

Articulating Bartók: Understanding the Touch Notation in his Pedagogical Works

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ABSTRACT: Béla Bartók (1881-1945), composer of those difficult, formidable and modern piano works also stands as one of the most important contributors to the elementary and intermediate piano repertoire. His *Piano Method* and *First Term at the Piano, For Children, Fourteen Bagatelles, Op. 6, Ten Easy Pieces, Mikrokosmos* and various other beginning pieces provide teachers with high quality 20th-century literature as well as an introduction to the charms of folk music. But the notation---the articulatory signs, pedal indications and unconventional key signatures and rhythms---can be difficult to interpret. The solutions can be found in understanding the sources: the folk music Bartók incorporated, as well as his ideas about piano technique and how to teach it. Bartók's deep study and appreciation of the folk music he collected transferred to his compositions. This, combined with his pedagogical interest in developing coordination at the piano, resulted in a thick layer of dots, dashes and slurs, pedal marks, and all manner of combinations. This presentation will share insights into what the notation means, and how to teach and play it. Representative works valuable to the beginning and intermediate studio will be demonstrated and explained.

OVERVIEW OF PIANO WORKS

Early Works (pre-folksong 1896-1905)

- *Der Junge Bartók* (Editio Musica Budapest)
- *Drei Klavierstücke* (from 1896-7), *Scherzo, Variations, Petits Morceaux*
- *Funeral March from Kossuth* (1903)
- *Four Piano Pieces* (1904)
- *Rhapsody, Op. 1* (1904)

Discovery of folksong in 1904, discovery of Debussy in 1907

First folksong collecting expeditions, Hungarian and Slovak (1904-1907)

- *Three Hungarian Folksongs from Csik* (1907)
- *Fourteen Bagatelles, Op. 6* (1908)
- *Ten Easy Pieces* (1908) Includes *Evening in Transylvania*
- *Two Elegies* (1908-9)
- *For Children, Volumes I and II* (1908-9, rev. 1945)
- *Two Romanian Dances, Op. 8a* (1909-1910)
- *Seven Sketches (Esquisses), Op. 9b* (1908-1910)
- *Four Dirges, Op. 9a* (1909-1910)
- *Deux Images, Op. 12* (1910)
- *Three Burlesques, Op. 8c* (1908-1910)
- *Allegro Barbaro* (1911)
- *Piano Method* (1913)
- *First Term at the Piano* (1913, 1929)

Hungarian, Romanian excursions (1914-15) and a trip to Africa (1913)

- *Sonatina* (1915)
- *Romanian Folk Dances* (1915)
- *Romanian Christmas Songs (Colinde)* (1915)
- *Suite, Op. 14* (1916)
- *Three Hungarian Folk-Tunes* (1914-1917)
- *Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs* (1914-1917)

Professor of Piano at Budapest Academy of Music 1907-1934

Resumption and intensification of concert career in 1920's

True synthesis of folksong, modern and personal elements:

- *Three Etudes, Op. 18* (1918)
- *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs, Op. 20* (1920)
- *Dance Suite* (1925)
- *Sonata* (1926)
- *Out of Doors* (1926)
- *Nine Little Piano Pieces* (1926)
- *Three Rondos on Folk Tunes* (No. 1- 1916; Nos. 2 and 3-1927)
- *Petite Suite* (1936) Transcriptions from *44 Duos for 2 Violins*
- *Mikrokosmos, Volumes 1-6* (1926-1937) Nos. 158-153 of Vol. 6 are *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm*

Piano Concertos

- No. 1 (1926) Premiered July 1, 1927, Frankfurt am Main Opera, Cond. Wilhelm Furtwängler, with Bartók at piano
- No. 2 (1930) Premiered January 23, Frankfurt am Main, Radio Symphony Orchestra, cond. Hans Rosbaud, with Bartók at piano
- No. 3 (1945) Dedicated and intended for performance of Ditta Pásztor-Bartók. Premiered February 8, 1946, Philadelphia Orchestra, cond. Eugene Ormandy, with György Sándor at piano

Emigration to New York City, 1940. Death in NY 1945

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Recordings:

Bartók at the Piano, Hungaraton HCD 12326-31. Ed. László Somfai and Zoltán Kocsis

Collected recordings of Bartók's own performances of many of his and other composers' works. Includes collaborations with his wife, Ditta, Joseph Szigeti, violin, Benny Goodman, clarinet, and singers Vilma Medgyaszay, Mária Basilides, Ferenc Székelyhidly.

Evening in the Country: Folk Influence in the Music of Béla Bartók, Victoria Fischer, pianist. 2002 Elon Improvibes.

Books and articles:

Antokoletz, Fischer, Suchoff, eds. **Bartók Perspectives: Man, Composer, & Ethnomusicologist** (Oxford University Press, 2000) Includes my article (*Bartók's Fourteen Bagatelles Op. 6, for Piano: Toward Performance Authenticity*)

Bartók, Béla. **Béla Bartók Essays**, ed. Benjamin Suchoff. (University of Nebraska Press, 1993)

Bartók, Béla. **The Hungarian Folk Song**, ed. Benjamin Suchoff. (State University of New York Press, 1981)

Bayley, Amanda, ed. **The Cambridge Companion to Bartók**. (Cambridge University Press, 2002) Includes my chapter "The teaching pieces and folksong settings for piano")

Fischer, Victoria. *Articulation Notation in the Piano Music of Béla Bartók: Evolution and Interpretation* (**Studio Musicologica** 1995)

Fischer, Victoria. *Articulating Bartók: Interpretation of the Piano Notation* (**International Journal of Musicology**, Vol. 9, 2006)

- Nissman, Barbara. **Bartók and the Piano: A Performer's View**. (Scarecrow Press, 2002) Includes CD of Nissman's performance of selected works.
- Somfai, László. *Nineteenth-Century Ideas Developed in Bartók's Piano Notation in the Years 1907-14 (19th-Century Music*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Summer, 1987)
- Stevens, Halsey, **The Life and Music of Béla Bartók**, 3rd edition. Ed. Malcolm Gillies. (Oxford University Press, 1993)
- Suchoff, Benjamin. **Guide to the Mikrokosmos**. (Da Capo Press, 1983)
- Yeomans, David. **Bartók for Piano: A Survey of His Solo Literature**. (Indiana University Press, 1988)

Catalogue of Articulation Notation from the Preface to Bartók's 1916 edition of selections from J. S. Bach's *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach*

- ''' = sharp staccato (staccatissimo) implying a certain accentuation and stronger tone color.
- ... = the regular staccato, whereby the sounding of the note ranges from the shortest in value to one-half the value of the note.
- . . . = portamento [portato], whereby the tones must be permitted to sound almost up to half of the note value in conjunction with a certain special coloring
- — — = the symbol for half-shortening (the tones should not sound shorter than half of the note value)
- — — = the tenuto symbol above different notes signifies that they must be held for their entire note value; when above each note of a group, that we must permit the notes to sound throughout their entire note value if possible, without linking them to one another
- = the well-known legato symbol, which we are also using, in the case of legato parts, for marking the phrase for lack of another symbol
- Sf** = the strongest accentuation
- ^ = accentuation still forceful enough
- > = weak accentuation
- — — = the tenuto symbol above the different tones of the legato parts signifies delicately emphasizing the tone by way of a different tone coloring.