

The “Bartók’s Orbit” Exhibition

As part of the ongoing renovation of the 18th-century Erdődy–Hatvany palace that is now home of the Institute for Musicology, sponsored by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, work on the exhibition hall of the Museum for Music History has recently been completed, thereby making it possible to mount a temporary exhibition to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the composer, pianist and ethnomusicologist Béla Bartók (1881–1945). The characteristic surroundings and fields of his activities are evoked by original documents displayed in showcases and two bookcases that once belonged to the composer himself. Starting with memorabilia of his childhood and the close family, Bartók’s studies, career as a concert pianist, his one-and-a-half-decade long folksong collecting expeditions and, most importantly, his “workshop” as ethnomusicologist and composer are represented. The title of the individual showcases are as follows: (1) Autobiographies; (2) In His Family; (3) At School; (4) At the Piano; (5) In the Country; and (6) In His Workshop (4 showcases).

Besides family portraits, photographs, and some of the famous caricatures painted by his cousin, Ervin Voit, such as “Bartók the Collector of Insects” or “The Chevalier of the Legion of Honor,” manuscripts and autographs of the most varied types, drafts of compositions and writings, letters and postcards, folksong transcriptions and scholarly works are at the centre of the exhibition. The composer’s whole career is documented starting with the music books containing his childhood compositions in the meticulous hand of his mother Paula Voit and ending with conductor Serge Koussevitsky’s letters related to the commission of the Concerto for Orchestra of 1943. The showcases in between display sources of his student works, as well as a number of outstanding compositions of his oeuvre, such as *Duke Bluebeard’s Castle* (1911), *The Miraculous Mandarin* (1918/19, 1924), *Dance Suite* (1923), *Violin Concert* (1937/38) and, as a last document, Bartók’s letter draft written to William Primrose on the formal structure of the *Viola Concerto*, his very last composition which was sadly left unfinished at his deathbed in 1945.

A selection of his piano works and related concert bills show a few significant moments of his pianist career. Furthermore, the visitor can have a glance at documents related to Bartók’s work as a folklorist, his field-books (or pocket-books), in which he made first notations of the melodies and/or texts of folksongs and autograph sources of his studies based on his Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Arab and Turkish collections. One can see Bartók’s notation of the pentatonic scale, a true discovery in the Transylvanian Csík County in 1907, recognized as specific to the old style of Hungarian folksongs. Two different notebooks have pre-

served the melody and the text of a folksong arranged in a later composition, *Village Scenes* (1924, 1926). Also to be seen is the transcription of the Romanian *colindă* on whose ballad text Bartók based the libretto of *Cantata profana* (1930). Further types of documents include volumes of Bartók’s music library, the full-score of *Ein Heldenleben* by Richard Strauss, whose *Zarathustra* made a decisive impression on the young composer at its first Budapest performance in 1902, as well as Bartók’s copies of his own works, the *Handexemplare*, used to enter corrections. One of them is the score of *Cantata profana* which bears Bartók’s notes and revisions partly entered at a rehearsal for the 1934 world première in London. A few interesting volumes, literary as well as scholarly works, from Bartók’s library are also on show. Thus we can read one of his comments to Nietzsche or see his markings in a volume of poems by Endre Ady. His collection of ethnomusicological studies testify to his meticulous and systematic reading of the works of other scholars in a great many languages.

The frieze-like series of enlarged photographs surrounding the hall is intended to tell a tale on its own—the same story, in fact, told in other words or in another “language.” Thus we can see him among his beloved peasant singers using the phonograph for making recordings and we can catch sight of his work at home transcribing melodies from phonograph cylinders or composing. There are also photos showing him at the piano with or without partners, while some photos record his lonely wandering.

By courtesy of Bartók’s Hungarian heir, Mr Gábor Vásárhelyi and the composer’s relatives, the Voit and Oláh-Tóth family, primary documents that were never previously shown in public could be included in the exhibition which was generously supported by the Secretariat of National Jubilees.

Between 22 and 24 March 2006, an international musicological conference with the title “Bartók’s Orbit” was held at the Institute for Musicology. The opening ceremony of the exhibition was held on that occasion.



Showcase 4 (photo: Zsolt Kemecsei)

The Budapest Bartók Archives

The Bartók Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences – originally a multi-profile musicological research institute – was opened on September 25, 1961, in the Castle district of Buda (Országház utca 9., Budapest I, in the neighborhood of the present location), under the directorship of Bence Szabolcsi. The Bartók Archives proper was an independent department of this institute. Denijs Dille, a Belgian Bartók expert, sought out for this post by Zoltán Kodály, became its first Director. The so-called “Bartók Hagyaték” (Bartók estate), owned by Béla Bartók Junior (d. 1994) but deposited as a permanent loan to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, formed the kernel of the collection. This was extensively enlarged with material from Bartók’s Hungarian publishers (Rozsnyai, Rózsavölgyi, etc.), and private collectors, including Mrs. Emma Kodály. Unfortunately, the Archives was practically cut off from the American sources. As a result of the policy of the Budapest and New York Bartók archives, aggravated by cold-war politics, family and legal matters, for two and a half decades the autograph sources were available for the international community of scholars and the public only to a very limited extent.

In 1972 László Somfai, Dille’s assistant since 1963, became the Director of the Bartók Archives. In 1984 the Bartók Archives, as part of the enlarged and renamed Institute for Musicology (also incorporating Kodály’s one-time Folk Music Research Group), moved to its present address.

In 1987–88, after the death of Bartók’s widow Ditta Pásztor (1982) and the following legal procedure, the former New York Bartók estate and archives came into the hand of the younger son of the composer, Peter Bartók, who sent photocopies of the primary sources of the compositions to the Budapest archive in 1988 in order to aid the work of the preparation of the complete critical edition and related studies. As a result, in the Budapest Bartók Archives the complete basic primary source material is either accessible to the qualified scholar or information on the whereabouts of the here missing documents is available.

Former members of Somfai’s staff from the 1970s–80s who accomplished crucial Bartók studies include Vera Lampert (Brandeis University, Library), Tibor Tallián (Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; F. Liszt Academy of Music), András Wilhelm (Budapest), Klára Móricz (Amherst, Mass.), Adrienne Gombocz (editor of Bartók letters), Sándor Kovács (folk-music collection), and László Vikárius (source studies) who, in 2005, became head of the archive.

In the first period of the institute, the six-volume series of *Documenta Bartókiana* and a thematic catalogue by Denijs Dille

of the juvenile compositions established a new standard in source-oriented Bartók documentary studies. A close contact with performance practice, advising recording projects, and the edition of Bartók's complete recordings also belong to the profile of the archive. The Bartók Archives, although not linked with a university, due to the unique material and the expertise of its fellows, continuously support graduate and postgraduate studies (including Ph.D. dissertations). Recently the study of Bartók's compositional process and the foundation of complex projects are in the forefront of the archive's activity: the preparations of sample volumes for the *Béla Bartók Complete Critical Edition*, and the production of the *Bartók Thematic Catalogue*.



From Bartók's library (photo: Zsolt Kemecsei)

An Hour with Béla Bartók

We expect visiting groups, especially of secondary school children, at the temporary exhibition for whom a lecture on the exhibition as well as a concert will be offered. Young musicians, students at the Bartók Conservatory and Liszt Academy of Music contribute to these concerts held at the Bartók Hall of the Institute for Musicology. Interested groups are asked to register ten days in advance at bartokutjan@zti.hu.

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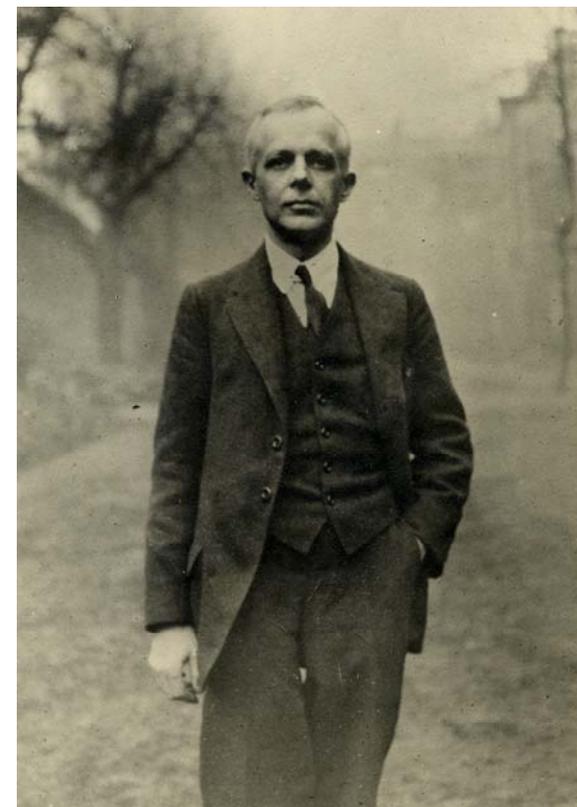


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On the title page:
Béla Bartók
1922



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Temporary Exhibition
In Commemoration of the
125th Anniversary of
Béla Bartók's Birth
Museum of Music History
Institute for Musicology
Hungarian Academy of Sciences

11 April – 31 October 2006