Béla Bartók's Concept of 'Genuine and Valuable Art'

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> Genuine and valuable art, at least for the time being, can be conceived of only in the form of a national art. For although every age displays artistic elements common to all countries, the fitting together of these common elements into works of art occurs involuntarily in a different manner in each country, each typical of the given country. Naturally this differentiation is only accomplished if in the works a genuine artist's creative power manifests itself *spontaneously*.
>
> Bartók, 'Staat und Kunst' (1934)[1]

This is a quotation from Bartók's text 'Staat und Kunst' (State and Art) drafted in German in 1934 presumably for a meeting of the League of Nations Cooperative Committee's Literary and Artistic Group. The statement was not motivated by current compositional plans that occupied Bartók's mind at that point. In 1934 he wrote his Fifth String Quartet, a commissioned work, and put a number of *Mikrokosmos* pieces on paper, a project still in progress. These are compositions that belong to the 'classical' middle period of his style, eminently 'abstract' music as they were, without ostentatiously national stylistic features, even if occasionally fascinating compositional ideas are manifest inspired by Bartók's folk-music sources (like the *Alla bulgarese* scherzo movement of the quartet: Bulgarian rhythm cross-fertilized with Hungarian-style melody). Without doubt the actual political environment, the Nazi takeover in Germany in 1933, provoked Bartók. In the continuation of the text he speaks about the 'obsessive ideas' of the 'government', the 'state', the 'dictator' who 'over an ever growing geographical territory' may destroy the efforts of artists.

Yet the statement unmistakably outlines Bartók's concept. Note that he does not use the word 'nationalism' but speaks about a 'national art', about the 'common elements ... typical of a given country'. No less importantly, in the following sentence Bartók underlines the presence of 'a genuine artist', his 'creative power', that manifests itself '*spontaneously*', a word that he underlined. Here Bartók speaks about himself.

1 Béla Bartók, 'Staat und Kunst', ed. Tibor Tallián in 'Bartók és a szavak – Bartók and Words', *Arion*, 13 (Almanach International de Poésie; Budapest, 1982), 104-6: 'Eine echte und wertvolle Kunst ist – wenigstens einstweilen – nur als nationale Kunst vorstellbar. Denn wenn auch je eine Zeitepoche in allen Ländern gemeinsame Kunstelemente aufweist, so wird die Zusammenfügung dieser gemeinsamen Elemente zu Kunstwerken in jedem Lande unwillkürlich in verschiedener, für das betreffende Land charakteristischer Weise stattfinden. Freilich wird diese Differenzierung nur dann zustande kommen, wenn sich in den Kunstwerken die schöpferische Kraft einer wirklichen Künstlerpersönlichkeit *spontan* offenbart'. English translation by László Somfai, cf. the end of the English translation in Tibor Tallián, *Béla Bartók. The Man and His Work* (Budapest, 1981), 179, '... if the artistic personality's spontaneous creative power manifests itself in the works of art'.

I would like to start by stating that Bartók, as I understand his position taken up in the question of nationalism – considering all of his statements in a chronology-sensitive context –, although he often referred to the case of national composers of the nineteenth century, did actually not approve of folklorism within the twentieth century in general but only his own and Zoltán Kodály's way of composition, and Igor Stravinsky's so-called Russian period. Because, to quote one of his similarly critical remarks, 'folk music will become a source of inspiration for a country's music only if the transplantation of its motives is the work of a great creative talent' (1931).[2]

With this in mind I focus on four questions,

1. How did Bartók determine his approach and his place on the map of the European modern music scene?
2. The multi-ethnic background of his music and Bartók's remarkable views on the lack of race purity in neighboring peoples' peasant music.
3. Bartók's belief in natural phenomena, even in the natural way of creating significant compositions.
4. Finally, as short case studies, we will visit two scores of Bartók (the Second Violin Sonata and the opening movement of the Second Piano Concerto) that reveal typical compositional strategies connected with his 'secret sources' (folk music and national identity).

Before I start quoting from Bartók, a few words must be said about his texts. Working with Bartók's texts is indeed more risky than quoting e.g. Schoenberg from the canonized German or English editions or even more from the original documents in the Schönberg Center available online. Bartók's case is not like the Stravinsky syndrome that the Russian composer's thoughts and statements were stylized and heavily edited by a sophisticated but mannerist writer (Robert Craft). The language is of course a problem with Bartók too. He wrote his lectures and essays in Hungarian or German (occasionally in French), then in the American years mostly in English. Several of his texts were translated in his lifetime with or without his approval. Unfortunately both the old all-Hungarian big volume *Bartók összegyűjtött írásai* (edited by András Szőllősy in 1967)[3] and the all-English *Béla Bartók Essays* volume (edited by Benjamin Suchoff in 1976)[4] print mixed texts, in a major part translations only, the English edition with severe misprints and arbitrary editorial amendments occasionally.[5] Unfortunately the new critical edition *Bartók Béla írásai* [Béla Bartók's writings] has published so far only three volumes of the planned eight.[6]

2 Béla Bartók, 'A népzene jelentőségéről' (On the Significance of Folk Music), cf. Béla Bartók, *Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (London, 1976), 347.

3 András Szőllősy (ed.), *Bartók Béla összegyűjtött írásai*, i (Budapest, 1967) [no second vol.].

4 Bartók, *Essays*.

5 Cf. László Somfai's review, 'Bartók's Writings', *The Musical Times*, 118/1611 (May 1977), 395-96.

6 *Bartók Béla írásai,* i: Tibor Tallián (ed.), *Bartók Béla önmagáról, műveiről, az új magyar zenéről, műzene és népzene viszonyáról* (Béla Bartók on his life, work, the new Hungarian music, the relation between art music and folk music) (Budapest, 1989); iii: Vera Lampert and Dorrit Révész (eds.),

Beyond the problem of the languages there are further traps. One must always know the context: when and why did Bartók give a statement? Was it his intention to stress certain thoughts but conceal others? A typical example: revising his German Autobiography (1918), in 1921 Bartók inserted a long passage about the significance of Liszt's music in the stylistic maturation of his own style. A close look at the events reveals that this was a response to Western European reviews that Bartók just became aware of, according to which the 'atonal path' of Wagner, Richard Strauss, and Schoenberg influenced Bartók's music that he vehemently rejected.

It is also characteristic of Bartók's texts that when he praises Kodály's approach he usually describes his own principles; when a 'few young Hungarian composers' are mentioned they were Bartók and Kodály, or even more just Bartók. Naturally he had great respect for his friend's music, admired Kodály's wisdom; they were partners. Yet he was a shy man who did not like to speak about his concepts or individual compositions directly, therefore the metaphor 'Kodály' was at hand.[7]

1.

As to the European scene of new music, there were aspects that Bartók readily discussed again and again, often using his previously formulated favorite text panels, and there were white holes, topics that he rather not discussed at all. Bartók had complexes with the meaning of the words 'tradition' and 'modern' (or 'progressive'). In 1927 in a Hungarian draft text probably connected with his preparations for the first American concert tour, Bartók specified Stravinsky's approach as 'revolutionary', as an opposite to his ideal of a 'great comprehensive art'.[8] In this text both – the revolutionary and the comprehensive – belong to 'progressive' music, both distance themselves from romanticism and lean on the music of old times (either on folk music or on the music of the past centuries of Western music). Incidentally in this context it looks as if Bartók disregarded Schoenberg and his followers because their music did not brake away from romanticism, yet it is my supposition only.

> Progressive musical creations of today – disregarding Schönberg and his followers – have two things in common: estrangement from the music of yesterday (romanticism), and leaning on the music of old times. The latter can happen in different ways: either – as e.g. in the first, Russian period of Stravinsky or with de Falla or the Hungarians – as leaning on the old folk (peasant) music, or – as e.g. in the case of the adherents of so-called Neoclassicism (among others, the last works of Stravinsky) – through a fertilization by the art music of the 16th and 17th centuries, or even earlier times. ...

Írások a népzenéről és a népzenekutatásról (On folk music and folk-music research) (Budapest, 1999); v: Dorrit Révész (ed.), *A magyar népdal* (The Hungarian folk song) (Budapest, 1990).

7 See also László Somfai, *Béla Bartók. Composition, Concepts, and Autograph Sources* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1996), 13.

8 László Somfai, 'Bartók Béla nyilatkozata a "Progresszív zenei alkotásokról" (1927-1928?)' (Béla Bartók on 'progressive music'), *Magyar Zene*, 11/2 (1975), 115-16.

> In general two opposite [approaches to new music] crystallize in practice: one (for example, Stravinsky) is revolutionary; that is, on the one hand, it shows a sudden break with the music of yesterday, and on the other, it throws the whole range of dazzling novelties and new departures into the music of today. The other type seems rather to be comprehensive: a summation of all the elements available up to now. It is thus not a revolutionary break with yesterday, for it even rescues everything it can use from romanticism ... that is, whatever has vitality. The most characteristic representative of this is the Hungarian Kodály. Which of the two will better withstand the test of time, the innovators or the summarizers, remains to be decided by the future. If, however, we think of parallels in music history, we would be inclined to rule in favor of the great comprehensive art.[9]

Sixteen years later in America in the first part of his Harvard Lectures that discussed revolution and evolution, Bartók rearranged his categories and now put both Schoenberg and Stravinsky in the same box: their art was based on evolution and that was the basic principle in the creation of the new Hungarian music too, he claimed.

> If we turn our attention toward the two leading composers of the last decades, I mean toward Schönberg and Stravinsky, we will see that their actual works are decidedly the outcome of evolution. In the succession of their works there is no abrupt turning away from previous devices, there is no abolition of almost all means used previously by other composers.[10]

After a discussion of selected works by Schoenberg and Stravinsky, Bartók's summary:

> As we see, those composers who achieved the most in the last decades were not demolishing revolutionaries; the development of their art is, on the contrary, based on a steady and continuous evolution.
>
> And similarly, evolution was the basic principle in the creation of the new Hungarian art music.[11]

After the Schoenberg–Stravinsky introduction Bartók arrives to the point: the roots of his own music. As a belated narrative of what Bartók's ambitious vision of a new national art could have been around 1905-8, before modern music beyond Strauss and Debussy appeared on his horizon, we can take his words on their face value:

> They [the young Hungarian composers] first studied eagerly the classics, in order to acquire the necessary technique in composition. The German romantic styles of the XIXth century, however, were not very well suited to their feelings and to their purposes ... . Much more impulse could be drawn from Liszt's original works the transparency of which was absolutely non-German; and then, of course, of the French impressionistic music. The innovations of these gave very valuable hints for future possibilities. ...

9 English translation in David E. Schneider, 'Bartók and Stravinsky: Respect, Competition, Influence, and the Hungarian Reaction to Modernism in the 1920s', in Peter Laki (ed.), *Bartók and His World* (Princeton, 1995), 183.

10 Bartók, *Essays,* 358-61.

11 Ibid.

> The Hungarians, however, had the far reaching vision to turn their attention to a not yet exploited source, absolutely unknown until then ... . This source of tremendous importance is the Eastern European rural music, especially the Hungarian rural music. ...
>
> So, the start for the creation of the New Hungarian art-music was given first: by a thorough knowledge of the devices of old and contemporary Western art-music; this for the technique of the composition. And second: by this newly discovered musical rural material of incomparable beauty and perfection; this for the spirit of our works to be created. Scores of aspects could be distinguished and quoted, by which this material exerted its influence on us; for instance tonal influence, melodic influence, and even structural influence.[12]

Several proud or critical views were involved in Bartók's position in this text as well as in his earlier statements. E.g. that for him the nineteenth-century Hungarian art music was neither sufficiently valuable nor even Hungarian enough – therefore the discovery of Hungarian peasant music as a tradition was crucial. Or he claimed that instead of the German music he found more inspiration in the French masters – but it cannot be denied that in his major instrumental forms until the latest scores he still fought with the Classic/Romantic German sonata-form heritage, besides true Viennese swing was running in his blood when he played e.g. a Brahms capriccio. Or that creativity was more important for him than the ideology of an approach – think of his stereotyped references to Eastern-European approaches and national composers yet a lack of interest in playing their music (he had no assiduous curiosity about the works of Janáček, Enescu, only a bit of Szymanowski, accompanying his violinist friends).

Beyond Debussy (he added Ravel to the same approach; by the way here we may disregard Bartók's interest in Strauss and Reger in his early years or his loyalty to Dohnányi and a few younger Hungarian composers, also typical for the earlier decades), on the imaginary map of Bartók's evaluation of the contemporary 'progressive' music scene it is hard to miss that, in spite of the repeated praise of Kodály's masterworks written up to the 1920s, Bartók considered Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky as the two outstanding figures of his time ('of the two, Stravinsky is closer to me').[13] Alban Berg impressed him positively; he appreciated younger French composers' reverence; he had Webern scores in his library; he heard works by Hindemith, Křenek, Casella, etc., at festivals; once he even played de Falla's *Noches en los jardines de España* (Nights in the Gardens of Spain) in Budapest; at the same time he was hardly aware of the post-Stravinsky Russian composers until the 'Leningrad' Symphony annoyed him in America. In short, composers younger than his age, except perhaps Berg's *Lyric Suite,* had no significant impact on his mature style. National idiom as a principle, without the manifestation of a genius, was no value for him.

Bartók never declared his innermost confidence, he was too shy to do it, but we can read between the lines in indirect remarks and private communications. For me there is no doubt that he thought that his *oeuvre* – a 'comprehensive art' – belonged to the rank of Schoenberg's and Stravinsky's music.

12 Ibid. 362-63.

13 Interview with Béla Bartók in *Kassai Napló* (23 Apr. 1926), English translation in Laki (ed.), *Bartók and His World,* 237.

2.

In contrast to the typical 'national' composer with a passionate interest in the national music or folk music of his homeland Bartók had a multi-ethnic background. Furthermore, it was not just interesting *gefundene Objekte* for him. Dealing with different kinds of folk music (in plural), although in the first years the young composer's eagerness motivated folk-song collecting trips, soon became an obsession for Bartók. He spent many times more time and energy on working with folk music than working on his compositions. He trained himself as a self-made ethnomusicologist and rapidly got ahead of the professionals in persistence, in learning local languages and the accurate transcription of the dialects, but above all in making incomparably virtuoso notations of the recorded music that he rightly called 'micro-acoustic' transcriptions.

Folk music – peasant music, rural music, as later he preferred to call it – became a source for him only if his own field studies authorized the material (or it came from the collection of his closest Hungarian colleagues). Bartók rejected inspiration of rural music known only from books, therefore his multi-ethnic background may be considered as strange: Hungarian, Rumanian, and Slovak peasant music was in the centre (about 3,000 songs and dances from each); some Ruthenian, a handful of Serbian and Bulgarian tunes, which he also collected in the Carpathian Basin, within the borders of Hungary up to the end of the First World War; in addition Arab Bedouin music from his 1913 trip in Biskra and around in Algeria. Of these the Hungarian, Rumanian, Slovak, Ruthenian, and Arab rural music sources undoubtedly influenced his own compositional language; these five (or occasionally four, without the Ruthenian) belonged to the typical 'catalogue' of national topoi in Bartók's music. The Turkish collecting trip in 1936 and a close study of Serbo-Croatian songs form M. Parry's recordings in the American years, as I see it, came too late to exert influence on his own music.

A short note about Bartók and the Gypsies. Beyond his general aversion to the phenomenon 'gypsy' transmission of Hungarian tunes that profoundly misled Liszt and Brahms, as an ethnomusicologist Bartók condemned the gypsy performance of Hungarian and Rumanian instrumental folk music, because it severely distorted the style and rhythm, he believed. Bartók recognized only in the 1920s that illiterate gypsies who lived with Rumanian peasants in Transylvania occasionally preserved very old styles, often with a Bulgarian-like asymmetry in the meter and rhythm. The composition of his two violin Rhapsodies based on a special collection of folk dances (1928) signalized the compositional output of this belated recognition.

The wealth of the different national sources in Bartók's case is indeed unique in the history of Western music. I am convinced that Bartók's outstanding position among 'national' composers (if we may call him one) is closely connected with the variety of inspirations, just as with the every day scholarly work on his material. The multi-national composite of his peasant sources offered him a much greater catalogue of useful raw material than it was typical in other composers' *oeuvre*. Classifying, studying, comparing his collection with other folk-music collections – specifically

after the Versailles Treaty when he practically closed the field work –, even more transcribing the recorded material and revising it up to ultimate perfection, meant highly creative activity for Bartók.

Folk-music arrangements of different kinds make up a substantial part of the *oeuvre*, but the creation of *folklore imaginaire* (Bartók's expression) interested him even more. In general terms he discussed this topic in public lectures and essays. Recent Bartók studies (including several of my essays)[14] analyzed the phenomenon in a number of his original compositions in detail. Themes, characters, textures, instrumental techniques, variation strategies were modeled on pure national forms as well as on combined national identities, e.g. Hungarian-like melody in Rumanian or Bulgarian meter in several compositions.

Bartók had to be aware of cross-fertilization of neighbouring peoples' rural music in Eastern Europe already in the 1910s, but discussed the matter of 'Race Purity in Music' only in a late essay written in America in 1942. According to his observations a definitely beneficial 'racial impurity' characterized the folklore, 'a continuous give and take of melodies, a constant crossing and recrossing [of the borders] which had persisted through centuries'; 'as a result of uninterrupted reciprocal influence upon the folk music of these peoples there are an immense variety and a wealth of melodies and melodic types'.[15] Bartók's excitement about the topic signalizes that he not only studied this phenomenon in folk music but also remembered how many times and how many ways he invented similar combinations of *folklore imaginaire* in his original compositions. The deeper we study the constituents of his style in so-called original compositions the more we recognize that it was no exaggeration when in the famous 1937 interview with Denijs Dille Bartók stated: 'The melodic world of my string quartets does not really differ from that of folk songs: it is only their setting that is stricter'.[16]

3.

Bartók's quasi-religious belief in and excitement about everything that was natural, that was connected with Nature is a well-documented fact. Beyond his private interest in botany and entomology, his lifelong longing for big mountains and unspoiled

14 In several of my earlier studies I detected and described what we would call the narrative of a piece today, see e.g. the analysis of 'The Night's Music', 'The Chase', and 'Musettes' from *Out Doors* in László Somfai, 'Analytical Notes on Bartók's Piano Year 1926', *Studia Musicologica*, 26 (1984), 5-17, 25-30; about Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2, and Movement III of the Piano Sonata in László Somfai, 'Einfall, Konzept, Komposition und Revision bei Béla Bartók', in Hermann Danuser and Günter Katzenberger (eds.), *Vom Einfall zum Kunstwerk: Der Kompositionsprozeß in der Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Laaber, 1993), 191-97, 203-9; about the (2.) Violin Concerto in 'Invention, Form, Narrative in Béla Bartók's Music', *Studia Musicologica*, 44/3-4 (2003), 291-303.

15 Bartók, *Essays,* 29-32.

16 An edited French version, authorized by Dille, cf. Denijs Dille, *Béla Bartók. Regard sur le passé,* ed. Yves Lenoir (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1990), 27-29.

forests, rural music as he discovered it was an exquisite form: 'Peasant music, in the strict sense of the word, must be regarded as a natural phenomenon'.[17]

The topic of Nature/natural was so central in Bartók's own writings and has already been discussed in such a detail in the Bartók literature that nothing need to be added. Except perhaps a still less detected aspect: the natural way in composition in Bartók's workshop and the natural growth and natural shape of his compositions. Here I am not referring to so-called proportions of the Nature (Golden section or Fibonacci series proportions) in the length of Bartók's scores as analyzed by Ernő Lendvai and others.[18] A close study of all of Bartók's manuscripts and papers, with special attention to inserted or deleted sections and corrected lengths in his drafts prove that he never calculated proportions in advance.[19] The best that manuscripts can evidence is that Bartók improved several progressions by changing the length not because he made a mistake with the exact numbers but because when he played the piece on piano for checking its effect certain sections did not work well.

His 'natural way' in composition was not at all a twentieth-century type workshop activity. Bartók did not work regularly as a composer, but rather in intensive, short bursts. Even if he was thinking about the planned work for a longer time, he so to speak waited for inspiration. For him composition meant creation; he intended to maintain the feeling of natural instinct and directness. He did not want to know how he happened to do it last time – no wonder that Bartók declined to teach composition on a regular basis. As a true pianist, he developed many of his new ideas at the instrument up to the point where he was sure about the quality of the new piece and a continuity draft could be put down on manuscript paper at the desk. The continuation of the composition, as he once admitted in an interview, happened between the piano and the desk.[20]

For Bartók no compositional plan was good enough if the piece failed to impress the audience in the concert hall. Without hesitation he discarded already written movements or sections of the composition that in fact were crucial for the complex plan of a new work if they failed to satisfy him (I refer to the well-known cases of the discarded Slovak-style movement of *Dance Suite* or the discarded big bagpipe episode in the finale of the Piano Sonata).[21] Naturalness, inspired simplicity were values for Bartók above all. In 1938, responding to a circular of a Belgian music journal that asked leading composers about their methods he stated: 'inspired simplicity, the spontaneous expression of Genius is sometimes more complicated than a mechanical creation'.[22]

17 Béla Bartók, 'The Relation of Folk Songs to the Development of the Art Music of Our Time' (1921), in Bartók, *Essays,* 321.

18 See specifically Ernő Lendvai's first book, *Bartók stílusa* (Bartók's style) (Budapest, 1955).

19 Cf. Somfai, *Béla Bartók. Composition,* 80-82.

20 About Bartók's compositional method cf. László Somfai, 'In his "Compositional Workshop"', in Malcolm Gillies (ed.), *The Bartók Companion* (London, 1993), 30-50.

21 Cf. Somfai, *Béla Bartók. Composition,* 17-18, and László Somfai, 'The Influence of Peasant Music on the Finale of Bartók's Piano Sonata', in Eugene K. Wolf and Edward H. Roesner (eds.), *Studies in Musical Sources and Styles: Essays in Honor of Jan LaRue* (Madison, Wis., 1990), 535-54.

22 Bartók, *Essays,* 516.

4.

Finally with two short case studies I intend to show the depth and intricacy inspired by ideas of folk music and national identity in Bartók's music.

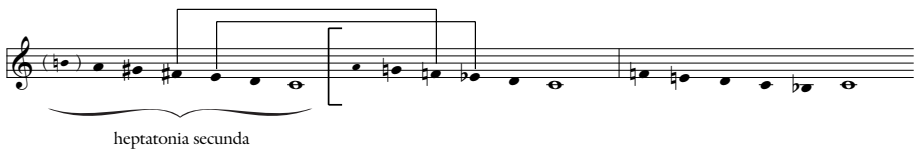
The compositional strategy of the Second Sonata for Violin and Piano written in 1922, a year after the First Sonata, involved several predetermined decisions that I will outline although I must add that Bartók himself did not make a statement about these plans at all.

Intentionally as an improved version of the relatively long fast–slow–fast three-movement form of the First Violin Sonata, in the Second Sonata Bartók looked for a more compact, more coherent two-movement structure, yet not simply a slow-and-fast rhapsody but an attacca form built on conspicuously opposite features like

– Improvisation-like themes vs. dance-like themes;
– Individual world vs. the feeling of community (ego vs. being with the peasants);
– Mourning vs. joy, but with recollections of the mourning;
– Slow vs. fast, but ending with a slow apotheosis.

The influence of instrumental peasant music phenomena, here primarily of Rumanian origin, is astonishingly rich from abstract to realistic features and include such common practices like the fiddler's imitation of bagpipe music (in the development section of the sonata-form second movement).

The mutual basis for the two contrasting movements was the common pitch collection, *heptatonia secunda* (frequent in Rumanian folk music) with polymodal coloration (Ex. 1). Already in the sketches, written on two opposite pages of the *Black Pocket-book*,[23] the opening violin themes of both movements were based on this pitch collection. By the way, more than in the First Sonata, contrasting roles were designated to the two instruments: as an opposition to the melody instrument, the piano characteristically moves in mirror-motion linear or chordal progressions.

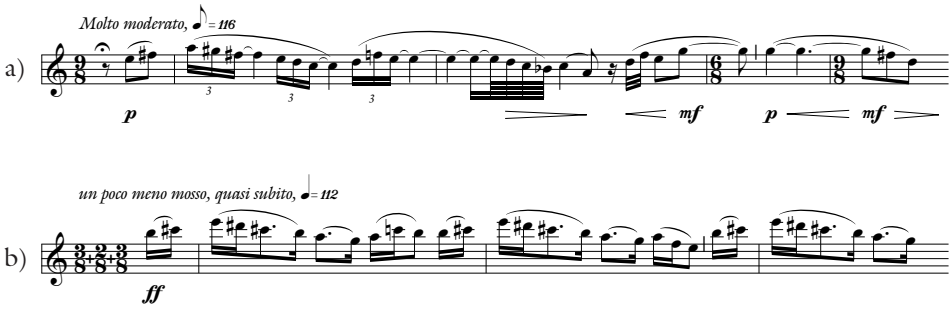


Example 1. Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2, pitch collection.

23 László Somfai (ed.), *Bartók Béla fekete zsebkönyve. Vázlatok 1907–1922 / Béla Bartók, Black Pocket-book. Sketches 1907–1922* (Budapest, 1987).

As to the special slow–fast concept of the form, Bartók picked up a Rumanian peasant music phenomenon, the only 'programmatic' piece in folk music (his word) that he knew, the two-part 'When the shepherd lost his sheep' – 'When the shepherd found his [lost] sheep', inspired by the most tragic event of a shepherd's life. In folk music the slow piece was always a variant of the so-called *hora lungă* or *cântec lung* ('the long melody'). The *hora lungă* phenomenon fascinated Bartók ever since in 1912 he discovered this kind of highly ornamented, oriental, improvisation-like melody. He heard a similar melody in Central Algeria, later knew that the phenomenon was known in Ukraine, Iraq, and Persia. He thought that in *hora lungă* he actually discovered a form of *Urmusik* in the world's folk music.

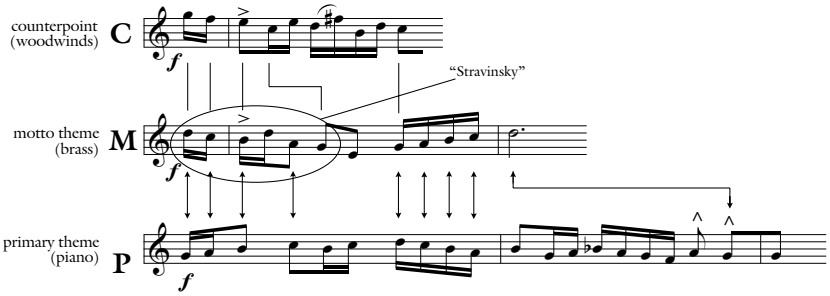
The opening violin theme of the Second Sonata in fact is a Bartók composition of an improvisation-like quasi *hora lungă* (Ex. 2a). Typical is the additional strategy: at the end of the first movement the theme returns in a higher-level form, as a 'motivic' material, and on the last page of the Sonata the same thematic material is crystallized as a quasi strophic form (Ex. 2b), as if Bartók had decided to recreate or mirror the evolution of folk music in his Second Sonata in miniature, from the improvisation-like *Urform* to the developed stanza formation. It is, however, significant that the Second Sonata does not end with the fortissimo Dionysian incantation of the stanza. The tempo gradually slows and the robust dynamic calms down to make way for the Apollonian end, a C major conclusion, a pianissimo apotheosis. Bartók is alone again.



Example 2. Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2; a) opening theme; b) the quasi strophic form at the end of the Sonata.

The concept of the First Movement of Bartók's Second Piano Concerto, written in 1930-31 is no less bold. In this *Allegro* opening movement Bartók combined the sonata form, the rondo principle, and the systematic transformation of his themes not as a neoclassical tour de force, as we would think after the first bars. He used all of these means to conduct his listener from the objective outside world into his innermost subjective world, from the contemporary musical vocabulary to a personal idiom.

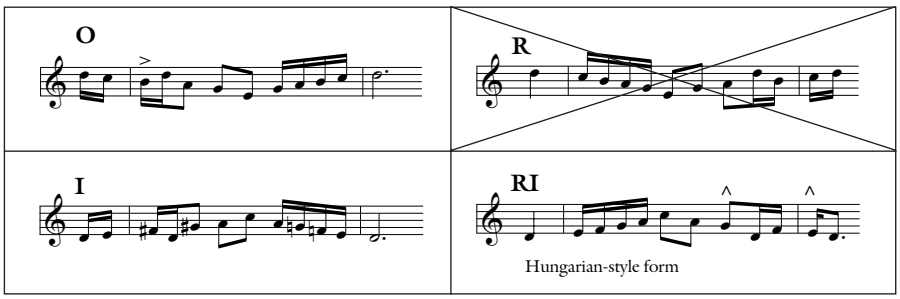
To get a fresh look on a well-known score, we visit some of the themes (to recognize their connotations) and inspect some of the thematic transformations (to understand their semantics). The primary theme complex (Ex. 3) includes three subjects: there is a trumpet signal 'motto', a nicely disguised borrowing from Stravinsky (the first six notes quote from the very slow-motion finale theme of the *Firebird,* a Russian folksong as Bartók believed), followed by a 21-measure-long piano primary theme (with *Petroushka* texture; its form was inspired by the stanza structure of new-style Hungarian folksongs, but in rhythm and style it is not Hungarian at all), and a woodwind countersubject. The interaction between these three themes is intricate: inversion, modal variation, *per arsin et thesin*-type rhythmic variation, etc., occur.



Example 3. Piano Concerto No. 2, primary theme complex.

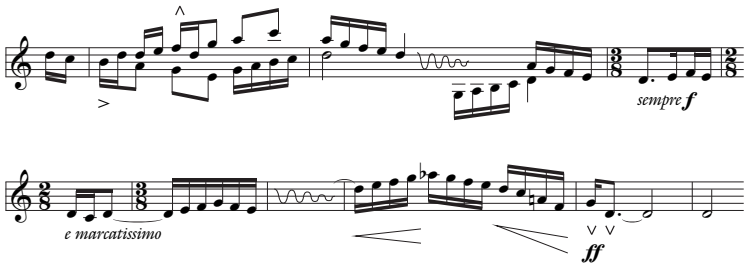
Bartók's strategy for the sonata-form recapitulation was that the themes return in the original sequence but in inversion – with significant irregularities. The primary theme of the piano returns in fragmentary form only. Why? Because, according to Bartók's musical taste (here the ethnomusicologist rules), the arch-form melodic contour of the Hungarian folksong-like stanza is not suited to inversion, it would ridicule the character.

The Stravinsky-quotation short trumpet motto offered Bartók more than two shapes (Ex. 4). One of his inspirations was the discovery that the otherwise so neutral, emphatically non-Hungarian motive, turning into retrograde inversion creates a warm, pathetic Hungarian phrase with the emblematic dotted-rhythm cadence. So



Example 4. Versions of the trumpet motto.

Bartók created a well-planned schedule. The inversion, with polymodal coloration, was used in the re-transition to the recapitulation; the Hungarian retrograde inversion made a transition to the solo cadenza. The retrograde shape on the other hand was useless, because the combination of this melodic curve with the Hungarian closing rhythm made no sense for Bartók. He returned to the original and inversion in the cadenza, then in the coda Bartók presented original and inversion shapes in character variations, in *stretto* leading to a brass melody, a triumphantly singing Hungarian-style conclusion theme (Ex. 5).



Example 5. Themes in the second part of the first movement of the Second Piano Concerto.

Considering the overall form, the sonata-form structure was ingeniously combined with a rondo-like super-structure with fascinating self-liquidation of both concepts by the end of the movement. From the Hungarian climax of the movement, i.e. the retrograde inversion of the motto onwards, the form is self-destructive.[24] The pianist — of course with Béla Bartók at the keyboard — in the cadenza takes away the brass theme; the coda brings a happy reunion with different characters of the motto theme. Avant-garde as well as neoclassical features gradually fade; the rigor of the beginning of the movement has vanished; the traditional construction, the classical form may be ruined but the listener arrives in a humane musical world. In the coda unmistakably a Hungarian master speaks who, however, is not a nationalist composer in the common sense of the word.

I will sum up my interpretation of the question nationalism and Bartók with a seeming *contradictio*. Béla Bartók did not intend to write progressive world music or to create any kind of international musical language, rather his ideal was to build up a great Hungarian national art. But he did not identify himself with nationalism in general, only if it was the outcome of a great creative talent's inspired work.

24 See in detail in László Somfai, 'Classicism as Bartók conceptualized it in his classical period, 1926-1937', in Hermann Danuser (ed.), *Die klassizistische Moderne in der Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Winterthur, 1997), 123-41, esp. 136-41.

Summary

Béla Bartók did not intend to write progressive world music or to create any kind of international musical language rather his ideal was to build up a great Hungarian national art, a 'comprehensive art'. He did not identify himself with nationalism in general; national idiom as a principle, without the manifestation of a genius, was no value for him. In contrast to the typical national composer with a passionate interest in the music or folk music of his homeland, Bartók had a multi-ethnic background (Hungarian, Rumanian, Slovak, Ruthenian, and Arab rural music).

Folk-music arrangements of different kinds make up a substantial part of the *oeuvre*, but the creation of *folklore imaginaire* (Bartók's expression) interested him even more. Two short case studies detect compositional strategies in original compositions connected with indirect folk-music influences. In the two-movement structure of the Second Sonata for Violin and Piano (1922), without quoting folk music, with the variant forms of the opening theme Bartók recreated the evolution of folk music in miniature, from a Rumanian *horă lungă*-like improvisational concept to the developed stanza formation. In the overall sonata form of the First Movement of the Second Piano Concerto (1930/31) the trumpet motto, an emphatically non-Hungarian motive theme (the first notes were borrowed from Stravinsky' *Firebird*) plays a crucial role: in retrograde inversion it creates a warm, pathetic Hungarian climax.