

Introduction

AMANDA BAYLEY

Béla Bartók's compositional output defies straightforward categorization. He is often bracketed with Hindemith and Stravinsky as a composer of non-serial music during the first half of the twentieth century, rather than with the twelve-tone composers of the Second Viennese School. Yet what sets him apart from all these composers is his interest in folk music and the assimilation of folk- and art-music influences in his works. His lifelong commitment to folk music, not just its collection and transcription but also its analysis and systematic classification, is unsurpassed.

This book brings together many leading exponents in Bartók research and endeavours to provide a concise yet comprehensive insight into current thoughts and ideas surrounding the historical, cultural and musical appreciation of his works. Even fifty-five years after the composer's death important documents continue to be translated from Hungarian to English, some of which challenge long-standing interpretations of cultural and political issues surrounding the music. The diversity of approaches to Bartók research is demonstrated in this volume through historical, performance-orientated and analytical perspectives within the organization of material into three main sections: 'Contexts', 'Profiles of the music' and 'Reception'.

For Bartók there were a great many political and social issues that underlay his musical philosophy. Lynn Hooker opens the first section of this book with a presentation of the political, social and cultural circumstances that surrounded Bartók in Hungary from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. This extends to include the eminent musicians and literary scholars with whom the composer shared some important affinities during this rapidly changing modern world.

A major contribution to the shaping of Bartók's artistic aesthetic was his folk-music research, the extent and significance of which are explained by Stephen Erdely. A map showing the places corresponding to the years that Bartók collected folksongs is accompanied by interesting accounts of his experiences and observations that influenced his investigation of musical folklore as a scientific discipline. Since his engagement with folk music is a recurrent theme of the book his folksong-collecting expeditions and publications are listed alongside his own compositions in the

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Chronology. A list of his folk-music studies, which were not all published in Bartók's lifetime, are cited as edited collections within the bibliography.

The second and largest part of the book examines Bartók's compositions grouped according to musical genre. Changing trends in his musical style are demonstrated in relation to the cultural and national issues elucidated in the first section: David Cooper pursues the contradictions and challenges that the composer faced by considering the changing emphasis of nationalist and modernist ideas throughout his orchestral music. Further conflicts are revealed in Bartók's increasingly complex development of folk material within the vocal repertoire: Rachel Beckles Willson shows how he combines the rustic nature of folksong with the Western art-music idiom.

In order that genuine folk music might reach as wide an audience as possible Bartók made many arrangements of folk melodies for instruments as well as for voice, most of which are for his own instrument, the piano. As concert pianist and piano teacher he was in an ideal position to convey the firm ideas he had about the interpretation of his own works as well as those of Classical composers, and Victoria Fischer shows how he developed his notation to support these ideas. Other contributors, including Susan Bradshaw on the piano recital repertoire and chamber music, also take Bartók's notation as a starting point to explain stylistic changes in the music and to understand the Austro-Hungarian tradition Bartók inherited in the context of other contemporary developments. Even though the piano was his own instrument it is questionable whether he adapted folk music in its most intimate or innovative way for this medium. The new ways he found for prescribing folk elements for stringed instruments, discussed in the violin works by Peter Laki and in the String Quartets and string orchestra pieces by Amanda Bayley, are arguably more adventurous than the piano works and, perhaps, come closest to the real folk sounds he was trying to imitate.

Very little help is available for understanding the composer at work since Bartók was a private man who never liked to reveal details about his compositional processes. Carl Leafstedt portrays this side of Bartók's character through his analysis of the theme of loneliness in the stage works and in relation to literary contemporaries. Two contributors, Nicky Losseff and Peter Laki, also consider the solitary figure of Bartók as composer and performer. From different perspectives they interpret the image of 'Self' and 'Other' in, respectively, the Piano Concertos, and the works for violin and piano.

Changes that have taken place in Bartók reception throughout the twentieth century are dealt with in the last section of the book. The fact that his music could not be neatly categorized by critics as atonal, serial or

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even entirely nationalist (since the breadth of his folksong studies made him more of an internationalist) led to a number of strong criticisms of him. The problem for many of his contemporary critics was that he was neither a modernist nor a nationalist, because he did not exploit chromaticism to the extreme of serialism, and because his fascination with the folk music of many countries was so diverse that, in their eyes, he rejected his native Hungarianness. David E. Schneider reviews the intelligentsia's thoughts on Bartók in Europe during the composer's lifetime, especially concerning the definition of nationalism, while Malcolm Gillies details Bartók's uncomfortable lifestyle and controversial reception in America from 1940 until his death in 1945.

The importance of Bartók's music as a model for future composers was hotly contested in the immediate post-war years among Hungarian composers and musicians. Danielle Fosler-Lussier assesses the influence of both Communist and non-Communist political propaganda in determining the subsequent popularity of his music, showing how international influences contributed to Bartók's eventual celebration as a national composer.

Controversy has also governed the interpretation of Bartók's music from an analytical viewpoint. As a result of his music fitting no neat, single category, predetermined analytical techniques cannot be attributed to it. Consequently a variety of analytical responses has emerged across Europe and the United States which Ivan F. Waldbauer surveys, focusing specifically on pitch organization.

Bartók's contribution to twentieth-century music has not only been in composition and ethnomusicology. The release of recordings of his own playing has more recently fuelled debates on performance practice in twentieth-century music. With consideration of advances in recording technology throughout the twentieth century, Vera Lampert evaluates performances of Bartók's instrumental music – including his own – and examines some of the issues of interpretation and performance touched upon by other contributors.

The culmination of different approaches of the individual authors together with the variety of sources examined, some hitherto unexplored, defines this book as a new synthesis of the circumstances surrounding Bartók's life, developments in his music and changes in its reception. However the composer is perceived, and regardless of labels attached to his music, his continuing status as an influential figure within twentieth-century music is assured.

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PART I

Contexts: political, social and cultural

1 The political and cultural climate in Hungary at the turn of the twentieth century

LYNN HOOKER

Open an introductory music history textbook at the section on Béla Bartók and you will find references to his deep patriotism, his folk-music research, and the relationships between these interests and his compositions. What you will not usually find, despite the weight placed on Bartók's connections to his environment, are many references to the people in that environment other than fellow composer Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) and the nebulous 'folk' – sometimes only the folk. While Schoenberg is associated with both Berg and Webern, and Stravinsky with Rimsky-Korsakov and Diaghilev, Bartók is usually depicted in English texts as an isolated naïf from the provinces. Since folk art and work influenced by it are often viewed as nostalgic, we could conclude that Bartók was a conservative longing for the past.

The historical record shows us something far more complex. After about 1904, Bartók seems to have thought of himself as much more of a radical than a reactionary. He stopped going to church, attempted to shock wealthy hosts, was called an anarchist by his friends, and railed against misconceptions of the peasantry.¹ The heritage of nineteenth-century Hungary, the political environment of early twentieth-century Budapest, the resulting polarization of intellectual and cultural groups, and the progressive musicians with whom he associated (including prominent Jewish musicians), all had an impact on his views. His symphonic poem, *Kossuth*, of 1903 was the musical culmination of the chauvinist-nationalist views he held in his conservatoire years and immediately thereafter. However, by 1906 and the publication, with Kodály, of *Hungarian Folksongs*, he had shifted towards a more politically radical and aesthetically cosmopolitan stance, and was interested in combining symbols of Hungarian identity with modernist approaches like those of artists in Berlin, Vienna and Paris. Bartók's provincial background was conservative in the way it looked at national and cultural issues, but the literary figures he encountered in Budapest, such as poet Endre Ady (1877–1919) and aesthetician György Lukács (1885–1971), in addition to Kodály and other musical figures, expanded his outlook. (Judit Frigyesi's recent book *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest* explores Bartók's literary connections in detail.²)

[7] By bringing together the political, cultural and musical issues of the day,

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we can paint a picture of the sphere in which Bartók and his colleagues worked and the scope of their challenge to the traditional, conservative notions of Hungarianness and Hungarian music. This portrait will also explore some of the ambiguities of Bartók's place in this sphere. What follows is a survey of issues at the fore in Hungary's political, cultural and musical life during Bartók's early career.

Turn-of-the-century Hungary: paradox and possibility

The Hungary of Bartók's youth was fraught with contradictions. After the landmark 1867 Compromise, it was both a colonial department of the Habsburg Empire, still subject to Vienna's control, and an imperial power in its own right, with broad jurisdiction in local matters over a population which was only half Magyar (ethnic Hungarian).³ Together, the Compromise and Hungary's Nationalities Law of 1868 provided other ethnic groups (the largest groups were, in alphabetical order, Croats, Germans, Romanians, Ruthenians, Serbs and Slovaks) with civil rights guarantees before the law and in education; these laws followed the liberal principles of the ruling party and earned approval from watchful Western interests. However, these minority groups also had their own national aspirations, which were not taken into consideration in the Compromise nor in the Nationalities Law.⁴ Nationality was determined by native language and not blood, so the prominent presence of Jews in society was not reflected in the census at all but was instead absorbed into other groups – mostly the German and majority Magyar categories. Furthermore, although the Liberal Party ruled the country for almost forty years after the Compromise and passed some important laws asserting legal equality for citizens, there was constant tension between the theory and practice of these laws. Some Liberal politicians, such as Ferenc Deák, the chief negotiator of the Compromise, and Sándor Wekerle, the first prime minister not of noble blood (1894–95), pursued civil rights issues such as freedom of religion, universal secret suffrage, and minority rights, considering them crucial to the modernization – the 'Westernization' – of the country. Other Liberal Party leaders considered issues of increasing equality and civil rights far subordinate or even counter to Hungary's more important goal of becoming a truly Magyar nation-state. This priority was due to the dominant role of the Hungarian nobility in local and national politics, from the wealthy magnates that dominated the upper echelons of government down to the middle nobility and impoverished landless gentry who made up most of the county bureaucracy.⁵ The nobles considered themselves to embody the Hungarian national ideal, and their hold on power

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ultimately led to further entrenchment of conservative Magyar nationalism in the government.

The Liberal ideal was overshadowed not only by nationalist ideals but also by class prejudice in an extremely hierarchical society. The government practised economic *laissez-faire* that allowed tremendous growth in some cities, but such keystones of liberalism as universal secret suffrage and freedom of religion, which might cause a loss of control over the masses, were never fully embraced. The wide latitude Hungary granted its county officials, as well as the administrative authority maintained by the Roman Catholic Church through to 1895, allowed ample opportunity for abuse. For example, the threat of legal reprisal encouraged many peasants to ‘volunteer’ to work for officials, just as they would have had they still been serfs. Poet and journalist Endre Ady raged against the continued poor living conditions and abuse of peasants’ rights in several newspaper articles.⁶ Bartók commented during his folksong collecting trips on the resentment the peasants felt for the gentry administrators.

In the sphere of religion, before the passage of the 1894–95 secularization law, the Catholic Church held a great deal of influence in its role as keeper of the official records of births, deaths and marriages. In this role it could legally decide the religion of children of mixed Protestant–Catholic or Orthodox–Catholic marriages, and it effectively banned marriages between Jews and Christians, despite the official emancipation of the Jews in 1867. A 1907 school reform law made elementary education free, greatly increasing rates of literacy in the younger generations; but to receive funding, schools had to teach a certain number of hours in Hungarian, use certain approved textbooks and implement ‘programmes inculcating an “exemplary patriotic attitude”’.⁷ These requirements opened the reform law to complaints from ethnic minorities within Hungary and to criticism from Western European observers as well. Furthermore, religious denominations were so often divided along ethnic lines that denomination and ethnicity were sometimes assumed to be equivalent. For this reason, oppression of religious as well as ethnic minorities was aided, indeed encouraged, by many powerful members of the Magyar Nation.

At the same time as the countryside was governed in a quasi-feudal manner, the capital city of Budapest – created by the merging of Pest, Buda and Óbuda in 1873 – was growing and modernizing at lightning pace. Large-scale milling of Hungary’s grain crops, agricultural support industries and printing, among other industries, mushroomed.⁸ Budapest developed an electric tram around the Körút (Ring-street) and the first underground rail system in continental Europe, going under the newly redesigned Sugár Avenue, sometimes called the ‘Champs Elysées of Budapest’. By the 1890s this grand thoroughfare had been renamed

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Andrássy Avenue after Count Gyula Andrássy, the first Hungarian prime minister. The new underground line began near the fashionable shopping district of Váci Street near the Danube, and its stops included the opera house, opened in 1884; the music academy at Vörösmarty Street, founded by Franz Liszt in 1875; and the splendid Heroes' Square monument celebrating the millennium of the arrival of the Magyar tribes in the Carpathian Basin. This monument also formed a gateway to the City Park (Városliget), home of a spa, a zoo and Gundel's Restaurant, where elegant visitors would come to experience the chef's famous blending of French and Hungarian cuisine. The underground line was but one sign of the city's success and modernity. Although Hungary as a whole lost about 1.2 million inhabitants to emigration (mostly to the United States) in the period 1869 to 1910, Budapest was booming faster than any city in Europe, with migrants streaming in from the depressed countryside. As World War I approached, the population of the capital was nearing one million (not counting suburbs) and Budapest was Europe's sixth largest city.

In a country that had no indigenous entrepreneurial middle class, non-Hungarians – Germans and especially Jews – were the driving force behind Hungary's economic growth of the late nineteenth century. At the turn of the century, Jews were only about 5 per cent of the population overall, but they made up 54 per cent of the country's businessmen, 43 per cent of its bankers and lenders, 12.5 per cent of its industrialists, 49 per cent of its doctors, and 45 per cent of its lawyers. In 1900, there were sixteen Jewish members of Parliament and two dozen Jewish professors at Budapest's universities. This success and the freedom that Hungary's generally liberal policies allowed in the cities inspired patriotic loyalty in this population. Hungarian Jews spoke a number of languages at the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially German and Yiddish, but as the century progressed, more and more of them adopted Hungarian as their native language. Many Magyarized their names and/or converted to Christianity. The wealthiest, such as the banker father of philosopher-aesthete György Lukács and the physician grandfather of writer Anna Lesznai, bought – or were granted – titles and/or estates, and even adopted some of the manners of the nobility.⁹ Some prominent Jewish citizens felt that 'Those who had been homeless for millennia found a home on Hungarian soil'.¹⁰ As the father of Bartók's librettist Béla Balázs (born Herbert Bauer) said to his son on his deathbed, they felt it their duty 'to root [themselves] firmly within the soil of the Hungarian homeland'.¹¹ And interestingly, the high property requirements for suffrage, preserved in large part to keep out ethnic minorities, empowered the new Jewish banking barons, though not, of course, the masses of Jews; meanwhile many of the socially 'superior' Magyar gentry had civil service jobs but no voting rights.

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The ironies of this situation were reflected by the physical division of Budapest. The royal castle on the hill acted as a symbol of Buda's glorious feudal and national past, and of the continuing rule of the Habsburgs. Across the river, though, Pest, formerly a German-Jewish merchants' city, looked to a more cosmopolitan future. This side of the river was growing at a much faster rate, and the manufacturing and financial sectors that provided the economic engine for the city's growth and success were in Pest. Parliament moved from an older site on Castle Hill to an ornate new building on the Pest riverbank in 1896, and the new St Stephen's Basilica was completed in Pest in 1905. By 1900, five out of six residents of Budapest lived on the Pest side of the river, along with most of the industry; 21.5 per cent of the city's population and about 40 per cent of its voters were Jewish. Though many of the city's ethnically diverse inhabitants still preferred another language (especially German), an increasing percentage spoke Hungarian.¹²

The period after the Compromise of 1867 brought great prosperity to the city and to some of the people, but towards the turn of the century and just after, tensions resulting from economic inequities and social shifts increased. The agrarian nobility spent more and more time in the Casinos (clubs), cafés and night spots of Pest because nowhere else in Hungary could one enjoy more glittering entertainments; but they were reminded everywhere of the economic success of the new capitalists. (The Casinos were an exception, since they were heavily segregated.) To a nation that so idealized its tribal roots, considered itself a unified, agrarian society, and prided itself on its ancient and nearly impenetrable Asiatic language, modern, cosmopolitan and industrial Pest still seemed uneasily 'foreign'. Bartók and Kodály perceived this 'foreignness' as a significant problem for the city's musical life. There was increasing tension in Hungary over whether it should look to an idealized Magyar past for its model, or instead should reinvent itself as a multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan society.

The 1896 Millennium Exhibition in Pest's City Park reflects this tension. The Magyar elite was especially swept up in this event, which celebrated the conquest of the Carpathian Basin by the eight Hungarian tribes migrating west from Asia in the year 896. To evoke Hungary's medieval and Baroque magnificence, those that could afford them wore elaborate 'dress Hungarian' uniforms which evoked the clothing of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Hungarian nobility. Grand works of art were commissioned to celebrate the conquest, including the Heroes' Square monument, a centrepiece of the Exhibition, with its towering central sculpture of Árpád and the other Magyar chieftains that founded the Hungarian state. But some of these art works also show those who were conquered: the ancestors of the 'nationalities', Slavs and Romanians. Of the historical

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Figure 1.1 Detail from Árpád Feszty's panoramic 'The Arrival of the Conquering Magyars' (1896). Notice not only the triumphant conquering chieftains but also the littered bodies of the conquered.

paintings featured by the Exhibition, Árpád Feszty's enormous (120 metres long and 15 metres high) panorama entitled 'The Arrival of the Conquering Magyars' shows this most spectacularly (see Fig. 1.1). The Exhibition at some level also celebrated the oppression of the 'nationalities', who were understandably not as enthusiastic about this Exhibition.

A few items from the Exhibition catalogue almost acknowledge the different meanings of the celebration to different ethnic groups. The catalogue's author praises the 'idyllic simplicity' of 'Nationality Street at the Exhibition', where each 'nationality' seems to have been represented by only one house, and states that this exhibit reflects 'the ardent desire of the nation, that the different races inhabiting this country may always live in peace and harmony side by side, united in the love of the common fatherland'.¹³ Meanwhile, though, Magyar peasants are showcased by representative dwellings from several different regions in 'Exhibition Village' – the title itself a veiled reminder that the Magyars are the real centre of this nation. Here, instead of 'idyllic simplicity', the author describes how this village 'gives a lively idea of the habits, dresses, mode of living etc. of the Hungarian [Magyar] people [in different parts of the country] . . . permit-