

KURTÁG'S *JÁTEKOK* AS LESSONS IN MUSICAL EXPRESSION

by

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Abstract

Teaching students to play the piano with more expression is one of the fundamental goals of piano pedagogy. The purpose of this study is to show how to help students develop careful and thoughtful articulation and interpretation, to gain experience performing contemporary piano works, as well as to improve their expression in the Classical and Romantic repertoire by having them learn selected pieces from Kurtág's *Játékok*.

Chapter 1 summarizes how musical “expression” has been defined by a number of philosophers, theorists, musicologists, and performers; it finds general agreement that four aspects of piano playing are especially important: tempo and flexible rhythm, dynamics, articulation, and sonority. Through analysis and discussion of many short pieces from *Játékok* Volume I – III, V – VII (Volumes IV and VIII are for piano duet and two pianos), Chapter 2 discusses how students can practice these aspects, learn a new music language through Kurtág's notation, open their minds to accept new sound, and gain a complete knowledge of the music's elaborate dynamic and expressive markings. The final chapter provides and discusses a progressive lesson plan, focusing on the major components that are demonstrated in Chapter 2. Kurtág's *Játékok* is an excellent model for teaching, and it should be recognized and used as an important contribution to contemporary piano pedagogy.

Preface

This thesis is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Rui Xuan Shi.

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Chapter 1: Playing the Piano “with expression”: a survey of definitions and pedagogies, with an introduction to *Játékok*

1.1 Introduction

Some years ago, when I was teaching one of my students to play Chopin’s elusive g minor *Ballade*, I was not satisfied with how she changed the character of her playing from the opening measures to the subsequent sections. I explained several different ways for her to improve her expression, involving interpretation, touch, rhythmic feeling, and also emotion. This spurred me to think more deeply than before about how to teach students to play more expressively, including an understanding of notation and how it is linked to sound images and their articulation in their performance. I searched for a piano method that could be used to train students in all those issues. Finally, I discovered the multi-volume series called *Játékok – Games for Piano* by the contemporary Hungarian composer György Kurtág. Although its many pieces might seem intimidating – a totally new music language to learn – on closer examination I realized that it is well suited to help students gain a complete understanding of notations, articulation, dynamics, and sound images, so that they can play traditional and contemporary repertoires more expressively.

1.2 Writings about expression

Musicians often discuss expression in connection with familiar Classical and Romantic piano masterworks, and each style has a unique set of technical features that are considered expressive. For example, when we think about the expression of Chopin’s nocturnes, the shape of phrases, the balance between the two hands, and the rubato may be foremost in our mind. If

we talk about Beethoven's piano sonatas, on the other hand, we may focus especially on the articulation, the dramatic dynamic contrasts, the connection between motives, and the tempo and rhythmic feeling. Again, when pianists play Debussy's works, they might focus especially on the tone color and those playing techniques that create a variety of sound. The topic of expression has been an interest of mine for many years. As a teacher, one of my main jobs is to inspire students to accept and learn new things. I would like to provoke their curiosity, engage their mind, spirit, and body in the music. With contemporary music, one of the most important things teachers can do is to help students connect the music with its appropriate expression from the very beginning.

One scholar's definition of the term "expression" is "those elements of a musical performance that depend on personal response and that vary between different interpretations."¹ Expression in Western music, she explains, as it was first conceived in the Renaissance, was associated with the imitation of affects. In the following centuries, aestheticians and philosophers considered passion and emotional expression to be more important.² This viewpoint was affirmed by many composers especially in the Romantic era.

Although Classical-era music is often thought to be less expressive compared with the music of the Romantic era, scholars have shown that expression of a subjective nature was at the heart of Classical-era thinking; indeed, it was considered to be the soul of music, which arose from the specific rhythms, melodies, and harmonies of a composition. Quoting several 18th century primary source materials, Dennis Schrock concludes that the "performer should exhibit

¹ Nancy Kovaleff Baker, et al. "Expression." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed April 16, 2016.

² Ibid.

expression by understanding the underlying affect or sentiment of each composition and then by varying all the components of performance practice (including tempos, articulations, metric accentuations, dynamics, rhythmic and phrase shapes, and ornaments) within the confines of Classical-era ideals of taste and sensibility.”³

The philosopher Stephen Davies surveys a number of theories of musical expression, such as the writings of Deryck Cooke and Leonard Meyer. He argues that music language is not similar to that of linguistic descriptions or pictures. Moreover, he holds that “the expression in music should not be understood as a relation between the music and the emotions of the composer or listener,”⁴ that it is a quality in the music itself. For instance, “music can be expressive of more complex emotional and other psychological states if we take into account not just the contours of particular short passages but the way in which those passages interact with each other over an extended period of musical development.”⁵ This suggests that performers need to carefully analyze the works they play in order to understand what the works are expressing.

Since the early 19th century, many great performers, such as Beethoven, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Liszt, Anton Rubinstein, and Clara Schumann, used their transcendental piano techniques to perform their own works or the piano compositions of other contemporary

³ Dennis Shrock, “Expression” in *Performance practices in the classical era: As related by primary resources and as illustrated in the music of W.A. Mozart and Joseph Haydn*. (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2011), 413-4.

⁴ Jenefer Robinson, Review of *Musical Meaning and Expression* by Stephen Davies, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54, no. 3 (1996): 307-09.

⁵ Ibid.

composers in an expressive way. They enhanced many aspects of piano technique: touch, dynamic contrast, beautiful tone, and pedaling.⁶ Although these artists left no definition of musical expression, they inspired later performers to think about how to interpret their music more expressively.

Articulation is often indicated by the composer with specific marks, such as slur, phrase mark, staccato, accent, sforzando, legato, and other symbols. But performers also provide it based on their experience and interpretation of the score. Either way, an appropriate articulation of individual notes and figures is essential for expressing musical meaning.⁷

Alfred Cortot, a renowned pianist in the 20th century, was famous for his unique expressive interpretations. His music is full of various color changes and dramatic contrast.⁸ In his writings and teaching videos, he encouraged students always to pursue a relationship between music and literature. Cortot's ideas about music expression can also be gleaned from his teaching, as exemplified by his masterclass about Schumann's "Der Dichter Spricht" from *Kinderszenen*:

It seems to me that this last piece, "The Poet Speaks," which is the title Schumann gave to this immortal work, should be conceived as a kind of intimate reverie. It's not just about making a beautiful sound, and expressive phrasing, you need also to create a sense of dreaming. The truth is you need to dream this piece rather than play it. [...] You should

⁶ Reginald R. Gerig, *Famous Pianists and Their Techniques*, (Washington: R. B. Luce.1974), 229.

⁷ Clive Brown, "Articulation and phrasing," in *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 138.

⁸ S. Isacoff, "Music Education: Murray Perahia on the Lessons of Cortot," *Piano Today* 26 (2006): 47-48.

convey the music not just through the notes, but through some kind of inspiration drawn from its immortal spirit...⁹

One particularly interesting discussion of musical expression is by György Sándor, the famous Hungarian pianist who was well known for his interpretations of the music of Béla Bartók, an important influence on Kurtág. In his book *On Piano Playing*, Sándor identifies several qualities that are expressive: a pianist's sound is the direct result of technique, the manner of playing, and the personal interpretation of the music. Sándor gives specific examples of how technique affects expression. First among them is "singing tone". Although the piano is a kind of percussion instrument, he says that it nevertheless has the ability to talk, to sing, and to whisper. If the attack on the piano is sudden, angular, and produced with a stiff wrist, a hard, harsh sound is inevitable. However, if the attack is produced with resilient and elastic fingers, wrist, and hand, then a singing tone will result. Therefore, the essential quality in a singing tone is intensity.¹⁰

However, Sándor also observes that the piano offers less control over the articulation and dynamic shaping of sound, compared to strings, winds, and voice which do so by bowing and breathing. He says that the pianist can nevertheless imitate this sense of singing through slight delays, suspense and *accelerando* – in other words, all those elements related to rhythm. The

⁹ "Alfred Cortot: Master Class on Schumann Kinderszenen (1953)," YouTube video, from a masterclass televised on 1953, posted by "win081," December 5, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNUNNNNj_Qw

¹⁰ György Sándor, *On Piano Playing: Motion, Sound and Expression*. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1981), 179-182.

performer should not play metronomically, but can be flexible and free within a reasonable limitation.¹¹

Another important feature of piano playing, according to Sándor, is the aspect of sonority that results from pedalling. He regards the three pedals (forte or damper pedal, sostenuto pedal, and sordino or una corda pedal) as the color palette of piano performance. In an overview of the history of the instrument, Sándor reviews the purpose and effects of pedaling in Classical era music. He then notes that in many other pieces, especially those composed by some contemporary composers, a particular sound effect has been indicated. For instance, in impressionist pieces, the pedal tremolo or pedal vibrato could be used quite often, and the *una corda* pedal is used to produce softer sonorities and change tone quality.¹²

Sándor's ideas are borne out to a certain extent by a recent study of the philosophical and aesthetic basis of 19th-century piano and violin performance practice. According to the authors, expressiveness in western classical musical performance is achieved when, by the application of myriad devices, musicians render the seemingly lifeless notes of a score with light and shade, emotion, feeling, and passion. In a manner similar to effective oration (which relies on the careful and calculated modulation of tone color, dynamics, and timing), musical expressiveness depends on dynamic variation, accentuation, articulation, rhythmic alteration, and tempo modification.¹³ They note that "numerous instrumental treatises encourage the player to emulate

¹¹ Ibid. 199-200.

¹² Ibid. 161-178.

¹³ David Milsom and Neal Peres Da Costa, "Expressiveness in Historical Perspective: Nineteenth-Century Ideals and Practices," in *Expressiveness in Music Performance: Empirical*

characteristics of singers, and to see the voice as the most natural and perfect of instruments."¹⁴ Several 19th century theorists also prescribed that the primary techniques for pianists to achieve tonal and textural variation were dislocation and arpeggiation. Dislocation means the localized separation of melody note from accompaniment. Arpeggiation means the separating of notes in chords, whether or not marked by the composer.

Some aspects of expressive playing aside from these purely technical ones are covered by essays collected in the book *Musical Excellence: Strategies and Techniques to Enhance Performance*.¹⁵ In the chapter of "Measuring Performance Enhancement in Music," Gary E. McPherson and Emery Schubert describe "expression" as including: an understanding of the emotional character of the work; the projection of its mood and character; the communication of its structural high points and turning point; sensitivity to the relationship between the parts within a texture; and appropriate use of tone and color, light and shade, and/or drama.¹⁶ They suggest students can maximize the impact of their performance by learning history, culture, among other related topics, then by defining the boundary of their own expression.

Approaches Across Styles and Cultures, ed. Dorottya Fabian, Renee Timmers, and Emery Schubert (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2014), accessed 25 Mar. 2016.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gary E. McPherson and Emery Schubert, "Measuring Performance Enhancement in Music," in *Musical Excellence: Strategies and Techniques to Enhance Performance*, ed. Aaron Williamon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 64.

¹⁶ Ibid.

A recent Master's thesis by Sophia Yu¹⁷ also connects music expressivity to emotion, feeling, and affects, but focuses on the visual element of performance. She describes musical communication in three steps:

- 1) the composer codes musical ideas into notation
- 2) the performer recodes the notation into audible musical signals
- 3) the listener recodes the performers' acoustical signals back into the musical idea.

Her primary point is that performers can use physical gestures to perform music more expressively, especially for untrained listeners.

A team of researchers from Sweden and Britain examined the importance of expressivity to contemporary music students. They found that students define expressivity mainly as communicating emotions and "playing with feeling," as distinct from interpretation, which students define as focusing on a performer's own feeling (using more accurate dynamics, pedals, etc.). Unfortunately, they write, there are few effective ways to teach expressivity because there are almost no theories to guide teachers, and it is difficult to express knowledge about it verbally. Nevertheless, expressivity should be practiced daily, and needs to be taught more.¹⁸

¹⁷ Sophia Tsin-Ting Yu, "Keyboard Choreography for the Young Pianist: Expressive Gestures in Piano Performance and their Pedagogical Implications" (M.A. thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 2011), 45.

¹⁸ Erik Lindström, Patrik N. Juslin, Roberto Bresin and Aaron Williamon, "Expressivity Comes from within Your Soul': A Questionnaire Study of Music Students' Perspectives on Expressivity," *Research Studies in Education* 20.1 (2003): 23-47.

Renee Timmers and Makiko Sadakata¹⁹ (2014) assert that expression can be trained by focusing on elements of timing, tempo, pitch, intensity, timbre, bodily movements, muscle, tension, posture, and facial expressions. They report on computer software that provides feedback about these technical and emotive aspects of musical performance.²⁰

Contemporary composers are also concerned with some aspects of expression too. In the last century they have been exploring many ways to create new sounds at the piano, and new ways to notate them. As these new ideas have gradually accumulated, so has the need to bring them to young musicians in a pedagogical approach. In 1939 the Hungarian composer Belá Bartók completed a progressive six-volume series that he called *Mikrokosmos*, suggesting that they encompassed all aspects of piano playing. Helmut Lachenmann's *Ein Kinderspiel: seven little pieces for piano* (1980)²¹ is a set of experimental compositions for his son, which includes clusters, cross-hands playing, and exploring new piano sonorities. Ross Lee Finney also composed a set of pedagogical pieces, *32 Piano Games* (1969)²² for young pianist. They introduce the student to new-music notation, such as a trill starting fast and slowing gradually, a prolongation of note, etc. But these pieces are more suitable for intermediate level students than

¹⁹ Renee Timmers, and Makiko Sadakata. Training Expressive Performance by Means of Visual Feedback: Existing and Potential Applications of Performance Measurement Techniques." *In Expressiveness in music performance: Empirical approaches across styles and cultures*, edited by Dorottya Fabian, Renee Timmers, and Emery Schubert. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2014, accessed 25 Mar. 2016.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Helmut Lachenmann, *Ein Kinderspiel: sieben kleine Stücke : für Klavier = Child's play : seven little pieces for piano* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1990).

²² Ross Lee Finney, *32 Piano Games* (New York: C. F. Peters Corporation, 1969).

beginners. Witold Lutosławski's works also include sets of pieces for young children, such as *Small Pieces* (1923-26), *Two Studies* (1941), *Folk Melodies* (1945), and other, but none of them is arranged by pedagogical purpose.

In 1973 another great Hungarian composer György Kurtág started to compose his own progressive series of pieces, and by 2010 completed the eight volumes. In his music, Kurtág explores many different piano sounds, the particular approach to play them, and some new ways to notate them. Overarching this pianistic and pedagogical approach is Kurtág's desire to open the minds of young musicians to acceptance of these sounds and playing styles in a very expressive way, and also eliminate their potential fear and suspicion of them.²³ In one of the interviews he described the expressive potential of the simple material that these pieces use:

What you hear are the notes of the C major scale turned into a meditation for four hands. There is nothing more familiar than these elements, but nothing stranger than what happens to them throughout this performance.[...] Hearing *Flowers We Are ...* is like opening a trapdoor in your floor and dropping for a moment into the infinity of the cosmos.²⁴

Although they take various approaches to the topic, the scholars and performers and composers I have cited agree that expression determines whether a performance is successful or not. There is a consensus that playing expressively on the piano involves dynamics, rhythm, articulation, and emotion. This paper will consider how Kurtág's *Játékok* can be used to teach these aspects of expression to young musician.

²³ Rachel Beckles Willson, "After 1968: Budapest, Kurtág and events" *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music during the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 148-57.

²⁴ Tom Service, "A Guide to György Kurtág's Music" *The Guardian* (March 12, 2013), accessed June 24, 2016.

1.3 György Kurtág's biography

György Kurtág has worked for a long time as a composer, pianist, and chamber coach. He was born in Romania of Hungarian parents in 1926. His mother was his first piano teacher when he was five years old, although he stopped playing it for some years. From 1940, he restarted piano studies with Magda Kardos and composition with Max Eisikovits in Romania. He moved to Budapest to continue his music studies in 1946. His early professional music education was at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music, where he met his pianist wife Márta and another great Hungarian composer György Ligeti, who became a close friend. Therefore, Kurtág's music has been strongly influenced by Hungarian composers such as Bartók, Ligeti, and Sándor Veress, who was one of his compositional teachers. For example, Kurtág's graduation composition, a Viola Concerto, was considerably influenced by Bartók's Violin Concerto No.2.²⁵ Kurtág once said: "My mother tongue is Bartók, and Bartók's mother tongue was Beethoven."²⁶ After he graduated from the Academy, he went to Paris and West Berlin to study with Max Deutsch, Olivier Messiaen and Darius Milhaud. His composition was also influenced by the music of Anton Webern and Pierre Boulez. Now at age 90 he is mostly composing, but he still performs selected works from *Játékok* and his own Bach transcriptions, often in duet with his pianist wife. His language has been received as personal and intimate, and his style "defies any system, accepts no compromise, and has traced a path independent from the mainstream."²⁷

²⁵ Rachel Beckles Willson. "Kurtág, György." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, date accessed July 5, 2016

²⁶ "György Kurtág: Small is beautiful," *Independent*, accessed July 4, 2016.

²⁷ "György Kurtág," BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards, accessed April 13, 2016.

Kurtág's works include pieces for orchestra, chamber group, voice, and solo instruments, many of them short aphoristic pieces focused on the most minute expressive details of intervals and timbre. In his chamber music, for instance, such as the well-known String Quartet Op.1 and 12 Microludes, he always pursues the tiniest forms with extreme expression. In all his compositions, he strives to “condense the most complex meaning into a handful of notes, to reduce it to the essence of musical expression, achieving a concentrated expressiveness with a minimum of material.”²⁸

Kurtág's piano works are few in number. In addition to his pedagogical books *Játékok*, he has published only three works: Eight Piano Pieces Op. 3 (1960), Splinters Op. 6d (1978), and In Memoriam (1990), although the latter has now been included in *Játékok*, Volume V.²⁹ Already with his Op. 3, Kurtág started to think about contemporary techniques. He employed new sounds and unusual piano techniques including ostinato, tremolo, clusters, glissandi, and groups of very fast grace notes often including very wide leaps, among other things. He explored all those elements more widely and deeply later in *Játékok*.

1.4 Background of *Játékok*

The impetus for Kurtág to start composing a series of pedagogical works was provided by a piano teacher, Marianne Teöke, whose name is listed on the title pages of *Játékok* Volumes I through IV as a pedagogical collaborator. She encouraged Kurtág to write some pieces for

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Bálint András Varga, *György Kurtág: Three Interviews and Ligeti Homages* (University Rochester Press, 2009), 140.

children that would be fun to play.³⁰ The whole series, which includes eight volumes, was completed in 2010. Volume IV and VIII contain compositions for piano duet and for two pianos. *Játékok – Games for Piano* provides one of the most current piano methods for contemporary art music study. The eight volumes are divided equally into two series. The four volumes (I – IV) of the first series, which are arranged pedagogically from very easy to fairly difficult for rudimentary to intermediate levels, are largely characterized by a playful exploration of the simple gestural possibilities that involve both basic and innovative techniques for playing the piano.³¹ They focus on Kurtág’s specific notation, articulation, and dynamics. The second series, Volumes V to VIII, has an added focus on expression and musical meaning. He called them diary entries and personal messages, and was often inspired to write them as compositional gifts to his friends.

Generally, there are two pedagogical goals evident in this collection. First of all, it teaches students to learn a new musical language, to build up concepts of sound that are new and different from those of the traditional repertoire. Yet secondly, if students learn how to realize the complete and elaborate dynamic and emotional signs in *Játékok*, they will be able to play the Classical and Romantic repertoire more expressively.

In recent years, several scholars and performers have published about Kurtág’s music, but most of them focus on his chamber, vocal, and orchestral works, mentioning *Játékok* only

³⁰ Rebekkah Laeuchli, "Játékok: Discovering New Worlds of Piano Playing: Pedagogical Aspects of the Series by György Kurtág" (M.A. thesis, Basel, Switzerland, Hochschule für Musik, 2012), 4.

³¹ Gabriel Neves Coelho, "Kurtág’s *Játékok*: Playing Games with Tradition" (DMA diss., University of Oregon, 2014), 2.

glancingly. The three most significant studies of *Játékok* itself are by Kristiina Junttu,³² Gabriel Neves Coelho,³³ and Jeongwood Jang.³⁴ Junttu focuses on those aspects that Kurtág's contemporary approach brings to teaching the piano to young children. Taking all of her examples from Volume I, she examines the "kinaesthetic" movement that the music requires, and relates it to Kurtág's concept of the piano as a toy. She shows that playing *Játékok* enhances children's use of their bodies in a natural manner, and also that it helps children to embrace their inner hearing, and gain autonomy and motivation by helping them to find their own way towards a sense of themselves and music.³⁵

Coelho's dissertation also finds that this music teaches that "playing the piano is playful"³⁶, that the piano is a kind of a toy that encourages exploring all possibilities of movement; but he goes beyond that to show how some of these pieces are also compositional and/or cultural games. By analyzing some of the pieces, he identifies "cultural symbols which Kurtág manipulates within his music, juxtaposing elements from several layers of tradition."³⁷

Jang's dissertation, focusing only on *Játékok* Volume I, was written for pedagogical purposes as well. She lists non-traditional pedagogical elements, including all kinds of clusters,

³² Kristiina Junttu, "György Kurtág's *Játékok* Brings the Body to the Centre of Learning Piano," *The Finnish Journal of Music Education* 11 (2008): 97.

³³ Gabriel Neves Coelho, "Kurtág's *Játékok*: Playing Games", 2.

³⁴ Jeongwood Jang, "An Instructional Guide to Teaching Kurtág's *Játékok* Volume I to Beginning and Intermediate Piano Students" (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2015), i.

³⁵ Kristiina Junttu, "György Kurtág's *Játékok*", 97.

³⁶ Coelho, "Kurtág's *Játékok*," iv.

³⁷ Ibid.

symbols for note duration and pauses, symbols of accidental range, etc., to assist instructors in interpreting the score. In chapter 3, she classifies students into two groups: those who never studied piano, and those who know how to read standard musical notation, and provides a lesson plan for both groups. The plans covers materials such as notation, unusual piano techniques, and physical movement.³⁸

Adding to these scholars' work, I will concentrate on Kurtág's approach to musical expression and his desire in all the volumes of *Játékok* to open up the world of the young pianists to an accepting and expressive approach to non-traditional figuration and sounds. By discussing selected pieces, I will demonstrate how Kurtág teaches the student control of four important aspects of expression: rhythm and tempo, dynamics, articulation and sonority.

³⁸ Jeongwood Jang, "An Instructional Guide to Teaching Kurtág's *Játékok* Volume I", i.

Chapter 2: Expression in *Játékok*

As discussed in the previous chapter, and according to the definition of expression by Stephen Davies, György Sándor, and other scholars, musical expression arises from the performer's shaping of rhythm and tempo, dynamics, articulation, and sonority. In this chapter, these aspects will be discussed using examples from pieces in *Játékok*. By analyzing them, I will demonstrate how students can improve their musical expression through learning these pieces.

2.1 Rhythm

Broadly conceived, rhythm comprises meter, duration, tempo, and pauses. It is not only a determinant of form, but is also an important aspect of thematic character and emotion. Therefore, imparting a complete understanding of rhythm is one of the most effective ways to teach students to perform the music more expressively. In *Játékok*, Kurtág adopts two novel ways to help students master a complete concept of rhythm: a unique notation, and encouraging improvisation.³⁹ Of course, students need to learn to play evenly in strict time, and *Játékok* provides exercises for that (such as the Waltz in C in Vol. 1, p. 1B) but beyond that, they need to learn how to shape phrases with tempo, how long to make pauses, and other rhythmic tasks. By acquiring rhythmic flexibility and rhythmic feeling, students will find their own way to interpret the music, and so enhance their expression.

In *Játékok*, Kurtág often employs common music notation, which assumes that there is a regular beat, but he also uses a notation “without beat”, in which the durations are measured relative to each other, not with reference to a constant tempo. In the Preface to Volume I (“Key to the Signs Used”), Kurtág explains this system. In the rest of this section, I will focus on

³⁹ Rachel Beckles Willson, *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music during the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 149.

“pieces without beat”, pointing out specific pieces in *Játékok* that help students focus on expressive aspects of rhythm via durational notation, tempo, rhythmic feeling, and prosody.

2.1.1 Duration

In Kurtág’s idiosyncratic system, there are five basic duration values, shown in Example 2.1: very long, long, short, like an appoggiatura (grace eighth-note), and quasi in brackets (sixteenth and thirty-second grace notes). Three additional signs (very long prolongation, long prolongation, and shortened) can modify these durations, not only of sounds but also of the pauses between sounds and between sections. When these are combined, a great variety of relative durations can be created. Kurtág invented this system because he was interested in rhythmic flexibility and freedom, which he explored for many years and adopted into his music.

⁴⁰ From a pedagogical point of view, it offers a way for students to learn about playing rhythms expressively.

The piece “Consolation: In Remembrance of Magda Szávai” from Volume II (Example 2.2) provides a good example of his notation and the pedagogical opportunities it presents. To perform this piece, the student needs to choose an appropriate tempo and determine the approximate durations of long and short pitches and different pauses. According to Kurtág’s notation, the longest note is the first one F^4 in the left hand. Three G^4 s played with the right hand are shorter than regular whole note, the pauses between Gs are short-short-long. After them, the left hand plays D^4 - F^4 answered by the very similar pattern G^4 - Bb^4 in the right hand. Here, the right hand G^4 is longer than the left hand D^4 , and the left hand F^4 is longer than the right hand Bb^4 . When hands play the series of pitches from D^4 to Bb^4 , these rhythmic nuances create a

⁴⁰ Ibid, 139-148.

ritardando, which could be understood as an expressive way to play. Because Kurtág had not given the tempo marking for this piece, when players decide the duration of pitches and pauses, they should consider the proper rhythm associated with the title “Consolation” and sad emotion. There is no doubt it starts with a slow tempo, but in the middle three systems, the texture is getting thicker, with a number of semitones and whole tones added in. From those dramatic chords with dynamics changes, we can feel the sorrow, pain and sadness. In the last system, the repeated G⁴s in the right hand with multiple long pauses seem to make a ritardando again. Meanwhile, playing a diminuendo to make an effect of “echo”. It feels like consoling someone and letting them feel peaceful.

 = very long
 = long
 = short
 = like an appoggiatura
 = quasi in brackets: to be performed quickly or as if incidentally, sometimes with melodic importance

1a) Signs affecting the duration (over notes or rests)

-  = very long prolongation
-  = long prolongation
-  = shortened

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

Example 2.1: “Sound Values,” from “Key to the Signs Used,” p. 9

Consolation

Szávai Magda emlékezete

Magda Szávai zum Gedächtnis In Remembrance of Magda Szávai

The musical score is presented in five systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).
- The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes the instruction *con Ped.*
- The second system features a *poco a poco cresc.* marking.
- The third system includes a forte (*f*) dynamic and two *Ped.* markings.
- The fourth system contains *rinf.* and *sonore, dolce* markings, along with a *Ped.* marking.
- The fifth system starts with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic and includes an *(eco)* marking.
The score is characterized by flowing melodic lines, often with slurs and ties, and a steady accompaniment in the bass. Pedal points are used to sustain the harmonic texture.

Example 2.2: “Consolation: In Remembrance of Magda Szávai” from Vol. II, p. 26

2.1.2 Tempo

During the Classical and Romantic eras, tempo was denoted by meter signature, note values, types of figuration, and descriptive terms. Additional considerations might include the character of the piece, the genre, and the movement to which it belonged.⁴¹ Choosing a proper tempo is an important factor in playing the piano expressively. If it is too fast, executing some passages may be difficult; and too slow a tempo might make it hard to bring out a long line. Across all eight books, Kurtág specifies tempo three ways – through basic tempo markings, common qualifiers, and mood markings that have a tempo connotation. Appendix A classifies all the tempo marks that appear in *Játékok* into these three categories. It can be used as a reference for teachers or students to look up the meaning of these terms. I have also listed the page number of pieces which contain unusual terms. All of these terms directly reflect the musical meaning which Kurtág wants to express, so students have to understand the meaning of these terms in order to play the music more expressively. From the list, we can see Kurtág only adopted six basic tempo markings: *Andante*, *Allegretto*, *Moderato*, *Largo*, *Lento*, and *Prestissimo*. In most of the pieces, he specifies tempo with descriptive terms that belong to the groups of common qualifiers and mood markings with a tempo connotation. Therefore, the players will determine the tempo according to these descriptive terms and by considering the musical texture, such as “Consolation” in a slow tempo which I have discussed in the previous section. Another example is “Les Adieux (in Janáček’s Manier)” from Volume VI. The terms at the beginning “*semplice, poco rubato, e sempre parlando*” mean “simple, a little free, and always speaking”. Kurtág

⁴¹ Clive Brown, “Tempo,” in *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 282-89.

imitates the style and sound of the beginning of Janáček's *In the Mists* No.1. Therefore, the tempo of *Les Adieux* is similar to the tempo of *In the Mists* No.1 (*Andante* ♩=96)⁴² as a moderate tempo, like a walking pace.

2.1.3 Shaping of rhythmic groups

The student needs to learn to make boundaries of phrases clear through slight pauses and the shaping of dynamics and tempo. *Játékok* is helpful for this, because in many pieces, pauses are used to indicate the phrases, using the different types of pause available in Kurtág's special notation.

A good piece from which to learn these skills is the "Elegy for the left hand" in Volume III (Example 2.3). The expressive marking bracketed at the top of the score means "tenderly yet vigorously," two potentially conflicting terms that provoke the students to make some choices about expression. Students can master the rhythm of this piece in three stages. First, they should learn how to clearly distinguish the various lengths of pauses. Having determined which are most important, the students can then analyze the phrase structure and the texture. Lastly, according to their analysis, the students should arrange the dynamics, shape the phrases, and differentiate the tone color between melody and accompaniment.

This piece contains four types of pause: a very brief comma, a short pause which is written like a bowl, a traditional-looking fermata, and a fermata without the dot, which indicates a long pause. The comma appears on the first system, mostly to separate five consecutive Cs. The function of these commas seems to be to ensure that each of these notes, for which the

⁴² Leoš Janáček, *In the Mists for Piano Solo*, (Prague: Hudební Matice, 1938).

articulation is tenuto with dot, is played with a clear sound and with a short separation between them. In this context, the indication at the beginning to pedal until the end does not mean to hold the pedal without changing, but rather to use it constantly with changes as necessary.

One of the functions of the long pauses is to articulate the whole piece into five sections, which are indicated with red lines on the example. The first section, an introduction, extends from the beginning up to the first long pause. The second section ends before F4 in the third system. The third section stops on the comma/ breath mark in the fifth system. The fourth section extends to the end of the second-to-last system, and the last system can be thought as a coda. Long pauses also appear in the middle of phrases, but should be played differently. Comparing three long pauses, for example, the first long pause which is just before the red line in the first system is the longest one. The second one located at the end of the first system is shorter than the first one because it is the end of a short melodic phrase (Bb-Eb-Db). And the third one which is after B³ at the start of the second system is the shortest one compared with other two long pauses, because it is the start of a short melodic phrase. The combination of two types of pauses in the last system (the coda) is another good example for teaching students to understand the different length of pauses. There are four pauses arranged from short to long. The performer could play each long pause successively longer to make for a more final conclusion.

The lengths of the two other types of pause, fermata and short pause, depend not only on the notation, but also on the player's musicality, the direction of a melodic line, and the overall tempo. The texture can be heard as combining a kind of ostinato (the repeated C) with a melodic line that includes all the other pitches. The long pitches can be considered as accented main notes, and the short grace notes decorate them. To clarify this texture, all melodic pitches can be played louder than the ostinato Cs, and dynamic shading can be used to shape the phrases. For

example, in the second system, the series of pitches, short G and Bb, long A-B-C#, could be played with a slight crescendo.

In a performance note, the composer suggests differentiating the ostinato Cs from the melody by timbre in two different ways. In one way, all the Cs are to be played with the right hand, and the melody with the left. In the other way, the whole piece should be played with the left hand, but the right hand should double the ostinato C with sustained Cs in another register. These suggestions show how open and flexible and keen Kurtág is to variations on his notation. One wonders how receptive he would be to other unmarked color and expression changes in other pieces from *Játékok*. I suspect he would be in favor of anything that resulted in more colorful and expressive playing from the students.

[szőlő gyengédén, de erővel]*)

mf Ped. al fine

f

pp (eco) ppp

più f

molto rubato

pp ppp

Kórmány Klára
darábja

Example 2.3: “Elegy for the left hand” from Vol. III, p. 15.

2.1.4 Prosodic rhythm

In many musical traditions, rhythms mimic the temporal patterns of speech. In one of the pieces in *Játékok*, Kurtág uses language to teach rhythmic expression. Perhaps this reflects

Kurtág's larger concerns with music and poetry.⁴³ In Example 2.4, words lead to playing, especially in the first system. There are five different rhythmic patterns in this short piece, and each measure illustrates one pattern. The tempo of the words determines the tempo of the playing. Also, the articulation of vocal and playing should match, except in measure 2, where the player speaks *Kecs-ke* with the staccato tenuto, but plays Eb-Gb staccatissimo. In the penultimate measure, the voice easily performs the crescendo, but playing crescendo on the piano is impossible. So the player should attack the piano louder than saying the word and wait for the sound to disappear gradually.

Magyar nyelvlecke külföldieknek
Ungarischer Sprachkurs für Ausländer
A Hungarian Lesson for Foreigners

The image shows a musical score for a Hungarian lesson. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has two staves: the top staff is for the voice (labeled 'zongorista hangja*' and 'm. s.') and the bottom staff is for the piano. The lyrics are 'Ke - fe', 'Kecs - ke', and 'Kalap'. The piano part has dynamic markings *f*, *sf*, and *sf*. The second system also has two staves: the top staff is for the voice and the bottom staff is for the piano. The lyrics are 'Ka - la - pál', 'Bosz - [sz _____] szant', and 'szant'. The piano part has dynamic markings *f*, *sf*, and *sf*. There are performance instructions in German and English: '* Stimme des Pianisten / The voice of the pianist'. The score is dated '1991. I. 12.'

Example 2.4: “A Hungarian Lesson for Foreigners” from Vol. VI, p. 17.

⁴³ “György Kurtág,” BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards, <http://www.fbbva.es/TLFU/tlfu/ing/microsites/premios/fronteras/galardonados/2014/musica.jsp>, accessed April 13, 2016.

2.2 Dynamics

Control of dynamics is one of the most effective ways to play music more expressively. It directly impacts on tone color, the character of textures, and emotional delivery. An important part of Kurtág's teaching philosophy is to sensitize the performer to dynamics. He considered all dynamic indications to be meaningful, as he confirmed in an interview:

You have only deserved this *decrescendo* if you managed to carry the previous *crescendo* to a point where it could no longer be continued. Or, you've got to earn this *sforzato*. If you get it for nothing, if it only sounds like one because you just pounded the keys, that's no *sforzato*...⁴⁴

In *Játékok*, students learn how to maintain a steady soft or loud dynamic, create dramatic dynamic contrast, change tempo and dynamics together, and realize various explicit accent signs. They will enhance their control, and start to think about the relationship between dynamics and timbre, sound images, and emotional expression.

2.2.1 Pieces that maintain a uniform loudness

One way for a student to master dynamics is to play a passage, or a whole piece, that is specified to be played at a uniform loudness all the way through. From the perspective of piano techniques, by practicing at a constant loudness students learn how to maintain a steady weight of the touch, especially in irregular hand positions, such as both hands in the same register, and when hands cross.

2.2.1.1 Constantly quiet

Soft volume can be considered one of the most expressive aspects of sound. It can represent many different feelings, such as mysteriousness, sadness, dreaming, and tenderness.

⁴⁴ Bálint András Varga, *György Kurtág: Three Interviews and Ligeti Homages* (University of Rochester Press, 2009), 32.

Across all of the *Játékok*, we find many pieces that Kurtág has specified should be played constantly softly. From them, we can see he gives students a complete concept of soft sound, and how to achieve it even when figuration, articulation, touch, and timbre are different.

One example is the piece “Hommage à Christian Wolff (half-asleep)” from Volume III (Example 2.5). This piece is supposed to be played extremely quietly. It begins with two contrasting ideas: a series of short white-key grace notes followed by a long note, played with the right hand, and a slow, uneven-rhythm black-key pentatonic scale segment first played with the left hand. In the first system, the right hand plays three grace-to-long-note groups, each of which makes a wedge of two converging lines, such that every finger is engaged. The left hand plays two four-note pentatonic segments. The texture changes in the second system, as the hands superimpose triads, then superimpose melodic lines based on white-key and black-key pentatonic scales in the right and left hands respectively. In the last system, the black-key pentatonic scales shift to the right hand while the left hand plays two white key clusters, then both hands end with white key triads. The constant damper and *una corda* pedalling combine to create a dreaming feeling. The pianist may change the damper pedal following the slurs. One challenge for the student, then, is to maintain a consistently quiet volume while playing these different materials in different combinations.

The dynamic indications also pose a puzzle for the student to solve. In the second system, the indications *più pp* and *pochiss rinf.*, are ambiguous. Since the the first system is played *ppppp*, the *più pp* could be interpreted in two ways: either softer than *ppppp* or between *ppp* and *pp*, that is, louder than *ppppp*. The two possibilities amount to the same kind of task, since each demands a subtle change of loudness while remaining barely audible. The *pochiss rinf.* means slightly reinforce. In this measure the pianist might interpret it to mean that the left hand line

should play somewhat strong because the texture is a longer, even melodic line based on three consecutive perfect fourths (A#-D#, C#-F#, and G#-C#).

Hommage à Christian Wolff

(Félálomban)

(Im Halbschlaf) (Half-asleep)

The musical score consists of three systems of piano notation. The first system features a treble clef with a melodic line of eighth notes and a bass clef with a line of perfect fourths. Dynamics include *ppppp* and performance instructions *(con Ped.)* and *(una corda)*. The second system continues the melodic line with *più pp* and *pochiss rinf.* dynamics. The third system concludes with *ppppp* and *più pp* dynamics, ending with a *[Ped.]* marking.

Example 2.5: “Hommage à Christian Wolff (Half-asleep)” from Volume III, p. 39

In other pieces, Kurtág not only used normal dynamic signs to indicate soft sound, but he also placed expressive descriptions at the beginning, in German, Hungarian or Italian. One example is “*sehr leise, äußerst langsam*” (Volume V, p. 9), which means extremely slow and soft. Other verbal directions, such as *nagyon csendesen* and *appena sentito*, also indicate to play soft, while also suggesting a particular emotion or affect.

2.2.1.2 Constantly loud

Loud sound in music conveys strong emotion or qualities such as solid, heroic, aggressive, or angry. It can be difficult for students to achieve. Just banging on the keyboard will produce a harsh and ugly sound. Because the piano is a very sensitive instrument, the key to playing a beautiful and warm loud sound is to touch the keys with deep energy and flexible arms by using natural body weight.

A good piece in *Játékok* for practicing this kind of touch is “La fille aux cheveux de lin – enragée,” in Volume V, the beginning of which is shown in Example 2.6. In it, Kurtág uses a motive from Debussy’s famous prelude but completely alters its affect by changing its articulation, dynamics, and rhythmic character. Debussy’s original idea of descending thirds appears through the entire right-hand part of Kurtág’s piece, while the left hand plays a contrasting leaping staccatissimo from the beginning until the scales in the third system. It’s a good exercise for playing different articulation at the same time in different hands. The dynamics stay loud, shaded by *crescendo* and *marcato*. According to the title, the girl is angry, so players should interpret it with that emotion, and think about the music as aggressive. The sound should be sharp, and the touch quick. It is a good piece to teach the student to decide what the sound image is, and to connect their emotion to that sound interpretation.

Example 2.6: “La fille aux cheveux de lin – enragée” from Volume V, p. 10

Another example, “Do-Mi D’arab – for a Birthday,” from Volume VI (Example 2.7), also involves various types of articulation in loud music, but with further complications. The title may refer to the fact that the whole piece focuses on major third intervals, which can be considered Do and Mi in any key, and on “Arab” scales that include augmented 2nds, such as F-G#. There are three main types of material: staccatissimo and marcato notes (single note and clusters), a counterpoint of slurred two-note leaps in one hand against staccato leaps in the other, and fast

sixteenth-note groups which are also constructed from major thirds. One pedagogical purpose of the piece is for the student to learn how to play these materials accurately in different directions in both hands while maintaining a loud volume. For example, in the first two measures, both hands alternately play staccatissimo and marcato in contrary motion and contrasting articulation. After a loud long chord in measure 3, the hands again contrast, with the right hand playing a slurred two-note pattern while the left hand plays the staccato, and this texture reappears inverted in the second system. In the third system, the last type of material joins in, and both hands alternate fast short sixteenth-note patterns, halting on an extremely short and loud chords. In the fourth system, the first type of material returns, now with clusters instead of single notes.

These two examples require different approaches to playing loudly. The first one maintains a consistent texture, combining scales and staccato, while the second one contrasts various kinds of articulation and constantly changes material and switches it between the hands.

Do-Mi D'arab

Születésnapra

Vivo *f* **sub. più vivo** *meno f, lusingando e crudele*

tempo I *più f* **tempo II** *rinf. meno f, come prima*

Prestissimo *ff, marcatissimo* *ff*

tempo I *f* *più f*

Example 2.7: “Do-Mi D’arab” from Vol. VI p. 26

2.2.1.3 Moderate loudness

Generally, while the dynamic marks *mf* and *mp* commonly appear in one section or some phrases within a piece, it is rare to see an entire piece composed in one of them, even in today's popular pedagogical textbooks for beginners. Sometimes it is the most unassuming of dynamics that offers the best training. In the first volume of *Játékok*, Kurtág employs them to teach students to keep a steady volume while varying articulation and touch.

The pieces “Out and in (1) and (2)” (Example 2.8) show how difficult it is to maintain mezzoforte when the two hands are put in an unusual position, and they are good for training students to maintain the same sound quality with different fingers. Both pieces involve gradually expanding wedges of pitch, white-key in (1), and chromatic in (2). In (1), the pianist uses only the second finger, and hands frequently cross. In (2), the hand position is special too – at the beginning of each measure, the hands both attack D4, then one holds it while the other plays two pitches equidistant from it above and below. This requires the hands to interlock; one possible way is for the left to stay above, and the right hand to stay below. The challenge for students is to keep the same volume in these positions as the articulation and patterns change. The first one combines tenuto and staccato, such that each hand does the same up-down movement to play short to long notes. In (2), although the hands are kept in a constant position, both hands play white and black keys legato alternately in the same register.

Tölcsérjáték (1)

Trichterspiel (1) Out and In (1)

Musical score for Tölcsérjáték (1) in 2/2 time. The score is written for piano with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. It consists of two staves. The right hand plays a series of half notes with slurs, and the left hand plays a series of half notes with slurs. The tempo is marked *simile*. The piece ends with the instruction *rep. senza fine*.

Tölcsérjáték (2)

Trichterspiel (2) Out and In (2)

Musical score for Tölcsérjáték (2) in 2/2 time. The score is written for piano with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a *legato* articulation. It consists of two staves. The right hand plays a series of half notes with slurs, and the left hand plays a series of half notes with slurs. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Example 2.8: “Out and In (1) (2),” from Vol. I pp. 3B and 15.

To maintain a steady loudness, students should have not only the proper playing technique, but also the sound image in their minds before they attack the keys. Having a sensitive aural imagination can improve players’ musical expression because they can anticipate what kind of sounds they will create, and check the results after they play them.

2.2.2 Dramatic contrasts of loudness

Across the entire eight volumes, most of the pieces have a variety of loud and soft dynamics. But some of them seem to emphasize a dramatic contrast between different dynamics, which entails a contrast timbre as well. “Hommage tardif à Karskaya” from Volume V, shown in Example 2.9, requires instant extreme changes. Its first section is a transcription of the first movement of Kurtág’s String Quartet, Op. 1, and special sound effects on the piano imitate string tremolos. Kurtág specifies a very particular tone color for each chord with very clear notation including dynamics and articulation. By practicing this piece, students can learn how to control the dynamics precisely when the arms are moving quickly from one register to another. At the same time, students should understand that each notation represents a particular touch that makes a specific sound. Ultimately, students gain a complete concept of the sound images that result from the different touches.

2. Hommage tardif à Karskaya

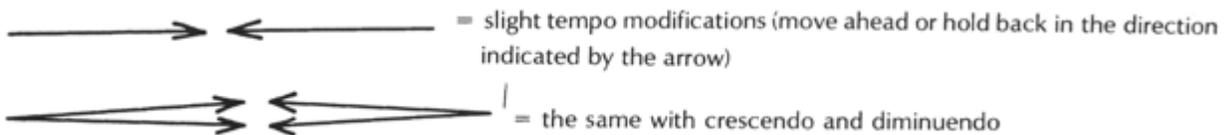
The musical score for "Hommage tardif à Karskaya" is presented in two systems. The first system is marked "Agitato" and features a piano part with rapid, tremolo-like chords, starting with *ppp* and moving through *molto*, *ff*, *pp, non cresc.*, *sub.*, *ff*, *pp*, and *fff*. The right hand part is marked *mf secco*. The second system is marked *p. poco dolce* and features a piano part with a more lyrical, tremolo-like texture, starting with *ppp* and moving through *f. marcatiss.* and *ff*. The right hand part includes a section marked *f. marcatiss.* and another marked *ff*. The score includes detailed dynamic markings, articulation symbols, and fingerings.

Example 2.9: “Hommage tardif à Karskaya,” from Vol. V, p. 44

2.2.3 Dynamics and tempo changing at the same time

Kurtág employs two special signs, shown at the bottom of Example 2.10, to indicate crescendo-with-accelerando and diminuendo-with-ritardando. Some of them clearly relate to emotional expression, because they appear with expressive markings, such as *espressivo* (*espr.*), *agitato*, *parlando*, and in the pieces titled “Sorrowful tune” and “Dirge”. They also tend to appear in glissandi and groups of clusters. For instance, crescendo-with-accelerando is used for group of loud clusters to create a climax, such as in “Sorrowful tune” in Volume III and “Hommage à Tchaikovsky” in Volume I. Example 2.11 shows the beginning of “Hommage à Tchaikovsky.” It refers to Tchaikovsky’s first Piano Concerto in B flat minor. The clusters represent the opening series of chords while glissandi stand for the fast arpeggios. The notation leaves the choice of exact pitches up to the player. The score just shows approximate range – low, middle, or high. The graphic shape of the glissandi shows their direction and their starting and ending registers. (Other aspects of this piece will be discussed in section 2.4.)

While Kurtág’s version is easier and fun to play for beginners, its changing tempo and dynamics also have a pedagogical purpose. It requires the pianist to play a series of middle-register clusters gradually louder and faster. After a long pause, contrasting glissandi enter, and they also get louder and faster. Practicing these coordinated changes helps the student gain good control of the arms and body.



Example 2.10: “Other signs,” from *Key to the Signs Used*, p. 12.

The image displays four systems of piano score for the piece "Hommage à Tchaikovsky".

- System 1:** Features a treble and bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The treble clef has a *fff* dynamic marking and the instruction *#b sempre*. The bass clef has a *#b* marking. The system includes a *con Ped.* instruction below the staff.
- System 2:** Continues the musical notation with various chordal textures and melodic lines.
- System 3:** Shows a dense texture of chords in the bass clef with a *ffff* dynamic marking and two long horizontal arrows pointing to the right. A fermata is present at the end of the system.
- System 4:** Features dynamic markings *ff* and *sff*. It includes slanted lines with wavy patterns and arrows, accompanied by dynamic markings *# m s*, *# m d*, and *molto*. The system concludes with a fermata.

Example 2.11: "Hommage à Tchaikovsky," from Vol. I, pp. 21-22.

2.2.4 Dynamic accent

Kurtág notates accents meticulously and uses a great variety of them, not only the common types, such as tenuto, accent, staccatissimo, marcato, *sf*, etc., but also in combinations, such as dynamic accent with staccato on single notes or clusters, or tenuto with staccato. All of these accent signs can also be thought of as part of the articulation, and each sign represents a different touch corresponding to a particular sound image that is closely linked to musical expression. The short but interesting piece “Little Chorale (2),” shown in Example 2.12, presents different types of accents which can be taught as particular touches. The two chords at the end of the first phrase have different articulations. The first one (F^{#4}-G^{#4} in the right hand together with F²-G² in the left hand) is staccato with dynamic accent on short notes, so the touch is quick followed by an upward movement. The second chord (A^{#3}-C^{#4} in the right hand together with B²-C³ in the left hand) is marcato on very long notes, so it should be played louder than the first chord, and the chord should be held. Both chords should sound sharper and louder than all previous chords. According to the composer’s accompanying note, the player can play the series of chords backwards to create the third and fourth phrases, but keep the same rhythm and dynamics of the original sequence. In this way the piece would change such that:

- In the third phrase, the last four staccato chords in the last measure become two groups of two slurred chords, with the first group *mp*, and the second one *f*.
- The *mp* two-slurred-chord group at the beginning of the second system keeps the same dynamic and articulation.
- The two chords at the end of the first system change to short staccato with an accented chord and a long marcato chord.

- In the fourth phrase, the long marcato chord and short staccato chord change to a two-slurred group with *mp* and *f*.
- The *mp* two-slurred-chord group in the middle of the first system keeps the same dynamic and articulation as in the first two measures of the second system.
- The fourth phrase will end with the first four chords, played staccato with accent instead of slurred, and the dynamics are *f*.

This exercise makes the student think about accent as a particular kind of touch, involving quick motion with natural weight to create a sharp and loud sound. It also teaches about retrograde not only in pitch, but in phrasing and even expressive character.

Kis korál (2)
Kleiner Choral (2) Little Chorale (2)

Egy korál első két sorát látjuk. Alkossuk meg önállóan a harmadik és negyedik sort, úgy, hogy a hangokat visszafelé, „rákmenetben” olvassuk, de a ritmust és dinamikát az eredeti sorrendben alkalmazzuk rájuk.
Wir sehen die ersten zwei Zeilen eines Chorals. Bilden wir nun selbständig die 3. und 4. Zeilen, indem wir die Noten von hinten nach vorne „im Krebsgang” lesen, wobei Rhythmus und Dynamik in der ursprünglichen Reihenfolge bleiben.
We see the first two lines of a chorale. Let us create the third and fourth lines by ourselves, by reading the notes backwards, “crabwise”, but applying the rhythm and dynamics in the original sequence.

Example 2.12: “Little Chorale (2),” from Vol. I, p. 14B

2.3 Articulation and interpretation

Teaching students to master articulation is one of the major goals in piano pedagogy. In this section, I will discuss how students can learn from *Játékok* how three types of articulation relate to expression: slurs, non-legato phrasing, and staccato.

2.3.1 Slurs

Kurtág notates three types of slurs, each with a different meaning: the common slur means to play legato, the dotted slur indicates phrasing, and what he calls “convolvulus-like” curves group together notes that are played with alternate hands (Example 2.13). Each can be clarified with careful control of dynamics and pedalling.

In the first system of “Adoration, adoration, accursed desolation” (Example 2.14), the left hand alternates two-note and three-note slurs. One possible way for the player to shape them is to play a slight diminuendo on the two-note slur, and a crescendo followed by a diminuendo for the three-note slur. The right hand part should be interpreted in a different way, still consistent with its slurs. Because the long notes are the main pitches, and the small notes are the decoration before the long notes, in mm. 1 and 3 the player should release the right hand after the G⁴, then play the A⁴ with somewhat louder and warmer sound. The two-note slur at mm. 2 and 4 could play a crescendo rather than a diminuendo because F^{#4} is the main note, and G⁴ is its anticipation.

The image shows three examples of musical notation with slurs:

- The first example shows a treble clef staff with two notes, G4 and A4, connected by a solid line slur. To the right of the slur is the text "= legato".
- The second example shows a treble clef staff with two notes, G4 and A4, connected by a dotted line slur. To the right of the slur is the text "= does not indicate touch but holds together units belonging together (phrasing)".
- The third example shows a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a complex passage of notes. Two large, irregular, convolvulus-like curves are drawn around groups of notes: one around a group in the bass clef and another around a group in the treble clef. To the right of these curves is the text "= these convolvulus-like curves indicate the units belonging together when played with alternate hands."

Example 2.13: “Other signs” from “Key to the Signs Used,” p. 12



Example 2.14: “Adoration, adoration, accursed desolation” from Vol. II, p. 12

Another piece, “In memoriam Hermann Alice” in Volume II (Example 2.16), presents a good example of how to learn to play legato without typical legato fingering while alternating hands in contrasting registers, a texture that recalls “Flowers We Are, Frail Flowers...” (Volume I. p. 3b) (Example 2.15). Its “melancholic character”⁴⁵ is manifested by the slow tempo and by the particular blending of overtones through the use of pedals. In the first two systems of Example 2.16, three long slurs indicate three phrases. In the first two phrases, the hands cross at the last two pitches; and in the third phrase, the hands crossing expands to four pitches. This exemplifies another important pedagogical application of *Játékok* – making an emotional connection to the music through body movement, as discussed by Kristiina Junttu.⁴⁶ The player should feel the changes in tension in the big leaps, yet maintain a smooth continuity under the

⁴⁵ Coelho, “Playing Games”, 106.

⁴⁶ Kristiina Junttu, “Abstract 2 in English,” http://www.junttu.net/kristiina/Abstract_2_in_English.html, accessed June 17, 2016.

slur. Phrasing can also be clarified through resonance, by holding the pedal all the way through each slur. This may be altered, however. To emphasize some pitches or chords the player may change the pedal to clarify and highlight passing sonorities. For example, in the second measure of the third system, I suggest changing the pedal right on the chord (Eb³-F⁴-D⁵) to emphasize its quality as the first chord of the whole piece, and to clarify its tenuto articulation.

Blumen die Menschen, nur Blumen . . . (1b) Flowers We Are, Frail Flowers . . . (1b)

(con Ped.)

8

8

B.Y. darabja

Example 2.15: “Flowers We Are, Frail Flowers...(1b)” from Vol. I, p. 3B

Example 2.16: “In memoriam Hermann Alice” from Vol. II, p. 30

2.3.2 Non-legato phrasing

In the second series of *Játékok*, especially in the pieces that are “*In memoriam...*” and “*Hommage à...*”, Kurtág often uses the term “quasi legato” to indicate the articulation. This direction means to play non-legato, but with well-shaped phrases, which is the way pianists

sometimes interpret Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*.⁴⁷ The piece “Versetto: Temptavit Deus Abraham...” (Example 2.17) provides a good way to practice this skill. In order to shape phrases better, students have to understand when they begin and end. One option in this piece is to consider all long pitches (and pause signs), indicated by lines on the example, as the ending of phrases. Then the player can shape the phrases through contours of loudness and tempo, for example as shown by the added dynamic signs I have added in blue. Note the tempo direction “parlando” encourages the player to shape the phrases like spoken utterances, as seen in “A Hungarian Lesson for Foreigners.” (Example 2.4)

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Versetto: Temptavit Deus Abraham" from Volume VI, page 6. The score is written for a single keyboard instrument and is in G major, 3/4 time. It consists of three systems of music. The tempo is marked "Parlando, molto rubato". The first system includes the instruction "mf sonore, non legato (quasi legato)". The score features various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings. Blue annotations highlight specific phrases and dynamics, while red vertical lines indicate phrase boundaries. The piece concludes with a final cadence marked "p".

Example 2.17: “Versetto: Temptavit Deus Abraham” from Vol. VI, p. 6.

⁴⁷ David Schulenberg, *Keyboard Music of J. S. Bach* (2nd Edition). (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 2006,) 21.

2.3.3 Staccato and staccatissimo

An important lesson to learn is that two notes with the same articulation mark may be played in different ways in different musical contexts and this is true even of such familiar articulation marks as staccato (dot) or staccatissimo (wedge). Generally, these two marks ask the player to attack the keyboard quickly in order to create a short and sharp sound. The touch of the staccatissimo to produce a loud sound is to strike the keys quickly and deeply with the player's natural arm weight, but the touch of the staccato is more gentle with less weight. "Play with Overtones" (Example 2.18) offers an opportunity to practice the difference, as it includes both staccato and staccatissimo. In the first measure of the second system, the left hand plays two loud staccatissimo chords followed by the right hand playing two *pp* staccatissimo single notes. The touch of the loud chords is deeper and quicker to create a sharp and loud sound, while the touch of the single notes is much lighter and softer. In my opinion, Kurtág marks staccatissimo on these single notes to tell the player to make them more intense compared with the staccato single notes in the first system. The interesting instruction "poco sost." written over them requires the player to think about how to play these two Es short, but slightly sustained. Realizing these nuances makes the music more expressive.

Example 2.18: “Play with Overtones (4)” from Vol. III, p. 46

Many of Kurtág’s pieces use a compound sign of dot (staccato) and tenuto together to signify a distinctive articulation that affects character and tone color. For example, in the middle section of the “Les Adieux (in Janáček’s Manier)” (Example 2.19), the notes with that sign need to be played non-legato, but not too short, just slightly emphasizing those pitches. Meanwhile, the phrases need to be shaped very well, as was discussed in the previous section. Here there are two different tone colors to be created with individual hands. At the very soft overall volume, the right-hand part has to be played legato, evoking a dreamy atmosphere, while the left hand plays with a slight weight to create a warm and thick sound, which contrasts but supports the melody of the right hand.

calando molto

quasi in tempo, scorrevole

pppp, kaum hörbar,*
delicatissimo,
quasi in sogno

perendosi

ppp

(von hier an stumm, die Synkopen nur mit den Fingerspitzen fühlen)**

(Ped.)

quasi l'istesso tempo

sempre pppp, irreal

(Ped.)

Example 2.19: “Les Adieux (in Janáček's Manier)” from Vol. VI, p. 28.

2.4 Sonority

An important part of the sonority of tonal music comes from the traditional harmonies it is built from. In contemporary music, though, the concept of sonority varies widely. Performers need to consider all its aspects in order to choose an appropriate way to interpret the music.⁴⁸ Some contemporary piano works create new sonorities with such extended techniques as playing clusters with palms, fist, and arms, or plucking strings, among other things. To learn how to

⁴⁸ R. Murray Schafer, *The Thinking Ear: Complete Writings on Music Education* (Toronto, 1988), 28.

control timbre, students need to master these different playing methods, and learn the sound images corresponding to those techniques. Those playing techniques and their expressive effect seem inseparable from physical movements, as Junttu explains:

Body movement plays an important role in musical performance. The piano is one of the most physically engaging of all instruments. The body is not only essential to the physical manipulation of the instrument, but also vital to the generation of expressive ideas about music.⁴⁹

The unique notation of *Játékok* helps students visualize the body movements⁵⁰ associated with the playing method, such as when the scores contain clusters and glissandi. One purpose of the graphic notation and extended piano techniques is to encourage players feel freedom to improvise and feel playful and be expressive.

This section presents certain pieces that are played with innovative piano techniques including clusters, glissando, harmonics, and unusual touches, and illustrates how to interpret them more expressively.

2.4.1 Clusters

Kurtág clearly explains his graphic notation of different clusters in “Key to the Signs Used” in the Appendix. Most of the scores that require them appear in the first two volumes. Kurtág provides a series of basic exercises at the beginning of Volume I to help students become familiar with these figures before they play the real pieces. This procedure is similar with Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*, which also contains additional exercises in Books 1-4. Generally, there

⁴⁹ Kristiina Junttu, "György Kurtág's *Játékok* brings the body to the centre of learning piano," *Finnish Journal of Music Education* 11 (2008): 97.

⁵⁰ Willson, *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music during the Cold War*, 149.

are three types of clusters, played with five fingers or palm, or with fist, or with forearm, but they are notated in several different ways.

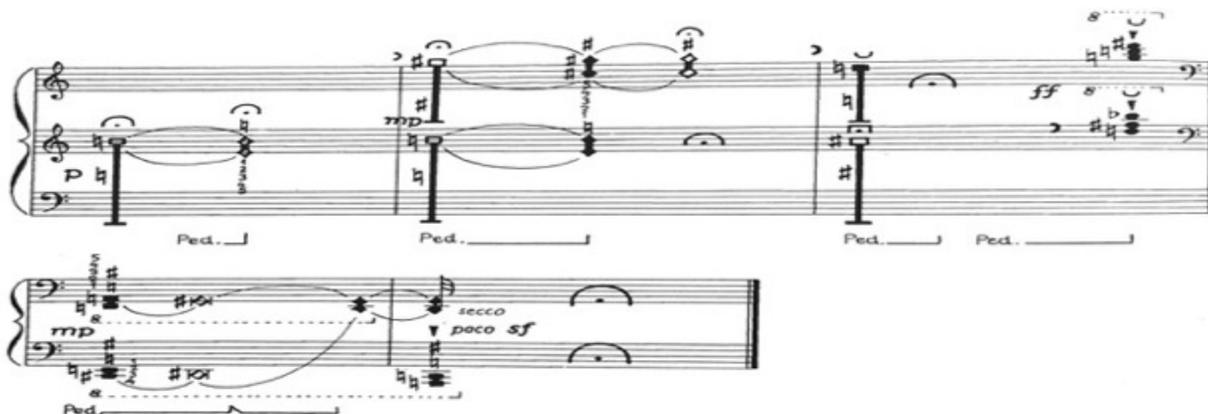
2.4.1.1 Palms

Kurtág writes circles to indicate palm clusters, a single circle for one hand, or two stacked circles for both hands. Accidentals next to the circles tell the player to include white keys (natural sign), black keys (sharp or flat signs), or both (natural and sharp/flat signs). An unusual notation and sound is indicated by a group of circles connected by a bold black line and a sharp sign. Here, the player has to keep fingers on the same black keys as the palm moves up or down on the white keys. This focuses on the held pitch within a changing surrounding cluster.

Many pieces composed of clusters in Volume I are a reminiscence or allusion to the music of other composers, imitating their compositional style, such as *Hommage à Paganini*, *Hommage à Eötvös Péter*, etc. Therefore, these pieces are not only technical exercises, but also contain musical imitation. For example, the clusters in *Hommage à Tchaikovsky* imitate the chords at the beginning of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 which was discussed in detail in section 2.2.3, Example 2.11. Students who are at the rudimentary or intermediate levels can play this piece so as to mimic the gesture of Tchaikovsky's concerto. The piano's entry in the concerto consists of a series of massive chords that go crashing up the keyboard with a powerful, brilliant, and magnificent sound. Kurtág's cluster imitation pursues the same gestural effect without the concern for pitches. Therefore, students need to play those clusters with power and energy combined with damper pedal to create more volume and colorful overtones, and so make an amusing reference to the original.

2.4.1.2 Fist and forearm

Fist clusters are often best produced with the fist facing upwards,⁵¹ with the thumb on top, while the most important goal in playing a forearm cluster is to aim for a clean, even sound across the gesture. However, players of Kurtag’s music express not just percussive effects or fireworks, but a multitude of fun physical movements, as well as melodic and harmonic ideas. The following example, “Hommage à Ligeti” (Example 2.20), focussing on forearm and finger clusters, contains both physical movement and expressive playing. The forearm is laid parallel to the keyboard, and attacks the keys; then it turns to traditional playing, using fingers to press keys silently, so its movement involves a 90-degree rotation. To play this piece expressively the player should distinguish the low, middle, and high register clusters with different dynamics. Proper use of the pedal is critical for catching the resonance, and for connecting the forearm clusters and finger clusters smoothly when the arms rotate. One possible way is to depress the pedal after playing one cluster, then release the pedal right at the onset of the the next cluster, in order to catch the resonance.



Example 2.20: “Hommage à Ligeti” from Vol. I, p. 20

⁵¹ “Henry Cowell Piano Music,” <http://www.cowellpiano.com/Clusters.html>, accessed June 26th, 2016.

There is no doubt that playing clusters is a fun way to learn the piano, especially for young students. It is not only an extended piano technique broadly used in contemporary piano works, but is also a way for students to develop the ability to imagine the sounds that correspond to each playing method.

2.4.2 Glissandi

In the classical and romantic repertoire, glissandi are used sparingly as a special effect, such as in Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata and Liszt's Paganini etude *La Chasse*. However, one of Kurtág's most well-known pieces "Perpetuum mobile (objet trouvé)" (Example 2.21) gives the glissando even more expressive color and dynamic change. The piece is perhaps the only example in the piano literature that is made up only of glissandi.⁵² It contains long and short glissandi, and alternation between glissandi on white and black keys emphasizing and dramatizing the color change between them. Kurtág states that the piece can be performed in three different dynamics: a) keeping the whole piece in *p*; b) playing with crescendo and diminuendo following the contour of the glissandi; c) playing sempre diminuendo. The author suggest students start with the second way – crescendo and diminuendo – because that is the most natural and varied playing method. The composer also instructs the performer that "the change of directions should be smooth as if played by a single hand. The tempo of the glissando must be steadily quiet and quick, therefore the longer the glissando line, the longer it should last.

⁵² Henry Cowell, an American avant-garde composer, did not compose a piece using glissando by itself, but he composed several pieces for string piano, which means the whole piece performed by sliding the strings of inside the piano, such as *The Banshee* (1925), *Sinister Resonance* (1930), etc. The non-stop sound effect is similar to Kurtág's one.

It may be repeated at will.”⁵³ Therefore, students can distinguish the different colors that result from the different dynamics of the continuous long and short glissandi, and of the white- and black-key glissandi. This piece is popular on the concert stage, undoubtedly because of the appeal of its sounds, but also because it is fun.

Örökmozgó (talalt tárgy)
Perpetuum mobile (objet trouvé)

Vivace, ma sempre tranquillo

sempre con Ped.
(ad lib: una corda)

molto

Example 2.21: “Perpetuum mobile (objet trouvé)” from Vol. I, p. 25

2.4.3 Resonance: pedalling and overtones

In traditional pedagogical textbooks, students come to understand resonances on the piano by learning how to use the damper and sustain pedals. In *Játékok*, Kurtág asks the student to make precise use of those pedals, but he also employs a third way to produce resonance – overtones.

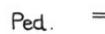
Kurtág’s damper pedal marks include four types (Example 2.22). The first one, “con Ped.” calls for pedalling with subtlety and color, which means “harmony must be created from

⁵³ Kurtág, *Játékok*, Vol. I, 25.

the melodic succession of notes but this must not happen at the expense of phrasing.”⁵⁴ The second mark is continuous pedalling, which means changing pedals without any full release. The third one tells the player to release the pedal. The last one indicates depressing and releasing the pedals gradually. In addition, Kurtág sometimes uses 1/2, 3/4 pedal marks.

“con Ped.” = calls for very subtle, colourful use of the pedal. Harmony must be created from the melodic succession of notes but this must not happen at the expense of phrasing. Thus the pedal should be used as required from simple echo-production (c. 1/8 Ped.) to the creation of full resonance, while constantly being controlled by the ear. Particular attention should be given at the phrase endings to the nuances/shadings of releases and redepressions (1/2, 1/4, etc. Ped.). All this is valid even for the “sempre con Ped.” The pedal kept depressed deeply all the way leads to chaotic sound effects and the superfluous accumulation of dynamics. In pieces without pedal markings the pedal may be used according to the foregoing (except, of course, where “senza Ped.” is indicated.)

 = continuous use of the pedal, without complete release

Ped.  Ped.  = with complete release

 = gradual depression and release

Example 2.22: “Pedalling marks” from “Key to the Signs Used”, p. 12

In “Les Adieux (in Janáček’s Manier)” (Example 2.23) Kurtág gives precise instructions about the color and expression of each line, which is challenging for young pianists to realize. The contrapuntal texture poses many difficult problems of articulation. In the first measure the player must hold the specific pitches A⁴ and D⁴ with tenuto, while the other fingers play different dynamics to shape the phrase, and bring out the top and bottom of the texture, meanwhile, giving a different tone color to the middle two lines. The pedal is shown as half-and three-quarters, which tells the player not to blur all those pitches too much. Various sound effects can be created

⁵⁴ “Other signs,” from “Key to the Signs Used”, 12.

by the combination of pedals and contrapuntal textures. If each layer is given its own tone color, the music can be played more expressively.

The musical score is divided into two systems, each with three measures. The first system includes the following markings and instructions:

- Measure 1:** *Semplice, poco rubato e sempre parlando*. Dynamics: *p. dolce, sonore*. Performance: *poco* (decreasing), *più* (increasing).
- Measure 2:** *calando*. Dynamics: *espr.*, *sub. ppp*.
- Measure 3:** *a tempo*. Dynamics: *p. dolce, sonore*. Performance: *poco* (decreasing), *più* (increasing). Pedal: $\frac{3}{4}$ Ped.

The second system includes the following markings and instructions:

- Measure 1:** *più calando*. Dynamics: *sub. ppp*, *m. d.*, *m. s.*. Pedal: $\frac{3}{4}$ Ped.
- Measure 2:** *a tempo, con slancio*. Dynamics: *poco rinf.*, *espr.*, *più*, *molto*. Pedal: *con ped.*
- Measure 3:** *a tempo*. Dynamics: *più rinf.*, *molto*. Pedal: *Ped.*

Example 2.23: “Les Adieux (in Janáček's Manier)” from Vol. VI, p. 28

Kurtág also likes using the soft pedal to create both soft volume and a mysterious atmosphere. He marks “una corda” in only a few of the works in *Játékok*. But, he suggests using it for passages that he marks with “*ppp*” or “*pppp*”, such as the last section of “Hommage tardif à Karskaya” (Example 2.24).

The musical score for "Hommage tardif à Karskaya" is presented in three systems. The first system begins with the tempo and performance instruction "poco rubato non strascinato, quasi scorrevole" and the dynamic marking "pppp, leggerissimo, delicatissimo". It features a piano part with a soft pedal effect and a "ped. al fine" instruction. The second system includes the instruction "poco in rilievo, legato" and "poco". The third system is marked "calando" and "smorzando", ending with "quasi niente". The score includes various fingerings, a repeat sign with "rep. 2-3 volte", and a page number "1990, IV, 5-6" in the bottom right corner.

Example 2.24: “Hommage tardif à Karskaya” from Vol. V, p. 45

Kurtág also teaches students to create resonance with overtones – to press specific keys silently then play other keys, such that the overtones of the silently touched string will ring sympathetically with the others. When the player presses and holds different keys silently, the overtones change at the same time. “Play with overtones (4)” (Example 2.25) is a very good piece to train students to listen carefully, and not to skip any subtle details. As the right hand silently presses and holds keys at the very beginning, the left hand plays loud staccatissimo chords. After the left hand releases the keys, the strings of the right hand ring as a result in two different collections of harmonics. In the last system, the right hand silently holds a chord while playing a repeated staccato C^4 , and the left hand holds C^3 silently in the first measure then switches to C^5 right before the last measure. The harmonics of the C^5 can be heard clearly when the right hand plays the C^4 . In this piece, bringing out these harmonics creates color and expression. The articulation of this piece is mainly staccatissimo alternating with soft staccato. I suspect the reason for Kurtág’s choice is to maximize the overtones, and the short and quick touches can provide the clearest harmonics. By learning this piece, students will distinguish between the different sounds of overtones when they attack the keys in different registers with heavy or light touches.

Felhangjáték (4)

Spiel mit Obertönen (4) Play with Overtones (4)

Senza tempo

(poco sost.) (tempo)

pp f sff sff

f sff sff

(molto misurato) [>]

pp

Köcsis Zoltán

Example 2.25: “Felhangjáték Play with Overtones (4)” from Vol. III, p. 46

Resonance on the piano can be very subtle. The three pedals act like a color palette that can change a black and white pencil sketch into a colorful painting. The damper pedal can create legato, warm and bright sound, more overtones, and loud volume. The *una corda* pedal can mute sound and change the timbre. The sustain pedal can catch specific pitches and overtones. The combination of using these pedals with different articulation, and different dynamics can create more variety of color. Kurtág also has the player produce overtones by pressing the keys silently. It helps open students' minds and think about other ways of creating sound on the piano. By learning these pieces, student can improve their listening, and focus it on the subtlest details, so that they can play the music more expressively.

Chapter 3: A suggested curriculum for learning expression from *Játékok*

The final section will identify those pieces from *Játékok* Volumes I to III that provide the most effective exercises in each of the areas discussed in Chapter 2, and arrange them into a graded series of lessons. Hopefully this will provide a resource for teachers who want to incorporate this music into their pedagogy, it also could be used together with Jang's syllabus for Volume I.⁵⁵ Selected pieces can be assigned from each category for students to practice. I suggest using *Játékok* in conjunction with other traditional pedagogical textbooks for beginners, such as the John Thompson series,⁵⁶ the Alfred Piano Library series,⁵⁷ the Suzuki Piano School series,⁵⁸ or other methods. It will help students accept contemporary piano works from the beginning.

The following tables list these works according to their training purposes and their level of difficulty. Pieces listed within the same cell in a given table are interchangeable for the task and difficulty level indicated, so teachers or students can choose any one of them to practice. Several pieces appear repeatedly in more than one category because they are suitable for

⁵⁵ Jeongwood Jang, "An Instructional Guide to Teaching Kurtág's *Játékok* Volume I", 26-28.

⁵⁶ John Thompson, Katherine Faith, Frederick S. Manning, Laurence B. Ellert, Doris Hauman, and George Hauman, *John Thompson's Modern Course for the Piano* (Florence, KY: Willis Music Publishing, 1942).

⁵⁷ Willard A. Palmer, Morton Manus, and Amanda Vick Lethco, *Prep Course for the Younger Beginners* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music Publishing, 1981).

⁵⁸ Shinichi Suzuki and Seizo Azuma, *Suzuki Piano School*, Vol. 1 (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music Publishing, 2008).

practicing rhythm, dynamics, and sonority—aspects that are important in learning both classical and contemporary music.

The right column of each table, with the heading “main educational features,” summarizes the most important pedagogical aspects of those pieces. These features are arranged from simple to fairly difficult levels.

3.1 Tempo and flexible rhythm

The pieces listed in this section fulfill two pedagogical purposes: training in maintaining a strict tempo (Table 3.1), and flexible rhythm (Table 3.2). The pieces in strict tempi usually contain a time signature, a “giusto” marking, or obviously countable beats. To present a piece with a clear meter and steady tempo is one of the fundamental skills of piano playing. It may be beneficial for students to learn the pieces in strict tempo first, and then move on to those with flexible rhythm. In *Játékok*, the majority of pieces are in the latter category. In learning them, students will need to determine the most reasonable tempo and how to shape phrases with flexible rhythmic patterns according to the notation, expressive markings, and texture. The understanding students gain from mastering these pieces can help them improve their expression especially in Romantic repertoire as well.

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Rudimentary	I, 12B I, 12B I, 13B I, 13B	Three-finger Play Gallop Szilaj csárdás Jerking	Basic counting units are quarter notes and eighth notes
	III, 19 III, 36 III, 44	Hommage à Ránki György Hommage à Szervánszky Stubbunny	
	I, 15B	Out and in (2)	Both hands in the same register; wedge
	I, 19B	Micro-rondo	Giusto; improvisation

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Rudimentary	II, 19	Out and in (3)	Crossing hands; legato; different articulation in the two hands
Intermediate	II, 8	Jerking 2	Basic counting units include sixteenth notes; accents; chords
	II, 17	Hommage à Kabalevsky	
	III, 2 III, 8	Play with infinity Five-finger play	Chromatic scales; wide leaps; different rhythmic patterns; extreme dynamics

Table 3.1 Strict tempos

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Rudimentary	I, 5B I, 9B I, 16B I, 20B	C's Night Song Legato Playing with overtones (2) Beating	Various lengths of pauses
	II, 3	Phone numbers of our loved ones 2	
	II, 5	Hommage à Szunyogh Blázs	
	III, 4	The mind will have its freedom...	
	III, 20	Hommage à Zenon	Parlando, rubato
	I, 6B	Staggering	
	II, 7	Sorely (1)	
	III, 23	Stubborn Knots	
III, 39	Half-asleep	Personal feeling; shaping phrases; extremely soft dynamic	
Intermediate	II, 12	Adoration...	Parlando
	III, 11 III, 56	Pen drawing Shadow-play (4)	

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Intermediate	II, 10	Forte-piano	Performer decides tempo and length of pauses; extreme changes of dynamics; crossing arms; staccatissimo
	II, 18	Angrily	Personal feeling; shaping phrases; crescendo and diminuendo
	III, 17	Sorrowful tune	
	II, 26	Consolation	Various pauses; shaping phrases; articulation includes staccato with tenuto, non-legato, legato, and marcato
	III, 15 III, 58	Elegy for the left hand Hommage à Mihály András	
	III, 6 III, 7	Thus it happened... Quiet talk with the devil	Ostinato; contrapuntal textures; short slurs; wide leaps, pauses

Table 3.2 Flexible rhythm

3.2 Extreme dynamics

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the interpretation of dynamics impacts significantly upon tone color and musical character. The pieces selected for students to learn to control dynamics are grouped into three categories: constantly soft (Table 3.3), constantly loud (Table 3.4), and combination dynamics (Table 3.5). They often have a variety of articulation as well. As in the previous tables, a progressive lesson plan is outlined.

There are two ways in which to use these lists. The student may work through all the pieces in all three tables, in sequence, first practicing pieces that are constantly soft, then those that are constantly loud, then those that combine different dynamics. This method can help students enhance their playing technique first by keeping a constant volume with different touches and articulations. Alternatively, the student may choose pieces from the different tables that are at the same level of difficulty and that involve similar kinds of articulation. In this way,

students can learn how to realize the same articulation in different dynamics, and create a great variety of tone colors.

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main Educational Feature
Rudimentary	I, 5B I, 18B	C's Night Song Twittering for piano duet (primo part)	Introducing the notes C, F, and F# single note playing
	III, 48	Portrait (3)	Legato; short phrases
	I, 9B I, 7B	Legato Rocking	
	III, 12 III, 39	Portrait (2) Half-asleep	Legato; hands play together; hands in same register
	II, 30	In memoriam Hermann Alice	Big leaping legato; ½ pedal
	II, 3	Phone numbers of our loved ones 2	Staccato; non-legato; independent fingers; alternating hands
	III, 18	Shadow play (3)	
Intermediate	I, 17B	Knots (1)	Finger clusters; staccato; short legato phrases
	I, 10A	The Stone-frog Crawled Along...	Arm, finger, and palm clusters
	I, 22	Hommage à Eötvös Péter	
	III, 41	Harmonica	Two-triad slur; staccato chord
	III, 11	Pen Drawing, Valediction to Erzsébet Schaár	Legato; complicated rhythm; staccato chord; pedal; overtone
	I, 25	Perpetuum Mobile (objet trouvé)	Glissandi

Table 3.3 Constantly soft

Level	Volume	Title	Main Educational Feature
Rudimentary	I, 2A I, 21	Palm Stroke (1) Hommage à Tchaikovsky	Clusters; glissandi
	I, 6	Staggering	Legato
	III, 27	Hommage à Petrovics	Legato; shaping short phrases
	I, 13B I, 13B	Boisterous Csárdás Jerking	Non-legato; alternating hands
	III, 24	Signs in Black	Independent fingers, non-legato, hands alternation

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Rudimentary	III, 16	Tumble-bunny	Four-fingers scale; hands alternate to play scales; staccatissimo
Intermediate	II, 18	Angrily	Pentatonic and chromatic scales; legato
	II, 12	Adoration, adoration, accursed desolation	Short slur; accents; shaping phrases; contrapuntal texture
	III, 25 III, 30	Stubborn Knots Hommgae à Farkas Ferenc (3)	Chords; two-chord slurs; overtones
	II, 22	Sound-filtering	Clusters; independent fingers
	III, 1	Stop and go	Finger clusters; two-note slurs; staccatissimo
	III, 47	Five-finger Quarrel	Fast chromatic scales; independent fingers

Table 3.4 Constantly loud

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main Educational Feature
Rudimentary	I, 1B	Prelude and Waltz in C	Introducing the note C; staccato; alternating hands; extreme changes of dynamics
	II, 2 II, 11	Phone numbers of our loved ones 1 Shadow-play (2)	Legato; non-legato; staccato; accent; alternating hands
	I, 19B I, 14B	Micro-rondo Melancholic Overtones	Alternating hands; staccato with tenuto; improvisation; staccato; accent; phrases with wide leaps
	II, 4	Quarrelling	Legato; arm crossing
	II, 20	Fifths (3)	Crossing hands; legato; staccato; accent
	II, 35	Hommage à Kadosa: 12 Microludes	Legato; staccato; accent; independent fingers; phrase shaping
	III, 63	Hommage à Stockhausen	Fast-note playing; legato; staccatissimo; accent; extreme dynamic changes between two hands

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Intermediate	I, 16B	Playing with Overtones (2)	Silently pressing keys to play overtone; dynamic contrast; staccatissimo
	III, 46	Playing with Overtones (4)	
	II, 29	Devil's Jump	Two-note slurs with wide leaps; staccato
	II, 34	Antiphony in f-sharp	Grace notes following a long note; accent; phrase shaping
	III, 56	Shadow-play (4)	Phrasing staccato notes; dynamic contrast between the hands
	III, 30	Hommage à Farkas Ferenc (3)	Fast two-note slur motion; phrase shaping

Table 3.5 Combination dynamics

3.3 Articulation and interpretation

The following tables group pieces according to two types of articulation slurs (table 3.6) and non-legato phrasing (table 3.7). Since articulation is also related to dynamics, as discussed above, several pieces appear repeatedly in the following two tables.

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Rudimentary	I, 7B I, 9B I, 12B	Rocking Legato Gallop	One hand plays slurs; independent fingers
	II, 18 II, 23 II, 33	Angrily Bluebell Dialogue	
	III, 39 III, 47	Half-asleep Five-finger Quarrel	
	II, 19	Out and In (3)	
	III, 12	Portrait (2)	Crossing hands play slurs
	I, 3B I, 4B I, 15B I, 20B	Flowers we are... Hommage à Verdi Satabande Beating	Alternating hands play slurs

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Rudimentary	II, 7 II, 30	Sorely (1) In memoriam Hermann Alice	
Intermediate	II, 12	Adoration...	Short slurs; shaping phrases; accents, multiple lines reading
	III, 11	Pen drawing...	Complicated rhythm; shaping phrases; dynamics
	III, 22	Double notes	Double-note slurs; independent fingers
	III, 41	Harmonica	Alternating hands play slurred chords

Table 3.6 Slurs

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Rudimentary	I, 1B	Prelude and waltz in C	Alternating hands play non-legato, staccato or staccatissimo
	III, 4 III, 15 III, 28	The mind will have its freedom Elegy for the left hand Hommage à Faras Ferenc (2)	
	I, 19B	Micro-rondo	Staccato; wedge; improvisation
	III, 42	Hommage à Varèse	Widely leaping staccato; staccatissimo
	III, 60	Obstinate A flat	Different playing methods in the two hands: steady touch and dynamic control in the left and short slur in the right
Intermediate	II, 9	Play with overtones (3)	Overtones; thumb staccato; unusual hand gestures
	III, 46	Play with overtones (4)	Dynamic control; staccato; staccatissimo
	III, 25	Sorrowful tune (17), Stubborn knots	Flexible tempo; chord playing; dynamics; accents
	III, 56	Shadow-play (4)	Shaping phrases; accents, widely leaping phrases

Table 3.7 Non-legato phrasing

3.4 Sonority

The following table groups pieces according to the way they control sonority. Those that call for extended techniques, including clusters and glissandi, are listed in Table 3.8, and those that control sonority through pedalling and overtones, are listed in Table 3.9. Combining each of these playing methods with different dynamics produces unique timbres, which are essential to play the piano more expressively.

Performing clusters is a playful way to attract students, especially young ones, and keep their interest. Learning different types of clusters can open students' minds and ears to accept both consonant and dissonant sounds as a part of music. In *Játékok*, several pieces contain only clusters and glissandi. In learning them, students need only concern themselves with timbre, not on whether they play some wrong notes.

Kurtág often indicates pedaling in a precise way, such as 1/2, or 1/3 ped. In some pieces, pedaling is indicated more vaguely as “con pedal”. This can be confusing for beginning students because they don't know how to change pedals at an appropriate point. Therefore, teachers need to guide students to find the points of pedal changes. In *Játékok*, the phrase markings and pause signs in most of the pieces can be considered as indications to change pedals.

Playing overtones on the piano is an important innovative 20th century technique. Their presence in the early volumes of *Játékok* trains students how to create them, by pressing specific keys silently, and striking other keys with sharp and quick touches, then listening for all subtle resonances. By learning these pieces, students can sensitize their hearing in other repertoire.

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Rudimentary	I, 1A I, 3A, I, 5A	Palm stroke (1) Flowers we are... Walking	Palms and fingers clusters; phrasing

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Rudimentary	II, 14	Hopscotch	
	I, 4A	Elbows	Forearm clusters; dynamics
	I, 20	Hommage à Tchaikovsky	Glissandi
	I, 11A	The young boxer's...	Fist clusters
	II, 14	Hommage à Papp Laci	
Intermediate	I, 24	Perpetuum mobile (objet trouvé)	Glissandi; dynamics
	I, 8A	Silent palms	Overtones; staccato clusters; dynamics
	III, 25	Stubborn knots	
	II, 6	To and fro	Glissandi; dynamics
	III, 9	Scherzo	
	III, 21	...and round...	Specific-pitch clusters
	II, 32	Waltz (2)	Clusters played with the edge of the palms or fingers

Table 3.8 Clusters, glissandi, and other extended techniques

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Rudimentary	I, 10B	Flowers we are (2)	With pedal marks
	II, 23	Star-music (18), Bluebell	
	I, 3B	Flowers we are...	Without pedal marks (articulation marks as a clue to change the pedal)
	II, 7	Sorely (1)	
	III, 48	Portrait (3)	

Level	Volume and page	Title	Main educational feature
Rudimentary	I, 14B I, 2	Melancholic overtones Playing with overtones	Silently pressing keys; overtones
Intermediate	II, 30	In memoriam Hermann Alice	Half and three-quarter pedalling
	III, 11 III, 15 III, 25	Pen drawing... Elegy for the left hand Stubborn knots	Finger pedal; overtones
	III, 46	Play with overtones (4)	Silently pressing keys; dynamics; staccatissimo

Table 3.9 Resonance: pedalling and overtones

3.5 Summary

Considering all the examples discussed above, both specifically in Chapter 2 and more generally in Chapter 3, it is apparent that Kurtág's music not only trains students in traditional skills, such as developing independent fingers, playing pieces in a strict meter, etc., but also gives them a new concept of sound, using things such as overtones, clusters, and using the pedals in specific ways to create different colors. In his music, no key signature and very few bar lines and time signatures regulate the performance. It is full of freedom and space. Students must find their own way to express the music, to feel its direction, and to convince listeners with well-thought-out structure, phrasing, and shape. Kurtág also asks the student to master many extended piano techniques. He shows many other possibilities in playing the piano, not just using fingers, but also fist, palm, and forearm, among other unusual hand positions. Lastly, Kurtág makes the players take touch and dynamics seriously, especially accent, always to create more character. After learning these pieces, students will gain a complete concept of articulation, and learn to make more artistic choices regarding rhythm and dynamics. They will acquire a richer repertoire of sound images, and be able to interpret the music more expressively. Mastering the pieces

from *Játékok* can help students perform the classical and romantic repertoire with greater variety of timbre and sound color. The study of Kurtág's *Játékok* is an excellent model for teaching, and it should be recognized and used as an important contribution to contemporary piano pedagogy.

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Appendix A: Tempo marks in *Játékok* and their meanings

All tempo marks have been listed and categorized into three groups.

a) Basic Tempo Markings

Andante

Allegretto

Moderato

Largo

Lento

Prestissimo

b) Common qualifiers

Alla breve: in short style

Assai: very much

Äußerst langsam: extremely slow

Con bravura: with skill. Vol. III p.14

Con moto: with motion

Capriccioso: free style, indicating a free and capricious approach to the tempo. Vol. III p.4

Giusto: in exact time

Lassan: slowly

Largamente: with slowness and breadth. Vol. V p.7

Nagyon lassan: very slow

Nem gyorsan: not too quickly

Parlando: played in the style of a recitative

Quasi: almost

Sostenuto: sustained

Szabadon: freely

c) Mood markings with a tempo connotation

Agitato: agitated; restless

Beszèdesen: parlando, sensitive. Vol. III p.48

Cantabile: in a singing style

Calmo, sereno: calm, tranquil. Vol. III p.11

Con dolore: with pain

Lendülettél, con slancio: with enthusiasm.

Dolce: sweetly

Levgaft: lively. Vol. VII p.25
Lendülettel: vigorously. Vol. III p.30
Luminoso: bright. Vol. V p.26
Lustán: lazily. Vol. VI p.21
Misterioso: mystical, in a shady manner. Vol. V p.40
Munter: blithely. Vol. VII p.25
Pesante: heavily. Vol. III p. 10
Quasi in sogno: almost in a dream. Vol. VII p.46
Risoluto, robusto: bold, strong
Semplice: simple. Vol. V p.27
Scherzando: playfully
Szórakozottan: absent-mindedly. Vol. VI p.16
Tétován: hesitating
Tranquillo: in a quiet or calm manner Vol. III p.2
Vidàman, Giocoso: joyfully. Vol. III p, 13
Vivo: lively. Vol. III p.1