

Béla Bartók's Music Legacy in Slovak Ethnomusicology and Music Pedagogy

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Abstract

The ties that bind Béla Bartók with Slovakia include family ties, friendships, and the onset of his musical career. His passion for folk music is also attributable to Slovakia. The article deals with the relevance of Béla Bartók's ethnomusicologist message to Slovakia. It highlights the compositional utilization of Slovak folk songs in Bartók's pedagogically-oriented works.

Key words: Béla Bartók, ethnomusicology, music pedagogy

Béla Bartók is an outstanding figure of 20th-century music. Through the inventive utilization of original tonal and rhythmic folk models he created a unique music style, a style specific to him. His resourceful career in composing, ethnomusicology and performing is linked with Slovakia.

His mother (Paula, neé Voit) and her family came from Bratislava. His first stay in Bratislava was between 1892 and 1893, when Bartók, his widowed mother and his sister were staying at their family's place (at present – Obrancov Mieru Street, No. 5). After a year's stay in a current Romanian village Bistrita, in 1894, Paula Bartók (a teacher) along with her children and her sister Irma settled down in Bratislava. She took up a job of a teacher in a teacher-trainer preparatory school and pursued her teacher career there till her retirement in 1907¹. The stay in Bratislava greatly influenced Bartók's personality development. The town environment filled with culture helped to create, form and enrich Bartók's personal and artistic profile. Bartók himself wrote about his stay in Bratislava in one of his autobiographies: "*It is Bratislava where I started to really live*"². In Bratislava, Bartók composed 26 works, out of which he considers 11 works lost.³

In Bratislava, he became a student of Royal Catholic High School in the former Convent of Poor Clares, and in 1899 he successfully graduated. During his high school studies he took part in music parties regularly thrown by prominent Bratislava families. He performed at school orchestra and choir recitals. At the Church of Poor Clares, he replaced Ernő Dohnányi⁴ as the organist. The acknowledgments for Bartók's accomplishments and success are mainly due to his music teachers who formally instructed him not only in piano playing but also in music theory and composition⁵.

¹ DUŠINSKÝ, Gabriel.: *Bratislavská topografia Bartókovo života*. In: *Hudobný život*, Vol. 13, 1981, No. 5, p. 5.

² GÁBOROVÁ, Mária: *Čo znamenala pre Bélu Bartóka Bratislava*. In: *Hudobný život*, Vol. 13, 1981, No. 5, p. 4.

³ In the list of works composed in Bratislava in 1894 – 1899, in addition to his lost works, the following can be found: *Sonáta č. 1 g-mol pre klavír, op. 1 (1894)*, *Scherzo g-mol pre klavír (1894)*, *Fantázia a-mol pre klavír, op. 2 (1895)*, *Sonáta č. 2 F-dur pre klavír, op. 3 (1895)*, *Capriccio h-mol pre klavír, op. 4 (1895)*, *Tri klavírne kusy, op. 13 (1897)*, *Scherzo alebo Fantáziu pre klavír, op. 18 (1897)*, *Klavírne kvarteto c-mol, op. 20 (1898)*, *Tri klavírne kusy, op. 21 (1898)*, *Tri piesne (1898)*, *Scherzo h-mol pre klavír (1898)* and *Sláčikové kvarteto F-dur (1898)*. In: GÁBOROVÁ, Mária: *Čo znamenala pre Bélu Bartóka Bratislava*. In: *Hudobný život*, Vol. 13, 1981, No. 5, p. 4.

⁴ DOHNÁNYI, Ernő (1874 – 1960) – composer, piano player, conductor. He was a student of Bratislava Catholic High School, later of *Music Academy* in Budapest. At the latter, he had pursued a teaching career since 1916. Between 1925 and 1928, was the chief conductor of the *State Symphony Orchestra* in New York. In 1934 he became the headmaster of the *Music Academy*.

⁵ TAUBEROVÁ, Alexandra: *Bartókovi bratislavskí učitelia hudby*. In: *Hudobný život*, Vol. 13, No. 5, p. 2, 1981.

The first Bartók's piano teacher was Ludwig Burger.⁶ In 1894 – 1896, his piano teacher was László Erkel⁷. After his death in 1896, Anton Hyrtl⁸ took over; he taught Bartók music theory and the elements of a composition technique.

Alongside with Bratislava teachers, it is necessary to mention other notable figures, namely Ján Nepomuk Batka⁹ and Miloš Ruppeltdt.¹⁰ Batka encouraged the start of a musical career of young Bartók. He provided him with scores and books, he published favorable reviews on his piano recitals, and introduced him to conductor Hans Richter. Ruppeltdt was the first editor of the planned publication of Bartók's Slovak folk song collection in Matica slovenská Institute, which is why he stayed in touch with him by writing letters.¹¹ Further bonds between Bartók and Slovakia were established when pursuing a teaching career at *Franz Liszt Music Academy* in Budapest and through his collecting and ethnomusicologic activities.

He gave lessons not only to her second wife Ditty Pásztor (born in Rimavská Sobota) but also to three other students from Slovakia: Alexander Albrecht, Helena Gáfforová and Štefan Németh Šamorínsky.¹²

Bartók felt a very close relationship to Slovakia also due to noteworthy ethnomusicologic activities. In 1906, he started collecting Slovak folk songs in small villages of the Gemer region and continued in the Nitra region (1906 – 1910), the Komárno region (1906, 1910), the Hont region (1910, 1914), and in the villages of Pohronie and those of Zvolen region (1915 – 1918). Until 1918, he had collected more than 3409 tunes and approximately 4000 pieces of folk song lyrics.¹³

Bartók's involvement in collecting activities and folk music activities was also supported by Štefan Németh-Šamorínsky, Alexander Albrecht and Anton Baník. The outcome of their teamwork was an extensive three-piece collection entitled *Slovak Folk Songs*. In addition to 3 223 tunes collected by them, it contains 145 folk songs originally collected by László Vikár, 113 tunes from Kodály's collection and 73 folk songs from Anton Baník's collection.¹⁴ Between 1919 and 1928, Bartók finalized and analyzed the collected song material including the Slovak collection that in 1928 was put in safekeeping in Matica Slovenská Institute.

Bartók's collection is of eminent significance to Slovak music and folklore studies. It is the outcome of an unusually well thought-out course of field data recording, its transcription, analysis, sorting and preparation for publishing. The editing method applied by Bartók was rather rare in Slovakia in the 1920's. The publishing of Bartók's Slovak folk songs has proved itself the most important asset of folk music studies even after years of ongoing persistent and systematic work; and despite the fact that the practice of collecting songs was established prior to Bartók. For the collected data, Bartók worked out a detailed classification based on “*a formal, rhythmic, and cadence pattern of songs*”. The preparation of the manuscript for publishing took a fairly short time. He started working in 1919 and as early as in the fall of 1920 the overall schedule of the printing and a part of the manuscript were completed. He completed the first volume in October 1922, the second volume in August 1924, and the third in May 1928. He submitted the volumes to Matica Slovenská Institute one after another, as they were ready for publication. However, the printing of the whole manuscript was delayed due to ongoing professional, editorial and technical problems.

⁶ BURGER Ludwig (1850 – 1936) was a foremost music teacher and between 1896 and 1910 a conductor of Bratislava *Kirchenmusikverein*. He was Bartók's teacher only for a short time, probably due to mutual intolerance. Alexandra Tauberová's study (*Hudobný život*, Vol. 13, No. 5, p. 2, 1981) assumes that the only evidence of Bartók's being Burger's student is verbal testimony of Bartók's sister Elza.

⁷ ERKEL László (1844 – 1896) was the third son of a famous composer *Ferenc Erkel*.

⁸ HYRTL Anton (1840 – 1914) – a student of Karol Meyrberger, a music teacher in Bratislava.

⁹ BATKA Jan Nepomuk (1845 – 1917) – the town archivist and a key figure of music life in 19th-century Bratislava

¹⁰ RUPPELDT Miloš (1881 – 1943) – a composer, a teacher, the first headmaster of the Music School that was a forerunner of Conservatory in Bratislava since 1918.

¹¹ DUŠINSKÝ, Gabriel: *Bratislavská topografia Bartókovo života*. In: *Hudobný život*, Vol. 13, No. 5, p. 5, 1981.

¹² CSEHIOVÁ, Agáta: *Bartók alkotómunkássága a mai Szlovákia területén*. In: *Bartók – Verdi tanulmánykötet*. Az SZTEJGYTFK Ének-zene Tanszékén 2001. november 8-án elhangzott előadások szerkesztett változata. Szeged, 2002.

¹³ CSEHIOVÁ, Agáta: *Bartók műveinek és előadóművészetének fogadtatása Szlovákiában és Csehországban*. In: *Mozart-Liszt-Bartók tanulmánykötet*. SZTEJGYTFK Ének-zene Tanszék. Szeged, 2007, p. 32.

¹⁴ BARTÓK, Béla: *Slovenské ľudové piesne I*. Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied, 1959, p. 12.

The problems continued to be present even after Bartók took over the editorship in 1935.¹⁵ The first two volumes of the collection were printed posthumously by the Department of folk music studies, the Institute of Music Science, Slovak Academy of Sciences in 1959 and 1970.¹⁶ Bartók's manuscript of folk songs that have not yet been published is in possession of Oskar Elschek and Alica Elschek, the scientific editors of the first volumes, who volunteered to prepare further two volumes for printing. The third volume was presented on 22nd June, 2009; the presentation took place in the European Information Center in Bratislava. It was held under the auspices of Ján Figel', a member of the European Commission for Education, Vocational Training, Culture and Youth. In the event, the following were performed: *fujara*¹⁷ tunes from Bartók's collection of 1906 – performed by Marián Plavec, Bartók's recording of phonogram sounds, samples of documentaries tracking Bartók's stay in Slovakia. This event was exceptional in two aspects – the editor Oskar Elschek presented Bartók's manuscript of folk songs and Ladislav Burlas gave a lecture on *Bartók and Slovak Music*. The collection is a landmark in scientific and documentary activities of Béla Bartók – a collector and internationally acclaimed expert in European traditional folk music. Particularly for this reason, in 2004, Béla Bartók's collection of Slovak folk songs was recommended to be entered in the international program *UNESCO The memory of the world*. The collection contains 3 409 Slovak folk songs and instrumental pieces and 4 500 pieces of Slovak folk songs lyrics. The collection includes a variety of data:

1. unabridged original manuscript, 1200 pages of Bartók's manuscript of Slovak folk songs,
2. the sound record of Slovak folk songs, 220 phonograms,
3. a collection of photographs taken by Bartók while doing research in Slovakia – they evidence his manner of researching, performers, singers, their way of life, national costumes and architecture,
4. printed volumes I – II and forthcoming volumes III – IV including the analytic and methodically organized list of tunes and lyrics, and data obtained through comparison and contrast.

The collection is in possession of *Slovak National Library* in Martin. It is the biggest and the most complex collection of Slovak folk songs collected by Béla Bartók, who in doing so demonstrated his excellent command of the Slovak language. This knowledge made it possible for him to record also lyrics in various dialects. The collection is Béla Bartók's masterwork and a paramount piece in European ethnomusicology. In terms of editing, it is considered one of the most complicated ethnomusicology texts to date due to complex and extensive comparative and contrastive notes and references, and melody records.¹⁸ The project was arranged and presented by prof. Oskar Elschek and team members of the Slovak Committee of The memory of the world program on 9th June, 2004. It was ubiquitously recommended for submission to the Slovak Board of UNESCO and for being entered into the register of *UNESCO The memory of the world of 2004*.

The collected Hungarian and Slovak folk songs originating in Slovakia were employed and compositionally quoted in the following pieces: *Štyri slovenské ľudové piesne [Four Slovak Folk Songs]* (1907), *Štrnásť skladieb pre klavír [Fourteen Music Pieces for Piano]* (1908), *Desať ľahkých skladieb pre klavír [Ten Easy Music Pieces for Piano]* (1908), *Deťom – 3. a 4. Zväzok [For Children – Volumes 3 and 4]* (1908 – 1909), *Slovenská ľudová pieseň [A Slovak Folk Song]* (1916), *Slovenské ľudové piesne [Slovak Folk Songs]* (1917), *Štyri slovenské ľudové piesne [Four Slovak Folk Songs]* (1917), *Na dedine [In the Country]* (1924), *Tri dedinské scény [Three Country Scenes]* (1926), *44 duet pre dvoje huslí [44 Duets for Two Violins]* (1931). Hungarian folk songs recorded in Slovakia can be recognized in the following pieces: *Deťom – 1. zväzok [For Children – Volume 1]* (1908 – 1909), *Štyri staré maďarské ľudové piesne [Four Old Hungarian Folk Songs]* (1910 – 1912), *Pätnásť maďarských sedliackych piesní [Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs]* (1914 – 1918), *Dvadsať maďarských ľudových piesní [Twenty Hungarian Folk Songs]* (1929), *44 duet pre dvoje huslí [44 Duets for Two Violins]* (1931).¹⁹

¹⁵ BARTÓK, Béla: *Slovenské ľudové piesne I*. Slovenská akadémia vied, Bratislava, 1959. p. 13.

¹⁶ ELSCHÉKOVÁ, Alica: *Béla Bartók a slovenská ľudová pieseň*. In: *Hudobný život*, Vol. 13, 1981, No. 5, p. 6.

¹⁷ *Fujara* is a bass overtone fipple flute.

¹⁸ Informácia o činnosti Slovenského výboru pre program UNESCO Pamäť sveta. Súčasný stav a nové nominácie do svetového registra UNESCO Pamäť sveta. [online]. [s.a.]. [Cit. 2008-04-08]. Available at: <<http://www.ulib.sk/index/go.php?id=1997/>> [The information on the activities of the Slovak Committee of the The Memory of the World, UNESCO Program. The present state and new nominations to be entered in the world register of UNESCO The Memory of the World.]

¹⁹ LAMPERT, Vera: *Népzene Bartók műveiben: feldolgozott dallamok forrásjegyzéke*. Budapest: Helikon, 2005, p. 15.

Béla Bartók's music and pedagogic legacy is fully manifested in his pedagogically-oriented works and/or works primarily not intended for music instruction, yet utilized so.²⁰ In the early period of his instruction the following pieces were composed: *Bagately op. 6, BB 50 [Bagatelas op. 6 BB 50]* (1908), *Desať ľahkých klavírných skladieb, BB 51 [Ten Easy Piano Pieces, BB 51]* (1908) and the cycle *Deťom, BB 53 [For Children, BB 53]* (1908-1909) and *Klavírna škola Bartók-Reschovsky Sz53, BB66 [Piano School Bartók-Reschovsky Sz53, BB66]* (1913).

In the period concerned, Bartók's focal interest and activity was serious studying of folklore. Bence Szabolcsi, an acclaimed historian, is undoubtedly right when saying that this stage caused a shake-up in Bartók's life and "provided foundations of his style"²¹ [my translation] and artistic stance. The basic compositional sources of the cycle *Deťom [For Children]* are Hungarian and Slovak folk songs – they provided a wealth of material for music instruction. The complete title of the cycle is *Ľahké klavírne skladby pre začiatočníkov bez oktavového dvojhmátu na tému maďarských a slovenských ľudových piesní (Könnyű zongoradarabok kezdők részére oktavfogás nélkül magyar, és szlovák népdalokra) [Easy Piano Pieces for Beginners Lacking Octave Cross-holds on the Theme of Hungarian and Slovak Folk Songs]*. The four volumes originally included 85 music pieces; these were later (1945) eliminated to two volumes including 79 pieces. The music pieces are easy arrangements of folk songs. In the utilized music material occur almost all types of diatonic modes and minor scales with the fourth degree raised. Bartók considered expanding the boundaries of the major-minor system and its enrichment by a folk melody to be one of the key tasks of music education and folk song comprehension. The third and fourth volumes include Slovak folk songs, in which he added a lydian mode and so expanded the diatonic mode. The volumes include many examples that can be applied in rhythmic education also thanks to specific accents added. A range of melodies is present; their occurrence is based on alternating tempo and mood, on melody richness and on a variety of folk material.

Bartók drew on various sources of folk cultures in order to unveil their nature, distinctiveness as well as shared features. Undeniably, Bartók's interest in Slovak folk songs has been an inspiration for generations of artists, composers and music scientists. In the introduction to the first collection of *Slovak Folk Songs*, Oskar Elsček wrote: "It is obvious that a methodical approach, the significance, extensivity, and novelty of his accomplishments, and the mere outcomes have brought such eternal values into present-day folklore studies as his music pieces brought into the manmade music of our century."²²

The above mentioned facts and brief information evidence that Bartók's bond with Slovakia was intensive, important and beneficial.

²⁰ Bartók's works can be classified as pedagogically-oriented and as those primarily not intended for music instruction. Pedagogically-oriented works were composed with the aim to be primarily used in formal instruction; they are accompanied with teaching tips. They include *Klavírna škola [Piano School]*, the cycle *Deťom [For Children]*, *Mikrokozmos [Microcosm]*, *44 duet pre 2 huslí [44 Duets for Two Violins]* and partially also *27 dvoj- a troj hlasných skladieb [27 Two-Tone and Three-Tone Pieces]*. The pieces primarily not intended for music instruction include those that were not composed with the aim to be utilized in formal music instruction, however, they contain many elements of the above mentioned pieces and thus have been used in music classes at music schools and conservatories.

²¹ SZABOLCSI, Bence: *Bartók a ľudová hudba. Krátky prehľad života a činnosti*. Vydavateľstvo maďarsko-sovietskej spoločnosti a Inštitútu kultúrnych stykov 1955. In: MALINOVSKAJA, Augusta Viktorovna: *Béla Bartók – pedagóg*. Bratislava: VŠMU, 1994, p. 22.

²² BARTÓK, Béla: *Slovenské ľudové piesne I*. Slovenská akadémia vied, Bratislava, 1959, p. 8.