

## BÉLA BARTÓK: “CONCERTO FOR ORCHESTRA”. ELEMENTS OF TURKISH FOLKLORE IN THE SOURCES OF A MASTERPIECE

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**SUMMARY.** Béla Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra* represents one of the masterpieces of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the field of musicology there are countless analyses of this work from different points of view. The *Concerto* combines elements of Western classical music (for instance the use of the sonata-form) and Eastern European folk music. The influence of the Hungarian, Slovakian, Romanian and Serbian folk music is evident in this work of Bartók, but there is limited information available about the traces of the last collecting tour of the composer and ethnomusicologist in 1936 to Anatolia, Turkey. Beside enumerating different sources of inspiration for this composition, present article aims to identify the influence of the Turkish Folk Music Collection in Béla Bartók's *Concerto*.

**Keywords:** Béla Bartók, *Concerto for Orchestra*, Turkish Folk Music Collection, Sources of Inspiration

It is a well-known fact that the ethnomusicologist's findings can be traced in Bartók, the composer's music. Musicological studies treat Bartók and the effect of oriental music in his compositions. Hungarian musicologist, János Kárpáti details even the far-East influences in his music. Arabic influences can be found for example in the *Piano Suite op. 14*, in the *Second String quartet*, or *The miraculous mandarin*, in the *Forth String quartet*, *Violin Duos*, *Dance Suite*, etc.

Musicologists were naturally interested in Bartók's collections on Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian or Arab folk music. Attempting to follow Bartók's footsteps, János Sipos researched Turkish folk music and tried conducting similar studies to Bartók in regard to the regions he covered and the methods he used.

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The most important document that has to be mentioned is Vera Lampert's source catalog, which brings together all the folk melodies that appear in Bartók's compositions.

The *Concerto for Orchestra* by Béla Bartók is one of the best-known, most popular work among his compositions. There are countless analyses concerning the origin of the melodies and the different musical sources he uses. For instance, a very detailed analysis is one of the musicologist's David Cooper, we can mention here Elliot Antokoletz, John McCabe, László Somfai, etc.

Apparently Turkish folk music didn't have such strong influence in Béla Bartók's oeuvre. There is even a strong statement from musicologist Ferenc László, in who's opinion "The Turkish music didn't leave any remarkable evidence in his [Bartók's] compositions, probably because in Turkey his discovery was not one of the differences but concerning the similarities."<sup>2</sup> In his musical style we really cannot find a specific element that he incorporated in his works from Turkish folk music. But in the composition of the *Concerto for orchestra* there can be traced a fragment of a Turkish melody the ethnomusicologist Bartók wrote down in Istanbul.

During the same period when he was composing the Concerto in 1943, Bartók had prepared the Turkish Folk Music Collection for publication. Thus the Turkish Folk Music Collection must have had an impact on the *Concerto for Orchestra*. In fact it did: the artist incorporated in its 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement a melody he noted in Istanbul.

An extremely relevant material aspect is the fact that the sketches of the *Concerto* are in the same field sketchbook as the melodies heard and transcribed in Turkey by Bartók<sup>3</sup>. Before going to Ankara and Anatolia, the composer had the opportunity to listen to a number of sixty-five double-faced records of performers – mostly peasants – who had been brought there in Istanbul for recording purposes from different villages. Two melodies from Istanbul appear exactly on the first pages of the field book.

Composed in 1943, the *Concerto for Orchestra* represents the first musical composition after the longest inactive period in the career of the Hungarian composer. It's a composition with a huge impact. It is in strong

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<sup>2</sup> Ferenc László, *Bartók markában (In the grip of Bartók.)* Polis Könyvkiadó, Kolozsvár, 2006, p. 140. „A török zene nem hagyott kimutatható nyomot Bartók zeneszerzői művében, alighanem azért, mert számára a törököknél a döntő élményt nem a más milyenség, hanem éppen hogy a rokonság felfedezése jelentette.” („The Turkish music didn't leave any remarkable evidence in his [Bartók's] compositions, probably because in Turkey his discovery was not one of the differences but concerning the similarities.”)

<sup>3</sup> NYBA MS. code no.8OFSS1, found at Bartók Archive, Music Science Institute, Budapest.

relation with his young works, not only in the musical language, but also concerning the structure (for example the *Suite No. 1 for Orchestra*, thought as a five-movement composition and the *String Quartets No. 4 and No. 5*). Another common feature is the so-called "Symphonic character", which the composer himself explains in the comments to his compositions. "The general mood of this work," he wrote, "represents, apart from the jesting second movement, a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death-song of the third to the life-assertion of the last"<sup>4</sup>. Probably drawing on some of his fleeting ideas from 1942, in August 1943, Bartók started to draft the work in five movements, less overtly symmetrical, however, than his other recent five-movement compositions. The new composition was complete in just 45 days.<sup>5</sup> The various folk-music and art-music components of its style are also less integrated than in his music from the 1930s. He named the piece a *concerto* because of its tendency, as he put it, "to treat the single instruments in a *concertante* or soloistic manner."<sup>6</sup> In the inner structure the movements are organized as in a suite: *Introduction (Andante non troppo)* having a theme built on fourths; *Allegro vivace (Allegretto scherzando)*, with a specific melody and a dance rhythm; *Elegia (Andante non troppo)* with its passionate expression, almost impressionist and romantic; *Intermezzo Interrotto (Allegretto)*, a genuine scherzo, fantastic and poetic and the *Finale (Pesante. Presto)* full of dynamism, with the rhythm of a Transylvanian dance.<sup>7</sup>

The orchestration of the piece implies a rich sound, which includes woodwind instruments, brass instruments, timpani, percussions, two harps and string instruments. The sketches of the *Concerto for Orchestra* can be found in the composer's second field book, from a series of three sketch books and transcriptions. As already mentioned, this second field book is the one that also contains the transcription of the Turkish folk melodies by Bartók in 1936.

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Machlis, *Introduction to Contemporary Music*, (second edition), Ed. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1979, p. 435.

<sup>5</sup> During his stay in the hospital in New York, Bartók's friend, József Szigeti approached the conductor Serge Koussevitzky, suggesting that he should commission a new orchestral work from Béla Bartók. He visited him in the hospital and they agreed. The requirement was that it has to be a work for orchestra and dedicated to the memory of Natalie Koussevitzky, the conductor's wife. A month later Bartók returned home from the hospital, he moved to a sanatorium in Saranac Lake, staying there from 1 July until 12 October. It was during this stay, from 15 August until the 8<sup>th</sup> of October that the *Concerto for Orchestra* was composed.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Machlis, *Op. cit.*, p. 435.

<sup>7</sup> Vasile Iliuț, *De la Wagner la contemporani (From Wagner to Contemporary)*, vol. IV, Editura Muzicală, București, 1998, p. 260-261.

The *Concerto* received its first performance in 1944, the year before Bartók died. The first audition took place in the concert hall of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Serge Koussevitzky, the permanent conductor of this famous orchestra between 1924-1949.<sup>8</sup>

In the first movement, *Introduzione*, a division of the musical form can be observed with two distinct articulations: *Andante* and *Allegro*.

The slow part of the movement, *Andante* is filled with a dramatic content, the first theme is based on the interval of the fourth, which occupies a prominent position in the melodic formations of this composer. These are played by cellos and basses set off by tremolos on upper strings and flute.

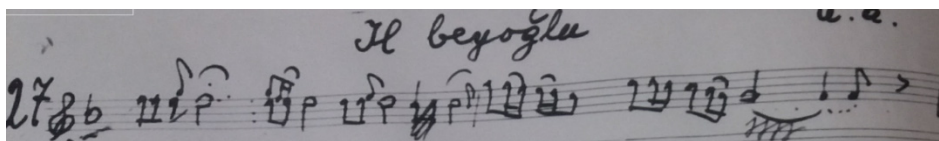
E.g. 1



Béla Bartók, *Concerto for Orchestra (Introduzione, b. 1-6)*

In the *Andante*, after the primary theme in bar 30, the secondary theme intoned by the flute actually follows a Turkish theme, a melody noted in Istanbul by Bartók in his field book, along the sketches of the *Concerto for Orchestra*.

E.g. 2



Béla Bartók, *Concerto for Orchestra (Introduzione, b. 30-34)*

<sup>8</sup> David Cooper, *Concerto for Orchestra*, Cambridge Music Handbooks, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 30.

Melody collected by Bartók from Turkish folklore, reproduced from the sketch book of the composer, NYBA MS. code no.80FSS1, found in Bartók Archive, Music Science Institute, Budapest

This harmonized melody, played by three trumpets, appears in bars 39-42, David Cooper calls it a synthetic melody of the type *parlando-rubato*:

E.g. 3



Béla Bartók, *Concerto for Orchestra (Introduzione, b. 39-42)*

The primary theme of the 1<sup>st</sup> movement is inspired by a melody from the Parry collection. The melody is contoured on the base of the characteristic scale of the Serbo-Croatian folk music, which contains the following sequence of notes *F – G – A sharp – B sharp – B – C flat*. In this collection Bartók refers to this scale as a very peculiar scale formation.

E.g. 4



The melody from the Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs from Milman Parry –  
Albert B: Lord – Béla Bartók, no 27c, b. 6:

E.g. 5

Musical score for Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass, showing a melodic line in G major, marked 'Allegro vivace, ♩. = 88'.

Béla Bartók, *Concerto for Orchestra (Introduzione, b. 76-85)*

In the middle section of the exposition a lyrical theme appears, which alludes to the nostalgic melody from the *Intermezzo* and is not repeated in the reprise of the first movement. This thematic group closes with an “alarm”, followed by a new melody idea, marked by Bartók in the musical score with the indication *tranquillo*, played by the oboe, at an extremely narrow range (at first an oscillation between just two pitches), and a rhythmic pattern derived from the second bar of the first subject. This is a melody that evokes an Arabic song, collected by Bartók in the North of Africa.

## E.g. 6

The image shows a page of a musical score for the introduction of Béla Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra. The score is for the first few measures, starting with the tempo marking 'poco a poco più - Tranquillo, ♩ = 70'. The instruments shown are Flute I, Oboe I, Clarinet I and II in F, Harp I, Violin I, and Viola. The oboe part is marked 'p, dolce' and 'simile'. The harp part is marked 'p, distinto'. The violin and viola parts are marked 'div.' and 'non div.'.

**Béla Bartók, *Concerto for Orchestra*, (Introduzione, b. 149-162)**

In the development, one episode played by the woodwind instruments recalls the secondary theme, the one of Turkish influence.

The second movement (*Giuoco delle coppie*) is the only movement full of humor, as the composer himself puts it. It interrupts the progression of the serious atmosphere in the first part until the “resignation of life” in the last part. Confirm Tibor Tallián “Listening to the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, the assumption seems to be confirmed that for the composition of the *Concerto*, Bartók used the sketches of a ballet symphony, which he started and did not finish. This movement is a scenic dance, and gives the impression of an inward *pas de deux*.”<sup>9</sup> In the second part of the Concerto a jesting “game of pairs”

<sup>9</sup> Tallián Tibor, *Bartók Béla*, ed. Rózsavölgyi és Társa, Budapest, 2016, p. 379: „A II. tételt hallgatva igazolódni látszik a feltételezés, hogy a *Concerto* komponálásához Bartók egy korábban elkezdett és félbemaradt szimfonikus balettzene vázlatanyagát is felhasználta. A második tétel színpadi tánc, egy bensőséges *pas de deux* lépéssorozatának benyomását kelti.”

is exposed, in which he has imitated the two-parallel Dalmatian style found in Parry's collection"<sup>10</sup>.

E.g. 7

The image shows a musical score for the first system of 'Allegretto scherzando, op. 74'. It includes staves for Bassoons I and II, Side Drum, and Double Basses. The Side Drum part is marked 'without snares' and 'mf'. The Double Basses part is marked 'p'. The score shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the bassoons and a similar pattern in the double basses.

**Béla Bartók, Concerto for Orchestra (Gioco delle coppie, b. 8-16)**

The 3rd movement, *Elegia*, appears in a contrasting tempo to the previous movement, emphasizing the tragic atmosphere of the movement. Bartók's cyclic thinking of the piece opens the composition with an interlocking-fourths figure in the same form as it appeared from the last beat of the third bar of the Introduction to the first movement, now played on the double basses.

Apart from the inspirational sources of folk music from different ethnical groups, in the *Concerto for Orchestra* Bartók evokes moments from other compositions of his own creation. Based on gloomy, dark motifs, the *Elegia* alludes to the motive called lake of tears from the opera *Bluebeard's Castle*, with the *glissandos* played by the harp and the dialogue between the clarinet and flute.

("Listening to the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, the assumption seems to be confirmed that for the composition of the *Concerto*, Bartók used the sketches of a ballet symphony, which he started and did not finish. This movement is a scenic dance, and gives the impression of an inward *pas de deux*." In the second part of the *Concerto* a jesting "game of pairs" is exposed, in which he has imitated the two-parallel Dalmatian style found in Parry's collection.")

<sup>10</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. II, IV, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, p. 805.

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E.g. 8

Musical score for E.g. 8, showing staves for Fl. I, Ob. I, Cl. I in Bb, Timp., and Harp I. The score includes dynamics like *pp* and *p*, and markings like *II* and *gliss.*

Béla Bartók, *Concerto for Orchestra (Elegia, b. 10-11)*

E.g. 9

Musical score for E.g. 9, showing staves for Fl. picc. 1, Fl. 1, 2, 3, Ob. 1, 2, Cor. Ingl. 1, Cl. (La.) 1, 2, 3, and Fg. 1, 2, 3. The score includes dynamics like *p* and *f*, and markings like *a2*.

Béla Bartók, *Bluebeard's Castle*

In the analysis Bartók himself made of his own composition, he calls this part a “lament”, and indeed the themes suggest an atmosphere of funeral music.



In this movement the composer returns to the Turkish theme noted in Istanbul and played in the first movement, *Andante*. In this new aspect the theme is presented with a rich sound and has a more emphasized dramatic charge.

E.g. 9

Béla Bartók, *Concerto for Orchestra (Elegia, b. 34-38)*

The sources of inspiration continues to appear in this piece, so that the theme played by viola, which (conform to the analysis of the Hungarian musicologist Tibor Tallián) one represents the peasant wailing, but in a chromatic variation.<sup>11</sup>

E.g. 10

Béla Bartók, *Concerto for Orchestra (Elegia, b. 62-71):*

The melody collected in Istanbul is vital in forming the musical discourse; it is reduced to the string instruments, in a varied form, more exactly, in mirror:

<sup>11</sup> Tibor Tallián, *Bartók Béla*, Rózsavölgyi és Társa, Budapest, 2016, p. 380.

Béla Bartók, *Concerto for Orchestra (Elegia, b. 85-88)*

Regarding the 4<sup>th</sup> movement, *Intermezzo*, Bartók himself confirms, that it is the “only one programmatic movement” of this composition.

Composed in a form with the structure A-A-B-A, the 4<sup>th</sup> movement expands the zone of inspirations from Turkish, Croatian and Hungarian folk music, to the zone with unexpected repertoire. The expressive melodic line of violins, which is on the base of B section, represents a variant of a phrase from an operette of Zsigmond Vincze, *A hamburgi menyasszony (The bride from Hamburg)*. The song called “Szép vagy gyönyörű vagy Magyarország” (You are lovely, you are beautiful, Hungary), was identified by György Sándor, a pianist who met Bartók in America. For Sándor it was not easy to recognize the source of inspiration, because Bartók is not directly quoting the melody. Still, the urban origin of the melody is evident.

Béla Bartók, *Concerto for Orchestra (Intermezzo interrotto, b. 42-46)*

The spectrum of sources is even wider, because the composer makes a parody of the 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony of Dimitri Shostakovici, called *Leningrad*:



**Béla Bartók, *Concerto for Orchestra (Intermezzo Interrotto, b. 75-82)***

As can be seen from the above analysis, the composition is one among the few in which Bartók has capitalized the melodic material collected in Turkey. Apart from this piece, some musicologists consider that the compositions written in the *aksak* rhythm after the composer's return from Anatolia, show an influence of the Turkish music, although the composer uses this rhythm already before 1936. An example of this direction would be the piece *Bulgarian Rhythm* from *Mikrokosmos VI* (the *aksak* rhythm is also called Bulgarian rhythm, it is linked to similar patterns found in Greece, Macedonia, Turkey and the Caucasus).

The *Concerto for orchestra*, this masterpiece composed among Bartók's last works, uses varied sources. It is a genuine work which combines inspirations of folklore-elements and western classical music. Beside the folk music, the author uses elements from his own composition – in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part, *Elegia* he evokes the lake of tears motive. He uses a melody from a Hungarian operetta from Zsigmond Vincze, "Szép vagy, gyönyörű vagy Magyarország" (You are lovely, you are beautiful, Hungary). The impact of the Turkish material in Bartók's oeuvre is much smaller than the Romanian, Hungarian, Slovakian or Arab folklore's inspiration. Still, due to lack of specific prior analyses and lack of references, I consider it important to introduce this peculiar aspect into the actual field of Bartók-research.

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