

UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS FACULTY OF ART  
DOCTORATE SCHOOL

**Borbála Seres**

**Alternative ways to work as a performer**

*The role of mental training in effective stage preparation*

DLA dissertation Thesis

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2023.

## **I. Background of the research**

Mental training including the tool of imagery, came to my attention very early at the age of 12, when I made my first attempts in the world of competition, my professor, guitarist József Papp, suggested that I should play the pieces by imagining them - as he expressed in my head - with particular attention to the finger placement of the left hand. This not only made my playing more confident, but also helped me to overcome the fear of making mistakes, so it became a constant part of my daily practice and preparation for competitions. Later, during my university studies, I had the opportunity to spend a year at the Frankfurt Conservatory on an Erasmus scholarship, where I also took part in courses on alternative practice methods. It was then that I first encountered the term and the additional possibilities of the technique, that I had been using for years. The course inspired me to further research and to use it more and more dominantly in my own instrumental and teaching practice.

When I returned home after my studies, I was disappointed to recognize the lack of mental training practice in Hungarian music education. Although the term itself is known to almost all musicians and music teachers in Hungary, there was a very little understanding of its real benefits or application. As a result, it is not sufficiently present in teaching and artistic practice, despite the fact that it could be an important and undoubtedly effective element of musical education and stage preparation. A further problem is a very significant research gap in the Hungarian literature (including general or specific to guitar methodology). Therefore, I decided to position my doctoral research in this very broad and diverse area.

Consequently, the primary objective of the dissertation was to search for and process the international literature in order to produce a Hungarian literature review of the topic. This was followed by the next objective, to develop a practical system to organize the identified tools. For that reason, I have categorized the techniques according to the process of musical preparation, thus helping to apply the techniques over time and incorporate the possibilities into the learning process. The third aim was to identify relevant research from different fields, not only from music and to integrate the results, that were of practical relevance to us into the dissertation.

## II. The method of the research

In order to get an accurate picture of the mental tools that can be used in the field of musical performance, I first had to search for published works in the field of music and take count of the tools discussed there. These include, in particular, the summaries of *Orloff-Tschekorsky* (1996), *Langeheine* (1996), *Klöppel* (1996), *Leimer-Giesecking* (1931), *Klees-Dacheneder and Campo* (1994) in German, and *Sisterchen McAllister* (2013), *Conolly and Williamon* (2004) and *Freymuth* (1999) in English. Given that there is still a relatively small number of publications on the use of mental tools in music and their potential compared to the field of sport psychology – including the so-called psychological skill training (PST) programmes integrated into everyday practice (*Clark and Williamon* 2011.; *Hartfield* 2016.; *Osborne, Green and Immel* 2014.; *Hoffmann and Hanrahan* 2012.; *Barden, Osborne and Wilson* 2015.) – it was also necessary to review the literature in this area. In addition, in line with my objectives, I also took into account publications from other performing arts, such as dance, and incorporated techniques into the dissertation that could be adapted to the field of music. This is how the metaphorical imagery of movements, among other things, was included in the "toolbox" (*Franklin* 1996.; *Overby and Dunn* 2011.). Finally, in line with my original research goals, the second pillar of the study was to map the results of relevant research in music, dance and sport psychology. A complete and exhaustive exploration of these, due to the diversity and the increasing number of publications, has become an almost impossible task, and therefore the exploration of musical studies has been the core of my method. I only deviated from this approach in cases where no research had been published in the field of the activity in question. One such typical area is the so-called "self-talk" (*Hatzigeorgiadis, Theodorakis, és Zourbanos* 2004.; *Van Raalte* 2010.; *Burnett* 1996.).

## III. The structure of the research

In accordance with the diversity and differences in the methods covered by the term, in the first half of the dissertation, I aim to give a comprehensive picture of the fields of application and their various methods. I systematically summarized the literature and the possible techniques I have set up. Most of these methods are, of course, from the field of sport psychology. However,

as mentioned earlier, I am also the first to apply techniques used in other performing arts, more specifically in dance, which I have not found examples of in the works of previous authors.

In the second half of the dissertation, I made an attempt to demonstrate the application of the techniques discussed earlier in relation to the practice of guitar. As a case study, based on Miguel Llobet's work *Varicaciones sobre un Tema de Sor*, Frederico Moreno Torroba's *Suite Castellana* first movement, Fandanguillo, Ferdinando Carulli's *Andantino*, and 5th *Etude* of Heitor Villa-Lobos I illustrated in detail the application of the various techniques, starting from the learning process leading up to the work's performance on stage. Llobet's variation presents the performer with an extremely wide technical and musical challenge, demonstrating main difficulties of guitar performance. This includes specific elements such as hammer on, pull off, playing only with the left hand, each of which forms a pivotal point of the guitar methodology. This piece was an excellent study to explore various elements of mental training on our instrument, while the other pieces mentioned were more suitable for presenting certain techniques, such as storytelling, utilizing metaphors and Leimer-Giesecking's learning form.

Finally, in the appendix of the thesis, I summarized in a table the techniques that can be used in the different learning stages, as well as the most important elements to be observed, both musically and technically. The analysis of the 5th *Etude* by Villa-Lobos presents Leimer's technique as another example, has also been included here, in order to make the dissertation less difficult to read, and at the same time, those interested in learning more about the use of this technique can also read an additional example.

#### **IV. The results of the research**

I choose the topic of my dissertation with the intent to fill in a crucial research gap in Hungarian scholarly literature. The processing and summarization of the topic in Hungarian provides an opportunity for the guitarist and wider instrumentalist community, to expand their repertoire of practice tools. My research impact will be also relevant for musicians who already experimented with mental practice tools, providing a more profound understanding and diverse contextualization of additional methods.

The topic of mental training is not only wide and diverse, but it is constantly growing with new and new options or providing new combinations of existing tools. While in the case of athletes, coaches and psychologists incorporate and develop various mental training programs within the framework of an organized work plan, in the field of music education, instrumentalists and singers mostly incorporate these tools into their daily routine through independent own experimentation. I aim to support these processes with a detailed presentation of the different techniques and my additional system, which was designed according to the practice process and its different stages. Incorporating the existing literature, I developed the following system of methods based on the process of learning:

**I. Techniques to help learning a new work:**

- Visualization or memorization of the score
- Imagery or memorization of Movements
- Musical Imagery
- Metaphorical imagery
- Resolving of physical tension through imagery
- Learning through observation
- Mind mapping

**II. Techniques to help you prepare for the stage:**

- Imagery of the Situation
- Building confidence
- Regulation of Arousal

In my opinion, understanding these techniques is only the first step in incorporating them into the daily routine. Similarly, to physical practice, we need and should learn their use and aims and how to integrate them into the process of our musical preparation and daily work. Ideally, this should be realized within an organized framework in the Higher Education curriculum. However, it is rarely offered as a course of European universities, despite the fact that more and more institutions are offering such programs. In the meantime, I hope that those interested can get help using these methods through my dissertation, and that more and more people will start to actively use them, consciously incorporate them into their teaching practice and, last but not least, pass them on.

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