

DLA doctoral dissertation theses

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“Only from clear mountain springs”

The continuation of Béla Bartók’s music in jazz.

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I. Antecedents of research

In jazz research, the study of the effects of classical music on a given period, both in Hungary and internationally, has an obvious antecedent, especially with regard to the so-called third stream style. Practitioners of this jazz style have clearly turned to the stylistic tools of classical music to broaden the framework of the jazz genre. We also find many examples of a jazz researcher focusing on the oeuvre of some of the composers to demonstrate the impact of classical music. A good example of this is the book by David Schiff, a professor at Reed College (*The Ellington Century*), in which he points to structural and stylistic elements derived from classical music – including Bartók – at the American pianist, orchestra leader Duke Ellington's art. He also examines the inspiration he draws from pieces by classical composers in Ellington's works. Nevertheless, in the last decades, only a few writings have been written, either domestically or internationally, that study such effects in the field of jazz in relation to Bartók.

Géza Gábor Simon was the first jazz researcher, to publish a study entitled "Ferenc Liszt, Béla Bartók and Jazz" in 1999. He made an attempt to show the influence of the two named Hungarian composers on jazz. In addition, the list of records in which he collected the data of the Bartók-related jazz albums published until then (*Magyar jazzdiszkográfia 1905–2000.*), must be mentioned. Simon's works reflects an attitude, that the jazz profession, and in many cases even jazz research, has turn against – as János Gonda has pointed out in his book *Jazzvilág* [World of Jazz]. The mentioned Hungarian jazz history book of Simon also provoked many debates, because he set the beginning of jazz in Hungary to the early 1900s. This is contrary to the generally accepted view, that before the Second World War it was not possible to speak of Hungarian jazz as an independent performing style. He tends to confuse dance- and salon music contains jazz elements with the jazz genre. The volume entitled *Hungarian Jazz History* was so rejected in professional circles, that after its publication the Hungarian Jazz Association issued a resolution, stating that it was "highly objectionable from a professional and stylistic point of view." There are also mistakes in Simon's jazz discography, for which it includes non-jazz musicians such as pianist Polo de Haas or saxophonist, record producer John Harle. Despite all the critical remarks, the very fact that he was the first to research this field, clearly seeking scientific thoroughness, is definitely commendable.

Subsequently, in 2006, jazz writer György J. Máté published "Inspirational folk music in white and black" in the columns of Gramofon, written primarily for educational purposes. In the first half of Máté's writing, he analyzes Bartók's connection to jazz music, while the second half of the article focuses specifically on the influence of the composer's work in the jazz genre. He takes this topic further, explaining the issue to a slightly greater extent in both his Hungarian and international context in his study entitled "Clear mountain spring (Bartók and Jazz)". In his introduction, Máté, draws attention to the fact that Bartók "due to his enduring oeuvre, and also his exemplary personality, that unwilling to compromise", he is considered a model by many Hungarian and foreign jazz musicians as well. Of course, the nature and scope of his writings did not provide an opportunity for a thorough discussion of this area of research, but it is definitely positive that he mention both American, European and Hungarian jazz musicians, from the perspective of the topic.

Several Hungarian jazz pianists gave lectures on Bartók's influence on jazz music almost at the same time (supplemented with illustrations from live music and sound recordings). As did first János Gonda at the 1st European Regional Music Pedagogy

Conference, held in Budapest on May 26-27, 2006. The title of his lecture was “Bartók’s influence in the XX. century jazz music”. The audio material of the recorded lecture (as part of Gonda’s legacy) can be found on a cassette in the Music Collection of the The Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library. The material is not yet researchable, thus one not have knowledge of the content of its performance. Same year, in October and December, Tibor Márkus gave two lectures under the title “Bartók and Jazz”. He shared his notes of this lectures with me. Károly Binder also gave a series of ten-stage lectures to studied this issue in the company of Mihály Borbély entitled “The Emergence of Bartók and Kodály’s Musical Universe in Contemporary Improvisation”, in secondary schools. Both Márkus and Binder have presented many aspects of this topic through their personal impressions, experiences and performing practices, showing how the style elements characteristic of Bartók can affect jazz compositions and related improvisations.

The international jazz research is still indebted to presenting the appearance of Béla Bartók’s musical world in the field of jazz music. In general, this area is unknown, although Krystoffer Dreps undertook to explain in his dissertation (written is German); *Béla Bartók im Jazz – zur Bedeutung des Komponisten im Schaffen von Richie Beirach und Woody Shaw* (Béla Bartók in jazz – on the importance of the composer in the work of Richie Beirach and Woody Shaw). The dissertation – focusing on two musicians as clearly articulated in the title – examines the emergence of Bartók’s influence through the works of Richie Beirach and Woody Shaw. Dreps, points out in the preface that the number and quality of researchable sources are very different for the two artists he examines. While about trumpet player, bandleader Woody Shaw has only a few primary sources are available (interviews and information on his website), counter to Richie Beirach, a pianist and composer, whom gave Dreps an interview specifically to answer questions about the research topic and also provided sheet music for his Bartók-related works. In Dreps’s dissertation, he narrowed his attention to three of Bartók’s works and groups of works; to music entitled *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, the pieces of *Mikrokosmos* created by Bartók for pedagogical purposes, and the string quartets, whose influence he sought in the works of those two musicians.

He also makes it clear in his writing that the Bartók analyzes he considers most relevant to the research topic are those published by Ernő Lendvai in connection with the *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, and the *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*. As a natural consequence, he treats the theory of ‘axis system’ as a starting point, but in addition to Lendvai’s analyzes, he used other studies on Bartók’s music while writing his dissertation (Dreps also relies heavily on the findings of Traimer Roswitha, Sándor Veress and Benjamin Suchoff). Dreps decision to narrow down the research area and define analogies in the selected Bartók works is definitely to be welcomed, given the framework provided by a dissertation. Apart from a few shortcomings, his dissertation is a good starting point, which only needs to be supplemented insofar as, in the more than ten years that have passed since then, Beirach, who is still active today, has created other works related to Bartók. However, considering that Dreps studied Bartók’s influence in only two musicians oeuvres, it would have been useful to perform a comparative analysis of at least one piece, which could point to possible changes and developments over time. Also he omitted to ask Beirach in the interview, whether he knows other Bartók analytics besides Lendvai’s writings.

Niran Jay Dasika, Australian trumpet player, composer investigated the issue from a completely different perspective in his thesis, *Applications of Béla Bartók’s techniques of pitch organisation to jazz improvisation*. The basis of his research – based on the writings of Bartók’s own, Elliott Antokoletz, János Kárpáti and Ernő Lendvai – the four melody-making

techniques he distinguishes are „mistuning”, „chromatic compression and diatonic extension”, „polymodal chromaticism” and „inversional symmetry”. Dasika does not study the appearance of these stylistic features in the works of other jazz musicians. Instead, under the coordination of his supervisor, he developed, mastered and documented (by making recordings) practical improvisation methods, based on the four melody development techniques mentioned above. The aim of his project was to expand his improvisational skills and to create new music by displaying Bartók’s inspiration. His exciting work is limited by the fact that he deals only with the melodic aspect of the scales he uses in jazz improvisation, without placing them in a harmonious context. Accordingly, the fourteen improvisations he recorded – which are closely related to the thesis – were all assigned to so-called “static”, non changing harmonies. Although there are many compositions in jazz whose improvisation is free of chord changes or modulations, this certainly limits its usefulness as an improvisational method.

II. Sources

In my dissertation, focusing on jazz within the improvisational music, I present the effects, “takeovers” – as Bartók describes the merges of foreign elements into folk music – which can be transformed organically due to their appearance in the new medium. Already during the planning of the dissertation, I assumed that I would find many examples to mention in the history of jazz; like reworkings, Bartók-inspired independent compositions, and statements in which a musician mentions Bartók as a composer or in another sense a model. However, it became clear how much material was actually being processed in the first phase of the research, during the systematization of sources and sound materials. I treated published and unpublished papers, articles in newspapers or scholarly journals, autobiographical books, statements, memoirs published in journals or on the Internet (if they could be considered authentic) as primary and secondary sources. Similarly to that, I also examined published and unpublished dissertations as well. Released music publications (such as vinyl albums, CDs, DVDs) as well as previously unpublished audio material (typically concert recordings) that can be found either online or in a collection have also served as important sources. In addition, I used art analyzes, sheet music, authors manuscripts, textbooks and, of course the relevant volumes of the literature. Whenever possible, I supplemented and clarified the information in the sources through personal or email interviews. The length of this dissertation also reflects the fact that I was the first to undertake a comprehensive processing of this large number of research materials.

III. Method

My dissertation differs from the previous similar projects listed in several respects in terms of methodology and objectives. Primarily in my efforts to process this area, which is important for Hungarian and international music history, but which has not been explored so far. I distinguished between the independent compositions that were influenced by Bartók’s music (showing whether they contained a takeover from a particular piece of music), the adaptations of his works, and if the stylistic elements of Bartók could be discovered (in some cases a mere tendency to a Bartókian idiom) in improvisations. In addition to that, I systematized each of the statements made by jazz musicians about the Hungarian composer. I also made an attempt to clarify the myths and legends that lives in rumors and appear less frequently in newspaper articles, which in many cases unjustifiably associate dominant musicians of jazz with the

stimulating effect of Bartók's art. I also tried to explore in as much detail as possible the motivation of the artists involved and – if any – the method by which they approached Bartók's musical world. Where possible, I show how they first encountered Bartók's compositions.

In the first chapter of my dissertation, I present those Bartók's statements from interviews (in chronological order), and studies forming part of the Bartók research, which relate to the composer's relationship to jazz music and the changes that have taken place in it.

In the second main chapter with a historical perspective, I discuss the eras of jazz in separate subchapters, also thematized in chronological order and according to their territorial appearance. The nature of each era allows the topic to be researched in different ways. Over time, both the amount of material to be processed and the amount of resources increase, in addition to which the thoroughness of jazz editors has repeatedly helped to draw attention to Bartók's aspects of a publication. There are also differences between the different stylistic periods in terms of the possible appearances of Bartók's influence, either due to the characteristic stylistic features of the given period or due to the different instrumentation and technical possibilities, which I tried to present. It is not uncommon for the artists who turned to Bartók for inspiration to be influenced by other classical composers, I drew attention to this in all cases. The processing of Bartók's influences can be distinguished not only by the style trends and the sound and instrumentation paradigms they naturally define, but also by the attitude, tastes and readiness of the jazz musicians. These differences fall into roughly three categories. The first category includes adaptations in which the theme is strongly connected to Bartók (either in the case of a reworking or an own composition), but the improvisations following the theme reflect the usual formal language of jazz. The second category is represented by the reworkings, in which improvisation or improvisations strongly connected to the theme carrying Bartók's spirituality and stylistic features. This is most easily achieved in the recordings where the melodic-rhythmic unit of the Bartók inspired theme can appear together in the improvisation. The third and rarest case is when a jazz performer gets to know and master – like Bartók did with peasant music – the compositional solutions characteristic of Bartók. In this case, the composer's musical world can permeate the whole oeuvre as a kind of compass. In my personal experience, Bartók's music is so complex that in some cases it takes several years to fully understand his compositional techniques and develop the results into improvisational possibilities.

In a separate section, in the third chapter, I detail the analogies that can be found between the stylistic features of Bartók and the formal language of jazz, and with the help of which the takeovers can appear more easily in their new medium. I discuss these musical parallels divided into subchapters, taking into account the melodic, harmonic and structural, as well as rhythmic analogies, including the issue of improvisation.

I considered it extremely important to make transcriptions of musical pieces that have a clear relevance to Bartók, as well as a thorough analysis of them. The fourth chapter of my dissertation is accordingly of a theoretical nature, in which I sought to select recordings for analysis closely related to the historical chapters. The music scores in the analyzes and the ones used as illustrations are mostly my transcriptions, I always indicate in cases other than this. Where I did not mark separately, I also made the translations of the foreign language quotations in the dissertation myself.

An important part of my dissertation is the "List of Referenced Discs", in which in accordance with the scientific aspects of discology, I publish the data of the publications and unpublished recordings in the dissertation as a source. In addition to jazz reworkings and

pieces inspired by Bartók, I listened to Bartók's works in their original form throughout the research as a reference. Among the recordings that are not included in the text of the dissertation, but were important for the dissertation, the *Concerto* and the *Dance Suite* in the performance of the Budapest Festival Orchestra should be mentioned, as well as the album where Bartók performs himself his piano works (Béla Bartók: *Spielt Béla Bartók*).

The compilation "Special Terms and Abbreviations" in the appendix is intended to provide useful material for my dissertation to anyone interested in this topic. I have therefore tried to create a uniform and transparent marking system. Some musical terms and notations differ in classical and jazz music theory, despite the fact that the score writing of jazz has taken on a number of classical musical notations, moreover at the same time that names derived from English-speaking culture have become commonplace in the terminology of classical music. I have tried to arrange in a systematic manner the elements of the terminology and notation I use where the two traditions of music theory differ to a greater or lesser extent.

I did not mention about the improvisational music works performed by pop musicians, folk musicians, in general by non-jazz musicians. Thus, I did not include – among others – the well-known reworking of Bartók by the English rock band Emerson Lake & Palmer, the unreleased Bartók album by the Hungarian progressive rock formation Panta Rhei, the *Private Folk Music* by Balázs Szokolay Dongó, as well as the pieces related to Bartók by the Talizmán ensemble led by Gergely Ittész. I only mention the ones herewith which the lack of works may be striking to many. In addition to that, in the case of the works discussed, it is not my task to judge the quality of the completed pieces. I have refrained from doing so in all cases, but I have tried to include all musical works according to their significance and possible impact, and not to their scope. I also did not discuss the possible inspiring effect of Bartók's piano performance on the playing of jazz pianists. This is a special subject, given that I am not a pianist, I do not have a good overview and, in the absence of relevant literature, I would not feel justified in forming an opinion. Hopefully in the future there will be a pianist who will explore this topic with due thoroughness. In addition the size limitations of the dissertation did not allow me to take stock of what musical solutions characteristic of Bartók could open up new avenues for jazz composition and improvisation in the future.

IV. Results

In his 1995 study „A rögtönzés mint attitűd.” [Improvisation as an attitude.], György Szabados draws attention to two facts that are key to my dissertation. On the one hand, the fact that Bartók's oeuvre has had a serious impact on improvisational music, and on the other hand, that the processing of this vast material is yet to come. During my choice of topic, a dual goal led. On the one hand since I recognized that jazz research does not keep pace with the creative activities of jazz musicians, therefore I felt that the presentation of Béla Bartók's impact on jazz music is a task that could not be postponed. On the other hand, to make observations with scientific demands about the new paths that the "touches" created – as Szabados refers it, between Bartók's musical world and the idiom of jazz.

The history of music provides many examples of a composer taking over and incorporating characteristic stylistic elements from other authors into his compositional solutions, as can be seen in Béla Bartók's oeuvre, among others. It is also very common that a composer, a musical style or genre has influence in jazz music. Although quite a few theories examining the interactions and transitions that result from this are certainly made impact on my dissertation, yet I sought independently of these to draw conclusions, focusing on the research material. Despite the fact that certain motifs, melodic and rhythmic solutions or

structural features can be clearly linked to Bartók, their appearance in a jazz piece does not in itself prove that they come from Bartók's music. In contrast, it is not necessarily true that the origin of a work that does not seem to represent the typical sound of Bartók's music, could not be linked to the inspiration of the composer's works.

In my dissertation, I do not use the term "quote", because a quote could be considered to be if a piece of Bartók, or a part of it appeared in its original form in a jazz environment. There are many examples of a jazz performer plays a piece from the Hungarian composer without modification, but in these cases the performances have no jazz implications. In contrast, I have shown many examples of "takeovers" in both the historical and theoretical sections. I used this term – in Bartók's interpretation – in connection with the musical works in which the musical techniques characteristic of Bartók can appear in the formal language of jazz. There is also a significant number of "reworkings", including those in which the reworker musician names (or leaves unchanged) the title of the original work, but in some cases only indicates that the piece is a reworking of a Bartók composition. We also find examples of works being included as the performer's own composition, without reference to Bartók, or the composer only indirectly referring to Bartók's authorship. We also have seen that, due to Bartók's unwavering love for folk music and the resulting compositional aspirations, as well as his uncompromising personality, he is an example for jazz musicians.

In the course of my work, have been stated that Bartók's music, not long after the composer's death in the late 1940s and early 1950s, continued to live in jazz thanks to musicians such as Kornél Kertész, Richard 'Dick' Twardzik, Stan Kenton or Pietro 'Pete' Rugolo. In the decades that followed, more and more jazz musicians were inspired by Bartók's epoch-making musical legacy, from countries outside the borders of Hungary and the United States. Today, until the completion of this dissertation – according to what János Gonda has shown about the territorial appearances of jazz in his already mentioned book on the history of jazz – there is hardly an area, where at least some Bartók-related pieces would not have been made. Thus, in addition to the countries already mentioned Australia, Brazil and many parts of Europe: England, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland, Sweden, Canada and Israel are also areas where Bartók influenced jazz.

Finally, it should be emphasized that it is more easy to install simpler structured works into jazz, due to the nature of improvisation. For this reason, it is not surprising that shorter, but more characteristic piano pieces such as those in the *Mikrokosmos* and *For Children*, *Allegro Barbaro*, or in the *Ten Easy Pieces* have been remarkably more frequently reworked. However, also has been made a jazz adaptation of a larger work, from the *Bluebear's Castle*. In contrast, in the case of own jazz compositions, Bartók's most common inspiring pieces were the *Concerto*, the *String Quartets* and the *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*. It can also be observed that jazz reworks of Bartók's adaptations of folk music also form a separate category.

V. Documentation of the activity related to the topic of the dissertation

Preliminary scientific publications on the topic:

„Uri Caine Bartók projektje a Műpában” *MagyarJazz* (April 2022). Available at: https://magyarjazz.hu/koncertbeszamolok/1540-uri-caine-bartok-projektje-a-mupabanfbclid=IwAR3WBGIA_z8xeDxMAIbQbkknla3O3bH4tVhIPdkVOGgWAYxoT5L6dlYew

„Csak tiszta forrásból.” *A SZÍV* 107/9 (September 2021): 55–58.

Art publication related to the topic of the dissertation:

Párniczky Quartet: Bartók electrified. (BMC, CD 260, 2018).

The album featured the following Bartók adaptations:

“Thumbs Under”

“Bulgarian rhythm”

“Boating”

“Village joke”

“Frustration”

“Major Seconds”

“Syncopation” (from volumes IV. and V. of *Mikrokosmos*)

“Bear Dance” (from *Ten Easy Pieces*)

“The Wheat has to Ripening” (Bartók’s adaptation of a folk song from *15 Hungarian Peasant Songs*, entitled Poco rubato)

“Fast Dance” (from the III. “Sebes” movement of *Contrasts*)

The following musicians participated on the CD:

András Párniczky – guitar, composer, bandleader

Péter Bede – alto saxophone, chromatic tárogató

Erő Hock – double bass

István Baló – drums