

CODE NOTATION AS A SIGNIFICANT MOTIVATIONAL ELEMENT IN THE BEGINNINGS OF TEACHING PLAYING THE ACCORDION

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Abstract: Today, accordion is a relatively popular instrument and interest in learning it is still evident. In pedagogical practice, when teaching the accordion to beginners, we often face the problem of insufficient motivation. The first enthusiasm to learn to play the instrument often recedes after the first lessons because the pupil has to learn several skills in a relatively short time. Notation, awareness of the rhythmic values, correct control over the heavy instrument, coordination of the right and the left hand, pulling the bellows, orientation over the right and the left manual without looking – for a beginner, all this is complicated. Slovak pedagogue Miroslav Košnár tried to develop a methodology which would enable the pupils to overcome the difficult beginner phase and he created a so-called code notation.

Keywords: Accordion. Beginners. Code notation. Miroslav Košnár. Motivation.

1 Accordion in the Territory of Slovakia and the History of Teaching the Accordion

Accordion¹ is a relatively young musical instrument, with its origins dating back to the second half of the 19th century. In Central Europe, the diatonic type of accordions enjoyed popularity until the end of the 19th century,² while chromatic button accordions became more popular in the early 20th century.³

In the territory of Slovakia, the accordion was long regarded as an instrument for cheap entertainment which belongs only to the sphere of utility music. This was due to the wide use of the heligonka⁴ in folk music. Thanks to its easy control, the heligonka became a solo instrument whenever an original string band of bowed instruments was unavailable. Folk musicians liked that they could play the melody and simultaneously create a harmonic or rhythmic accompaniment, and even sing to it. The position of the heligonka in folk music was so strong that even the accordion started to be viewed as a folk instrument, which prevented its penetration into other fields of music. The biggest boom of the diatonic heligonka took place in the 1920s and 1930s. Subsequently, the chromatic accordion came to the fore.⁵

In the 1940s, the popularity of the accordion rose⁶ mainly due to the popularity of the tango.⁷ Moreover, accordionists began to perform as soloists in various entertainment shows and variety

shows. Ján Ondruš was such a performer in Slovakia.⁸ After World War II, the development of accordion playing followed the Soviet model.⁹ In practice, this meant that the accordion was mostly used for playing chastushkas and socialist mass songs.¹⁰ Thanks to the connection of the instrument to the cultural ideology, accordion received wide support in education and, besides the violin and the piano, the accordion was also started to be taught in the newly established schools of arts.¹¹

It was also in the 1950s that the first Slovak accordion coursebook (1952) was written. Its author was Jozef Vašica.¹² However, there were not enough qualified teachers to teach the accordion, so it was taught mainly by pianists or organists who introduced the methodologies of their own instruments into the teaching process of accordion playing. Changes in accordion methodology took place only in the late 1960s when Marta Szókeová's¹³ book *Akordeón [The Accordion]* was published (by the Regional Institute of Education, Bratislava, 1967). She drew on the lectures of German teacher Inggaard Slota-Krieg. The methodology was groundbreaking because it accented work with the bellows as a significant factor of producing the sound on the accordion. Thanks to the production of the sound with the bellows, performance became more refined and it had a significant influence on differentiation between the various periods and styles on the accordion. Another change in the field of accordion methodology occurred only in the 1990s when Miroslav Košnár, based on his practical experience, created a so-called code notation which significantly facilitates the work with beginners.

1.1 Miroslav Košnár's Personality

Slovak accordionist, pedagogue and enthusiastic promoter of the accordion Miroslav Košnár was born on 6 July 1938 in Nové Mesto nad Váhom. He studied the accordion from 1953 to 1959 at the Conservatory in Bratislava and began to teach at Music School IV in Bratislava as external staff already during his conservatory studies. In this way, he had the opportunity to confront the acquired theoretical knowledge with pedagogical practice and gradually developed his own methodology for

⁸ JÁN ONDRUŠ (1922 – 1974) was a performer and teacher at the Conservatory in Bratislava. In collaboration with Františka Machalíčková and Ilja Havlíček, they created an accordion coursebook and he authored several instructive compositions. In: VÍČAR, J. pp. 81 – 83.

⁹ KATINA, P.: Accordion. In: *Hudba*. Košice: Evhettia, 2008. 3. No. 4, p. 9.

¹⁰ Chastushkas and socialist songs (peace songs, mass songs) used to be the most prominent musical genre after 1945 when the political regime changed in Czechoslovakia. In: MATZNER, Antonín – POLEDNÁK, Ivan – WASSENBERGER, Igor et al.: *Encyklopedie jazzu a moderní populární hudby I. [Encyclopedia of Jazz and Modern Popular Music I.]* Prague: Supraphon, 1983. pp. 221 – 222.

¹¹ In the 1950s, after a reform of the education system, public schools of arts were established to provide basic music education. Besides the music schools, departments of education were established in Bratislava, Žilina and Košice which, along with specialist artistic training, focused also on the methodological training of their students. Accordion playing was included into the curriculum at both types of schools. In: GREGOR, Vladimír – SEDLICKÝ, Tibor: *Dějiny hudební výchovy v českých zemích a na Slovensku. [History of Music Education in the Czech Lands and in Slovakia]* Prague: Supraphon, 1990. pp. 209 – 216.

¹² JOZEF VAŠICA (1909 – 1975) studied the violin at the Conservatory in Brno. His interest in popular and dance music made him establish his own salon orchestra where he familiarized himself with the accordion as well. After World War II, he started to teach the accordion at the Music School in Bratislava. His *Practical Coursebook of Accordion Playing of 1952* (last published in 1990) is still in use in the music education process. In: KRÁSENSKÁ, Milada. 2010. *Analýza a reflexe vývoje kulturního života v Bystřici nad Pernštejnem* [Diplomová práce]. [Analysis and Reflections over Cultural Life in Bystřice nad Pernštejnem [Thesis]] Brno: Masaryk University. 2010. pp. 30 – 37.

¹³ MARTA SZÓKEOVÁ (1920 – 2002) was a pedagogue at the Conservatory in Bratislava. It was her achievement that the accordion was included into the curricula of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava in 1971, the only academy of arts with the accordion in its curriculum in Czechoslovakia at the time. She authored two methodological publications: *Akordeón – dejiny a stavba nástroja [The Accordion: History and Construction of the Instrument]* (1967) and *Artikulácia a frázovanie na akordeóne [Articulation and Phrasing on the Accordion]* (1970). Thanks to her, the progressive German bellows methodology focusing on detailed work with the bellows and refinement of the resulting sound began to be used even in Slovak accordion education. In: KISSOVÁ, Magdaléna – FITUŠOVÁ, Agneša: *Hudobníci okresu Nové Zámky. [Musicians in the District of Nové Zámky]* Nové Zámky: Anton Bernolák Library in Nové Zámky, Bibliography and Regional Science Section and Department of Music, 2000. p. 26.

¹ The English term *accordion* [accordeon, accordian, squashbox, squeezebox], (French *accordéon*, German *Akkordeon*, *Handharmonika*, *Klavier – Harmonika*, *Ziehharmonika*, Italian: *armonica a maniccino*, *fisarmonica*, Russian: *bayan*, *garmonica*, *garmoschka*) is applied to a number of polyphonic free-reed aerophones whose common features include the existence of two bodies with manuals controlled by the fingers. These two bodies are connected by bellows driving air to the reedplates which then vibrate and emit a sound. In: HARRINGTON, H. S. – KUBIK, G.: *Accordion*. In: *The New Dictionary of Music and Musicians: A to Aristotle*. Vol. 1. : Editor Stanley Sadie – 2. Edit. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. p. 56.

² The diatonic accordion is a polyphonic diatonic instrument which has two different reeds for each button so that the pitch changes with the movement of the bellows. In: VÍČAR, Jan: *Akordeon a jeho hudební uplatnění. [The Accordion and its Musical Scope]* Prague: Panton, 1981. p. 9.

³ By the term accordion, Ján Vičár means a chromatic instrument which has two identical sounds for each key/button, and the tone does not change with pulling or pushing the bellows. VÍČAR, Jan. p. 8.

⁴ Heligonka is a Czech innovation of the Viennese accordion. The Hlaváček brothers, Czech instrument makers who owned a factory in Louny, began to equip diatonic accordions with so-called helicon basses with a powerful sound. In: UKROPCOVÁ, Lýdia: *Heligónka – nástroj a ľudový hudobný repertoár. [Heligonka: The Instrument and its Folk Music Repertoire]* In: *Musicalogica Slovaca X.: slovenská ľudová nástrojová hudba a ľudové piesne*. Bratislava: VEDA, 1985. p. 50.

⁵ ELSCHKE, Oskár: *Slovenské ľudové píšťaly a ďalšie aerofóny. [Slovak Folk Pipes and Other Aerophones]* Bratislava: VEDA, 1991. p. 206.

⁶ According to Jozef Šamko's research in 1943, the accordion (harmonica) was the second most popular instrument (the violin being the most popular and the piano ranking number three). In: ŠAMKO, Jozef: *Hudba a hudobnosť v spoločnosti. [Music and Musicality in the Society]* Bratislava: DOBA, 1947. s. 40.

⁷ Instrumental ensembles playing tangos typically included the Spanish guitar and the accordion (or the bandoneon). In: MATZNER, Antonín – POLEDNÁK, Ivan – WASSENBERGER, Igor et al.: *Encyklopedie jazzu a moderní populární hudby I. [Encyclopedia of Jazz and Modern Popular Music I.]* Prague: Supraphon, 1983. p. 350.

playing the accordion. From the academic year of 1964/1965, he taught at the Conservatory in Žilina and, at the same time, deepened his knowledge by attending Františka Machalíková's button accordion lessons in Ostrava (Czech Republic).¹⁴ Later, he became a student of Polish teacher Joachim Pichura at the Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Muzyczna in Katowice (1971 – 1974), learning to play the accordion with melodic basses.¹⁵ From 2002, Miroslav Košnář taught at the University of Žilina, at the Private School of Arts in Žilina, and at the Primary School of Arts in Rajecké Teplice. He was the founder and art director of the international accordion festival for young accordionists called *Euromusette – Goldentango*¹⁶ in Rajecké Teplice and also initiated the *Accordion Festival in the Rhythm of Various Genres*¹⁷ in Kysucké Nové Mesto where students compete in performing dance music. Even at an advanced age, he enthusiastically pursued his pedagogical activities and took active part in organizing accordion festivals. He transferred his enthusiasm to his students as well and, thanks to his innovative teaching methods, he raised not only professional performers but also a number of amateur musicians who played happily for their own pleasure and for the pleasure of their environment despite not making it to concert stages. Miroslav Košnář passed away on 2 October 2016 in Žilina.¹⁸

2 The Beginnings of Learning the Accordion

Pupils in Slovakia can learn to play the accordion privately or at public or private primary schools of arts. According to Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (the Education Act), schools of arts organize preparatory courses, primary courses, courses with an extended number of lessons, shortened courses, and courses for adults. Pupils of the lower grades of primary schools who begin to learn the accordion are assigned to the preparatory course, while adults who take up learning the instrument can join the adult course. The preparatory course is meant even for talented preschool-aged children, and it consists of maximum two years. The adult course consists of maximum four years.¹⁹

2.1 Preparatory Course

Primary Schools of Arts (hereinafter referred to as PSA) organize two forms of preparatory courses: preparatory course “A” and preparatory course “B”. Preschool-aged children and

children of the first year of primary schools may be admitted to preparatory course “A” which lasts for two years. Pupils who complete this course may apply for admission to the first year of the primary course of music specialization at PSA. Preparatory course “B” is meant for 6 or 7-year-old pupils who did not attend preparatory course “A”. This course lasts for one year and, after its completion, the pupils may apply for admission to the first year of the primary course of music specialization at PSA.²⁰

Children aged five to seven may be admitted to the preparatory course. From the aspect of a child's musical development, this period is characterized by their rapidly increasing skills to differentiate between pitches and between musical forms. Children are able to grasp the movement of the melody, differentiate between various means of musical expression, and synchronize body movements with musical rhythm. At preschool age, music education should take place primarily by musical games. Pedagogical activities should be based on the child's anatomic, physiological and mental characteristics.²¹

The organ of hearing dominates in a child's perception of music, although very often the supportive function of the visual and the motoric analyzer also play a role. Graphic depictions with various drawings make musical perception more precise especially for children with less developed musical hearing.

Pupils of the preparatory course who start the primary school of arts with the aim to learn to play the accordion face several problems. With respect to their physical dispositions, the instrument they are trying to learn is heavy.²² The pupils cannot bear to play for long, and they have to have frequent breaks during the lesson. Holding the instrument in the correct way²³ presumes playing without visual control, and the pupils have to orient themselves on the left body of the instrument exclusively by touch.²⁴ Also, beginners often face problems connected with controlling the bellows because they have to concentrate on changing its direction in the right way. Changing the direction of the bellows may be complicated for the pupils with respect to the anatomic disposition of their left hand, since controlling it downwards may cause pain in the arm in the beginning. Another problem is reading the music and connecting the notation with playing the pitches on the keyboard of the instrument. Pupils must often focus on several actions at the same time: reading the notation, controlling the instrument, and coordinating their right hand and left hand. Too many new stimuli may appear confusing, and the initial motivation of the pupils may decrease rapidly.

Accordion coursebooks used according to the valid Slovak curricula²⁵ start with playing in a so-called five-finger position of the right hand (the thumb is on C4 and the little finger on G5). Since holding the instrument correctly requires playing with a loose wrist while the elbow is raised and should not drop downwards, the position containing sounds in the upper part of

¹⁴ The treble of the button accordion is formed by buttons arranged into three to five rows, while the fourth and the fifth row are repetitions of the first and the second one. The range of the button accordion and the number of the rows may change depending on the size of the accordion. On a concert button accordion, compositions ranging from E₂ to G₇ can be rendered. The button accordion offers much richer rendering possibilities than the piano accordion. In: HARRINGTON, H. S. – KUBIK, G.: *Accordion*. In: *The New Dictionary of Music and Musicians: A to Aristotle*. Vol. 1.; Editor Stanley Sadie – 2. Edit. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. pp. 59 – 60.

¹⁵ On the left body of concert instruments, we can find *melodic basses* beside the *standard basses*. By a converter, the system of several octaves coupled above each other can be switched to melodic basses. After switching, the identical buttons which sounded as full chords before sound as specific tones in a chromatic range from E₁ to C₆. On an instrument with melodic basses, the performer can play the melody as well as the harmony by both hands, several octaves simultaneously, in a dense texture. The logical arrangement of the manuals enables technically precise and virtuoso playing. In: EICHELBBERG, Heinz: *Das Akkordeon mit 162 Bildern*. Leipzig: VEB Fachbuchverlag, 1964. pp. 12 – 55.

¹⁶ The Euromusette-Goldentango accordion competition has been regularly organized since 2001 in the first week of June in the town of Rajecké Teplice and is meant for pupils of primary schools of arts and students of faculties of arts at universities and colleges. Thanks to the approval of its rules of organization, the competition gained an international character in 2008; for 15 years, it was dedicated to the memory of accordionist Michael Ganian. After the death of its founder Miroslav Košnář, the festival has been dedicated to his memory since 2016. In: *Euromusette – Goldentango* [Bulletin + result sheets]. [online]. 2017 [Retrieved on 27/10/2017]. Available at: <https://sites.google.com/site/euromusette/euromusette-2012/bulletin>

¹⁷ The Accordion Festival in the Rhythm of Various Genres began in 2002 and is organized by the Primary School of Arts in the town of Kysucké Nové Mesto. It is meant for pupils of primary schools of arts under 18 in solo playing and under 19 in chamber music. In: *Akordeónový festival* [Propozície]. *Accordion Festival* [Propositions] [online]. 2017 [Retrieved on 27/10/2017]. Available at: <http://www.zusknm.sk/dokumenty/sutaze/akordeon/pozvanka/propozicie-akordeon-ovy-festival.pdf>

¹⁸ In: RAJTEKOVÁ, Andrea – KOŠNÁŘ, Igor: *Miroslav Košnář – významná osobnosť akordeónovej školy na Slovensku. [Miroslav Košnář – A Significant Personality of Accordion Playing in Slovakia]* [Thesis]. Banská Bystrica: Matej Bel University, 2003. pp. 52 – 60.

¹⁹ According to Article 51 of Act 245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (the Education Act). Available online: <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2008/245/20180901>

²⁰ *Innovated State Educational Programme for Primary Schools of Arts – Addenda nos. 1, 2, 3*. [Framework Curricula – since 1 Sept 2018]. [online]. 2018. [Retrieved on 11/11/2018]. Available at: <http://www.minedu.sk/data/att/12827.pdf>

²¹ SEDLÁK, František: *Didaktika hudební výchovy I. [Didactics of Music Education I.]* Prague: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1985. pp. 40 – 41.

²² A 48-bass accordion of the Weltmeister brand, suitable for young pupils, weighs 5.5 kg. In: *Weltmeister Akkordeon Manufaktur* [Weltmeister Perle]. [online]. 2018. [Retrieved on 10/11/2018]. Available at: <https://www.weltmeister-akkordeon.de/shop/akkordeons-harmonikas/weltmeister-perle-die-perle-unter-den-akkordeons/>

²³ The pupil has to sit while playing, and the weight of the instrument rests on his left leg. The accordion is fastened to the player's shoulders by straps and is fixed by a so-called cross-connector. The player's back should be straightened and the neck should not be bent as a result of the visual control of the right hand. The right hand has to be relaxed and the elbow raised so that the wrist can move freely (if the elbow is dropped, the wrist becomes stiff). In: SZÓKEOVÁ, Marta: *Akordeón. [The Accordion]* Bratislava: Krajský pedagogický ústav, 1968. pp. 25 – 27.

²⁴ To facilitate orientation, the bass buttons on the left manual of the instrument are marked as follows: root bass C is marked with a concave depression, root basses Ab and E are marked with a grid (on the instruments of the Delicia brand) or also with a concave depression (e.g. on instruments of the Weltmeister, Pignini or Hohner brand).

²⁵ E.g. Jozef Vašička's coursebook: *Praktická škola hry na akordeóne [Practical Coursebook of Accordion Playing]* or the coursebook of the authors Machalíková – Havlíček – Ondruš: *Škola hry na akordeón. [Coursebook of Accordion Playing]* In: *SVP pre základné umelecké školy [Učebné osnovy hry na akordeóne. [State Educational Programme for Primary Schools of Arts [Accordions Curricula]]* [online]. 2018. [Retrieved on 10/11/2018]. Available at: http://www.statpedu.sk/files/sk/svp/statny-vzdelavaci-program/svp-zakladne-umelecke-skoly/uo_hry_na_akordeone.pdf

the keyboard may be difficult and painful. Pain while playing, or while practising, may be demotivating.

2.2 Adult Course

The adult course enables adults of all ages to start learning the instrument. One of the reasons why adults want to learn to play the accordion is the existence of folklore ensembles where the accordion is used as an accompanying instrument. Consequently, these people are mostly dilettantes in music whose priority is not to perform on concert stages but to make music for pleasure among their family and friends. In these cases, the syllabus contains mainly folk songs, folkish songs and popular songs.

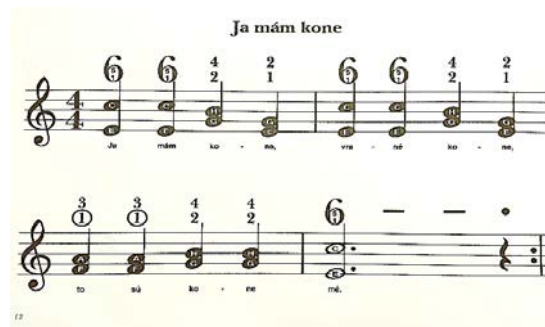
Even though the students are adults, they face several difficulties in the early stage of learning. Problems arise mainly from the coordination of the right and the left hand and from reading the notation. The students of this group are very enthusiastic but, after the first problems, their enthusiasm starts to vanish. Due to the other priorities in their life, they do not have that much time for practising and want to learn to play as fast as possible. The classic methodological procedure based on perfecting the fingering technique by exercises of an étude character appears to be ineffective and code notation seems to be a more suitable method for this group of learners.

3 Code Notation

Based on his experience gained by teaching, Miroslav Košnár tried to develop a methodology which would arouse the pupils' interest in playing the accordion and not make the early phase of learning more difficult by reading the notation. By a synthesis of the classical notation in G-clef and numeric representations of the finger placements in the various positions of the accordion keyboard, he created a so-called code notation²⁶ which is a set of numeric codes where each code represents an interval of traditional notation. Košnár arranged Slovak folk songs into this code notation and published a collection of *50 Folk Songs Not Only for Beginners*, progressing systematically from simpler to more complicated folk songs. The main didactic objective of the collection was to motivate the pupils to play the accordion or another keyboard instrument.²⁷

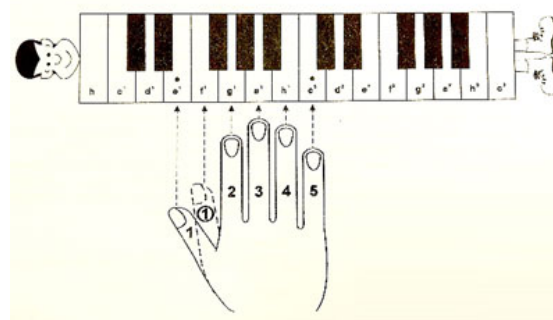
3.1 Advantages of the Code Notation

By code notation, pupils can learn the finger placements, based on which they become aware of the position of the tones and their graphic image in the form of notation. While, in the classic methodological process for developing the fingering technique, the pupils must first read the notation while concentrating on the position of the various tones on the keyboard, in code notation, they orientate themselves only by finger placements marked by numbers. The names of the notes are written in the note heads, so the children subconsciously memorize the pitches as well as their position on the staff (Example 1). Playing songs in code notation eliminates the problems connected with reading the notation.



Example 1: Košnár, M.: *Akordeón – 50 ľudových piesní nielen pre začiatočníkov [50 Folk Songs Not Only for Beginners]*, notation of a song.

The basic position of the hand on the right body of the instrument (Example 2) is based on the position of the right hand on the $E_4 - C_5$ sixth (thumb – little finger), while the thumb takes care of playing two keys. The hand moves roughly in the middle of the accordion keyboard, which makes it much easier to adopt the correct position of the hand on the right body of the instrument. When placing the hand on the $E_4 - C_5$ sixth (thumb – little finger), it is easier to keep the elbow straight and, consequently, to keep the wrist relaxed, as this position is more natural with respect to the anatomic features of a pupil's hand than the classic five-finger position.



Example 2: Košnár, M.: *Akordeón – 50 ľudových piesní nielen pre začiatočníkov [50 Folk Songs Not Only for Beginners]*, basic position of the right hand and finger markings

1 - thumb in basic position, ⊙ - thumb moved to the forefinger, 2 - forefinger, 3 - middle finger, 4 - ring finger, 5 - little finger

Thanks to the easiness of learning the finger placements, the pupils do not have to concentrate on the fingering but can focus on the right movement of the bellows and on changing its direction. Indeed, it is controlling the bellows that may cause the biggest problems in the beginning of learning.

The biggest advantage of the code notation is that the pupils do not learn to play tedious études and, still, they can render a folk song in an interesting way after just a few lessons. This fact significantly motivates not only young beginners but also adult students who are learning to play the accordion to be able to render folk songs as fast as possible.

3.2 Disadvantages of the Code Notation

The code notation is based on playing two-finger placements. Their playing, however, increases the risk of stiff playing because the pupils play with two fingers and keep subconsciously pressing into the keyboard. In this way, the hand gets fixed in an unnatural position. Therefore, increased attention has to be paid to relaxing exercises so that the tendons and nerves of the right wrist of the pupil's hand do not get damaged.

Since code notation involves learning the finger placements by numeric codes, it can happen that the pupils learn them

²⁶ Efforts to make learning the instrument easier appeared already in the early 20th century when various coursebooks were published for autodidacts due to the popularity of the heligonka. Such coursebooks were produced even by heligonka manufacturers, for example the Hlaváček brothers. These materials made use of a numeric notation. This appeared to be an optimal solution to notate the music for dilettantes who could play the instrument only mechanically, without preliminary knowledge of music theory. In: VIČAR, J. p. 70.

²⁷ Due to the same position of the hand, the code notation can be used for teaching any keyboard instrument

mechanically and do not connect the numeric representations of the finger placements with the classical notation in G-clef. The teacher should also remember to use the classical notation in G-clef and F-clef, and connect the knowledge gained by code notation with learning the classical notation.

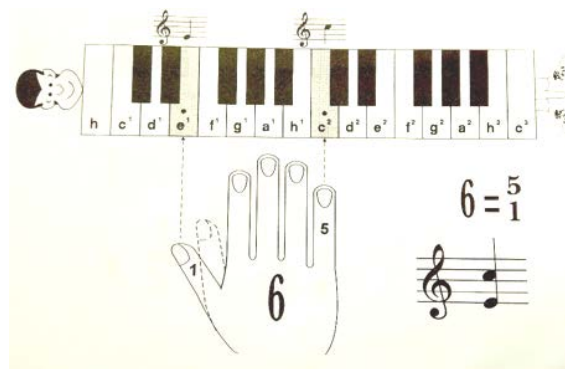
The main didactic purpose of the code notation is to arouse the pupils' interest in playing the instrument. Therefore, it does not focus on the development of the fingering technique and the bellows technique but on enabling the pupils to learn to play as fast as possible and, consequently, to increase their interest in practising the instrument at home, too. However, without proper fingering technique and bellows technique, more demanding compositions cannot be performed. Therefore, the right method to teach playing the accordion appears to be a combination of the code notation (arousing motivation) and the classic accordion methodology (gradual technical development).

3.3 Analysis of the Collection of 50 Folk Songs Not Only for Beginners

In the Introduction to his collection, the author describes the layout of the tones on the right and the left body of the instrument, and presents the basic position of the right hand and the layout of the basses for the left hand. The author divided the collection into three parts. In the first part, the pupils learn the basic finger placements – they use mainly the *basic finger placement* which they shift along the keyboard. In the second part, the pupils learn the so-called *finger placements of the right hand in minor songs*. In the third part, pupils practise *finger placements in a lower position of the right hand*, and encounter accidentals.

Basic Finger Placements

The basic finger placement is placement no. 6, marked mathematically as $1 + 5 = 6$ (thumb + little finger). The sixth is explained to the pupils theoretically (Example 3). Learning this finger placement is very important for playing the next songs in which the pupils have to shift this finger placement along the keyboard. After strengthening this basic finger placement, three other, easily playable placements are introduced, based on the basic position of the hand. These are the so-called easiest $\frac{2}{4}$ finger placement of $E_4 - G_4$, the so-called borrowed $\frac{3}{4}$ finger placement of $F_4 - A_4$ and the last one, the so-called hardest $\frac{4}{2}$ finger placement of $G_4 - B_4$.



Example 3: Košnář, M.: *Akordeón – 50 ľudových piesní nielen pre začiatočníkov* [50 Folk Songs Not Only for Beginners], basic finger placement

With these four finger placements, the pupils are able to play the *Ja mám kone, vrané kone* [I have horses, black horses] song (Example 1). The songs that follow contain even finger placements nos. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. However, these are only shifts of finger placement no. 6 along the keyboard. While pupils can play the *Ja mám kone, vrané kone* [I have horses, black horses] song without changing the position of the hand, in the next songs they have to practise various skips. In this way, the pupils perfect their orientation on the right body of the

instrument. Finger placement no. 13 reaches the highest possible tone of the 60-bass accordion, C_6 . With these finger placements, pupils can play 21 songs.

Finger Placements of the Right Hand in Minor Songs

In this part, pupils learn finger placements which the author calls *finger placements of the right hand in minor songs*. These are finger placements in the range of a third, which can be used in minor as well as in major songs. The lowest tone used in playing the songs was E_4 . In *finger placements of the right hand in minor songs*, C_4 and D_4 are used, too. By the use of these finger placements, pupils can play further 11 songs.

Finger Placements in the Lower Position of the Right Hand

When the pupils have learnt all the finger placements, it is time to practise *finger placements in the lower position of the right hand*. These finger placements are a variation of placement no. 6 (i.e. placement in the range of a sixth) with B as the lowest tone. In songs using *finger placements in the lower position of the right hand*, the pupils come across accidentals as well. The author marks these as follows: a) sharps are indicated in the code with a flake at the respective finger; b) flats are indicated with a star. The rhythmic values of the notes are also depicted visually: the author marks the duration of the notes by a line after the given finger placement, and the amount of lines depends on the required duration. Pauses are indicated by simple dots.

Playing with the Left Hand

Pupils can start playing with their left hand already from the second song. The author does not burden the pupils by reading the F-clef but writes the instructions for the left hand simply below the staff. He denotes the root bass with a capital letter, the major triad with a small letter, and adds the number seven to the seventh chord. He denotes the minor bass by a small letter, and adds "m" to it, e.g. he writes the D minor triad as "dm". The pupils may play the chordal accompaniment in the left hand but do not have to, it depends on their technical development.

4 The Motivational Aspect of the Code Notation

The code notation integrates three elements simultaneously: fixing the position of the hand on the keyboard, automatic recognition of the notes in G-clef, and developing technical skills. The pupils learn to read the notes in G-clef in an unforced way and, at the same time, perfect their orientation on the right body of the instrument.

The code notation is based on playing double positions. The hand is shifted along the keyboard in thirds and sixths, characteristic for playing Slovak folk songs. Within just a few lessons, the pupils learn to play a simple folk song in an interesting way. The folk songs that Miroslav Košnář included in his coursebook are well-known in Slovakia. If the pupil already knows these songs, playing them becomes much easier. If they do not know them, first they can learn to sing them with their teacher. Singing the songs helps develop the pupil's intonation skills. Another significant motivational element is when the pupil plays the song in an environment that is familiar with it and the audience sings the song along with the performer. This gives the pupils a sense of achievement and pleasure. Support from their environment has a positive influence on the pupils who long to learn the first songs.

Another advantage is that the pupils do not have to concentrate on reading the notation in the beginning but can orientate their right hand with the numeric finger placements and their left hand with letter marks. Since the pupils do not have to control the rightness of the fingering and do not have to focus on reading the notes, they can turn their attention to aural control. This develops their skills to play by ear without being absorbed with the notation.

4.1 Working with Code Notation in Accordion Lessons

Code notation provides several impetuses to the teacher to make the teaching process more interesting. It depends only on the teacher's creativity what activities he chooses.

Graphic Activities

The organ of hearing dominates in a child's perception of music, although very often the supportive function of the visual and the motoric analyser also play a role. Graphic depictions with various drawings make musical perception more precise especially for children with less developed musical hearing.²⁸

Learning the various finger placements may be supported by graphic illustrations. Since each placement is depicted graphically (Example 3) on a separate page, these pages may be used as graphic worksheets, too. The teacher introduces the finger placement to the pupil and shows him the position on the keyboard of the accordion. Each finger placement has its corresponding illustration of the keyboard, illustration of the right hand, and position of the notes on the stave. In the initial phase, we can indicate by arrows (leading from the illustration of the right hand to the keyboard) which fingers will be used for the given placement. We can also colour the keys that are used with any colour and can also colour the fingers on the illustration of the right hand. Later, we may give only the illustration of the keyboard to the pupil, while his task is to colour the notes of the given finger placement and name them. In this way, pupils can perfect their orientation on the right body of the instrument and, thanks to the visual aid, they can learn faster not only the finger placement itself but also the position of the various tones on the keyboard.

Musical Riddles

The teaching process can be made more interesting even with various musical riddles connected to learning the finger placements. The teacher may play the finger placements and the pupil has to guess which placement it is. In the beginning, the pupil can make guesses by looking at the keyboard and, later on, he may try to differentiate between the finger placements by ear. The teacher starts playing an interval which does not figure in the given song at all (second, fourth, octave, or any two tones), and then the interval that corresponds to the finger placement learnt (e.g. sixth or third). The tasks may be swapped, and the pupil may try to test his teacher. Musical riddles can refine the pupils' pitch sense, one of the basic features of musical hearing.²⁹

Song in the Tunnel

An interesting activity to perfect musical imagination³⁰ is a game called *Song in the Tunnel*. The teacher plays a song to the pupil while replacing certain finger placements (or sections) by a pause of the same duration. The pupil's task is to say which placement was omitted by the teacher. If the pupil is skilful enough, the roles can be swapped.

Echo

The pupils' musical memory³¹ can be developed by an echo game where the teacher plays the already learnt finger placements or certain melodic sections of a song in a random order, and the pupils have to repeat them. The tasks may be swapped again, and the pupil may try to test his teacher.

²⁸ SEDLÁK, František: *Didaktika hudební výchovy I. [Didactics of Music Education I.]* Prague : Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1985, pp. 40 – 41.

²⁹ SEDLÁK, F. p. 62

³⁰ According to František Sedlák, musical imagination refers to mental qualities, recalled imagines of tones, tonal relationships, and means of musical expressions of parts or even whole compositions perceived in the past. Musical imagination is a key musical skill and a prerequisite for any musical activity. In: SEDLÁK, F. p. 64.

³¹ František Sedlák describes musical memory as the ability of man to remember the perceived music, to recall it and reconstruct it in its original form, or to reproduce it by the voice or on a musical instrument. In: SEDLÁK, F. p. 66

5 Conclusion

Miroslav Košnár was an accordion pedagogue for many years. During his pedagogical practice, he encountered pupils of various ages – he taught young as well as older beginners, and also guided artistically advanced students of conservatories. He faced several problems that complicated the teaching process especially when working with beginners. Playing various technical exercises of the étude character, difficulties with orientation on the keyboard and problems with reading the notation were the most frequent factors causing demotivation in students and their reluctance to go on. Therefore, Miroslav Košnár tried to develop a method which would make it significantly easier for beginners to learn the basics of accordion playing and which would accentuate their pleasure from playing. His quest for new possibilities resulted in creating a so-called code notation which integrates classical notation in G-clef and numeric representations of the finger placements.

Subsequently, Košnár arranged 50 well-known Slovak folk songs into this notation. They are arranged in a way that enables the pupils to learn the placements gradually. By learning finger placements mainly in the range of a third or sixth, the pupils are able to render folk songs relatively quickly and interestingly. The speed of learning the songs has a motivating influence on the pupils because they have a sense of achievement and can see the actual results of their efforts, especially if they render the songs in front of a home audience. The feedback from the audience, and the feeling of support and containment with the rendering of well-known songs, motivates the pupils to learn more songs. Mastering the various finger placements which, depending on the teacher's creativity, may have a playful character, is also motivating. Playfulness and curiosity connected with learning new finger placements and songs make the learning process more interesting and the pupils look forward to their accordion lessons.

Despite all the above advantages, it is not advisable to use only this method for teaching the accordion. Since the learning is based on playing double placements, it does not develop the fingering technique. The code notation is based on accentuating the right hand, while the left hand has an accompanying character. Using only the code notation method for teaching may have a negative impact on the development of the technique of both the hands. Therefore, the code notation should be combined with the classic methodology of playing the accordion so that the pupils develop in all aspects.

The code notation is one of the possibilities to motivate the pupils in the early stage of learning to play the accordion. Its advantage is that it can be applied also to any other keyboard instrument and that it enables the pupils to learn to play songs relatively fast, even without mastering the notation. It has its advantages not only in working with young children but also with adult amateurs who want to learn to play as fast as possible to make music among their close friends and family.

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