

Thesis Abstract of DLA Dissertation

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The History of Hungarian Guitar Playing  
to the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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## **Antecedents of the Research**

The history of guitar playing in Hungary has not been researched in a detailed and comprehensive manner to date. There are only two attempts at an overview of the subject: *Gitár breviárium (A Guitar Breviary)* by Ferenc Brodszky and *Koboz, lant, gitár (Koboz, Lute and Guitar)* by Ferenc Fodor. Brodszky's work remains unpublished and only a few privately owned copies of the manuscript have survived. Fodor's book is a useful handbook which was not designed for scholarly use. Péter Király's thorough study, *Lantjáték Magyarországon a XV. századtól a XVII. század közepéig (Lute Playing in Hungary from the 15th Century to the Middle of the 17th Century)* is based on the most complete research in its field. Even though it also contains data concerning the guitar of the period, its main subject is the lute. The great number of excellent studies and monographs on Bálint Bakfark also enrich the bibliography of works on this instrument. There is no written material available even on the most significant guitar players of Hungary: Astrid Stempnik wrote a dissertation on the life, work and musical background of J. K. Mertz, which is available only abroad and a summary of a conference on Ivan Padovec was published in Croatia containing studies in Croatian.

There is a great number of works on the overall history of the guitar abroad, and extensive research has been done by such scholars as Matanya Ophee, Michael Sieberichs-Nau, Brian Torosian, Gerhard Penn and others. In these studies Hungarian guitar life is not mentioned, because it has always been dependent on foreign achievements, or it was completely isolated from them in certain periods.

## Sources

The sources of the present study are of different kinds. Given the above mentioned limitations and lacking relevant literature other than that concerning general guitar history, I have had to rely on sparse references and literature from other fields of musicology such as literature on related instruments, music history, and scholarship on musical folklore. The presence of the guitar in Hungary in the Middle Ages can only be rendered likely based on the fact that troubadours used the instrument throughout Europe, especially in Spain. Its proofs are extensively documented in the book *La Guitarra Espanola*. The influence of troubadours and minnesingers in Hungary (Gaucelm Faidit, Peire Vidal, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and Walter von der Vogelweide) has been reported in many volumes on music history.

The Hungarian history of the renaissance lute is documented by a large number of books and studies: Ottó Gombosi's *Zenei élet Mátyás király udvarában, Bakfark Bálint élete és művei* (Music in the Court of King Matthias, The Life and Works of Bálint Bakfark), the manuscripts of István Bartalus such as *XVI. és XVII. század lant-zeneművei* (Lute Pieces from the 16th and 17th Centuries), *Orgona- és lanttáblázatok* (Organ and Lute Tabulatures), *Adalékok a magyar zene történelméhez*, (Additional Material to the History of Hungarian Music), *Bakfark Bálint, Mihály és János* (Bálint, Mihály and János Bakfark) by Kálmán Isov, István Homolya's book *Bakfark and Lantjáték Magyarországon a XV. századtól a XVII. század közepéig* (Lute Playing in Hungary from the 15th Century to the Middle of the 17th Century) by Péter Király, not to mention works on overall music history. So I have been able to relatively easily find data about Pietro Bono's stay in

Hungary, the Hungarian verse chronicle, Tinódi, Neusiedler, Bakfark and other lesser known lutists. But concerning the guitar, one can only make assumptions: this is the period when the instrument's "8" shape becomes widespread and it gains popularity throughout Europe, so it is very likely that King Matthias ordered guitars as well as other plucked instruments from abroad. The prevailing confusion in the terminology of plucked instruments also makes this theory plausible.

The era of the Turkish occupation coincides with what has been called the *Spanish guitar* coming into general use in Europe. James Tyler and Paul Sparks are accomplished scholars of the subject. Their book *The Guitar and its Music* gives a comprehensive account of the development of the instrument and its role in accomplishing new achievements in music. Surviving data from this period are more precise: records by contemporary historians István Szamosközy and Georg Krauss mention guitarist Don Diego de Estrada and luthier Adam Bessler who made guitars along with other instruments. There are references mentioning that lutist and guitarist Alexandre de Saint Luc was in the service of Eugen von Savoyen.

The golden age of the guitar was the beginning of the 19th century, by which time the model fitted with six simple strings had become widespread. It was employed by the most prominent composers of music history. It was very popular in Vienna, so it soon became widely used in Hungary as well. From this time on until the end of the 19th century primary sources dealing with the guitar in Hungary are plentiful. **Period press:** *Honművész (Artist of the Homeland)*, *Honderű*, *Hasznos Múlatások (Useful Amusements)*, *Szegedi Híradó (Szeged Courier)*, *Zenészeti Lapok (Music News)*, *Vasárnapi Újság (The Sunday Paper)* often reported on concerts and other

guitar events. The instrument was essential in domestic music making so a number of **private collections** survive in manuscript form. Such are the collections of Johann Flock and Dániel Stollmann: *Sehr leichte und Angenehme Ländlers* (*Very Easy and Pleasant Landlers*) and *Gítárra való énekes darabok* (*Songs for guitar*) by Sándor Nagy. The *Gyurkovics collection* (*Gyurkovics Ferenc gyűjteménye*) is a compilation by different family members and informs on important aspects of the nature of contemporary private music making. The guitar was used in **collecting folk music** as well. A call by the Scientific Society (later the Academy of Sciences) to the nation to collect folk songs produced songs with guitar accompaniment. Such collections were the *88 Eredeti magyar Dal* (*88 Original Hungarian Songs*) by Dániel Mindszenty, and *Magyar Népdalok* (*Hungarian Folk Songs*) by Lázár Karácsony. The song collection of poet János Arany did not have any accompaniment even though he was a guitar player. He employed the instrument during his theater career to teach actors their singing roles. His correspondence and the memoirs of Déryné, a celebrated actress and singer of the time, contain accounts of how the guitar was used in Hungarian musical theaters during the heyday of their existence. Gusztáv Nyizsnyay's life can be tracked in his handwritten memoirs set in verse, and Count Lajos Gyulay's diary prompted my research into the Dubez brothers' contribution to guitar playing. Several original copies of **sheet music** by Hungarian (Ferenc Pfeiffer, Ivan Padovec, J. K. Mertz, Gusztáv Nyizsnyay) and international composers (Mauro Giuliani, Ferdinando Carulli, Felix Horetzky etc.) survive in print or in manuscript which are accessible at libraries and on the internet. Theoretical works of the age on the history of music and literature have greatly assisted my own work: *A Muzsikának*

*Közönséges Története és egyéb írások (The General History of Music and Other Writings)* by Gábor Mátray, who himself played the guitar and wrote a guitar tutor, István Bartalus's *Adalékok a magyar zene történelméhez (Additional Material to the History of Hungarian Music)*, *Magyar írók élete és munkái (The Lives and Works of Hungarian Writers)* by József Szinnyei, *A magyar zene a 19-ik században [sic] (Hungarian Music in the 19th Century)* by Kornél Ábrányi, *A zene története: különös tekintettel a magyar és magyarországi zenére (The History of Music with Special Regard to Hungarian Music)* by Imre Szentimrényi.

The 20th century bibliography on Hungarian music history does not deal with the guitar, so my secondary sources have consisted of the literature based on the latest achievements of musicology. Studies on the collecting of folk songs by Lujza Tari and treatises *Forrásjegyzék Csokonai dallamkövető verseihez (Sources of Csokonai verses which follow tunes' lead [sic])* by Mária Hovánszky, *Széchenyi Ferenc gróf és a zene (Count Ferenc Széchenyi and Music)* by Rennerné Várhidy Klára, *Főúri zenei intézmények, arisztokrata mecénások a 18. században Magyarországon (Musical Establishments and Patronage of the Aristocracy in the 18th Century in Hungary)* by Ágnes Sas, *Magyar zeneműkiadók és tevékenységük, 1774-1867 (Hungarian Music Publishers and their Activity, 1774-1867)* by Ilona Mona, in which book the significance of the guitar becomes evident.

### **The methodology and results of the research**

Most Hungarian guitarists are not familiar with the history of the instrument they play. There is hardly any Hungarian literature available on the subject, and no teaching material on

the topic exists at all. The works published abroad are prohibitively expensive for Hungarians, and most of them are impossible to access in Hungary. The majority of the history of guitar playing has not been researched, thus, it is essentially important to start scholarly work on the subject.

The dissertation is a result of extensive research. I have relied mostly on foreign sources and period literature. Exchange of the latest research results with colleagues abroad has been of great help too. I have on several occasions discovered astonishing data on musicians who were influential to Hungarian music life, having devoted a large body of their work to the guitar. This is not so surprising if one takes the results of research abroad into account: it is getting to be known that a number of the most prominent composers in Europe played the guitar and/or composed for it. So, following foreign models, the exploration of this specific segment of Hungarian music history, which is attracting more and more attention of modern musicology, has proved to be successful.

This dissertation aims at pointing out the role of the guitar in such important fields of music history as the troubadour culture, the rise of monody, and the birth of romanticism. I provide a summary of the history of the guitar abroad and show Hungarian achievements in this context. So far, the role of this instrument in the Hungarian national movement and in shaping the cultural life of the Age of Reform has become known only as a byproduct of the above mentioned scholarly works. The present dissertation is the first in Hungary to provide a comprehensive and scholarly overview of the subject and, as far as I know, the only one internationally to provide an account of the history of guitar playing in one specific nation.

## Artistic activity related to the topic of the thesis

I have always considered it important to promote Hungarian guitar music, so I have included Hungarian pieces in my concert repertoire whenever I could.

A list of Hungarian pieces I have played is as follows:

Péter Bornemisza: Canto optima  
 Sebestyén Tinódi Lantos: Verse-chronicle  
 Dances from the Vietórisz-and Kájoni-codexes  
 J. K. Mertz: Fantaisie Originale, Flowers of the Fatherland  
 Bartók: For Children arr. F. Brodsky / L. Szendrey-Karper/  
     A. Bozóki  
     Romanian Folk Dances arr. A. Bozóki  
     Folk Songs arr. A. Bozóki  
 Barna Kovács: Sonata nova, Suite hommage á Goldoni  
 Fernc Farkas: Exercitium Tonale, Postcards, Guitar Songs  
 Máté Hollós: Farewell to Aase, Promenade  
 György Kurtág: The Little Fix  
 Péter Tóth: A Letter from Na'Conxypan

The most important concerts at which I played Hungarian pieces

April 1987. Concert tour in Czechoslovakia with the  
     Kecskemét Early Music Ensemble  
 18 Sept. 1998. Old Synagogue, Szeged, organized by MASZK  
     Society  
 29 Nov. 1998, 20 Nov. 2000, 19 Nov. 2003. István Vántus  
     Contemporary Music Festival, Szeged  
 11 March 1999. Alliance Francaise Szeged  
 27 Aug. 2001. Himmelev Kirke  
 29 Aug. 2001. Hojskolen Marielyst  
 2004. Máté Hollós's author's night, Szeged  
 5 Aug. 2005. Hojskolen Marielyst  
 10 Aug. 2005. Biografen, Stege  
 17 March 2007. Institut für Musik, Fachhochschule Osnabrück