

WHAT IS THERE TO KNOW ABOUT CIRCLE DANCES?

A REVIEW OF THE BOOK *THE HUNGARIAN CIRCLE DANCE AND ITS EUROPEAN RELATIONS**

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Abstract

György Martin's book, *The Hungarian Circle Dance and its European Relations*, is one of the most significant dance-scientific summaries and typological monographs from the 1970s. The importance of this work is demonstrated by the fact that the book was also published in English in 2024, edited by János Fügedi and Dóra Pál-Kovács. The review is about how the original Hungarian volume was created, presents the structure and contents of the monograph, and points out the different editorial approaches of the two volumes.

Keywords: körtánc, Martin György

In 2024, an updated English version of György Martin's book, *A magyar körtánc és európai rokonsága*, was published under the title *The Hungarian Circle Dance and Its European Relations*. This project was a collaboration between the Hungarian Heritage House and the HUN-REN Institute of Musicology, edited by János Fügedi and Dóra Pál-Kovács (Figure 1). A number of experts were involved in the publication, including Ákos Balogh, Zoltán Simon, and myself for the dance notations scores, while Réka Ferkóné Pávai prepared the graphics for the musical scores. (The names of the other contributors can be found in the acknowledgements.)

The work of György Martin is of paramount importance in Hungarian folk dance research. In his doctoral dissertation, also titled *The Hungarian Circle Dance and Its European Relations*, he comprehensively studied Hungarian circle dances from a formal, historical, and comparative perspective. Later, continuing his research, a summary work on circle dances was published with the same title in 1979, 10 years after he obtained his doctorate (Fügedi & Pál-Kovács, 2024, p. 8).

The book, a type monograph, describes the characteristics of the circle dances once found in the traditional dance culture of the Carpathian Basin, including the girls' circle dances with sung accompaniment, also known as *karikázó*. In the 1970s and 80s, the focus of dance research was the preparation and publication of monographs

* The first version of the Hungarian manuscript was received on 16. September 2025.

describing dance types (Fügedi & Pál-Kovács, 2024, p. 8). The publication of such texts is a time-consuming process, as it typically requires extensive source material to be collected and scientifically processed. In addition to the aforementioned volume, another type monograph is *A körverbunk története, típusai és rokonsága* (*The History, Types, and Relations of the Körverbunk*) by György Martin, Ernő Pesovár, and Ágoston Lányi, published in 1983. The most recent publication of this genre is *Régi magyar táncstílus: Az ugrós: Antológia / Old Hungarian Dance Style: The Ugrós: Anthology* (2013), edited by János Fügedi and András Vavrinecz, which contains descriptions and Labanotation for dances belonging to the *kanásztánc-ugrós* dance style. This latter work differs from the two previously mentioned volumes by Martin and his colleagues in that it does not include a general description of the dance type, its characteristics, or a structural presentation and analysis of the published dances.

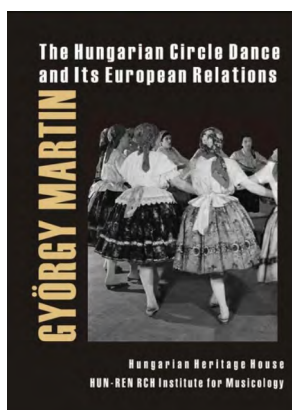


Figure 1. Book cover

The contents of the chapters in the two books on circle dances (the one published by Martin and the new English version) are essentially the same. The preface of the English edition outlines the research background and provides a brief history of the Hungarian edition. In the introduction of both books, readers can read descriptions of group dances, ways of holding hands, and the circle form; the history and spread of chain and circle dances; European circle dances with sung accompaniment; chain dances; the principles of analyzing and systematizing folk dances; and the classification and study of Hungarian circle dances. In the chapters mentioned above, the reader can learn about the general historical development and structural characteristics of circle dances. This is followed by a detailed description of the main and sub-dialects of Hungarian circle dances in the first main chapter, one of the most useful sections for the Hungarian folk dance community as it breaks down the circle dances by small regions and settlements, including the characteristics of the girls' circle dances with sung accompaniment (*karikázók*). The descriptions also cover dance phrases (the largest structural units of the dances), circular movements, ways of holding hands, danced motifs, and the sung melodies. The information found in these volumes makes it possible to stage authentic *karikázó* dances from a dance folklore perspective (Fügedi & Pál-Kovács, 2024; Martin, 1979).

The second main chapter contains additional valuable information, including descriptions of the European connections of Hungarian circle dances. The sub-chapters describe Northern Slavic circle dances (Ukrainian, Russian, Slovak), the Transylvanian Romanian circle dance, Balkan chain dances, and a historical overview of dance that presents the chain dances fashionable in 16th-century Western Europe and their parallel features with Hungarian circle dances (Fügedi & Pál-Kovács, 2024; Martin, 1979).

A difference between the Hungarian and English editions lies in the placement of the figures within the volume. In the original book, György Martin inserted the numbered melodies and Labanotation motifs for the circle dances into the body of the text. The data for the figures can be found in the indexes at the end of the volume. The advantage of this layout is that the text can be interpreted simultaneously with the corresponding figures. However, the disadvantage is that the large number of consecutive figures at times separate logically related parts of the text, sometimes pushing it pages apart and making the text difficult to read. To overcome this problem, the editors of the English edition chose to place all the musical scores and dance notations at the end of the volume, making the text continuous and easier to follow. The disadvantage of this change, however, is that readers must continuously flip to the back of the book to view the melodies and motifs corresponding to the text (Fügedi & Pál-Kovács, 2024; Martin, 1979).

Although the content of the two volumes is the same, it is striking that the new English edition is approximately 280 pages longer than the original. This is due to the re-edited scores, dance notations, tables, and maps included. Compared to the original book, all figures in the English edition are uniformly sized and larger than those in the previous edition, in line with modern publication trends. This solution greatly improves readability (Fügedi & Pál-Kovács, 2024; Martin, 1979).

The new edition is valuable for both the international and domestic dance communities. The English volume contributes to making Hungarian dance research internationally accessible. Furthermore, the re-edited figures facilitate the interpretation of the text, which is a significant positive aspect of the English edition, which can also be used as a supplement to the Hungarian text. This book was one of the last major projects of János Fügedi's life, and its high professional quality stands as a fitting conclusion to his scholarly work.

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