The Culture and History Surrounding “Szomorú nóták” of Béla Bartók’s Twenty Hungarian Folksongs and Its Influence on Bartók’s Settings

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The Culture and History Surrounding “Szomorú nóták” of Béla Bartók’s Twenty Hungarian Folksongs and Its Influence on Bartók’s Settings

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Abstract

This document is an exploration of the Hungarian culture and history as it pertains to “Somorú nótak” of Bartók’s *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs*. The information presented will provide insight into the Magyar, Hungarian, outlook as well as relevant themes. As a performer, it is important to make these connections and apply them to the musical setting so that a genuine portrayal of the texts and their emotions is possible. Hungarian history, the folksong as it pertains to the Hungarians, and the process by which these songs were composed are discussed in order to establish their importance and background of the content. A brief analysis will also be provided of each song discussing the ways in which Bartók expresses the Magyar sentiment through music in an effort to help the performer to better understand the piece.
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// a strong stress; Bartók used this symbol to denote the strongest stresses in a linguistical phrase as well as the metrically strongest beat in a musical phrase.

/ a stress; Bartók used this as the weak stress symbol for both language and musical phrases.

- an unstressed syllable of the text as well as an unstressed note in the musical phrase.
Chapter 1

Introduction

The songs of the Magyar, or Hungarian, people provide an invaluable musical and pedagogical source in vocal music. From a historical standpoint, the texts present the experiences, values, and plights of an ancient people who have endured greatness and failure time and time again. Bartók made it his mission in life to collect, preserve, and promote the importance of these songs to his fellow countrymen as well as the world. In a letter written to the President of Columbia University, Dr. Nicolas Murray, in 1940, Bartók described his “life work [as] the collection of many records of Hungarian folk-music.”

In fact, he published a comprehensive collection of melodies and texts that had been assembled over the years by himself and others. In addition, he also published arrangements of these melodies in several forms. Some were published as solo pieces for piano and voice, while others were presented in collections meant to educate young musicians on the importance and validity of the genuine Hungarian folksong. His passion for the preservation and value of these melodies is noticed in the care, precision, and quality of the arrangements. Among these publications is Twenty Hungarian Folksongs (20 Magyar Népdal), a four-volume set of arranged melodies for voice and piano. The first volume will be the focus of this study.

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1 Béla Bartók, Letter to Dr. Nicolas Murray, May 2, 1940, (Bartók Archives, New York).
With their rich history, they provided a canvas on which Bartók created evocative images demonstrating his understanding of the texts. The music written to convey the texts is complex, dramatic, and individual, just as the lives of its subjects, the Magyar.

Although the early collections of Hungarian folksong arrangements are both educational and appropriate for the young musician, *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs* is meant for the more advanced vocalist and pianist. They not only have a rich traditional history, but also offer melodies and harmonies that challenge and encourage the performer to explore vocal music in a new and exciting way. Bartók’s folksong arrangements range in appropriateness from beginning to advanced, yet all encourage a student’s heightened artistry at any level. However, these arrangements are rarely included as part of recital programming and song literature texts. Part of the reason for this disregard may be unfamiliarity with the cultural implications presented in the texts.

In order to achieve a successful performance of these settings, it is important for the singer to know and understand the cultural characteristics that are specific to the texts. A knowledge of the Magyar and their history and customs is needed to provide the performer all the information required to portray the stories of the Magyar effectively.

The meanings of these texts have not yet been investigated in detail as they relate to their musical settings. Of the writings and studies conducted on these folk song arrangements, the majority explore the compositional and theoretical aspects of Bartók’s songs. Although it is important to understand the theoretical components, proper knowledge of the Magyar culture as reflected in the texts is essential to a realistic rendering of the arrangements. The purpose of this document is to explore Hungarian history and culture in relation to Bartók’s first volume of the *Twenty Hungarian*
Folksongs, “Szomorú nóták”, and find correlations between the texts and the method of composition. This information will provide the performer with all the information needed to present an historically informed and meaningful performance of “Szomorú nóták”.

Unfortunately, when investigating the history of Europe and Eastern Europe in the early Twentieth Century the issues of racism and ethnic cleansing arise. The sense of growing nationalism throughout individual countries encouraged cultures to increase their pride as well as heighten their view of themselves as superior to other races. Although there is mention of the national movement within Hungary, the focus of this document does not focus on its effects.²

Chapter 2
Literature Review

The compositions of Béla Bartók have been influential in both musical and historical circles. Bartók’s obsession with the folksong and its preservation aided in the establishment of a new field of study - ethnomusicology. Bartók served as an ethnomusicologist by collecting, preserving and analyzing his data. His theoretical ideas pertaining to the composition of music have been studied by many. Most of the works that have been critically studied are his instrumental works. Although these works provide irreplaceable insight into his compositional process, they do not deliver a complete picture of the composer. His most vivid passion was the cultural and musical value of Magyar folksong. As a result, it is imperative to look at the vocal folksong arrangements to form a complete understanding of the man. Bartók not only prized the musical value of the melodies that he spent much of his life collecting, but also the history and culture contained in the texts.

A large part of the research available on Bartók’s works is dedicated to the musical analysis and how the folksongs are integrated and used compositionally. There is very little that explores the relationship between the accompaniment and the text. Although there has been research on the settings of folk melodies with texts included, the focus of such studies is on the musical features, discounting the text as influential to the composition or the meaning.
In 2006, Yu-Young Lee completed her dissertation, *Béla Bartók’s Eight Hungarian Folk Songs*. Her purpose was to “explore the authentic folk characteristics of the Hungarian tunes, and to show how Bartók is already beginning to draw these melodic structures into his own original style.”\(^3\) The discussion was only on the music and lacked any connection to the text. Although it is important to understand how Bartók began to use folk melodic structures in his compositions, it is also imperative that the motivation be understood: his love of the unique culture of the Magyar. An understanding of the relationship between the text and music is essential.

Other monographs exist, such as Vera Lampert’s *Folk Music in Bartók’s Compositions: A Source Catalog*, that gives a detailed look at the melodies Bartók used in his compositions.\(^4\) This collection, while a detailed resource, does not cover the historical and cultural relevance of these songs contain. There is no discussion of the texts other than from whence they came and the melody with which they were originally paired.

Few extended studies deal specifically with *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs*. Mention and praise of these songs may be found within comprehensive studies of his complete works, describing the collection as “the emancipation of the folksong arrangement within the realm of original composition”\(^5\) and “a living museum to Bartók’s devotion to the peasants.”\(^6\) The only comprehensive study of *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs*

Folkskongs is an article by Hugo Leichtentritt entitled “Bartók and the Hungarian Folk-Song” published in 1933. Leichtentritt describes the songs as: many charming, expressive, fantastic, and novel traits, that they deserve the attention of progressive musicians. And their strangeness and complexity invite some sort of commentary to explain their structure and also the characteristic methods employed in the piano accompaniment…Its aim is not to find the simplest and the most direct solution of the problem, but on the contrary, the most unexpected, interesting and complex manner of accompanying the popular tune.\(^7\)

In other words, his purpose is to look at the compositional aspects, disregarding their relevance to the text. A brief description is then given of each song; some as long as a few paragraphs while others are afforded a mere sentence or two. Within each description, only the melodic and harmonic aspects of the accompaniment are discussed, with no mention of the text.

In 1992, The Journal of Musicology Research published an article by Ingrid Arauco in which she discusses “The Method of Translation in Bartók’s Twenty Hungarian Folksongs.”\(^8\) Arauco articulates a brilliant study of the differences between Bartók’s settings and the traditional Lied that have been so popular as a form. She argues that “Bartók’s arrangements provide this context by mediating between the folk and art traditions…the arrangements may have allowed Bartók an opportunity to experiment with new musical materials while remaining explicitly faithful to his artistic heritage.”\(^9\) A detailed analysis is then provided of two of the songs from the set, “A Tömlöcber”, and

\(^7\) Hugo Leichtentritt. “Bartók and the Hungarian Folk-Song,” Modern Music: A Quarterly Review 10, no. 3 (1933), 130.

\(^8\) “Translation” in this case having to do with how the original melody forms are preserved in Bartók’s settings. Not the actual translation of the text. Ingrid Arauco, “Methods of Translation in Bartók’s Twenty Hungarian Folksongs,” Journal of Musicological Research 12 (1992).

\(^9\) Ibid, 207.
“Szekely ‘Lassú’”, the focus being on Bartók’s handling of the melody. Although the
text is not central to Arauco’s study, she does make the point that:

Folk melody itself, especially of the most ancient variety, is similarly
devoid of word-painting. The collective origins of folk poetry and
song allowed Bartók a certain detachment from his material – that is,
a release from the moment-to-moment directives of personal emotion.
Rather, emphasis is placed on projecting the universal feelings
inherent in the tune.\(^\text{10}\)

While the melodies may be void of emotion, the texts offer emotional insight. As a
result, Bartók expresses something that is much bigger than himself, the feelings of an
entire nation or communities within that nation. In understanding the history of the texts
and the people from which they were collected, Bartók infuses a unique historical
empathy of a nation with a melody that could otherwise be considered bland.

Numerous studies have been conducted that look at the treatment of rhythm and
meter in Bartók’s oeuvre. These include writings by Frigyesi,\(^\text{11}\) Csilla,\(^\text{12}\) Leong,\(^\text{13}\)
Roeder,\(^\text{14}\) and Vikárius.\(^\text{15}\) Parlando rubato, which is a type of rhythm particular to this
study, was explored in Bartók’s opera, Bluebeard’s Castle, but the principles behind the
findings can be applied to the Twenty Hungarian Folksongs.\(^\text{16}\)

There are have been a few comprehensive studies on the works of Béla Bartók
and his style. László Somfai published a book called Béla Bartók: Composition,

\(^{10}\) Ibid, 208.
\(^{11}\) Judit Frigyesi, “Between Rubato and Rigid Rhythm: A Particular Type of Rhythmical Asymmetry as
Reflected in Bartók’s Writing on Folk Music,” Studia Musicologica 24, no. 3–4 (1982).
\(^{12}\) Csilla Pintér, “Questions On the Autonomy of Rhythm in Bartók’s Writings,” Magyar zene 40, no. 2
(2002).
\(^{13}\) Daphne Leong, “Bartók’s Studies of Folk Rhythm: A Widow into His Own Practice,” Acta Musicologica
76, no. 2 (2004).
\(^{14}\) John Roeder, “Rhythmic Process and Form in Bartók’s ‘Syncopation’,” College Music Symposium 44
(2004).
\(^{15}\) László Vikárius, “Rhythmic and Metric Fifths in the Works of Bartók,” Magyar zene 41, no. 2 (May
2003).
\(^{16}\) Csilla Pintár and Boldizsár Fejérvári. “The Significance of the Varieties of Parlando-Rubato in the
Concepts, and Autograph Sources in which he discusses Bartók’s compositional process through study of his sketches, autographs, and sources. Another such source is Malcolm Gillies’ article “Bartók Analysis and Authenticity.” Although both of these sources provide invaluable information about the composer and his works, neither mention Twenty Hungarian Folksongs in anything other than a list of his compositions.

Chapter 3
Methodology

By studying the historical implications of the texts, it is possible to understand Bartók’s musical choices and how performers should portray the songs. Researching the history of the Hungarian nation will create an informed historical perception of the people from which these songs were collected. The methods that Bartók used to accomplish the preservation of his heritage provide insight to his compositional decisions.

In order to accomplish this, I have visited the Bartók Archivum in Budapest, Hungary and conducted an analysis of the scores. While in Budapest, I spent over a week studying autograph copies of the sketches and drafts of the Twenty Hungarian Folksongs. Also having access to unpublished documents concerning the work as well as biographical information on Bartók was helpful in my research. I also investigated the historical and cultural aspects by visiting museums and exploring the city.

Studying Bartók’s essays, letters, and other writings have shown Bartók’s collection method as well as further history of the texts and how they were incorporated in his accompaniments. The focus will be on the first volume of Twenty Hungarian Folksongs, “Szomorú nótá”.

9
Chapter 4

Béla Bartók Biography

For purposes of this study, a brief account of Bartók’s life will be given with particular attention to his dedication to folk song. Among his many musical endeavors, preserving the heritage of his people was of paramount importance. This resulted in global awareness of Hungarian folksong, and legitimized their use in concert settings.

On March 25, 1881 in Nagysentimiklós, Hungary (modern day Sînnoclau Mare, Romania), Béla Viktor János Bartók was born to Béla Bartók and Paula Voit. Through much of his childhood, the younger Bartók suffered from many illnesses that kept him homebound and prevented his participating in activities and developing relationships with peers. After his father’s death in 1888, the Bartók family relocated numerous times, finally settling in Pozsony, Hungary (modern day Bratislava in Slovakia). In 1899 he enrolled in the Budapest Academy of Music, studying piano and composition. During the years at the academy, his sense of nationalism increased as he became more politically active. Exposure to popular folksong furthered his pride and was musically inspirational. In the year of his graduation, 1903, Bartók wrote the Kossuth Symphonic Poem, one of the first of his compositions inspired by folksong. Based on the ill-fated

\[19 \text{ As discussed in the introduction, the subject of nationalism and its effects on the social atmospheres in Europe are discussed further in this document, nor condoned by the author. Refer to footnote number two for further information on the subject.} \]

\[20 \text{ The folksong mentioned here is in reference to “gypsy song,” which is elaborated upon later.} \]
revolution led by Louis Kossuth, Bartók combined the “new but dissonant harmonic novelties of Richard Strauss with the Hungarianism of Franz Liszt.”

Bartók attempted to establish a career as a solo pianist, but was unsuccessful. Although an accomplished artist, the standards to which he held himself were often unattained and he was unable to cope with the critics’ remarks. He was appointed Professor of Piano in 1907 at the Budapest Academy of Music, where he continued composing and began adding folk song elements into his music. Despite his enthusiasm, the pieces created during this time were not very successful in Hungary or in Europe. He became discouraged and quit writing for a time. These years of disillusionment and withdrawal are often known as his “hermit” years. Although there was little musical output, this time was extremely important to the development of Bartók as a composer. His focus began to shift to the study and collection of folksongs.

In 1904 Bartók’s imagination was captured by the melodies of the Hungarian peasantry. In an interview given for a radio broadcast in Budapest in 1933, Bartók explains a specific event and how it influenced him as a composer:

> To be quite frank, until I was twenty-three, I believed what so many of you still do or once did, that only this kind of Hungarian folk song existed. But then, in 1904, I grew bored with this excessively known material. I began to wonder whether it was true that really no other Hungarian folk songs existed; whether the simple country folk didn’t know airs which we city-dwellers hadn’t heard of. Taking advantage of an opportunity that just happened to come along, I listened to Lidi Dósa, a Székely peasant girl, sing. At once I jotted down five or six songs, all completely unknown melodies, and what’s more, melodies which were entirely different from the known city-type Hungarian songs. This first experiment showed the way to

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23 “gypsy” songs
endless possibilities: I decided to follow this road after adequate preparation. First of all, I had to find out whether any collecting had been done in this field earlier. Even in the best of folks-song collections published until now such as Bartalus’ seven volumes, the city and the country songs are presented in a great muddle, and taken down deficiently, which is obvious at first sight. There are hardly more than a few hundred peasant songs among them. But soon it turned out the Béla Vikár had for years been dedicated to the collection of country songs. Vikár, unfamiliar with score copying, used a phonograph to record the tunes; up till 1904 he had collected about a thousand melodies this way. It also came to light that Zoltán Kodály, whom I met around this time, was also working in this field. The three of us and many others in our wake set out for the unknown, and discovered the true folk music of Hungary.24

A letter to his sister Elza reflects the impact of this introduction to peasant folksong.

Bartók proclaimed, “[n]ow I have a new plan: to collect the finest Hungarian folksongs and to raise them, adding the best possible piano accompaniments, to the level of art song.”25 Bartók was, at the time, in the Hungarian resort town of Gerlicepuszta where he was escaping life and recuperating from the stress of the city. His hearing of Lidi exponentially changed his musical philosophies and shifted his focus from the Western European style to the seemingly simple music of his homeland. Bartók’s passion created an avenue for the legitimization of folk-music in the classical realm of music.

The relationship between Bartók and Zoltán Kodály began in 1905 in the salon of Emma Gruber (Kodály’s future wife). Although they had both attended the Academy at the same time, their paths had not crossed. Their shared passion for the preservation and analysis of folksong provided a basis for their friendship. Kodály, who was in the process of completing his thesis on the stanzic structure of Hungarian folksong,26 was

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26 Ibid, 52.
able to share his wisdom and methods on the matter with Bartók. Their friendship led to Bartók’s introduction to Béla Vikár, who was one of the first to use the phonograph when collecting songs. A year after their introduction, Bartók began incorporating the phonograph in his own expeditions in an effort to help organize and obtain the information reliably.

In an effort to educate the public, both Bartók and Kodály petitioned for support in accomplishing a “scientifically precise and complete collection of folksongs.” This eventually led to a joint publication of a volume of twenty folksong arrangements for voice and piano at the end of 1906. The purpose of the volume was to defuse the idea of ‘popular’ Hungarian folksong, or gypsy songs, as the musical heritage of the Hungarians, and promote the genuine music of the Magyar.

Eventually, Bartók’s interests expanded beyond the Magyar songs. Both he and Kodály, as they analyzed their collections, realized that Magyar songs contain influences of outlying peoples. In order to distinguish characteristics between the regions, they began exploring the areas surrounding Hungary.

Between 1911 and the World War, under the spell of comparative musical folklore, he explored great distances geographically. He made preparations to go to Russia for research into the folk music of the Finno-Ugric tribes, whose language was related to the Hungarians, and to go to Romania, to the Moldovan Csángó people, the group of Hungarians who had lived on the outer side of the Carpathians since the Middle Ages and had preserved archaic elements in their language and their art. His feverish folkloristic comings and goings, his correspondence and petitioning in the matter of folk song collecting and publication was partly a compensation and reparation which filled the compositional void.

27 Ibid, 53.
28 Although the term “gypsy” is now considered a racial slur, Bartók used this term in many of his writings and talks. Because this is how he refers to a specific type of what he calls impure folksong the remainder of the document will use Bartók’s word choice.
29 Tibor Tallián, Béla Bartók: The Man and His Works (Budapest; Corvina: 1981), 90.
In 1917, during the height of World War I, Bartók was finally given recognition as a composer. His ballet, *The Wooden Prince*, was an instant success and led to the production of his opera, *Blue Beard’s Castle*. Due to the success of these productions, Universal Edition of Vienna offered to publish Bartók’s works.

At the end of the war, Bartók briefly served as musical advisor to the Communist government of Béla Kun, and lost favor with the conservative governors of Hungary. As a result, Bartók began seeking international performance opportunities.30

He continued to travel whenever possible, although “[a]lmost every one of Bartόk’s collecting expeditions ended in physical collapse and illness. Yet still he went, because regardless of other considerations, in the villages he found the release that did not exist for him in the city.”31 Unable to travel in the years after the Austro-Hungarian collapse, Bartók devoted himself to the analysis of folksong that had been collected. In 1921, he began compiling *The Hungarian Folksong*, a massive volume of collected folksong. The volume, published in 1924, outlined the method for which each song was categorized and its properties. He expounded upon the definition of true ‘folksong’ and detailed the unique attributes of the different areas from which each melody was collected.

Touring as a pianist in the 1920s allowed Bartók to experience many different countries and cultures. He toured most of Western Europe as well as the United States, and the Soviet Union. The programs performed offered many of his original compositions and as a result, demand for copies increased in other countries. His travels

30 Gillies, p. 5.
31 Tallián, p. 93.
also inspired him to compose works such as, *Allegro Barbaro*, *Dance Suite*, and *Romanian Folk Dances* as well as some string quartets.

After ten years of touring and composing, Bartók’s focus returned to the folksong. Transcription and analysis of field collections dominated his time and energies. He conducted very few expeditions to the countryside, but concentrated on the transcription and organization of the gathered information. In 1934, Bartók accepted a new position as ethnomusicologist and composer at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Tensions began mounting in Europe in the late 1930s as a second world war threatened. Bartók considered emigrating and sent his most valuable manuscripts out of the country.\(^{32}\) Not until the death of his mother in December 1939, was he willing to leave Europe. He came to the United States in 1940 where he was able to perform and accepted a position at Columbia University in New York. There he was tasked with analyzing and categorizing Serbo-Croatian folk materials. Although now removed from the escalating situation in Europe, he longed to return to his homeland in order to “save [his] life[’s] work; the collection of many records of Hungarian folk-music.”\(^{33}\) On November 25, 1940, Columbia University awarded Bartók an honorary Doctor of Music.

In 1942, Bartók became ill and was unable to continue his work. After he was diagnosed with leukemia and received treatment he was able to complete his work with the Serbo-Croatian folk-music and compose some final works. He died in New York on September 26, 1945 at the age of sixty-four. Though he never returned to Hungary, the work that he accomplished helped to bring global attention to the value and validity of the cultural songs of the Magyar.

\(^{32}\) Gillies, p. 7.  
Chapter 5

The History of the Magyar

In order to understand the texts of the Twenty Hungarian Folksongs, it is imperative to be familiar with the history and culture of the Magyars. Since folk songs are songs of the people, or peasants, understanding their way of life, livelihood, beliefs, folklore, and history allows for a genuine presentation of these songs. As a singer it is essential that the text be portrayed accurately and in a meaningful way in which the audiences are able to share. An in-depth study is not necessary, but a brief overview will provide knowledge of the Magyar’s past experiences. This information will give the singer insight into how the songs are meant to be sung, whether tongue-in-cheek, with sarcasm, double meaning, or literal interpretation. It also keeps the singer true to the intensity of intended emotion. The history of the Magyars through present day will not be discussed, only from their settlement in the Carpathian valley through their establishment as an independent nation. This will present a general overview of the conditions of the peasantry up to the time in which Bartók began collecting.

Before the Magyars settled in the Carpathian Basin, the area was a dividing point between two powerful empires; the Romans and the Chinese. About the time that the Roman general, Julius Ceasar conquered Gaul (modern-day France), the Chinese defeated the Hun empire, forcing them to travel west.
With the decline of Rome, their troops began to retreat from East-Central Europe, which left the Carpathian Basin free of opposition and a prime land in which to settle. Tribes from all directions began to migrate and assimilate in the area. The resulting group became known as the Magyars. The Magyars are an intermingling of two major people groups, the Turkic and the Finno-Ugrians. Characteristics of each have strengthened and developed the society into a culture that is still in existence. The Hungarian language is a result of the combination of the two cultures. While holding to its basic Finnish roots, the language is enriched with Turkic elements and words, particularly those having to do with husbandry, politics, and military. Being of nomadic origins, the Magyars sought to establish themselves as an independent nation as well as a strong and powerful entity. When the Magyars first arrived in the Basin, they had many opposing nations also vying for the land - the Byzantine Empire and the Eastern peoples of Asia. With the purpose of holding their position and claiming their national independence, seven tribes were forced to unite under one leader, Árpád, from the largest tribe, Magyar. In order to legitimize their agreement, all of the tribal leaders cut themselves and let their blood fall into a single vessel. Mixing their blood solidified their loyalty to one another as well as the recognition of a single leader. This pact strengthened the Magyars and they were able to defeat their enemies, establishing a permanent nation in the Carpathian Basin. Before this, no single regime that occupied the area survived.

Once settled in 895, the tribes established themselves as an extremely disciplined, militant people. The Magyar nation was comprised of seven individual tribes; the Magyars (meaning “men”), the Nyék (“enclosed or fortified place”), the Kürt-Gyarmat (“snowstorm” or “indefatigable”), the Tarjan (“name of a certain high office”), the Jenő
“councilor”), the Kér (“giant”), and the Keszi (“remnant” or “part”). The tribe of Magyar was the largest and was thus the name under which all others fell. They united under one rule, and “[t]hey believed in the super-natural mission of their ruler and his successor.”

Being a strong military power, many of the surrounding nations feared and respected them. Leo the Wise of the Byzantine Empire visited the area and said: “[t]his people abounds in men and is independent. Aside from their love of pomp and abundant life, their chief aim is to fight bravely against any invader.”

The ruler of the tribes, Árpád, was given the most central location within their borders, Buda. The other tribes encircled the area creating protection from all directions. To this day, Buda (now Budapest) remains the capitol of Hungary.

In the ninth century, the religious influences of the European peoples began to shift. The pagan beliefs of the people and the government moved toward Christianity. In an attempt to spread the gospel to the world, countries such as Germany and Saxony sought to conquer lands inundated with pagans. The Magyar were superstitious and believed that their origins could be traced to a mystical animal. As such, they were categorized as “heathen” and suffered onslaught and war as Christianity spread. The wars were violent and eventually lead to the Cluny movement, which idealized human brotherhood. This allowed any country that proclaimed the faith to be left in peace. In an attempt to retain their independence, Prince Géza, the great grandson of Árpád, attempted the introduction of the Christian faith into the pagan tribes. He believed that their success was dependent upon the assimilating to Christianity. Although his

motivations were purely political, his son Stephen was raised a devout Catholic and led the country in this faith when he rose to power.

For three hundred years the bloodline of Árpád ruled and established Hungary as an influential part of European history. After the death of the last Árpád heir, political instability occurred. The feudal lords became “little kings,” no longer under one rule. For years they feuded until the Catholic Pope finally named Charles Robert, of the house of Anjous, the king of Hungary. His family ruled for nearly eighty years. At the end of the Anjous reign, the Turks sought to conquer Hungary, causing many problems. Later, during the Renaissance, under the rule of King Matthias, Hungary began the abolition of the feudal system, creating autonomous rights and independence for the serfs. Along with the Turks, another growing Western power threatened Hungary’s independence, the Hapsburgs. Matthias wrote of Frederick, the Hapsburg emperor, saying, “[w]hen it comes to power and authority, we are in no wise subservient to him, being his equal to such an extent that we do not fear him nor shall we ever fear him.”

With Matthias’ unexpected death in 1490, the Turks were finally able to invade and destroy the borders of the Magyar districts. Slavic and Wallachian shepherds were then able to infiltrate and settle within the Hungarian borders.

The Magyar people spent one hundred and fifty years under Turkish occupation of the eastern part of the country, while the Hapsburgs continued their effort to conquer of the west. Despite the Hungarian’s fight to hold on to their independence, in 1526 they lost a pivotal battle and the Turks took complete rule of eastern Hungary. The Hapsburgs did not relinquish their hold on the western areas and conflict ensued for hundreds of years.

36 Ibid, 75.
In 1711, the Treaty of Szatmár was signed that promised constitutional and religious freedom to the Magyar people. Its signing signified the beginning of an era of recovery for the Hungarians. The country had been ravaged by both the Ottoman and the Turks and as a result, numerous non-Magyars now occupied the country. Basic economic troubles as well as the desolation of a culture over a three hundred year span was a result of the occupation that preceded the treaty. No government existed within the state of Hungary, so they were dependent upon Central Europe for stability until they were able to regain their strength as a nation. Under the reign of Maria Theresa, beginning in 1740, the Hungarians were finally able to reestablish themselves as a distinct country. Despite their “freedom”, restrictions of national expression began to regulate their society. Magyars were limited on where and when they could use their own language. An Englishman passing through in 1825 commented to the Magyars that, “[y]our freedom gentlemen, is a joke. You fight for the use of your own language. Even wild tribes can boast of that right through nature.”

Although Hungary was able to restore its economic stability, the reforms excluded the peasantry. The rural areas of the country remained poor, isolated, and forgotten. Their lives evolved around herding and agriculture. This situation continued for most of the nineteenth century. Although this was unfortunate for the peasants, the isolation ensured that folk-music and culture were preserved for generations.

Stephen Széchenyi, a young aristocrat, did much of the protesting against current policies and aroused the people to cry out for reform. Between 1830 and 1835 he published three book-length essays that expounded upon his social and political views and related them to the Hungarian condition. “He pointed out that nine million peasants,
‘the most numerous part of the population and that deserving the chief attention,’ were patiently carrying every burden, though they were ‘the provider and hope’ of the nation.” 38 As a result of his efforts, laws were passed that reshaped and strengthened the Hungarian nation as a whole, as well as encouraged pride in its language and heritage. Other revolutionaries, such as Louis Kossuth, expanded the ideas and methods by which Széchenyi sought to bring change. “[B]ills passed in 1848 did no more than transform Hungary…from a feudal into a democratic state, assuring it a form of government of a Western European character.” 39 Along with a democratic form of government, the peasantry saw the provision of social reform carried out through the promise of more economic and social equality within the classes.

Despite the apparent win of the Hungarians’ efforts, the Hapsburgs were not willing to relinquish their hold. As the two countries sought to work out their differences tension rose, and in 1848 revolution resulted. On April 14, 1849 the Declaration of Independence was approved resulting in a war between the Hapsburgs and Hungary. Russia eventually stepped into the conflict to help resolve the situation. Regardless of the Hungarians’ will and spirit, they were defeated and surrendered to the Russians in the hopes that they might serve as mediators. Russia was not helpful, and the Magyar were, again, placed under Austrian rule. The grip of the oppressor tightened discouraging those who would seek to revolt again. They were no longer allowed their independence and were assimilated into what became known as the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In 1914 the First World War began. Hungary was thrown into this conflict, even though it was not part of the problem, and forced to fight for a country it loathed.

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38 Ibid, 192.
39 Ibid, 223.
Geographically, Hungary remained untouched by the war, but the effects devastated any political and economic progress they had made in previous years. After the war, Hungary was liberated from the defeated Austrians. As the peace talks proceeded it was evident that Hungary was considered to be on the enemy’s side. Through much debate and explanation, the Magyar were able to convince the Allied Powers that they were completely against the Austrians. On November 16, 1918, the Hungarian Republic was established, and the Magyars were finally granted independence after much sacrifice, blood, and grief. This freedom was limited in that after the war, the winning powers divided up control of Eastern Europe in order to retain peace.

Borders left unprotected and ideas of pacifism predominant in Magyar ideology resulted in the dismemberment of the Hungarian army, despite being surrounded by anxious enemies that wished to occupy the Carpathian Basin. The Communist Red regime took power for a year, which the majority of the population resisted. On July 31, 1919, having failed to retain power, the Communist leader, Béla Kun, handed over the governing reigns to the Socialists and fled the country. Hungary, although technically under French occupation according to the Allied Powers agreement, sought to politically reorganize. The socialist party eventually took over and Hungary was again led unwillingly into another World War in which they had no personal conflict. After World War II, the Russians gained control of Hungary, returning it to Communist rule. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Communist rule. In 1984 Hungary won its independence and became a free nation, once again declaring itself a republic.
Reviewing the Magyar’s history gives one an understanding of Hungarian heritage which is riddled with glories as well as defeats. They established themselves as a strong nation, able to unite and assimilate seven tribes as a necessary method for survival. These seven tribes remained a single unit for over a thousand years. Geographically, they occupy lands that separate the East from the West. The great powers on either side fought to control the Basin in hopes of expanding their rule. That was never Hungary’s purpose. When the Hungarians conquered surrounding nations, they never tried to integrate those cultures into their own; instead, they allowed the peoples to retain their identities. When conquered by the Turks and later by the Hapsburgs, the Magyar fought ceaselessly to regain their stability and independence. It was a lengthy battle, yet the Magyars are finally considered to be an independent nation after four hundred and thirty years. The Hungarians are a resilient people who will fight to stay where they first settled in 895 and retain their independence. Their lives have been filled with sorrow, but they maintain their pride in nation and culture.
Chapter 6
Folksong

When considering the history of Western music, the reason for the omission of folk music as “high art” is evident. Generally speaking, music composed and performed for the gentry, nobility, and royalty is the music that has been studied and historically appreciated. What was then considered “peasant music”, or folk music, was viewed as a vulgar and simplistic form of expression. Those who were uneducated could not possibly create music of merit. What facets of folksong excited and inspired Bartók to devote his life to its study and preservation? “It cannot be denied that the impulse to begin folk song research, as well as any folklore science in general, is attributable to the awakening of national feeling. The discovery of values of folklore and folk music excited the national pride, and as there were no means whatever for comparison at the outset, members of each nation were convinced that the possession of such treasures was their only particular privilege.”40 During the turn of the twentieth century, a pride in one’s country and its unique qualities began to pervade European sentiment. Bartók was not excluded from this movement; rather he was an extremely active Hungarian nationalist.

Bartók became actively nationalistic after serving as a piano accompanist and soloist for the Hungarian Millennium celebrations (his first public

performance) in 1896, as well as the fiftieth anniversary of the 1848 Revolution. The festivities of the Millennium celebrations, which included traditional clothing, Hungarian cuisine, and commissioned art works, honored and commemorated the first Hungarian tribes to settle in the Carpathian Basin in 896.\textsuperscript{41} This was a celebration, but also a political statement. The Magyar people longed for their freedom and resented the oppression of the Austrians on their culture and society. The Millennium event was a way in which the Hungarian people could subtly revolt against the oppression by celebrating their distinctive roots and traditions.

The Germanic ideology, held by the Austrians, permeated the lifestyle of many Hungarians during this time and heavily influenced the Budapest Academy. A number of the Hungarian Academy professors primarily spoke in German rather than their native tongue. While attending the Academy, Bartók felt that “German was the language of Austria, the oppressor, [and] a hindrance to Hungary’s development and its hope for eventual independence.”\textsuperscript{42} Bartók became very involved with the Chauvinist movements\textsuperscript{43} and proudly proclaimed his love of all things Magyar. In his final performance as a music student, he wore the traditional Hungarian suit, despite his friends’ disapproval, to showcase publically his national pride.\textsuperscript{44}

During his time of intense chauvinistic nationalism, Bartók discovered the impact of folk music on his national pride. Bartók viewed the Hungarian folk song as superior in musical and aesthetic quality. He also understood the implications of class distinctions

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{43} During the Magyarization of Hungary, Magyar became the dominate language and was used in legal and social matters. Anything that was not Magyar was considered to be unacceptable. This isolated non-Hungarians as they were forced to comply with a language not their own. The Chauvinists were the ones that supported and furthered the Magyarization. This movement was the cause of racial issues in Hungary.
\textsuperscript{44} Hooker, p. 18.
and the inability of the peasants to receive an education, yet exposure to the songs of their
culture as children provides a solid musical foundation. Bartók said:

[w]ork and study, work and study, and again, work and study. Then
we may achieve something. For we’re in a surprisingly favourable
position, compared with other nations, in regard to our folk-music.
From what I know of the folk-music of other nations, ours is vastly
superior to theirs as regards force of expression and variety. If a
peasant with the ability to compose tunes like the one enclosed [the
music examples have since been lost] had but emerged from this class
during childhood and acquired an education, he would assuredly have
created some outstanding works of great value. Unfortunately it is
rare for a Hungarian peasant to go in for a scholarly profession.
[Therefore, since our intelligentsia comes, almost exclusively, from
foreign stock] A real Hungarian music can originate only if there is a

Although, patriotism fueled Bartók’s desire to reflect Hungarian culture in his
music, it was the simple song of a girl that made him aware of the musical value of the
pure Hungarian folksong. These melodies were full of new harmonic possibilities and
soundly constructed music of high quality. In contrast, the popular “gypsy” songs were
simple, unimaginative, and dull. In a radio broadcast in Budapest, Bartók offered his
definition of “gypsy” music:

I beg your forgiveness if in my reading I happen to disappoint the
expectations of the majority of you. I see fit to state right at the very
beginning that the subject of my reading is not that part of the
Hungarian song stock known as “gypsy music” which you know so
excellently and even much better than I. As to the latter, I would only
like to remark that it is called gypsy music erroneously, because the
gypsies do not compose these well-known songs themselves, only
perform them. They are composed mostly by music-loving
Hungarian gentry such as, for example, Szentirmay, Simonfy, Fráter,
and the audience is predominantly gentry as well. None of them are
old pieces, their date of writing being within the last hundred and odd
years. I couldn’t quite tell the exact number of these airs; they can
hardly outnumber a thousand or so. Both you and I know these airs
well from our childhood; in most cases we even know who composed them; there’s not much to be studied in them. The only regrettable thing is that so far no publishing company had undertaken to bring out the whole material in an authentic collection.46

Songs that had been composed and elaborated upon by the gypsies became popular and were considered genuine. Bartók claimed that this is not the way in which the public should identify themselves culturally through music. He desired that his people be corrected in their thinking and taught their true musical heritage.

Bartók’s nationalism was a strong motivator in his quest for the Hungarian folksong, yet other events in his life also helped to guide him. Upon hearing Lidi’s simple song, he was inspired as a composer. In an interview with Dezső Kosztolányi in 1925, Bartók explains the influence that the Hungarian songs, and folk music in general, had on his works:

However – I think – knowledge of folk songs is even more important in music [than in literature], because folk songs can be better integrated with music. I mean that peasant music continually inspires the composer. Do not imagine that we are thinking of the transplantation, the assimilation, the annexation of peasant music into the classical musical inheritance. No, no. We think that peasant music gives our music its character. Furthermore, if one hears songs from peasants in their original environment, one understands them much better; they inspire him much more than if he were familiar with them only from written collections or recordings. The atmosphere also affects us. Foreigners have also written a lot about the role of folk music in our music. But more recently – especially in America – they are spreading the (in my opinion incorrect) idea that reliance on folk music is harmful.47

Bartók believed that the folksong should be highly valued and used as a tool to enhance and individualize classical music.

47 Dezső Kosztolányi, Béla Bartók, (Budapest, 1995), 230.
Along with his enthusiasm for educating the public on the difference between genuine folksong and gypsy song, Bartók also wanted to explore the differences between the music of the Magyar and the surrounding areas. The countries of Eastern Europe are small and close together. Due to wars and occupations, the borders have changed multiple times. Because of this, the possibility of influence of the individual cultures, languages, and music exists. In an essay entitled, “Race Purity in Music,” Bartók discusses these differences and their importance. He states:

From the very beginning [of the expeditions] I have been amazed by the extraordinary wealth of melody types existing in the territory under investigation in Eastern Europe. As I pursued my research, this amazement increased. In view of the comparatively small size of the countries – numbering forty to fifty million people – the variety in folk music is really marvelous! It is still more remarkable when compared with the peasant music of other more or less remote regions, for instance North Africa, where the Arab peasant music presents so much less variety.  

There is a definite difference in the melodies, scales, and structure of the Magyar people and neighboring areas. These distinctions are important in identifying the individual cultures. In 1937, Bartók gave a lecture in Amsterdam that acknowledged some of these differences and explained the importance of the ability to distinguish between the different countries’ melodies.

I should like to stress at once that we East Europeans use the term folk music not quite in the sense customary in Western Europe. Here, in your country (Holland) and in the rest of the Western countries those melodies are called folk music whose composers are unknown, and which, descending from generation to generation in every stratum of the people enjoy a certain prevalence in time and area. As it turned out many of these songs were variants or ‘zersengene’ (distorted) forms, of the poems or melodies of composers known by the name, it is presumed that the origin of the rest of them is similar, although

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their authors are unknown. Viewed from its aspect the Germans like
to call this corpus of melodies ‘submerged cultural goods’.
The foregoing definition, naturally is also fitting for East European
folk music. However, if we speak of East European folk music in a
stricter sense of the term we have to narrow down this concept in two
directions. In this instance we must add various supplements to the
definition … Firstly: in the narrower sense of the term, from the
foregoing definition we consider as folk music only those songs
which represent a homogenous style. Clearly the homogenous style is
the logical consequence of the variational instinct living in certain
members of the community. That here it is not a matter of submerged
cultural goods in the modern sense of the term under discussion,
which sank from some higher stratum of the people to a lower one, is
certain. Incidentally speaking, social stratification in ancient times
was quite likely far less pronounced, and probably for this reason it is
not possible that the art of the people varied conformity with the
social stratification. Today – and for centuries past – this has not
been the case, not even in Eastern Europe. For this reason we must
narrow down the concept of the ‘folk’ that is, we must replace it with
the concept of the ‘peasant class’. We use the term peasant class to
describe the lowest stratum of the people, that community which
labour, and which, in keeping with its art spontaneously … Strictly
speaking for a long time there has been no folk music in the narrower
sense of the term in Western Europe according to our concept. Many
centuries ago, before the ascendancy of the submerged cultural goods,
this kind of music must have existed there too, but the sporadic
records do not give us an adequate picture of it.49

Each country in Eastern Europe, although closely neighbored, has retained its heritage
through the tradition of song passed down through generations. Variations of style within
the cultures allow native composers to be unique to their particular people, making their
music truly Hungarian, or truly Romanian.

Bartók’s obsession with the folk song began with the pride he had in his country
and eventually developed into compositional inspiration. He was able to incorporate his
passion into his music, creating a genuine Hungarian sound that divorced the values of
Western tradition and allowed him to express himself as a Hungarian, rather than a

German-Hungarian. Expeditions into the countryside allowed him to explore small, secluded villages which brought him in touch with a simple world that held musical treasures. When nurtured and expanded, these melodies become magnificent works played in concert halls around the world.
Chapter 7

Process of Collection

One could and should disclose the ancient cultural connections of peoples who are now far from each other; one could clarify problems of settlement, history; one could point to the form of contact, to the relationship or contrast of the spiritual complexion of neighbouring nations. The analysis of these issues of this kind should be the ultimate aim of folk song research: if our young discipline will conscientiously serve this aim, whose practical interest is evident, it will be worthy of a place among its elders. Additionally, it will have the benefit that was the only one considered when research was begun: to offer pleasure to all those who still have a taste for wild flowers. I need not emphasize that this latter aim is better served by authentic publications than by folk music anthologies whose contents are ‘corrected’ and pruned according to the ‘rules of art’.  

Béla Bartók, one of the pioneers of ethnomusicology, believed that when collecting peasant songs it is important not only to preserve its original form, but also consider its surrounding influences. He understood that every culture surrounding the Magyar influenced their customs and music in one way or another, yet each holds their own unique style and characteristics. Expeditions into the country side to collect these treasures required a lot of Bartók’s time and energy. It is because of his efforts that there are archives and institutions dedicated to the preservation and study of Eastern European folk-music.

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The process of collecting works is tedious and requires much planning. One must first review previous collections and expeditions to see where information is lacking. If there are areas of the country that have not been explored, then those are the places to which one must go. It is also important to know which areas, although already having been researched, might still offer undiscovered treasures. Regions within the center of the country are more affluent with music than others. “The more promising villages are those in which less foreign or urban has been felt. A mining district, for instance, is an unsuitable area, because there is, so to speak, too much ‘tourist traffic’. Isolated villages to which there is little travel are the most favorable areas due to the fact that they have less interference from the outside world and their customs have been retained and unchanged for hundreds of years.

In his travels, Bartók often encountered resistance and distrust from the villagers. Having an outsider wanting to hear and record their music was strange and off-putting. Peasants accustomed to the village life rarely came in contact with strangers and were therefore are unlikely to share their ways of living. In some cases there were people who have been displaced or have moved from another village. Bartók says that although “[i]t is not expedient to record village people who are found in foreign places, such as domestics in the city, pedlars, and prisoners of war[, t]hose who have been torn away from their home may have lost contact with their village musical community to such an extent that their mode of performance changes.” Although these situations were not desired, they should not be ignored. The ideal collecting occurs in the village when other members are surrounding the performer. The other people often will provide corrections,

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52 Ibid
additions, and refreshments of memory. “The true spirit or inherent function of the songs can be observed only in their habitat…Here is an absolute restriction: it is not permitted to accept educated persons as informants.”

When Bartók began collecting, he would transcribe the melodies using pencil and paper. A metronome was used to ensure that the tempo recorded was as accurate as possible. After his introduction to another noted collector, Béla Vikár, his use of the phonograph became the dominant instrument for collections. Bartók quickly encouraged its use and advocated the phonograph as the only way in which to scientifically obtain the authentic rendition of the music. “No matter how experienced the collector is, certain fine details (cursory gliding tones, glissandi, subtle value relationships) cannot be notated. Another reason, moreover, is that these trifles – which at first seem imponderable – change with each presentation of the iterated melody: the principal tones are static, but the minute ornaments will differ every time.” This method also captured intonation, tone color, and language nuances that cannot be notated. Although collection by phonograph was preferred, on spot notation of the melodies was advisable in order to find discrepancies. Consumed with gathering the melodies accurately, Bartók took great care and pride in his collection method.

Upon entering a village, Bartók first sought out the elderly, who would remember the “old songs.” When asked to sing an old song, they often sing a popular tune that they consider old rather than the folksongs that were intended. Bartók found it useful to sing one of the tunes that had already been collected. This usually encouraged the person in question to either sing another variant of the melody or sing a different one altogether. Sometimes it was better to collect from a small group, rather than an individual due to

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53 Ibid
embarrassment of the performer in a one on one situation. Another tool used to encourage performance was the ability of the phonograph to play back immediately what was just recorded. The peasants were then able to hear themselves (introducing themselves as well as what they were singing) and able to interject jokes that others could hear and laugh. These playback sessions often drew a big audience, which in turn allowed for a greater volume of collection. When a performer, usually a woman, was convinced to sing, the initial song was usually inappropriate for the purpose of collection because of it being a “gypsy” song. In these cases, Bartók would pretend to take notes in attempt to bolster their confidence and in hopes of finding something useful later.54

“But however skilful or cunning we are, successful collecting – just the same as hunting – still depends very often on a stroke of chance whether a good catch will appear before the phonograph. For our precious old songs are teetering on the brink of disappearance!”55

The collection of the texts is a very important part of the collection process. Bartók encouraged the practice of notating the text separate from the recordings. This allowed him to make notes of dialect differences and as a means to compare the dictated performances for variances. It also gives the opportunity to record the strophes and syllables of each line accurately. It is the subtle differences in text, as well as ornamentations, that will identify the regional origin of a song.

Observing and collecting just the melodies and texts of folksong does not allow one to fully grasp the entire character and appreciation for the songs. In an essay entitled, “Why and How Do We Collect Folk Music?,” Bartók equates his process to that of a naturalist collecting bug specimens. They do not merely gather individual species, but

54 Ibid, 18.
55 Ibid
they also study habits and behaviors, which leads to a comprehensive understanding of the animal. In the same way, “[a]lthough we admit that the most minute description cannot restore to life that which is dead, it nevertheless recaptures some of the taste and fragrance of life and imparts it to the dead collection. Similar reasons direct the folk music collector to investigate in detail the conditions surrounding the real life of the melodies.”

Bartók recognized the importance of recording not only the songs, but information about the performers.

When possible, Bartók would interview a person in order to obtain personal information, as well as information about the songs they had sung for him. These questions allowed him to authenticate both the song and the performer’s knowledge thereof. Some of the questions included: “age, profession, education, has he been away from the village and, if so, where and for how long…was he drafted, and where and when did he serve…financial status…whether he is considered by the village people as a qualified performer…characteristics of the performer’s willingness and ability to perform…but, where, and from whom did he or she learn the song[, w]ho else is acquainted with it, a few, many, or all the village people[, w]hich is the favorite song, which is the least liked, and why,” what are the customs surrounding the song, if any, and by whom it is customarily sung.

Bartók also used a set of controls to assure that the melody was recorded with accuracy and without bias. He recommended the following:

To record a certain melody performed by a second, possibly a third singer or group of singers; [t]o record the same melody, after a lapse of several days, by the same singer or group of singers in order to determine whether the tempo, pitch, and so forth of each performance

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57 Ibid, 20.
differ and in what ways; to record the same melody performed by different singers of different ages; to record the same melody after a lapse of time, for instance, fifteen or twenty years later, in the same village: (1) from the same singers, as far as possible, (2) from singers of a younger generation\textsuperscript{58}.

Maintaining these guidelines ensured that variances in the melodies were captured and allowed Bartók to distinguish the most genuine, pure form of the song.

When collecting, the “folk song collector has many obligations.\textsuperscript{59}” Bartók tried to collect as much information on as many songs as he could, resulting in his physical and financial exhaustion. With so much information to obtain, he had to make quick decisions as to whether or not he desired more songs at the sacrifice of the background information or the comprehensiveness of the collection.

Once the songs were collected, Bartók tasked himself with organizing and categorizing the texts and melodies. He divided the Hungarian folksongs into three groups: old, new and mixed. Those melodies classified in the “old style” are melodies that are solely uniform throughout the Hungarian territory. Mainly characterized by their anhemitonic pentatonic scale, they contain a non-architectonic stanza structure of four isometric melody lines. These are considered “an exclusively Hungarian folk product\textsuperscript{60}” and most likely originated in much older times. The four line strophe is accompanied by a melodic line that changed contours for each of the text lines, but contain a similar rhythm which provides unity throughout the song.\textsuperscript{61}

The songs in the “new style” are similar in their wide appearance over the country, but generally have musical and textual differences. Having the “so-called

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 23.}\n\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 24.}\n\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{60} Béla Bartók, “Music Folklore Research in Hungary,” In Béla Bartók Essays ed. Benjamin Suchoff, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976), 165.}\n\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{61} Suchoff, p. 150.}
‘dotted adjustable’ rhythm and an architectonic stanza structure of four melody lines, for example, A B B A,” it is also considered to be exclusively Hungarian. Although the old style was developed many generations ago, the new style was probably created during the last seven or eight decades.63

The third and final category is the “mixed” style. Within this style there is no uniformity of form or style. As a result, there is a lack of defining characteristics of the melodies as a group. The melodies are all primarily borrowed from the music of the Slovaks, Ruthenians, with a few from the Germans and Romanians. Although considered to be Hungarian, they have been influenced and tainted by the surrounding regions.

Within the work of his Twenty Hungarian Folksongs, Bartók includes examples of each type. The first set, which is the concentration of this study, is wholly of the “old style” and the oldest of all the songs. “Sorozat”, with the title “Szomorú Nóták”, are all songs of sorrow, mourning, and lament.

Understanding the style and type of songs contained in the “Somorú nóták” volume of Bartók’s Twenty Hungarian Folksongs allows one to appreciate his musical settings. The melodies are pentatonic and their origin unknown, demarcating them as “old style”. They are ancient and the most accurately preserved Hungarian folk melodies in existence. Laments are a common occurrence in the customs and beliefs of the Hungarians and permit a view into the deep emotions and care that the villagers have for one another. As a Hungarian, Bartók could easily identify with the emotional context of the texts.

63 The reference to decades is in reference to Bartók’s writings from 1929.
Chapter 8

History of the *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs*

The genesis of *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs* is ambiguous. Varying theories are in circulation, but none have been proven as “the” catalyst for the work. Several occasions in Bartók’s life coincide with the writings of these songs, though most are a response to criticism incurring both inspiration and/or outrage. It is important to understand the events surrounding the creation of this work, as it allows one to comprehend a more intimate understanding of the composition. When historical context of the songs is viewed in conjunction with analysis, the depth of devotion and emotion imbued by Bartók is made manifest through the realization of text and music. His efforts to preserve the collected melodies motivated him to transform them into concert works so that they might be appreciated by other nationalities.

In Western music, the setting of texts was centered on the melody and its harmonic relationship to the accompaniment. Harmonization, though attentive of the text, is not solely committed to its meaning. Bartók circumvented the traditional relationship between melody and accompaniment by shifting the balance of power to the text’s implications as a means for governing harmonic development. Although he was using pre-existing melodies, the harmonies are not based on them. Instead, the harmonic and melodic figures and progressions of the accompaniment illustrate the singer’s
emotional state at a precise moment. This is made obvious through the many drafts and sketches he produced of the work in an attempt to elevate the folksong to the status of art song.

In December 1928, a recording session for His Master’s Voice, a large recording label, occurred in which folksong arrangements by both Bartók and Kodály were combined for a single publication. In examining his personal contribution compared to his partner’s, Bartók realized that his personal output was much less substantial. The meager contribution inspired him to increase his productivity, thus he began composing Twenty Hungarian Folksongs.

It has also been suggested that Bartók wrote the work in response to a 1929 publication by Heinrich Möller entitled Das Lieder der Völker, in which a collection of Hungarian songs was represented. The songs offered were written and researched by “a person totally unfamiliar with the musical folklore of Eastern European music,” according to Bartók. Outrage spurred his response as to why Möller would publish something with such “poor and haphazard character of the selection, [containing] often erroneous notation of the melodies based on unreliable sources,….scarcity or lack of references, data based on false or fake historic “facts,” and the aesthetic quality of the piano accompaniments often taken over from the nineteenth century amateur composers.” In Möller’s preface, he seems to intentionally disregard the legitimate study occurring in the field of ethnomusicology by Bartók, Kodály, and others. He states:

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65 Ibid, 5.
There is a certain lack of clarity concerning the definition of Hungarian folksong. Recent attempts at scientifically defining the Hungarian folksong through theoretically based analysis has only added to the obscurity of its concept. After Liszt, Brahms, Hubay, Chován and others overemphasized gypsy music and more recent popular art songs belonging to Hungarian folk music…today’s researchers of folksong tend to underemphasize gypsy influence and wish to exclude songs showing gypsy elements and popular art songs altogether from Hungarian folksongs…This concept is based on a definition that restricts the meaning of folksong to “peasant song” being its allegedly pure manifestation…it assimilates and deforms in conformity with certain conventional rules that are artistically not to be evaluated any higher. Even if the concept of peasant song were clearer, its practical employment would be a *circulus vitiosus*. The doctrinaire arbitrariness of following the stock of melodies of a single social stratum in defining a national musical style and of limiting folksong by using the old unscientific differentiation between “true” and “untrue” folksongs results in an incomplete, one-sided and, on top of that, monotonous picture even in the case of Hungarian folksongs.\(^\text{66}\)

Bartók believed this to be a direct attack on his life’s work, and rightly so. After many letters to publishers, as well as lectures on the subject, Bartók felt that he must create a collection of true Hungarian folksongs of which the accompaniments were non-Western, and the supplementary information was well researched and referenced; songs that could be identified as wholly Hungarian. Many people decided to join in the arguments. There were “newspaper squabble[s] concerning genuine (peasant) folk music and pseudo-folk music (popular art song in folk style, or gypsy music).”\(^\text{67}\) The disagreement between Müller and Bartók opened a conversation and debate within the public centered on the authenticity of Hungarian music.

Bartók was inspired to display genuine Hungarian folksong to the world. He foresaw that Magyar music could and would be a part of the higher arts. What was considered to be “folksong” by the general public at the time were composed tunes that

\(^{66}\) Ibid, 7.  
\(^{67}\) Tallián, 158.
had been conventionally modified. Although many arranged folksong publications existed, the tunes were forced to conform to Western harmonic tradition. Many of the melodies advertised as folksongs were actually tunes composers had developed “in the style of” Hungarian folksong. Despite the melody’s origin and the harmonic language from which it developed, composers made intervallic and pitch changes where necessary in order to conform to the preferred harmonizations. *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs* sought to dismiss this misnomer while simultaneously establishing the musical value of Magyar music. Bartók used genuine folk melodies and texts collected from peasants, rather than the gentry,\(^{68}\) and based his accompaniments on the indigenous harmonies also gleaned from the peasants.

Although the collection was written in 1929, the texts and melodies were taken from a previous publication of folksongs from Bartók’s *Hungarian Folk Music*.\(^{69}\) Published in 1924, this reference book contains the melodies and origins collected by Bartók and other ethnomusicologists of the time who held the same urgency for their preservation.

While collecting melodies, Bartók would often fashion what is known as a Master Sheet. These sheets contain a transcription of the melody, the text written in prose, and notes about the performer/performance.\(^{70}\) From this information, he created sketches of what would eventually become known as the *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs*. The

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\(^{68}\) The terms peasant and gentry are used to refer to two different people groups in Hungary. The peasants lived an isolated life in rural towns and villages. They were often uneducated and uninfluenced by surrounding peoples. The gentry, as Bartók describes them, are city dwellers. Often educated to some degree, these people are immersed in influences of other peoples and cultures, both foreign and local (gypsies).

\(^{69}\) Lampert. “Works for Solo Voice with Piano,” 400.

\(^{70}\) Mastersheets can be viewed in an on-line data base located on the Budapest Bartók Archivum website.
preserved melodies were transformed slightly in order to be used as the focus of Bartók’s settings of the songs.

As the work neared completion, Bartók went through several phases of grouping and editing the songs. There are a total of three drafts (one sketch and two final drafts) that show the process by which the final product was fashioned. These, as well as copies of the drafts, are kept in the Budapest archives. By looking at the differences between the stages, one is able to observe the processes and thoughts behind Bartók’s compilation.

The first set of sketches does not denote sections, nor is it titled. The songs are also in a different order than the published version: 7, 4, 3, 15, 13, 5, 8, 11, 6, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 12, 2, 9, 14, 1. Each song is written on four staves: a vocal line, an empty staff for corrections and additions, and two for the piano. Tempo and dynamic markings are absent from the scores. Song number three, “Bujdosó-énnek”, lacks the octaves in the accompaniment that are present in the final rendition. None of the songs are given key signatures, accidentals used when necessary. Musical markings, such as phrasing and accents, are almost nonexistent, although there are a few phrases marked. When editing the score, Bartók would cross out a phrase or part of a melody and write the revision on the blank staff. In both the vocal line and the accompaniment, the duration of notes is indistinct, using quarter notes as reference points. In such instances, between two of these indicative quarter notes, there may be a measure or two worth of melodic material. Instead of writing each note with the desired duration, Bartók simply sketched out the chords. He also omitted the ties over measure, indicating more iterations rather than a continuous sound. Within these sketches there are many revisions of all parts. It is
evident from these changes and inconsistencies that Bartók was not always satisfied with his original ideas, but he worked and reworked until his expectations were met.

The first draft is similar to the published version. A title has been given to each song, as well as a title page. The songs have not yet been divided into volumes, but they are reordered from that of the sketches to the published version. Omitting the blank staff, each song is now allowed three staves. Tempo and dynamic markings have been added in both the voice and accompaniment. Quarter notes are no longer the only duration notated. More of the phrasing has been indicated, especially in the accompaniment, through slurs and ties. There are also accents identified in specific places, as well as pedaling. In three of the songs, Bartók began writing his own German translation of the texts. Although this draft is more complete than the sketch, there are still revisions that are either copy mistakes or places that were still substandard, but it is not nearly as altered as the former. When repeated material occurs, instead of writing it all out, repeat measure signs are used. Another difference between this draft and the sketch is the legibility. This draft is much easier to read due to neater penmanship. On the whole, the first draft is nearer to being considered publishable than the sketch, but Bartók was still not content and continued to revise.

The second, and final, draft (the Stichvorlage) is the closest to the published work. The songs have been put into four titled volumes, each containing a specific type of song (songs of sorrow, dance songs, children’s songs, and a mixed set). These transcriptions are the cleanest and on three staves. Although it is the final draft before publication, there are still a few corrections. Bartók has finished writing his German translation for all of the songs under the Hungarian text. Another addition to the text is accent marks.
denoting the stressed and unstressed syllables. This is noteworthy, as the indicated stresses do not follow the natural stresses of the Hungarian language, nor were they published. These stresses follow the accents of the music rather than the language. A key is provided at the beginning of the document to help with the understanding the markings. For example, in the last verse of “Régi Keserves” the syllable stresses as indicated by Bartók are:

\[ // _| | _| | _| | _| | // _| | / _| | _| \]

Her-vad-ni kez-det-tem, mint űsz-szel a róz-sa

Yet, the natural stresses of the language fall on different syllables.

\[ / _| | _| | / _| | / _| | / _| | / _| \]

Her-vad-ni kez-det-tem, mint űsz-szel a róz-sa

In songs three and four, Bartók does not mark syllable stresses for all the words. If the same pattern repeated in the following phrase(s), he would not write them out. Instead he left them blank, implying reiteration of the pattern.

First published in 1932 by Universal-Edition in Austria, Twenty Hungarian Folksongs was printed in four volumes. Each volume is titled in German with the Hungarian, Húsz Magyar Néadal, in smaller print as a subtitle. A single title page was created for all four volumes: a list of the four and their contents. The German titles were given first, followed by the Hungarian title. Although German was the dominant language on the cover and index, Hungarian takes precedence within the songs, the German translation underneath. The second publication came about in 1939, but by a different publishing company, Boosey and Hawkes, which received the copyright for the collection from Universal Edition and still holds it to this day. The title has since been

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71 These stresses can be found in the second final draft of Twenty Hungarian Folksongs which is housed in the archives in Budapest. http://db.zti.hu/nza/br.asp.
changed to *20 Magyar Népdal (Twenty Hungarian Folksongs)* and is still printed with the informational pages predominantly in German.

Bartók, who was particular about words, created his own German translations for his songs (as noted in the final draft), but they were not included in either of the publications. Benedikt Sazbolcsi and R. St. Hoffmann provided the published German translations in both the Universal-Edition and Boosey and Hawkes publications for unknown reasons. Bartók’s original translations, including his personal notes and syllable stresses, are housed in the Budapest Archives.\(^{72}\)

*Twenty Hungarian Folksongs* was not the only publication of folksong arrangements distributed by Bartók. In 1906 and 1915, *Ten Hungarian Folksongs* and *Eight Hungarian Folksongs* were published respectively; both were well received. The accompaniments are less virtuosic and tend to stay centered around the conventionally harmonized melody. Bartók did not limit his publication of Hungarian folk arrangements to vocal music. In 1915 two collections of piano arrangements were published entitled *Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs*, and *Eight Improvisations on Hungarian Songs*. Bartók expanded his writing genres in 1930 with the publication of *Four Hungarian Folksongs* for mixed choir, a musically difficult choral setting.

In 1908, Bartók realized that publishing his arrangements would go unnoticed by the public unless they were first informed of their misunderstanding of genuine Hungarian folksong. As a result, he began publishing a piano pedagogy study called *For Children*, a collection of forty-two Hungarian and forty-three Slovakian folk songs arranged for piano in order to teach and instruct developing piano technique. Bartók

\(^{72}\) All information discussed concerning the drafts and sketches are based on thorough notes taken over a week of study in the Budapest Archives. Because of copyrights, reproductions/images of the originals cannot be provided.
seized the opportunity to educate the public on more than playing techniques by using the real Hungarian folksongs. Kodály recalls the intentions of the collections creation as being less philanthropic:

Bartók’s first interest in children’s music was not internally motivated...its external motivation was quite prosaic, a commission from a publisher. We know from the history of music that numerous masterpieces were written on commission. On this occasion, too, the prose of a commission became poetry. The publisher only asked for easy pieces and teaching material, but it emerged that the soul of Bartók had remained child enough to be able to speak naturally in a child’s tongue...If all this had penetrated the bloodstream of our musical education, we would have a different public today...But it did not...73

In the later arrangements (Twenty Hungarian Folksongs and Four Hungarian Folksongs) it became evident that Bartók’s view of the texts had shifted slightly. “In both sets we find a large four-movement succession of folk songs, from an anguished-chromatic slow beginning to a gay, spirited dance finale.” The struggles and spirit of the Hungarian people become more evident through his compositions. Much of his leisure and holidays were spent with people in villages and rural towns. Although collecting the melodies was his primary purpose, building personal relationships with the villagers was fundamental; trust was not given quickly to outsiders. In order to convince them to participate, Bartók spent time, and sometimes money, with the people. Not everyone was willing to participate for free. It is possible that as he spent more time with the “peasants” he began to understand and identify with their current situation as well as their past. He did not feel that modern harmonizations honestly portrayed the depth of the

73 Tallián, 74.
74 Ibid, 160.
texts, but rather focused on the formal aspects of the melody. This is evident when the earlier arrangements are examined. The relationship between the melody and the accompaniment is more disjointed in the later collections (*Twenty and Four*) than in the preceding ones. The accompaniment is through composed so that the character of the text dictates the emotion and direction of the underlying music. Though the melody is strophic and can only be harmonized to a certain point, Bartók disregards the convention of a strophic, yet slightly variable, piano part that coincides with the harmonies implied by the vocal line.

In composing the arrangements, Barók was not concerned with the difficulty levels. Pianistically, the score is extremely demanding and requires not only technical proficiency, but a musicality worthy of a virtuosic performer. “[T]hey are not to be performed by the casual accompanist.” The harmonies are inventive and the reach required expansive. Most of the tempos are quick and require complex accuracy in addition to speed.

The melodies are of less importance than the accompaniment. Little emotional character is shown through them and some have been paired with texts not original to the collected material. In a letter to G.E. Lessings, Bartók describes his concept behind the songs: “These works are not ‘arrangements’, but represent original compositions, with – as a motto – overlaid Hungarian folk songs.” He never intended the melodies to be the focus; instead his emphasis was on the text conveyed through the accompaniment.

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75 Form at this point in Western music theory was governed by harmonies and their progression. A Sonata, for example, must follow the prescribed harmonic outline, I-V-I, which creates the basic form on which the piece is composed.


Another interesting fact about the songs is that each of the vocal parts is marked

*parlando rubato*, giving the words an increased significance. The performer is given the freedom to express the language naturally, or unnaturally,\(^78\) as they feel led, similar to recitative. The choice of the texts is evidence of Bartók’s growth both as a musician and as a person. József Ujfalussy said:

> From the Twenty Hungarian Folk-Songs onwards … more and more frequently the vocal works present us with a picture of suffering and oppressed people. The first volume of the Twenty Hungarian Folk-Songs consists of sad lyrics gathered together under the title Szomorú nóták (Sad Songs): “A tömlőcben”, “Régi Keserves”, “Bujdosó ének”, “Pástor nóta” (In Prison, Old Complaint, The Fugitive and Herdsman’s song, respectively). The Four Hungarian Folk-Songs for mixed chorus returns again to tales of misfortune…\(^79\)

In other words, the focus of the texts of the first volume in *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs* is on the misfortunes that have plagued the Hungarian people for centuries. There is much grief and sadness in Magyar history that is reflected in the lyrics of the people who are affected the most, the peasants. The choice of text also indicates that Bartók had ended a period in the development of his world outlook. His love of the people, his nostalgia for the village and his pantheism became synthesized, in a new manner and more completely than ever before, with an internationalism based on science and humanism.\(^80\) The songs are all indicated for unspecified voice both in the score and the drafts, meaning no definite voice type was intended. This is indicative of Bartók’s understanding that folksong is meant to be sung by the people, not a single person, male or female. When the song is performed in its original environment (in a village by one of

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\(^78\) As explained earlier, Bartók marked his own syllable stresses on one of the drafts. They do not follow the natural stresses of the Hungarian language.


\(^80\) Ibid, 159.
the peasants), there are no classifications as to voice type. The melody primarily resides in the middle voice with a manageable tessitura for all; however, there are moments of extended range throughout the collection, which indicate emotional highs and lows respectively.

The original phonographic recordings collected by Bartók offer an interesting insight into the lives of the Hungarian people. The recorded voice is emotionless and unaccompanied. Bartók uses this idea when setting the melodies in that the vocal melodies in and of themselves hold no emotional significance. Unlike the original recordings, emotion radiates from his compositions via the accompaniment. Emotion conveyed through the combination of accompaniment and text requires the singer to observe the nuances of the piano rather than the melody line.

An extant recording of Bartók’s setting performed by a genuine Hungarian folk singer presents ornamentations as they would be performed traditionally, yet the combination of different styles (folk and classical) is jarring. A classically trained singer is better suited to Bartók’s demands, both vocally and musically, as was intended. Some of the ranges require more dexterity and less strain than that which the folk singer is able to accomplish. The singer also takes liberty with the rhythms and some of the ornamentation, though the *parlando rubato* is excellent. Because this conglomeration of styles failed, it strengthens Bartók’s intention of elevating the folksong genre to that of art song. The difficulty of the pieces require trained musicians to accomplish a successful and meaningful performance; only then will the two parts (voice and piano) conjoin to create one remarkable work of art.

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81 A copy of the CD is housed in the Budapest Archives.
The premiere of Twenty Hungarian Folksongs occurred in London at the Arts Theatre Club on January 6, 1930, the same year in which Bartók’s celebrated Cantata Profana premiered. The Arts Theatre Club performance was a private event in which Mária Basilides, a contralto, and Bartók performed a few of the songs. Bartók played on a Bechstein pianoforte. The original program of the concert, which is housed in the Budapest archives, shows only a few selected folk songs featured after the intermission. English titles were provided instead of the Hungarian. Included in the program were selections from each of the volumes: “Song of Sorrow” (song three), “Shepherd’s Song” (song nine), “Matchmaking Song” (song eleven), and “Swineherd’s Dance” (song seven). Programmed along with the folk songs was a collection of works by Bartók and Joseph Szigeti. These included: Rhapsody No. 1 for violin and pianoforte (a new version dedicated to Joseph Szigeti), Second Elegy for Pianoforte, Two Burlesques for Pianoforte, 2nd Sonata for violin and pianoforte in two movements, Three Village Scenes, which are based on Slovakian folksongs, Nine Little Pianoforte Pieces, and Hungarian folk-tunes transcribed for violin and pianoforte from the Three Pieces for Children by Joseph Szigeti. The entire program featured Eastern European folksong.

On January 30, 1930 the Hungarian premier of the Twenty Hungarian Folksongs occurred in Budapest with Bartók playing on a Bösendorfer and Mária Basilides singing. Along with his new work, two sets of folk songs arranged by Kodály were programmed. The first set contained selections from Énekeszó. Positioned second in the evening’s performance were Debussy’s Trois chanson de France and Ballade des femmes de Paris. Bartók’s songs were the third, as well as the final, sets of the night’s program. The third set was comprised of the Öt ujabb népdal, which is the entire fourth volume (songs
sixteen through twenty), “Régi Keserves” (song two), “Bujdosó ének” (song three), “Két párosito” (songs eleven and twelve), and “Régi táncdal” (song eight). The fifth set was slightly shorter in the amount of songs performed. Beginning the set was “Két régi táncdal” (songs five and six) followed by “A juhász” (song nine), “A rab” (song one), “Tréfás dal” (song ten), and “Kanásztánc” (song seven). Not all of the titles given in the program are the published titles. Some of the songs grouped together were given a title that represented the type of songs rather than the given title or volume. Set four included selections from the *Megkésett melódiák* collection written by Kodály.

The original Budapest program lists sixteen of the twenty songs to be performed. On the archived copy beside each set Bartók noted in changes to the program, scratching out two of the songs to be performed as well as omitting certain numbers. It is evident from reviews of the performance that these changes were not implemented that night as all 16 selections were performed. The corrections were possibly for a later performance, or just an afterthought of how he would have liked to reorder the performance. The original order was as follows:

Set 3: Öt ujabb népdal (16-20)

Régi Keserves (2)

Bujdosó ének (3)

Két párosito (11, 12)

Régi táncdal (8)

Set 5: Két régi táncdal (5, 6)

A juhász (9)

A rab (1)
Tréfás dal (10)

Kanásztánc (7)

In the third set, songs two and three were crossed out, leaving only songs eleven, twelve, and eight. Set 5 listed songs five, nine, one, and seven, omitting songs six and ten. Other programs featuring the Twenty Hungarian Folksongs include a selection of songs from multiple volumes. This illustrates that Bartók was not concerned with the songs being performed in a specific order. The four volumes of the Twenty Hungarian Folk Songs are merely groups of related songs which can be mixed to suit the requirements of the individual venue.

Neither of these premieres was well received. In fact, some of the reactions were overtly negative. Bartók did not take this criticism well and secluded himself, not performing his or anyone else’s works for four years. Since then, the appreciation and understanding of the genius of Twenty Hungarian Folksongs has become more evident to the public. Amanda Bayley, editor of The Cambridge Companion to Bartók, describes the compositions as:

the emancipation of the folksong arrangement within the realm of original composition had reached a new stage...[they] transcend the dilettante sphere of music-making and definitely take their place on the concert platform...To single out the most significant innovations introduced by these compositions for piano one has to refer to the increased role of horizontal elements and percussion-like effects.

Tabor Tallián supported this line of thinking when he said the collection was “a living museum to Bartók’s devotion to the peasants.” Both Bayley and Tallián recognized that Twenty Hungarian Folksongs is an exceptional, new way of arranging the folksong

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82 Tallián, 157.
84 Tallián, 160.
that challenges musicians and elevates the status of folksong arrangements in classical repertoire.

Working with the meaning of the text rather than the melody to create a musical atmosphere was a new way to express old ideas. Bartók sought to portray his understanding of the text rather than how the melody melded with the accompaniment, and most of the time the two are independent. The piano tells the stories, while the melodies serve as a motto. Bartók describes this process in his essay entitled “The Influence of Peasant Music on Modern Music”:

> It is very important at all times that the musical garment in which we clothe the melody should be deducible from the character of the melody, from the musical characteristics overtly or obscurely, that is, the melody and everything added to it should give the impression of inseparable unity. It may sound odd, but I do not hesitate to say: the simpler the melody the more complex and strange may be the harmonization and accompaniment that go well with it. Let us, for instance, take a melody that moves on two successive notes only (there are many such melodies in Arab peasant music). It is obvious that we are much freer in the invention of an accompaniment than in the case of a melody of a more complex character. These primitive melodies, moreover, show no trace of the stereotyped joining of triads. That again means greater freedom for us in the treatment of the melody. It allows us to bring out the melody most clearly by building around it harmonies of the widest range varying along different keynotes.85

This was confusing to the first audiences. His devotion to collecting and preserving these songs allowed him to gain an understanding of the people and the deep seeded emotions associated with the texts. He understood that the melodies were merely a means of expression and interchangeable depending on the situation, the true expression being in the words.

It has been widely debated whether *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs* can be considered a song cycle. Although not meant to be performed all at once, commonalities of theme and text substance link one song to another. This freedom to blend within the constraints of the cycle allows one to create a different emotional path each time the work is performed. Like a puzzle, Bartók has provided the performer all of the pieces. All that must be done is to put them together. Order does not matter, as long as the resulting product is sympathetic. Every song can succeed on its own, but better understanding and appreciation comes from amalgamation. Combining songs from different volumes and reordering was done often by the composer himself. Tallián stated that “[a]lthough he did not compose the work to be sung straight through…still it is a true cycle, with a musical-lyrical order, and only if we allow ourselves to be led by Bartók past each of his exhibited pictures is our experience complete.”

Understanding the history of the composition and the details of the editing process provides insight into the importance of this set of songs to Bartók. He strove to create accompaniments that exhibited the passion and importance that he felt towards the Hungarian folksong. Through these, he elevated the folksong arrangement to a level equal with art song.

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86 Tallián, p. 160.
Chapter 9

Laments

The musical focus of this study is the first volume of Bartók’s *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs*, “Somorú nóták”, which is comprised of four songs that are traditional Hungarian laments. Before an analysis of each song is presented, the lament genre needs to be explained in the context of the culture and musical aspects.

In the Hungarian tradition, the lament is the oldest song type in existence. Naturally, laments are often associated with religious customs, but not all of them stem from Christian practices or contain Christian themes. Most laments, or at least the style of the folk music of pre-Conquest Hungary, can be traced back to the folk music of pre-Conquest Hungary. Studies on the subject have determined “the occurrence of this type of tune in song collections ecclesiastial and secular alike, of the Hungarian language area in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.” These airs cover an array of subjects, mainly lays, deaths, parodies of cantorial valedictory songs, and complaints. They were also often included in wedding ceremonies. Serving as a way to release and express deep emotional turmoil, it is easy to comprehend why laments are among the oldest tunes passed orally through generations.

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88 Ibid. 16.
89 Ibid. 56.
Among the most common of laments are those associated with death and funerals. Women served as wailers; their job was to cry out and mourn the dead after the moment of death, as the body was being prepared, and during the procession to the grave side. In an essay written in 1936, Bartók recorded an interview between Constantin Brâiloiu, a Romanian folklore music researcher, and some female mourners. The conversation went as follows:

Lamentations are traditional and are a compulsory ceremony of propriety. Traditional, because: that is the law among us...our great-grandfathers, our ancestor did it, not only us; compulsory, because: one has to lament...it would be shameful for someone not to. People would say, he isn't even sorry that a relative died...people would say, he is glad of his death.

Additionally, lamentation assuages grief: When somebody is sorrowful, he feels relieved by weeping. Whoever is heart-broken with grief, ceaselessly laments his departed.

It is unthinkable, therefore, for a death to occur without mourning: No deceased person ever goes un lamented...everybody is mourned.

Lamentations begin immediately after death has occurred and end after leaving the grave: As soon as somebody has passed away, the laments are begun. He lamented in his house, when they carry him to the graveyard...and while clods of earth are thrown on the coffin.

Lamentations in the deceased's house can be carried on at any time or linked with certain phases of the funeral rites: We mourn when we desire it...we mourn at home as we want to and as often as possible. (But according to another informant): He is very, very strongly lamented when dressing him, when putting him in the coffin. – One must lament when the bell is tolled (and so on).

Only women are permitted to lament: God beware that men should lament! They only weep.

Furthermore, women lament during their childhood: I was only nine years old when my mother died: I lamented her at such a tender girlhood age.

Children learn how to lament from other persons: I learned it when I heard the woman lamenting...I just stood there and listened to them; it went into my head in such a way that it couldn’t ever leave it.²⁹⁰

Although these accounts are Romanian, the Hungarian burial and mourning customs are similar. Death laments are outpourings of the soul that are of a certain form and musical character. Erudition of these songs occurred aurally and were handed from one generation to the next by example.

Although dirges were written and purchased, they are still considered to be folksong, specifically laments. Death dirges were performed during funerals. The cantors, who performed the songs, were men. The length of the dirge was the basis for the price; the longer the dirge, the more it cost.

The rural form of the dirge reflects a unique component of folklore between written and oral traditions. Here too – as in other branches of folk tradition – the influence of village intellectuals and the role of elite in popular culture can be observed. The archaic elements of the genre – e.g., speaking in the first person singular on behalf of the deceased – can be found in other genres of folk poetry. Incorporating tragic life-histories into dirges resembles the mourning ballads.

Children’s dirges and those of the untimely dead were filled with beautiful imagery and sorrow, whereas those for the elderly (those expected to die) were more matter of fact; quick and to the point. Although dirges were written and purchased, they are still considered to be folksong, specifically laments.

Another interesting form of lament is that performed by the bride before her wedding. Before the wedding feast, it was customary for the bride to sing a lament, a farewell, to the family she had known all of her life. Professor Tekla Dömötör gave a presentation on “Hungarian Folk Customs” at a symposium in 1980 in which he describes the wedding customs of the Magyar. His description of the laments is as follows:

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91 As is described in detail in Ildikó Kriza’s article “The Rural Form of the Death Dirges in Hungary,” 112.
True emotion was often expressed in these laments, for it meant that the girl would have to leave her parent’s home and that from then on she must carry out the orders of her in-laws. In cases where the choice of a husband had been made for economic reasons, rather than any feeling of mutual attraction, the lament was particularly sincere and full of emotion.93

Bartók categorized all of the songs in his first volume in “old style”. In his words he describes this category:

The overwhelming majority of these melodies have four sections corresponding to the four-section isometric text stanzas. Most of them have eight syllables; text lines of twelve or six syllables are in the minority. Each text line can be traced back to the following rhythmic structure:

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

The style of performance is always parlando, poco rubato... augmentations [of note values], especially those of a rational value, are constant at certain tones of the melody; they belong so to speak essentially to the melody and are to be considered as hardened rubato.94

He continued this thought in a later essay:

The archaic colours and the parlando-rubato rhythm of the old-style melodies prompt us to surmise that these melodies are the remnants of an old musical culture, kept alive in the peasant class. Their antiquated character results mainly from their prevailing scale which is the pentatonic one.95

Improvisation on the basic melodic structure does occur, which can be unsettling to the rubato. Other stylistic hallmarks include observations that the musical phrases of the melodies never begin on a weak beat, the last tones are often augmented and abundantly

ornamented, and the structure of the melodies consists of four different parts, which make up a stanza. According to Bartók, this structure is the antithesis of the “architectonic form of Western folk and art melodies” and distinguishes Hungarian music as unique, in a form that is “much more complicated and far superior [in] development.” In staying true to the described form, each stanza of the songs from “Szomorú nóták” is paired with accompaniment that is sensitive to the text. These variations imitate possible improvisations that would occur in original performances due to the singer’s understanding and interpretation of the texts.

Of the research conducted on the subject of Hungarian folksong (not confined to Bartók’s collection) much has been discovered as to its musical heritage. L. Dobszay delves into the originality of “Old Style” Hungarian folk music, specifically laments. As a part of his conclusions, he notes:

> the lament tunes (more appropriately the type tunes preserved in the lament forms) have been rooted in an extensive European tradition. Further development of the basic idea, however, had probably been achieved under the peculiar musical environment of the settled Hungarians, who succeed in bringing together the ancient musical heritage with more recent cultural and musical influences.

Although this was claimed thirty years after Bartók’s death, Dobszay strengthened Bartók’s initial definition of “old style” through studying the historical development of lament melodies. Three musical features are outlined in Dobszay’s study as being distinctly characteristic of lament airs: freely variable rhythmic pattern, unfixed order of cadences, and a connection with ritual or narrative texts. The pitches included in the melodies are anywhere from the interval of a fourth to an octave. Based on a minor third,
the tunes are extended when ornamented. These pitch additions are neighboring tones of the original third, thus the fourth and fifth relationships are created. “[T]he fourth enters the scene to gain independence gradually and become incorporated in the augmented tonality and establish relationship with the middle tones of the trichord…the fourth reinforced induces the reinforcement of the fifth, which first appears as an auxiliary (complementary) note.” Dobszay characterizes the rudimentary characteristics of the lament by “not only…the basic elements and their typical connections (which at the same time discern them from the pentatone style reduced to the two system construction), but also…the frequency of individual tones and intervals (compasses).” In other words, the lament tune is based on two or three notes, additional pitches serve to extend and show moments of intense emotions. He continues to say that “[t]he melody mainly develops scale-like, i.e. in second degrees. Recitative-like repetitions or floating reciting tone frequently occur.”

As previously mentioned, Bartók marked all the songs in Twenty Hungarian Folksongs parlando rubato. Historically, there is a reason for the indication. Laments, being an outpouring of the soul, are made in the form of speech, recitative like. Dobszay asserts:

Recitative tunes of…the Hungarian laments…in which structurally loose improvisations governed by the main melody notes only, cannot be reasonably approached from the side of major – minor tonality, this being a much later development, nor can they be listened to under impressions associated with the periodic construction of classical music.

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102 Ibid, 61.
103 Ibid, 17.
Authenticating Bartók’s vocal style marking, Dobszay notes another unique trait of the Magyar folksong of which Bartók was adamant, the harmonization of these melodies. Laments were being sung prior to the development of modern harmonies, and as such cannot be associated with them. The structural characteristics of the tunes as well as their functional implications allow the Hungarian laments to “claim their right to antiquity,” and should not be manipulated to conform to the harmonic features developed hundreds of years later.

Although determining the exact date in which these lament melodies came into existence, there are several attributes that qualify them as old-style. “[O]ne can draw the conclusion of old age from their antique mode of ornamentation, primitive pentatonic scale, [and the] antique character of the underlying texts.” Viewing the ancient prose from the historical point of view allows an insight as to how and why Bartók composed the accompaniments in the way that he did. The laments provide a structure with which the resultant paired accompaniment is genuinely Hungarian. Bartók found these melodies and texts extremely valuable, offering “something absolutely uncommon, in perfect shape, and it exhibits not the slightest tinge of vulgar phraseology.” He continues this praise of Magyar folksong in saying that “[i]t has a refreshing effect on the Western European ear, because of the complete lack of melody line pointing to the tonic-dominant combination.”

The setting of these prized melodies is not something to be taken lightly. Bartók spent many hours perfecting the musical representations of the texts (as discussed in the

104 Ibid, 36.
previous chapter). In an essay entitled “On the Significance of Folk Music” written in 1931, he describes the challenges associated with composing folksong settings that do not corrupt the integrity of the original songs.

To handle folk melodies is one of the most difficult tasks; equally difficult if not more so than to write a major original composition. If we keep in mind that borrowing a melody means being bound by its individual peculiarity we shall understand one part of the difficulty. Another is created by the special character of a folk melody. We must penetrate into it, feel it, and bring out in sharp contours by the appropriate setting. The composition round a folk melody must be done in a ‘propitious hour’ or – as is generally said – it must be a work of inspiration just as much as any other composition.\(^\text{107}\)

The “special character” referred to is naturally embodied within the text. In order to “penetrate” and “feel” the song, it was imperative that Bartók intimately familiarize himself with the text and the history of the people from whom he collected them.

The laments included in the “Somorú nóták” do not include religious or customary texts. Instead, these songs deal with the issues of everyday life; love, death, loneliness, and failure. These common themes allow Bartók to express the intense emotion of a people that have endured through a thousand years of hardships. Although universal, these subjects offer a specific meaning when related to the people from which they came. Without an understanding of this relationship, Bartók’s settings would have represented a general idea rather than that specific to the Magyar.

Chapter 10

A Tömlöcben (In Prison)

1 Minden ember szerencsésen, 
   All people live fortunately,
2 Csak én élek keservesen, 
   Only I live so bitterly,
3 Fejem lehajtom csendesen, 
   I bow my head quietly,
4 Csak úgy sírok keservesen. 
   And so I weep bitterly.
5 Olyan nap nam jött az égre, 
   Never has a new day yet dawned
6 Könynyem ne hulljon a földre, 
   Without my tears dropping to the ground,
7 Hull a földre, hull ölembe, 
   They drop to the ground, drop into my lap,
8 Hull a gyászoz kebelembe. 
   They drop in my sorrowful breast.
9 Bolthaltásos az én szobám, 
   My room is vaulted,
10 Még a holdvilág sem süt rám; 
   Not even does the moon shine upon me;
11 Hát a fényses napsugárja 
   How then should the rays of the bright sun
12 Hogy sütne hervadt orcámra! 
   Shine on my faded cheeks!
13 Azt sohasem hittem volna, 
   I would have never thought
14 Tömlöc oldalamat rontsa, 
   That a prison should impair my side,
15 Piros orcám meghervaszsza, 
   That it should fade away my red cheeks,
16 Bodor hajam levásítsa 
   And wear off my curling hair.
17 Ne sirj, kedves feleségem 
   Do not weep, my dear wife,
18 Ne zokogj, édes gyermekem! 
   Do not sob my dear child!
19 Gondodat viseli az Isten, 
   God will provide for you,
20 Kiszabadulok még innen.\textsuperscript{108} 
   I will yet be released from here.

\textsuperscript{108} English translation by Maria Steiner, Liner notes for Béla Bartók’s \textit{Complete Edition} 4, Hungaroton recording, SLPX 11610, LP, 1960.
During an expedition into the countryside in April of 1912, Bartók traveled to Bereg county and the village of Rafajnuajfalu. In this village, János Gajdos, a sixty year old man, was recorded singing “A Tömlöcben” on the gramophone. The melody would later become the first song in Twenty Hungarian Folksongs. Although originally last in the collection’s order, Bartók placed it at the beginning in the final draft because the melody was one of “oldest layer[s] of Hungarian folk music.”

As a lament of the old style, the text and melody are considered among the most genuine Hungarian archetypes. Logically, Bartók would assemble all of the laments in the initial volume. One of Bartók’s ambitions was to educate the public on genuine Magyar music, discrediting “gypsy songs”. Including the most valid type of Hungarian song as the opening volume brings the songs which are imbued with the most culture into immediate focus.

Beginning in agony and ending with hope, the text of “A Tömlöcben” is an emotional journey through different stages of despair which end with a glimmer of light. In the first stanza the character is introduced as a man deeply depressed and discontented with his situation in life. The fact that he is in prison is not yet known, only his emotional state. The belief that everyone, except himself, is living a life of fortune and happiness is expressed in lines 1 and 2. Because of this, he can find no other way to cope other than inward reflection, which results weeping (lines 3 and 4).

The second stanza provides a deeper look into the man’s psyche. His utter despair consumes him in never ending darkness (line 5). The remaining three lines of the stanza describe this outpouring. Tears drop to the ground, into his lap, and on his breast. Stopping the flow is impossible, so he allows the tears to consume him.

The third stanza places the man in a room with no windows to the outside. In his depressed state, he is unable to see the light of the moon (line 10) and is completely surrounded by endless night. If one hint of this moonlight would break through the dark, then his belief that hope still exists would be kindled. Any glimpse of light from outside the room indicates a possibility for life beyond the walls of his room; yet there is none.

Lines 13-16 reveal that the room occupied by the man is a prison cell. The speaker begins to concentrate on the physical changes that have occurred as a result of being incarcerated. The color has left his skin and he is showing signs of aging. His limbs are no longer lithe and straight, and his hair is beginning to thin. Within these lines, a general timeline is presented of how long he has been there. It is obvious that he was a young man, but this period of imprisonment he is beginning to show signs of age. Although an exact time frame cannot be determined, life in a cell has been extensive enough to physically change him. He longs for the way things were, when his body was young and full of life.

After varying levels of despair and self-pity, the mood of the final stanza dramatically shifts. No longer is he focused on himself. Instead, his thoughts turn towards his family; his wife and child. The thought of them shedding tears for him is enough to bring him out of despair and encourage hope. Although he is not able to provide for them in his current situation, he is confident that God will take care of them until the time of his release.

The text chosen is neither a religious nor a text associated with a specific custom. It is the personal complaint of a man that has been imprisoned. The reason for his incarnation, although not specified, is not important. The emotions are applicable to
others in the same predicament. Each of the stanzas contains four lines of eight syllables. This is consistent with the isometric form of the lament texts of the old style, although they are usually made of four, instead of five, stanzas. Historically, many reasons exist as to why the speaker was incarcerated. During the time of pre-occupied Hungary, the reason might be unpaid debt or some other type of misdemeanor. During times of occupation, Hungarians could be imprisoned for racial reasons or revolutionary associations. Despite this uncertainty, it is clear that a major crime was not committed. Line 20, “Kiszabadulok még innen”, offers this insight. Because the man will be released at some point, it can be assumed that an offense was not committed deserving of death.

In Chapter 8, the word stresses indicated by Bartók in the final draft were discussed. When added to the published version of volume one, the reason is made clear. Although linguistically the stresses do not make sense, metrically they do. Bartók remarked that “a time signature, however, changing in some melodies from bar to bar, would be neither expedient nor adequately representative of the parlando performance.”110 The idea of assigning a single time signature to such a free melody was constrictive and retracted from the spontaneity of the performance. Despite this hurdle, Bartók needed to develop a way in which traditional melodies could be notated. His solution was to change the indicated meter when necessary in order to keep the pulse of the song free and steady. Example 10.1 shows the first two lines of “Tömlőcben” with the added stresses from the final draft. The stresses indicate both the strong and weak beats of the measure in accordance with the text, as well as the strong and weak metric pattern within the measures.

110 Bartók, “Melodies of the Hungarian Soldier’s Songs,” 51.
Example 10.1

When looking only at the metric accent, a strong-strong-strong-weak pattern of downbeats is seen. Traditionally, metrical rhythms consist of a series of strong-weak-strong-weak downbeats. The remaining two lines of the first stanza metrically differ from the first, forming a strong-weak-strong-strong pattern (example 10.2), yet the time signature remains constant.

Example 10.2

These are the two sections that compose the melody of old style mentioned by Bartók. The metrical stress patterns continue in the same manner through the remaining four stanzas. Although the following stanzas vary slightly in rhythm as a result of textual meaning, the pattern of metrical stresses is consistent.

Each verse is accompanied by music that is indicative of the text’s meaning. The beginning two measures serve as an introduction of the man and his mental state. Bartók implements harmonies based on thirds, in which the neighboring tones, A and E, outline a fourth (example 10.3). These harmonies are achieved through a melodic process in which once the note is sounded it then remains sustained until the figure is repeated. This instability evokes a feeling of uncertainty.
Example 10.3

The entrance of the vocal line supports this as he says, “All people live fortunately, Only I live so bitterly.” Another way in which Bartók illustrates this low emotional state is through the low level of pitch in the accompaniment.

Tears are the focus of verse two. Bartók continues the initial harmonic figure adding tear drops (example 10.4).

Example 10.4

These staccato paired octaves begin slowly in measure 11 during the transition into verse two. The prisoner has begun weeping after recognizing his plight. As he allows himself to fall into despair, the flow of tears increases. Bartók illustrates this through the rise in pitch of the tear drop motive and their increased frequency. The emotional climax occurs in measures 18 and 19 with a tear drop on every beat and the height of their pitch level is reached (example 10.5).

Example 10.5
Tears are now falling onto his lap and breast. As they begin to dissipate in measure 20, Bartók changes the harmonic and rhythmic texture to indicate the change in emotion the man experiences as verse three begins.

The prison cell is described as having “vaulted ceilings”; an open, empty image. The absence of light also adds a degree of hopelessness. Lonely in the darkness, the man is pulled into his blackest night, forced to deal with the madness that comes with being alone for an extended period with the sun’s rays unattainable. Bartók demonstrates this with a tritone and octaves as shown in example 10.6.

![Example 10.6](image)

The open intervals evoke an unfulfilled sense that expands deep into the soul. A meandering motive that outlines $d^7$ chord begins in measure 21 in accompaniment to the octaves (example 10.7).

![Example 10.7](image)

At this point, everything is notated in the bass clef, signifying the emotional lows experienced by the prisoner. Even more angst is faced in measure 26 as the prisoner begins to question the idea of hope. Musically, there are several elements that indicate
this conflict. The first is the altered meandering $d^7$ chord. An $A^\natural$ is added in measure 26 which competes with the $A^#$ octaves in the bass (example 10.8).

![Example 10.8](image)

The vocal line also causes dissonances: the $E^\natural$ against the $D$ and the $A^\natural$ against the $A^#$. This dissonance represents the internal war the prisoner is waging between holding tight to hope or to sink into a pit of despair. The meter also becomes unstable, changing every measure. The third verse is the climax of the entire piece. It illustrates the moment in which the prisoner must make the decision that will affect the remainder of his stay.

As the battle comes to a close, there is a shift in the prisoner’s mindset. He is no longer focused on internal struggles, as in the previous verses, rather the notice of his outward appearance draws him out of his dark place. He realizes how life in prison has affected him. This change provides a way to bolster himself and start looking towards the hope of beholding light yet. The octaves continue in the accompaniment, but they are pitched higher, illustrating the lightening emotion. There remains a sense of uncertainty and loneliness, but hope is beginning to take precedence. Not only are they notated both in the bass and treble clef, but at the end of measure 34 a third octave is added and they continue to rise in tandem until measure 36. The harmonic movements of these octaves are centered on $C^#$, neighboring both up and down. This instability illustrates the insecurity still felt, yet beginning to settle.
The final verse brings the stability for which the prisoner has been searching. The time signature remains consistent and the beginning harmonies are heard. Although of the same sonorities, the chord is played all at once instead of gradually adding notes. Thoughts of his family enter the prisoner’s mind, and with this he is strengthened and able to focus on the hope that he will one day see them again. Along with the chords, the meandering figure returns in measure 38, except it has been altered to outline the quartal relationships of the harmonies as shown in example 10.9. The meandering figure with the simplified harmonies of the right hand is presented here.

Example 10.9

It no longer serves as confliction. As the verse comes to a close, the prisoner is renewed with hope and is confident that he will be released. His self-assurance and optimism are shown through the final chord containing the highest pitches in the piece.

Bartók masterfully illustrated the prisoner’s journey through pain and despair and his decision to hold on to hope. Through the use of quartal harmonies, dissonances, and open intervals the portrayal of the emotions held in each individual verse is evident and extremely effective.
Chapter 11
Régi Keserves (Old Lament)

1 Olyan árva vagyok, mint út melett az ág,
2 Kinek minden ember nekimenyen slevág;
3 Az én élemnek es most úgy vagyonsorsa,
4 Mer borkros búbánat azt igen futkossa.

5 Hervadni kezdettem, mint összel a rózsa,
6 Kinek noncsen sohutt semi partfogója;
7 Addig menyek, addig a kerek ég alatt,
8 Valamíg megnyugszom fekete född alatt.

I am as lonely as the bough ailing the road
Which everyone stumbles into and cuts off;
The destiny of my life now is just the same,
Because it is interwoven with thorny grief.

I began to whither like the rose in autumn,
Who has no patron ever anywhere;
I will keep going under the firmament,
Until I get rest under the black earth.

In 1911, a folksong collector by the name of Antal Molnár visited Csík county. In the village of Gyergyóalfalu, he encountered a man named Ismeretlen who sang a melody that was later used by Bartók in Twenty Hungarian Folksongs as the song “Régi Keserves”. The original text collected with this melody by Molnár was substituted for another text, which Bartók had collected in the same village four years earlier from Tóth Péterné. The specific reason for the substitution is unclear, yet Bartók would often mix texts with different melodies as long as there was not a discrepancy of style.

Structurally, “Old Lament” is different than “In Prison”. The prose consists of two stanzas of four lines, each line containing twelve syllables. This poetic form, although less common than those with eight syllables, is considered to be of the old style.
The melody collected by Bartók in 1915 is structured similarly to that of Molnár’s. In example, 11.1 a side-by-side comparison of the melodies is shown.

Molnár’s melody

![Molnár’s melody image]

Bartók’s melody

![Bartók’s melody image]

Example 11.1

Both contain two sections that have an overall downward motion based on a pentatonic scale. When choosing material with which to work, Bartók did not always take the expected route. “[A]t times [he] preferred to select not the ideal or most beautiful variant of a melody but one that was less facile yet more interesting.”

Perhaps this is the reason for the switching of melodies. Bartók found Molnár’s melody more interesting and appropriate to the meaning of the text.

Expression of old, universal sentiments is rarely gender specific and the themes resonate with humanity. They are passed through generations because they contain wisdom and remind people that they are not the first to experience these emotions and

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111 Lampert, “Folk-Song Arrangement”, p. 402.
situations. Very often the origin of these verses cannot be remembered, yet they seem as old as the earth. Life can be an exhausting journey, yet there is some comfort offered in the fact that one is not the first to experience heavy emotional burdens.

Alone in the world, beaten and trampled upon, the speaker is consumed with feelings of defeat. Consuming grief has blinded and engulfed him to the point where nothing else can be seen. Hope is nonexistent. What would cause this much despair? Perhaps the death of a loved one, financial issues, or maybe fate has been unkind, heaping obstacles and tribulation at every turn in life. Whatever the cause, the pain and hollowness is manifested in the first stanza. No details are given regarding the gender or age of the narrator. This is important because it solidifies the text as a universal theme; something to which everyone man, woman, and child can relate at some point in their lives.

The internal turmoil is seen at a deeper level in the second stanza. The narrator is beginning to bend and unravel under the burden of these trials, both physically and emotionally. Life is draining away, withering as a flower (line 5) as cold reality takes hold. Line 7 offers a slightly different view of the situation. Although still dreary, the narrator resolves to trudge on through the murk and grime, accepting fate however grim. The journey ahead offers no solace or hope, only the awaited rest in death.

The parlando rubato is handled much the same way as “In prison.” Each line of the phrase is divided into strong and weak metric beats (as denoted by the stresses). The rhythm is simple and speech like. Time signatures change only when the parlando requires it, although the changes are less frequent than in the previous song. The melody
is again divided into two parts. The first creates a neighboring pattern around a B and G♯ (example 11.2).

![Example 11.2](image)

Ornamentation continues around the G in an exaggerated flourish in the second section outlining the G pentatonic scale (example 11.3).

![Example 11.3](image)

Verse two is similar, with slight variations to express emotional changes. Measure 36 is an excellent example of such an instant. Instead of continuing the repeated G pattern, on the words “semmi pártfogója”, meaning no patron, a descending B♭-G-F-G figure is seen. This modification allows the performer to distinguish a deeper emotional reaction than that which is in the first verse. Another inconsistency is the ending cadence of the second section. The final note is an F, or a ♯5 cadence, rather than the tonic G. This is indicative of the narrator’s unresolved sentiments. He is ill-fated and recognizes that he must continue, for there is no more hope in life, rest can only be achieved in death.

Alternating open fifths show the angst and emptiness felt by the narrator. The sparse texture reinforces this sentiment, the second fifth dropping like tear drops.
Example 11.4 shows that when combined, these two chords form a quartal relationship. Bartók favors the sonorities of the bass clef to illustrate feelings of despair.

Example 11.4

As this state of mind increases, the range in the accompaniment widens into the treble clef. In measure 10 the heightening despair is heard through the $F^\#$ dissonance that is introduced to the harmonies. As the second section of the first verse begins, the conflict is reinforced through an added $C^\#$ to the $F^\#$ in measure 15, conflicting with the sustained $G$ and $D$. This continues and increases through measure 37 until new musical material is introduced in the piano.

As the second verse begins a wandering figure (example 11.5) is heard, signifying the narrator’s resignation with his plight and his ultimate decision to wander the earth until the day death takes him.

Example 11.5

With no indication as to where the melody is heading, the narrator has become a wanderer on the way to nowhere. This nomadic theme is an overlay of the background thirds, which change to fifths in measure 34.

As the second section approaches in measure 37, the wandering figure becomes more agitated, with syncopation and faster rhythms. The intervals of the in the bass clef widen, increasing the empty feeling felt by the narrator. After the decision is made to
continue living only to welcome death, the open fifths of the first verse return, with
dissonance added with the F♯ as a constant reminder of the continual pain.

Bartók’s treatment of the text is indicative of the narrator’s emotions. In order to
identify with the source’s pain, he had to understand the daily trials and disappointments
of the Magyar peasants. Although the text offers a universal theme, the cultural
awareness of its origin permits Bartók to fully empathize and create a genuine
representation of the true emotions through the music.
Chapter 12
Bujodosó-ének (Wandering Song)

1 Erdők, völgyek, szűk legetek,
   You woods, dales, and narrow groves,
   You would think it is raining,
   The rose is blooming in the valleys,
2 Sokat bujdostam nemetek,
   I have often wandered among you,
   But only my eyes shed tears,
   Rain pours from the skies.
3 Bujdomstám én az vadakkal,
   I have wandered with the wild beasts,
   My eyes are full of tears, my cheeks are wet,
   And I, by myself, in such loneliness,
4 Sírtam a kis madarakkal.
   I have wept with the little birds.
   And all this for you, dearest.
   How shall I live without you!
5 Azt gondolnád, eső esik,
   You would think it is raining,
   But only my eyes shed tears,
   And I, by myself, in such loneliness,
6 Pedig a szemem könnyezik,
   But only my eyes shed tears,
   My eyes are full of tears, my cheeks are wet,
   How shall I live without you!
7 Szemem könnyes, orcám nedves,
   And all this for you, dearest.
   And I, by myself, in such loneliness,
    How shall I live without you!
8 Mind teérted van ez, Kedves.
   And I, by myself, in such loneliness,
7 Mind teérted van ez, Kedves.
9 Rózsa nyilik az völgyekből,
   The rose is blooming in the valleys,
   And I, by myself, in such loneliness,
10 Esik eső az egyekből.
   Rain pours from the skies.
   How shall I live without you!
11 Hát én magma így egyedül,
   And I, by myself, in such loneliness,
   How shall I live without you!
12 Hogy éljek meg nálad nélkül!
   How shall I live without you!
   How shall I live without you!

In September 1906, Bartók wandered through the Magyar countryside looking for melodic treasures to record. He came upon the small village of Felsőiregh in the county of Tolna, where a woman gave him the opportunity to collect such a song - “Bujodosó-ének”.

Structurally, this text contains most of the characteristics that are consistent in the old style. Stanzas are comprised of four lines, each containing eight syllables. This is the most common style of the antiquated prose. Although a text in the old style is commonly composed of four stanzas, “Bujodosó-ének” has only three.
The Hungarian countryside is a beautiful landscape. Trees exist in abundance and wildlife flourishes. It is a quiet place offering many venues in which one can be alone and think. Such a place is described by the narrator: woods dense with overgrowth and wildlife. As the speaker wanders alone, the beasts and birds his only company, this happy image is slightly obscured when tears are revealed in line 4. No more can the scene be viewed as a blissful place, but a haven of sorrow.

In the second stanza, the extent of the sorrow is encountered through an outpouring of tears. The grass and flowers beneath his feet feel the water falling to the ground as if it is raining (line 5), yet these drops come not from the sky but from the eyes of the speaker. Something has deeply upset the narrator and as a result, he is unable to quench the emotion. The final line of the stanza reveals the source of the intense reaction, a beloved.

Despite all of the life that surrounds him, the narrator feels utterly alone. There are beautiful roses in the valley (line 9) signaling life, love, and happiness, yet he has none. Rain falling from the sky represents his tears (line 10), however the existence of other beings does not comfort or console him. The love of his life, his “dearest,” has been taken from him. The purpose for this removal is unclear. It could be that the beloved died, she married another, or has left him. Regardless, the intense emotional response remains. In the last line of the stanza, the narrator exclaims that he does not know how he will go on without the companionship of his love.

The stresses indicated by Bartók in the final draft function the same as the previous settings discussed. Rather than alternating the normal strong-weak measures of the metrical downbeat pattern, the vocal line is shown to follow a strong-strong-strong-
strong-strong pattern (example 12.1). The absence of weak downbeats brings urgency to the flow of the phrase. There is no metrical lilt, only an insistent, hard movement. The second section of the melody is similar except for the final measure, which is notated as weak (example 12.2).

Meter changes occur in the second section of the tune. This is important, because it is in the last two lines of each verse that the narrator reveals his emotional instability. Stanzas two and three share a metrical pattern, but there is one alteration in the third. At the entrance of the third verse, there is an immediate change of tone. A single measure is added in the middle of line 9. It is as if the narrator’s tears are yet again beginning to flow and he needs a moment to compose himself. In measure 37, the stress pattern changes (example 12.3).

The measure both begins and ends with a strong beat showing that the narrator is overcome with emotion and can no longer contain himself. This changing of the metric
pattern effectively demonstrates Bartók’s sensitivity in setting the text, and allows him to successfully simulate the emotional response of holding back tears.

To show the narrator’s aimless walks through the woods, Bartók uses a chromatic collection of pitches between $E^\flat$ and $G^\natural$ (excluding $E^\natural$ and $F^\natural$) which are sounded in three octaves. In order to foreshadow the loneliness that is not yet revealed, open $D^\flat$ octaves are used as a pedal tone, an inescapable, continuous sound below the surface (example 12.4).

![Example 12.4](image)

This continues until measure 11 when the second section begins, and the narrator reveals his sorrow. At this point, the $D^\flat$ pedal tone is raised to an $F^\natural$, heightening the tension, and remains unstable as it changes from $F-C^\flat-B^\flat-F^\flat$. The wandering pattern also moves up to include the chromatic pitches between $F_b$ and $A^\natural$ (excluding $F^\natural$ and $A^\flat$).

The harmonic texture dramatically thins beginning in measure 17. The reason for the sorrow has been unveiled and with that remembrance the emptiness inside overwhelms the speaker. An $F^\flat$ pedal tone is a constant reminder of the void left behind by his beloved. In measure 27 the register of the pedal tone is dropped and altered to an $F^\natural$. Around the $F^\natural$ short chromatic scalar passages are interspersed, alternating between the treble and bass clefs, until they join in simultaneous rising octaves in measures 27.
Measure 32 is the point of yet another change in texture. No longer are there sparse pedal tones paired with a wandering scale. A solitary note, D♮2, is heard by itself for a full measure and a half. This is the point in the verse where loneliness is most strongly felt, and the emotion can no longer be controlled. Solid chords are heard on the downbeats, except in measure 36 where, again, the D♮2 natural stands alone. When the crushing loneliness overflows in measure 38, the chordal sonorities are the densest and most widely ranged. His hollow tears, the evidence of overly spent emotion, are reconstructed through the falling octaves at the end of measure 41 into 43. The sparse, open texture of verse two returns as he says “and I, by myself, in such loneliness” (measure 43). The final sonority leaves him only consoled with the dissonance of empty octave seconds (example 12.5).

Example 12.5

Bartók’s play with texture and pedal tones throughout the song is an aural reminder of the emptiness and loneliness consuming the narrator due to the loss of his beloved. The text is full of an ancient yet modern sentiment that reveals humanity’s need to connect with others. When these bonds are broken, one may feel completely alone, despite the presence of life surrounding them. Although this sentiment is expressed in many ancient cultures around the world, Bartók’s understanding of the people from
which it came allows him to add musical elements that are distinctly Hungarian. This relationship between the music and the text elicits a genuinely Magyar composition in every facet.
Chapter 13

Pásztornota (Shepherd’s Song)

1 Mikor guláskegény voltam,
When I was a herds-boy,
2 Zöld mezőre kihajtotam,
I drove the cattle afield,
3 Zöld mezőre kihajtotam,
I drove the cattle afield,
4 Gula melett elaludtam.
And fell asleep beside the cattle.
5 Gula mellet elaludtam,
I fell asleep beside the cattle,
6 Ott én cask magma maradtam
And was left all to myself;
7 Fölébredtem éjféltájba,
When I awoke around midnight,
8 Egy barmom sincs az állásba.
Not one head of cattle did I find in its place.

9 Őszszejártam szállásimat,
I roamed through all me dwellings,
10 Szállásimat, határimat,
My dwellings and the fields,
11 Még sem találtam barmomra,
Yet I did not find my cattle,
12 Csak a barna galambomra
Only my brown dove.

József Pál, a native of the village of Kaposujlak in Somogy county, aided in the preservation of folksong on August 3, 1899. Belá Vikár was in the area collecting melodies, and while in Somogy county met József Pál, who sang an old song called “Pásztornota”. Vikár dutifully recorded the man’s offering, which was later chosen by Bartók as the final tune included in the first volume of Twenty Hungarian Folksongs.

“Pásztornota”, which is translated as “Shepherd’s Song”, tells the story of a shepherd who fell asleep, and when he awoke his cattle were nowhere to be found. The Hungarian peasants have traditionally earned their living by farming and shepherding. Therefore, to lose an entire herd of cattle would cause indubitable panic. The manner in which this shepherd feeds, clothes, and shelters his family has suddenly vanished. Bartók
was aware that these people were dependent on the wellbeing of the herds and farms, and that misfortune would prove disastrous, thrusting them into destitution.

Bartók employs a change of meter in every bar through the first two verses. Each downbeat is strong, except in a few key spots. It should also be noted that the strong stresses occur on every first and fifth syllable, dividing the eight syllable phrase in half. This pattern of the text accent is consistent throughout the piece, although it does not always match metrically. For example, measure 27 is in 7/8 meter and contains six syllables, the remaining two syllables of the phrase in the next measure. Because the fifth syllable, a strong beat, is grouped in the previous measure, the weak beat, rather than the strong beat, falls on the downbeat of measure 28 (example 13.1).

Example 13.1

This is interesting in that it is the same point at which the shepherd admits that he cannot find his cattle anywhere despite searching. Another instance in which the pattern is altered is in the last phrase (example 13.2).

Example 13.2

The second strong beat is shifted to the penultimate syllable stressing the last syllable of the word “galambom”, a dove. As only animal that the shepherd could find, this
emphasizes the disappointment and cost experienced from the consequences of his carelessness.

Musically, the shepherd’s panic is heard from the very beginning. Tremolos in the right hand on octave Es contrast sharply with a sustained F octave in the left hand. A triplet figure falling to the F is representative of the shepherd’s heart dropping as he realizes that his cattle are missing (example 13.3).

As the sustained tone changes to an F# and then to a G, the triplet figure follows supplying the same function. His growing panic is about to overwhelm him when he is suddenly able to calm down slightly.

A change in texture occurs in measure 11 signifying the control of the panic. The shepherd has now gotten over the shock of losing his stock and has resolved himself to search for them. This resolve, or calming down, is depicted through the tenuto markings over the steadied rhythm (example 13.4).
Alas, this moment of collected calm is interrupted when the F on the and of beat 3 of measure 11 expands outwards ending in a dissonance of $B^\flat$ over $B^\natural$. The panic has returned, although this time it is not as frenzied. Sustained chords illustrate the horror and despair felt as he retraces his actions trying to understand how something like this could happen. The reappearance of the falling triplet figure in measure 13 is the acceleration of his heart as he realizes that his loss is a reality and it was entirely his fault. Adding a triplet in measure 12 in the treble clef with an opposite motion (stepping up) heightens the anxiety. The alternating figures move away from one another in quick succession. The shepherd is mortified by his irresponsibility and is consumed with grief and guilt.

In measure 21, the fact that his cattle are missing and the responsibility is his has mentally settled. A slow, disconcerting progression is heard as the hopeless search for the cattle begins. Long, sustained chords represent the shepherd’s isolation. The low voicing of the descending base line is representative of his despair. It is only when he find his brown dove that the lowest note of the piece is heard. Interestingly enough, this is also the only moment in which the stress pattern of the lyrics is altered. Destitute and guilt ridden, the shepherd has sunk to his lowest emotional point. The final chord, shown in example 13.5, illustrates this through the open, empty octaves, the dissonance between them. This is also the lowest sonority in the piece.
Example 13.5

Bartók’s musical implementations take the listener on the shepherd’s emotional journey. If he was not familiar with the importance of livestock to the Magyars’ quality of life, the setting would not have been as expressive nor would it have been as successful. It is the understanding of the culture that provides Bartók with the ability to completely capture the emotion and reality behind a shepherd’s lament.
Chapter 14

Conclusion

As this study shows, a detailed understanding of the Hungarian peasant culture is needed to fully grasp the intensity and nuances of Bartók’s settings in the first volume of *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs*. Although a general analysis is needed in all performed pieces, it is the connection to the history behind these songs that allows the performer to completely and genuinely portray the texts. Folksongs can be a difficult genre to perform, as that they are based on the beliefs and ideals of a single people. Although the themes may be universal, the colloquial language and images evoked are inherent to that culture. Unlike composed art song, they harness an emotional depth that envelopes hundreds and thousands of years of beliefs, experiences, and struggles. Colloquialisms are prevalent throughout the folksong, and not understanding their origin can cause misinterpretation.

Bartók’s masterful settings incorporate the incivility associated with folk music with the gracefulness considered to be high art in music, and demand a place among the great art songs of history. Although they are not tonally based on traditional harmonies, the fact Bartók developed a new harmonic structure that is uniquely Hungarian is remarkable. Musical integrity is maintained throughout the collection.

There is much research left to be done regarding *Twenty Hungarian*
Folksongs. In future projects, this research can be extended to include the remaining volumes of the work. It would also be interesting to identify the history related to the county from which each song was collected. This would provide a deeper understanding of the texts based on the ideals of the individual areas. Looking closely at the usage of the language would be a fascinating study for future endeavors, as well as a closer look at the first few programs that included this set and the reviews thereof. All of these topics could eventually be compiled into a performer’s guide which would make these songs more accessible to the vocal studio.
Bibliography


_____. Autograph copy of *Húsz Magyar Népdal*, PB 64VoPFC1, 1–68. Budapest: Bartók Archives.


Appendix A: Final Draft Syllable Stresses

A TÖMLÖCBEN

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Gon-do-dat vi-se-li az Ist-en,
Ki-sza-ba-du-lok még in-nen.

RÉGI KESERVÉS
O-lyan ár-va va-gyok, mint út me-lett az ág,
Ki-nek min-den em-ber ne- ki-me-nyen sle-vág;
Az én é-lem-nek es most úgy va-gyon-sor-sa,
Mer bor-kros bú-bá-nat azt i-gen fu-tos-sa.

Her-vad-ni kez-de-ttem, mint ősz-szel a róz-sa,
Ki-nek non-csen so-hutt se-mi part-fo-gó-ja;
Ad-dig me-nyek, ad-dig a ke-rek ég a-latt,
Va-la-míg meg-nyu-szom fe-ke-te född a-latt.

BUJODOSÓ-ÉNEK
Er-dők, völ-gyek, szűk le-ge-tek,
So-kat buj-do-stam ne-me-tek,
Buj-dom-stám én az va-dak-kal,
Sír-tam a kis ma-da-rak-kal.

Azt gon-dol-nád, e-ső e-sik,
Pe-dig a sze-mem kön-nye-zik,
Sze-mem kön-nyes, or-cám ned-ves,
Mind te-ér-ted van ez, Ked-ves.
Rózsa nyílik az völ-gyek-ből,
E-sik e-ső az e-gyek-ből.
Hát én én igy e-gye-dül,
Hogy él-jek meg ná-lad nél-küll!

PÁSZTORNOTA
Mi-ker gu-lás-ke-gény vol-tam,
Zöld me-ző-re ki-haj-to-tam,
Zöld me-ző-re ki-haj-to-tam,
Gu-la me-lett e-la-lud-tam.

Gú-la mel-let e-la-lud-tam,
Ott én cask mag-ma ra-rad-tam
Főlé- bred-tem ép-fél táj-ba,
Egy bar-mom sincs az ál-lás-ba.

Ösz-sze-jár-tam szál-lá- si-mat,
Szál-lá- si-mat, ha-tá- ri-mat,
Még sem ta-lál-tam bar-mom-ra,
Csak a bar-na ga-lam-bom-ra
Appendix B: Score Excerpt Copyright Permission

April 15, 2014

Kate Rawls
University of South Carolina
3063 Beechaven Rd.
Columbia, SC 29204
USA

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Appendix C: Recital Programs
presents

KATE RAWLS, soprano

in

Doctoral Candidacy Recital

Sharon Rattray, piano

Monday, October 3, 2011 • 6:00 PM • Recital Hall

Fêtes Galantes I & II
  En Sourdine
  Fantoches
  Clair de Lune
  Les Ingénus
  Le Faune
  Colloque sentimental

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

Villanelle

Eva Dell’ Acqua
(1856-1930)

Nacht
  Ich schweb
  Das verlassene Mägdlein
  Der Gärtner

Richard Strauss
(1864-1949)

Hugo Wolf
(1860-1903)

from The Ballad of Baby Doe
  “Willow Song”
  “Always Through the Changing”

Douglas Moore
(1893-1969)

Auf geheimem Waldespfade
  The Lament of Ian the Proud

Charles Griffes
(1884-1920)

from Susannah
  “Ain’t it a pretty night”

Carlisle Floyd
(b. 1926)

Ms. Rawls is a student of Tina Stallard. This recital is given
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for candidacy to
the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance.
KATE RAWLS, soprano

In
Doctoral Recital

Sharon Rattray, piano

Monday, April 2, 2012
6:00 PM • Recital Hall

Bella mia fiamma...Resta, o cara

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Dein Angesicht
Schlusslied des Narren
Intermezzo
An den Mond

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

I Never Saw Another Butterfly

Lori Laitmen
(b. 1955)

I. The Butterfly
II. Yes, That’s the Way Things Are
III. Birdsong
IV. The Garden
V. Man Proposes, God Disposes
VI. The Old House

Laura Zitelli, clarinet

Fiançailles Pour Rire

Francis Poulenc
(1899-1963)

I. La Dame d’André
II. Dans l’herebe
III. Il vole
IV. Mon cadaver est doux comme un gant
V. Violon
VI. Fluers

from Linda di Chamounix

Ah! tardai troppo - O luce quest’anima

Gaetano Donizetti
(1797-1848)

Mr. Rawls is a student of Tina Stallard.
This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance.
KATE RAWLS, soprano

In
Doctoral Recital

Sharon Rattray, piano

Monday, April 2, 2012
6:00 PM • Recital Hall

Bella mia fiamma...Resta, o cara  Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Dein Angesicht  Robert Schumann
Schlusslied des Narren  (1810-1856)
Intermezzo
An den Mond

I Never Saw Another Butterfly  Lori Laitmen
I. The Butterfly  (b. 1955)
II. Yes, That's the Way Things Are
III. Birdsong
IV. The Garden
V. Man Proposes, God Disposes
VI. The Old House

Laura Zitelli, clarinet

Françaises Pour Rire  Francis Poulenc
I. La Dame d'André  (1899-1963)
II. Dans l'herbe
III. Il vole
IV. Mon cadaver est doux comme un gant
V. Violon
VI. Fluers

from Linda di Chamounix  Gaetano Donizetti
Ah! tardai troppo - O luce quest'anima  (1797-1848)

Mr. Rawls is a student of Tina Stallard.
This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance.
IV.  The Trees They Grow So High
    Dink’s Song
    She’s Like the Swallow
    O Walzy, Walzy
    Pray Goody
    I Will Give My Love an Apple
    The Soldier and the Sailor

arr. Benjamin Britten
(1913-1976)

Ms. Rawls is a student of Tina Stallard.
This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance.
KATE RAWLS, soprano
in
DOCTORAL RECITAL

Sharon Rattray, piano

Friday, October 4, 2013
4:30 PM • Recital Hall

Lo temi...Lo potò! Ma frattanto, oh infelice
from Paride ed Elena

Christoph Willibald von Gluck
(1714-1787)

Trois Fables
I. Le Corbeau et le Renard
II. La Cigale et la Fourmi
III. Le Loup et l’Agneau

André Caplet
(1878-1925)

Ach, ich fühls
from Die Zauberflöte

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Sorozat (Végys Dalok)
I. Juhászcsőről
II. Tréfás Női
III. Párosító (1)
IV. Pár-ének
V. Párosító (2)

Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)

The Bird
Little Elegy
Voices
I Carry Your Heart
A Piper

John Duke
(1899-1984)

Ah! non credea...Ah! non giunge
from La Sonnambula

Vincenzo Bellini
(1801-1835)

Ms. Rawls is a student of Tina Milhorn Stallard.
This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance.
Presents

KATE RAWLS, sopranino

in

Doctoral Lecture Recital

Sharon Rattray, piano

Tuesday, April 22, 2014 · 6:00 PM · MUS 060

Szomorú nóták

Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)

I. Tömlöcben
II. Régi Keserves
III. Bujdosó-ének
IV. Pásztornota

V. Székely “Lassú”
VI. Székely “Friss
XVII. Érik a ropogós
XVIII. Már Dobozon
IXX. Sárgo kukoricaszál
XX. Buza, buza

Mrs. Rawls is a student of Tina Stallard.
The recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Performance