

WITNESS HILLS: AN INVITATION TO DANCE

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The Hungarian Pedagogical Association has always considered drawing on the examples and strengths of notable predecessors to contemporary pedagogy to be a vital mission which can help teachers who struggle with everyday challenges and, at times, are vulnerable to burnout.

A symbolic tool for taking up this task is the publication activity of the Association. The book ‘Tanúhegyek’ (Witness Hills in English - a metaphor) was published in 2018 with support from several municipalities and institutions of higher education. The book contains more than fifty portraits and interviews in alphabetical order, beginning with that of Lajos Áprily, a famous 20th-century poet and the former headmaster of Baár-Madas Secondary Grammar School, and ending with the guitar player Ferenc Snétberger, who created a center for talented Roma youth. Naturally, in addition to colleagues with a nationwide or international reputation, this book’s pantheon includes the privates of weekdays, classrooms, ensembles, and children’s camps. The reason for including them is that their loyalty, professionalism, and love of children have set an example for present-day successors just as the former ‘greats’ did (such individuals include József Ferge, director from Sármellék, Edit Ruppert from Péccszabolcs, and primary school teacher László Varjasy from Mátraverebély, among others). They, too, are ‘witness hills’ of a twentieth-century pedagogy which is full of defeats and looking for renewal. Similar to the pedagogy of the century, an essential principle of editing this work was looking past (the sometimes narrow) walls of classrooms and interpreting pedagogy in a modern (or postmodern) context. There, alongside natural communities (e.g., one’s family, neighborhood or peer group) and the traditionally accepted partner: institutions, market players, and civil initiatives also demand a share in the mental-physical-emotional education of the next generation. Among such communities, we find one which is becoming more and more significant: the network called community culture education or, as it can also be called, the world of children’s culture.

It is essential to note here that the volumes’ papers are re-publications. Professor Imre Knausz, the editor of the previously ‘regular’ journal ‘Taní-tani’, has an online journal under the same title. All texts found in ‘Tanúhegyek’ (Witnessing Hills) have been previously published there. The logo of the online journal, a drawing by one of the ‘Real Pearls of Berettyóújfalu’ (Igazgyöngy Alapítvány, 2019), decorates the volume’s cover. The founding leader of that community, Nóra L. Ritók, wrote the original introduction.

That is how outstanding representatives of art pedagogy made their way into this volume; the book features drama teachers, puppet artists, musicians, radio art specialists, and music teachers, as well as dance teachers.¹ Who are they? In regard to one member of the quartet of authors of the school folk-dance curriculum, a student of Éva Karcagi (who left Székesfehérvár for the famous Alsó Erdősor school in Budapest), by the name of Katalin Riba conducted an autobiographical interview with the instructor. Henrik Kovács (who became since then a PhD) compiled interviews with colleagues who had been awarded by the 'Örökség Gyermek Népművészeti Egyesület' (= 'Heritage Children's Folk Association'). These include Róbert Majoros (from Székesfehérvár, Alba Regia Ensemble) and Margit Békési, from Somogy, Barcs. Next to them in the volume, we can find a portrait of Kata Prekler, founder of 'Görömbő Kompánia', an innovative nursery school teacher who merged children's games, dance, and drama. The portrait was written by her colleague, Annamária Farkas.

Years went by, and in addition to other topics, pedagogical ruminations, good practices, portraits, and autobiographical interviews began to accumulate, inspiring editors to consider a subsequent volume. In 2002 the second volume was published by the Hungarian Pedagogical Association with the support of the Etel Takács Pedagogical Foundation. The introduction this time is by professor Éva Makai, representing the NGO 'Section for Children's interests – Committee 'Korczak'. The principles of editing remained unchanged. The aim is to highlight the devoted work of the colleagues and the oeuvre of various venues.

The increased consciousness in editing is marked by a more robust representation of dance and dance pedagogy – a crucial field. The editors identify with the concept that dance, incorporating the complexity of knowledge and skills, plays an extraordinary role in the fulfillment of developing personality and social relations. Obviously, this explains why dance has been included in the national curriculum, and in the official world of art schools characterized by strong traditions.

Tradition? To be honest, the vast majority of dancers in the second volume present folk dance. Katalin Mizerák's essay on Sára Berczik represents another form of movement. Moreover, István Váradi can be mentioned here for his revival of historical ballroom dance with his ensemble 'Garabonciás' in Ferencváros, Budapest. Still, the 'witness hills' of folk dance draw from a wide range of mountains of modern dance pedagogy. Let us first mention, from among the already deceased, Katalin Györgyfalvai, about whom József Mihályi has written a thesis. The analysis of 'Bujócska' (=Hide and seek) should also be mentioned here as well (written by Petra Péter). In the beginning, the former choreographer of the 25. Színház (The 25th Theater) played a significant part in contemporary children's dance. Two essays are devoted to Jolán Foltin's choreographies and pedagogical oeuvre; she was famous for (in addition to producing dance portraits of women's lives) her concern about children's souls and her sensitivity towards groups of children.

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¹ Earlier, the Hungarian Pedagogical Association dedicated a separate volume to the work of the expert of children's dances, Mária Keszler. Ibolya Bura, a former dancer of the State Folk Ensemble and a graduate student of ELTE in Game and Leisure Pedagogy, undertook the editing of the book, which presents her subject with a broad perspective (Bura, 2014).

Ildikó Sándor expressed respect towards contemporaries in her summary, while Anna Gordos, with the eyes of a children's dance teacher, represented their successors, drawing a portrait of a decisive personality. Virág Tavaszi-Sipos proposed a toast for the 90th birthday of Sándor Tímár. She, as an expert herself and also the mother of girls who dance in Tímár's famous children's ensemble 'Csillagszeműek', recalled the key figure of the dance house movement. (The writer of this a résumé was able to work with Master Tímár in the Folklore Pioneers' Camp – initiated by the previously mentioned legendary Mária Keszler in 1976.) In Csillebérc, the venue of this camp, another author of the dance curriculum, Erzsike Salamon from Martonvásár and the founder of the ensemble 'Százszorszép', was in charge of the program. She was someone who could preserve the bloom of amateur art even in an art school. A similar career and mission can be found among the dancers from Cigánd. In the history of folk-dance collection in Hungary, that village in the county of Zemplén enjoys a unique position thanks to the young Edit Kaposi, and Dezső Téglás and István Nagy continued this tradition. The latter made famous and novel choreographies in the genre of edited dance games. In this genre, the most outstanding work belongs to Annamária Neuwirth. She is also a remarkable organizer, school founder and civil activist, as well as a co-author of the curriculum. Ildikó Sándor's laudation recalls these momentums in the book.

The rich message of neo-folklorism could not have spread so widely in and out of schools all over the country (even in tiny villages) if there had not been followers who combined keeping up traditions, 'Landeskunde' and providing expertise in leading children's dance groups. These are the basis of a new profession, i.e. children's dance pedagogy, which is already spreading as a movement. Her own children have written about Mrs. Mária Értl from Litér (the 'cultural farmhand' of her village). It is Tamás Sós who wrote about Mrs. Somfai, the honorary citizen of Parád (Palóc region).

Almost ten dance teachers out of sixty portraits, now that is a good proportion. But is this tabloid complete? Who is missing? The personalities mentioned above, deceased or still with us, are the representatives of the 1970s and the significant initiatives of discovering children's culture. Who are the ones we should not forget about? Who should be written about in the 3rd volume of 'Taní-tani'? Offhand, I can recommend the Slovakian István Lami from Püspökhatvan, the Schwabian József Wenczl from Pilisvörösvár, Snr. Simon Kishegyi from Nemesnádudvar, János Rúzsza from Méhkerék, or Ferenc Tóth from Kalocsa. The list goes on. In fact, the reader is requested to think it about their own region and write the missing portraits (Editor-in-chief Knausz welcomes these messages!). And where are the outstanding actors of the upcoming third generation?

Let us continue together!

Trencsényi, L. (Ed.). (2022). *Tanúhegyek II. Újabb portrék, emlékezések, interjúk mintaadó pedagógusokról*. Magyar Pedagógiai Társaság. 320 pp. ISBN 978-963-7123-81-8, ISBN 978-963-7123-82-5 (pdf)

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