

# UNHEARD BUT VISIBLE – DEFINING DANCE AND MUSIC SYNCHRONY IN SILENT FILMS<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The authors of this paper introduce a method of establishing the dance and music synchrony of silent films by observing the play of musical instruments in case of the early dance films before the 1960s. They claim that applying the method needs the joint recording of the dancer(s) and the musician(s), as well as a thorough knowledge of instrument use, that of the ways of instrumental decorations and the movement analytical skill, which supported finding the connection between music and dance. They note that recording the dancers and the musicians in the same picture frame (or with time coded separate cameras) even in case of video recording is vital from the point of studying the interactions between the dancers and the musicians and their non-verbal communication, which is not possible without seeing the musicians as well.

**Keywords:** dance and music relationship, interaction between dancers and musicians, synchrony

Hungarian ethnochoreology has always stressed the importance of relationship between music and dance, how dance meets the structural elements of music. In her attempt to establish an analytical method for Hungarian traditional dances Olga Szentpál<sup>2</sup> declared – among other aspects – that the structure of a dance can be revealed fully only if its relation to music is taken into consideration as well. Regarding the dance and music relation a determinant morphological factor, in an early study on their structural analytical method for folk dance György Martin and Ernő Pesovár<sup>3</sup> investigated dance in synchrony with music when their recordings made it possible to find the hidden principles of improvised dances. The metrical-structural relationship between dance and music remained for both of them a central issue in their later research. Pesovár<sup>4</sup> pointed out motifs with delimiting

<sup>1</sup> The research was supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Found (OTKA), NK 77922.

<sup>2</sup> SZENTPÁL 1958: 263. In lack of appropriate footage and music recordings she centered her investigations to the relations of motifs and dance sections to each other and could not investigate her material synchronously with music. However, she presented a uniquely elaborated system for analyzing dance structure.

<sup>3</sup> MARTIN – PESOVÁR 1961.

<sup>4</sup> PESOVÁR Ernő 1960.

(opening, closing) functions in relation to tunes in the highly amorphous structure of man dances called *verbung*<sup>5</sup> in Transdanubia, while Martin<sup>6</sup> based a long range investigation of the Central Transylvanian *legényes* dances on the “location” of motifs compared to the structure of the accompanying music.

Ernő Pesovár in his late works on the typology of Hungarian traditional dances<sup>7</sup> called the attention to an overall correspondence between a group of dances regarded to belong to the old stratum and their accompanying music. Pesovár concluded that dance types such as e.g. *kanásztánc*, *söprűtánc*, *ugrós* possessing a characteristically double structure in relation to the first and second part of the tunes or the periods of music form the *kanásztánc-ugrós* style, a higher level complex representation of types mentioned, that evolved upon the influence of certain historical waves of fashionable dances.<sup>8</sup> As an overall summary of his theory Ernő Pesovár initiated a comprehensive monograph to introduce this style in collaboration with his colleagues in 2005.<sup>9</sup> Owing to the magnitude of the ramifying theme, the variety of viewpoints and the amount of dances to be published, the originally planned single volume monograph was extended into a series. Katalin Paksa’s book on *The Music of Ugrós Dances* came out first, a summary of the vocal tune types and their musical characteristics involved in the theme. For the second volume titled *Old Hungarian Dance Style – The Ugrós* and edited by the authors of this paper 70 dances from 43 villages were selected to exemplify nearly all manifestations of the style: the *kanásztánc* types danced around and over sticks, brooms, candles, bottles or hats placed on the ground; dexterity dances performed with sticks, brooms, kerchiefs held in hand; and solo, couple and group *ugrós* dances without props. The dances were recorded on film<sup>10</sup> out of function, on pre-arranged occasions between 1942 and 1984, in line with the fieldwork practice at that time.

The dances in the second volume are published with Labanotation, completed with the musical score of the accompanying tunes, photos and short textual descriptions on the circumstances of the field research, the footage and the performance characteristics of the dances themselves. Taking into consideration the importance of the relation between dance and the accompanying tunes mentioned above we ascribed great weight to determine the exact synchrony of the dance tune with the dance score. It was easy to match

<sup>5</sup> The Hungarian dance names are translated or shortly explained at the end of the paper.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. MARTIN 1977; KARSAI – MARTIN 1989; MARTIN 2004.

<sup>7</sup> PESOVÁR Ernő 1985, 1990, 1992, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> KARÁCSONY 2012: 97–101. Zoltán Karácsony in his study introduced in detail the formation of Pesovár’s style concept and its relation to the typology established by György Martin on the classification of *ugrós* dances.

<sup>9</sup> He called upon Katalin Paksa ethnomusicologist to summarize the accumulated knowledge on the tunes regarded as belonging to the subject, János Fügedi to be his aid in editing the volume and László Felföldi to organize the team of co-workers as analyzers of the dances. After Pesovár’s passing away in 2008 his plan was embraced by the Ethnochoreology Department of the Institute for Musicology (Hungarian Academy of Sciences) he had led earlier.

<sup>10</sup> With two exceptions all the dances selected for the anthology were captured on 16 mm black/white film. The two exceptions are preserved on 8 mm film. All the films are archived and registered in the Film Collection of the Folk Music and Dance Archives at the Institute of Musicology, Research Centre for Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (further on abbreviated and referred to as FC).

the two when a sound film was shot, i.e. the apparatuses recorded the dance and dance tune synchronously. When a silent film was shot without simultaneous sound recording, the research practice of the period applied hand strokes in the footage as synchronizing marks.<sup>11</sup> A researcher waved his arm in front of the camera at the beginning of a strophe or a period, or at the beginning of a repeated period. Taking up one or two frames of the film reel, the “hand marker” indicated which movement of the dancer coincided with the noted musical moment. The hand stroke also allowed the synchronization of music to dance when no sound recording but only on-the-spot notation of the dance tune was available.

The technique of the hand stroke was introduced in films shot only after November 1955. For earlier silent films when the hand strokes were missed from the recordings we could determine the synchrony when the play of the musicians was also filmed, e.g. in Halászi (Ft.254.3), Rábatamási (Ft.256.12a), Simonfa (Ft.223.4) and Bogyiszló (Ft.259.3).<sup>12</sup> Clues to synchrony based on the observation of the musicians included the tape recording parallel with the dance, but when there was none, the on-the-spot notation of the dance tune or the researcher’s note were taken of the tune type.<sup>13</sup> The following five typical cases we faced when striving to find the dance and music synchrony in silent films will be introduced below: 1) comparing the tape recording with the play of the musician; 2) comparing the play of the musician with the on-the-spot musical notation; 3) comparing the play of the musician with earlier published musical notation; 4) relying exclusively on observing the instrumental play; and finally 5) comparing the structure of dance with that of music supposed to be an accompanying melody. In cases 1–4 synchrony could be detected for certainty, in case 5 it could only be assumed, though with great probability.

The *gyertás verbunk* from Halászi (Ft.254.3) was accompanied by a solo violin, the footage made visible by Pál Banyák violinist – as it can be seen in *Figure 1*<sup>14</sup> – standing in the background (with Márta Jámbor field researcher at the tape recorder). The tape presented the melody known with the first line as “Kalapom szememre vágom”<sup>15</sup> [I pull my hat over my eyes] played six times, the tune was started at the same moment with the film recording. The bow pulled dynamically downward at the start of the tune marked unambiguously the first synchronous point of the dance and music. The dancer began his performance a crochet later compared to the violin. The play of the violinist could be observed throughout the whole dance. The earlier publications of the dance<sup>16</sup> introduced only a section of the dance and the synchrony was defined differently. The dance was indicated to start at the beginning of the strophe, while in reality it started at the repeti-

<sup>11</sup> An indirect reference to the solution was mentioned first by György Martin and Ernő Pesovár in their study on the structural analysis of Hungarian folk dances (MARTIN – PESOVÁR 1961: 3). A detailed description of the technique can be found in György Martin’s paper *Tánc* [Dance] (MARTIN 1979: 525).

<sup>12</sup> In the identification of a film e.g. Ft.254.3 the abbreviation “Ft.” refers to the FC (in Hungarian *Filmtár*), the first number identifies the number of the film reel, the second one separated from it by a dot stands for the number of the dance in the footage.

<sup>13</sup> The recognition of the tune while observing only the play of the musicians was not easy when the violinist ornamented the melody therefore his play differed from the simple versions notated in the scores. The movement of the bow itself was rather inadequate; the violinist’s fingering was needed to be followed as well.

<sup>14</sup> The data of the illustrations are enlisted at the end of the study.

<sup>15</sup> PAKSA 2010: 217–218.

<sup>16</sup> PESOVÁR Ferenc 1969: 125; TAKÁCS 2000: 80–87.

tion of strophe 2. (Beyond the shift in synchrony the earlier notation differs from the real performance in several aspects both spatially and rhythmically.)



Figure 1. Tf. 3697, photographer György Martin, 1955

When the *dus* was performed by József Tálás in Rábatamási (Ft.256.12a), the sound was not recorded, but a sketchy transcription of the presumed accompanying tune could be found in the on-the-spot film logbook put down by György Martin known by the text incipit “Ezt a kislányt ne vedd el”<sup>17</sup> [Don’t marry this young lassie]. The dance was accompanied by a band with a first violinist, two *kontra*-players, a clarinetist and a double-bass player,<sup>18</sup> though the footage recorded only the first violinist, one of the *kontra*-players and the double-bass player, as it can be seen in *Figure 2*. The synchrony of the music to the partially recorded dance could rely on the visible play of the band leader and a *kontra*

<sup>17</sup> PAKSA 2010: 318.

<sup>18</sup> Rudolf Horváth first violinist (1925, Mihályi), József Horváth kontra-player (1928, Mihályi), Flóri Jónás kontra-player (1925, Balkonytamási), János Baranyai “Csimpa” double-bass player (1900, Beled), Antal Sárközi “Pukka Tóni” clarinetist (1903, Beled)



player as they appeared in the film from the 10<sup>th</sup> measure of strophe 2 until the 5<sup>th</sup> measure of strophe 3. Owing to the good quality footage the violinist's fingering could be observed as well. According to his hand holding the violinist started strophe 3 in D major on string E in fifth position (d<sup>'''</sup>). Four semi-crotchets in the first measure were played *spiccato* when he stepped forward and bent toward the dancer to inspire his dancing. The former publication<sup>19</sup> structured the dance score to correspond to the 12 measure tune, though the melody itself was not included. (The former notation differs both spatially and rhythmically from the real performance at several sections in this case too.)



Figure 2. A scanned image from dance Ft.256.12a

Neither sound recording nor on-the-spot notation were made when the *verbung* performed by Sándor Volner in Simonfa was filmed (Ft.223.4), however, a tune in the former publications of the dance<sup>20</sup> was available which identified the melody as a 16 measure four-line *kanásztánc* tune with the text “Az oláhok, az oláhok”<sup>21</sup> [The Wallachians]. Figure 3 illustrates that the play of the violinist could be seen only partially. The observation of the

<sup>19</sup> MARTIN 1970–1972: Appendix I, Dance IV.

<sup>20</sup> PESOVÁR Ernő 1960: 78, 1985: 40–41; DÖMÖTÖR 1990: 472–473, FELFÖLDI – PESOVÁR 1997: 296–297.

<sup>21</sup> PAKSA 2010: 315.

fingering and the movement of the bow during the first strophe led to the conclusion that the violinist played the tune in the first position on the *A* and *E* strings in D minor. The synchrony of the dance and the music differed from the previously established one. As it can be seen in *Figure 4b* the dance was started one measure earlier compared to its earlier publications shown in *Figure 4a*. (Independently of this shift, changes can be detected in the inner structure and musical synchrony of several motifs all over the dance as well.)



*Figure 3.* A scanned image from dance Ft.223.4

When the *söprűtánc* performed by Gyula Szalai was filmed in Bogyoszló (Ft.259.3) neither a sound recording was made nor the tune accompanying the dance was notated on-the-spot, and no published melody could be found which might be played for the dance. As *Figure 5* shows, the dance was accompanied by a music band of four musicians<sup>22</sup>, the

<sup>22</sup> István Áder first violinist (1919, Potyond), Jenő Nagy kontra-palyer (1906, Kistata, Szil), József Varga double-bass player (1920, Bogyoszló), Lajos Áder cymbalist (s.a., Potyond). József Palenik and Gyula Schwarzkopf local experts helped us to discover the data of the musicians.

Figure 4a and 4b illustrate two different systems of dance notation. Figure 4a (left) features a musical staff on the left with a tempo marking of 120. To its right is a vertical column of 10 frames of dance notation, each containing various symbols and lines representing dance movements. Figure 4b (right) shows a vertical column of 8 frames of dance notation, with the first frame labeled '1.1'. This system uses a different set of symbols and includes a large curved arrow at the top of the column.

Figure 4a. A part of dance notation Tit.[Dance Notation Archive No.] 657 of dance Ft.223.4  
 Figure 4b. A part of dance notation Tit.1420 of dance Ft.223.4



play of the first violinist and the *kontra*-player could be observed throughout the dance. The examination of the bowing and fingering suggested that the tune was a four-line 16 measure *ugrós* tune in 2/4 meter accompanied in *esztam* rhythm, with the text incipit “Elment Szent Péter Rómába”<sup>23</sup> [St Peter went off to Rome]. Even in the slightly blurred picture the first violinist could be observed playing on the *A* and *E* strings in third position, reaching to fifth position in the second half of the strophes. His fingering but mainly the change of positions let us conclude that he was likely to play in D major. The 9<sup>th</sup> measure of the first strophe could be regarded the first definite point for synchrony which was accentuated by a stronger bow movement and the violinist’s dynamic knee bending. The two former identical publications of the dance<sup>24</sup> included no musical score, the two separate parts of the dance were published in 16 measure sections, each positioned to measure 1. However, according to the synchrony established by the observation the visible part of the dance coincided with measure 7 of the first strophe. (Aside the difference in synchrony the former notation deviated both spatially and rhythmically from the new kinetographic transcription.)



Figure 5. A scanned image from dance Ft.259.3

<sup>23</sup> PAKSA 2010: 319.

<sup>24</sup> PESOVÁR Ferenc 1969: 124, 1980: 167–168.



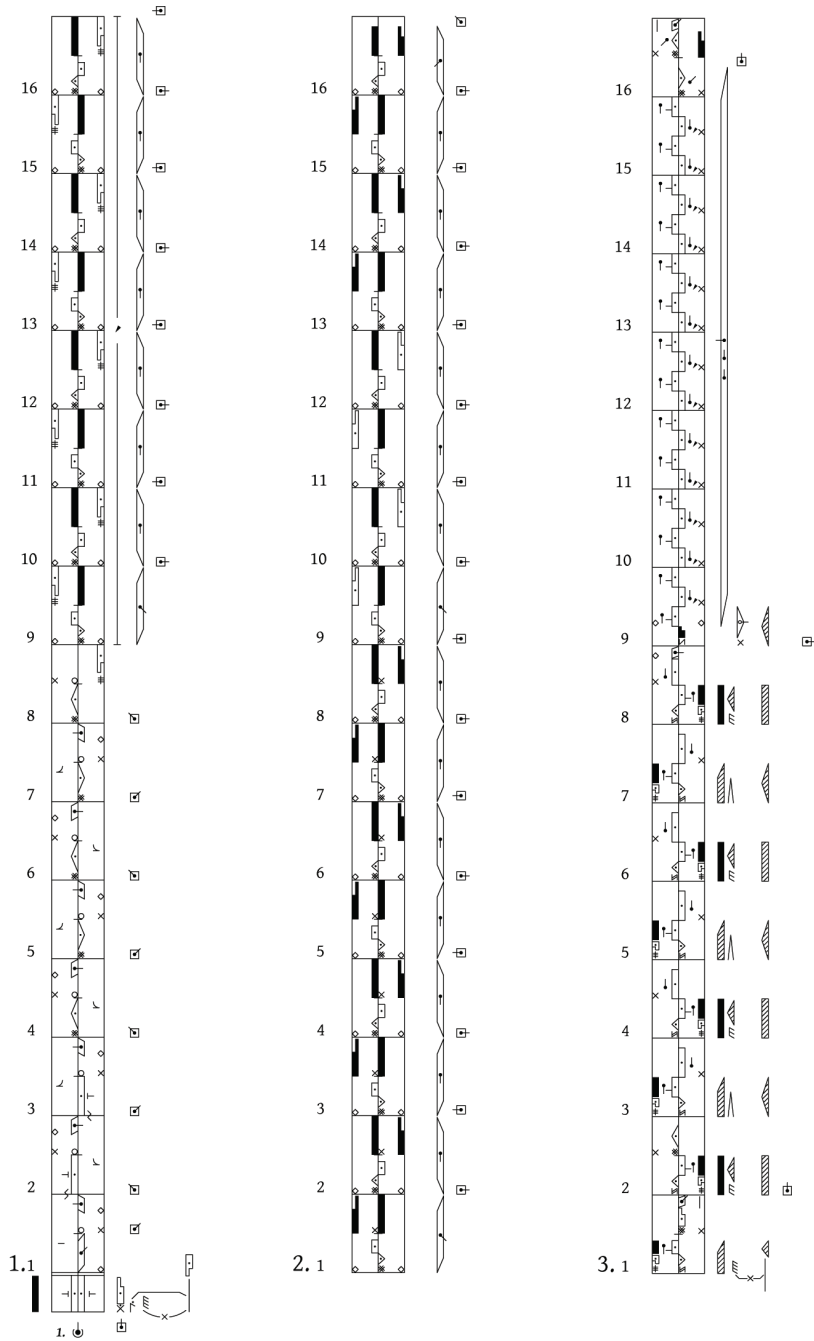


Figure 6. A part of dance notation Tit.1418 of dance Ft.207.2

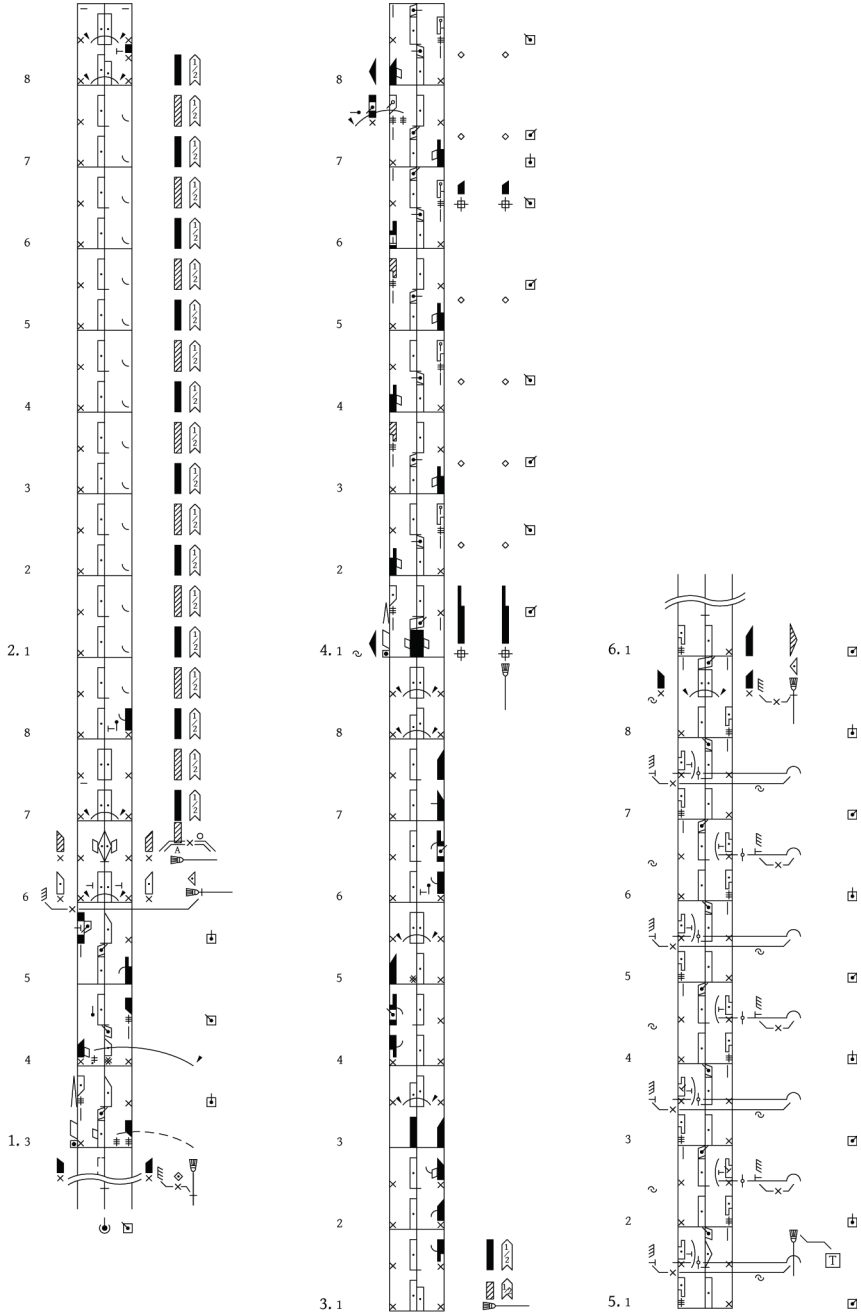


Figure 7. A part of dance notation Tit.1430 of dance Ft.28.8

The silent footage of *kanásztánc* (Ft.207.2) in Karád was recorded without hand strokes and visible music accompaniment, the accompanying music was neither recorded nor written down on the spot. On inquiry we learnt from specialists<sup>25</sup> on local traditions that the *kanásztánc* in Karád was always danced to a 16 measure instrumental tune (its vocal type is known with the text incipit “Az oláhok, az oláhok” [The Wallachians]), which was transcribed and published by ethnomusicologist Lajos Vargyas.<sup>26</sup> In the dance structure a pattern could be recognized which followed strictly the changes in music (strophes or lines). *Figure 6* shows a sample as the dancer repeated his first and second motifs eight times in strophe 1, the third motif and its variant with a lifted leg into forward middle eight-eight times again in strophe 2, his fourth motif with a three-step pattern eight times again in the first part of strophe 3 and turning around three times in the second part of strophe 3. The unvaried repetition of motifs and orderly motif change suggested the synchrony as shown in *Figure 6* and the assumption that the dance was a choreographed production of a local Pearly Bouquet<sup>27</sup> group. A less definite answer could be given to the question of synchrony based on dance structure in case of a *söprűtánc* from Arak (Ft.28.8) – see *Figure 7*. Fieldwork log-book identified the dance accompanying tune as a variant of the widely known children’s game melody of twin-bar structure with the text incipit “Hess légy, ne szállj rám”<sup>28</sup> [Shoo fly, don’t land on me]. We could only presume that the heel-clicking positioned to the end of strophes 2 and 3 coincided with the musical cadences and the change of motifs from leg swinging to the shuttling the end of the broomstick from one hand into the other under dancer’s legs indicated a change in strophes as well.

The above introduced method of establishing the dance and music synchrony of silent films by observing the play of instruments has not been in use yet. Applying the method needs the joint recording of the dancer(s) and the musician(s) just as well as a thorough knowledge of instrument use, that of the ways of instrumental decorations and the movement analytical skill which supported finding the connection between music and dance. In regard to a deeper level analysis of dance and its relation to the accompanying music it must be noted that recording the dancers and the musicians in the same picture frame (or with time coded separate cameras) even in case of video recording is vital from the point of studying the interactions between the dancers and the musicians and their non-verbal communication, which is not possible without seeing the musicians as well.

#### Dance names

<i>dus</i>	– a local name for <i>ugrós</i> mainly in use in the western part of Hungary
<i>kanásztánc</i>	– swineherd’s dance
<i>legényes</i>	– (lit. “manly”) a male dance type in Central Transylvania
<i>söprűtánc</i>	– broom dance
<i>ugrós</i>	– springing dance
<i>verbung, verbunk</i>	– local names for <i>ugrós</i>
<i>gyertás verbunk</i>	– <i>verbunk</i> with a candle

<sup>25</sup> János Pajor and Zsolt Szabó.

<sup>26</sup> VARGYAS 1954: 256.

<sup>27</sup> A widely popular folk dance and music revival movement in Hungary in the 1930s. For a description of the movement see PÁLFI 1970.

<sup>28</sup> KODÁLY 1952: 285.

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