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(6.8 Art and Cultural History Studies: Musicology)

“I WAS AN EXCEPTIONAL PUPIL OF HIM”  
DITTA PÁSZTORY BARTÓK, THE PIANIST AND THE FELLOW-  
ARTIST

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## Background

The dissertation examines Ditta Pásztory Bartók's life and artistic activity from two main perspectives. The first part (*I. The Pianist*) focuses on Ditta, the pianist, while the second, analytical part (*II. For Ditta*) attempts to identify musical elements which might allude to her or to her relationship with Bartók in compositions dedicated to her.

Considering Ditta's career and pianism, there are only a few articles which go beyond the usual clichés and provide well-grounded, factual information. The first essays, written in Ditta's lifetime, which were valuable even from a scholarly point of view, were articles by István Volly. Although his approach is rather biased, his two-part study on Ditta's career is still one of the most comprehensive and detailed summaries with quite a few valuable biographical data. He was also among the first, who attempted to give a scholarly analysis of Ditta's art of performance. Nevertheless, for a long time, the only person who gave an objective evaluation of her piano playing was László Somfai. Regarding the present dissertation, two lectures by him deserve special attention. A radio lecture about the problems of the interpretation of Bartók 3rd Piano Concerto and a memorial lecture on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ditta's birth. The latter gives a through description of her career, including its last phase (in the 1960s and 1970s), the significance of which can be understood only if we know that following her death, her performance was mentioned only in connection with Bartók and with their two-piano recordings, especially in connection with the recording of the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, recorded in 1940. (See Emőke Ujj-Hilliard's PhD dissertation, 2004, and László Vikárius's study in the facsimile edition of the draft score and Paul Sacher's annotated full score copy of the Sonata for Two Pianos, B&H – P. Sacher Stiftung, 2018.)

In 2006, Krisztina Voit, one of the heirs of Ditta Pásztory, deposited a new group of documents (manuscripts, photographs and several items of the Bartóks' everyday life) at the Budapest Bartók Archives and at the Museum of Music History. Since then, Ditta's person has been receiving more attention again. Based mainly on the material of this new estate, two exhibitions were organised, in the preparation of which the author of the present dissertation was also involved. The first, *Édes Dittám* [Dearest Ditta] (2007), curated by Anna Baranyi and László Vikárius, gave a general overview of the legacy, while the

second one, *Egy különleges életút tanúi* [Witnesses of an Extraordinary Path of Life] (2016), organised by Katalin Dózsa F. and Anna Baranyi, focused on the personal objects (first of all Ditta's wardrobe) from the estate. The catalogue produced for this second exhibition contains also a short biography of Ditta Pásztory by the present author.

Considering the background of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, analytical part of the dissertation, although there are quite a few published analyses of some of the compositions dedicated to Ditta, with the single exception of the technical solutions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Piano Concerto specifically tailored to her abilities, nobody seems to have been interested in whether there are special musical elements in these compositions that can be interpreted in relation to her.

### Sources

The biographical data of the dissertation (*The Pianist*) comes from different sources: (1) from the manuscript material kept in the Bartók Archives: family documents, Ditta's correspondence, her notes and diaries; (2) from contemporary newspaper articles; and (3) from a number of (public and private) interviews. Some of her letters have already been published. A few of them are included in Béla Bartók Jr. and Adrienne Konkoly Gombocz's edition, *Bartók Béla családi levelei* [The Family Letters of Béla Bartók] (1981), and some letters written during their American exile, in Péter Bartók's book, *My Father* (2004). Regarding the press, I relied mainly on the press collection of the Bartók Archives, but many important biographical data have been found with the help of the *Arcanum* database. The collection of the Bartók Archives also contains copies of Ditta's radio and television interviews. Some of them originally belonged to the Pásztory estate, but there are copies from the Archives of the Hungarian Radio and Television which were specially ordered only around 2015.

The Bartók biographies or biographical works are also among the most important sources of information; however, most of the relevant data can be found in less sources, such as biographical novels, including novels by Agatha Fassett, Júlia Székely or Júlia Szegő. Even if the majority of the information coming from these novels prove to be authentic, they should be treated with caution and criticism. The books by Béla Bartók Jr., and especially by Peter Bartók also contain many interesting biographical details regarding her life and

personality, nevertheless, the most authentic Bartók biographies or biographical works – that is, besides the books by Bartók's sons mentioned above, the works by József Ujfalussy, Tibor Tallián and David Cooper –are usually less concerned with Bartók's private life.

Considering Ditta's activities as a pianist, the first stage of her career (1938–1943), that is the period when she played together with her husband, have already been thoroughly investigated. The concert programs and the reviews for the period from 1938 to 1940 were collected and published by János Demény (in the volumes of *Zenetudományi Tanulmányok* [Studies in Musicology]) and those from 1940 to 1943 by Tibor Tallián (*Béla Bartók's Reception in the United States*, 2017). The date and program of the concerts can also be found in the books by Béla Bartók jr. (*Apám életének krónikája*, [The Chronicle of my Father's Life], 1981 *Bartók Béla műhelyében* [In Béla Bartók's Workshop], 1982).

To outline the Budapest concert life and the role of the two-piano concerts in this musical environment, the data was gathered from the Budapest Concert Database of the Archives and Research Group for 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> Century Hungarian Music. Concerning Ernő Dohnányi's two-piano concerts I drew also on the books by Veronika Kusz and Ilona Kovács. To describe the possibilities for two-piano performances in America, the dissertation by Hans Moldenhauer (*Duo-Pianism*, 1955) was used.

The second phase of her career, that is her professional life after Bartók's death (1945), has not yet been examined so thoroughly as the first one, and the data (the dates and programs of her concerts or the press reviews) of this period has not been collected, either. For an overview of the events of these years, the following sources were used: The compilation of the list of her concerts was drawn up on the basis of Ditta's diaries and notes; the reviews were taken from the press collection of the Bartók Archives and from the *Arcanum* database.

These reviews, besides her recordings, the recollections of her contemporaries, and even the markings in her scores, were also used to the analysis of her performance. A considerable part of her recordings are available on commercial LP's and CD's, but I have also used some private recordings, like the recording of the radio broadcast, *Ask the Composer* (1944), or a recording which contains two excerpts from a two-piano performance of Bartók 3<sup>rd</sup> Piano Concerto, played by Ditta Pásztor and Mária Comensoli (1964), and recorded by Ditta's

younger brother, Jenő Pásztory, these private recordings belong to the collection of the Bartók Archives.

## Methods

From the different methods applied in the dissertation, only two deserve special attention, the methods used for the analysis of Ditta's performance in the first part of the dissertation, and, in the second part, the methods used for the musical analysis of the works dedicated to her.

Since Ditta, as a partner in two-piano performances, submitted herself completely to Bartók's conception, her two-piano recordings received only a little attention in the dissertation, and, instead, I focused on her solo recordings. However, even as a soloist, Ditta's main aim was to preserve the Bartókian pianistic style; consequently, the majority of my analyses are comparative analyses of the performances by Ditta and Bartók, or Ditta and her contemporaries (e.g. Etelka Freund, Louis Kentner, or György Sándor).

In analysing Ditta's piano playing, to obtain as objective and unbiased results as possible, the emphasis was put on such measurable components of the performance as the tempo. These seemingly dry data can provide important information about agogic, or about the performer's ability to build larger musical structures. The measurements were made with the help of Sony's Sound Forge Program.

The second, analytical, part of the dissertation tries to reveal such (meaningful) musical elements which might allude to Ditta's person or to her relationship with Bartók in compositions dedicated to her, by pointing out special traits in his musical language. There is a musical network, which permeates Bartók's entire oeuvre, and which consists of continuously recurring musical elements having a well-defined semantic range. Sometimes, we know about the meaning behind these elements, only through Bartók's private notes or correspondence (like in the case of the Stefi Geyer *Leitmotiv*), but in the case of his songs or stage works the text (or the plot) can help our understanding. Nonetheless, to be able to find and to recognise the presence of these elements also in the works dedicated to Ditta, we must be familiar with Bartók's entire oeuvre.

## Findings

The first part of the dissertation focuses on Ditta, the pianist. The 1<sup>st</sup> chapter (*A tanítvány* [The Pupil]) outlines her early studies, the 2<sup>nd</sup> (*A kamarapartner* [The Chamber Music Partner]) gives an overview of Ditta and Bartók's two-piano concerts in Europe and America, the 3<sup>rd</sup> (*Önálló utakon* [On Her Own]) concentrates on her career opportunities as soloist in America, and, finally, the 4<sup>th</sup> (*Az örökös* [The Heir]) on her professional life after Bartók's death.

The first two chapters summarize and supplement all the information which has already been published regarding Ditta's studies and the two-piano concerts given with her husband, also including the reception of these concerts. This period is the most thoroughly investigated phase of Ditta's career, therefore, not surprisingly, I have only supplemented its discussion with the background and the environment in which the Bartók-Pásztory piano-duo appeared. Chapter 2.3 *Kézzongorás koncertek a budapesti hangversenyéletben* [Two-pianos Concerts in the Budapest Concert Life] gives an overview about the piano-duos working in the Budapest concert scene at the time of the Bartóks', while Chapters 2.4.3. *Gyakorlási lehetőségek és hangszerek* [Practice Opportunities and Instruments] and the 2.4.4 *Az előadói hagyományok* [Performance Practice] focus on the circumstances among which the Bartóks had to work in America.

The issues treated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> chapters, have been very rarely discussed, so far. Chapter 3 describes how Ditta attempted to launch her own career as a soloist, and I try to explain why these attempts were not successful. The last phase of Ditta's career presented Chapter 4 has been only scarcely investigated before, and some of the issues presented here, for instance Ditta's image created by the press and changes to it, were only very rarely mentioned in connection with her and her career. Finally, the chapters focusing on the 3rd Piano Concerto: on the genesis of the work, or on the occasions when it was performed by Ditta, can be regarded as a novelty, as well.

The second, analytical part (*For Ditta*) focuses on those features of the compositions which might allude to the dedicatee. Although, the first chapter in this part (5. *Dedikációk Bartók zenéjében* [Dedications in Bartók's Music]) discusses dedications in general, some of the examples (e.g. the peasant flute

melodies), appear also in the works dedicated to Ditta. The remaining two chapters (6. “... október 31-ére” – Bartók Pásztory Dittának ajánlott művei [“...for 31<sup>st</sup> October” – Bartók’s Compositions Dedicated to Ditta], and 7. 3. zongoraverseny [3<sup>rd</sup> Piano Concerto]) concentrate entirely on “her” compositions.

The analytical method, which follows the semantic change of some recurring musical elements (themes, motives or topoi) in Bartók’s oeuvre, (See the Stefi Geyer *Leitmotiv*), cannot be regarded as a novelty. Nevertheless, this method has not been applied to the compositions dedicated to Ditta before. And the new approach brought new results, and shed light on some, so far hidden, connections between the works written for Ditta and other compositions of the oeuvre. We can see, for instance, how, in what form and with what meaning, the two characteristic components of the *Este a székeleyknél* [Evening in Transylvania], that is the descending pentatonic melody and the peasant flute melody appear in the “The Night’s Music” of 1926. And we can also see how deep connections exist between the most personal, confession-like works (that is the *Bölcsődal* [Lullaby] or the slow movement in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Piano Concerto) of the compositions dedicated to Ditta, and the compositions bearing some characteristic traits of the “night’s music” phenomenon in Bartók’s work.

## Publications in connection with the subject of the thesis

### Studies:

- Büky Virág: “Bartók örökében. Pásztory Ditta, a ‘Bartók-interpretátor’” [Bartók’ Heiress. Ditta Pásztory, “The Bartók-Interpreter”]. *Magyar Zene* L/3 (2012), 282–302., the English version: “Bartók’s Heiress”. *Studia Musicologica* 53/1–3, (2012), 187–197.
- Büky Virág, Maria Grazia Sità: “Bartók e l’Italia, viaggi, contatti, concerti”. In *Fonti Musicali Italiane* 2013/18, Roma, SidM – CIDIM – LIM, 2013 [2014], 119–175.
- Büky Virág: “Dittáié – az éjszaka zenéi” [Ditta’s – the Night’s Musics]. *Magyar Zene* LII/2 (2014), 137–158.
- Büky Virág: “Bartók Béla és Pásztory Ditta Amerikában” [Béla Bartók and Ditta Pásztory in America]. *Liget*, (2015. január), <http://ligetmuhely.com/bartok-bela-es-pasztery-ditta-amerikaban/>

- Büky Virág: “Pásztory Ditta élete = The Life of Ditta Pásztory Bartók”. In Baranyi Anna, Büky Virág, F. Dózsa Katalin, *Egy különleges életút tanúi. Bartókné Pásztory Ditta hagyatéka a Zenetörténeti Múzeumban = Witnesses of and Extraordinary Path of Life. The Legacy of Ditta Pásztory-Bartók at the Museum of Music History*, Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Központ Zenetudományi Intézet Zenetörténeti Múzeuma, 2017., 8–39
- Büky Virág: “Menyegzők és asszonysorsok: A személyes és a személytelen Bartók *Falun* című népdalfeldolgozás-sorozatában” [Weddings and Women’s Lives. The Personal and the Impersonal in Béla Bartók’s Village Scenes]. *Magyar Zene* LVI/4 (2018), 441–151.
- Büky Virág: “Bartók zongorái” [Bartók’s Pianos]. In *A zongorázó Bartók*, kiállítás katalógus, MTA Bölcsészettudományi központ, Zenetudományi Intézet Bartók Archívuma és Zenetörténeti Múzeuma, Budapest, 2017., 8–12.

#### Editions:

- Büky Virág (közr.): “Somfai László beszélgetése Pásztory Dittával Bartók halálának 30. évfordulója alkalmából” [An interview by László Somfai with Ditta Pásztory Bartók on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Béla Bartók’s death]. In Kiss Gábor (szerk.): *Zenetudományi dolgozatok 2009*, Budapest: Zenetudományi Intézet, 2010., 13–31.
- Büky Virág (közr.): “Serly Tibor beszélgetése Bartókné Pásztory Dittával (1976. november 10.)” [Tibor Serly’s Conversation with Ditta Pásztory Bartók]. In Kiss Gábor (szerk.): *Zenetudományi dolgozatok 1978–2012. 35 éves jubileumi kötet*, Budapest: MTA BTK Zenetudomány Intézet, 2014., 299–320.