

Doctoral School of Music and Visual Arts, University of Pécs

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**Methodological analysis of the French
cello school**

The technical foundations of André Navarra's teaching

Dissertation theses

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Background of the research, motivation

Simultaneously with my doctoral studies and research work at the University of Pécs, I had the opportunity to work in Germany with a renowned German professor, Siegmund von Hausegger, who excels not only in interpreting and caring the occidental music culture, but also in handing over the cello playing in methodological sense. Within the confines of my Master's degree at the Hochschule für Musik in Nuremberg, I had the opportunity to be absorbed in the methodological basics and technique of the French school cello playing, that enable qualified musical solutions. This had a great impact on the research I had already started. My work with Prof. Siegmund von Hausegger laid the foundations for the development of the topic in sufficient detail. I feel incredibly lucky to have had the opportunity to participate in the acquisition of the French cello school playing method not only on a theoretical level, but also in practice I could incorporate all the technical changes and refinements affecting the cello playing.

In addition to the practical acquisition, it was very important for me to have this methodological material recorded in writing. Thus, I wrote down everything that was discussed during the sessions to get a complete picture of my developmental process during my studies. This documentation later greatly facilitated my research work, as it provided an opportunity for a better understanding of this complex topic in terms of the main directing principles.

Sources, research methods

Of course, for a detailed and accurate description of muscle sensations, it is always the best starting point, if the examination itself is based on personal experiences. Thus, it made sense to use my own documentation of my studies as a base for my research work. With the analysis of my notes, I progressed in chronological order, so my horizons gradually expanded with the introduction of newer and newer methodological topics, mapping the French cello school technique

I have used as a common practice, breaking it down and analyzing it according to different problematical areas.

As regards the technical affiliation of the cello, the trend represented by Prof. Siegmund von Hausegger, belongs to the French cello school. Prof. Hausegger studied with the French cellist, André Navarra (1911 – 1988), one of the leading figures in French culture life, whose influence on the development of the modern cello playing practice is unquestionable. During my studies in Germany, I automatically started to question, if a detailed analysis about the cello playing technique based on the foundations of the French school had already been written in Hungarian language. However, my efforts to find resources on this topic have unfortunately not been a complete success. Basically, the number of source materials about the cello methodology, and within that, the French school, is quite limited. Some dissertations or recordings from notorious cellists can be found, but they are not available in Hungarian.

One of the most important sources used in my research on this topic is the video material recorded by André Navarra (*Ma Technique De Violoncelle*, Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Wien, 1975). In this video recording, Navarra reveals his methodological parameters of cello playing, analyzing it from the basic issues to the very complex technical solutions. The video format seems to be definitely a great leap forward, because it can present many movements in the process, that gives the possibility of a better and easier approach and comprehension. The analysis of this video material was very interesting, and fascinating for me, as it was very much in line with the technical features of the instrumental practice I already knew and mastered. Navarra's analytical way to express the topic and his individual vision broadened my horizons in many ways by bringing new perspectives and insights.

It is important to mention another work on the subject, written by the French cellist, Paul Tortelier (1914 – 1990). Like André Navarra, Tortelier has also been a celebrated musician, and renowned professor in the French string music culture. His cello school in English (*How I Play, How I Teach*, Chester Music, London, 1976), analyzes various possible technical dilemmas from an individual, novel approach, offering an alternative solution to achieve the appropriate sense of

the musculature during the playing. To reach this aim, he is providing numerous extraordinary exercises with short, concise instructions, avoiding the longer analytical descriptions. In many cases, the exercises approach the given problem from a distance, which means the drilled movements have sometimes just little to do with the actual motions of cello playing. However, as I have tried them out, it became clear to me, their practice can lead to very useful experiences on the level of sensations.

Of course, the systematization of the source materials and the comprehensive, detailed elaboration of the topic in Hungarian language would not necessarily have justified me to carry out my empirical research work until the writing of the dissertation. However, the analysis of different source materials and the testing of their contents on a practical level have often led to insights, that have helped to approach a particular technical issue from a new perspective. On several occasions, my experiments with the instrument have resulted more efficient practices that have not been mentioned in any of the sources I have previously known. This has enabled to enrich my methodological analysis of the French cello school technique with some completely new elements, hopefully making the subject more complete and unique in detail.

Structure of the dissertation

As the movements of the cello playing are extremely complex, the best solution for a comprehensive methodological analysis was, to examine the different motions of the two hands separately, breaking them down to the smallest details. For the accurate description of these technical bases and the different sensations, it has become sometimes necessary to supplement and complete them, by illustrations. Using numerous pictures, I have been able to visualize the playing positions during the execution of the different movements. This way provided an opportunity to illuminate the analysis from various angles, going beyond the framework of literacy to make the described fine-motorized muscle movements as understandable and visualizable as possible.

In addition to the detailed analysis, it was important to include a practical approach to my work, which helps to understand the movements gradually, getting step by step to the desired goal, the appropriate execution of the given motion. The most effective way to reach this progress, using different exercises related to the given technical issue. The sufficiently detailed description of this technical trainings, occasionally illustrated with picture attachments, is also an important element of my doctoral dissertation. In many cases, these exercises only practice certain details, smaller units of a more complex movement, thus giving the possibility to feel the different micro - elements separately and correctly at the sensory level, using the appropriate muscles.

In the course of my research work, I also placed emphasis on the fact that the main goal on the way to the technically worked out instrumental practice should be the musical expression from the very beginning. It can truly, and significantly help to understand, which fine – motorized muscle movement is needed at the given moment. And vice versa, if the implementation of musical processes is put at the center of the attention, instead of trying to overcome the technical difficulties, it is easier to find the most optimal technical solution for a given musical excerpt. Keeping in mind, it was important not just to attach the different images, reinforcing the technical descriptions, but also to relate as many musical excerpt as possible to a given methodological field. Thus demonstrating, and confirming the close relationship between artistic expression and methodology. Examining these music appendices can reveal how vital it is for the player to be aware of the importance of the accurate movements. As a result can be achieved a much more frills-free playing, which is enabled with the most efficient muscle function.

Results

With regard to my choice of the topic, it is important to note, that my interest in analyzing and learning about the cello playing in a methodological sense is not newfangled. I had been researching on the subject long before my studies in Germany. After all, in the case of the cello playing in the technical sense, there are a

lot of challenges from the very beginning in terms of learning, perfecting and, if necessary, further optimizing. This is very important to be mentioned, because in addition to musical knowledge, learning the string instrumental playing, due to its complexity, cannot be started early enough. With the right information, the quality sound producing becomes much easier to access, allowing for a much more colorful, expressive cello playing. Not to mention that, in long-term, an inadequate playing technique can cause serious consequences for health. As the ergonomics sets the physical limits for the cello playing.

That is why it is very important to write my doctoral dissertation on the French cello school, which is one of the most important methodological trends of our time. Thus providing the availability of this very important playing technical source material in Hungarian language.

List of cited sources

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