

As an orchestral musician – although I am a member of a symphony orchestra, not an opera orchestra – I was fortunate enough to play all of Bartók's stage works, some of them several different productions.

As solo clarinet player of the Budapest Festival Orchestra, I participated in every Bartók production the orchestra was involved in between September 1999 to September 2000, including two CD recordings of *The Miraculous Mandarin* and *The Wooden Prince* under the baton of Iván Fischer and published by Philips. As soloist of the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra, again I had the opportunity to participate in a recording of *The Wooden Prince* with Zoltán Kocsis conducting, and published as part of the Bartók New Series by Hungaroton. I was able to record all of Bartók's works for orchestra under the insightful guidance of Zoltán Kocsis. Also, I regularly perform at the season-opening concerts of the National Philharmonic Orchestra on the anniversary of Bartók's death, where it is tradition to perform a work by Bartók.

It has been interesting to observe how, in the course of rehearsing for these Bartók productions, different conductors take a different approach to unravelling the musical fabric and, in doing so, coming to understand the intentions of the composer. I set out to study in greater depth the parts played by my own instrument and, through comparative analysis, seek to trace the genesis of the works and Bartók's use of directions to make his intentions clear. Also, since 1993 I have been assistant professor in clarinet at the Liszt Academy of Music, chiefly teaching orchestral part analysis, which has also helped me enormously. When preparing my students for auditions, I attach great importance to choosing a reliable edition of the music, so they are able to follow the composer's instructions in every respect.

Owing to the adventurous history of the origins and performances of Bartók's three stage works, a fairly rich collection of sources has come down to us, which, however, is difficult to find one's bearings. The situation is particularly complicated when, parallel with preparing for the world première, Bartók was also preparing the score for publication and he used the help of copyists he had not used before. Due to parallel copying and manuscripts being sent abroad, not all of his corrections were actually made in the right places, and therefore with the final printed editions it is often difficult to decide what the composer's original intentions were. Luckily, in some cases, such as *The Wooden Prince*, Bartók himself copied and revised the orchestral parts too.

My research is neither in the genesis of these stage works, nor in the sources. I studied these only to the extent that they directly affected, due to changes in the composer's circumstances, the shaping of the orchestral parts. It is a well-known fact that Bartók's first stage work, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, received its première only a year after the Budapest première of *The Wooden Prince*, at the Royal Hungarian Opera House. The rehearsal process of the ballet was quite an experience for the composer who had had no theatrical stage experience, the lessons of which he was able to use not only in preparing for the world première of *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* but also in preparing the final draft of the opera. At the time of preparing for Bartók's first opera-house première, Bartók had an almost uninterrupted stay in Budapest, and he personally copied and edited the orchestral parts used for the première. Consequently, these parts have considerably fewer later changes than the orchestral parts of the opera and the pantomime. Importantly, too, the première of his third stage work, *The Miraculous Mandarin*, was not in Budapest but in Cologne, followed shortly by a successful Prague première. Scheduled for 1931, the Budapest première was eventually cancelled, but thanks to the run-up to this performance many edited and amended manuscripts have come down to us, including the third and final ending of the pantomime.

These specific circumstances – selective, albeit highly significant – considerably influenced the quantity and quality of sources for the orchestral parts of the stage works. In addition to these, however, numerous other factors contributed to the creation of sources, among other things, Bartók's relationship with the performers and his subsequent publisher, whether at a particular time

he had help in copying the parts, and whether these included his family members or they were professional copyists.

Assessing these circumstances, however, always requires circumspection before any conclusions can be made. Consequently, in addition to studying the sources, I sought to take into consideration other information, such as family letters and the recollections of former opera-house members. I was disappointed to find that much important information about the performance practices have presumably been lost forever.

Naturally, thorough analysis of a single part cannot yield far-reaching conclusions regarding the interpretation of the whole. What can be observed, however, is that due to the existence of many parallel versions, the hand of unknown copyists and changes that were never eventually copied, vast amounts of composer instructions disappear from the works. As a result, the interpretation loses much of its individual characteristics; the performance will be less striking or original and the expression will be shortened in intensity and drama. Further confirmation of this could be gained by comparing the performance manuscripts of the other orchestral parts.

It can be established with certainty that the clarinet parts of *The Miraculous Mandarin* were the most devastatingly affected by the compositional and performance history, while the performance instructions of *The Wooden Prince* have come down to us least affected.

With respect to the interpretation it can also be established in general that the preparations for a première at Bartók's time cannot be judged according to the standards of current practices and ethics, but one must absolutely take into consideration the customs and resulting mentality of the social and cultural context, and the level of technical development of the given age. Contemporary composers and artists on the whole were well aware of this and, provided the integrity of a work was unaffected, they would agree to the necessary changes.

In spite of numerous questions that cannot be answered, studying the individual parts of Bartók's works has been an eye-opening experience not only because it sheds light on the internal logic of the process of creation, but also because it changes the attitude of the performer to the works in that he or she will seek answers to questions of interpretation suggested by the music, from the composer's viewpoint.

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