

**AN INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDE TO TEACHING KURTÁG'S *JÁTÉKOK***  
**VOLUME I TO BEGINNING AND INTERMEDIATE PIANO STUDENTS**

JEONGWOOK JANG, B.M., M.M.

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**APPROVED:**

Adam Wodnicki, Major Professor  
Elvia Puccinelli, Committee Member  
Joseph Banowetz, Committee Member  
Steven Harlos, Chair of the Division of  
Keyboard Studies  
Benjamin Brand, Director of Graduate  
Studies in the College  
Of Music  
James C. Scott, Dean of the College of  
Music  
Mark Wardell, Dean of the Toulouse  
Graduate School

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Pedagogical methods in piano instruction are constantly evolving. Traditional approaches for beginning students typically focus on teaching music theory and developing the skills necessary to read music. Some contemporary methods, however, are centered on training students to use their whole body while playing the instrument. These more recent methodologies allow students to bond with the piano in a more personal manner, as if they were playing a game with a big toy. One of the most representative works of this approach is the eight-volume collection *Játékok* (1973) by György Kurtág (b.1926).

Volume 1 of *Játékok* consists of short pieces featuring a new graphic notation devised by Kurtág himself. It also incorporates the use of unusual piano techniques, such as playing with the palm, fist, and forearm. The method also explores the use of the entire range of the instrument. Though the work is over 40 years old, *Játékok* is only infrequently used as a teaching tool for piano instructors in Hungary, and is unknown in the United States. This probably stems from the fact that it presents students and teachers with atypical musical elements such as unusual notation, use of an unlimited register, and pieces that feature varying degrees of difficulty within the same volume. This study provides a guideline which will assist instructors in implementing *Játékok's* Volume 1 effectively as a pedagogical tool by introducing instructor's teaching content, rearranging the original order of pieces in ascending level of difficulty, and providing a methodology to creatively teach the three most significant musical skills to be developed through Volume 1.

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## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Brief Biographical Information about György Kurtág

György Kurtág (b. 1926) is one of Hungary's most important living composers and pianists.<sup>1</sup> He studied piano, composition, and chamber music at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music from 1948 to 1955. He also studied composition in Paris with Darius Milhaud and Olivier Messiaen. During his stay in France, Kurtág came across some scores of Anton Webern's works and studied some Bartók pieces that had been banned in Hungary during the Stalinist regime.<sup>2</sup> These two composers would strongly influence Kurtág's development. In 1947, Kurtág married pianist Márta Kinsker, with whom he has performed many times. Their duo repertoire mainly consists of Kurtág's own transcriptions of J.S. Bach's works and pieces from *Játékok*. Kurtág worked as a resident composer for the Berlin Philharmonic from 1993 to 1995.

Kurtág's instrumental works show an affinity with the music of Béla Bartók. He has performed all of Bartók's works, and is widely regarded as a great interpreter of his music. One of the main characteristics of Kurtág's music is the recycling of material from previous works, mostly his own. The best example of this technique can be seen in his orchestral work *Stele*, Op. 33, which bears significant similarity to his piece for solo piano "*Mihály András Emlékére*," (In memoriam András Mihály) from the *Játékok*

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Walsh, "György Kurtág: An Outline Study (I)," in *Tempo. New Series*, no.140 (1982), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Grmela, "Exploiting Material to the Maximum: Pitch Structure and Recall in Kurtág's Instrumental Music." (PhD diss., State University of New York, 2004), 5-6.



Volume 6.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Kurtág's Compositional Output

In an interview with music critic Jeremy Eichler, Kurtág discussed his lifelong struggle to compose, mainly due to depression.<sup>4</sup> Despite this obstacle, Kurtág has composed in many genres, including orchestral, choral, vocal, chamber, and instrumental works after meeting psychologist Marianne Stein. His music generally displays prominent use of cimbalom, celesta, piano, harp, mandolin, and extensive percussion.<sup>5</sup> His most representative work is *Poslaniya pokoynoy R.V. Trusovoy*, Op. 17 ("Messages of the Late R.V. Trousova": 1976-1980) for soprano and chamber ensemble, for which he achieved worldwide recognition. Another well-known composition is *Stele* Op. 33, dedicated to Claudio Abbado and the Berlin Philharmonic. Kurtág has also written several piano works that include *Játékok*, *Suite* for four-hand piano, and *Szálkák*, ("Splinters"). Among these, the suite *Játékok*, ("Games") is arguably his most noteworthy work for piano. In this series of pieces, Kurtág presents his own graphic notation and employs clusters, and other contemporary elements. As mentioned earlier, Kurtág has also transcribed Bach's piano works and his own *Játékok* for piano duet.

## 1.3 Kurtág's Approach towards Piano Pedagogy

Throughout his career, Kurtág has been critical of traditional piano pedagogical methods. His main criticism has been that standard methods lack freedom to experiment, and are not conducive to stimulating children's playfulness and curiosity. Kurtág also

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<sup>3</sup> Mika Pelo, "An Analysis of the Third Movement of György Kurtág's *Stele*." (DMA diss., Columbia University, 2009), 56-57.

<sup>4</sup>Pelo, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Rachel Beckles Willson. "Kurtág, György." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed December 19, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/15695>

believes these methods decrease students' listening and the ability to develop expressive qualities. Because of his aversion towards these methods, Kurtág decided to compose piano works according to his own ideas; these are designed to supplant the elements he finds negative in traditional piano methods. According to Sylvia Grmela, Kurtág feels standard piano methods are tedious because 1) they mainly focus on playing at all times in the same register, and 2) students have to constantly think about fingering and rhythm.<sup>6</sup> Kurtág composed works that use a wide range of the keyboard. He also wanted to help performers become more attuned with their bodies, and to facilitate movement. He achieved this by writing numerous clusters to be played with the palm, fist, and forearm as well as using wide range. According to Valéria Szervánszky (b. 1947) and Gergely Szokolay, who studied piano and chamber music with Kurtág, he always pointed out the importance of listening and expressing emotion.<sup>7</sup> This is consistent with his compositional approach, as many of his piano pieces have as a primary purpose enhancement of students' listening and expression skills.

#### 1.4 *Játékok* Volume I

*Játékok* (1973) is comprised of eight volumes containing hundreds of short piano pieces. Volumes I, II, III, V, VI, and VII feature pieces for piano solo, while Volumes IV and VIII are for piano solo, piano duet, and for two pianos. The work originated in 1960, when Kurtág composed a few pieces for his son. Thirteen years later, Hungarian piano pedagogue Marianne Teöke suggested that Kurtág compose music for children. As a result, Kurtág wrote an additional nineteen pieces adding to those he wrote for his son.

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<sup>6</sup> Sylvia Grmela, "Exploiting Material to the Maximum: Pitch Structure and Recall in Kurtág's Instrumental Music." (PhD diss., State University of New York, 2004), 25.

<sup>7</sup> Gergely Szokolay, "Kurtág, as I Know Him", in *Gestes, fragments, timbres: La musique de György Kurtág en l'honneur de son 80e anniversaire*, ed. L'Harmattan (Paris: 2008), 39-40.

These were the starting points for the creation of *Játékok*. According to Rachel Beckles Willson, Kurtág wrote *Játékok* in order to foster children's playfulness, curiosity, and bravura at the keyboard.<sup>8</sup> In the first part of the supplement to *Játékok*, Kurtág himself stated that "a great deal of freedom and initiative from the performer"<sup>9</sup> are required to play these pieces properly.<sup>10</sup> As such, *Játékok* leads students to bond with the piano in a more personal manner, as if they were playing a game with a big toy.

Volume 1 of Kurtág's *Játékok* consists of short piano pieces featuring a new graphic notation devised by Kurtág himself. Some pieces, nonetheless, are written in standard musical notation, while others combine both. According to Kristina Junttu, *Játékok* is an invaluable piano method that provides students with a set of performing skills enabling them to use their whole body.<sup>11</sup> Several musicologists and piano pedagogues have conducted research on the importance of *Játékok*, noting its pedagogical value. Antonietta Loffredo identifies *Játékok* as a method that is useful in learning contemporary music. She focuses her research on the piece titled *Hommage à Tchaikovsky*, which appears towards the end of Volume 1.<sup>12</sup> In *Centre and Periphery, Roots and Exile*, Stefano Melis explores various aspects that describe how *Játékok* helps children understand musical form and its relation to body gestures.<sup>13</sup> He presents three

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<sup>8</sup> Rachel Beckles Wilson, *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music during the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 149.

<sup>9</sup> György Kurtág, *Játékok: Supplement to series for Piano Vol.1* (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1979), 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Kristina Junttu, "György Kurtág's *Játékok* Brings the Body to the Centre of Learning piano," *The Finnish Journal of Music Education* 11, no.1-2 (2008).

[http://www2.siba.fi/musiikkikasvatuslehti/userfiles/FJMEvol11nro1+2\\_sivut.pdf](http://www2.siba.fi/musiikkikasvatuslehti/userfiles/FJMEvol11nro1+2_sivut.pdf) (accessed August 21, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Loffredo, Antonietta. 2009. Contemporary Music in Piano Pedagogy. Paper presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference, Sydney, Australia. July 13-17.

<sup>13</sup> Stefano Melis, "György Kurtág's *Játékok*: A Voyage' into the Child's Musical Mind" in *Centre and Periphery, Roots and Exile: Interpreting the Music of István Anhalt, György Kurtág, and Sándor Veress*,

pieces from Volume I to illustrate the ways by which children recognize and react to musical images. He further examines the structures, musical figures, and rhythmic patterns of the three selected works. Andre Hajdu states that *Játékok* is a significant pedagogical tool that introduces children to contemporary sonorities. He also claims that *Játékok* encourages children to learn several sophisticated performing techniques that include hand crossing technique, playing overtones, and playing with palm, fist, and forearm.<sup>14</sup>

Most researchers and piano pedagogues have focused solely on researching *Játékok* from a kinesthetic perspective while providing brief guidelines and analyses of selected pieces. Even though many scholars have shown the significance and advantages gained by students who learn *Játékok*, no research has been conducted with regard to creating a systematic guideline aimed at successfully teaching the work. Though Kurtág provided teachers with a short four-page supplement that includes detailed information on the new notation and the unusual signs that appear in the score, some of the signs are difficult to understand and follow. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, most musicologists have focused on describing the character of selected pieces within the set, but none has fully addressed teaching the work.

Despite being written 40 years ago, *Játékok* is only infrequently used as a teaching tool in Hungary, and is practically unknown in the United States. This probably is due to the fact that it presents students and teachers with atypical musical elements. These include use of novel notation, use of an unlimited register, as well as pieces that feature varying degrees of difficulty within the same volume. According to Kurtág, the

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eds. Friedemann Sallis, Robin Elliot, and Kenneth Delong (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), 241-259.

<sup>14</sup> Andre Hajdu, "A Galaxy Called 'Mikrokosmos: A Composer's View,'" in *Tempo*. 62, no. 243 (2008), 27.

first volume is mainly designed for children. From a pedagogical standpoint this volume would be appropriate for both beginning and intermediate students.

Thus, given the potential significance and advantages of using *Játékok* as a pedagogical tool, the creation of a systematic guideline is essential for teachers who are not familiar with the collection or with teaching the techniques contained within its various pieces. Furthermore, this research will be valuable for teachers looking to explore a more varied repertoire for beginning and intermediate piano students.

## CHAPTER II

### NON-TRADITIONAL PEDAGOGICAL ELEMENTS IN *JÁTEKOK*'S VOLUME I

#### 2.1 Introducing Four Non-Traditional Elements

*Játékok* Volume I features four primary non-traditional musical elements. These constitute a serious challenge to teachers who are accustomed to working only with standard notation and traditional method books. These elements are: 1) an unusual, novel notation; 2) the use of a wide range of the keyboard that features the inclusion of various ledger lines; 3) the uncommon placement of notes; and 4) a wide gap between pieces that feature varying degrees of difficulty. Below, I provide a detailed guideline for four non-traditional elements.

#### 2.2 Kurtág's Graphic Notation

##### 2.2.1 Symbols for Clusters and Glissando

As previously noted, Kurtág uses his own graphic notation to portray different kinds of musical ideas. In addition to glissandi, he uses six different kinds of clusters: these are to be played with the palm, rotating palm, circling palm, forearm, fist, laid fist. In Volume 1 Kurtág frequently presents two kinds of clusters, as shown in Example 2.1: the large black and white notes are meant to be played with the palm, the long thick lines with the forearm.

Example 2.1 Kurtág *Játékok*. Palm exercise: Playing with palm and forearm

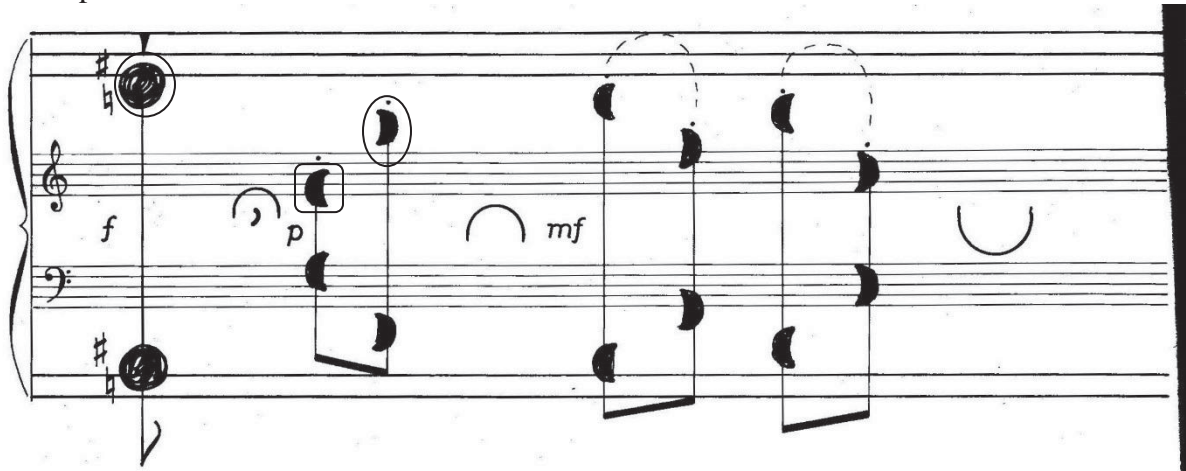
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The large black and white notes (mm. 1-8) require the performer to play palm clusters. Black notes are representative of shorter values, while white notes stand for longer values. The accidentals on the left side of the clusters indicate their pitch range. The long thick lines in the last measure ask the pianist to use forearms. Kurtág also employs two kinds of duration signs; these are located both at the top of palm clusters, and two kinds of pause signs in between palm and forearm clusters. The first of duration signs indicates a short duration, while the second one stands for a long one. The first pause sign with red arrow in measure 5 stands a long pause, and the second sign of measure 9 indicates short pause.

Example 2.2 features the use of palm clusters and rotating palm clusters. The first type of graphic notation indicates a palm cluster, while the second one asks the performer

to play with the two edges of the right hand palm from left to right by rotating the right forearm. The third graphic notation is needed to play with the same part of the right hand palm from right to left rotating the right forearm.

Example 2.2 Kurtág *Játékok*. Rotating palms (first line): Playing with palm and rotating palm



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An additional form of palm cluster, known as “circling palm,” is shown in Example 2.3. To play a circling palm cluster, the palm is placed on the white keys and then turns in circular motion in either clockwise or counter direction. Fingers should try to remain on the same black keys, which are shown by the black line and the # symbol. For the first group of four circling palm clusters which are in the treble clef part, fingers should be placed to begin on B#, and right palm on the white keys turns from E4 to C5 for the first circling palm cluster in the treble staff. For the second cluster of the first group, the right palm on the white keys turns from F4 to E5 while the fingers remain on B#.



Example 2.3 Kurtág *Játékok*. Sidling Palms (first line): Playing with circling palm

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Example 2.4 illustrates two different types of clusters, presented within a variety of leaps.

The graphic notation in the first circle indicates a fist cluster, while that of the second circle asks the performer to play with two laid fists. Kurtág suggests that the fist cluster notation should be played with the edge of the fist, while the laid fist, as the name indicates, should be played with the fist laid flat.

Example 2.4 Kurtág *Játékok*. The Young Boxer's Lighter Moments: Two types of fist cluster

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Example 2.5 is an example of Kurtág’s use of glissando, which is more familiar compared to the other kinds of clusters used. Kurtág uses three types of glissandos on black keys, on white keys, or a combination of black and white keys. He indicates a # sign for black keys, a natural sign for white keys, and both a sharp and natural sign for a combination of black and white keys. As shown in Example 2.5, Kurtág uses glissandos that employ the entire range of the keyboard and are played with both hands simultaneously.

Example 2.5 Kurtág *Játékok*. Hommage à Tchaikovsky, mm. 11-12: two types of glissandos

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### 2.2.2 Symbols for Note Duration, Rests and Pauses

Kurtág uses four unusual signs in Volume 1 of *Játékok* for note duration, rests and pauses. As shown in Example 2.6, Kurtág employs quarter and eighth rests that are larger in size than those found in a traditional musical score. Despite their size, these rests should simply be treated as normal-sized rests. It is important to note this because this explanation regarding rests is not mentioned in the supplement to *Játékok*.

Example 2.6 Kurtág *Játékok*. Jerking, mm. 1-5: bigger eighth and quarter rests

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Example 2.7 shows three kinds of pauses (very long, long, and short), and three kinds of rests (two rests of caesura value, with two modifications, and the rest of appoggiatura value). Kurtág does not make any distinction between the two fermatas, both indicated as very long.

Example 2.7 Kurtág *Játékok*. Supplement: Three kinds of pauses and four kinds of rests

- ◌̇ ◌̄ = very long (fermata)
- ◌̂ = long
- ◌̃ = short
- ⌋ = rest of caesura value and its modifications: ⌋̂ = longer, ⌋̃ = shorter,
- ⌋̄ = rest of appoggiatura value

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The unusual signs for duration, which appear above each note, are listed in Example 2.8. The durations of these signs correspond exactly with those of pause signs. However, duration signs function like a fermata, while pause signs serve as rests between

notes.

Example 2.8 Kurtág *Játékok*. Supplement: Three kinds of duration signs

- ⊙ = very long prolongation
- ⊖ = long prolongation
- ⊔ = shortened

1b) The range of sound values, in decreasing order:

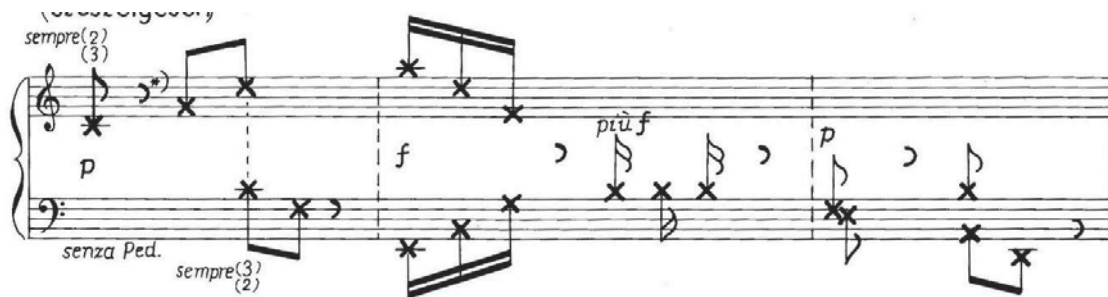


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### 2.2.3 Symbols for Single Notes and Overtones

The third category of unusual signs refers to groups of single notes and overtones. The excerpt in Example 2.9 is comprised only of single notes. Kurtág uses asterisk in place of the usual note head to indicate approximate rather than specific pitches.

Example 2.9 Kurtág *Játékok*. Dot-strumming, mm. 1-3: Unusual sign for single notes



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A sign to produce an overtone is shown in Example 2.10. The diamond-like figures indicate keys to be silently depressed to produce overtone. The notes written in standard notation should be played with a short and strong sound. This particular piece prolongs a

middle D as an overtone by playing D's in different registers.

Example 2.10 Kurtág *Játékok*. Playing overtones

The musical score for Example 2.10, Kurtág *Játékok*, is for piano. It consists of two staves. The right hand (treble clef) plays a series of chords, with dynamic markings of *f* and *mf*. The left hand (bass clef) plays single notes, with dynamic markings of *f* and *mf*. There are several phrasing marks, including a large diamond shape and several inverted triangles. The score is labeled 17a) and includes a copyright notice for Editio Musica Budapest.

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## 2.2.4 Symbols for Phrasing Marks

A fourth type of unusual signs involves phrasing marks, as shown in Example 2.11. The first four dotted lines indicate the units that belong together.

Example 2.11 Kurtág *Játékok*. Melancholic Overtone: Unusual signs for phrasing

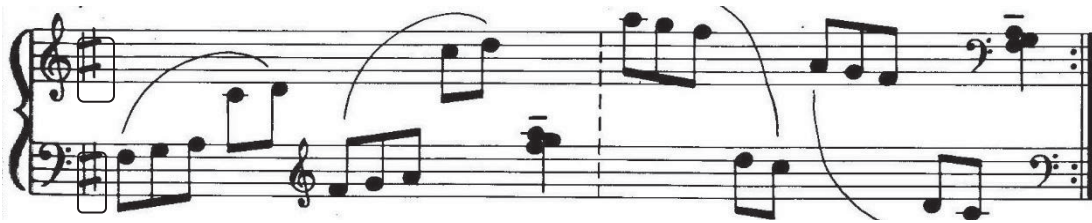
The musical score for Example 2.11, Kurtág *Játékok*, is for piano. It consists of two staves. The right hand (treble clef) plays a series of chords, with dynamic markings of *mf* and *rinf*. The left hand (bass clef) plays single notes, with dynamic markings of *mp*, *mf*, *pppp*, and *pp secco*. There are several phrasing marks, including a large diamond shape and several inverted triangles. The score is labeled 17a) and includes a copyright notice for Editio Musica Budapest.

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### 2.3 Symbols for Accidentals and Range

A second category of unusual signs involve accidental signs, of which there are four types: normal accidentals, large accidentals (with different meanings), those serving to show range on the keyboard, and those for black keys, white keys, or a combination of both. Kurtág frequently uses larger sharps, flats, and naturals; these indicate that all notes in the staff should be treated as sharps, flats, or naturals.<sup>15</sup> In Example 2.12, for instance, all notes should be played as sharps.

Example 2.12 Kurtág *Játékok*. Large size sharp



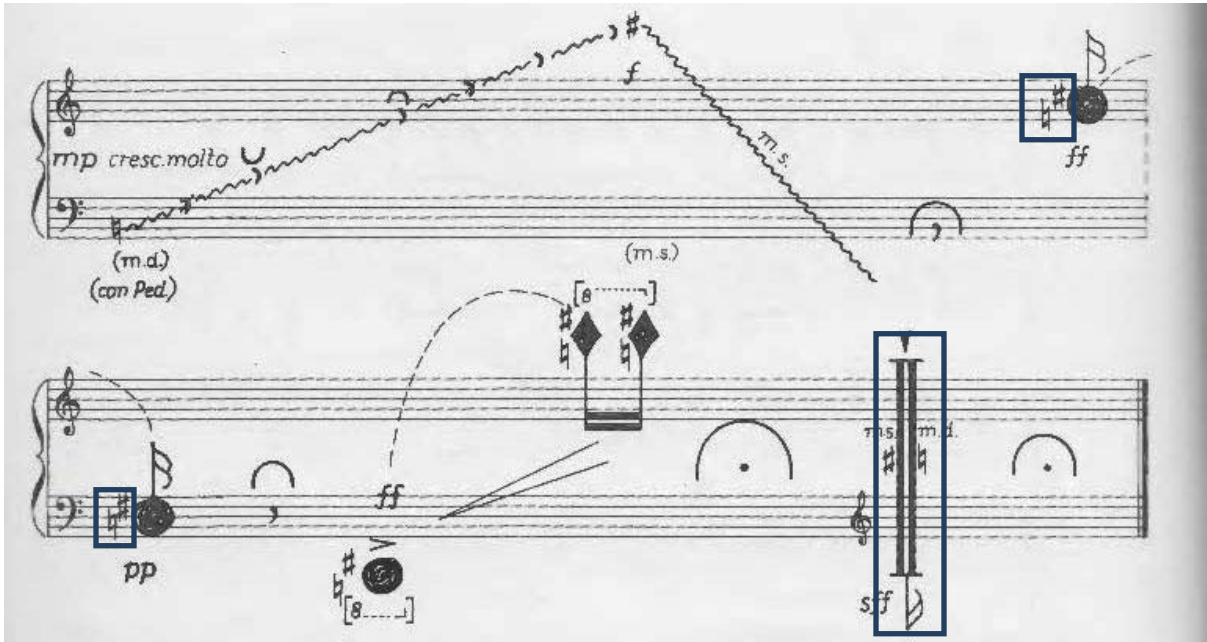
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In Example 2.13, the accidentals being used have two different meanings. The first one refers to the range of keyboard, while the second one instructs the performer to play black or white keys. The accidentals before the first palm cluster shown in the first line of the example 2.13 is indicative of the range on the keyboard. This could be potentially confusing, and it should be noted once again that sharp and natural symbols could refer to either the application of accidentals, or to an instruction regarding the range of the keyboard. The range of the first palm cluster extends from F4 to C#5. The next palm cluster (found in the second line) denotes accidentals that range from C3 to F#3. The last forearm clusters of the last line have both a sharp and natural signs. The left side

<sup>15</sup> György Kurtág, Supplement to *Játékok*, p. 10

forearm cluster instructs the performer to play the black keys with the left forearm, while the right side cluster should be played with the right forearm on white keys.


Example 2.13 Kurtág *Játékok*. Quarrelling: Two kinds of accidentals



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The last type of accidental is shown in Example 2.14, and illustrates a chromatic range. According to the supplement to *Játékok*, the first box indicates a chromatic range. However, Kurtág does not specify the difference between this indication and the one appearing in the second box. It is unclear whether the second sign has the same meaning, or a different one. The second sign would seem to call for a combination of white and black keys.

Example 2.14 Kurtág *Játékok*. Supplement: Accidentals for chromatic range<sup>16</sup>



The image shows two musical staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains two groups of notes, each with a box above it containing two sharps (F# and C#). The first group is on the staff, and the second group is on the line above the staff. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains two groups of notes, each with a box above it containing two sharps (F# and C#). The first group is on the staff, and the second group is on the line above the staff.

= the same with chromatic range

= clusters consisting of soundlessly depressed keys

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### 2.3.3 Further Clarification of the Supplement Regarding Notation of High and Low Notes

While Kurtág provided a supplement to the work where he addresses some of the complexities found in the score, a series of more detailed guidelines allow pianists to better understand how to adequately study and interpret the work. Kurtág's supplementary information is sometimes confusing, and a clearer explanation is necessary for teachers who are approaching the work for the first time.

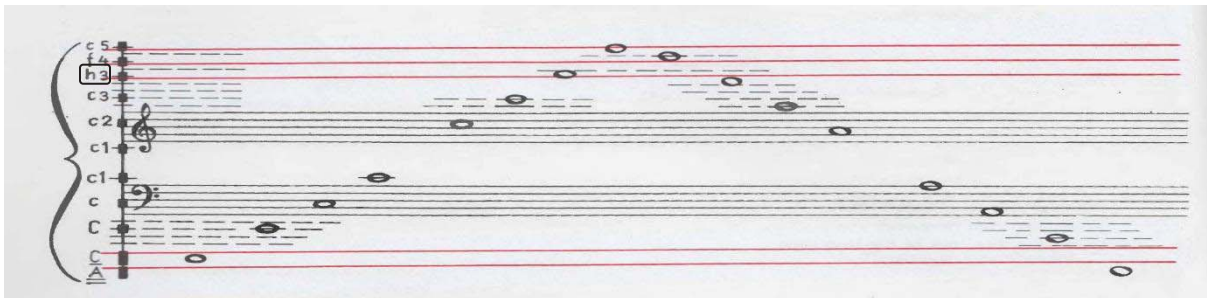
As mentioned earlier, Kurtág explores a wide range of the keyboard; he avoids using higher and lower *ottava* signs by providing three additional lines above the treble staff and two below the bass staff. In the supplement to the work, the three additional lines in the high register are indicated as h3, f4, and c5, while the two additional lines in the low register are labeled as C and A. Example 2.15 shows two groups of notes: the first, shown in ascending direction, consists of eight C's; the second one shows eight A's in descending order. The chart also includes a pitch reference column on the left side that show the lowest A in the piano, as well as ground C, low C, bass C, middle C, treble C, high C, h3, f4, and C5.

<sup>16</sup> György Kurtág. Supplement to *Játékok*, p. 11



The main reason the chart is confusing is that the side note names h3 and f4, which belong to the three additional lines above the staff, do not match with the notes C or A in the high register. This could be potentially unclear to teachers who are using the chart as a reference to clarify the range of notes in the work. Therefore, a useful improvement is to match note names with the actual notes in the chart, as shown in Example 2.16. In addition, a short explanation regarding the side note h3 would be helpful for teachers: the note on the reference column h3 refers to B natural 3 in the nomenclature.

Example 2.15 Kurtág *Játékok*. Tabelle Chart: Additional lines above and below the staff



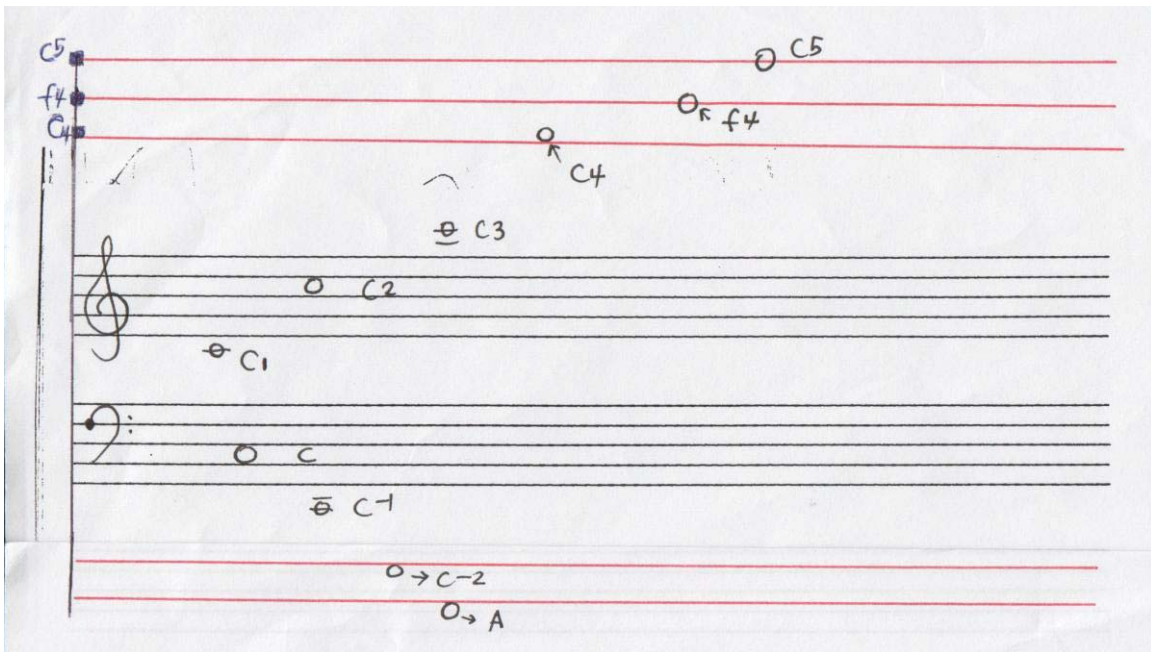
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Another suggestion is renaming all the C's that appear in the chart, namely those from ground C to high C (Example 2.16). For some unspecified reason, Kurtág used the term "C" three times while referring to three different notes in the low register, which does not seem ideal from a pedagogical viewpoint. The first C represents C3, the second one C2, and the last one C1, as labeled under the American Standard Pitch Notation system. I also suggest, for clarification purposes, that the term "low C" be replaced with "C-1" and ground C be replaced with "C-2".

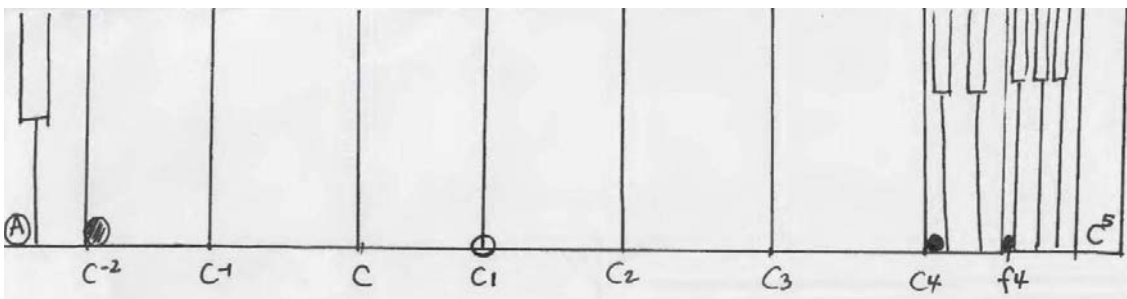
In Example 2.16, I provide a guideline that indicates the exact notes that are represented by each additional line. Furthermore, the keyboard representation drawn in example 2.16 (b) indicates all C's in the keyboard, in addition to f4, and the lowest A. The figuration clearly shows the ranges of the five additional lines; the three additional high lines refer to the highest octave, while the two additional low lines range from C1 to A1.

Example 2.16 Guideline for the additional lines above and below the staff

a)



b) Keyboard reference

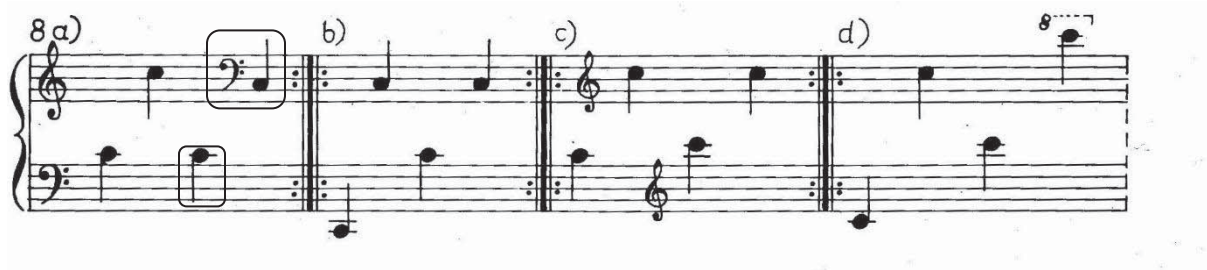


## 2.4 Non-Traditional Placement of Notes

The third non-traditional element in *Játékok* involves various kinds of unusual placements of notes. To begin with, Kurtág places higher notes in the bottom staff, which is extremely uncommon in beginning pedagogical literature given the fact that this reverses the traditional order of having the bass clef in the lower staff and the treble clef in the upper one (Example 2.17).

As seen in Example 2.17, the last note of the first measure, C3, is on the top staff rather than the bottom staff. The third note of the second measure, C4, is a higher note than the previous C3, although this note is in the bottom staff. This piece can be used as a hand crossing exercise.

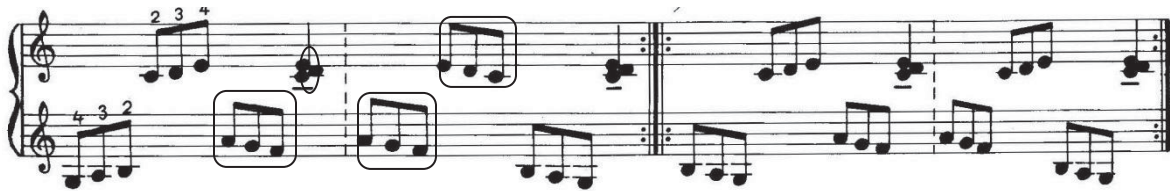
Example 2.17 Kurtág *Játékok*. Higher notes in the bass staff and lower notes in the treble staff



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Kurtág also uses the same clef in both hands, as shown in Example 2.18. Most traditional method books also feature pieces with two treble or two bass clef signs, but what is unusual in this case is that higher notes have been placed in the bottom staff. Moreover, traditional piano book usually employ the treble clef in only one staff. This example also shows the group of higher notes has been placed on the bottom staff, rather than in the top staff.

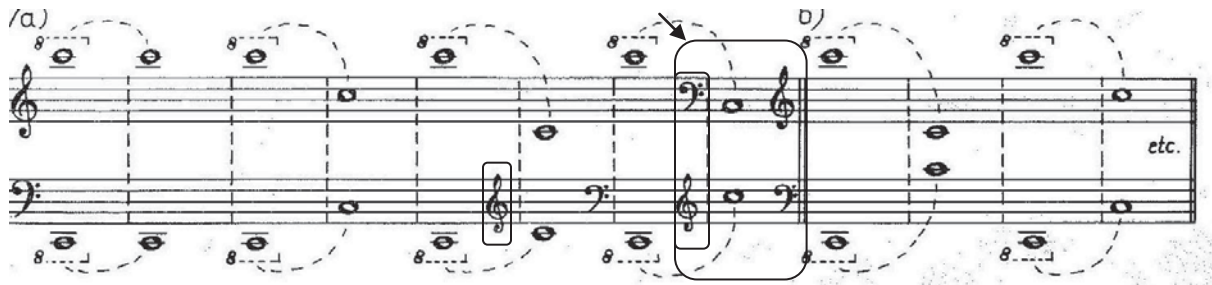
Example 2.18 Kurtág *Játékok*. Dividing notes in the same clef sign into two different staves



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Kurtág changes the normal placement of notes by positioning bass clef notes in the treble clef, two bass clef notes in the grand staff, and treble clef notes in the bass clef. As shown in Example 2.19, he set the treble clef note in the bass staff in measure 6, and reverses the placement of clefs in measure 8. The clef signs are changed four times in one short exercise.

Example 2.19 Kurtág *Játékok*. Non-Traditional placement of notes



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A final example that illustrates Kurtág's non-traditional placement of notes involves repeated notes in two different staves (Example 2.20). Most piano pedagogical method books contain just one staff to write repeated notes, but Kurtág positioned these in two staves. Kurtág suggested playing with the fifth fingers of both hands, or even with

the side of the fifth fingers.<sup>17</sup>

Example 2.20 Kurtág *Játékok*. Repeated notes placed in two staves

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Despite the difficult aspect of reading Kurtág's notation properly, having an unusual placement of notes stimulates students' brain and fosters their creativity. When Kurtág described his motivation to compose *Játékok*, he spoke of playing the piano with freedom and without limitations, in addition to stimulating students' brain (e.g., improvement of thinking ability) and physical activity (e.g., using arms and hand crossing) with game-like elements.

## 2.5 Gap in Difficulty Levels

The last non-traditional element addressed in this study is the placement of both beginning and more advanced pieces within the first volume. Example 2.21 shows a piece that is too demanding for beginners. This piece has a variety of difficult elements that are out of reach for beginning students: numerous accidentals, playing up to five-note clusters, and a constant change in hand placement. Usually, method books gradually increase the difficulty as one moves along. In this case, however, this piece is on the sixth

<sup>17</sup> György Kurtág, *Játékok: Series for Piano vol. 1* (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1979), VI B.

page of the exercise part of volume 1 rather than in the last part of the work.

Example 2.21. Kurtág *Játékok*. 12 c) to 13 d) :Difficult piece for beginning students

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Another example of a piece that has difficult elements is shown in Example 2.22.

This short piece has five sharps, but these are placed in non-traditional order.

Furthermore, a piece with five sharps in the key signature would not appear in a traditional method book for beginners. This kind of difficult element could also be confusing to teachers, and would also pose concerns for students who have already learned the normal order of sharps. In addition, this piece has free meter, and Kurtág did not follow same key signature in the bass clef part compared to the treble clef part.

Example 2.22 Kurtág *Játékok*. Flowers We Are (3): Difficult piece with five sharps

The musical score is presented on a grand staff with two staves. The upper staff uses a treble clef and the lower staff uses a bass clef. The key signature consists of five sharps: F#, C#, G#, D#, and A#. The tempo/mood is marked 'dolce'. The piece concludes with a 'Ped. al fine' instruction. The score is attributed to '(w. K. darabja)'.

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## CHAPTER III

### PREPARING TO TEACH *JÁTÉKOK*'S VOLUME I

#### 3.1 Preparatory study for teacher

Traditional method books introduce standard musical notation through a step-by-step process. The first level in a traditional method book usually introduces basic musical elements such as the staff, guide notes, rhythmic values, registers and accidentals. This is geared towards students who have never learned piano before. A book like this is obviously designed for beginners, not intermediate students.

*Játékok*'s Volume 1, differs in its approach: it does not include information on basic musical elements, and consists of pieces for both beginning and intermediate students many of which feature unusual musical elements. Because of this, preparatory study to introduce these pieces to for both groups of students is necessary.

The contents of *Játékok*'s Volume 1 can be divided into two categories: 1) works that are written in standard musical notation and 2) works that are written in Kurtág's own graphic notation. The table below divides the content to be taught through *Játékok* based a student's knowledge of musical notation.



Table 3.1 Instructor's Categorization of Teaching Content for Two Groups of Students

<p>Concepts to be taught</p> <p>Two Groups of students</p>	<p>Novel notation</p>	<p>Traditional Standard Musical Notation To be taught</p>
<p>Students who never studied piano</p>	<p>The concept of high and low register of notes with body movement;                      Teaching normal staff and additional five lines;                      Introducing new graphic notation;                      Black and White keys for #, b , and natural signs;                      Three kinds of rests; m.s. and m.d;                      Dynamics- <i>pppp</i>, <i>ppp</i>, <i>pp</i>, <i>p</i>, <i>mp</i>, <i>mf</i>, <i>f</i>, <i>ff</i>, <i>sff</i>, <i>fff</i>, etc;                      Ossia</p>	<p>Teaching all C's- from the lowest C to C4;                      Explaining octaves;                      Diatonic scales;                      Accidentals- #, b , natural sign;                      The concept of register- from low C to C3;                      The concept of interval- 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>;                      Wide leaps;                      Variety placements of notes: bass clef notes in the treble clef part, treble clef notes in the bottom</p>
<p>Students who know how to read standard musical notation</p>	<p>Teaching ranges of additional five lines;                      Introducing new graphic notation, three new rests; m.s. and m.d;                      Dynamics- <i>pppp</i>, <i>ppp</i>, <i>fff</i>;                      Ossia</p>	<p>Drawing family C's except for bass C, C1, C2, and C3;                      The concept of register- from low part which is lower than low C to high part that is higher than C3;                      Variety placement of notes;                      Diatonic scales;                      Interval playing with accidentals;                      Wide leaps;                      Chord playing</p>

### 3.2 Rearrangement of pieces in three levels

*Játékok* Volume 1 features beginning through advanced intermediate pieces. The tables below rearrange the pieces into three levels of progressive difficulty. Table 3.2 categorizes works in *Játékok* Volume 1 based on the use of clusters and glissando, further dividing them into five different sub-categories: glissando, forearms, palm, fist, and overtones.

Table 3.2 Rearrangement of Pieces Based on Student's Level and on Use of Clusters and Glissando: Subdivided into Three Levels and Five Categories<sup>18</sup>

Cluster type Level	Glissando	Forearms	Palm	Fist	Overtones
Level I	II-A, p.1-A	II-B, IV-A	III-A, IV-A p.3-A	VII-A	
Level II	p.4-A, VII-A, p.8-A, p.10-A p.12-A, p.19-A, p.16- A	p.4-A, p.16-A p.19-A	VI-A, p.2-A p.5-A, p.8-A p.9-A, p.12-A p.13-A, p.14-A, p.15-A, p.17-A, p.20-A, p.22-L,R	p.11-A p.19-A	p.8-A,B p.14-B p.19-A
Level III	p.11-A p.21-L,R p.25-L,R	p.6-A, p.10-A p.11-A, p.21-L,R p.20-A	VIII-A p.6-A, p.10-A p.11-A, p.16-A,B p.18-A p.19-A p.21-L,R p.23-L,R		IX-A,B p.16-B

<sup>18</sup> Every piece in *Játékok's* Volume 1 is preceded by preparatory exercise. Both pieces and exercises are labeled with the same page number, except that exercises are identified with pages headed in Roman numerals while pieces use Arabic numbers. Kurtág also indicated "A" for left side pages and "B" for right side pages. Kurtág eliminated the letters "A" and "B" from pgs. 21-24, so I substituted these for "L" (left side) and "R" (right side) for these pages.

Table 3.3 categorizes pieces that employ a standard musical notation. In this case, these have been further organized by subdividing them by seven musical elements: Playing various C's, diatonic scales, repeated patterns, interval playing, chords, chromatic scales, and register use.

Table 3.3 Rearrangement of Pieces that Employ a Standard Musical Notation

Normal Notation Level	Playing various C's & wide ranges	Diatonic Scales	Repeated Notes & patterns	Interval	Chord	Chromatic Scales	Various registers
Level I	IV-B(8a) p.5-B	V-B(9a) VII-B	p.6-B				
Level II	III-B, IV-B(6,7a), p.1-B, p.8-B, p.2-B, p.3-B, p.4-B, p.9-B, p.17-B, p.19-B	V-B (10a, 11a, 12) p.12-B	VI-B VII-B p.8-B p.13-B p.9-B p.18-B p.20-B	VIII-B (Fifth) p.5-B p.10-B p.11-B p.14-B p.15-B p.19-B	p.8-B p.10-B	p.12-B p.20-B	IV-B V-B,A p.18-B p.19-B
Level III	p.24-L,R	V-A p.24-L		p.17-B			p.24-L,R

## CHAPTER IV

### A METHODOLOGY FOR DEVELOPING SELECTED MUSICAL SKILLS IN VOLUME I OF *JÁTÉKOK*

#### 4.1 Introduction

Three primary musical skills that students will foster through the study of *Játékok* Volume I are: 1) enhancing their listening skills 2) expressing their emotions, and 3) developing improvisational techniques. This chapter will present a variety of teaching methods and activities for use with selected pieces from Kurtág's *Játékok* Volume I. The teaching methods and activities in this chapter are aimed at stimulating students' creativity. Suggested methods and activities below are based on ideas of Kurtág's pupils Szervánszky and Szokolay, as well as on Dalcroze's method.

According to Szervánszky and Szokolay, during his lessons Kurtág specifically emphasized the importance of listening and expressing emotions. Though Kurtág does not specifically address three aforementioned skills in the supplement to *Játékok*, his music (particularly his use of a novel, graphic notation) does lead teachers to reflect about the impact of these pieces on their students.

Through my study of these pieces, I find that activities that encourage students to move their whole bodies based on the movement and rhythm of clusters help the students to conceptualize the piece. Below, I suggest activities based on Dalcroze's method<sup>19</sup> particularly for developing listening skills and expressing emotions. I propose certain activities that encourage students to move their bodies based on the movement and

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<sup>19</sup> Dalcroze's method is also known as Dalcroze Eurhythmics, which is an approach that attempts to teach musical concepts through body movement. Dalcroze thought that music is closely related to the senses of movement and rhythm, and proved that his method is effective in developing listening, memorizing, imagining, and fostering creativity.

rhythm of clusters.

## 4.2 Listening

According to Szervánszky, Kurtág regarded the students' ability to improve their listening skills as being extremely important.<sup>20</sup> In an article titled "*About the Játékok-Games*," Szervánszky proposes a teaching method that is designed to enhance listening skills by creating specific characterizations for each type of cluster used by Kurtág. She suggests that teachers allow students to listen to the sounds between the clusters, in a way that they are later able to express their own emotions of each piece's character.<sup>21</sup> In addition, I will suggest a teaching method that is related to Kurtág's phrasing.

Teaching students how to enhance their listening skills is closely related to creating a story to tell for each phrase. For example, the teacher plays an excerpt of example 4.1 and teaches three short phrases. The teacher then allows the student to make up student's own story, asking him/her to write three sentences (one for each phrase); these should be based on the mood of each section. Once the process has been completed, the teacher instructs the student to play the excerpt with his/her story in mind. This includes imagining the feeling student conceived for every phrase and listening carefully to the sound that is sustained between clusters and rests. In addition, I suggest that this activity includes body gestures based on the movement for each graphic notation. Gestures should be practiced as the students speak their respective sentences out loud. This teaching method is an adaptation of Dalcroze's method. For example, the teacher lets the student stand up when playing notes in a high register. Similarly, the student sits down when playing in the low register. Consequently, the teacher instructs the student to

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<sup>20</sup> Valéria Szervánszky, "*About the Játékok-Games*," in *Gestes, Fragments, Timbres: La Musique de György Kurtág en L'honneur de Son 80e Anniversaire*, ed. L'Harmattan (Paris: 2008), 178.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

bend his/her waist forward when playing notes in a medium register.

Example 4.1 Kurtág *Játékok*. Flowers We Are, Frail Flowers

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The music is written in a minimalist style with several clusters of notes. The first cluster is enclosed in a box and has the instruction 'pppp (alig érintve a billenlyűket)\*'. Below the staves, there are three more clusters, each also enclosed in a box. The first cluster is in the treble clef, the second is in the bass clef, and the third is in the treble clef. The score is marked '(con Ped.)' and includes the German and English translations: '(die Tasten kaum berührend)' and '(hardly touching the keys)'. The score is set against a background of red horizontal lines.

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A musical example for a group activity is shown below in Example 4.2. This music comprises palm clusters, forearm clusters, and normal notations. For this activity, a minimum of four students and a maximum of six students are required. For a situation where four students are present, the teacher should divide them into two teams, the “high cluster team” and the “low cluster team”. The students will act with body movement, and the teacher will also participate in this activity by playing standard notations that occur between palm clusters and forearm cluster.

The first group of high palm clusters, box number 1 in example 4.2, is for the first team (or “high cluster team”). Two students in the team will tap on the floor with their feet, following a “long-short-long” pattern based on the note values. One of the students taps with his feet the higher cluster (which is the short second cluster of the first box), while another taps the lower two clusters (corresponding to the first and third clusters in the same register). The second team, identified as the “low cluster team”, will represent the next group of low palm clusters which is in box number 2 in example 4.2. One

student is assigned the higher cluster of box number 2 the low register, while another student is assigned the two lower clusters of that same part as he/she taps shortly based on the short note value. The third group of clusters needs two teams, a high cluster team and a low cluster team. Two students of high cluster team will tap their feet for the high cluster, while two students of the low cluster team will tap them for the low cluster. After playing the music written in standard notation in box number 4 on the piano, the teacher asks students to lie down on the floor in order to act out forearm clusters for the fifth box. The high cluster team lies down together for the left forearm cluster, which has a sharp sign, and the low cluster team lies down together for the right cluster, which has a natural sign. After this, the teacher will play the G#6 and F#2 that are written in standard notation in box number 6. The seventh box indicates that students should play two palm clusters at the same time. The students of the high cluster team tap on the floor at the same time the first two palm clusters, and then the students of the low cluster team also tap together on the floor the next two palm clusters. The two teams need to apply the same movement for the rest of the palm clusters. In the last part of the piece, the teacher plays an F5 with the right hand and an E3 with left hand seven times.

Example 4.2 Kurtág *Játékok*. Trippelnd Toddling.

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Trippelnd Toddling" from Kurtág's *Játékok*. The score is presented in three systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and includes fingerings and hand positions.

- System 1:** Measures 1-4. Measure 1 features a forte (*f*) dynamic with a slur over two notes. Measure 2 has a forte (*f*) dynamic. Measure 3 includes a triplet of notes. Measure 4 is marked *meno f* and contains a series of sixteenth notes.
- System 2:** Measures 5-7. Measure 5 is marked *ff*. Measure 6 is marked *mp*. Measure 7 is marked *pp*. The score shows complex hand positions with slurs and ties across the grand staff.
- System 3:** Measures 8-9. Measure 8 is marked *mf*. The score shows a continuation of the hand positions from the previous system.

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### 4.3 Expressing Emotions

The second significant musical skill through the teaching and study of Kurtág's work is developing the ability to express emotions, which can be taught by using the leaps that occur either between clusters or between two notes (Example 4.3). Szokolay stated that Kurtág often emphasized the importance of sincerity and originality of expression, and suggested Szokolay to practice leaps by gradually extending their distance while keeping a singing quality.<sup>22</sup> Based on Szokolay's statement, it is conjectural that Kurtág composed certain pieces with various leaps in order to enhance expression skills.

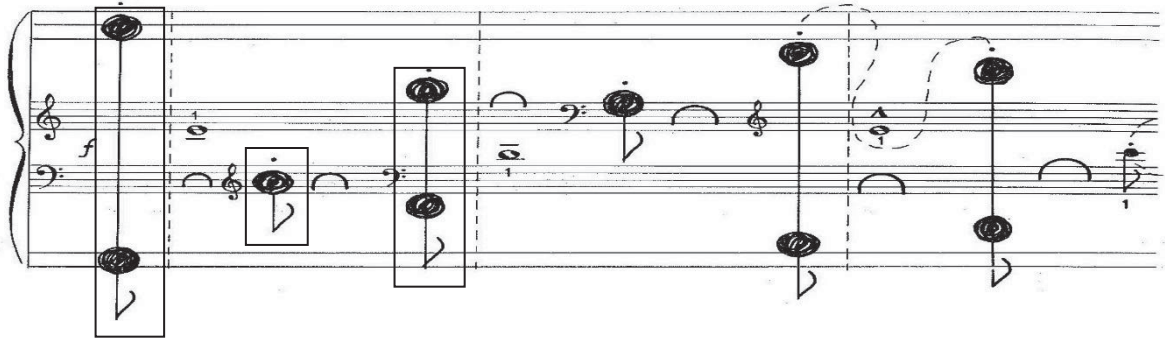
In order to teach the second skill, the instructor may present students with the following list of emotions and asks them to choose one or more: happy, angry, sad, scared, funny, nervous, and tired. In the first part of the process, the teacher gives the student time to figure out how many close or wide leaps occur in the music. Afterwards, the teacher asks the student to choose a certain emotion for each leap. It is important for the teacher to point out that students should imagine specific situations that generate feelings. In addition, teachers can have a group activity with a minimum of two and maximum of ten students that includes body gestures and singing based on the movement of each leap; gestures should be practiced following the distance in each leap. For example, the teacher instructs two students to choose an emotion and the way they want to express it. One student decides to sing a high register part on the right side of the floor, expressing the emotion that he/she chooses. The other student chooses to sing in a low register on the left side of the floor and chooses an emotion. For the first box of Example 4.3, two

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<sup>22</sup> Gergely Szokolay, "Kurtág, as I Know Him", in *Gestes, Fragments, Timbres: La Musique de György Kurtág en L'honneur de Son 80e Anniversaire*, ed. L'Harmattan (Paris: 2008), 39-40.

students are in their places, one on the right and one on the left, and they follow the distance as written in the music, as the teacher plays an E4. Upon hearing this note, the student singing in a high register moves slightly to the left side and sings a little bit lower than the first time for the second box. Following the third box of clusters shown in Example 4.3, both students move from their place to the right side, and so on. In the same way, teachers can do this activity with ten students by dividing them into two teams of five. This group activity stimulates students' cognitive skills as these relate to the leaps between succeeding clusters. The exercise also increases a student's interest in music by encouraging body movement and expression of emotions through singing.

Example 4.3 Kurtág *Játékok*. Sound and Sound-ball, mm. 1-4: Wide leaps and close leaps between clusters



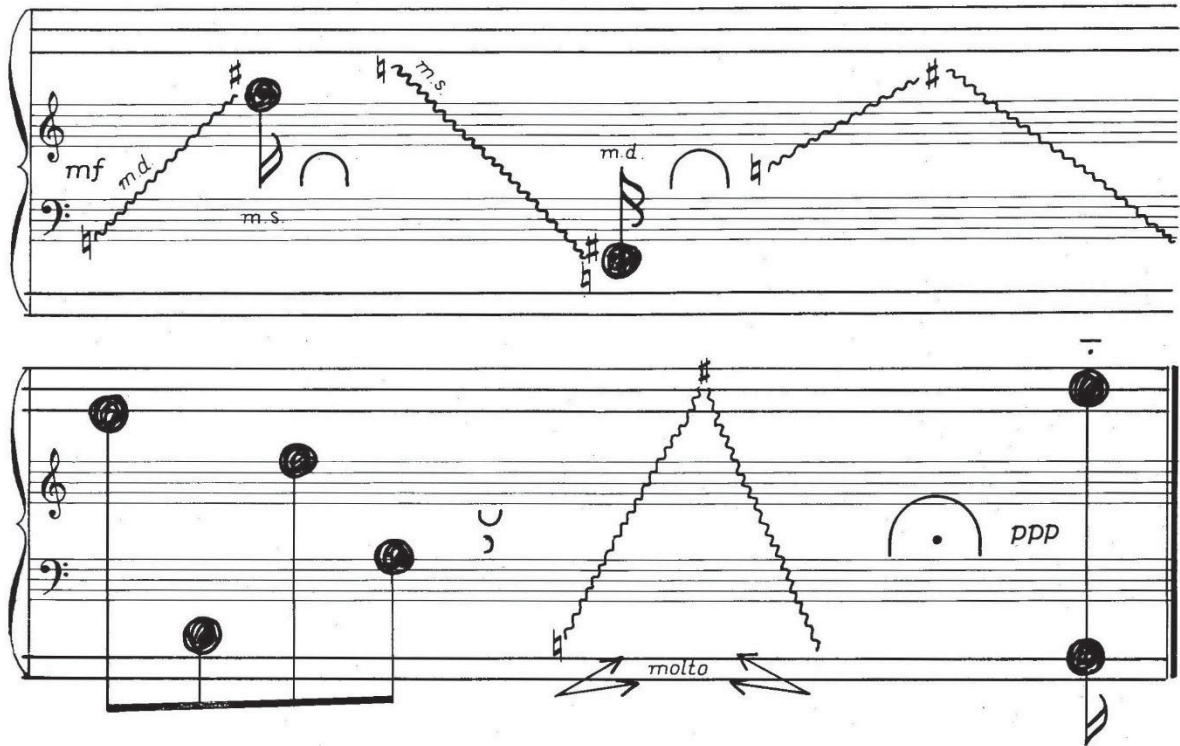
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Another good example of expressing emotions is shown below in Example 4.4. This piece has wide leaps between clusters, and specifically includes two kinds of ascending and descending glissandos.

Teachers can use the music in this excerpt to further reinforce the importance of both body movement and singing. This activity can be performed with one or two students. I suggest the teacher allows students to run to represent glissandos. For

ascending glissandos, students should run to the right side of the floor while gradually singing higher sounds. Consequently, students should run to the left side and sing gradually lower sounds while representing descending glissandos. For palm clusters, a student should run to the right side, then hop quickly with both feet and stand in an upright position. For the subsequent descending glissando, students should run to the left side of the floor. Afterwards, for the second palm cluster, a student should step shortly while bending her/his waist forward. Then, for the ascending glissando and crescendo marking, students run and sing gradually louder. The exact opposite is done for the descending glissando and decrescendo in the last line. The last two palm clusters, also in the last line, require two people for their proper execution. A student steps on the ground in the right side while the teacher steps in the left side, both far apart from each other to accurately reflect the musical writing. This activity enhances students' cognitive skills of rhythmic values, glissando playing, and attention to dynamics. Furthermore, the activity reflects Kurtág's methodology in terms of developing musical communication through physical movement.

Example 4.4 Kurtág *Játékok*. Let's be Silly.



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#### 4.4 Improvisation

The third skill fosters the development of improvisation techniques based on Kurtág's use of clusters. Beckles Wilson, the author of *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music During the Cold War*, states that *Játékok's* Volume I encourages improvisation.<sup>23</sup> According to her assessment of the work, the lack of bar lines gives performers the opportunity to express in open form the relationship between one cluster to the next cluster. This means that Kurtág gives performers the possibility to freely improvise by

<sup>23</sup> Rachel Beckles Wilson, *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music During the Cold War*. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 149.

using other clusters in addition to those that were originally written. In addition, Kurtág also encourages teachers to promote the use of creative ideas that can lead students to compose, as shown in Example 4.5. A six-year-old child named Krisztina Takács composed the piece in Example 4.5, titled “The Bunny and the Fox”. The composition uses palm and circling palm clusters with various dynamic markings, rests, and pauses. It constitutes a wonderful example of what students can achieve given the proper guidance.

Example 4.5 Kurtág Játékok. The Bunny and the Fox, composed by Krisztina Takács

Takács Krisztina 6 éves korában írta

*Das Häschen und der Fuchs*  
Von der 6-jährigen Krisztina Takács komponiert

*The Bunny and the Fox*  
Composed by Krisztina Takács aged 6.

*Lopakodik a róka, a tisztábra érve  
körülnéz.*  
*Der Fuchs schleicht sich heran, auf der  
Lichtung blickt er sich um.*  
The creeping fox, arriving at the glade,  
looks around.

*Szalad a nyuszó is a tisztás felé. Körülnéz.*  
*Auch das Häschen läuft zur Lichtung. Es blickt sich um.*  
The Bunny also runs toward the glade. He looks  
around.

*A róka üldözi a nyuszót.*  
*Der Fuchs verfolgt das Häschen.*  
The fox pursues the Bunny.

*A vadász elkergeti a rókát és ... lö!*  
*Der Jäger vertreibt den Fuchs und ... schießt!*  
The hunter chases off the fox and... shoots!

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As mentioned earlier in the first chapter, students are to use their palm, fist and forearms when playing clusters. In addition, students also explore the keyboard by doing glissandos and playing with a variety of dynamics. In terms of the methodology regarding improvisation, I have devised two activities. The first intended to be taught one student at a time, and the second designed for a group of four to six students.

In the first activity, the teacher allows the student to explore playing clusters that have been previously learned. Students can think of specific emotions based on what they have written in their diaries, read in fairytales, or heard on specific recordings. The teacher should ask the student to write four to eight sentences, and decide the direction of clusters. The teacher should then encourage the student to choose dynamics to use while playing. It is essential to show some examples in terms of the story contents as a template of this activity before the student actually plays the piece.

The method for the group activity is basically the same as the one just described, but the teacher should make the group of four to six members. The teacher then allows the students to discuss and come up with story four to six sentences long. The length of the story will vary depending on the number of members in each group. The teacher then asks each member to select one of the sentences in the story, and choose the clusters, dynamics, and direction of clusters that they want to play. After this process, each student gets the opportunity to play. This methodology allows students to work and play together, which is usually a satisfactory experience. This process improves students' creativity, their improvisation technique, and their expressive skills.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Kurtág's *Játékok*'s Volume I features the use of several interesting musical elements. These include a new graphic notation, unusual signs, use of a wide range of the keyboard, and a non-traditional placement of notes. Kurtág's use of these components was mainly designed to stimulate students' creativity. In addition, students can learn contemporary musical elements such as free meter, tone clusters, dissonance, and irregular rhythmic patterns. Volume I not only can be used to enhance significant musical skills, but also may be used strategically based on student's personality: for example, a student who has a timid character may become actively inclined to express his/her emotions through the performance of a piece with loud or wide-ranging clusters.

Traditional piano pedagogical method books are mostly focused on developing the skills necessary to read music and teaching music theory. As a piano teacher, I have often felt that traditional approaches decrease beginning piano students' natural interest in playing the piano because of the limited range involved and the focus on music theory. Unlike traditional approaches, *Játékok*'s Volume I stimulates students' interest and creativity enabling them to use their whole body. This results in students feeling more interested in playing the piano because of the sense of freedom and fun. In addition, teaching methodologies suggested in Chapter IV are may help teachers to bring out their students' potential musical talent and creativity.

Although Kurtág's *Játékok*'s Volume I includes valuable pedagogical tools, it is not well known as a method book. Additionally, not all teachers are able to effectively present the difficult musical elements present in the score. It is hoped that this guideline



may serve as a useful complement to Kurtág's existing supplement for teachers wishing to use *Játékok*'s Volume I in the teaching studio. It may also allow teachers to further understand Kurtág's complex writing and introduce to students a valuable and novel method of learning piano that can be paired along traditional methods for a more complete pianistic education.

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