

University of Theatre and Film Art Doctoral School

**István Molnár, a distinguished artistic innovator
of hungarian folk dance**

Theses

Béla Ónodi

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Reader: Géza D. Hegedűs associate professor

Theses:

The present thesis was written with the double aim of presenting István Molnár dance artist, choreographer and educator's creative periods by exploring the interdependencies between them on the one hand, and summarising his pedagogical activity along with the methodology of the physical and mental preparatory training system he had elaborated on the other. Furthermore the thesis attempts to put Molnár's work in the context of today's professional folk dance artist's education as well. This paper does not give an overall view and list of István Molnár's works performed on stage, it only refers to the most essential pieces to illustrate the creative period under discussion.

I. Introduction

II. The activity of István Molnár

II.1 Modern Dance Movements

First and foremost my thesis intends to give a general historical summary of dances in the decades between the end of 19th and mid 20th century, focusing on the development of modern dance movements both outside and in Hungary and their influence on István Molnár's creative work as well. The emphasis is on the period between 1930-40 because a thorough knowledge of those years is essential in order to understand and rate István Molnár's first creative period adequately in European context.

The topic is divided into three parts as follows:

- 1. The early days and development of 'free dance'*
- 2. European dancers searching for new artistic aspects of movement*
- 3. Hungary as one of the centres of European free dance*

II.2 István Molnár and the Modern Dance

The first part of this chapter attempts to explore the very first and so far non-documented phases of István Molnár's career including the antecedents of why the successful gymnast had given up doing sport, as well as his activity as an avatgarde dance artist and choreographer.

The second part intends to throw new light on the connections of the successful expressionist artist to modern dance schools and trends in Hungary.

The subtitles included are the following:

1. *Artistic life in Kolozsvár between the two world wars*
2. *Early days of István Molnár's creative period of expressionism and the avant-garde*
3. *The expressionist dancer and choreographer*
4. *István Molnár and the Hungarian modern dance movements*

II.3. István Molnár's second creative period in terms of traditional Hungarian folklore

The main purpose of the current part of the paper is to describe how Molnár became keenly interested in folk dance, considering it to be a folk art form, how he based his work upon three new domains, namely doing some research on folk dances, creating staged folk dance productions and training dancers. The end of the chapter tries to outline those historic and social conditions that temporarily hindered Molnár from continuing his artistic, pedagogical and research work.

The topic is divided into four subsections:

1. *Laying the foundations of modern dance art research*
2. *The very first steps in the direction of staging folk dance productions and its trends*
3. *István Molnár, the teacher and educator*
4. *István Molnár, considered as a 'NON-person'*

II.4 István Molnár's third creative period - The professional István Molnár

This part of the thesis is based on István Molnár's personal documents and attempts to depict a trustworthy image of his more and more successful accomplishments as an artistic director and choreographer in the 1950s, 60, and 70s. During these political eras István Molnár directed two professional dance workshops and achieved great success both in Hungary and abroad. First he worked for the Art Ensemble of Trade Unions, then after some years working as independent choreographer, he established and directed the Budapest Dance Ensemble that was declared professional in 1955. In 1958 he applied for retirement at the age of 62.

The closing part of the chapter tries to reveal the true reasons for his retiring by presenting some personal documents of his own and summarising his contemporaries' opinions. Unpublished memories of his daughter might also help in making a more subtle approach to IM's work.

This section includes the following headings:

1. *The Trade Unions' Art Ensemble*
2. *The Budapest Dance Ensemble*

II.5 The period of isolation – The Hungarian Ballad Ensemble

The history of Hungarian dance has so far lacked satisfactory information about the last period of István Molnár's life. While doing my research I tried to track down all possible documents available and afterwards, supplementing them with the memoirs of István Molnár's students, fellow dancers and other contemporaries, I made an attempt to provide a valid and analytical description of the period in question. Resigning from the post of artistic director of the Budapest Ensemble Molnár established the Hungarian Ballad Ensemble in the year of his retirement. Not compromising one part of his artistic creed or fastidiousness, the elderly Molnár continued to implement his ideas with his gradually shrinking dance group for fourteen years, until his death.

III. István Molnár's pedagogical legacy and its justification nowadays

III.1 István Molnár's pedagogical legacy

Concerning teaching perhaps even more than dancing, István Molnár summarised the most crucial issues of folk dance pedagogy in *Dance Aesthetics* and *Dance Technique*, two volumes of a series of textbooks entitled 'My Hungarian Dance Learning System' written by him.

This chapter includes:

1. *Thoughts on the essentials of folk dance as an art form*
2. *Improving expressiveness and stage acting*
3. *Physical training of the dancer - The Molnár-technique*

III.2 István Molnár's intellectual impact and its justification nowadays

This part of the dissertation intends to present the lengthy personal development process, which started with my getting acquainted with István Molnár's technical training, then practising it during my dancer's and teacher's career and finally led me to the idea of reviving the original bases and elaborating a reviewed and renewed version of the Molnár-technique. My developed version has been adapted to the level of knowledge and needs of the dancers of our age, and hopefully will gradually achieve the aims of the original creator.

This chapter includes:

1. *My connection with István Molnár's dance technical system*
2. *The Basics of Molnár-technique - auxiliary teaching material*
3. *Correspondencies and differences between the original and renewed Molnár-technique*
4. *The role of the Molnár-technique in today's folk dancer training*

IV. Summary

V. Bibliography

VI. Attachments

Findings of the research carried out on the subject of the thesis:

1. Unpublished radio interviews transcribed from tape recordings from István Molnár's bequest

- *'How I met folk music, István Molnár by the microphone'*

Hungarian Folk Song Week, Radio Kossuth 19.40. 1978.

Interviewer: Imre Vasali, Duration: 35 minutes

Transcribed: by Béla Ónodi, April-May 2014.

- *'Transylvanian Report'* 24. October 1980.

(A reporter from Transylvania visited IM at his home and made the interview in the presence of György Martin, scholar of ethnography and folk musicology. No more details available.)

Duration: 65 minutes Transcribed: by Béla Ónodi, August – October 2014.

- 'Attracted to Folk Dance' - Portrait of the 75 year old István Molnár folk dance researcher - 1983.

Interviewer: János Szász Editor: Gyula Varsányi

Transcribed: by Béla Ónodi, February 2014.

2. Interviews with István Molnár's family members and students (Transcribed from audio recordings)

1. *Interview with Hajnalka Molnár on her father's art* - 29.05.2014.

Duration: 75 minutes, Made and transcribed: by Béla Ónodi, Sept.-Oct. 2014.

2. *Interview with Iván Vitányi on István Molnár, the man and artist* - 02.10.2014.

Duration: 30 minutes, Made and transcribed: by Béla Ónodi Nov. – Dec. 2014.

3. *Interview with Zsuzsa Hargitai on István Molnár's situational excersises* - 19.03. 2015.

Duration: 45 minutes, Made and transcribed: by Béla Ónodi 20-22. 05. 2015.

4. *Interview with Hajnalka Molnár and Mrs Zsuzsa Fentor Demény on the Ballad Ensemble* 06. Jan. 2016.

Duration: 70 minutes, Made and transcribed: by Béla Ónodi 05-06. 04. 2016.

5. *Interview with Béla Bróz and Csaba Molnár on the Ballad Ensemble* - 10. February 2016.

Duration: 65 minutes, Made and transcribed: by Ónodi Béla, 08-11. 04. 2016.

3. Other publications and appearances related to the theme of the thesis

Béla Ónodi: An overall view in words, Doctorands' National Association

Art, Theatre and Film Department , 2014. Budapest

Béla Ónodi: *István Molnár's expressionist avant-garde period*

Zempléni Múzsza, XIV. vol. 3. 2014 Autumn issue

Béla Ónodi: *Applying the Molnár-technique to children's folk dance training* -

Presentation Nationwide refresher course by the 'HERITAGE' Folk Art Association for Children, 12.11.2016. Budapest