holding hands. They walk around singing until at one point the leader breaks the circle and coils the chain. When the 'bun' is ready, they uncoil it and then start again.

One of the most popular songs in the southern Transdanubian region is 'Éva szívem Éva' (Eve, My Dear Eve), which is a circle dance for girls, related to fertility rites. The dance is very old, dating back to the Middle Ages. The dancers go around with normal and turning steps in a set order.

The walk follows the course of the Sun, from right to left. The dance was in use in times of fasting and no dance events, with singing unison.

The song was also known as coupling game for adolescents. The ones standing around, holding hands behind their backs, move from right to left, while in the centre a boy and a girl are dancing the two-step 'csárdás'. After the last verse, they shout 'Get out, naughty!', and a new couple gets in the centre. In some versions, everybody chooses a partner during the last verse; while whoever cannot find one stands in the centre.

There are similar coupling games for children as well. In the game 'Widow Duck', an odd number of players form a circle. One child stands in the centre, the other are walking around, holding hands and singing. At the end of the song, everybody chooses a partner. Whoever cannot find one stands in the centre becomes the 'Widow Duck' and the game starts from the beginning. The excitement of the game comes from the tension of separation relieving after reunion.

In turning-out circle games, the children walk around holding hands, one child stands in the centre and points at the ones that have to turn out. The names of these children are sung at the end of the song, they turn out and go on to dance on with their backs to the centre. In some versions, one child is walking around outside the circle with a handkerchief, and the ones hit with the handkerchief have to turn outside. When everyone is facing outside, they change the lyrics (instead of 'turn outside', they sing 'turn inside') and keep dancing until everybody faces the centre again.

In the game 'Ispilángi rózsza' (orig. Ich spiel eine Rose, from German), the children stand in couples around, with their backs to their partners, and name the ones who have to turn. By the end of the song, everybody is facing their partner. (Kerényi, 1938)

Turning in and out both have a symbolic meaning: turning out means leaving, exclusion and separation, while turning in means meeting, reunion, accompanying

### **Direction of movement in circle games**

The shape of a circle is natural. Standing and moving around were part of magical ceremonies, with the symbolic meaning of protection, owning, healing. Exclusion from the circle means exclusion, curse, and the direction of movement is also related to this.

The direction of rotation is explained with astronomical and physiological reasons. The direction symbolizes the natural and the unnatural: movements following the course of the Sun (from right to left) are natural, they are the symbols of protecting, healing magic; the opposite direction is unnatural, related to curses. There are physiological factors, as well: due to its

structure, right-to-left moves are more natural for the human body. (Martin, 1979) The course of the Sun is mentioned in a rhyme as well. 'North is in front of me, South is behind, The Sun sets on the left, it rises on the right'. (Molnár V. József, 1996)

Some examples highlighting the direction of movement in circle games:

While singing 'Recse, recse pogácsa', the child in the centre is moving following the course of the Sun, the circle itself is moving the opposite direction. After the line 'Get her skirt, little girl, sit!', the girl whose skirt was caught switches places with the child in the middle. (Forrai, 1983 p. 184.)

In the game 'Járom az új váramat' (I'm Walking My New Castle), there is a singing dialogue going on between the mother of the bride (Mrs. Kiss) and the suitors. The mother inside and the suitors outside the circle are walking from right to left, the dancers of the circle in the opposite direction. After the question 'Who will you give me?', the mother points at someone, who joins the suitors. (Forrai, 1983)

'Elvesztettem páromat' (I Have Lost My Couple) – one child is walking from right to left outside the circle. After the line 'Come here, my daughter', she touches someone's back, who joins her and they keep playing until everybody is taken. (Forrai, 1983)

'Erzsébet asszony' (Lady Elisabeth) – the children are walking around from left to right. One child (Lady Elisabeth) within the circle and the suitor outside are walking from right to left. When the song is over behind the one he wants to take and a conversation begins. They keep playing until everybody is taken. (Forrai, 1983)

Walking the circle visualizes the building blocks of music, makes them perceptible. According to the size of the circle, perceiving and understanding 4-, 8- and 16-beat units is made easier, which is important for the development of the sense of form. The smallest unit, the motif – usually four beats divided into two bars – creates the smallest circle, when a child turns around. 'Mackó, mackó ugorjál' (Jump, Bear) (Forrai, 1983) is a popular children's song, in which at line above the players turn around. This turn is carried out with four steps, giving the most important building block of children's songs, namely the *motif*.

The same four-beat motif is taught by the song 'A kállói szőlőbe' (In the Vineyards of Kálló). In the widening-narrowing circle, the children walk closer to, then further from the centre of the circle. They walk around taking sidesteps, then during the last line of the song they take four steps towards the centre, finally four steps to widen the circle. (Forrai, 1983)

The eight-beat unit, i.e. the four-bar *line*, is well-perceptible in the song 'Kis kece lányom' (My Little Daughter). The couples are standing in a double line, in the first half of the song they dance two-step csárdás, in the second half they turn around.

During the following rhyme: 'One, two, three, four. Little boy, where do you go?' (no offbeat in the original) 'I'm not going very far, only to the end of town' (Forrai, 1983), the children walk around the circle in sixteen steps – everybody gets back to their starting point –, so this walk completes an eight-bar unit, a *period*. A period is a musical sentence in which the question and the answer, like opening and closure, create a whole. The first half of the rhyme is the question, answered by the second half.

### **Conclusion**

Folk games reflect the values and customs of the everyday world, mimicking them is a fundamental need for the child. Singing games develop singing skills, the sense of rhythm, musical hearing and memory; the dance moves shape the child's sense of form. The spirals, circular movements in different directions, labyrinth-designs all enrich imagination. Singing games and circle games develop the individual through pair and group work.

Forming a circle is the most natural way of giving the sense of community and also the most ancient form in dances. It establishes close relationship among the members making them equal. Everybody is at the same distance from the centre of the circle, not even widening the circle changes this; this way no feeling of exclusion or neglect can arouse. (Martin, 1979)

Through singing-dancing games, children acquire the songs suitable for their age, the accompanying movement helps them understand the lyrics and its symbolic meaning.

These contents carry the culture and customs of the given community. With the tailored movements, the children acquire the kinaesthetic heritage of the community, which allows a smooth transition into the adults' world. Cultivating these folk games is part of preserving and transmitting the art, culture and traditions of the community.

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