

The Appearance of the “Ideal” and Other Topoi in Bartók’s Two Sonatas for Violin and Piano nos. 1–2

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Received: March 5, 2018 • Accepted: February 8, 2020

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ABSTRACT

The early Violin Concerto (1907–1908) dedicated to the young violinist, Stefi Geyer, is regarded as one of the most personal compositions by Béla Bartók. The transparent structure, and the ethereal, unearthly tone of the first movement, probably inspired by Stefi Geyer’s playing, belongs to the warmest and most intimate tone used by the composer. Presumably, its re-emergence in certain passages of the two Violin-Piano Sonatas (1921 and 1922) was not by chance. It might have been the composer’s reaction to Jelly d’Arányi’s violin playing that evoked the memory of the early concerto and its source of inspiration. However, despite their similarities the “ideal” tone of the Sonatas is not the same as that in the Violin Concerto. It is still recognisable, but it has a different, perhaps more mature character and, furthermore, within the material surrounding it, we can detect the kernel of those Bartókian types which gain their definite form only in his 1926 emblematic piano pieces, for instance some elements of his “night music” type, his mourning song type, and some characteristic traits of his “chase” music. In the present article, besides following the process of transformation of the “ideal,” I make an attempt to identify the newly developed musical types, and to find an explanation of all these changes.

KEYWORDS

Bartók, topoi, allusions, Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 1, Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 2

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The first movement of the early Violin Concerto (BB 48a) dedicated to Stefi Geyer, and later entitled as *Ideal* in the *Two Portraits* (BB 48b) has an exceptional tone, which may be described as something special in Bartók's style. Its characteristic, ethereal sound, which appeared already in some of his earlier compositions, for instance at the end of the second movement of the Suite for Orchestra no. 1, op. 3, (BB 39, 1905), and re-emerged also in his later works, almost never constituted an entire movement. The early Violin Concerto is exceptional in this respect.¹ It is rather difficult to describe the essence of this sound quality. One of its most conspicuous features is that it is in a very high register, but it also has a certain indescribable sweetness due, perhaps, to the relatively consonant accompaniment. Also among its salient characteristics are the longing, yearning gestures in the melody. On the basis of these distinguishing features, this special "tone" is easily recognisable in the two Sonatas for Violin and Piano (BB 84, 85); however, despite their similarities, the "ideal" tone of each of the Sonatas is distinctive. To find an explanation to the possible causes of its change, and to follow the process of its transformation we should examine it in the context of the whole compositions. The two Sonatas were composed in 1921 and 1922, after a relatively barren period following the completion of the one-act pantomime, *The Miraculous Mandarin*, op. 19, (BB 82, 1918–1919, orchestration 1924), when apart from the *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs*, op. 20 (BB 83, 1920), Bartók did not compose any large-scale works.

Both Violin Sonatas contain a peculiar mixture of old and new stylistic elements. Listening to the opening movement of the First Sonata, in particular, creates the feeling that the listener is in the midst of a process of stylistic transformation. The characteristic traits of the movement: the unusually dense texture, the angular, jagged melodies, a host of dissonant chords, the irregular phrase structures, the uneven rhythmical pulsation, the abrupt changes in mood and dynamics, and, finally, in addition to these, their uneasy, troubled tone are probably enough to explain why some scholars (e.g., Malcolm Gillies) thought of them as strange, alien works compared to other ones composed around this time.² However, it is not the first time that these peculiar features emerge. Some important works among his earlier compositions have the same strange characteristics. János Kárpáti pointed out the general similarities between the two Sonatas and, among others, the Second String Quartet, (op. 17, BB 75, 1914–1917), or Bartók's stage works.³ László Vikárius drew attention to a more direct resemblance when he pointed at the close similarities between the arpeggiated introductory measures in the accompaniment of the fourth *Ady Song*, (BB 72, 1916) "Egyedül a tengerrel" [Alone by the sea] written in the same period as the Second String Quartet, and the first few measures of the piano part at the beginning of the opening movement of the First Violin Sonata.⁴ In his study "Bartók and the Ideal of a 'Sentimentalitäts-Mangel'," Vikárius alluded also to the relationship between the First Sonata and the first *Elegy*, op. 8b (1908). Analysing the first *Elegy* he

¹About the movements using this special tone, see Csilla Mária PINTÉR, "Bipolar Musical Universe: Béla Bartók's Two-part Compositions around 1910," unpublished paper. I am grateful to Ms. Pintér for letting me see her unpublished study.

²Malcolm GILLIES, "Integrity and Influence in Bartók's Work: The Case of Szymanowski," *International Journal of Musicology* 1 (1992), 148–150.

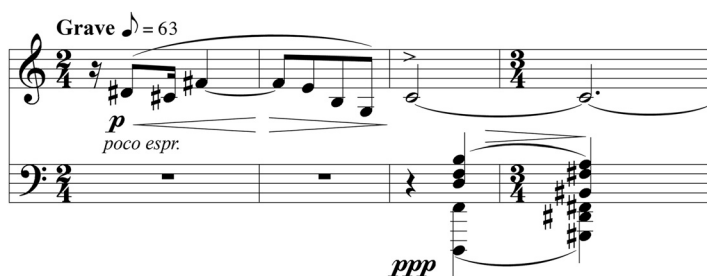
³János KÁRPÁTI, *Bartók's Chamber Music*, transl. by Fred MACNICOL, Maria STEINER (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1994), 294, 303.

⁴László VIKÁRIUS, "Erinnern an die 'Stimmung' der Sache: Das Konkrete und das Schwebende im Komponieren Bartóks," in *Resonanzen. Vom Erinnern in der Musik*, Studien zur Wertungsforschung 47, ed. by Andreas DORSCHER (Wien: Universal Edition, 2007), 173–177.



remarked that although the *Two Elegies* (BB 49) were almost refused by their composer because of their use of the exuberant style of his earlier works, he put them on the programme of some of his very important concerts. Thus, he played the first *Elegy* on the concert he gave together with Jelly Arányi in Paris on 8 April 1922, the main attraction of which was the performance of the First Sonata.⁵ The similarity between the two works is conspicuous, indeed (Examples 1a–b). Besides their general harassed tone, there is a close resemblance between the melodic turns of their first themes; furthermore, they have the same dense texture, featuring uneasily undulating broken chords in their accompaniment. Not surprisingly, there are parallels also in their compositional history. The first *Elegy* was written in 1908, immediately after Bartók's relationship with Stefi Geyer had come to a hopeless end. It belongs to the series of works composed during this period and based on the now famous Stefi Geyer leitmotiv. The *Ady Songs*, op. 16 together with the *Five Songs*, op. 15, (BB 71) were composed in 1916, when his marriage was in crisis because of his preoccupation with Klára Gombossy, the daughter of a forester of Kisgaram (now Hronec in Slovakia) during his folksong collecting trips. Apparently, these compositions originated in critical periods of their composer's life. These circumstances explain the strange, uneasy, and highly expressive tone of these works, a tone which we may even designate as Bartók's "crisis tone."

The two Sonatas were also written in a very difficult period of Bartók's life. It was a rather complex crisis in which almost every important sphere of his life was affected. Among the reasons for this crisis were the difficulties caused by the First World War, and later the revolutions of 1919, but probably one of the heaviest blows for him around this time was the loss of access to his folksong collecting territories after the ratification of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. His distresses were not eased by the few positive changes after the war, either. The reopening of the borders and his return to the Western European musical world, the encounter with new works by his contemporaries and with new artistic currents that had arisen during the early 1920s were like a shock for him and caused a compositional crisis. In addition to this, due to the resumption of his regular concert activity he must have realised the need of a new, grand-scale concert piece.



Example 1a. First *Elegy*, beginning

⁵László VIKÁRIUS, "Bartók and the Ideal of a 'Sentimentalitäts-Mangel'," *International Journal of Musicology* 10 (2000), ed. by Elliott ANTOKOLETZ, Michael von ALBRECHT (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), 227.



Allegro appassionato $\text{♩} = 72 - 80$

The image displays the beginning of the first movement of Béla Bartók's Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 1. The tempo is marked 'Allegro appassionato' with a quarter note equal to 72-80 beats. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is written for violin and piano. The first system shows the initial chords and the start of the violin melody. The second and third systems continue the musical development with various dynamic markings including piano (p), mezzo-forte (mf), and forte (f). The score includes slurs, ties, and other musical notations typical of Bartók's style.

Example 1b. Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 1, mov. I, beginning

It was in this extremely sensitive phase of his life that the plan for the British tour with Jelly Arányi emerged. Bartók had become acquainted with the Arányi family, first of all with Jelly's two elder sisters, the violinist Adila, and the pianist Hortense, to whom he gave private piano lessons, during his years of study at the Budapest Academy of Music. At that time Jelly was only nine years old; accordingly, Bartók could know nothing about her later musical talents.⁶ At first he regarded the idea of Jelly's participation in his concerts during the planned tour with reservation.⁷ After playing together with her, during Jelly's Budapest sojourn when she visited him at his home, not only his reservations disappeared, but, inspired by her playing – and infatuated by her person – he received finally an impetus to compose a sonata for violin and piano, the first in

⁶Bartók first mentioned the Arányi family in his letter to his mother written in March 1902. See *Bartók Béla családi levelei* [Béla Bartók family letters], ed. by Béla BARTÓK, Jr. (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1981), 60. About the Arányi family see Joseph MACLEOD, *The Sisters d'Aranyi* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1969).

⁷See Bartók's letter to Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi on 24 September 1921, Adrienne GOMBOCZ and László SOMFAI, "Bartók's Briefe an Calvocoressi [Bartók letters to Calvocoressi] (1914–1930)," *Studia Musicologica* 24 (1982), 205–207.



this genre among his mature compositions.⁸ The richness or even crowdedness of the ideas in the opening movement of the First Sonata gives the very impression of somebody who, after a long period of silence, releasing his pent-up emotions, wants to tell everything at once.

The extreme emotions presented in his works written in critical phases of his life required appropriately extreme musical means like large leaps in the melody, unusual harmonies,⁹ the creation of special effects, or the creation of sounds which are often on the border between musical sounds and noises.¹⁰ These noise-like structures are important for the present discussion partly because of the connection between these noises and the “ideal” tone, partly because of the new idioms born from these sounds. Bartók, unlike some of his contemporaries, never used real noises in music. In his article, “Das Problem der neuen Musik” [The problem of new music],¹¹ writing about the advantages of the free and equal treatment of the twelve tones, he presented a few chords, taken from his *Three Studies*, op. 18 (BB 81, 1918), as an illustration, and he described some of them as having a noise-like effect or the effect of stylized noise. These noise-like chords were built up of three or more adjacent notes. Their effect could be enhanced with the involvement of additional tones creating a cluster-like texture. These noise- or cluster-like sounds can appear in many different contexts, expressing different contents. The chords in the slow first movement of the Second Sonata, at the peak of an intensification process beginning from fig. 7, sounds as a painful outcry. In the third movement of the First Sonata (e.g., between figs. 22 and 25), and in the second movement in the Second Sonata (beginning at fig. 35), Bartók used the cluster-like type to reach a percussion-like sound. This characteristic drumming texture became the most well-known percussive idiom in his compositions of the 1920s, the most famous example for it is the opening movement of the *Outdoors* cycle (BB 89, 1926), with a revealing title: “With Drums and Pipes.” However, they can also be used to create a

⁸See Bartók’s letter to Calvocoressi of 20 October 1921. *Briefe an Calvocoressi*, 207, and Bartók’s letter to Jelly Arányi on 9 November 1921, *Sotheby & Co: Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books, Music Autograph Letters and Historical Documents*, 15–16 May 1967, 112. The original Hungarian letter is unavailable, it is known only in partial English translation.

⁹In connection with the different expressive tools used by him, Bartók gave an unusually detailed description to Klára Gombossy, explaining his methods used for setting her poem, “Az én szerelmem” [My love], *Five Songs*, op. 15 (BB 71), no. 1, and presenting the means – “sharp, ear splitting effects” and ambiguous (major-minor) closing chord – used to depict excessive feelings, in this case “ecstasy.” Bartók’s letter to Klára Gombossy, 15 January 1916 in László VIKÁRIUS, “Intimations through Words and Music: Unique Sources to Béla Bartók’s Life and Thought in the Fonds Denijs Dille (B-Br),” *Revue Belge de Musicologie / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap* LXVII (2013), 179–217, for the original Hungarian text, see 210–211, and for the English translation, 191–192.

¹⁰His fascinations with special sound effects are also described by Joseph Szigeti. Writing his recollections of Bartók, Szigeti recalled what a pleasure it was for the composer when he showed him some “unorthodox, violinistic ‘possibilities.’” “When I say that ‘the instrument’ (whether his own or ours) meant much to him, I am thinking of our rehearsals, of our talks together, of his interest in instrumental knowhow, of his pleasure when (in Davos in the Summer of 1927) I jotted down for him some unorthodox, violinistic ‘possibilities’ harmonies, pizzicato effects and the like.” Joseph SZIGETI, “Making Music with Bartók,” *The Long Player* 2, no. 10, Bartók issue (October 1953), 10–12.

¹¹Béla BARTÓK, “Das Problem der Neuen Musik,” *Melos* 1, no. 5 (1920) “Az új zene problémája,” in *Bartók Béla összegyűjtött írásai*, ed. by András SZÖLLÖSY (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1967), 718–722. The drafts written for the different versions of the article and the examples taken from the second of the *Three Studies*, op. 18, see “Vierzehn Bartók-Schriften aus den Jahren 1920–21. Aufsätze über die zeitgenössische Musik und Konzertberichte aus Budapest,” in *Documenta Bartókiana* 5, ed. by László SOMFAI (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó; Mainz: Schott, 1977), 23–33. In English: “The Problem of New Music,” in *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. by Benjamin SUCHOFF (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), 455–459.



grotesque effect, as in the second, fast movement in the Second Sonata (beginning at around 3 measures before fig. 22 until fig. 25). Furthermore, they can appear in slow melancholic, introspective passages, creating a sounding background for the inner sounds of the soul. Actually, it is this type, the forerunner of the “night music” idiom, that contains both the noise-like and the cluster-like sounds in the greatest quantities. In these movements they appear together with other noise-like sounds, like strangely shaped formulas, trills, etc.

The middle section of the first movement of the First Sonata contains almost all of the characteristic elements of the type later designated as “night music”: the quick, asymmetric, arabesque-like formulas, the murmuring background evolving from the regularly alternating chords and, besides the noises, the mirror-like structures and the chorale-like passages in the piano can also be mentioned.¹² (See the section between fig. 10 and around 3 measures before fig. 13.) It is interesting to note that, similarly to his “night music” pieces which are usually the central movements within his multi-movement works, this passage appears also in the central part of the movement.

The “ideal” tone of the First Sonata appears amid these “night music” sounds in the development section of the first movement (Example 2). It is the first or main theme transposed to the “ideal” register. The theme, at the beginning of the Sonata does not possess this character yet. Initially, it is a passionate, elegiac melody getting only gradually to the “ideal” sphere. It appears in a higher register first at the end of the main theme section around 3 measures after fig. 3, but it only receives the calm, almost serene, nostalgic tone, and the strange splendour of the “ideal” in the development section. How could it happen that this special sound resurfaced exactly in this Sonata?

According to Malcolm Gillies¹³ and Alistar Wightman¹⁴ some characteristic traits of the two Sonatas, especially the use of exceptional types of violin technique, show the influence of Karol Szymanowski’s works, first of all his *Myths*, op. 11 (1915), and his *Nocturne et Tarantella*, op. 28 (1915), composed a few years earlier than the Bartók Sonatas, which he heard in Jelly’s performance. They focus mainly on technical features, and mention only one passage, the recapitulation section of the First Sonata – a section which possesses every traits of the “ideal” tone – in which even, both in the melody and in the texture of the accompaniment, some resemblance can be detected with the first theme area of Szymanowski’s “La Fontaine d’Arethuse” from *Myths*.¹⁵ The question of the Szymanowski influence provoked many debates. While most scholars accept that Szymanowski’s works exerted some influence on Bartók’s Sonatas for Violin and Piano, opinions differ regarding its exact significance and, especially, its supposed role in the formation of the First Sonata.¹⁶ In Gillies’s opinion, Jelly’s performances of Szymanowski’s

¹²About the mirror-like structures in Bartók’s “night music” movements, see László VIKÁRIUS, *Modell és inspiráció Bartók zenei gondolkodásában* [Model and inspiration in Bartók’s musical thinking] (Pécs: Jelenkor Kiadó, 1999), 168–182.

¹³GILLIES, “Integrity and Influence in Bartók’s Work,” 148–156.

¹⁴Alistar WHITEMANN, “Szymanowski, Bartók and the Violin,” *Musical Times* 122, no. 1657 (March 1981), 159–163.

¹⁵Although it is impossible to exclude completely that he chose this texture under the influence of Szymanowski’s works, it had already had its forerunner among Bartók’s earlier works. See p. 2 and footnote 5 of the present article.

¹⁶For further views on this alleged influence see János KÁRPÁTI, *Bartók’s Chamber Music*, 297–298, László VIKÁRIUS, “Bartók’s Neo-Classical Re-evaluation of Mozart,” in *The Past in the Present. Papers Read at the IMS Intercongressional Symposium and the 10th Meeting of the Cantus Planus. Budapest & Visegrád, 2000*, ed. by László DOBSZAY (Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, 2003), vol. 1, 478–479 and the most detailed study considering the question of technical borrowing see László VIKÁRIUS, *Modell és inspiráció*, 113–130.



Example 2. Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 1, mov. I, fig. 13

works gave the most important impetus for Bartók to compose the Sonata. Contrary to Gillies, László Somfai¹⁷ declares that the first drafts for the Sonata written in Bartók's *Black Pocket-book*¹⁸ were written well before his encounter with Jelly and the compositions of the Polish composer.¹⁹ Unfortunately there is no evidence that can unambiguously prove any hypothesis regarding the dating of the sources.²⁰ Nevertheless, in relatively barren periods, such as that

¹⁷László SOMFAI, " 'Written between the Desk and the Piano': Dating Béla Bartók's Sketches," in *A Handbook to Twentieth-Century Musical Sketches*, ed. by Patricia HALL and Friedemann SALLIS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 114–130.

¹⁸Bartók Béla *fekete zsebkönyve. Vázlatok 1907–1922*. Az eredeti kézirat fakszimile kiadása Somfai László utószavával / *Black Pocket-Book (Sketches 1907–1922)*. Facsimile edition of the manuscript with a commentary by László Somfai (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1987).

¹⁹See also László Somfai's article in the present volume, pp. 25–54.

²⁰There are only two letters which contain references to the work: the first one was written by Bartók's first wife, Márta Ziegler to the composer's mother on 19 October 1921, see *Családi levelei*, 325, the second one was written by Bartók to Jelly on 9 November, see footnote 8.



which preceded the composition of the Sonata, Bartók usually required a very strong, emotionally infused musical impact, a “lightning stroke,”²¹ to get out of his creative crisis. Thus, it seems more plausible that in this case the “lightning stroke” he needed was Jelly’s performance.

The characteristic traits of Szymanowski’s *Myths* – the transparent texture, the clear, impressionistic sound with the violin placed in a very high register –, remind us not only of the recapitulation section of the First Sonata, but also of the “ideal” tone of the early Violin Concerto. Bartók might have been deeply moved by recognising this “well-known sound from the past” in Jelly’s suggestive performance. This experience might explain even his sudden infatuation with the violinist. Actually, it is doubtful whether these works could have had the same effect on him in anybody else’s performance. His hurry to obtain Szymanowski’s works from his publisher clearly reveals the intensity of his feelings. On 6 October 1920, immediately after Jelly’s leaving Budapest, Bartók wrote to Universal Edition asking for Szymanowski’s most recent compositions,²² and he put the works of the Polish composer on a concert programme very soon after. He played the *Myths* with Zoltán Székely at a concert on 11 November 1921.²³ Thus, it seems that the Szymanowski influence lies deeper than to describe it as mere technical borrowing. It rather concerns the general mood, character or spirit of the work and its themes.²⁴

When examining the Sonata one can detect many signs which can be interpreted as hidden, personal allusions to Bartók’s troubled state of mind, which might further support the hypothesis regarding Jelly’s determining role in the composition of the work. First of all, the presence of the general depressed mood and even the reappearance of some characteristic melodic turns of his works from 1908 or 1916. A revealing example of this can be found in the development section of the First Sonata, the delicacy of which is pointed out by David Cooper in his Bartók-biography.²⁵ After the “night” sounds of the beginning, and the main theme, which

²¹Bartók used this expression in his autobiography from 1918, to describe what a powerful influence had Richard Strauss’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* on him during his fallow years around 1902. Béla BARTÓK, “Autobiography,” in *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. by Benjamin SUCHOFF (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), 409.

²²Bartók requested Szymanowski’s *Nocturne et Tarantella* and *Myths*, and also his newest piano works, the *Masques*, op. 34, and Piano Sonata, op. 36. Bartók’s letter to the Universal Edition, 6 October 1921, see Bartók’s correspondence with the Universal Edition, all sources available in photocopy in the Budapest Bartók Archives. Regarding Arányi’s leaving Budapest see MACLEOD, *The Sisters d’Aranyi*, 137.

²³Concert bill, BBA, BAN: 2049/84.

²⁴As an illustration, we can mention some similarities which can be detected between Bartók’s Second Violin Sonata and Szymanowski’s *Nocturne et Tarantella*. Right at the beginnings of the two works there is something similar as both works start in a very low register. There is some resemblance also between their improvisatory-like first materials which are juxtapositions of long, sustained notes and short, ornament-like figures consisting of small rhythmic values. As the movements progress both themes get in a very high register, in the case of the *Nocturne* at around two measure before fig. 10, while in Bartók’s work, at the end of the slow movement, around fig. 18, although even its first appearance is already in the third octave above middle C. Finally, there are also some similarities between the main themes of the fast movements of the two works. Furthermore, we can find similarities even in a higher, structural level. Szymanowski’s work uses a rhapsody-like arrangement; a slow movement with improvisatory character followed by a whirling, dance-like fast movement, which was in fact Bartók’s favourite. There is exotic, folk-like flavor in both movements, Spanish in the *Nocturne* and Italian in the *Tarantella*. Nevertheless, Szymanowski’s composition is a virtuoso, Western-European “salon” music, and in this context Bartók’s Sonata may be regarded as an East-European answer to this “salon” piece.

²⁵David COOPER, *Béla Bartók* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 184.



appear in the “ideal” register like a distant memory, the descending line of a broken chord at fig. 14 reminds us of the Stefi Geyer leitmotiv (Example 3). Interestingly, together with this motive an unusual Italian marking appears in the score: *risvegliandosi* [reawakening]. It is like an explanation with text. First, it verifies that the resemblance between the descending four notes and the Stefi Geyer motive is no coincidence, but it also gives an explanation to the appearance of the “ideal” tone. However, this “reawakening” motive is not in its hopeful rising form, but appears instead as a descending, mourning variant, and its grief is coloured by the grief of another Bartókian “character” – the Miraculous Mandarin. The closeness of the ballet and the two Sonatas can be felt even in their general mood and their similar melodic gestures, but some passages show a more direct relationship between them. The epilogue-like closing measures of the Coda in the first movement of the First Sonata (Example 4) remind us of the textless choir, and its accompaniment alternating between the high and low register, which appears at the moment when “the hanging body of the Mandarin begins to glow with a bluish green light” (Example 5). This relationship is more obvious in the case of the slow movement of the Second Sonata where a melody developed from the first *hora lungă*-like theme and presented at fig. 7, bears a more conspicuous resemblance to the dirge-like viola part mourning the hanged Mandarin (Example 6).

I have no intention to create a narrative for the two Violin Sonatas on the basis of the topoi used by their composer, but it is undeniable that in Bartók’s oeuvre certain recurring musical figures and sounds have a very similar emotional content, and these similarities invite us to seek a hidden meaning underlying the score.²⁶ What we can detect is not a coherent program. These recurring figures are rather like symbols with many different possible interpretations. How can we explain, then, the appearance of the music of the dying Mandarin among characteristic passages referring to longing, love, or depression over unrequited love? Could it be the symbol of a deep longing for fulfilment at any price? Or does it represent an unconscious fear that it might be the very last time to be in love?

Distant melody in the “ideal” register among “night” sounds is an element that also became a characteristic feature of the later “night’s music” type. The slow movement of the Second Sonata, and partly the second movement of the First Sonata, follow this model. However, the “ideal” sound of the “night music” pieces composed after the two Sonatas underwent further changes and the tone, familiar from the Sonatas or from the early Violin Concerto, disappeared. We can

²⁶It was not the first time that Bartók, like Schumann, put an encoded message into one of his works. Besides the compositions based on the famous Stefi Geyer motive, he used this method even in his earliest compositions (*Liebeslieder*, Scherzo “F.F. B.B.”, BB 20) dedicated to Felicie Fábrián (his fellow student at the Academy of Music in Budapest). Some of his youthful works even had a hidden programme, as it was in the case of his Rhapsody, op. 1 (BB 36a, 1904), or Scherzo, op. 2 (1904), BB 35. What is more, he used a recurring theme (“love theme”) in these early works, which kept reappearing in other compositions (*Andante* for violin and piano, 1902, BB 26b, dedicated to Adila Arányi and Piano Quintet, 1903–1904), BB 33, too. About the programme of the Scherzo, op. 2, see Denijs DILLE, *Het werk van Bela Bartok* (Antwerpen: Metropolis, 1979), 41, and László SOMFAI, “Bartók Béla: Scherzo op. 2,” in *A hét zeneműve*, 1986/1987, ed. by György KROÓ (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1986), 311. Regarding the programme of the Rhapsody, op. 1, see Bartók’s letter to Emma Gruber, 22 April 1904, unpublished, Zoltán Kodály Archives, MS.mus. epist. – BB 12, photocopy in the Budapest Bartók Archives. Most of the information about the programmes and also the composition history of the works came from László SOMFAI’s *Thematic Catalog of Béla Bartók’s Compositions* (in preparation). I am very grateful to Prof. Somfai for letting me study his unpublished work.



Un poco più di mosso
♩ = 84

f *risvegliandosi molto espr.*

Un poco più di mosso
♩ = 84

mf *risvegliandosi espr.*

Example 3. Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 1, mov. I, fig. 14

hear, instead, scraps of folksong-like melodies, as in the case of the melody recalling the peasant flute²⁷ in the “Night’s Music” within the *Outdoors* cycle. It also emerges as nature songs or bird songs, as in the third movement (*Elegia*) of the Concerto for Orchestra (BB 123, 1943). Together with the original tone of the “ideal,” the peculiar, strained, tormented, turbulent tone of the works born in his critical period also disappeared. It is probably no coincidence that Bartók stopped giving opus numbers to his compositions exactly at this period.²⁸

Is there anything which remained of the idioms which once were in close relationship with the original “ideal”? To answer this, it would be important to know what Bartók meant by the “ideal.” Csilla Mária Pintér²⁹ reminds us of Bartók’s concept regarding the ideal in general, which he formulated in a letter of 27 July 1907 to Stefi Geyer. Writing about the struggle against fate and similar grave topics, in relation to his ideal goal, Bartók remarked that it is a goal that he

²⁷The peasant flute probably also had a special meaning for him. In his correspondence with Stefi Geyer, Bartók alluded a few times to a piece written for peasant flute (*tilinkó*) and piano which he presented to her, but later he asked her to return it for publication purposes. Bartók’s letter to Stefi Geyer, 26 November 1907 in *Béla Bartók Briefe an Stefi Geyer*, ed. by Paul SACHER (Basel: Privatdruck Paul Sacher Stiftung, 1979), facsimile 65. This work was the first version (BB 45a) of the piano piece *Three Hungarian Folk Songs from Csík County* (BB 45b). The source of the piece was a tune played on peasant flute by Áron Balogh in Gyergyótekerőpatak (Csík County). He wrote even about the recording (Bartók’s letter to Stefi Geyer, 7 August 1907, Gyergyókilyénfalva, *Briefe an Stefi Geyer*, facsimile 25, further information regarding the composition history of the *Three Hungarian Folksongs* comes from SOMFAI’s unpublished *Thematic Catalog of Béla Bartók’s Compositions*). The tune shows close resemblance to the flute-like part of the *Evening in Transylvania*, written in 1908, after their relationship came to an end, but it shows resemblance also with the flute-like passages of the “Night’s Music” from 1926, and even with the birdsong-like textures of the slow movements in his later works. The tune moves in the high, “Ideal,” region. It might be “the recall of happiness in time of misery.” At the same time, however, it can refer to a different kind of happiness, too, the happiness given by his collecting trip, and the time he spent “among his beloved peasants” (“Kedves parasztaim között kellemes órákat töltötök.” [I am spending happy hours among my beloved peasants.] Bartók’s letter to Emma Gruber, 25 November 1906 in *Bartók Béla levelei* [Béla Bartók letters], ed. by János DEMÉNY (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1976), 113–115.

²⁸Regarding the question of why Bartók ceased to give opus numbers to his compositions, see GILLIES, “Integrity and Influence in Bartók’s Work,” 156–157 and VIKÁRIUS, *Modell és inspiráció*, 73.

²⁹See footnote 1.



Più mosso, $\text{♩} = 92$

Più mosso, $\text{♩} = 92$

p

mf

sin al fine

Example 4. Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 1, mov. I, fig. 27

can hardly achieve because it is an ideal. (“What exists, cannot be an ideal any more . . .”)³⁰ A few months later, confronting the two motives of his early Violin Concerto, he commented that the first one is only an “*Idealbild*,” the reality is in the second one, which is in his words “the reality of Jászberény” – a reference to the place where Bartók visited the Geyer family in summer 1907. According to him the first one depicts a “very kind, gracious something or somebody.”³¹

³⁰Bartók’s letter to Stefi Geyer, 27 July 1907, *Briefe an Stefi Geyer*, facsimile 19.

³¹Bartók’s letter to Stefi Geyer, 21 December 1907, *Briefe an Stefi Geyer*, facsimile 71.



FL 1

FL 2

FL 3

Cor.
in Fa

Cin.

Tam-tam

Cel.

Arpa

Pft.

Alto

Bass

VL I
div.

VL II

Vla.

Vlc.

Cb.

sempre simile

pizz.

Example 5. The Miraculous Mandarin, fig. 101



The musical score is for a section of Bartók's Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 2, movement I. It is written in 8/8 time. The first system features a violin part with a tempo marking 'Più vivo, ♩ = 132' and a piano part with a 'pp' dynamic. The second system continues the piano part with a 'p' dynamic and includes a 'breve' marking. The third system shows the violin part with a 'p' dynamic and the piano part with a 'mp' dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Example 6. Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 2, mov. I, fig. 7

Finishing the second movement he described it as the portrait of the “boisterous Stefi,” which is “funny (humorous), witty and amusing.”³² Accordingly, this movement is a scherzo-like composition, using a gentle teasing tone, without destructive sarcasm. This “gracious” tone had already appeared in his earlier works. For instance, his Scherzo, op. 2 (BB 35, 1904), also contains a passage, based on the variation of its second – according to László Somfai’s³³ designation: “female” – theme, which has a similar character. It is probably no coincidence that the theme received a *grazioso* marking.

This tone continues resurfacing in the piano works Bartók dedicated to his first wife, Márta Ziegler, in the music of the princess in the ballet *The Wooden Prince*, op. 13 (BB 74, 1917), as well as in the First Sonata for Violin and Piano. We can recognise it in the *grazioso* theme of the middle section, and in the Coda of the third movement (Example 7). This tone and this

³²Bartók’s letter to Stefi Geyer, 29 November 1908, *Briefe an Stefi Geyer*, facsimile 81.

³³SOMFAI, “Bartók Béla: Scherzo op. 2,” 309–310.



sostenuto
f
s
p
grazioso
Più vivo, ♩ = 108
sostenuto
p
scherzando, leggiero
f
p
f

Example 7. Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 1, mov. III, fig. 26

character, the “real” next to the “ideal,” did not disappear, not even from his later works; it returned for the last time in the first movement of the Third Piano Concerto (BB 127, 1945), dedicated to Ditta Pásztory Bartók.

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