

# WHY PLAY AND SING? THE ROLE OF FOLK GAMES AND FOLK SONGS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

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*Playing helps us in learning and developing more kinds of skills, further in developing our emotional world, not only in traditional society but in any time and any place. Singing strengthens collective consciousness and identity. Besides, playing and singing as basic forms of entertainment assure enjoying ourselves to us. We have to learn and do them for the sake of living a perfect life: to be able to express our joy and to amuse ourselves.*

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*Igranje pomaga pri učenju in razvijanju številnih sposobnosti, pa tudi pri razvoju čustvenega sveta, ne le v tradicionalni družbi, ampak v katerem koli prostoru in času. Petje krepi kolektivno zavest in identiteto. Poleg tega igranje in petje kot osnovni obliki zabave zagotavljata, da uživamo tudi sami s seboj. Zato se ju moramo učiti in s petjem in igranjem izražati svoje veselje in se zabavati.*

Ključne besede: *igre, petje.*

One of the basic principles of our age is not to do everything yourself. We are told to do something yourself, which is your profession, to make money with it, and to buy what other professionals do for you.

This principle is not new: division of labor is essential in the development of human society. There was a period when people made an effort for self-sufficiency: they produced everything they needed themselves. The situation is different nowadays in Europe: neither rural people nor city dwellers are self-sufficient. People do not spin, weave, and make their clothes themselves, but buy them. People do not make bread themselves, but buy it. People do not cure themselves, but go to doctors and pay them to cure us.

One cannot wonder at the strengthening of this process of division of labor. However, in our time-conscious perspective, the drive to buy everything seems to be pushed into other spheres of life in addition to commodity production and service. It appears to be pushed into the spheres of entertainment as well. However, one must not carry labor division to extremes: one must be careful when admitting it into the sphere of culture and entertainment.

An examination of the role of games, singing, and dance in our lives begins with surveying the role of these activities in traditional culture. The standard manner of entertainment in this age is passive entertainment: one watches television, and one goes to the cinema, theatre, opera, and concerts. These are also useful in their own way, but perhaps it is not enough. In traditional society the customary form of entertainment was active entertainment: those that wanted to enjoy themselves played, and they could sing and dance as well.

In Hungarian villages, games surrounded the child from birth in peasant communities. Grownups and older children (mainly sisters) caressed the baby's face, identified parts of

the face (see the 1st game), rubbed the baby's fingers, drew circles in the palm (see the 2nd game), tickled the baby, took the baby onto their backs, and so on. During these games, babies could experience the boundaries of their own bodies, to separate themselves from the surrounding world. While knocking fists against one another, clapping, and other games (see the 3rd game), babies could learn how to use their hands. When they could go out to the yard, they could encounter the sun, the rain, and various plants and animals, and they talked to them as equals; when they wanted the sunshine or rain to come or stop (see the 4th game), or wanted to know whether they had lived for a long time, or urged the geese to return to the house. Children encountered the sand and mud, and learned how to use them. They soon discovered that you cannot make a castle or animals with dry sand; cakes made of wet sand returned to powder when they dry, and animals and other things made of sticky clay become fragile when they dry. Girls learned how to use needles and thread when they made rag-dolls, and to sew clothes for them; they braided hair for dolls made of corn husks, and so on; boys learned how to use a knife, which kind of tree was harder and which was softer, which one was easy to break, and which one was good to carve.

Early childhood is the age in which imitation has the most important role. The urban children of the 21st century also learn by imitation. Verbal teaching takes place only later, in preschool and especially in school, where teachers say what must be known, and do not demonstrate it. Naturally there are a lot of things that cannot be shown, but unfortunately children nowadays learn almost everything verbally. In the awareness that imitation is so important in the lives of children, it is unfortunate that it has been displaced by verbal teaching so early, at about the age of 5 or 6. Imitation plays an important role in the lives of older children and grownups as well. Fashion and advertising come to mind; on the basis of this, people are inspired to imitate the way of life shown in fashion, and this attitude is depicted on posters and in advertisements, and broadcast on television. In any case, imitation is much more important in the life of the little child, because it is the main means of learning. Children learn to clap, stand, and walk through imitation; they learn movements, actions, attitudes, and even speaking by imitation. In preschool there is a small stove and pans among the toys: little girls place a pan onto the stove and stir "soup" in it, just like they see at home with their mothers. They are happy to use the small doctor's bag to examine friends, teachers, and parents, as they can see at the doctor. They like to imitate hairdressers, teachers, and other occupations as well. Psychologists consider these kinds of games very important in the development of the child's personality.

Games with lots of movement and running (such as tag, hopscotch, ball games, etc.) satisfy younger and older children's need to move. Hopscotch, skipping rope, ball games, and so on develop skills. Moving together, paying attention to one another, and adapting themselves to one another are skills that are developed by games of procession (see the 5th game) and many other kinds of games. In traditional culture socialization, cooperation, proper self-assessment, and self-confidence are developed in children through games played in teams [cf. Lackovits 1999]. The experience of playing provides motivation for all of these:

there is no physical education lesson that can teach such quickness to a child like the opportunity to throw a ball. Moreover, in addition to developing their bodies, minds, and emotions, children enjoyed themselves – they had a good time. If they had to sing during play, they did so: they did not pay too much attention to clear intonation, but during singing the quality of this was also developed. In the last quarter of the 20th century I could not find a single person in Hungarian villages that said he or she was unable to sing. Some said that they could no longer sing because they were too old, or some said that others could sing better, but everyone could sing to a certain degree. When it was time for amusement, this could not happen without singing and dancing.

At the age of 5 or 6, the games in which children need other children to play with come to the fore. In these games they do not play next to each other, but with each other. This also demands that children be able to make connections with others and adapt themselves to one another (see the 5th game). In traditional society this was not learned at school during etiquette lessons, but first by imitation, and second with the help of games, while playing them [cf. Szapu 1999: 59]. In folk tradition, a number of games that demand ongoing responses are known (see the 6th game). While playing, children became accustomed to situations in which one speaks first, and the other second. During play they could also learn the formulas that were used to address one another (e.g., “Hello”). They had to adapt themselves to one another at the very beginning, when they had to decide which game to play: one wanted this game, the other that one, and one had to yield, or the time for play passed in argument.

At about the age of 6, children awake to the consciousness of rules. In the games of smaller children one does not find rules: they imitate grown-ups and practice various movements – for example, how to throw a ball, how to catch it, how to run quickly enough, and so on. If we play tag with a three-year-old child and we catch him, he laughs and demands that we let him go. When we let him go, he runs away and expects us to run after him again to catch him. It does not enter such children’s minds that they should be “it,” and that they should run after others to catch someone. At the age of 6 they know this already, and it is natural for them because they already know the rules and everyone knows that the player that is caught is the new “it.” Moreover, it is also made clear during play that rules must be followed, or otherwise the game does not work.

Thus, children follow the rules during play and also make others follow them in the interest of the game. The consequence is that the child realizes the function and meaning of rules, and the fact that rules are not created to make life more difficult and cause unnecessary problems. Children become accustomed to following rules, even if they cannot see the meaning of all of them: their experience is that they are meaningful and it is worth keeping them. In this way rules become a necessary means for living in society, a means of adapting to one another, and not some senseless system forced upon them by an outsider. Teachers may turn this to their advantage when children make each other follow the rules, and it is not the teacher that need do so.

Perhaps it is not necessary to speak in detail about the importance of following rules in the lives of grown-ups. Unfortunately there are many that do not even follow traffic rules, although their meaning and necessity is quite obvious, and “punishment” comes at once, and is often very serious. It is also good for society that playing children turn into grown-ups that follow the rules, and that are able to make contact and to adapt themselves to others. This is socialization, which manifests itself in the connection of the individual and society, the individual and culture: the individual in a given group learns the group’s culture, rules, and attitudes in play during childhood. This role of traditional games shows that they are not relics of cultural history to be preserved in museums, but a kind of activity that plays an important role in all kinds of societies. In Hungary it was the peasantry that maintained these; however, they cannot be considered the product of any particular social class, because they cannot be assigned to any given era or social system, and we must not let them disappear with the peasantry and with changes in culture because children have always gotten to know the world and learn their own cultures.

As can be seen, it is not too difficult to explain why children in any era and any place play: they learn from it. They acquire a knowledge of materials and how to deal with various kinds of materials, and their manual skills and visual fantasy are developed. They learn to treat instruments, they learn esthetics and quick movements, and their memory, inventiveness, ability to observe, and self-discipline are developed. They learn to express and to accept emotions. They learn to respect themselves and others, and they learn the significance of following the rules, and how to belong to a group and to a community. They learn cooperation, self-awareness, and socialization. All of these are motivated by playing as an experience, as enjoyment, and as entertainment. Entertainment and joy do not exclude learning and development; positive experience does not diminish these, but aids them. Education follows a very poor path when it wishes to take these away from children out of the conviction that one can learn and develop only through serious, exhausting, and trying work, and that to do this we have to force ourselves and must not be happy during this.

A survey of the role of singing in traditional culture shows that it had the function of creating a community. The young and old could sing, primarily on various feast days, during play, and during the customary walks girls took on Sunday afternoons – and, naturally, during dancing. Songs were connected with calendar feasts, and with weddings and keeping vigil beside the dead. On Sunday afternoons the girls walked through the village, singing; in this case the role of the singing was to call the boys’ attention to what was going on. In the breaks during dancing the boys could sing; singing together strengthened the feeling of belonging together, the collective consciousness.

Singing and playing (especially the latter) is increasingly being eliminated from modern education in Hungary. There are increasingly fewer singing lessons at school, and the program for those few that exist consists more of listening to and analyzing music than active singing. The state of games is even worse: they can still be found in preschools, but no one

can tell when they will be pushed out from there as well by the teaching of mathematics or foreign languages. Play is considered foolish and an unnecessary waste of time.

To explain the necessity of singing is a greater challenge than explaining playing because singing is not such a complex activity; its utility is more hidden. However, everybody that likes to sing knows that singing is the source of a strong positive experience. Positive experiences are very important in life; they provide the power and motivation to do something less pleasant. Such positive experiences are common activities: playing, singing, and dancing. Singing together strengthens identity, the awareness of belonging to a group. Songs (in traditional society, folk songs) represented an element of the culture of the group, dialect, or ethnic unit, and remembering and using them strengthened the awareness of belonging to that group, dialect, or ethnic unit. To this end, it is also necessary to have positive experiences when singing, which are also transferred to the awareness of belonging to the group. Singing teachers should work to create this positive experience instead of concentrating only on clear intonation.

## GAMES

### *1<sup>ST</sup> GAME*

Knock on the door,	(knock on the child's forehead)
Ring the bell,	(pull his ear)
Peek in the window,	(lift up his eyelid)
Lift the latch,	(push up the tip of his nose)
And roll out the red carpet.	(he sticks out his tongue)

[Forrai 1998: 29]; in the book the rhythm is also marked.

### *2<sup>ND</sup> GAME*

Round and round the cornfield  
Looking for a hare.  
Where can we find one?  
Right up there!

[Forrai 1998: 51]; in the book the rhythm is also marked.

The child's hand is held palm up and the adult slowly traces circles. On "right up there," the adult runs his fingers up the child's arm and tickles him under the arm.

### *3<sup>RD</sup> GAME*

Hickory, dickory, dock,	(clap the child's hands together)
The mouse ran up the clock,	(run fingers up the child's arm)
The clock struck one,	(touch child's nose once)

The mouse ran down, (run fingers down the child's arm)  
 Hickory, dickory, dock. (clap the child's hands together)

[Forrai 1998: 17]; in the book the rhythm is also marked.

#### 4<sup>TH</sup> GAME

Rain, rain, go away,  
 Little Johnny wants to play!

[Bakos 1953: 67], 9th note.

#### 5<sup>TH</sup> GAME

The children stand in pairs, with the pairs one behind the other. They make gates with their hands joined and raised. The last pair begins to come forward under the gates (they walk bent over), and they stand in front of the first pair. The next pair, being the last, does the same, and all the pairs come forwards when they become the last. The result is that the column moves forward. During the game they sing continuously.

#### 6<sup>TH</sup> GAME

Dialogue between two children:

Pussy-cat, Pussy-cat, where have you been?  
 I've been to London to visit the Queen.  
 Pussy-cat, Pussy-cat, what did you there?  
 I frightened a little mouse under her chair.

[Forrai 1998: 45]; in the book the rhythm is also marked.

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## ZAKAJ IGRATI IN PETI: VLOGA LJUDSKIH IGER IN LJUDSKIH PESMI V VSAKDANJEM ŽIVLJENJU

*Tradicionalne igre in igrice, ki so se razvile v ljudski tradiciji, so manjšim in večjim otrokom pomembno sredstvo pri spoznavanju telesa, zunanjega sveta in družbe, v kateri živijo. Igre in igrice jim pomagajo, da se prilagodijo družbi, da se socializirajo, se priučijo družbenih pravil in njihovega pomena ter se naučijo vzpostavljati povezave z drugimi in sodelovati z njimi. Drugi del prispevka se ukvarja s petjem, ki je bilo poleg plesa in igre glavno sredstvo zabave mladih. Odmori med plesi so bili napolnjeni s splošnim fantovskim petjem ali kolom deklet, ki ga je petje zgolj spremljalo. Otroci so lahko poslušali pesmi odraslih, in se jih tako naučili peti. Dobri pevci so bili v vasi spoštovani, toda tudi slabši pevci so se lahko pridružili skupnemu petju.*

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