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The Violin Concerti of Béla Bartók

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ABSTRACT

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There are two violin concertos in Béla Bartók’s body of compositions. The first concerto written in 1907 is obscure and rarely heard, while the second, completed in 1939, is widely performed and generally regarded as a twentieth-century masterwork. Bartók had contrasting relationships with the violinists for whom the works were written: the first, for Stefi Geyer; and the second, for Zoltán Székely. My thesis will compare the two concerti, illustrating how the second refines, expands and more fully develops the compositional approach of the first. It will also examine the working relationship and influence the performers had on the ultimate outcome of the concerti. This comparison of two works with very different outcomes offers insights into Bartók’s compositional methods and development.
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INTRODUCTION

Béla Bartók wrote two violin concertos thirty years apart. The first is obscure and rarely heard; the second is widely performed and generally regarded as a twentieth-century masterwork. Studying the two concerti side by side offers insights into Bartók’s compositional development and the ways in which performers influenced his music. In the thirty years between the two violin concerti, Bartók became the composer we know today – an artistic innovator who wrote in a musical language infused with folk music, expressed within meticulous structure.

This document discusses both violin concertos in depth as well as the transformation in Bartók’s artistic language. It also studies the relationships with the violinists for whom he wrote the works: the first, for Stefi Geyer; and the second, for Zoltán Székely.

The first chapter gives a brief background on the composer’s life and both concerti. The next chapter deals with the First Violin Concerto, including its genesis and Bartók’s rather short lived, one-sided relationship with Stefi Geyer – and the dismal effect that this affair had on young Bartók as well as the fate of the first concerto. It gives insight into young Bartók’s
character, philosophy, and musical language, which was marked by his waning interest in late romantic German music and the increasing influence of folk music. The third chapter examines Bartók’s achievements and developments during the thirty years before he began composing the Second Violin Concerto. Lastly, the final chapter discusses Bartók’s mature compositional language, his collaborative relationship with Székely, and the influence that this relationship had on the final outcome of the concerto.

This study of the two concertos reveals a composer who took in the world around him—whether it was a youthful love interest, indigenous music, or the advice of a trusted colleague— and refracted it in a distinctly personal way.
CHAPTER 1

Brief biographical information on Béla Bartók and background information on the First and Second Violin Concertos

Béla Viktor János Bartók (1881-1945)

Béla Viktor János Bartók was born on 25 March 1881 in a relatively small town of Nagyszentmiklos of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. An ethnic mix of Romanians, Germans, Hungarians, and Serbs, his birthplace later became the Western tip of Romania after the signing of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. Until Bartók’s teenage years, much of his life was unsettled: the family also faced a great deal of financial trouble when his father passed away in 1888, which caused them to move around rather frequently. Moreover, young Bartók suffered chronically from lung problems and other illnesses. Despite unstable conditions, once the family managed to settle down in Pozsony, Bratislava, Bartók worked hard as a pianist and a composer, starting his first numbered opus in 1890, and

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completing his education in piano and composition at the Academy of Music in Budapest in 1903.²

The years after post graduation until 1908 were transitional, allowing Bartók to develop as a composer and a pianist. Around the time of his graduation, the nationalist current in Hungary had a resurgence, and Bartók became concerned with this political wave, in particular with the problem of national music. Under the influence of the nationalist fervor, Bartók wrote his first orchestral piece, a symphonic poem *Kossuth* (1903) – a Hungarian “Hero’s Life” – which was very well-received. He also spent the summer of 1903 in Gmunden, Austria, working with Ernő Dohnányi and making plans to launch his career as a concert pianist. For the next year or so, he embarked on a somewhat successful career as a pianist.³ It is during this time – sometime in 1904 – that he had his first encounter with folk music, and his increasing interest in Hungarian folk music resulted in the start of his collaborations with Zoltán Kodály. His initial interest later broadened into Slovak and Romanian folk music, and folk music would have a profound

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³ Stevens, 19.
effect on his compositional language.\textsuperscript{4} It is also around this time that Bartók fell in love for the first time, which resulted in his composition of the \textit{First Violin Concerto} (Op.posth.) in 1908, dedicated to the object of his affection, Stefi Geyer. Unfortunately, Geyer rejected both the Concerto and its composer. Although he was heartbroken, he soon fell in love again and married his first wife Márta Ziegler in 1909.

Bartók attempted to remedy the failure of the First Violin Concerto by trying to reincorporate elements from it into a new composition, \textit{Two Portraits for Orchestra, Op. 5}. However, according to Stevens, the \textit{Two Portraits}, first preformed in 1909 with László Kún conducting the Budapest Symphony “was anything but successful.”\textsuperscript{5} Although discouraged, Bartók continued to compose new works: between 1909 to 1912, he produced two Romanian Dances, four Dirges, the second and third Burlesques, \textit{Allegro barbaro} for piano, Four Pieces for orchestra, as well as the one-act opera, \textit{Duke Bluebeard’s Castle}, which was to receive its deserved recognition in a few years to come.

\textsuperscript{4} Gillies, 4.
\textsuperscript{5} Stevens, 46.
Though *Kossuth* had been a success, Bartók had struggled since then as a composer and pianist. He became increasingly dissatisfied with the direction of his career and frustrated with his surroundings. He withdrew from Hungarian public musical life, and devoted a lot of effort and energy into his research in folk music.

Even though Bartók was putting a lot of work into his folk music research, he continued to work on his compositions, and the years between 1914-1920 brought a good amount of success in his career through his works *The Wooden Prince Op.13* and the opera *Duke Bluebeard’s Castle* for the Budapest Opera. According to Malcolm Gillies:

> These successes led to something Bartók had longed for: a comprehensive agreement to publish his compositions, both past and future, with one of the leading promoters of contemporary music, Universal Edition of Vienna.\(^6\)

After the end of the First World War, Bartók’s personal life took a different turn: he divorced his first wife, and married pianist Ditta Pásztory in 1923. He was also able to enjoy a more successful career as a pianist and composer in Hungary. In these years, Bartók developed a desire to visit Western

\(^6\) Gillies, 5.
Europe, the United States, and the Soviet Union. He organized a number of tours as a pianist, mostly playing his own music – solo piano pieces, his piano concertos, as well as violin sonatas and rhapsodies. By 1928, he had already succeeded in writing four string quartets. These garnered significant attention among musicians for their combination of innovative qualities and classical structure, reminiscent of Beethoven’s string quartets. In 1934 Bartók was appointed to the folk music section of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, freeing him from his duties as a member of the piano faculty at the Budapest Academy of Music. This allowed him to focus on the transcription and analysis of volumes of Hungarian, Romanian, and Slovak folk music during the time between the wars.\(^7\) This new appointment gave Bartók a lot of pleasure, for he had been becoming increasingly unhappy with his job as a professor of piano. His piano class at the Academy was not made up of the best students, and although more talented students approached him as his stature grew, Bartók resented teaching untalented pupils.\(^8\) He wished to focus on his research in folk music, and in the years leading up to his new post, he had made significant contributions in this

\(^7\) Stevens, 6.
\(^8\) Stevens, 39.
field. In 1930, he was made Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, his book on Hungarian Folk Music was published in 1931, and he was rapidly becoming renowned in the field of musico-ethnology. Bartók was also able to compose a large body of what is now considered some of his best repertoire during this period, including his final two string quartets, Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta, the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, the Second Violin Concerto and a stunning collection of Twenty-seven Choruses. Among these accomplishments, his Second Violin Concerto had a much different fate than his First, which was never premiered during Bartók’s lifetime. Violinist Zoltán Székely and the Concertgebouw Orchestra under the direction of Willem Megelberg gave a remarkable premiere of the second concerto in 1939. Herman Rutters wrote for the Algemeen Handelsblad that “the Concerto is a great work and Székely’s interpretation deserves all praise.”

However, the growing tension in Europe around this time encouraged Bartók to seriously rearrange his life, and he began to consider emigrating to

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9 Ibid.
10 Gillies, 6.
America. He moved his publishing contract to Boosey & Hawkes after his former publisher Universal Editions was taken over by the Nazis, and he made his final concert tour of Western Europe in France, Switzerland, and Italy in 1939. One year later, Bartók was offered a job at Columbia University as a research fellow as well as an honorary doctorate. Bartók and his wife embarked on his second American concert tour and immigrated to America, settling down in New York. During his first couple of years in America, he focused his energy on folk music research at Columbia University as well as performing concerts, often with his wife. Rather devastatingly, he was also dealing with the first signs of leukemia, which forced him to give his last concert in 1943. Although he was in poor health in the last years of his life, Bartók was very prolific during this time, composing the Concerto for Orchestra (1943) and the Third Piano Concerto (1945). He also drafted his Viola Concerto as well as completing his study of Serbo-Croatian folksongs and Romanian folk music. Bartók died on 26 September 1945 in New York City.

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12 Gillies, 6
13 Ibid.
Bartók undertook a great deal of study and research during his lifetime and devoted much of his energy to the discovery, study, and collection of folk music. He combined his interest in these simple, rural tunes with his imaginative musical structure, rhythmic patterns, and dissonance in his own compositions. Therefore, his music was often considered challenging by the public, and many of his musical peers perceived his music as too eclectic and eccentric. Nevertheless, Bartók was consistently supported by those who believed in his music and trusted that it would take its place in history. One such person was Zoltán Székely, who was Bartók’s lifelong musical collaborator and a close friend. As Brian Lorne Harris writes in his forward for Claude Kenneson’s *Székely and Bartók: The Story of a Friendship*, “in Székely, Bartók did indeed find a sympathetic and responsive interpreter of his music.”14 It is very evident how the personal working relationship and the understanding of Bartók’s music affected the fate of Bartók’s two violin concertos – one virtually unknown, the other performed around the world.

14 Kenneson, ix.
The First Violin Concerto

The composition of the First Violin Concerto – his first major work for a string instrument – was composed at a formative point in Bartók’s career. Up until this point, Bartók had been focusing his efforts on the piano and his music conservatory education. He had gained a substantial amount of success as a pianist when he performed the Liszt b-minor Sonata in his first public concert in the Academy of Music, which earned him praise as a young man with “extraordinary strength”. Bartók was also exploring composition for the first time, writing primarily for piano.

Bartók’s musical language was significantly influenced by hearing the music of Richard Strauss for the first time. He felt himself drawn to large orchestral tone poems such as Ein Heldenleben and Also Sprach Zarathustra. Many years later, he wrote of the impact Also Sprach Zarathustra had on him:

…I was aroused as by a flash of lightning by the first Budapest performance of Also Sprach Zarathustra…This work… stimulated the greatest enthusiasm in me… Straight away I threw myself into a study of Strauss’s scores, and began to compose…

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15 Stevens, 15.
The introduction to the music of Strauss inspired Bartók to compose *Kossuth* in 1903, his first symphonic poem, which was met with great success. In the following year, he completed a Piano Quintet (unpublished), the Rhapsody, Op.1 for piano, and Op.2 Scherzo for piano and orchestra. While his music clearly flowed from the classical tradition, perhaps the most important discovery of this period was the “one which was to change the whole orientation of his esthetics, to make its impression upon every subsequent composition.”

By chance Bartók had encountered Hungarian peasant music, and immediately became involved with discovering, collecting, and learning more about folk music in many parts of Eastern Europe, Turkey, and even North Africa. After failing to receive a prize in the Rubenstein Competition in Paris as neither a pianist and nor a composer in 1905, Bartók turned from his concert career to his first collaboration with Zoltán Kodály, publishing his first Hungarian folk song settings and taking expeditions with Kodály to collect folk tunes from many different parts of Eastern Europe.

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¹⁷ Stevens, 22.
In 1907, the twenty-six-year old Bartók accepted a position as a professor of piano at the Academy of Music in Budapest. There he renewed his acquaintance with Stefi Geyer, a nineteen-year old violinist studying with Jánó Hubay. They had known each other since 1903 when they were both students at the Academy of Music.\(^{18}\) As evidenced by their yearlong correspondence, which included twenty letters and several postcards, Bartók and Geyer built their relationship through conversations about music and later, philosophy. However, the relationship was unbalanced: despite Bartók’s efforts, Geyer seemed often distant and mute. When Bartók started to compose the First Violin Concerto in 1907, he was eager for her feedback, and wrote that he “always has [her] style of playing in mind” and that “otherwise [he] would not compose it”.\(^{19}\) Nevertheless, there is almost no written response about the concerto from Geyer. Given Bartók’s statement in another letter that “we have one trait in common – that we are both better at


\(^{19}\) Béla Bartók, Briefe an Stefi Geyer. Edited by Lajos Nyikos Paul Sacher. (Basel: Privatdruck Ltd., 1979), sec.2.
writing than at talking...”\textsuperscript{20}, it is unlikely that they spoke in person either. As a result, Geyer seemed to have given no input during the working process of the Concerto. Her dismissive attitude caused Bartók a great deal of grief and prevented him from publishing the Concerto during his lifetime, ultimately bringing no light or attention to this work for a very long time.

\textbf{The Second Violin Concerto}

Between the years of the First and the Second Violin Concerto, Bartók accomplished a great deal of composition and research. He had completed a study of one-hundred-and-fifty Hungarian folksongs from Transylvania with Zoltán Kodály as well as a study of Romanian Christmas songs, and he had written a significant amount of string music – five string quartets, two violin sonatas, and two Rhapsodies for Violin.

In 1936, violinist Zoltán Székely, a good friend and a frequent chamber music partner, asked Bartók to write a violin concerto for him.

Born in Kocs, Hungary on 8 December 1903, Zoltán Székely studied violin with Sándor Kőszegi, Joseph Bloch, and Janó Hubay at the Franz Liszt

Academy of Music. Székely also had a great deal of interest in composition and was a rather accomplished composer regularly receiving guidance from Zoltán Kodály. Székely became a huge influence on Bartók’s works for violin, from performing the monumental cycle of the complete string quartets to premiering the Second Violin Concerto. He also became intimately involved with both Rhapsodies for Violin, and premiered the Second Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra with the Budapest Philharmonic under the baton of Ernst von Dohnányi.

At the time when Székely first proposed the idea of composing a violin concerto, Bartók was occupied with many other projects. However, upon receiving Székely’s proposal Bartók decided to conduct due diligence and find out about violin concertos from the most recent relevant composers – Berg, Weill, and Szymanowski – asking for copies of “the most recent relevant [violin] literature in [the] catalogue” from his publisher, Universal Editions.21 When he did start to work seriously on the second concerto in 1937, he discussed everything from its initial formal layout to small rhythmic details with Székely, as it is evident in their many letters to each other.

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21 Gillies, 515.
other during that time. In the days leading up to the premiere, Székely recalled that they went through the concerto very thoroughly, and as they worked together, Bartók played the orchestra part on the piano while Székely played the solo part, and they discussed in detail “what should be done and how it should be played.” Székely also took great care in expressing Bartók’s wishes while rehearsing with Mengelberg and the Concertgebouw Orchestra, making sure that there would be plenty of time to rehearse with the orchestra by carefully planning the rest of the concert program with Mengelberg and going to great lengths to ensure that Bartók’s wishes, such as the specific placement of percussion in the orchestra, were carried out. The premier was a success, receiving great reviews for both composer and the soloist. Bartók was unfortunately unable to attend, as he had to be in Budapest for a concert engagement the following day. He expressed his regret in a letter to a friend in which he said “what a pity that [I] cannot be present”, adding that he was pleased with how the concerto turned out and how excited he was for its premier.

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22 Kenesson, 205.
23 Gillies, 524.
24 Kenesson, 206.
Over time, the first and the second violin concertos took very different paths; the first, seldom played and scarcely recognized, and the second becoming one of the most highly regarded concertos in the violin repertoire. Both concertos are similarly unconventional for the time in regard to concept and form, and both pieces were influenced by his study and interest in folk music. However, due to the many years between them, Bartók’s maturation as a composer and the different processes of collaboration between Geyer and Székely made a big difference in the execution of the latter concerto. Bartók eloquently expresses his intricate and complex thematic and structural development in the second concerto in a way that he felt that he had failed to do so in the first. A comparison of these two concerti illuminates aspects of Bartók’s compositional development, his working method, and the impact that the performers he worked with had on his music.
CHAPTER 2
The First Violin Concerto

Unconventional Concept

Bartók’s initial concept for the First Violin Concerto was unconventional compared to what was considered the “norm” at the time. Most instrumental concerti at this time were written in the standard three-movement fast-slow-fast style that mostly showcased the solo instrument. When Bartók started writing the First Violin Concerto in July 1907, he came up with a surprising alternative: the concerto as program music. Bartók’s goal was to seek the approval of the woman he desired and was in love with: Stefi Geyer.\textsuperscript{25} Through their relationship and exchange of letters, he was impressed and in love with her intelligence and humor, and they had many discussions about life and music. However, he also experienced her shrewishness towards him, through her lack of communication and many unanswered letters. Bartók, therefore, wanted to create a piece that described all the different aspects of Geyer’s personality: the first movement.

\footnote{Stevens, 227.}
would represent “idealized Geyer, celestial and inward”; the second, “cheerful, witty, amusing Geyer”; and the third, “indifferent cool and silent Geyer.” However, shortly after he began composing, he decided to reject the third movement, in which he was to describe the cold and cruel side of Geyer, and the concerto became a two-movement work. In its finished form, the First Violin Concerto displays many sides of Bartók as a young composer: still under the influence of late Romantic composers, in the process of finding his lifelong passion for folk music – and in love for the first time.

The discovery of folk music and early compositions (1904-1907)

Bartók had gone through some changes in his life since his success with his nationalistic symphonic poem *Kossuth* in 1903, a work inspired by *Ein Heldenleben* by Richard Strauss. By 1907, he was starting to grow out of the medium of the symphonic poem and the heavy influence of late German Romanticism. Bartók’s nationalistic tendencies were also waning,

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26 Gillies, 469.
27 Gillies, 468.
and he was embarking on a new stage of his stylistic development through the discovery of folk music.

Bartók was initially introduced to folk music sometime during 1904, when he heard a young girl, Lidi Dósa singing in Kibéď, Maros-Torda. He made his first notation of peasant music through this encounter, and realized that there was an “autochthonous Magyar music,” of which he was completely unaware. Magyar is a word that Hungarians use to refer to themselves, which describes all people associated and connected to the Hungarian language and the ethnic group, including the archaic peripheral Hungarian-speaking territories from before the First World War. Therefore, Magyar folk music refers to the music originating from all of these neighboring areas and countries of current Hungary. Bartók’s first serious research in the true folk music of Hungary began with his studies with Zoltán Kodály, who introduced Bartók into the technique of collecting folk music. Bartók later wrote in his autobiography:

In 1905, I started out on a search for Hungarian peasant melodies, which were then virtually unknown. I had the good luck to find an excellent collaborator in Zoltán Kodály,

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who, with his perspicacity and critical sense, gave me invaluable advice in all branches of music. I began my researches from a purely musical point of view, restricting myself to Hungarian-speaking territory. Later, the musical material collected was scientifically examined, and at the same time, I extended my activities to the Slovak and Rumanian language territories.  

In 1906, he continued his investigations by making his own field recordings in Transylvanian-Hungarian villages, and found in these folk songs old ecclesiastical or old Greek modes, or simple pentatonic scales, and the extensive use of dotted rhythms, where the accentuated short values are followed by non accentuated long values, in various formations. He also realized that there were two types of prevailing rhythmic styles: *parlando rubato*, a free, recitative type; and *tempo giusto*, a more rigid dance type.

In December of 1906, Bartók and Kodály published their first collective effort: *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs*, for voice and piano, in which each composer set half the collection. Through his research in folk music, Bartók suddenly felt drawn to a new goal for his composition: “the highest level of abstract composition in which neither folk tune nor its imitation is used, but

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29 Bartók, Selbstdiographie, 88.
31 Ibid.
the work [is] nevertheless pervaded by the “spirit” of folk music.” Bartók began to develop his musical language in order to achieve this goal, and his Suite No.2, Op.4, for orchestra (1907), began to bear witness to these recent developments.

Bartók’s Suite No.2 was a turning point. He drafted the first three movements in late 1905. When he came back to compose the fourth movement in 1907, his folk music experiences had fundamentally influenced his musical style. The first three movements still bear much influence from late Romantic composers such as Liszt and Wagner. For instance, the Fugato passage in the second, allegro scherzando movement, is widely agreed to have been modeled after Liszt’s Piano Sonata in b-minor, which Bartók had been performing in concerts during 1905. Likewise, the opening solo for bass clarinet in the third movement pays homage to the extended cor anglais solo at the opening of Tristan und Isolde. However, the fourth movement composed in 1907 contains one of the most significant discoveries that Bartók made in folk music: the importance of pentatony.

32 Suchoff, 47.
33 Gillies, 464.
34 Ibid.
The opening bars of the fourth movement employ a short, pentatonic melody. (Ex.1)

Example 1 – Suite No. 2, 4th mvt, mm. 3-6, Bassoons

![Example 1](image)

In the continuation of the phrase, the pentatonic melody is embellished by passing notes and increasing chromaticism. Nonetheless, this was a very important step for Bartók’s musical language, for it is the first time that he was able to boldly use a Hungarian tonal element in his “Art music.”

Another significant element in Bartók’s second Suite is the appearance of the falling thirds motif, which dominates the third movement. It first appears in the bass clarinet solo in measure 16-18 (Ex. 2), as well as in figure 2, and lastly in the last twelve *quieto* bars of the coda. This motif bares great significance, because it is the precursor to Bartók’s motif for Stefi Geyer in the First Violin Concerto. It is the descending version of the “Stefi motif,” but the range of the motif is a minor seventh instead of a
major seventh; the last third is a minor third instead of the major third in the
“Stefi motif.”

Example 2 – Suite No. 2, 3rd mvt, mm. 16-22

The “Stefi motif” became a prevailing motif that occurred many times in
Bartók’s compositions of 1907-1910. The First Violin Concerto begins
with the four-note Stefi motif that eventually appears in many variants. It
was described to Geyer by Bartók as “your leitmotif” in one of his
affectionate letters to her. (Ex. 3)

Example 3 – Stefi motif

\footnote{Gillies, 477.}
**Bartók’s First Violin Concerto**

The first concerto reflects a growing stage in Bartók’s life, where his compositional language is still very much in development. Although he uses some folk music elements through modal scales, intervals, and certain rhythmic motives, much of his harmony, especially in the first movement, is still under the influence of the late Romantic idiom of Strauss and Wagner. The Concerto also lacks the tightly organized arch structure of his later works, as both of the movements in this concerto struggle to state a real climax.

Bartók referred to the first movement of the concerto as music “written exclusively from the heart.” This movement, which describes “the idealized Geyer,” develops melodically from the seven-measure opening theme. Bartók represents Geyer’s “idealness” as a recurring motive. In a letter to Geyer in September 1907, he specifies the notes of her “Leitmotif” (C#-E-G#-B#), and he also quotes two transformed motives: the first one to be used for the first movement, and the second one, for the second

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36 Gillies, 469.
The entire first theme of the movement grows from these notes of the transformed motive, where the first minor third leap is changed to a major third, perhaps suggesting Bartók’s intentions to describe a positive, ideal, and content side of Geyer. The motive is varied and threaded through more chromatic contrapuntal passages, and it accentuates moments of tonal resolutions throughout the entire movement.

The concerto opens with the solo violin, performing the first seven bars alone. These seven bars combine diatonic tonal moments with elements of folk music through the use of the pentatonic scale and syncopated rhythms. (Ex. 4) Malcolm Gillies believes that the seven-bar opening offers a distilled expression of Bartók’s evolving compositional style:

The expositional nucleus is formed by the seven bars of the main theme, which are performed alone by the solo violin. The various parts of this nucleus illustrate musical concerns of Bartók at this time: the diatonic, chordal cumulation of thirds (bar 1-3); scalar movement involving some chromatics (bar 4); a two-level pentatonic movement emphasizing the fourth intervals D-G and E-A (bars 5-6); a Hungarian-style syncopation (bar 7).38

38 Gillies, 469-470.
Once the orchestra enters, the texture becomes denser and more involved, eventually leading to a fugue-like passage in the strings. Ascending and descending thirds of the Geyer’s motive are prominent throughout, eventually leading to a return of the opening theme in the solo violin. The ascending thirds from the first three notes of the piece – the Geyer motive – appear in numerous forms: as melody, as bass-line, as the interval of sequences, and as the subject of variation. As the violins enter with the Geyer motive between figure 1 and 2, the solo violin develops a rhythmic motive from bars 5-6 of the theme, which builds up to figure 2, where the winds enter with the Geyer motive as the solo violin climbs up to the high registers. Bartók then uses the Geyer motive in the bass-line, three measures before figure 3, continuing the build up to what seems like the first climax
for the solo violin in figure 4. Figure 4 display Bartók’s overwhelming love for Geyer through his usage of her motive combined with the rhythmic motive of the dotted figures. The harmonic material is very chromatic: the solo violin states the Geyer motive with an added fifth note, an octave above the first note, to “complete” the motive. This statement of the motive is centered in the key of B, with the orchestra moving sequentially through chromatic falling passing tones. This chromatic falling movement is also enhanced in measure 8 of figure 4 by the solo violin, in which Bartók adds a chromatic passing tone G# to the Geyer motive. However, figure 4 bears the problem of being a structurally ineloquent culmination. The build up to figure 4 consists of a relatively short 5 bars preceded by 7 bars of thematic material that abruptly rises in dynamics to a dramatic B minor cadence in figure 4.7. However, Bartók immediately bring the dynamic back to a subito p only to build up the orchestra again through contrapuntal material. The Geyer motive then appears in inversion in figure 6, developing sequentially through chromatic harmony into a second climax for the orchestra, this time without the solo violin. (Ex.5) This orchestral climax halts abruptly in subito p, with the solo violin stating the theme once again. By reaching
twice for climaxes in such quick succession, the young composer appears to be struggling with how to reach a strong apotheosis of his material.

Example 5 – Violin Concerto No. 1, 1st mvt, fig. 6.3

The movement comes to a close with the solo violin stating the Geyer motive on F-sharp three times, before it states the theme for the last time on D, as it did in the opening. However, this time there is a final resolution on D in D major, perhaps to signify the complete idealness of Geyer.

The second movement develops the Geyer motive even more
extensively than the first: it is nearly three times the number of bars. There are three contrasting thematic groups as well as three motivically transformed themes in the developmental section. Three main themes from this movement can be linked to the Geyer motif, and the motivically transformed themes show strong elements of folk music. The jagged figures of the first theme originates directly from the opening measures of the first movement:

Comparison of the openings of the two movements reveal that bar 2 of the second movement is directly derived from bar 4 of the first, and that bars 3-4 are somewhat freely drawn from bars 5-7 of the first movement… bars 1-3 and 12-14 of the first movement have prepared for the transformed bar 1 of the second movement.39

This motive is present through the first 107 bars of the movement as part of the first theme group, and goes through many reformulations. Already in the fifth bar, the motive is presented in its rhythmic transformation (Ex. 6), as well as in figure 10 in its rhythmic inversion.

39 Gillies, 473.
Example 6 – Violin Concerto No. 1, 1\textsuperscript{st} mvt, mm. 1-15
Violin Concerto No. 1, 2\textsuperscript{nd} mvt, mm. 1-5

1\textsuperscript{st} mvt

The second theme appears midway through the movement at figure 12.11. This theme in \textit{Meno allegro e rubato} bears “the impression of a quasi-slow movement” due to its rather disproportionately large magnitude within the movement.\(^{40}\)In a letter addressed to Geyer in 20 September 1907, Bartók

\(^{40}\)Usarek, 65.
quotes this second theme as one of the transformations of Geyer’s leitmotif:

Upon a closer look at the second theme, it is clear that the theme is built on the enharmonically spelled thirds motive of the Geyer motif, accompanied by chromatically moving figures, reminiscent of the late-Romantic idiom.

The second theme group gets even broader in figure 14.5, *Poco piú sostenuto*, in what appears to be an extended transitional “Straussian theme, [which] draw[s] its inspiration from bar 2 of the opening theme.” The third theme group in figure 15.9 has a distinctly different character and origin from the previous theme. It has “the quality of an incessant sixteenth-note pattern of the verbunkos style,” displaying distinct elements of folk

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42 Usarek, 65.
Bartók links this theme back to the Geyer theme by basically building most of the intervallic contents in thirds in the solo violin line. The melodic content of the entrance of the solo violin also outlines a minor seventh, a transformation from the major seventh of the Geyer motif. (Ex.7) The developmental section begins with a motivic transformation of the theme in figure 17.20. It has a melodic movement derived from the opening theme. This developmental theme, which appears only once in the movement, embodies a strong folk influence in terms of its structure: a mix of old Hungarian and Slovak quaternary folk song. The second developmental theme in figure 19.10 is a rhythmic variant of the first developmental theme in fugal structure, which leads directly into another motivic transformation in figure 23, this time accentuated by the verbunkos style rhythm (sixteenth+eighth+sixteenth). Bartók brings back the movement into recapitulation in figure 24 reintroducing the first theme followed by themes 2 and 3. The solo violin then has a minimally accompanied cadenza comprised of a mixture of major thematic and motivic content, leading to an extended coda of an orchestral

43 Usarek, 66.
44 Usarek, 66.
Example 7 – Violin Concerto No. 1, mvt 2, fig. 15.8

tutti, finishing the concerto with an absent solo violin.

Although Bartók utilizes more folk music elements in this movement, and captures certain cheerful and witty qualities as he intended, it struggles to have a coherent structure. The proportions of the themes in relation to each other seem to be arbitrary: they are rather freely composed without the structural precision of Bartók’s later works. For instance, orchestral tutti are too rare: the first one occurs after 107 bars of the first theme’s
exposition; it lasts only six bars. It is another 93 bars until the next tutti, which is also short. The last tutti in figure 34.4 also seems to lack a definite purpose after a long solo violin cadenza, for the whole concerto – meant for the violin – actually ends without the soloist. Bartók clearly felt dissatisfied with the concerto as he did not allow it to be published during his lifetime, and never spoke about it even when asked by Zoltán Székely years later. Székely later recalled in 1990:

> When I inquired about [the first] concerto, he made no answer whatsoever. He simply turned away and went out the room as though he hadn’t heard my question. At the moment I thought he was going to get the music, but when he returned he never mentioned it at all.\(^{45}\)

The First Violin Concerto was published in 1959 after both Bartók and Geyer’s death. It was finally given its premier in Basel with Hans Heinz Schneeberger on violin, and the Basel Chamber Orchestra conducted by Paul Sacher.

\(^{45}\) Kenneson, 53.
Bartók and Geyer: Their Relationship

Artistic discontent may have lead Bartók to discard the concerto upon its completion, but part of the reason could also be heartbreak. Despite Bartók’s many attempts to woo Geyer, and to seek for her advice and approval regarding the concerto, Geyer rejected both Bartók and the work, which left him devastated.

One can only speculate exactly what went wrong between them. As it is evident in their yearlong correspondence, Bartók discussed his moral views and perception of life as well as his views on marriage and freedom. He also expressed his distaste for organized religion and current societal issues. At this time, Bartók had a strong interest in the philosophy of Nietzsche, and he was especially influenced by its atheistic nature, values that were starkly opposite from Geyer’s. In one of his lengthy letters Bartók tries also to convince Geyer of his view:

As far as tradition is concerned, only the average person identifies with the Holy Scripture. But people like Stefi Geyer were created precisely in order not to be placed under its yoke. For the lowest class – of people – the more they can cling to the tradition, the better. But people in the highest must

46 Usarek, 6.
always free themselves from it more and more...we want to be dependent on no one, on nothing; we want to be lord over ourselves.47

Geyer, although an open-minded and intelligent woman, was a devout Catholic at the time. Perhaps Bartók, clouded by his desire for her, did not realize that his atheistic views on religion and liberal views on marriage may have negated prospects of a relationship for a young woman of those times.

When Bartók started to work on the concerto, he sent her quotes of the main motives and expressed his fervent desire for her in his letters dated September 20th 1907:

Your leitmotifs are buzzing all around me. All day long I live in you like a narcotic dream. And this is good; one needs such opium in order to work.48

Upon hearing no feedback from her, Bartók began to question Geyer’s silence in his postcard of September 26, 1907, along with more excerpts from the concerto asking for her opinion. 49

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47 Bartok, Briefe an Stefi Geyer, no.4, sees 1-4.
48 Bartok, Briefe an Stefi Geyer, no.11.
49 Ibid.
Of the two themes that will eventually appear in the second movement, he asks her how she finds the instrumentation regarding the orchestral accompaniment, and asks for her opinion on how she finds the other theme. Unfortunately, Bartók received no response from her regarding the concerto. Moreover, her silences kept growing longer and longer between each correspondence. When the concerto was finally completed she passed judgment, writing that she does “not [see the work] as a ‘proper’ concerto.”

Due to this devastating comment from Geyer, and months of longer silences between October 1907 and February 1908, Bartók finally wrote his last letter to Geyer dated February 8th 1908, bidding farewell forever. In the same letter, he wrote regarding the first concerto:

50 Gillies, 469.
Exactly the same day you signed my death-sentence. I have locked you up in a drawer. I don’t know if I should annihilate you, or just leave you locked up there, and only perhaps one day after my death somebody will perhaps find you there… I cannot talk about it, I cannot show it to anybody; this confession with its sad result does not matter to the whole world anyway.\textsuperscript{51}

His final thoughts on Geyer and the concerto lay in the manuscript where he wrote:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{l}
But even this was a needless battle: needless the strong will, needless everything… \\
My confession \\
For Stefi \\
still from happy times. \\
But even that was only part happiness. \\
I. \\
Violo solo…) \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

Béla Bartók\textsuperscript{52}

Bartók did not attempt to write another violin concerto for the next 30 years. However, the next one he would write came to have a very different outcome from the first.

\textsuperscript{51}Bartok, \textit{Brie\f{e} an Stefi Geyer}, 8 Feb 1908, sec. 6.  
\textsuperscript{52}Bartok, \textit{Brie\f{e} an Stefi Geyer}, no.28.
CHAPTER 3
Between the Two Concerti

Brief Background

Bartók began to write his second violin concerto in 1936 at the request of a special person in his life: violinist Zoltán Székely, a dear friend and a frequent musical partner. In the thirty years between Bartók’s first and second violin concertos, he had solidified his musical language and style as a composer, and was a far different composer than the 17-year old who had discarded his First Violin Concerto. At this point in his life, Bartók was a sought-after pianist, a well-established composer and teacher, and a prominent figure in the field of folk music research. His pioneering interest and expertise in folk music brought new influences, and it had shaped a distinctive yet culturally grounded attribute in his music. Undoubtedly, his compositional craft had matured: the more “raw” qualities of his approach in his First Violin Concerto had matured into a new level of coherency, expressivity, and eloquence. The genesis of his Second Violin Concerto
would be shaped by all of these factors, and become one of the most exceptional violin concertos in the instrument’s repertoire.

Folk Music Research and Collection (1908-1936)

Thirty years of research in Magyar music had an enormous impact on Bartók’s musical language. Initially, Bartók shared with others the belief that Hungarian folk music was synonymous with gypsy music. However, through his continued interest in folk music:

he came to realize that something else did exist in the songs of the peasants, something genuinely Hungarian, of immense artistic value and great significance to musical and general ethnology.

Furthermore, the overall lack of interest in this type of gypsy, peasant, or folk music made it hard to differentiate the unique qualities and quirks in peasant music from different regions. As Bartók would discover and study later on, ancient Magyar peasant or folk tunes were generally sung to Magyar words, and were made of distinct character and soul. This type was

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53 Kenneson, 42.
54 Ibid.
music was later divided into three categorize: “ancient strata” or “old style”; the “new style”; and the “heterogeneous style,” for tunes that belong to neither style but represent a mixed style.\textsuperscript{55} The ancient stratum of Hungarian folk melody, the “old style,” consists of songs that are associated with no particular circumstance or purpose. They are comprised of a tune from a pentatonic scale, where the second and the sixth scales degrees are missing. The tune-strophe consists of four isometric lines of twelve, eight, six, seven, eleven, ten, or nine syllables. These “old-style” songs generally employ structures ABCD, ABBC, and A\textsuperscript{5}B\textsuperscript{5}AB.\textsuperscript{56} These tunes were sung in \textit{tempo giusto} rhythm or with fluctuating rhythms in \textit{parlando rubato}, “with the singer singing the various syllables with greatly varying note-values,” as well as with ornamentation.\textsuperscript{57} Naturally, as time progressed, this pure form of the pitches and structure of the tunes could not be preserved: the majority have been transformed by the multiplicity of musical influences acting upon the musical life of the Magyars in their new land.

\textsuperscript{55} Béla Bartók, \textit{The Hungarian Folk Song}. Edited by Benjamin Suchoff, Calvocoressi, and Zoltán Kodály. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1981), 11
\textsuperscript{56} The superscript 5 refers to the melody transposed up a fifth.
\textsuperscript{57} Manga, 15-16.
over a thousand years… and these live on in the “new style” folk-tunes.\textsuperscript{58}

The changes in geography as well as new social and cultural influences affected the “new-style” mainly in its structure. The forms became rounded, distinctly: AA\textsuperscript{5}BA; AA\textsuperscript{5}A\textsuperscript{5}A; ABBA; and AABA.\textsuperscript{59} On further changes, Bartók writes that:

Another characteristic feature is the variable tempo guisto rhythm. The rhythmic schemata evolved from the old-style tunes. Lastly, the isometric strophe-structure is characteristic… with many tunes in the Dorian or Aeolian scale… probably [of] Western influences.\textsuperscript{60}

Bartók also developed a methodical system to categorize the peasant music of Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, Turks, and even some of North Africa. Most importantly, it pushed him to “reconsider his whole aesthetics, to find a style upon the assimilated essence of peasant music, and to determine the direction of the art music of Hungary for years to come.”\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{58} Manga, 15-16.
\textsuperscript{59} Bartók, \textit{The Hungarian Folk Song}, 22.
\textsuperscript{60} Bartók, \textit{The Hungarian Folk Song}, 52.
\textsuperscript{61} Stevens, 23.
After a few years of collecting and researching, Bartók published his first article about folk music in 1908, the same year he completed the First Violin Concerto. In the subsequent decades until the composition of his Second Violin Concerto, folk music played a central role in Bartók’s musical life. In 1911, Bartók, with Kodály and other friends, founded the New Hungarian Music Society to help find a voice for Hungarian Art Music as well as researching its indigenous origins. However, the project unfortunately soon failed and Bartók continued on with his individual research. His first ethnomusicological book about Romanian folk music was published through the Romanian Academy in Budapest in 1913, and he embarked on a trip to North Africa (French region) to collect folk music in French.

In addition to transcribing source material, Bartók began composing his own arrangements. In 1915, he composed the *Romanian Folk Dances*, and the *Romanian Christmas Carols*, and travelled several times to Slovak regions to collect folk tunes. He remained productive in the next few years completing *Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs* for solo piano (1918), and together with Kodály, completed the joint study of *150 Transylvanian*
*folk songs* (1921), which was soon published in Budapest. In 1924, Bartók’s most widely known folk music study, *The Hungarian Folksong*, was published in Budapest; it appeared in print in Berlin the next year, as well as in London in 1931. In the years following, his work in folk music started to garner international attention, and he continued his work and composed *Twenty Hungarian Folksongs* (1929) and *Szekely Folksongs for male chorus* (1932).

In 1934, Bartók, due to his accumulated research and work in folk music, retired from his duties as a piano professor at the Budapest Academy of Music, and started his post in the folk-music section of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The next year, he published his study of *Romanian Christmas Songs* (1926) at his own expense. At the time when Székely brought up the subject of a second violin concerto in 1936, Bartók was preparing his inaugural address before the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on Magyar musical traditions.

Bartók’s interest in folk music had a profound effect on his musical language. Bartók discussed this influence in his autobiography:
The outcome of these studies was the decisive influence upon my work, because it freed me from the tyrannical rule of the major and minor keys. The greater part… was in old ecclesiastical or old Greek modes… and the melodies were full of most free and varied rhythmic phrases and changes of tempi, played both rubato and giusto. It became clear to me that the old modes, which had been forgotten in our music, had lost nothing of their vigor. Their new employment made new rhythmic combinations possible. This new way of using the diatonic scale brought freedom from the rigid use of the major and minor keys, and eventually led to a new conception of the chromatic scale, every tone of which came to be considered of equal value and could be used freely and independently.\textsuperscript{62}

In his desire to move away from Western tonality, Bartók sought to devise a new conception of harmony that could accompany both authentic folk melodies and his own original themes that might imitate folk melodies. The frequent leaps of perfect fourths or fifths in the old Magyar folk tunes were a significant source for Bartók’s melodic and new harmonic constructions. These repetitive skips provided “the construction of the simplest fourth-chord,” in which any diatonic mode (ex. C-D-E-F-G-A-B) can be reordered as a seven-note segment in fourths or fifths (ex. F-C-G-D-A-E-B). Through

this derivation, Bartók developed a harmonic structure derived from the diatonic modes through a process of organized rearrangement. Bartók then established connections between the melodic and harmonic levels: a tune built primarily from skips of perfect intervals, harmonized by chords also built from perfect intervals.

The earliest work in which Bartók successfully attempted this juxtaposition of folk music and his new means of harmonization is the Fourteen Bagatelles for Piano, Op. 6, completed shortly after the First Violin Concerto in 1908. In Bagatelle No.1, he demonstrates not only his freedom from the conventions of major and minor keys, but also his ability to connect melody and harmony through the use of the same intervals. The melody, in the right hand of the piano, combines stepwise motion and skips that most often outline perfect fifths or fourths. The accompaniment, at least initially, consists of perfect fifths filled in by descending stepwise motion. Beyond this intervallic connection between melody and accompaniment, Bartók opens up his new conception of harmony by combining two distinctively different modes – the one in the right hand is notated in four sharps, and that in the left hand in four flats. (Ex.8) The upper melodic line articulates C-
sharp minor with frequent emphasis on its third scale degree, E. The lower line unfolds in C-Phrygian and cadences repeatedly on C despite the f-minor key signature. The chromatic synthesis that results from combining the two voices is unique: Bartók termed it “Phrygian-colored C major,” a great example of his emancipation from the attributes of conventional major and minor keys.\(^{63}\)

Example 8 – Bagatelle No. 1, mm 1-9

Bartók transformed and synthesized melodic and harmonic content from modal folk melodic elements. The fusion of all these elements in his mature works would result in a highly complex and systematic network of

\(^{63}\) Antokoletz, 52.
divergent chords and scales. His *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta*, composed in 1936, is a striking example of Bartók’s hybrid methods. In the opening highly chromatic fugue, successive entrances fan out in symmetric circle of fifths progressions away from the starting pitch A: while one strand of entrances moves in rising fifths, the other moves in falling ones. The two strands meet at the tritone, E-flat, at the climax of the fugue, then retrace their steps back to the origin. Meanwhile, other movements of the piece incorporate modal diatonic sections based on traditional key centers. Thus, in this work Bartók created coexistence between facets from ancient Magyar music, including chains of perfect intervals, and the diatonic framework of tonally grounded music.

Beginning with his first published article about folk music in 1908 – the same year he completed his First Violin Concerto – Bartók amassed a substantial collection of folk music. Bartók’s years of study and research in folk music shaped his mature style: a musical language that has as its basis the ancient folk modes, developed into a highly systematic and integrated...
use of abstract melodic and harmonic formations, and a new means of musical progression. 66

**Other Compositions (1908-1936)**

As Bartók’s research in folk music deepened, it began to shape and transform his musical language. When Bartók wrote his First Violin Concerto, he had only written one work – the Violin Sonata (1903) – for a string instrument, and only a few works for full orchestra; most of the rest of his music was for the piano. 67 As his career progressed, Bartók continued to write frequently for the piano, but he also began to compose an ample amount of music for string instruments as well as other mediums.

Bartók initially had some difficulties moving on from the failure of his First Violin Concerto, for he tried to “salvage the best material from [it]” in his subsequent compositions. 68 For instance, Bartók started composing the *Two Portraits*, op. 5, for orchestra in 1907, the same year he started

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66 Antokoletz, xi.
67 There is a very early Violin Sonata (DD49), written in 1897, along with a few chamber music works, during his time in Pozsony, before Bartók began his formal musical training at the Academy of Music in Budapest.
68 Gillies, 477.
writing the First Violin Concerto. However, he took four years to finish it, perhaps due to his preoccupation with the violin concerto. Unable to move away from his disappointment, and in an attempt to improve the material from the violin concerto, Bartók adopted the first movement of the violin concerto as the first movement of the Two Portraits. However, not much could be done. He made only minor changes, shortening the length of the soloist’s final note, changing the orchestral texture, and making minute differences in the performing instructions.\textsuperscript{69} Unfortunately, Bartók remained dissatisfied with the music, even in its new context. Although he never discussed his true sentiments towards Two Portraits, he did not actively try to get this work performed, preferring to get another orchestral work – Two Pictures, Op.10 – performed in his later years.\textsuperscript{70}

In 1909, Bartók wrote his First String Quartet, Op.7. It would mark a compositional turning point. Similar to the other pieces written directly after Geyer’s rejection, Bartók tried again to salvage the material from the First Violin Concerto in this string quartet. The first bars of the quartet contain germs of the theme from the second movement of the First Violin Concerto.

\textsuperscript{69} Gillies, 478.
\textsuperscript{70} Gillies, 478.
and Bartók himself admits this to Stefi Geyer in a letter signifying the real end of their relationship: “I have begun a quartet; the first theme is the theme of the [Violin Concerto’s] 2nd movement: this is my funeral dirge.”\(^{71}\) It would be the last time he would quote the Concerto. At the same time, the work was the first of what would become a monumental set of six string quartets. Already, the composer was moving on from his youthful inspiration to his more mature pre-occupations. Inspired by his two-months long trip in Transylvania in 1907, Bartók makes an emphatic reference to a Hungarian folk song in the cello melody. In the last movement of the quartet, Bartók directly quotes the first line of a pentatonic tune that he found on this trip in Csíkrákos.\(^ {72}\) Bartók inserts this folk tune plainly, without truly integrating it into the music, suggesting his inexperience in eloquently coalescing folk music into his language. Nevertheless, it foreshadows the future development of his musical style.

Bartók continued to gain experience and develop as a composer. Prior to writing his first opera, the one-act *Duke Bluebeard’s Castle* Op.11 (1911),

\(^{71}\) Gillies, 226.

\(^{72}\) Gillies, 231.
Bartók was not particularly well versed in orchestral writing. He had only written: the very early symphonic work *Kossuth; Two Portraits*, in which the First Violin Concerto was minutely changed into the first *Portrait*, and the second *Portrait* that was directly transcribed from the last of his *Fourteen Bagatelles* for piano. He had also written *Two Pictures* (1910), perhaps the most original and successful orchestral work up to this point. Therefore, the composition of *Bluebeard* had a significant effect on his orchestral development.\(^\text{73}\) *Bluebeard* embodies many qualities from his work of this period characterized by the discovery of folk music, in which Bartók incorporates many elements of folk music into his existing compositional and structural influence from late German Romanticism. Bartók makes frequent use of *parlando* in the style of Hungarian folk songs, as well as descending pentatonic movements that are common in folk music. Meanwhile, the overall structure and the instrumentation “behave like the theme and variation in a Romantic symphony or symphonic poem.”\(^\text{74}\) Bartók also had a deep connection to the text and the overall solitary nature

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\(^{74}\) Gillies, 357.
of the protagonist’s character, and was dedicated to the compositional process of this opera. It is widely considered as a success in that:

…*Duke Bluebeard’s Castle* did more than merely explore attitudes and beliefs with which Bartók had an innate sympathy… It paralleled the integration of primeval folk music with… art music [and] it was ideally suited to [his] first attempt at opera.\(^75\)

In the following years, Bartók continued his work in transcriptions and arrangements, refining his approach to original composition through this process. In 1921, he transcribed an unpublished piece for two pianos written in 1912 into his *Four Pieces*, Op. 12, for orchestra. He gained experience as a composer and arranger through his ballet *The Wooden Prince* Op.13, which proved to be a big success, and the short score of *The Miraculous Mandarin*, which he had yet to fully orchestrate.\(^76\) He also transcribed his orchestra works into works for the piano, such as the *Dance Suite* (1923), in which both the compositions and the transcription of the piece helped Bartók

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\(^76\) Gillies, 482-483.
to further his knowledge in orchestration for his last composition for the
stage, *The Miraculous Mandarin*. In the final orchestrated version of this
work, it is clear that:

> Bartók’s art of orchestration was fundamentally renewed… The orchestration also plays an
important role in the articulation of form… Even
more importantly, every character of the drama,
ev...
In his Third String Quartet, which consists of only two movements, played without a break, Bartók created unusual and extraordinary sound effects through his various use of *con sord.*: muting of the instruments. Although Bartók’s use of the mutes was probably inspired by Berg’s *Lyric Suite* – a work he cited as a model – he combined it with folk music references to create innovative new textures. In the opening of the quartet, Bartók mutes the second violin, viola, and cello, creating a cloud-like texture for the unmuted first violin’s lyrical yet wailing melody. Moreover, in figure 4, Bartók mutes the viola and the cello in slurred ostinato figure in alternating leaps of fourths in pianissimo, while the two unmuted violins create eerie articulate gestures containing heavily dotted rhythmic figures in *sul ponticello* and *glissandi.* Another of Bartók’s innovations was his special instructions for the left and the right hand (bow arm). In figure 34, he specifically instructs the players to use very little bow at the tip (*a punta d’arco*) as well as alternating in and out of *sul ponticello* in pianissimo. However, in figure 46, he asks for the complete opposite effect, where the players are instructed to play “mistuned multiple-stops” at the frog of the
bow (talon) in fortissimo marcatissimo. He also instructed the use of *col legno battuto*, in which striking the string with the wooden part of the bow creates an edgy, metallic sound. For the left hand, Bartók explored the use of *glissandi* to extreme limits, as in figure 44, where all four instruments slide over big intervals in contrary motion. Moreover, he experimented with the range of vibrato, by using *molto vibrato* that resulted in quarter-tone-trill-like intervals, evocative of wide vibrato in the voice or instruments of folk music.

In his Fourth Quartet, Bartók further pursued the creative issues explored in the Third Quartet. In the second movement, Prestissimo, *con sordino*, he indicates that the entire movement is to be played with mutes. To this muted color, he adds another layer of texture with sharp jabs and pops of pizzicatos and accents. He also employed *glissandi* on higher positions of each of the strings, which combined with the *con sordino*, evokes the sounds of nature. Moreover, in the third movement, Bartók began to use rapid alterations between *sul ponticello* and *ordinario* in *tremolo*, as well as alternation of vibrato and non-vibrato chords, which

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evokes “twanging [and] sounds of peasant fiddling.” The most remarkable movement in the Fourth Quartet is perhaps the fourth movement, Allegretto pizzicato. As the title indicates, the entire movement is played pizzicato throughout, using various kinds of pizzicato effects. Bartók wrote for the pizzicatos to be played as chords, “arpeggiated” chords, as well as “strumming,” which produces a guitar-like effect. He also combined the effect of pizzicato with glissandi and sul ponticello. Bartók went even a step further, and invented a new type of pizzicato, now widely known as the “Bartók Pizzicato,” in which the string is plucked so high that it rebounds against the fingerboard, creating an audible snap. Thus, by the time he composed the Fourth Quartet, Bartók had developed a very personal and unique palette of string sounds – many of which would play a role in the Second Concerto.

The Fourth Quartet is significant not only because of its innovative and original performance techniques, but also because of Bartók’s use of “the arch form.”

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80 Walsh, 56-57.
and so are the second and fourth, while the third, a slow movement, stands in the center of the scheme." This form of structural organization becomes even more apparent in the Fifth Quartet (1934). It is composed in an arch-form of five movements, in which the four outer movements balance one another similarly, and the whole structure “pivots on a central movement.” However, compared to the Fourth Quartet, the Fifth Quartet contains more architectural ideas and symmetrical patterns that are complex and delicately woven. The central movement of this quartet, at the peak of the arch, is the dance scherzo called *Alla Bulgarese*, Vivace. Flanked by slow, spacious outer movements, this “essay in Bulgarian rhythm” is in itself an arch form, in basic ternary, rooted on a very simple folksong that is subtlety rendered by melodic and harmonic embellishments. The Fifth Quartet also ends with a cadential figure frequently used by Bartók in his mature works, where he approaches the final note symmetrically in contrary motion scales that

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82 Walsh, 60.
84 Walsh, 60.
exactly invert one another: he uses a similar device to end the first
movement of *Music for String Instruments, Percussion, and Celeste*. (Ex.9)

Example 9

*Music for String Instruments, Percussion, and Celeste*

![Example music notation](image)

*The Fifth String Quartet*

![Example music notation](image)
The Fifth Quartet is considered to be one of the most substantial works of the mature Bartók. It precedes *Music for String Instruments, Percussion, and Celeste*, which is considered as “perhaps the greatest of his compositions,” and the beginning of his work on the Second Violin Concerto, by only two years. Thus, in the intervening years since the First Violin Concerto, Bartók’s music had developed into the mature form for which he is known, characterized by the influence of folk music, as well as sonic and formal innovations.

**The Genesis of the Second Violin Concerto**

When Zoltán Székely asked Bartók to write another violin concerto, the composer had to be convinced to take on the project. His life was very much occupied with concert engagements, private students, and his regular work at the Academy of Sciences.\(^85\) At the time of Székely’s proposal on 10 August 1936, Bartók already had a few important projects under way. He was rearranging his Petite Suite for piano, a transcription from five of the Forty-Four Duos for violins that he composed in 1931. He was also working

\(^{85}\) Gillies, 515.
on *Music for String Instruments, Percussion and Celesta*. In addition to the compositional projects, Bartók was organizing a trip to Turkey to collect folk music, after having read pamphlets published in 1936 by two Turkish musicologists. They wrote about the relation of Anatolia to Hungary, Asia, and other European countries. Bartók’s interest in this subject grew very quickly, for Turkey’s occupation of Hungary lasted from the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries, and naturally had left its impressions on all parts of Hungarian culture.

Bartók’s reluctance in accepting Székely’s proposal resulted in “complex negotiations [that] continued for many years” over what the piece was to be. Bartók originally had a rather unconventional concept in mind for the Second Violin Concerto. He wanted to write a fantasy for violin and orchestra as a massive one-movement theme and variation. Ironically, it was Székely who convinced Bartók to write him a “real concerto,” a standard three-movement concerto. In their final agreement, which Bartók drafted, it

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86 The two musicologists were A. Adnan Saygun and Mahmud R. Gazamihâl.
87 Stevens, 79.
was solidified that the genre of the work is a *concerto*, as well as performance rights, and honorarium.\(^{88}\) (Ex. 10)

Example 10 – Final Agreement (1936)

Agreement between Béla Bartók and Zoltán Székely

1. Béla Bartók will write a Violin Concerto in 1937 of about twenty-one to twenty-five minutes’ duration.

2. The sole performance rights of this work will belong to Zoltán Székely until August 31, 1941; this can be extended until August 31, 1944 at Zoltán Székely’s wish, of which he must notify Béla Bartók by December 31, 1940.

3. Béla Bartók will have to place a copy of the work’s score at Zoltán Székely’s disposal by the end of 1937.

4. Zoltán Székely may have the orchestra material produced from this copy once or in duplicate, and will be able to use this material during the time of the sole performing rights, but he has no right to ask the orchestras or their managers for any compensation for the use of that material. He may not loan this material to anyone else.

5. This orchestra material will stay in Zoltán Székely’s possession even after the expiration of the exclusivity period and he himself may use it for public performances; however, he or the concert’s management is obliged to pay the usual hire [rental] fees to the publisher.

6. Zoltán Székely shall, at the acceptance of the manuscript mentioned in point three, pay 500 Dutch florins for the rights

\(^{88}\) Kenneson, 179.
described in the preceding paragraphs.

7. In case Béla Bartók should be for whatever reason unable to complete this work mentioned above, no indemnification shall be sought from him.

Zoltán Székely was instrumental in persuading Bartók to create a three-movement-structure for the Second Violin Concerto. He continued to share his thoughts and opinions with Bartók throughout their close working process. His suggestions concerned not only technical aspect of violin playing, but also the music’s rhythmic, melodic, and structural elements – areas outside of those typically influenced by a performer. However, the way these two musicians collaborated, and the manner in which Bartók was able to respect Székely’s suggestions while staying true to his vision and artistic concepts, was a truly extraordinary effort that produced one of the most exceptional works in the genre of violin concertos.
CHAPTER 4
The Second Violin Concerto

Bartók and Székely

Bartók and Székely met when Bartók was nearly forty years old, and Székely was a seventeen-year-old student at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest. Kodály arranged that first meeting sometime in March of 1921. Although Székely’s career was just starting, he was already building a reputation as a promising violinist and Kodály raised the idea with Bartók of a possible collaboration even before introducing the two to each other. Of that initial encounter, Székely recalled:

This meeting took place in Bartók’s home… It marked the beginning of a long friendship between us. It became a happy day for me and also a significant one. I think it must have made its imprint on my whole future career, because as an outcome of this encounter not only did I win Bartók’s friendship but as an immediate practical result he chose me as a partner for many concerts… Shortly after this first meeting I received a message from him that he would like to play with me.89

89 Kenneson, 32.
90 Kenneson, 33.
In the beginning of their collaboration as pianist and violinist, they not only played compositions by Bartók, but also explored a wide range of repertoire from Beethoven to Debussy and Szymanovksy. They worked together extremely well as musicians. In a review of their performance on 23 April 1921, critic Aladár Tóth found their performance remarkable because of “Bartók’s rigorous, hard-spined approach so ably complimented by Székely’s violin playing.”

Over Székely’s lifetime, he dedicated much of his career to performing and recording Bartók’s music as a soloist and as the first violinist of the Hungarian Quartet from 1937 to 1972. He recorded Bartók’s Second Violin Concerto, both Rhapsodies for Violin and Piano, and Rumanian Folk Dances, which Székely transcribed himself in 1925. With the Hungarian String Quartet, Székely contributed to Bartók’s legacy when the group recorded all six string quartets for the Deutsche Grammophone label. When the quartet disbanded in 1972, Richard Buell of the Boston Phoenix noted their historical significance:

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91 Kenneson, 34.
They bear the weight of the history – the close association with Bartók and Kodály, for instance – with such ease and modesty… The experience of Székely, Kuttner, Koromzay, and Magyar could exemplify rather dolefully the upheavals of European history…

Bartók and Székely also shared a close friendship. The two musicians frequently wrote to each other, and kept each other up to date on their personal lives as well as their professional activities. In a letter that Bartók wrote to Székely on 28 June 1938, it is clear that they shared a trusting and comfortable friendship. Bartók wrote in an easy and informal colloquial manner, and he freely discussed all aspects of professional and personal life:

My situation is still in limbo, at best it will clear itself somewhat within a few weeks. What is involved is that I should be freed from the claws of the Viennese robbers [Universal-Edition] but this is not so simple, it requires a highly diplomatic approach. If I succeed in escaping the clutch of the Universal-Edition highwayman, I will go with another publisher… If I don’t escape them what will happen is what I told you on the phone… I don’t write about the deplorable situation in Hungary, I imagine you know the most important aspects. It would be best to emigrate before it is too late; but how and where? Would I achieve anything by it? Too bad I couldn’t answer your

92 Kenneson, 126.
letter right away, I would have wanted to begin with “Hooray for Székely’s!! This is really happy news, we greet the little Székely in advance on the occasion of his entry into the world.” Are you sufficiently happy about it?93

Due to the fact that they shared such a close relationship as friends and musicians, Bartók valued Székely’s views and opinions. This was crucial to the composition of the Second Violin Concerto, for Székely’s involvement played an exceptional role in the outcome of the concerto.

**Székely’s Requests**

Székely naturally had input in matters regarding violin technique in the Second Violin Concerto. Passages that Székely found to be too difficult or uncomfortable to play were respected and adjusted by Bartók. Bartók mentions those changes as well as pressing Székely for suggestions on bowings and articulations in his letter dated 14 September 1938:

I would need your suggestions concerning articulations, etc., after all that is why I gave you the piano reduction so that you could mark in your

93 Kenneson, 190.
recommendations (slurs, bowings, etc.) (In the
cadenza of the first movement I already eliminated
the discomfort in the passage in fifths, in the second
movement I also adjusted the penultimate pizzicato
variations). ⁹⁴

Moreover, in the second movement, there were more corrections for some
double stops which were replaced by arpeggios for a more sonorous texture
for the violin, as well as some enharmonic notational corrections suggested
by Székely that were more logical solutions for the violin. ⁹⁵

However, Székely also made a number of suggestions that went well
beyond technical matters. One of the most significant of these is in the
overall form of the Concerto. As mentioned previously, Bartók’s original
idea for the Second Violin Concerto was to write a one-movement theme
and variation work. It was Székely who requested that Bartók follow the
more conventional concerto form of Fast-Slow-Fast, like that of classical
composers such as Mozart and Beethoven. Székely recalled, “At the
beginning Bartók suggested that this work be in variation form, but I wanted
it to be a big work in the traditional concerto form.” Bartók consented to

⁹⁴ Kenneson, 192.
⁹⁵ Kenneson, 463.
Székely’s wish to have a ‘real’ violin concerto in three movements, and they made this decision clear in their agreement.\textsuperscript{96} In his mature works, Bartók often employed cyclic and symmetrical formal procedures, as well as extensive usage of contrapuntal techniques such as canon and fugue.\textsuperscript{97} Bartók also frequently organized his multi-movement works into arch forms. Székely, having been so familiar with Bartók’s mature string quartets, perhaps instinctively felt that Fast-Slow-Fast format of a traditional concerto could be appealing to Bartók musically as well as fulfilling Székely’s own desire for a “concerto.” Bartók stayed true to their agreement and wrote the concerto in three movements with two fast outer movements and a slower inner movement.

Another significant suggestion concerned the orchestral episode at the end of the exposition in the first movement. Székely felt that the six bars of orchestral episode between the end of the violin solo and the new entrance of the development section were not sufficient, and should be longer. He made a suggestion to Bartók supporting his argument with the fact that not only does the solo violin needs more time, but that the modulation felt too

\textsuperscript{96} Kenneson, 186.
\textsuperscript{97} Walsh, 41, 46-47.
sudden. To Székely’s great surprise, Bartók not only extended this tutti section, but also told Székely to go ahead and make the changes on his own for the first performance, displaying an incredible trust between the two musicians.\textsuperscript{98} Székely’s modification to the orchestral episode added six measures, and were later incorporated into the printed score by Bartók:

(1) Bartók’s original measure 105 marked \textit{piano} is repeated as new measure 106 marked \textit{subito mezzo piano}.
(2) Bartók’s original measure 106 marked \textit{mezzo forte} is repeated as new measure 107 marked \textit{crescendo}.
(3) Bartók’s original measure 109 and 110 are augmented from two to four measures by extending the trill into an entire measure; the original quarter-note upbeat in the horns is augmented into half-notes arriving at the sections marked \textit{quasi a tempo}.\textsuperscript{99}

Székely also requested a change in the very beginning of the Concerto, in its opening theme. In Bartók’s initial sketch of the first theme, there was no two eighth-note upbeat leading to the B; the theme merely started on the downbeat. During their long rehearsals in Paris in March of 1939, Székely felt that there must be a “preparation” for this theme, and it was then that Bartók agreed to add the two sixteenth notes as an upbeat.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{98} Kenneson, 205.
\textsuperscript{99} Kenneson, 463.
\textsuperscript{100} Gillies, 517.
The open G, which then became the first note, enhanced the open character of the theme even more through its natural resonance of the open G-string.

Above and beyond these suggestions, Székely’s most dramatic request was his proposal for an alternate ending to the Concerto. Székely recalled:

…While studying the newly received copy of the manuscript in 1939 I felt more and more that the end, which was a big *fortissimo* orchestral apotheosis, did not fit the conception of a violin concerto. It seemed to me more like the conclusion of a symphony.

I was so much convinced of the correctness of my feelings that I wrote a letter to Bartók explaining to him that in my opinion a concerto for violin and orchestra is not a challenge – it is more a cooperation, and the violin and the orchestra have to complement each other.

You can imagine my astonishment when fairly soon I got his answer, saying that he went to a concert where Szigeti played two great violin concertos in one evening, the Beethoven and the Brahms, and that after listening to these works he appreciated the validity of my opinion and had accordingly rewritten the end of his concerto. There were very interesting orchestral effects in the original ending which he didn’t want to sacrifice. He retained much of this material which he transformed into a version he corrected although in the publication the original ending is appended to the score *ad libitum*. One has to study and compare the two endings to see the masterful ease and perfection with which he accomplished this task.101

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101 Kenneson, 185-186.
Bartók indeed kept most of the material from his original orchestral ending in the alternate ending for the solo violin. The alternate ending begins in measure 593. In Bartók’s original, the bass trombone performs *glissandi* from measures 594-597, with the trumpets and horns performing the melody over it. In the revised version, Bartók kept the same pitches from the tunes of the trumpets and horns in the solo violin in octaves with trills, and eliminated all brass instruments until measure 610. He kept the strings with the exception of contrabass, with *tremolo in piano*. The *glissando* effect that was eliminated from the trombone part was transformed into a dramatic *cadenza* for the solo violin over an orchestral accompaniment. The *sostenuto e largamente* measure 602 of the original ending with the horns and trumpets in unison **fff** B-A-E-A in quadruplets was stretched out to two measures in the alternate ending for the solo violin alone playing the same pitches. The *Risoluto* in measure 603 to 609 in the original ending was also adjusted in the alternate ending: Bartók added in an extra measure for the solo violin to continue the modulations of ascending Aeolian mode scales, which were previously written for the first violins in the original ending. For the last five bars of the concerto, he kept the orchestration and all the
pitches exactly the same in the alternate ending, with the exception of
omitting held notes in the brass to clear the texture for the solo violin to end
the piece in a virtuosic manner with the orchestra.

The effort that Bartók made for Székely in making all of these changes
was indeed a hugely significant gesture. However, upon closer look, it is
evident that although Bartók complied with Székely’s requests, he ultimately
stayed true to his original musical visions. Most striking is Bartok’s solution
for the concerto’s formal plan. While complying with Székely’s request to
write a “standard concerto” in three movements, Bartók cleverly stayed true
to his original vision to write a theme and variations. The central inner
movement is itself a theme and variations. The outer movements are
thematically related to one another, with the third movement as a free
variation of the first. This three-movement structure gives the concerto a
thematically cyclical arch form that is cohesive and organized. Thus, “while
creating the Violin Concerto as Székely had requested, Bartók
simultaneously fulfilled his desire to write in a variation form.” Bartók jokingly made sure to let Székely aware of this:

I think the third movement turned out very well, actually a free variation of the first (thus I got the best of you, I wrote variations after all)…

Among the other changes, Bartok did allow Szekely to rewrite a few bars in the development section, but Szekely’s contribution refined rather than substantially altered the original passage. Finally, Bartók did not change the musical content of the ending; he merely re-orchestrated it by highlighting the solo violin.

Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the Second Violin Concerto would have not reached its final form without Székely’s substantive input: in the history of major classical composers, it is one of the most striking examples of a performer’s direct influence on the outcome of a work.

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102 Kenneson, 192.
103 Kenneson, 191.
Bartók’s Second Violin Concerto

The Second Violin Concerto well represents Bartók’s artistic maturity as a composer. The construction of the concerto displays his sophisticated approach in using arch form, which he frequently employed in his mature compositions. Furthermore, Bartók demonstrates a grand synthesis of elements of the classical tradition – including a range of compositional techniques including a nod to other progressive composers of his time – and the distinct color he gained from folk music influences.

The first movement of the concerto is written in Sonata form, where subsequent themes and elements are clearly defined and presented. The character of the movement and its folk music influences are clear from the copies of the first two pages Bartók made for Székely in 1937. To indicate the tempo and character of this movement, Bartók wrote “Tempo di verbunkos”. (Ex. 11)\textsuperscript{104}

Example 11
The Verbunkos was a popular Hungarian dance style in the nineteenth century, developed from Hungarian military settings, employing mainly instrumental dance traditions. The basis of the Verbunkos is founded on “new-style” Magyar folk songs – both instrumental and vocal – and was incorporated into the Hungarian musical idiom.¹⁰⁵

The opening bass line of the first movement, played by lower strings in pizzicato, contains the “motivic kernel” that generates much of the material in the first movement – and, by extension, its variation in the third movement.¹⁰⁶ The opening bass line B-F#-A-E returns immediately in melodic permutation in the theme presented in the solo violin. (Ex. 12)

Example 12

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¹⁰⁵ Bartók, *The Hungarian Folk Song*, xvi.
¹⁰⁶ Schneider, 233.
The solo violin theme is based in the Dorian mode on B with a raised third scale degree D-sharp, characteristic of “new-style” Magyar peasant melody. In the third phrase, however, Bartók refers to the characteristic mode of the “old-style” in the bass line by using a subset of a pentatonic collection “[resulting] in a kind of modal chromaticism...”\(^{107}\) Structurally, the opening theme is composed in the four-line strophic song structure AA\(^5\)BA, modeled after a “new-style” folk song structure. Therefore, the four-measure theme is repeated immediately a perfect fifth above starting on F-sharp.

Additionally, the opening theme employs typical Hungarian syncopation, and palindromic dotted rhythm: short-long; short-short-long; long-short-short-long. These rhythms appear in every single measure of the four-bar theme.

To contrast with the folk-influenced opening theme, Bartók offered something uncharacteristic for him in his second theme: a twelve-tone melody. This “lonely, hesitating melody set within a soft, mysteriously distant orchestral structure” gained much critical excitement due to its nod to Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School for Bartók’s deliberate use of

\(^{107}\) Schneider, 236.
the twelve-tones. 108 (Ex. 15A) In accordance with twelve-tone procedures, the theme’s row is presented in inversions and transpositions as the theme alternates between solo violin and the orchestra. However, Bartok does not strictly adhere to the rules of the twelve-tone technique: he occasionally changes the row ordering to subsequent entrances of the theme, presumably because he preferred the line that resulted. (Ex. 13)

Example 13 – Violin Concerto No.2, 1st mvt, mm. 74-91

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108 Gillies, 518.
In the development section, which starts in measure 115, Bartók brings back fragments of the opening theme, as well as pentatonic fragments of the melody in inversions, transpositions, rhythmic permutations, and different metric profiles. Bartók employs these methods in the recapitulation as well where fragments, inversions, or rhythmic variations of previously introduced themes are interwoven together. The coda, which starts in measure 364, is an aggrandizement of the main theme, with a heavy Hungarian flavor in its rhythmic and intervallic content, and it also exhibits the technical brilliance of the solo violin to its full extent.

The second movement of this concerto consists of a theme and six variations, concluding with a coda, which restates the main theme an octave higher. It is composed in the manner of an “old-style” song using the ‘parlando rubato’ rhythmic style, on a tonal center of G in contrast to the B of the surrounding movements.\(^\text{109}\) The movement opens with the solo violin playing the theme, which has a very strong modal tendency toward the Lydian mode. This is especially evident in measures 4-5 with the

\(^{109}\) Stevens, 249.
appearance of C, in addition to further intricate chromatic modifications. The use of musical figures dominated by a strong, shorter first beat followed by a longer beat – a very typical Hungarian rhythm – is also very prevalent in this movement. The theme is immediately followed by the first of its variations where the solo violin plays a slightly embellished version of the theme over newly added kettledrums and bass pizzicatos in the orchestra. The second variation in measure 23 presents a slightly inverted contour of the theme in a rhythmic variant, thus moving the theme’s presentation further away from its origins. The third variation that follows in measure 43 is a further change based on the contour of the previous theme in a completely contrasting character of roughness and aggression. In the fourth variation, the theme appears in a simplified version in the low strings while the solo violin trills and plays scales in a rhapsodic manner: towards the end of the variation, the theme appears in multiple canon starting with the solo violin, followed by violas, cellos, and double basses. The fifth variation, Allegro scherzando, treats the theme in a scherzo manner by the solo violin, with short and percussive effects from the orchestra. The last variation begins with the solo violin displaying a brilliantly embellished theme in
**Ricochet**, a bow technique where one produces the fast and light consecutive sounds by throwing the bow on the string while moving it horizontally. The orchestra meanwhile has the theme in a simpler version in *pizzicato* (plucking of the string), in three-part canon. The solo violin and the supporting canonic lines meet later as the solo becomes more rich and lyrical. In the coda, the theme returns in the solo violin alone one octave higher than in the beginning, later joined by three solo violas in imitating voices, closing the movement with a delicate and tenuous atmosphere.

The third movement – a variation on the first movement – does not simply re-use the earlier thematic materials, but develops and enhances them section by section.\(^{110}\) Both movements consist of two main theme groups surrounded by a number of pertinent transitional materials. Even the introductory motive of the orchestra is an embellished variation of the opening of the first movement. When compared side by side, it is clear that the sixteenth-note gestures in the third movement highlight the main pitches and the intervallic content from the opening of the first movement. The first

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\(^{110}\) Stevens, 245.
four bars of first movement’s opening theme—based on the intervallic relations characteristic of Magyar peasant melody—have been transformed into eight quick bars in the third movement, highlighting essentially all of the main pitches and intervallic relations from the original. (Ex. 14)

Example 14

1st movement

3rd movement

The transitional theme in the first movement—of a feisty and aggressive character in contrast to the generous opening theme—is also transformed in the third movement. It is in a form of variation, where the quintuplets of the first movement are transformed into triplets, while outlining the same pitch and intervallic construction.
The twelve-tone second theme from the first movement is developed in the third movement through reordering of the pitches, and metric displacement of the rhythmic structure. (Ex. 15)

Example 15

A) 1st movement

B) 3rd movement

The coda is perhaps the most varied theme from the first movement, due to its metric reorganization. In the first movement, the coda is in 4/4. In the third movement, Bartók juxtaposes 3/4 and 4/4 (Risoluto in 3/4 followed by 1 bar of 4/4) not only metrically, but also with the use of hemiola. However, in terms of the pitch content, both movements share a similar pitch and
intervallic construction: in the first movement in groups of sixteenth-notes outlining perfect fourths, and in the third, through ascending perfect fifths.

The structural organization of the Second Violin Concerto fulfilled Bartók’s artistic desire as well as complying with Székely’s request. It is superbly constructed in its structure and form. As Halsey Stevens notes, “its musical organization has been accomplished so completely” and “it is a full bodied, virile work, original in form and content; concentrated, economical, and intense.”

Bartók was very satisfied with his Second Violin Concerto, speaking proudly of it, which was unusual for him: “it is brilliant, effective, with some new things in it…” His confidence was rewarded: the Second Violin Concerto was an immediate success with critics and the public.

Following the premiere of the concerto with the Amsterdam Concertgebouw under the direction of William Mengleberg on 23 March 1939, Lou van Strien of the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* wrote, “the new concerto is a great victory… Bartók reached new heights…” Furthermore, of the second performance on 26 March 1939:

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111 Stevens, 245.
112 Kenneson, 192.
113 Kenneson, 208.
The new Concerto is a work that one can love. Bartók is a giant and in this work he uses everything that has arrived in the past and everything is in perfect balance. Székely, Mengelberg, and the orchestra certainly deserved our admiration and our gratitude although all of this is most deserved by the creator, Béla Bartók.\textsuperscript{114}

Székely was also praised for his “perfect sense of style” and “lively virtuosity [that] lifted the work very, very high.”\textsuperscript{115}

The success of the Second Violin Concerto is a product of an uncanny collaboration between two musicians. Bartók of course deserves the lion’s share of the credit: he was the creative force behind the concerto. Nevertheless, Székely had a significant impact, his suggestions ranging from large-scale organization to important details. In the end, Bartók demonstrated amazing skill in balancing his own creative vision with the requests of the performer for whom the concerto was written. His extraordinary collaboration with Székely catapulted the concerto to its final form as one of the most important violin concertos of the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{114} Kenneson, 209.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
CONCLUSION

The study of the two violin concerti provides significant insight into Bartók’s artistic maturation. It shows how folk music ultimately shapes the fundamental musical principle of Bartók’s harmonic and melodic construction. In addition, the contrasting relationships that Bartók had with Geyer and Székely offer especially vivid glimpses into the inner workings of the composer-performer relationship and the impact it can have on a composition.

When Bartók began writing the first concerto, he was a young man, who wanted to profess his love and win over his first love, Stefi Geyer. Musically, he was embarking on a new path through the discovery of folk music. Bartók was engaged and eager to incorporate elements of folk music into his compositional language, and wanted opinions and feedback from Geyer through the concerto. Geyer’s lack of communication and ultimate rejection of both Bartók and the concerto led the composer to consider the piece a lost cause and abandon it.

The second concerto has a different genesis and outcome. Bartók began working on the Second Violin Concerto in 1936, and it took nearly
three years for him to complete it. The long genesis of the concerto resulted largely from negotiating performing and publishing rights, and most importantly the concept of the concerto itself. Bartók took extra measures and preparation to make sure that this violin concerto would be published and performed. He insured this by collaborating with a close friend and colleague he trusted: Zoltán Székely. Their close personal and working relationship resulted in the concerto becoming one of the monumental works for the violin repertoire of the twentieth century as well as occupying a significant place among the works in Bartók’s oeuvre.

In many ways, the first concerto was the rough draft for the second. Motivated by romantic interest, it was his first major effort to collaborate closely with a performer; he was also trying out new musical concepts. In the second concerto, Bartók was able to respond to both folk music influences and his friend’s advice with poise and authority. He had become not only a mature thinker, but also a mature listener.
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