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János Fügedi

Institute for Musicology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, fuedi.janos@btk.mta.hu

Livia Fuchs

fuchsli@t-online.hu

Author Credentials

János Fügedi, Ph.D.

Livia Fuchs

Editor-in-Chief: Teresa Heiland

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Doctrines and Laban Kinetography in a Hungarian Modern Dance School in the 1930s

Abstract

The article introduces the early years of modern dance in Hungary, focusing on one outstanding personality, Olga Szentpál, and her school. The dance creation system and dance education methods are discussed with attention to Szentpál's unique doctrines. The doctrines are built of theorems and functions to approach the structural, contextual, compositional, and expressive characteristics of the new dance. The overview of the theories is supported by a selection from a comparatively large amount of Laban kinetography, found in Olga Szentpál's legacy. The use of notation in the Szentpál School comprised historical and traditional dance research just as well as introducing body technique, and creating scores of choreographies. The early integration of kinetography exemplifies the effort to document dance, education concepts, and results of research of times, when the means of moving pictures were not easily available.

Keywords

modern dance, Hungary, Olga Szentpál, movement system doctrine, dance theorem, Laban-kinetography

Introduction

When the new directions in dance emerged, in the early years of the 20th century, the leading personalities of the American new dance, Saharet, Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Maud Allan, and Ruth St. Denis, on their performing tours in Europe, visited Budapest, the capital of Hungary, as well. They gained success only in small circles while leaving untouched the conviction that dance as a subject exists only outside the genres of art. The local press initiated some discourse on the limits of dance as an art form and on the role of the human body on the stage, but mostly on how the female dancer might express herself when abandoning the confining conventions.¹

By the end of the 1910s, however, circumstances changed. A generation emerged, which, utilizing their experiences in the modern dance education methods, acquired abroad, opened schools; their artistic and training results achieved increasing recognition. In the traditionally German-oriented Hungarian cultural life, the acceptance of their efforts were supported by the fact that the outstanding representatives of the European new dance, such as Hanna Berger, Rosalia Chladek, Emile Dalcroze, Valeska Gert, Niddy Impekoven, Kurt Jooss, Harald Kreutzberg, Gret Palucca, the Wiesenthal-daughters, and Mary Wigman arrived exclusively from German-speaking countries. Beyond their regular guest performances, they influenced the Hungarian schools, which strived to find their own ways of expression. The Hungarian dance teachers, dancers, and choreographers experimenting with new forms slowly achieved acceptance and established a circle of schools for modern dance,² mainly in the capital, Budapest, and organized their own companies in the 1920s.

The social, health, and educational aspirations of the new schools are recognizably similar in motivations and methods. Shared ideas were the return to nature as a harmonic lifestyle; the desire to revive the Ancient Greek culture and ideals; the cultivation of the female body; the importance of amateur body culture; and supporting the development of personality by arts. In the beginning, the representatives of this generation were not interested in the possibilities of movement as a form of art because they themselves had no training in dance; they gradually alternated their focus from the education of movement as a tool for beauty and health to the research of dance as art of the moving human body.

By the time they staged their choreographies, most of them cooperated with avant-garde composers, painters, and directors of the period and aspired to

1. Livia Fuchs, *A tánc forradalmárai: Vendégszereplők 1898 és 1948 között* [Revolutionaries in Dance: Guest Performers between 1898 and 1948] (Budapest: Bajor Gizi Színészmuzeum, 2004), 72–73.

2. In Hungary, the “modern dance” was called “*mozgásművészet*” or “*mozdulatművészet*” [art of movement], a translation of the German “*Bewegungskunst*.”

join the circles of European modern dance. Sometimes they applied only subjects and motifs, and sometimes they supported their dancers to enter performance contracts in other countries or obtain scholarships abroad. A common feature of this generation was also that their practice in dance education and theatrical creation was accompanied by their own theoretical research. The results—or their parts, over a wide span of time—were published as studies or books. The values of the achievements are emphasized by the scientific rigor and artistic sensibility as the subjects were elaborated; the methods and theories proved to be applicable and survived their age in the field of medical praxis, choreographic doctrines, dance notation, and philosophical considerations of human movement. Two of the three prominent dance artists, who represent the foundation of Hungarian modern dance, Alice Madzsar³ and Valéria Dienes⁴ are mentioned here only briefly to outline the new approaches of this era. Our investigation focuses on Olga Szentpál, a dancer, choreographer, and school creator, who provided her unique theoretical framework for teaching and analysis of early Hungarian modern dance.

Alice Madzsar's primary interest was the question of the health of the female body. After attending Bess Mensendieck's school in Berlin, she developed a training method exploring the context of the unity of body and soul. Her educational practice turned its attention to another possible way of further developing the culture of the body, that is, to the art of movement. In the second edition of her book, *A női testkultúra új útjai* [The New Ways of Female Body Culture], she declared the art of movement a new form of art, which is not subordinate to other art forms. She intended to express ideas that would influence contemporary man with new forms of movement rooted in contemporary intellectual tendencies. She felt that this expressivity needed to be derived from three sources: gestures, stance, mimics, all springing instinctively from the spiritual life; movements and dance of early traditional cultures, which accompanied rituals and religious customs; and mostly the unexploited sources of movements in the modern age, the movements of physical labor, stemming from machinery.⁵ With a young director Ödön Palasovszky, they experimented with new theatrical performances involving avant-garde artists and composers. They aimed to break with the theatre of the invalid words and renew it with the spectacles of dance, centering on expressivity of the sincere movement, space, dynamics, and rhythm. The political power of the age continuously prohibited their performances due to the left wing orientation of the participating artists and their experimental approach. Madzsar's death in 1935, followed by the ban on the school erased the Madzsar Studio's experimental results from the Hungarian

3. Alice Madzsar, née Alice Jászi (1877–1935).

4. Valéria Dienes, née Valéria Geiger (1879–1978).

5. Alice Jászi Madzsarné, *A női testkultúra új útjai* [The New Ways of Female Body Culture], 2nd edition (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1929), 107–108.

theatrical life completely. However, the training of the Hungarian physiotherapists established by Madzsar's students and her remedial exercises applied in medical praxis after WWII are still in use today.

Valéria Dienes, doctor of mathematics, philosophy, and aesthetics, approached movement from a different background and motivation. Between 1908 and 1912 she attended Henry Bergson's lectures at the Collège de France. Her attention turned to the questions concerning the human body and its movement expressivity; she enrolled in Raymond Duncan's movement classes called "Greek gymnastics," which were considered to be rooted in Ancient Greek aesthetics. After Dienes returned to Hungary in 1912, she started to teach Greek gymnastics, with the aim of guiding the human being living in the modern age to the corporeal-spiritual harmony of the Ancient Greek ideas. She named her own system *orkesztika* [*orchestics*], originating in the natural movements of the human body and the assumption of the interaction between body, soul, and mind. The system of *orchestics* consisted of four main areas: *plastics*, based mainly on "profile" (forward-backward sagittal) movements in space;⁶ *rhythm*, which investigated the questions of sequences in time and accents;⁷ *dynamics*, which focused on the energy use of movements and gravity; and the subject of *symbolics*, which was the spiritual dimension, the meaning of movement formulated by the physical factors of space, time, and dynamics.⁸ She created choreographic compositions for the *Orkesztika Társaság* [Orchestics Association], and founded the *Orkesztikai Iskola* [Orchestics School]; she assembled dances—without music—on verses by contemporary poets and several other pieces for groups with Ancient Greek themes. A sharp change of direction in her attitude toward religion and a return to the teachings of the Catholic Church during the 1920s resulted in her staging of mystery plays, sometimes including large numbers of amateur dancers. After WWII, the new political system, influenced by the soviet cultural directions, forbid Dienes from including any Christian doctrines or personalities in her teaching; however, her *orchestics* survived the circumstances of the easing grip of the cultural dictatorship in the 1980s. Among the several modern dance courses after the change of regime in 1989 one approach—forged with a number of former students, including her son Gedeon Dienes—endeavored to convey to interested parties the system that seemingly was dead for half a century.

6. Valéria Dienes, *A plasztika profil tagozata* [The Profile Section of Plastics] (Budapest: Orkesztika Alapítvány, 2000), 12.

7. Valéria Dienes, "A mozdulatritmika alapvonalai" [The Basics of Movement Rhythm]. In *Táncstudományi Tanulmányok 1969–1970*, ed. Gedeon Dienes, and László Maác (Budapest: Magyar Táncművészek Szövetsége Tudományos Tagozata, 1970), 92–114.

8. Valéria Dienes, "A szimbolika főbb problémái" [The Main Problems of Symbolics], *Táncművészeti Értesítő*, no. 1, (1974): 63–69.

Madzsar and Dienes' contributions are indicative of the ways in which the concerns of the time shaped movement practices. However, Olga Szentpál's eminently creative works and doctrines mark unique developments; even if their deeper exploration has just begun, the potential is doubtlessly promising due to her early recognition of the value of applying a reliable dance notation system.

Olga Szentpál's Career—In Brief

Olga Szentpál,⁹ one of the most significant figures of Hungarian modern dance history, turned her attention during her piano studies at the Academy of Music toward the new musical education method by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. She attended Dalcroze's school in Hellerau and graduated in 1917 as a certified "rhythmic gymnastics" teacher. She opened her own school in 1919, and, some years later, her courses achieved wide recognition. Zsuzsa Merényi, a disciple of Szentpál, wrote in her study on the life work of her master that this early educational practice became the foundation by which the Szentpál School was established, and which also led to the development of Szentpál's methods and movement system doctrines.¹⁰ The method raised interest at the *Színművészeti Akadémia* [Academy of Dramatic Arts], where Szentpál was appointed a permanent teacher in 1924. See Szentpál in Figure 1.

Merényi stated that Szentpál gradually abandoned the original, *rithmicienne*-centered Dalcroze method to develop a more colorful system and perspective of dance.¹¹ Szentpál's primary aim was to discover the movement potential of the human body, leaving behind the classical routes of ballet or the traditions of folk dances. In the field of dance education, she set herself the ambitious, far-reaching aim to make dance an organic element of a new education where body and soul melt into harmony again, so that the balance between one-sided cognitive development and one-



Fig. 1. Olga Szentpál, performing her choreography for Béla Bartók's 4 Laments in 1923

9. Olga Szentpál, née Olga Stricker (1895–1968).

10. Zsuzsa Merényi L., "Szentpál Olga munkássága (Halálának 10. évfordulója alkalmából)" [Olga Szentpál's Life Work (On the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of Her Death)]. In *Táncstudományi Tanulmányok 1978–1979*, ed. Gedeon Dienes, and Ernő Pesovár (Budapest: Magyar Táncművészek Szövetsége Tudományos Tagozata, 1979), 285.

11. *Ibid.*, 290.

sided training in sports can be achieved through dance. She initiated her own movement system and doctrine; its first compilation, titled *Tánc: A mozgásművészet könyve* [Dance: The Book of the Art of Movement], was published in 1928.¹²

Her most talented disciples who formed the Szentpál Dance Group in 1926 were those who had already graduated from her school and had intended to become professional dancers. For them, she organized a two-and-half year dance teacher-training course in her school with the aim of guiding them acquire the mastery of all genres of the art of movement. Beyond several subjects, such as body technique, gymnastics, Dalcroze exercises, the theory and practice of her movement doctrine, Laban kinetography was also included as a compulsory subject beginning in 1942.¹³

In March 1944 when the German Army moved into Budapest, Szentpál decided to close her school. After WWII, she reopened it for a short period, but closed it down again in 1947. The communist change in governance led to the prohibition of all modern dance schools and stage works. The art of movement was declared a *bourgeois* tendency of dance, which was engaged “in the individual problems of the soul instead of committing itself to overthrow capitalism.”¹⁴ Szentpál was required to release a statement denying her former artistic approaches. However, she became a leading member of the new *Magyar Táncszövetség* [Hungarian Dance Association]. She founded the *Táncrendező Tanszak* [Dance Director Department] in the *Színművészeti Főiskola* [College of Dramatic Arts], and taught in the *Állami Balett Intézet* [State Ballet Institute]. She abandoned staging choreographies, and, instead, turned her attention to dance analysis and the research of historical dances. She finished her dance education career—as if closing a circle—by conducting a Dalcroze course in a North Hungarian town.¹⁵

Szentpál’s First System Doctrine

As a choreographer and dance theorist, Olga Szentpál believed that dance as an autonomous field genuinely can be art, but only if it emerges from the characteristic laws of movement. The following reflections started her book, *Dance: The Book of the Art of Movement*, written with her husband and art historian, Máriusz Rabinovszky: “Do we want *new* dance? No. We want dance as

12. Olga Szentpál and Máriusz Rabinovszky, *Tánc: A mozgásművészet könyve* [Dance: The Book of the Art of Movement] (Budapest: Általános Nyomda, Könyv- és Lapkiadó, 1928).

13. *Ibid.*, 292.

14. Iván Vitányi, “A mozgásművészetéről” [On the Art of Movement], *Táncoló nép*, October–December, (1950): 10.

15. Merényi, “Olga Szentpál’s Life Work,” 288.

art. Dance, which erupts from the depth of the soul and embodies condensed spiritual experiences.”¹⁶ Szentpál and Rabinovszky intended to establish the dancers’ physical and compositional training using contemporary theoretical bases. They declared the body technique as a starting point of the dance education to develop body consciousness.¹⁷ However, as they stated, the body technique can serve artistic purposes only if the dancer attains the “technical means of inner attitude.”¹⁸ As a summary of such means, they introduced a system doctrine including the following, “categorization of artistic movement,” “body technique,” “rhythm theory,” “theory of space,” and “the art of movement.”¹⁹

As stated, the artistic movement consisted of four parts: space, time, force, and the way of performance. The spatial aspect of the movement is its direction. The point of reference for a movement is the center of the body; a movement becomes narrow, when it approaches toward the center point, and wide, when it moves away. All movements are performed in time with a speed, with a *tempo*. Just as space has its center, which is the heart for a person, the normal *tempo* of the movement has its mean value, which is the heart’s normal rate. Force or dynamics form the third feature of movement, which can be weak or strong. Its mean value corresponds to the posture of relaxed standing, when all muscles are ready for innervation; in other words, the body is in a state of neutral readiness. The first three categories can be presented in grades as well, where smooth change may appear from one end to the other. However, the fourth—the way of performance—is a dichotomy of impetus and guidance. The movement with impetus is started with an aim and then left to go freely on its way. The guided movement is controlled continuously, while an even energy is added to its flow.

It is impossible not to discover the connection of Szentpál’s movement categories to Laban’s early theories, especially to Effort, which was mentioned in traces already in his *Choreographie* published in 1926,²⁰ though definite differences can be observed between their disciplines. Laban’s influence on the Hungarian art of movement and his relationships with his homeland colleagues of modern dance warrants further research; however, the aforementioned findings assert that a connection likely existed.

16. Szentpál and Rabinovszky, *Dance: The Book of the Art of Movement*, 11. Italics by Szentpál and Rabinovszky. All citations are translated by the authors of the present paper.

17. *Ibid.*, 35.

18. *Ibid.*, 36.

19. *Ibid.*, 49–100. The system is called *Metodika* [Methodology] in the book, they used the term “doctrine” only later. The following short introduction of the method’s elements is cited from the section of the book indicated above; for readability, the locations of the explanations are not referred to page by page.

20. Rudolf Laban, *Choreographie*, (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1926), 4. As a coherent system with the today widely known name, Effort, was first introduced only in 1946. See Rudolf Laban, and Frederick C. Lawrence, *Effort* (London: Macdonald and Evans, 1947).

Szentpál's body technique consisted of twelve groups of practice, including standing, squatting, kneeling, sitting, and lying exercises on a spot; "whole body movements," meaning progressing in space such as walking, running, springing, turning and rolling on the floor; isolated movement practices with different body parts; tensions and relaxations, with transitions between the opposite states achieved; balance and breathing exercises, to name a few.

Her view of rhythm, when movement is not accompanied by music, deserves attention. Representing her separation from the formerly followed, music-bound Dalcroze method, she pointed out, that beyond all similarities, the rhythm in music, and that of movement are fundamentally different. The movement rhythm is freer, more independent from the meter, and it may change its tempo several times in a short period. The sequence of movement rhythms is held together by the inner logic of the whole composition. An exact description is almost impossible. That is, the rhythm of movement may meet the meter only approximately, and its indication with musical notes is—to a certain extent—a forced effort.

Her theory of space included the sense of the body and the sense of the space. The exercises for developing the sense of the body included parallel and opposite (today we would say: symmetrical) movements of the limbs, the movement scales, the dynamism of reaction ability, the auto-suggestive (emotionally enhanced) and neutral movements, movements with active and passive accents, and movements with specific aspects. Some elements refer to the influence of Laban's theories again, though the content of the similar expressions are different. Szentpál's movement scales are grouped around spatial dichotomies, such as narrow and wide, small and large, deep and high, concentric and eccentric; therefore, they differ from Laban's known scales, which are based on Platonic Solids. However, when Szentpál characterized the active and passive accents and the specific aspects of movements, she used almost the same descriptions, which Laban introduced as the eight fundamental Effort qualities—though at that time they were yet not published.

Szentpál admitted that the fourth subject of the doctrine, the "art of movement" was difficult to characterize; fulfilling its requirements demanded the highest level of artistic abilities and creativity. The discussed areas representing the "art of movement" included structural analysis of dance, such as creating short sequences as motifs; abstract, dramatic, nature- and object-bound empathy; mimics; and stylistic practices. There is no room here to introduce all in detail. We call attention only to Szentpál's early establishment of the concept of motifs;

she elaborated the theory in greater detail later, as a structural approach to analyzing traditional dances.²¹

Szentpál and Rabinovszky's understanding of the concept of style also deserves attention. Their focus was not directed to the individual differences of dancers, but to dance in relation to other art forms, such as music, literature, painting, architecture, and how these forms correspond to their historical periods. For example, a performance in Renaissance style requires sharp divisions of space, employs movement symmetries, and aims clear structures. A Baroque etude applies diagonals with sudden impetus, using complicated, endless strings of movements of different body parts.

Dance: The Book of the Art of Movement gives the reader an experience of the depth of the work; the passionate descriptions intend to visualize the movements with a certain success for those who have an inner view of dance. Still, as in the case with so many other books on dance without an exact system of notation, the images of dance movements are vague, the actual content remains a subject of conjecture, and the interpretation can rely only on initial impressions.

Szentpál's Second Doctrine with Notation Use

New theories and developments based on new movement experiments led to the second version of her doctrine. She published a short summary of the new doctrine, titled *A mozgásművészet útja* [The Road of Art of Movement], in 1935.²² She presented here, for the first time, her definition of a single movement consisting of three components, the start, the development, and the arrival.²³ She also briefly mentioned her theorems here, which were the form, the function, and expression theorems. She regarded these theorems, completed by the body technique, as one single subject, the art of movement.²⁴ The manuscript of the elaborated version of the second doctrine²⁵ from 1941 titled, "A Szentpál Iskola

21. Olga Szentpál, "Versuch einer Formanalyse der ungarischen Volkstänze" [An Attempt on the Form Analysis of Hungarian Traditional Dances], *Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 7, no. 3–4, (1958): 257–336.

22. Olga Szentpál, "A mozgásművészet útja" [The Road of Art of Movement]. In *A mozgásművészet útja*, ed. Máriusz Rabinovszky (Budapest: Szentpál Iskola, 1935), 4–8. She noted, that—just as the first one—the new doctrine was compiled together with her husband, Máriusz Rabinovszky. The 8-page booklet was published on the 15th anniversary of establishing the Szentpál School.

23. *Ibid.*, 5.

24. *Ibid.*, 6–7. Here she missed the composition theorem, which was a part of a later version of her doctrine. The theorems will be discussed in detail later.

25. No authors of the 1941 doctrine are indicated on the cover page of the manuscript; however, we are certain without doubts that the authors are Szentpál and Rabinovszky. Merényi regarded them unquestionably the authors of the doctrine in her study (Merényi, "Olga Szentpál's Life Work," 312–316).

mozgásművészeti rendszere” [The Art of Movement Doctrine of the Szentpál School], a part of her legacy,²⁶ remains unpublished.

A vast amount, approximately 500 shorter or longer entities, of dance notation illustrating the Szentpál exercises and technique—preserved in the legacy as well—can be attributed to the 1941 text. All were made using Laban kinetography. The system, as a method in use, was introduced first in Hungary by György Lőrinc, an outstanding student of the Szentpál School, and a leading personality in the Hungarian ballet and dance education world in the 1950s. Lőrinc attended Kurt Jooss’ school at Dartington Hall, in England, in 1936, where he learned the basics of the system from Lisa Ullmann. As he returned to Hungary to the Szentpál School in 1938, he presented the practice of kinetography to Olga Szentpál and her daughter Mária Szentpál. Merényi informed us that the notations illustrating Olga Szentpál’s second doctrine were made by György Lőrinc between 1940 and 1942.²⁷

The early use of the comparatively new notation system in the Szentpál School plays a key role in the fact that kinetography later became widely accepted in Hungarian dance research, especially in the field of traditional dances. As an expert notator, and well trained in her mother’s system of movement analysis, Mária Szentpál took part in the development of Laban kinetography as one of the leading personalities along with Albrecht Knust and Ann Hutchinson Guest, since the International Council of Kinetography Laban was established in 1959. Because an aim of the present study is to contribute to the known history of use of the Laban system of notation, the following introduction of Olga Szentpál’s theoretical activity will be supported by notation examples from her legacy.

The introduction of the 1941 manuscript declares the subjects of investigation:

Our doctrine consists of four main parts, namely the form, the composition, the function, and the expression theorems. The form theorem deals with the structure, which is the constant in the continuously changing flow of the artistic movement. The function theorem however focuses on the process of the movement, what is changing, what is actually the content. The form and the function theorems are the basic principles, completing each other organically.

26. Olga Szentpál’s legacy was handed over to the Dance Archives of the *Magyar Táncművészek Szövetsége* [Hungarian Dance Association] by her daughters, Mária and Mónika Szentpál in 1987. The legacy is held today in the Dance Archives of the *Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet* [National Theatre History Museum and Institute], registered as Fond 32. Further on, in this work, documents in the legacy are cited shortly as of *Olga Szentpál’s Legacy*.

27. Zsuzsa Merényi was interviewed by János Fügedi on 1 December 1989.

The form theorem leads us to the composition theorem, whose subject is the form aspects and structural characteristics of the dance works. The function theorem opens the road to the expression theorem, which investigates the higher problems of the artistic dance performances.²⁸

Only the form and the function theorems are discussed in the available manuscript. The form theorem is not presented here, as its key concepts can be found elsewhere: Olga Szentpál applied its elements in her published method of analyzing Hungarian traditional dances.²⁹ Another source is her daughter's, Mária Szentpál's book, *A mozdulatelemzés alapfogalmai* [The Fundamental Concepts of Movement Analysis];³⁰ the meticulously detailed concepts are rooted in Olga Szentpál's form theorem. Mária Szentpál applied them in the process of adapting the Laban kinetography to notate Hungarian traditional dances, taking into consideration the dance genre's special movement phenomena.³¹

The function theorem deserves attention, as it seems to be a unique theory of dance of the age. The main functions are introduced as follows:

Four main functions as determinations of all artistic dance movements can be distinguished: the elevated, the flowing, the even and the oppositional functions. All other complex functions are composed of these four fundamental ones.³²

The authors expound the functions by using consistently three aspects: the *criteria* identified by the above-mentioned spatial, temporal, and dynamic categories, the *spiritual characteristics*, and the *features* of movements.

28. [Olga Szentpál and Máriusz Rabinovszky], "A Szentpál Iskola mozgásművészeti rendszere" [The Art of Movement Doctrine of the Szentpál School]. In *Olga Szentpál's Legacy*, (Typewritten manuscript, 1941), 1. The words are underlined in the original text.

29. Olga Szentpál, "An Attempt at the Form Analysis of Hungarian Traditional Dances," 257–336.

30. Mária Szentpál, *A mozdulatelemzés alapfogalmai* [The Fundamental Concepts of Movement Analysis] (Budapest: Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, 1978).

31. Mária Szentpál revised her texts several times. The last versions in chronological order are *Táncjelírás: Laban-kinetográfia*, II. kötet [Dance Notation: Kinetography Laban, vol. 2, with kinetographic addendum.] (Budapest: Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, [1969]); *Táncjelírás: Laban-kinetográfia*. III. kötet. [Dance Notation: Kinetography Laban, vol. 3, with kinetographic addendum] (Budapest: Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, [1973]); *Táncjelírás: Laban-kinetográfia*. I. kötet. Második, átdolgozott kiadás. Kinetográfiai melléklettel. [Dance Notation: Kinetography Laban, vol. 1, second, revised edition, with kinetographic addendum] (Budapest: Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, [1976]). She translated the texts of the volumes into English and distributed to the main centers of kinetography as typed manuscripts.

32. [Szentpál and Rabinovszky], "The Art of Movement Doctrine," 19.

The Elevated Function

The criteria of the elevated function are the sense of the natural spatial characteristics of the body, the planar resemblance, sharp articulations of shapes, the endpoints of movements, and the muscular tone required by the weight of the dancer. The authors state that its spiritual characteristics

reflect the experience of confidence . . . fulfill but do not overflow, in effect they stay within themselves. . . . Dances arising from this style feature self-control and authority. The emotions are restrained, and the mind is filled with a certain sense of triumph and ascendancy.³³

Its movement features are the floating, the hitting, the throwing, and certain passive elevations, the latter referring primarily to the hands and the head.³⁴ As Merényi formulated in an interview, “[One of the functions was] the elevated function, in which movement types carrying characteristics such as guiding, airy quality, a way of reserved attitude near to the classical ballet were included.”³⁵

Figures 2a and 2b are examples of “arm scales” of the elevated function, representing “aerial floating.”³⁶ Merényi explained in her study on the score of an Olga Szentpál choreography that the staves for the kinetograms were represented by five central vertical lines to indicate the support and leg gesture columns, and separate, two-column staves were drawn comparatively far from the central staff to the left and to the right. The outer column of the distant two-column staff served for notating movements of the whole arm, the inner one for those of the torso and the pelvis.³⁷ Longer and shorter horizontal lines indicated the musical synchrony. Because no explanation was given in the manuscripts, nor did Merényi provide guidelines for interpreting them, we could only deduce from Mária Szentpál’s notation practice that the shorter lines represented the beats and the longer ones the measures.

According to the notes in the notation manuscripts, A-, B-, and C-scales were distinguished for the arms. It can be deduced from the notations, that the A-scale indicated symmetrical arm arcs and circles. A B-scale was performed when

33. *Ibid.*, 20.

34. *Ibid.*, 20.

35. Interview with Zsuzsa Merényi, as mentioned earlier.

36. The functions of the kinetograms could be identified by complementary handwritten notes. The notes included short explanations on the movement content as well, such as “arm scales” and “aerial floating” cited here.

37. Merényi, Zsuzsa L., “Egy kinetográfiai leletről” [On a Kinetographic Finding]. In *Táncstudományi Tanulmányok 1986–1987*, ed. Lívía Fuchs (Budapest: Magyar Táncművészek Szövetsége Tudományos Tagozata, 1987), 87.

both arms arced parallel into the same directions on the lateral plane, and the diagonal arm movements constituted the C-scales. Figure 2a shows an A-scale and Figure 2b a B-scale. Reading the notation reveals that the arm sequences have no connection to the A- and B-scales in Laban's *Choreutics*, which are based on the icosahedron.³⁸

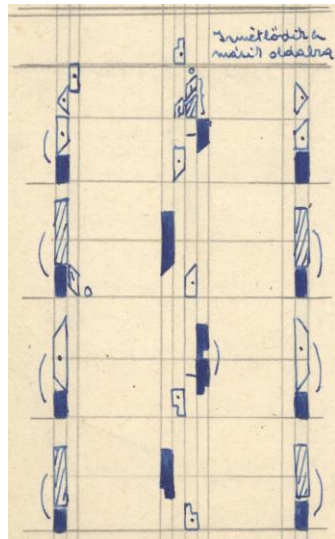


Fig. 2a. An arm A-scale

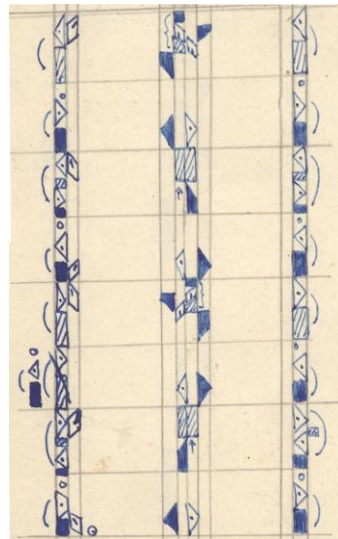


Fig. 2b. An arm B-scale

The Flowing Function

The authors state that when movements feature the flowing function they are fluctuating from one center of the body to the other. The spatial aspects of flowing movements resemble comforting the surface of a sphere. Stretch and release change the waves from one muscle group to the other, out of a center and reverse. Their rhythm criteria include a frequent *accelerando* and *ritardando*, and freedom in timing may appear as well. Regarding the spiritual characteristics, the flowing movements emerge from intensive emotional waves; the self overflows, surpasses its own limits, raises the experience of devotion, and is free to indulge and dissolve. The features of the flowing movements are the pulling, pushing, stretching, thrusting, and tugging that the swinging, as an impetus, is performed by the flowing part of the body. It includes the flowing passivity as well, when the center initiates the movement by a release within the comparatively tense body. We may assume that the system's creators focused on the elaboration of this

38. Rudolf Laban, *Choreutics*. Annotated and edited by Lisa Ullmann, (London: Macdonald and Evans, 1966).

function because the legacy includes a large amount of notation examples of pulling, pushing, thrusting, and tugging characteristics with steps, springs, and turns as support, but also with leg and arm gesture movements.³⁹

Figure 3 presents an example of “a flowing arm scale with strong tug.”⁴⁰ The notator may have not differentiated the symbols of the joints, as the sign for the ankle is the pre-sign for lower arm directions. Two tugs are performed, followed by arm circles. The first starts the sequence to change the left arm forward, right arm backward middle directions in the starting position to their opposites then both arms circle simultaneously into side middle. The arm circle, stressed with the upper body returning to its vertical position, definitely adds impetus to the half turn in a *relevé* on the left leg. The second, spatially increased tug is performed at the end of the second beat. The suddenly downward pulled elbows of the fully contracted arms correspond to lowering the center of weight into *demi plié*; the tug is followed immediately by strong opposite diagonal directions of the upper and lower arms, which is resolved by a slow return of the arms and legs to the starting position. The correspondence of the two downward directed, fast tugs and the lowering of the body, their resolution by elongated horizontal arm gestures and elevation of supports, the application of the temporal and spatial oppositions, the inclusion of the rotated torso definitely possess the sense of flow, while the sequence may raise a unique, surprising movement harmony for both the performer and the spectator.

It must be noted that the description of Szentpál’s flowing function is clearly different from the Flow quality of Laban’s Effort theory, which is regarded as free or bound.

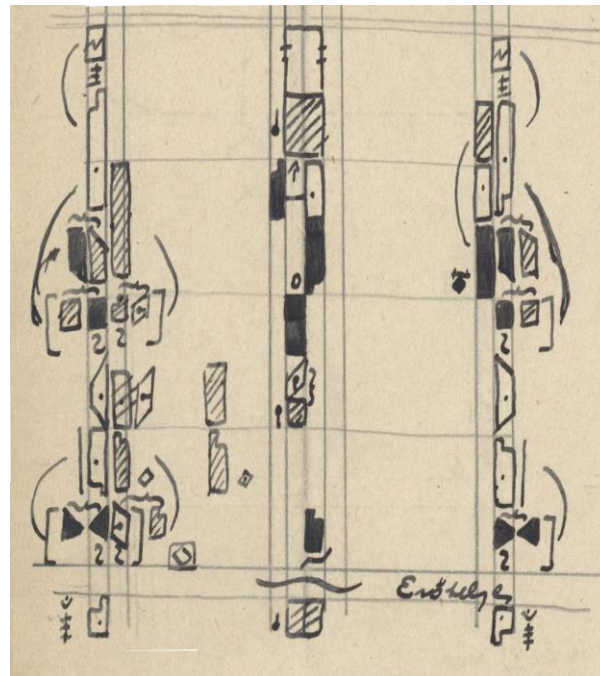


Fig. 3. A flowing arm scale with strong tugs

39. Szentpál and Rabinovszky, “The Art of Movement Doctrines,” 21–22.

40. Unidentified manuscripts on flowing arm scales, page 30, in *Olga Szentpál’s Legacy*.

The Oppositional Function

The spatial criteria of the oppositional function are the asymmetries compared to the line of gravity and the axes crossing the center of the body.⁴¹ In the oppositional function, counter-tensions force one side of the body open while they squeeze the body parts together in the other; rhythmical disorders and peculiarities take place such as the interrupted, rubato, or syncopated rhythms. Its spiritual experiences are the struggle and dissonance. As a hidden tendency, the movements intend to run into infinity, but are bound by the limited capacity of the body—an awkward contradiction emerges between the sense of the body and that of space. The movements feature a mix of curved and angular shapes. Their lines are broken and intend to break forth suddenly, which stresses their oppositional character. Cognate artistic genres are the 20th century Expressionism and—as the authors declared—styles of the past, such as the late northern Gothic art.⁴²

Figure 4 presents oppositional leg gestures. Three short movement sequences can be located, as their separations indicated by double starting and ending lines. The characteristic of all three are the foot folded strongly backward creating a grotesque effect as deviating definitely from the lines of the legs and the arms held high and stretched backward in broken angles. The notator identified the third example (reading from bottom up) as a “Vix sequence with stretched legs performed in a mischievous manner.” The indication of “Vix” refers to the diagonally crossed, middle level, left leg.⁴³

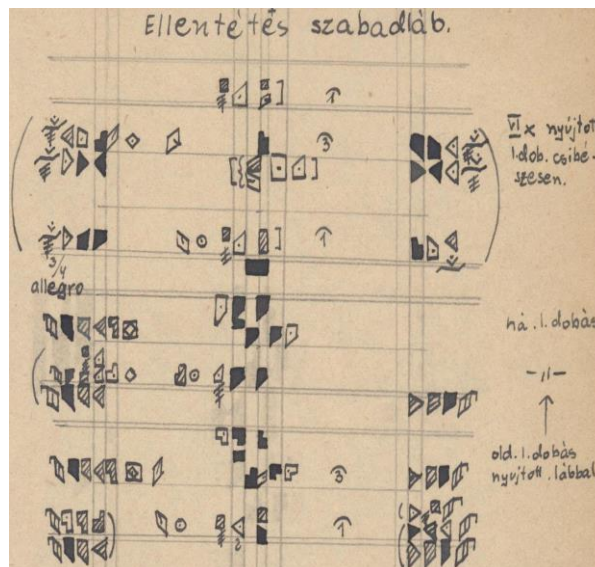


Fig. 4. Oppositional leg gestures

41. [Szentpál and Rabinovszky], “The Art of Movement Doctrine,” 22–23.

42. *Ibid.*, 23.

43. The Szentpáls introduced the notion of the sixth position for the open or crossed diagonal double supports as a continuation of the five positions of ballet. The same crossed double support was called a “crossed diagonal position,” without numbering, by Ann Hutchinson Guest in her *Labanotation: The System of Analyzing and Recording Movement*, fourth edition (New York:

The Even Function

In the doctrine, the function called “even” conveys the sense of the whole surface of the body, without accenting any parts; the movements of the smaller ones melt into that of the larger.⁴⁴ Rhythmically, the even function is monotonous, and movements are performed mechanically. From the point of dynamics, the body constitutes a single mass equally imbued with force. Its spiritual characteristics are the indifference with objective coldness, which may indicate a great level of concentration, will, and experience of resolution instead of inertia. The function may be active; however, the characteristics of the sudden or swung movements are mechanical as well. Its passive case reflects rigidity or, as an extreme example, may result in a collapse. As the authors put it, pure evenly used energy is seldom used by expressive dancers.⁴⁵ This small role of even energy use could be attributed to the concept not being present in Szentpál’s notated examples.

The significance of the main functions is emphasized in the system creators’ closing remarks about the inartistic features of choreography, which stem from their erroneous use—the solid and thorough mastery of dance creation depends on the proper acquisition and use of the aforementioned fundamental functions.

Other Notation Sources Preserved

Olga Szentpál’s legacy preserved several other notation documents, all notated by her or by disciples in her school with kinetography. We introduce them briefly, as they represent so far unknown sources of notation history, but also the interest and results of the Szentpál School in technique, history and staging choreographies.

Body Technique

Illustrations of the dance technique, which was closely related to the Szentpál’s system doctrine, the spatial, dynamic, and rhythmical variations of the exercises linked in several combinations are represented in abundance in kinetographic notation. The detailed, textual manuscript for their *Testtechnika* [Body Technique] was written in 1935; the supplemental notated material must have been made later, at the earliest in 1939. Szentpál and Rabinovszky devoted careful attention to the technical training as they declared in the introduction of the work:

Routledge, 2005), 55. Here, the indication of “VIX” was applied to the diagonal crossing of a gesture.

44. [Szentpál and Rabinovszky], “The Art of Movement Doctrine,” 23.

45. *Ibid.*, 24.

Our body technique is fundamentally an artistic subject: it is strongly related to a vast variety of inner contents. . . . However, focusing on spiritual connections cannot decrease the seriousness, effectiveness, and relentless consistency of technical training. We seriously warn all against the delusions admiring themselves in inner experiences which have no connection to the vivacity of the physical body.⁴⁶

Only a single example, a turn-spring combination called “cut slice” is presented here in Figure 5. The exercise is opened with three “spring cut” (resembling *grand jeté en tournant*), followed by a full turn in *relevé*. The combination is completed by a “spring cut” and “cut fly.” If the longer cross lines are interpreted as bar lines, the metrical structure is possibly 6/8. A rhythmical correction can be observed in the first measure, and the insertion of a missed *relevé* in the third.

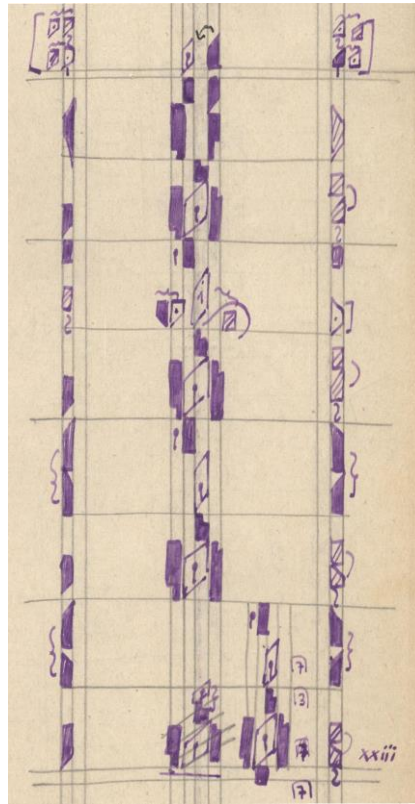


Fig. 5. A turn-spring combination

46. Olga Szentpál and Máriusz Rabinovszky, “Testtechnika. Gimnasztikai függelékkel” [Body Technique. Gymnastic exercises appended], (Typewritten manuscript, 1935). In *Olga Szentpál’s Legacy*, 4.

Historical Dances

After the closing of her school in the communist era, Olga Szentpál selected historical dances as her main research and educational focus while she was the leader of the Historical Dance Panel in the State Ballet Institute. She published her kinetographic transcription and analysis of *galliarde*s from Arbeau's *Orchésographie* in 1964,⁴⁷ though she had been dealing with reconstructing historical sources of dance—as Merényi mentioned—since the 1930s.⁴⁸

Figure 6 presents the first page of a *gavotte* notation manuscript—the source of the dance and the person transcribing it into kinetogram are unknown. The style of autography implies the same skilled hand of the previously introduced notations; therefore, we may assume it was made by György Lőrinc, around 1939–1940. The dance was created for a couple; the floor plan indicates two women.

A single one of its genre among the notations of Szentpál's legacy, it may be one of the first kinetograms representing 17–18th century historical dances. Collection Knust, archived at the *Centre national de la danse* in Paris, stores a notation of a *menuet* notated by Irmgard Bartenieff in 1936,⁴⁹ from the 19th century, and *Le Rigaudon de la Paix* by Feuillet, notated by Irmgard Bartenieff and Albrecht Knust in 1936.⁵⁰ In the *Laban Notation Scores: An International Bibliography* by Mary Jane Warner, a reference to a 15th century *basse* dance can be found, notated again by Irmgard Bartenieff in 1949,⁵¹ but, according to Warner's *Bibliography*, the bulk of the historical dance notation manuscripts are dated 1950 or later.

47. Olga Szentpál, "Arbeau francia galliarde-jainak formai elemzése" [Form Analysis of Arbeau's French Galliardes]. In *Táncudományi Tanulmányok 1963–1964*, ed. Gedeon Dienes (Budapest: Magyar Táncművészek Szövetsége, 1964), 79–148. A English translation of Arbeau's *Orchésographie* released in 1967 also includes Labanotation of some dances transcribed from the text by Mireille Backer and Julia Sutton. Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchésographie* (New York: Dover, 1967), 245–260.

48. Merényi, "Olga Szentpál's Life Work," 318.

49. *La "Collection Knust" de cinéogrammes*. (Object name KNU_P_05_05; accessed June 19, 2016), http://mediatheque.cnd.fr/spip.php?page=ressources&id_article=9.

50. *La "Collection Knust,"* (Object name KNU_P_05_02; accessed June 19, 2016); Mary Jane Warner, with Frederick E. Warner, *Laban Notation Scores: An International Bibliography* (s.l.: International Council of Kinetography Laban, 1984), 91, entry 0798.

51. Warner, *Laban Notation Scores: An International Bibliography*, 28, entry 0187.

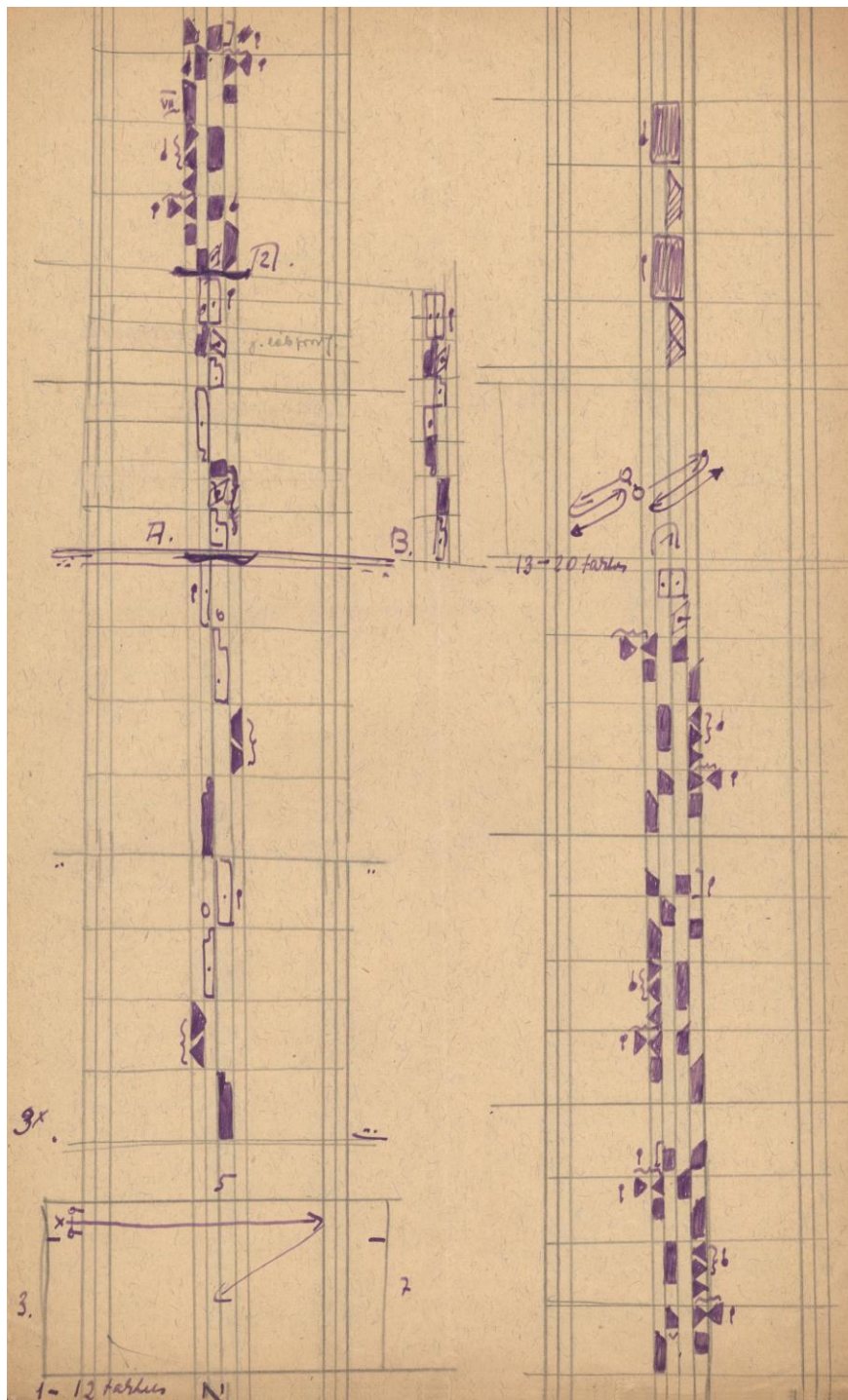


Fig. 6. The beginning of a gavotte

Traditional Dances

Traditional dance belonged to the Szentpál School's area of interest from the early years of the institution. However, the earliest notations of traditional dance in the legacy dates from 1946 and were written in a small notebook in which Zsuzsa Merényi notated motifs used for compositions by Olga and Mária Szentpál. Figure 7 presents some “*géderlaki*” motifs—resembling the generally known dance named *mars* [march]. The text located next to the notation states the place of origin of the dance, with the added information that the dance can be performed while turning or by a couple. The notation was made with special care given to the details of stretching the leg in the air before taking support on bent legs for the second motif. It can be observed now that the horizontal crossing lines stand for beats and not for measures—a special practice of Mária Szentpál aiming to provide clarity for dancers to understand rhythm as a fundamentally important feature of traditional dances.

The importance of the early traditional dance notations can be attributed to the need to know the diverging conventions and applications of special symbols in the kinetograms of the legacy. Because we are familiar with the movement structures and live performances of traditional dance motifs, notations of these basic dance forms serve as clues to understanding the others.

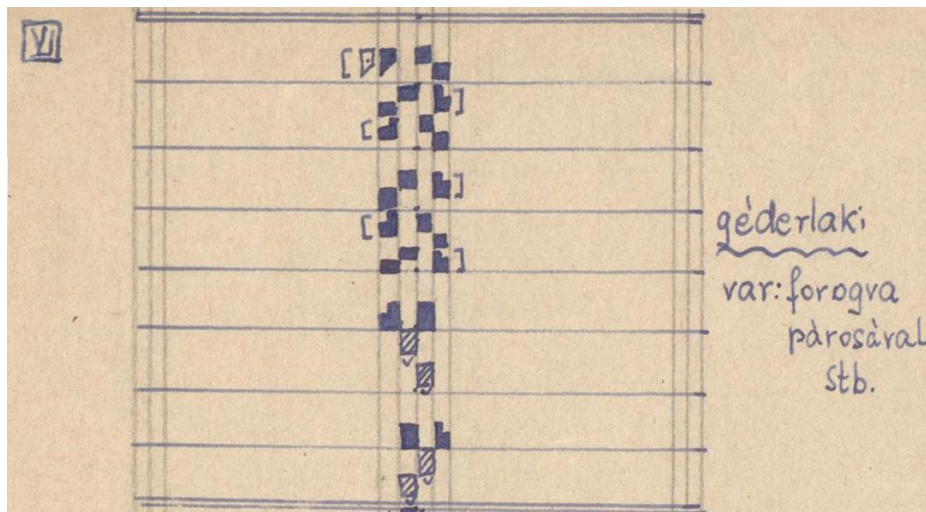


Fig. 7. *Mars* from village *Géderlak*

Choreographies

Olga Szentpál composed more than 150 choreographies.⁵² Three are known to have been notated. These are the *Mária-lányok* [Mary Devotees] and *Magyar halottas* [Hungarian Funeral], by Mária Szentpál, and *Kiűzetés a paradicsomból* [Driven from Paradise] by György Lőrinc.⁵³ A scene from *Hungarian Funeral* can be seen in Figure 8. Only one of the three scores, the *Mary Devotees*, was found after the war. As Mária Szentpál recalled:

. . . I notated my mother's choreography in '42–43, the *Mary Devotees* as a surprise for their silver wedding. It is near a miracle that the score appeared a couple of months ago in a bit wrecked state . . . from the cellar . . . The silver wedding present included the performance of a certain part of the score by four students of mine who have never seen and never danced the *Mary Devotees*.⁵⁴ They read and learnt the section. I corrected a bit, and they presented it in this festive day, in '43. It was a huge success; already that time it proved that dance can be reconstructed perfectly from notation. It is true, however, that the motifs were simple and perhaps I helped them—I can't remember it exactly—but I am positive that they learnt it from notation.⁵⁵



Fig. 8. *Hungarian Funeral*, 1936 (Mária Szentpál is third from right)

52. Merényi, "Olga Szentpál's Life Work," 311.

53. Merényi recalled in her study (Merényi, "Olga Szentpál's Life Work," 332) that all three were notated by Mária Szentpál; however, Mária Szentpál remembered in a tape recorded interview made by János Fügedi in her home on 14 September 1987 that the *Driven from Paradise* was notated by György Lőrinc.

54. Mária Szentpál referred to her notation students as she was already teaching kinetography in her mother's school.

55. From the interview made with Mária Szentpál mentioned above. The date of the silver wedding was incorrect, it happened in the spring of 1944.

Merényi evoked the story of the choreography.⁵⁶ It was inspired by a painting of Virgin Mary, kept in a Franciscan church in a south Hungarian town, Szeged, a place of pilgrimage. According to the legend, the picture was hidden in a lake to save it after the Ottoman occupation in the 16th century. However, a Turkish warrior, watering his stallion, found it. Charmed by its heavenly beauty, he returned it to the convent. In Szentpál's choreography, two young pilgrim girls are overcome by sleep in front of the picture. In their dreams, their future appeared as Life Woman and Death Woman to designate their fate. The Life Daughter woke cheerfully knowing her happy future, the Death Daughter having a presentiment of facing death soon. The dance was choreographed in 1938, a harbinger of the dangers of fascism and war.

The notated score of *Mary Devotees*, based on stylized Hungarian traditional dance motifs, was drawn by hand on large pages beyond the size of A3. The dance score was supplemented by photos of the performers, a short textual description of the subject, floor plans, performance attributes required to stage the characters in the dance, and the kinetographic notation of the four roles, the Life Woman, Life Daughter, Death Woman, and Death Daughter. The date of the first performance and the names of the dancers are also included, as the notator identified, "Written into dance score by Mária Szentpál in 16 March 1944, for the silver wedding of her parents." The dancers of the first performance (Zsuzsa Kemény, Lea Merényi, Edit Kállay, and Erzsébet Arany) can be seen in Figure 9.



Fig. 9. *Mary Devotees*, 1938

56. Merényi, „On a Kinetographic Finding,” 90–91.

Habl~lány

Élet~lány

72

68

60

1/2

6

1/4

1

Fig. 10. Measures 58–73 from the score of *Mary Devotees*
Left staff: Death Daughter; right staff: Life Daughter

Measures 58–73 of Death and Life Daughter’s dance can be seen in Figure 10 from the more than 300-measure long score. The enlarged four-measure sections in Figures 11a–b represent the meticulous care the notator took to depict the spatial details and temporal clarity. The relationships between characters’ movements can be understood from the score. The Death Daughter performs downward accented movement pairs⁵⁷ in even eight-count rhythm; each second count of eight is completed with a stiff, staccato turn; the upper body leaves the vertical and returns to it, the left arm changes low and high. At the same time, the Life Daughter presents steps in a soft crotchet-eight triplet rhythm progressing on a quarter circle melting continuously into a whole turn to the left while continuing the circle clockwise in measure 70; her torso is kept calmly side high, the arms stretching slowly into low directions.

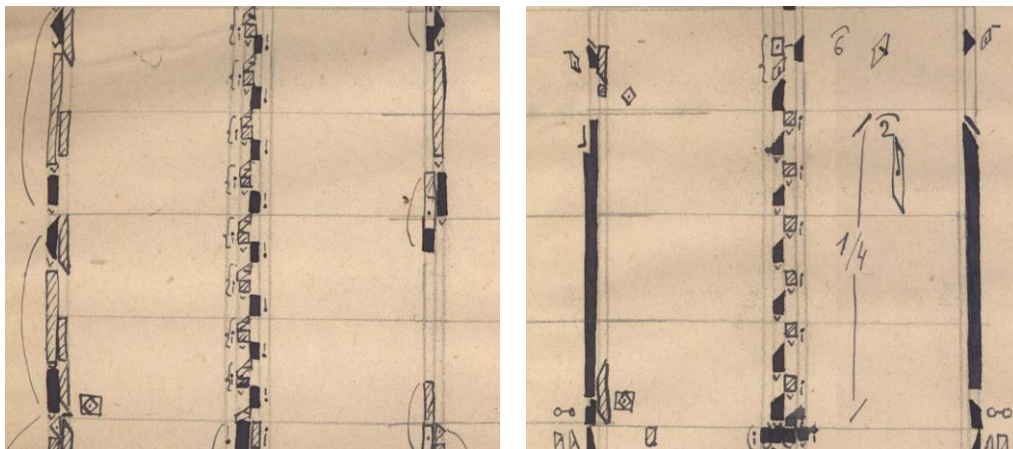


Fig. 11a. *Death Daughter—Measures 68–71* Fig. 11b. *Life Daughter—Measures 68–71*

Complete scores of choreographies with Laban kinetography were rare at that time. The aforementioned pieces had to be among the earliest scores, though they were not registered, as, for example, *The Green Table* by Kurt Jooss, notated by Ann Hutchinson in 1939,⁵⁸ or *Billie the Kid* by Eugene Loring, notated by Ann Hutchinson, Helen Priest Rogers, and Anne Wilson in 1942.⁵⁹

57. The terms of downward or upward accented motifs (here a movement pair) stem from movement analysis of Hungarian traditional dances. If a motif is started with lowering the center of gravity on the downbeat of the accompanying music, it is regarded a downward accented one, and vice versa. C.f. Mária Szentpál, *The Fundamental Concepts of Movement Analysis*, 156.

58. Dance Notation Bureau, Notated Theatrical Dances Catalog, Dance ID: 284 (accessed July 20, 2016), <http://dancenotation.org/catalog/EditDanceDetails.aspx?DanceID=284>.

59. Dance Notation Bureau, Notated Theatrical Dances Catalog, Dance ID: 335 (accessed July 20, 2016), <http://dancenotation.org/catalog/EditDanceDetails.aspx?DanceID=335>.

Closing Remarks

There can be no doubt about it, the published, and the unpublished textual and dance notation material of the Szentpál School is an outstanding document representing the era with both quality and quantity. The special significance of the kinetograms is emphasized by the fact that Olga Szentpál recognized the importance of using an internationally accepted system. Hence, she did not develop her own—which was a favored practice among dance intelligentsia of the age—as spreading an individual system can be futile if the system is overlooked, consequently, the invested work is lost.

The documents introduced are evidence of how the first generation of Hungarian modern dance maintained strong international connections, and the results became integrated into their own field of practice. Even while forging a path in an indifferent or sometimes hostile environment and being driven to the periphery of theatrical life, Madzsar, Dienes, and Szentpál contributed their special initiatives to the process of creating modern dance. However, before achieving their full development, the promising lines of experiments were broken in 1948 when the Communist Party took over the power by ruling all politics, economy, and culture. The practice of educating with modern dance was prohibited, as they were regarded as an opposition to the expected social realism. The results of the new dance disappeared and lost continuity; the approaches garnered toward focusing on personalities and creativity, analysis and research, and ambitions toward novelty and experiments could not be continued.

The new dance re-appeared in the beginning of the 1980s, without the local historic roots, but as a result of cultural influences arriving from the West, again. If a new intelligentsia emerges, one as devoted as the pioneers of Hungarian modern dance, they can then rediscover their heritage with the help of these documents, simultaneously ensuring the survival of Szentpál's doctrine and the forging of new identities.

Acknowledgments

We hereby thank Teresa Heiland for her encouragement and professional advice. We would also like to acknowledge with appreciation the help given by Márk Fenyves, director of the *Mozdulatművészek Háza* [MOHA; House of Movement Artists] and by Tamás Halász, leader of the Dance Archive in the *Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet* [OSZMI; National Dramatic Arts History Museum and Institute] (Budapest, Hungary).

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