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Béla Bartók, from Tradition to Universality

Abstract

Considered during his lifetime one of the 3 pillars of the aesthetic musical revolution of modernity in the first half of 20th century, alongside Schoenberg and Stravinsky, Béla Bartók was born in 1881 in a small village of Transylvania, in Romania. His works were studied by musicologists only from a compositional point of view. Researchers attempted to decipher his musical language and put forward various theories, some stemming from the highly speculative abilities of their authors.

Bartók, like other contemporary composers from Eastern Europe, as Georges Enescu, or Léos Janacek, created his works at a time when the musical language was being questioned in the Western classical music. Immersed in peasant music from his childhood, Bartók was among the first ethnomusicologists in the world to record and preserve the tunes and songs of the peasants, to safeguard them from their potential disappearance. He quickly realized that the simple melodies and rhythms of these tunes could be a source of inspiration for his own compositions. I realized from 2002 research on Bartók's violin works, considering not only the musical language he developed, based on melodic and harmonic structures, but also the instrumental techniques of the Transylvanian peasants, a region extensively explored by the composer. It appears that certain elements and the impact of peasant's instrumental gestures, which do not align with "classical" instrumental technique, may have directly influenced the composer's musical language.

The presentation I am proposing today will demonstrate this thesis: from elements of musical and peasant instrumental techniques, Bartók founded an original musical language which propelled him by the most appreciated composers of Western art music.

By assimilating traditional elements from diverse music and traditional cultures, Bartók established a link between peasant's traditions and the musical modernity of the first half of the 20th century and the compositions inspired by the peasant's tunes propelled him to the ranks of the most illustrious composers of the world and opened to him the door to the Universality.



Short CV Dr. Liliana-Isabela Apostu
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Liliana-Isabela Apostu holds a Doctorate of Arts from the University of Nice, is qualified for the position of University Lecturer and is an Associate Professor of Music. Born in Romania into a family steeped in music and the arts, she began studying violin at the Music High School in Iași in 1981 and completed her studies with a concert diploma under Maestro Stefan Ruha in 1998 at the Cluj National Academy of Music. Arriving in France in 2001 after winning an international competition to join the youth orchestra in Nantes, she simultaneously pursued advanced studies in Baroque music performance with Daniel Cuiller. In 2002, she began her studies in musicology at the University of Nice, culminating in a doctoral thesis in 2010. Since 2011, she has dedicated herself to research, teaching, and performance as a concert violinist and in chamber music ensembles. Her research offers a fresh perspective on the works of 20th-century composers from Eastern European countries and has gradually expanded into diverse fields within musicology, ethnomusicology, aesthetics, and music education. She collaborates with universities in France, including Aix-en-Provence, Nice, Paris, and Angers, as well as internationally in Germany, Romania, Tunisia, and Canada. After university affiliations in Nice, Oldenburg, and Montreal, she is currently a researcher and lecturer at Aix-Marseille University.