

## TESTING MUSIC-READING ABILITY IN CONSERVATORY STUDENTS: RESULTS OF A PILOT STUDY

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The standard system of Western musical notation, that forms one of the bases of musical literacy, seems to be the most accepted notation in professional and educational musical fields. The notation consists of unique symbols for every element of music and elements of musical grammar are taught from the first year in primary education and specialized musical education as well.

In *McPherson's* theoretical model (1997) music-reading and sight-reading are distinguished aspects of musical performance beside improvisation, playing from memory and playing from ear. In spite of its importance, there exists no reliable instrument to test the ability to read music. *Erősné's* model of basic musical skills (1992) does include features of music-reading, such as melody-, chord-, and rhythm-reading, but on the conservatory level we should complete the model with tone- and dynamic-reading as well.

The knowledge of musical styles, improvisation, music memory (*Lehmann* and *Ericsson*, 1996) a person's technical skill by sight-playing with many sub-skills, such as hand-eye coordination, independence of fingers, weight controls of the fingering, and agility count (*Enoch*, 1996) also can be components of music-reading.

Our research was carried out in October 2013 at two Hungarian conservatories. The sample consists of 62 students. 20 boys and 42 girls filled in an online questionnaire (Cronbach's  $\alpha=.79$ ). The questionnaire consists of 29 questions with 116 four-point Likert scale items about music-reading ability. 14% of students were singers, and 54% of them sing in a choir. 73% of students play in different types of orchestras and 82% are involved in chamber music. Students were asked about their knowledge of music patterns and symbols, and about the tempo of their music-reading. Inner-hearing ability and concentration were parts of the questionnaire as well. The music-reading strategies of the students were also examined. 84% of students like solfège, the subject that targets the improvement of students' music-reading and writing abilities. A strong correlation was found between the solfège grade and the speed of music reading ( $p<.001$ ) and also between the solfège grade and the attitude towards reading more complex music ( $p<.001$ ).

Our further research areas include exploring the differences and properties in different music reading materials, exploring the characteristics of expert music-reading strategy users and examining the relationship between the development of reading skills and music reading ability not only in Hungarian conservatories, but abroad as well.