

Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music

28. Doctoral School of Arts and Cultural History

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FORM AND MEANING

In Bartók's Violin Sonatas

PhD Theses

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## I. Antecedents of the Research

Analyzing Bartók's violin sonatas at the turning points of his career, it draws the arch of his career in a sense – the sonatas written in his youth are the collectors of the impacts on the composer, the witnesses of the maturing of his compositional knowledge; in connection with the two sonatas for violin and piano and the Sonata for Solo Violin we can say without exaggeration that they are masterpieces carrying the basic ideas and contents of his life work. Their specialty is that as opposed to the piano works that were mostly meant for own use – except for the Violin Sonata (1903) – these were written to violinist who had personal contact with Bartók and whose individual playing style was more or less taken into consideration by the composer when writing the string parts.

Obviously the Bartók research does not discuss the three violin sonatas written at a young age and the three written at a mature age in the same rate: while the two works written during the student years in Bratislava and the Violin Sonata (1903) that was closing the student years of the Academy of Music were more like summarizing essays, the two great sonatas for violin and piano and the Sonata for Solo Violin are subjects to individual studies with multitude aspects.

The works that discuss Bartók's life and life work are naturally dealing with all the works (except the sonatas from his young age) to a greater or lesser extent: first of all József Ujfalussy (*Bartók Béla*, 1965), Tibor Tallián (*Bartók Béla*, 1981), György Kroó (*Bartók-kalauz*, 1975), and in literature from abroad the books of Paul Griffiths (*The Master Musicians – Bartók*, 1984) and Halsey Stevens (*The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, 1993) can be mentioned here. The essay of Péter Laki (*Violin works and Viola Concerto*, 2001) also provides a full overview of the works.

The sonatas from his student years and the Violin Sonata (1903) were analyzed briefly in the books of Denijs Dille (*Thematisches Verzeichnis der Jugendwerke Béla Bartóks 1890–1904*, 1974) and Günter Weiss-Aigner (*Die frühe Schaffensentwicklung Béla Bartóks im Lichte westlichen und östlichen Traditionen*, 1970).

The essays of Mátyás Seiber (*Béla Bartók's Chamber Music*, 1949), János Kárpáti (*Bartók kamarazenéje*, 1976), Wilson Paul (*Violin Sonatas*, 1993) and László Somfai (*The Two Sonatas for Violin and Piano (1921–1922): Avantgarde Music à la Bartók*, 2008) are considered as milestones in the research of the First and Second Violin Sonatas

In the articles of Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno published in 1922 and 1924 (*Studia Musicologia*, 1981) specific philosophical and aesthetic aspects were proven. The biographer

of the Arányi sisters, Joseph Macleod dealt with their biographical background and with the relationship of Bartók and Jelly Arányi (*The Sisters d'Aranyi*, 1969). Alistair Wightman published a thought-provoking study about the effects of Szymanowski's music on the works (*Szymanowski, Bartók and the Violin*, 1981). Malcolm Gillies went on to discussing Bartók's Szymanowski reception referring to First Violin Sonata (*Stylistic Integrity and Influence in Bartók's Works: the Case of Szymanowski*, 1992) – their perceptions were reconsidered in several aspects in the relevant chapter of the book of László Vikárius (*Modell és inspiráció Bartók zenei gondolkodásában. A hatás jelenségének értelmezéséhez*, 1999). Márta Papp was studying the effects of Romanian folk playing methods on the violin parts of the sonatas (*Bartók hegedűrapszódiai és a román népi hegedűs játékmód hatása Bartók műveire*, 1973).

Out of the relatively smaller analyzing literature dealing with the First Violin Sonata the study of Sándor Kovács was analyzing the whole work (*Bartók Béla: I. hegedű-zongora szonáta*, 1976). László Somfai's studies concentrating on sub-problems were essential for the in-depth and multi-faceted interpretation of the finale (*Egy sajátos forma-struktúra az 1920-as évek Bartók kompozícióiban*, 1970/71; *Progressive Music Via Peasant Music? Revisiting the Sources of Bartók's Style and Compositional Process*, 2003), and for the sketch research (*Bartók vázlatok (II). Témafeljegyzések az 1. hegedű-zongoraszonátához*, 1985; „Written between the desk and the piano”: dating Béla Bartók's sketches, 2004).

The Second Violin Sonata is subject to several significant studies, both in the interpretation of the form and the meaning. The leading role of László Somfai is indisputable, he has explained his comprehensive concepts about the work in several consecutive essays-lectures (*Egy sajátos forma-struktúra az 1920-as évek Bartók kompozícióiban*, 1970/71; *Bartók Béla: 2. hegedű-zongora szonáta*, 1977; *Einfall, Konzept, Komposition und Revision bei Béla Bartók*, 1993; *Bartók Béla kompozíciós módszere*, 1996/2000; *Egy mestermű rejtett üzenete*, 2006). Beside Somfai, others have tried to present individual, high quality interpretation attempts, for instance Benjamin Suchoff (*Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano*, 2004) and Judit Frigyesi (*Bartók's Non-Classical Narrative: Sonata for Violin and Piano, No. 2 (1922)*, 2006).

Brigitte Petrovitsch discussed the Sonata for Solo Violin in a wider context (*Studien zur Musik für Violine solo 1945–1970*, 1972). Thorough studies were published by Malcolm Gillies (*Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin: An Analysis*, 1981; *Final Chamber Works*, 1993), Yves Lenoir (*Contributions à l'étude de la Sonate pour Violon Solo de Béla Bartók (1944)*, 1981) and Georg Brunner (*Béla Bartók's „Sonata for Solo Violin”*, 1984). In his dissertation, Phillip Coonce published several, previously unknown source material (*The Genesis of the*

*Bela Bartok Sonata for Solo Violin*, 1992). There were essays concentrating on certain movements of the work: Ove Nordwall and Peter Petersen analyzed the quarter tone version of the finale (*The Original Version of Bartok's Sonata for Solo Violin*, 1965 and *Bartók's Sonata für Violine solo. Ein Appell an die Hüter der Autographen*, 1981, respectively). Malcolm Gillies analyzed the fugue theme (*Notation and Tonal Structure in Bartók's Later Works*, 1989). Special violin technique elements were examined by Günter Weiss-Aigner (*Der Spätstil Bartóks in seiner Violinmusik – Studia Musicologia*, 1981). The Hungarian Bartók research, besides György Kroó contributed to the expansion of the literature with the short reviewer of János Kovács (*Bartók Béla: Hegedű szólószonáta*, 1974) and important comparative study of the two editions of the work by András Wilhelm (*Közelebb az eredetihez. Bartók Szólószonátája új kiadásban*, 1995).

Several collections of documents help processing the compositional process and reception of the sonatas, first of all the two foundation stones of the Bartók research, the two books compiled with exceptional accuracy by Béla Bartók Jr. (*Apám életének krónikája*, 1981; *Bartók Béla műhelyében*, 1982). The correspondence volumes edited by János Demény and Béla Bartók Jr. (*Bartók Béla levelei*, 1976; *Bartók Béla családi levelei*, 1981), and the reminiscences compiled by Malcolm Gillies and Ferenc Bónis (*Bartók remembered*, 1990 and *Így láttuk Bartókot. Ötvennégy emlékezés*, 1995, respectively) and the interview volume edited by András Wilhelm (*Beszélgetések Bartókkal. Interjúk, nyilatkozatok 1911–1945*, 2000) contain important information. János Demény published several documents about the interpretation history of the Violin Sonata (1903) and the two great sonatas for violin and piano in his compilation following Bartók's career in volumes 2, 3, 7 and 10 of the *Musicology Studies*. From the essays dealing with the reception of the First and Second Violin Sonatas it is worth mentioning first of all the book of Malcolm Gillies about Bartók's relationships in Britain, in which he was publishing several extracts of criticism (*Bartók in Britain: A Guided Tour*, 1989). Tibor Tallián introduced the critical reaction of their performances and the premiere of the Sonata for Solo Violin in America (*Bartók fogadtatása Amerikában 1940–1945*, 1988).

## **II. Methods**

In selecting the subject of my dissertation, my consultant László Somfai motivated me, who drew my attention to the topic as my consultant for my thesis about Bartók's Violin Concerto. I was encouraged to deal with Bartók's violin music more intensively because, as having a

degree of a violin teacher and chamber musician, I have always been interested in the research of the playing techniques of Bartók's violin music and the problems of their authentic performance. As I had the opportunity to assess the literature while preparing my thesis and I could have experience in how to use the different sources, I did not prepare the plan of my dissertation unprecedented.

In my dissertation I intended to be exhaustive with Bartók's violin sonatas: I wanted to give a complex picture of the six works, with the introduction of their compositional process and their source situation, and finally with their analysis. Of course, it meant different tasks to fill the frame chosen to be unified regarding their different state of processing, as the processing of the works from his youth basically stopped after the very first steps, the processing of the Violin Sonata (1903) was not complete either, and deficiency could be found in the case of the First and Second Violin Sonatas and the Sonata for Solo Violin.

Therefore the emphasis within the certain chapters were put on different places: in the case of the two sonatas from his student years the analysis was more detailed with special attention to the processing of the influences on them. I also tried to introduce the circumstances of their compositional process, which could hardly be reconstructed, as fairly as possible. (The simplicity of their source situation did not need any special discussion). The inner ratio of the chapters leveled up in the case of the Violin Sonata (1903) and the three great sonatas, as sufficient material was provided for processing all subfields.

During my work I tried to understand and utilize all the results of the Bartók research regarding my topic: I overviewed all the available documents in working out the compositional process, while compiling the resource chains I relied on the revised source material of the Béla Bartók Complete Critical Edition in preparation.

For preparing the analyses I was motivated by working out the main topic of my doctoral exam (*Musical analysis in the 20<sup>th</sup> century*), while I reviewed the most important analysis trends: in the end I used several of the known analytical methods in Bartók research in my dissertation. The basis of the analyses are formal analysis that are supplemented with interpreting attempts that are closer to the narrative trends: the works' correlation with the oeuvre and the music of predecessors and contemporary musicians were important for me. In my work I placed emphasis on the favored methods of the "Hungarian school" of Bartók research, especially the well-known sketch research of László Somfai.

### III. Findings

I consider one of the most important result of my dissertation that the two sonatas from Bartók's student years, which were handled only in major correlations, were analyzed in details: the improvement of Bartók's composing technique, the effects of Beethoven and the masters of romanticism in these works (with concrete parallels) could manifest more detectable than before. In the case of the Violin Sonata (1903) besides making the previously missing detailed formal analysis I also pointed out important stages of the creation of the work with the help of sketch research; I also discussed the compositional process and reception of the work in more details than it was before.

New elements are in the compositional process of the great sonatas on one hand the integration of the correspondence with the Universal Edition to the research, on the other hand the organized follow-up of the first part of the reception. I compiled the annotated description of the stemma after the thorough review of all available resources. The results of the source research appear in the analyses, which gives new interpretation attempts different from the ones in the literature: in the case of the First Violin Sonata I tried to explain the complex structure of the finale in a new way; in the interpretation of the Second Violin Sonata – besides finding noteworthy formal context – in Kodály's Serenade for two violins and viola I also found a new parallel that raises to a higher level the relationship with Jelly Arányi.

Besides discussing the problems that were previously much discussed in literature about the Sonata for Solo Violin (the relationship with Bach; the assessment of the half and quarter note versions of the finale, etc.), I placed more emphasis on the specific intonations of the movements, on the introduction of the relationship between the work and the contemporary violin literature and the life-work. Besides working out the compositional process and the reception, in the introduction of the source situation, special attention was paid to Menuhin's and R. Kolish's annotated copies from which they played and to the textual criticism comparison of the first edition prepared by Menuhin and the edition by Péter Bartók.

When examining the sonatas it is indispensable to expand the research to the side-tracks: this is how the relationship of Bartók and the genre of violin sonatas was processed involving several documents and relying on the studies of János Demény (*Zeitgenössische Musik in Bartóks Konzertrepertoire*, 1977) and Vera Lampert (*Zeitgenössische Musik in Bartóks Notensammlung*, 1977). As a novelty, my dissertation contains the statistics of Bartók's concerts with violinists regarding their programs, the participants and the locations.

Finally, I included the analysis of four recordings in my dissertation: I discussed the coherence of the music and the sounding at the examination of the legendary Bartók-Szigeti interpretation of the Second Violin Sonata and three recordings of the Sonata for Solo Violin by Menuhin, following the ideal of the authentic Bartók interpretation. In the case of the latter work I tried to point out such details that – though previously not recorded – are probably integral parts of the text. These two chapters were meant to contribute to the interpretation history of Bartók's violin music with analytical results.

#### IV. List of Publications

„Forma és dramaturgia Bartók Szólószonátájának zárótételében” [Form und Dramaturgie in dem Finale Bartóks Sonate für Violine Solo] In: *Magyar Zene* XLI/3 (2003. augusztus), 313–326.

„Bartók és Kodály. A 2. szonáta és a Triószerenád kapcsolatáról” [Bartók and Kodály: on the Connection between Sonata No. 2. and Trio-Serenade] In: *Magyar Zene* XLVI/2 (2008. május), 183–196.

„»És Szigeti másképp játszik...« Bartók 2. hegedű-zongoraszonátájának 1940-es lemezfelvételéről” [“And Szigeti plays it differently” The 1940 Recording of Bartók’s 2nd Violin Sonata] In: *Magyar Zene* 50/2 (2012. május), 210–216.

„Bartók Béla: Szólószonáta hegedűre BB 124 – Yehudi Menuhin első kiadásának és három lemezfelvételének tanulságai” [Béla Bartók: Sonate für Violine Solo BB 124 Zeugnisse der Erstausgabe und Yehudi Menuhins drei Schallplattenaufnahmen] In: *Zenetudományi dolgozatok 2011 – In memoriam Dobszay László*, Kiss Gábor szerk. (Budapest: MTA BTK Zenetudományi Intézet, 2012), 271–290.

„Bartók 1. hegedű-zongoraszonátájának fináléjáról” [The Finale of Bartók’s First Violin Sonata] In: *Magyar Zene* 51/3 (2013. augusztus), 316–322.