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1 Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra and the Demise of Hungary's "Third Road"

The years immediately after the conclusion of the Second World War were turbulent ones in Hungary. Occupation by the Soviet army and food shortages made people's everyday lives difficult, but the end of hostilities also brought the hope of establishing a democracy and renewing concert life. This was a moment of great openness, when all political and musical possibilities could be discussed frankly and their validity debated. The events of this period present a rare opportunity to glimpse Hungarian musicians' ideas about their musical future just before their choices were restricted by the increasingly severe policies of the Communist regime that came to power in 1948.¹ That Hungary would follow the Soviet road, politically or musically, was by no means a foregone conclusion: only the passage of time and the gradual accumulation and exercise of political power made it seem that way in retrospect. This early and chaotic postwar period is worth our attention, for here, through music and words about music, the historical voices of Hungarian composers point the way to a musical "road not taken," a road that existed in the minds of Hungarian intellectuals but would not be realized.

After the "liberation" of Hungary by the Red Army in 1945, most Hungarians had no idea that new assaults on their freedom were soon to follow. Even as late as 1946 and 1947, Hungarians, and especially leftist Hungarians, had good reason to feel optimistic about the future of their new "People's Democracy," as the East Bloc states were then known. During these early years the Soviet Union allowed the People's Democracies considerable independence as national entities separate from the Soviet Union.² It seemed likely that Hungary would pursue socialism in its own way: Mátyás Rákosi, the secretary general of the Hungarian Communist Party, stated in 1946 that the party would embrace a "Socialism born on Hungarian soil and adapted to Hungarian conditions."³ The idea that Hungary's path

should be neither wholly Eastern European nor wholly Western European had circulated among Hungarian intellectuals for years; since this position advocated a third, unique alternative, it was often referred to as Hungary's "third road." In a 1945 article, the Hungarian writer István Bibó defined the third road as follows: "Anyone who wants to turn Hungary into a Soviet member state is a traitor; anyone who wants to restore the Habsburg [monarchy] in Hungary is a traitor; but anyone who wants to present Hungary with the false dichotomy that it may choose only one of these two is a traitor twice over, because *between the two there lies a third road, the only correct road*: the possibility of a democratic, independent, free Hungary that practices a balanced but radical program of reform."⁴ The idea that Hungarians could negotiate a path between the great powers of the Soviet and Western European empires guided those who sought to reestablish Hungarian cultural life after the upheavals of war. To the leftists who wanted to gain control over the state and its resources, the third road meant a gradual rather than a revolutionary approach to socialism, and this strategy helped the party win support among intellectuals, including many of Hungary's composers. Although the Communists' consolidation of power was already beginning to affect government and industry by 1947, it had relatively little effect on cultural life at first, leaving musicians free to compose as they wished and to argue about what new music should sound like in a new society.

Particularly heated debate surrounded the arrival of Béla Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, first performed in Hungary on 22 April 1947. Bartók had died in New York City in 1945, after five years of exile; during the war and the turmoil that followed, his countrymen had no opportunity to hear the music he had composed in the United States. When the late works were finally performed in Budapest, Hungarian musicians were taken aback: the style of this music differed dramatically from what they had anticipated. In a review of the concerto, Sándor Jemnitz uneasily commented, "This work leaves no one indifferent: it seizes and shakes its listeners, but they cannot make heads or tails of it, despite the greatness of the impression they received."⁵

Some musicians who revered Bartók's modernist music saw the concerto as a surprising simplification of his style. As the composer and critic Endre Szervánszky described it, "Quite a few appraised the work's easy accessibility as chasing after success, as giving in to the dollar, and there were some who explained the multiplicity of styles in the concerto as the exhaustion of Bartók's creative energy."⁶ Several critics questioned whether Bartók had compromised his artistic integrity; one even called the concerto "the sell-

ing out of the spirit of modern music."⁷ Even some musicians who praised the concerto out of loyalty to Bartók still acknowledged that the piece represented a certain softening of the composer's style, one that might be forgivable on the part of a dying composer but almost certainly revealed an unfortunate turn away from the progressive musical values of the 1920s and 1930s.⁸

Others, however, spoke favorably of the concerto's easy accessibility and its communicative power. Endre Szervánszky, for instance, wrote: "In our opinion, Bartók, who is one of the most powerful musical innovators of the recent history of music, showed the path ahead in this work too. The slogan of the work could be this: 'Out from the coldly lit world of the laboratory—out among the people!' . . . In easily intelligible, melodious language, sometimes perhaps in conventional harmonic and formal expression, but always in a sincere, pure tone, he communicates his deeply human message."⁹ Coming from Szervánszky, himself a composer who sympathized profoundly with the aesthetic goals of modern music articulated by Bartók and others, the description of the *Concerto for Orchestra* as music's emergence out of a cold, impersonal laboratory might have seemed surprising. Nonetheless, like several other composers of his generation, Szervánszky believed that socialism might enhance musical life by providing greater access to music for a wider variety of people. Thus, in his article, written for a Communist newspaper, he celebrated the concerto as an important step toward art music that might communicate intelligibly to the broadest possible audience. (Neither Szervánszky nor any other socialist critic mentioned the apparent parodistic reference in the concerto's fourth movement to Shostakovich's *Leningrad Symphony*, although Szervánszky did mention that the concerto contained humorous moments that evoked laughter. Perhaps the critics sidestepped this issue to avoid suggesting that the concerto itself could be a critique of socialist music.)

These positive and negative responses to the concerto did not correspond precisely to their authors' political affiliations; they reflected a complicated mix of aesthetic, personal, and political loyalties. Even though one might be tempted to presume that most Communists would share the agenda of making music more accessible, there was in fact no agreement among Communists about how to judge the concerto. Although some praised the piece, others, like the composer Pál Kadosa, continued to express dissatisfaction with it because it seemed to refute the premises of the modern music they held dear. Each of these positions was perceived by its proponents as springing from a deep loyalty to Bartók: the pro-concerto position from a personal loyalty to Bartók that transcended any particular style or technique, and the anti-

concerto position from a more specific loyalty to Bartók's modernist music of the 1920s. Kadosa in particular remained faithful to Bartók's modernism even as he espoused Communist politics; the involuted melodies and rhythmic complexity characteristic of the middle of Bartók's career also resonate in several of Kadosa's postwar works, such as his 1948 *Capriccio* Symphony.

Over the next few years, the more favorable interpretation of Bartók's concerto continued to be a viable position in public music criticism; indeed, glowing praise of the late works seemed a more or less officially sanctioned opinion. The modernist grumblings about Bartók's late works, on the other hand, gradually disappeared from view. This change reflected not a sudden shift in aesthetic principles, but the altered political atmosphere in which critical writings were produced and published. Between 1948 and 1950 those who cherished modernist styles would be compelled either to reevaluate and defend their opinions or to withdraw into silence.

THE ZHDANOVSHCHINA COMES TO HUNGARY

The most immediate impetus behind these changes was the Soviet Communist Party's notorious resolution on music. On 10 February 1948, following a series of hearings convened by the leading cultural ideologist, Andrei Zhdanov, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party issued a statement intended to serve as a blueprint for the development of music both in the Soviet Union and throughout the East Bloc. The resolution's stated purpose was to denounce the opera *The Great Friendship* by Vano Muradeli, but it reached much further than that, chastising several Soviet composers and presenting criteria for the creation of music that was appropriate to the development of socialist societies. This was the fourth and last in a series of cultural reforms, collectively known as the *Zhdanovshchina*, led by Zhdanov in various branches of the arts after the war.¹⁰

The decree declared that Muradeli's opera was discordant and unmelodious, that it failed to incorporate folk and popular idioms, and that it neglected to follow the forms of classic opera. Muradeli's opera, according to the Central Committee, was thus characteristic of a more general trend toward formalism in the works of leading Soviet composers, including Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev, and Aram Khachaturian:

The characteristic marks of this music are the negation of the basic principles of classical music: the cult of atonality, the dissonance and discord supposedly expressive of "progress" and "novelty" in the development of musical form, the rejection of such a vital principle

of musical composition as melody, and enthusiasm for confused, neuro-pathological combinations which transform music into cacophony, into a chaotic medley of sounds. This music reeks strongly of the odor of the contemporary, modernistic, bourgeois music of Europe and America which reflects the decay of bourgeois culture, the total negation, the impasse of musical art.¹¹

Formalism, according to the resolution, was also marked by a lack of attention to the composition of music in vocal genres, which it imputed to composers' scorn for the art of melody. Referring to the 1936 condemnation of Shostakovich that had appeared in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda*,¹² the resolution made it clear that insufficient progress had been made in music since that time and demanded that composers abandon the use of formalist techniques. The committee's closing statement indicated that organizational measures would soon be taken for the improvement of this unacceptable musical situation.

The Central Committee's stated aim of ensuring that music develop "in the direction of realism" made more explicit the philosophical outlook that stood behind all the accusations against the Soviet composers.¹³ The Soviet regime articulated the fundamental principles of socialist realism as *narodnost'* ("peopleness"), *klassovost'* ("classness"), and *partiinost'* ("partyness")—in other words, art should be of the people, support the cause of the oppressed and revolutionary social class, and identify with the Communist Party. These three principles would continue to form the foundations of art criticism in the East Bloc even after the death of Stalin in 1953.¹⁴ The charge of formalism in music, for example, was primarily an extension of the idea that music must exhibit *narodnost'*, a vague equivalent of *Volkstümlichkeit* or "folksiness." Because music with no clear topical or referential content could appeal only to the narrow class trained to enjoy it, the party's official position favored opera, simpler songs, and other genres that might be more easily understood by more people. Thus, Zhdanov and his colleagues dismissed music in which the primary interest was the abstract play of sound and form in favor of music with an explicit plot or easy-to-follow tunes, as well as a text that could easily be censored. As we will see, even Hungarians who embraced socialism were not quick to align themselves with the musical values espoused by the Central Committee, but these values did eventually come to be enforced in Hungary.

The full text of the Central Committee's resolution on music was published in the Hungarian press a week after it was issued in the Soviet Union.¹⁵ Composers and critics alike wondered to what extent the resolution would

apply to people living outside the Soviet Union but within the Soviet sphere of influence. Szervánszky remarked that the resolution brought wholly unfamiliar problems to the attention of Hungarian artists:

The Soviet Communist Party's harsh criticism of Soviet music has stirred up Hungarian musical public opinion to an extraordinary extent. . . . The primary thing that is entirely unusual for the Hungarian public is that in the Soviet Union artistic problems are on the agenda of the Communist Party. We must clarify for our readers that in the socialist state cultural problems, and thus music, are matters of public interest. Cultural factors possess just as important a social function as the problems of politics or economics. Thus, the current intervention into musical life is understandable.¹⁶

That Szervánszky felt the need to explain this aspect of the resolution to his readers indicates that, as he stated, the kind of intervention practiced by the Soviet Communist Party was upsetting to many Hungarians. Though censorship had been practiced in prewar Hungary, this kind of wide-ranging official rebuke was shocking to many Hungarian composers; they expressed concerns about artistic freedom and wondered fearfully whether the Soviet resolution would apply to them. Some also worried specifically about what the resolution implied for their national tradition, particularly for Bartók.

Communist music critics in Hungary tried to allay these fears, insisting that as long as art remained connected with the folk, it would not run afoul of Communist principles. Several interpreted the resolution as favorable to Bartók—for Bartók's music featured folk melodies and classical forms and could therefore serve as a model for the kind of populism the Soviet Communist Party sought to achieve. Szervánszky, for instance, came to Bartók's defense, saying that "in Bartók's music . . . we constantly perceive the formal principles of Bach and Beethoven."¹⁷ The Hungarian composer András Mihály, too, spoke in Bartók's favor: he explained that Bartók was different from other modernists because he had "turn[ed] back from the cold emptiness of the unbounded freedom of fantasy toward the warm, human, voluntary boundaries of communal language."¹⁸ Lajos Vargyas, a former student of Zoltán Kodály, maintained that Bartók and Kodály firmly espoused the very same aesthetic principles as those advocated by the Central Committee, and that their music was therefore already compatible with the resolution's demands, far superior to any decadent Western European music. Vargyas's article was something of a preemptive strike: his claim that Hungarian composers were musically and ideologically superior to those of Western Europe supported an argument that Hungarian musical life did not need to be

rebuilt on the model of Soviet music.¹⁹ The implication of these essays and others like them was that the humanity, folksiness, and classicism of Bartók's music would surely shelter it from criticism under the Soviet guidelines.

Nationalism played a key role in these interpretations of the Soviet resolution. Although Hungarian Communists regarded the Soviet Union as more experienced in political socialism, most had no reason to believe in its cultural superiority. On the contrary, they continued to prize their own musical traditions above all others. Mihály went so far as to speculate that since the best Soviet composers had been criticized as formalists, and since Bartók seemed to fulfill the party's criteria for populist music, perhaps the vanguard of socialist music would arise not in the Soviet Union but in Hungary. He explained that the creation of music appropriate to a socialist society was not a question of mere goodwill or talent, such as that of Shostakovich or Prokofiev, but a matter of real genius. He then went on to ask, "Is it certain that this creative musical genius will appear on Soviet soil? According to the lessons of history, absolutely not."²⁰ For Mihály, there was no reason to believe that the Soviet tradition would prove any more fertile than the Hungarian tradition of Bartók and Kodály.

The young music critic József Ujfalussy also saw Bartók's legacy as a musical force that would have more than just local importance. Ujfalussy explained that "thanks to the work of the two great artists [Bartók and Kodály], new Hungarian musical production has found in Hungarian and Eastern European folk music a firm foundation for the cultivation of art music of the highest quality that slowly will conquer the entire world. . . ." ²¹ Ujfalussy's triumphal imagery expressed a dream that was cherished by many Hungarian musicians during this otherwise demoralizing period: that Hungarian music—the tradition of Bartók and Kodály—would emerge as a model for, or even the basis of, a new international socialist music tradition. This hope for the future of Bartók's music was intimately bound up with the hope that Hungary would be able to follow a third road, a path between Eastern and Western European cultural powers. Mihály's and Ujfalussy's arguments suggest that just as Hungarians planned to follow their own unique path to political socialism, they also intended to follow their own path to socialist music, the path indicated by Bartók in his late works.

FERENC SZABÓ'S *HOMECOMING*

This hope was expressed not only in words, but also in music. In Ferenc Szabó's 1948 orchestral work entitled *Homecoming*, later referred to simply as his Concerto for Orchestra, one can hear how central Bartók's music

was to Communist imaginings of the future. Szabó, who studied with Kodály in the 1920s, had been a member of the illegal interwar Communist Party in Hungary and had spent several years in exile in the Soviet Union. The “homecoming” of the title refers most directly to his return to Hungary in 1945 as an officer in the Soviet army. The composer wrote about the autobiographical inspiration for the piece in a preface to the score: “The composer is one of those who had the elevating task of taking part personally in the great fight for freedom. He returned home and found his true home, as did millions of Hungarian working people. His music speaks of this. He dedicates his work to the immortal memory of the many who could not return home because they sacrificed their lives for the great cause of the workers’ liberation, of the freedom of their homeland and of their Hungarian people.”²² In accordance with its autobiographical theme, the music is replete with reminiscences; the most obvious and the most evocative are those of Bartók’s *Concerto for Orchestra*. The composer’s dedication therefore seems to include Bartók himself as one of those who “could not return home.”

The points of contact between Szabó’s concerto and Bartók’s link the two exiled composers in an act of remembrance and homage.²³ The homage begins even before the first measure of music. Szabó’s preface to the score explains that his designation of the work as a concerto “is not an end in itself; rather, it refers only to the freer nature of its performance. If the playful sparkling and the evident play of instruments occasionally predominate, the designation ‘concerto’ primarily calls attention to the intensified independence and responsibility of the orchestral instruments.”²⁴ Szabó’s description echoed Bartók’s own words: Bartók had explained about his own concerto in 1944 that “the title of this symphony-like orchestral work is explained by its tendency to treat the single instruments or instrument groups in a ‘concertant’ or soloistic manner.”²⁵ Like Bartók’s *Concerto for Orchestra*, Szabó’s *Homecoming* concerto relies not on the use of a solo instrument, but on the presentation of contrasting groups of instruments. Szabó’s act of homage suggests that he, like Mihály, considered Bartók an excellent model for new socialist music.

Szabó’s debt to Bartók is most apparent in the slow introduction that opens his concerto. Both composers open their works with low strings playing a melody based on leaps of a fourth, expanding gradually in successive phrases. (Compare example 1a, the first eight measures of Bartók’s *Concerto for Orchestra*, to example 1b, the opening of Szabó’s *Homecoming* concerto.)²⁶ Despite this resemblance, the two passages differ in affect because

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Ferenc Szabó. Photo: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum (Hungarian National Museum). Used by permission.

of the different character of the music that accompanies the two melodies. Bartók's trembling, muted strings play symmetrical chromatic figures that expand and contract, creating dense clusters of seconds. By contrast, Szabó's low string phrases are interrupted by resonant chiming in the woodwinds, enhanced by pizzicato attacks in the strings. Szabó's slow introduction remains close to its model throughout, imitating each prominent element of Bartók's in turn. Thus, we hear in Szabó's concerto echoes of Bartók's dissonant, halting trumpet figures (examples 2a and 2b) and of Bartók's climactic string and woodwind outcries (examples 3a and 3b). A motive bor-

rowed from Bartók's introduction also appears prominently as a thematic element of the vivace that follows Szabó's slow introduction, though the subsequent music bears a more individual stamp than the obvious homage of the opening measures.

In a brief episode midway through Szabó's concerto, Bartók's music leaves its mark again. Here Szabó evokes the elegiac third movement of Bartók's concerto, in which Bartók alternates reminiscences of the slow introduction with the eerie, tremulous utterances of his trademark "night-music" style. Szabó's procedure is similar—he brings back the melody from the slow introduction phrase by phrase, accompanied by twittering arpeggios in the harp and woodwinds (example 4). Here again, though, Szabó's passage has a very different effect. The sonorous landscape of Bartók's night music remains ominously static—even the oboe's melodic line wanders without clear direction (mm. 10–12). By contrast, the corresponding passage in Szabó's concerto is divided into neat two-bar phrases, led by the piano's short-winded presentation of a circular melody (mm. 283–292, 302–308). Moreover, Bartók's more exotic woodwind and harp figures are composed of alternating minor thirds and minor seconds, whereas Szabó's consist of tame arpeggiated triads with an added neighbor note. Bartók's night music is apprehensive, but Szabó's is luminous, untroubled.

In spite of the transparency of his homage to Bartók, Szabó was no mere epigone. Rather, he seems to have gone out of his way to adapt the expressive strategies of Bartók's concerto to a simpler orchestral style that would communicate to the widest possible audience. The brighter sound of Szabó's score reflected the socialist demand that art represent optimistic sentiments befitting the glorious new world that Stalin and Rákosi were building. This political vision had no place for a night music as dark or as mysterious as Bartók's. Indeed, it is striking that Szabó, a loyal Communist, took Bartók as a model at all; given the occasionally elegiac tone of the *Concerto for Orchestra*, one might wonder why Szabó did not simply choose another example to follow. In portraying his own return to Hungary, though, Szabó seems to have been motivated by a longing for continuity with the Hungarian traditions of the immediate past—a desire to create music that would be not only socialist, but also specifically Hungarian. Even Szabó, of all Hungarian composers the most amenable to Soviet leadership, seems to have harbored the hope that Hungarian traditions could play a leading role in the development of new socialist music. By adapting elements of Bartók's late style, then, Szabó was pursuing one likely strategy for creating truly Hungarian music that would also reflect socialist ideals.

Example 1.

a. Bartók, Concerto for Orchestra, I, mm. 1–8.

b. Szabó, *Homecoming* concerto, mm. 1–7.

a.

Andante non troppo, $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 73 - 64$ con sord. div.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.
Cb.

p legato

con sord. div. *pp*

con sord. div. *pp*

sul pont.

div. in 2 *pp*

b.

Andante

Fl. 1, 2, 3

Cl. 1, 2 (Bb)

B.Cl. (Bb)

Timp.

Vlins. 1, 2

Vla.

Vc.
Cb.

pp

pp

pp

pp

pp

pp

pp

pp

Vln. 1 pizz. *pp*

Vln. 2

pizz. *pp*

Example 2.

- a. Bartók, Concerto for Orchestra, I, mm. 39–42.
- b. Szabó, *Homecoming* concerto, mm. 28–31 (all parts shown at sounding pitch).

a.

I, III
Tpt. (C) *pp*

II *pp*

b.

1,2
Tpt. (C) *f*

3,4 *f*

Trb. 1,2
Hn. 1,2 8va *f*

Trb. 3, Tuba
Hn. 3,4 8va *f*

Timp. *f*

Sn. D. *mf* *f*

Vln. 1
Fl. *f* *f*

Vln. 2
Ob. *f* *f*

Engl. Hn. only *f*

Vla., Cl.,
Engl. Hn. *f* *f*

Vc., Cb.,
Bsn., Cbsn.,
B.Cl. *f* *f*

Example 3.

- a. Bartók, Concerto for Orchestra, I, mm. 51–54 (woodwinds double the emphasized notes).
- b. Szabó, *Homecoming* concerto, mm. 42–45 (trumpets omitted).

a.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

b.

Fl.

Ob.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Example 4. Szabó, *Homecoming* concerto, after rehearsal 18 (mm. 274–282).

Tempo I, ma molto rubato

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The top section includes woodwinds and percussion: Cl. 1, 2 (Bb), Bsn., C. Bsn., Hn., Timp., and Tam-Tam. The middle section features the string families: Vln. 1 div. (Violins I), Vln. 2 div. (Violins II), Vla. (Viola), Vc. (Violoncello), and Cb. (Contrabasso). The score is written in 3/4 time and begins with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'Tempo I, ma molto rubato'. The music is characterized by a dense harmonic texture, with many accidentals and dynamic markings such as *mf*, *f*, and *ff*. The woodwinds and strings play sustained chords and moving lines, while the percussion provides a rhythmic foundation.

Example 4 (continued)

This musical score page, labeled 'Example 4 (continued)', features 14 staves for various instruments. The woodwind section includes Piccolo (Fl. picc.), Flute 1 (Fl. 1), Flute 2 (Fl. 2), Oboe 1 (Ob. 1), Oboe 2 (Ob. 2), English Horn (Engl. Hn.), Clarinet 1 (Cl. 1, B \flat), Clarinet 2 (Cl. 2, B \flat), and Bass Clarinet (B.Cl., B \flat). The string section includes Harp, Piano (Pf.), Violin 1 (Vln. 1, div.), and Violin 2 (Vln. 2, div.). The score is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The woodwinds and strings play sustained notes, while the flutes and piccolo play a melodic line starting in the third measure. The harp features glissando passages. Dynamic markings include *p* (piano), *mp* (mezzo-piano), and *gliss.* (glissando). The string parts include first and second endings for the Violin 1 and 2 parts.

THE THIRD ROAD DENIED

Even Szabó's careful moderation of Bartók's idiom would prove insufficient when, at the behest of Stalin himself, the Hungarian government put a stop to Hungarian intellectuals' pursuit of a third road. A policy change that Stalin communicated to East Bloc leaders near the end of 1948 demanded that the leaders of the People's Democracies follow the Soviet line much more closely than they had previously done.²⁷ In January and March 1949 Secretary General Rákosi and the eminent party ideologist József Révai issued self-critical statements indicating that they had misunderstood the nature of the People's Democracy. Rákosi explained that too much emphasis had been placed on the differences between Soviet and Hungarian socialism, and Révai stated unequivocally that "the way of the People's Democracies differs only in certain external forms, and not in essence, from the way of the Soviet Union."²⁸ This fundamental change in outlook would significantly alter the prospects for a uniquely Hungarian socialist music. Over the next few years, Soviet authorities would invest in the project of bringing satellite cultures into conformity, sponsoring educational exchange trips, promoting the translation of Soviet texted musical works into Hungarian, and—most significantly—enforcing artistic standards that more closely resembled those promoted by Soviet authorities.

Concurrent with the political shift away from the third-road policy came increased attention to artistic matters. On 27 November 1948 Rákosi called on the party's Culture-Political Division to combat bourgeois and Western influences in the arts.²⁹ The division immediately responded by announcing an ambitious plan that would target both "aristocratic, avant-garde formalism" and "kitsch that is in the immediate service of monopolistic capitalism."³⁰ In what would become an important decision for the history of Bartók's legacy, the Culture-Political Division recommended the founding of the "Culture-Political Academy," a lecture series that would help Hungarians to understand how the arts should reflect socialist ideology.³¹ One of the proposed lectures explicitly concerned the very question that had pre-occupied Hungarian musicians since Bartók's death: how his music would influence the next generation of musicians. The Culture-Political Division determined that Mihály would give a lecture entitled "Béla Bartók and the Generation Coming after Him," and that its content would consist of "the adaptation of the Bolshevik Party's musical critique to the Hungarian situation." Mihály presented the lecture on 3 February 1949.

As he was instructed to do, Mihály took as his starting point the speech given by Zhdanov at the end of the 1948 musicians' congress at which the

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András Mihály. Photo: MTI Fotó, Magyar Távirati Iroda
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Soviet Central Committee announced its resolution on music.³² Zhdanov's speech, which was distributed widely both inside and outside the Soviet Union, had amplified many of the precepts laid out in the resolution. Mihály mimicked Zhdanov's particular turns of phrase—referring, for example, to “sharp” debates taking place “under the surface” of society—as well as his rhetorical treatment of certain issues. Both Mihály's and Zhdanov's lectures progressed from a discussion of the general musical situations in their respective countries, focusing especially on the activities of established institutions, to the problems of formalism that challenged their vision of an appropriately socialist musical life.

Zhdanov's speech had critiqued both the social structure that allowed composers to believe they were independent of society and the stylistic features of the music created by such composers:

There is in fact, then, a sharp though hidden struggle between two trends taking place in Soviet music. One trend represents the healthy, progressive principles in Soviet music, based on the acceptance of the immense role to be played by the classical heritage, and in particular, by the Russian school, in the creation of a music which is realist and of truthful content and is closely and organically linked with the people and their folk music and folk song—all this combined with a high degree of professional mastery. The other trend represents a formalism alien to Soviet art, a rejection of the classical heritage under the banner of innovation, a rejection of the idea of the popular origin of music, and of service to the people, in order to gratify the individualistic emotions of a small group of select aesthetes.³³

For Zhdanov, then, the struggle took place between two trends, the “classical heritage” and “formalism.” He included within the “classical” tradition the (deceased Russian) composers Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Dargomyzhsky, and Musorgsky, whose art was marked by “truthfulness and realism, its ability to blend brilliant artistic form with profound content, and to combine the highest technical achievement with simplicity and intelligibility.”³⁴ The opposing “formalist” trend, distinct from the “classical” both in musical style and in the educational qualifications of its composers, was represented by Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and their colleagues, all living Soviet composers of concert music. Zhdanov had at his disposal a national tradition: his pantheon of composers included some who claimed autodidacticism and repudiated academic musical styles, and several who drew on the Russian folk heritage. He used this tradition to point out a new direction for socialist composers: a return to the “classic” would, ironically enough, promise a bright Communist future.

Mihály’s decision to adapt Zhdanov’s positions in his own lecture—as requested by party officials—posed a dilemma. Zhdanov’s emphasis on tradition could not be ignored; at the same time, the music of Hungarian composers of the nineteenth century, including Liszt and Erkel, bore obvious hallmarks of bourgeois nationalism.³⁵ Bartók and Kodály were the first art-music composers consciously to develop a sophisticated Hungarian style that went beyond the application of local color in selected works. Given that Kodály was still alive and present in Hungary, though, he could hardly be treated as a historical personage in 1949. Thus, whereas Zhdanov had an array of historical figures who could be used to support his argument, Mihály really had only one figure to call upon—Bartók—and one who moreover did not fall cleanly on one side or another of the divide. While Zhdanov’s “sharp struggle” took place between two trends and their representatives

on either side, Mihály's "sharp debate" consisted of attempts to come to terms with a single figure's work. Mihály framed the conflict thus:

The first fundamental question consists in how we regard Bartók's work, what we consider closed in it and tied to its time, and what is suitable for continuation or capable of development. This question is timely because under the surface a serious debate is in progress about whether Bartók is indebted to the progressive or to the decadent trend in music; or, examining the course of his musical progress in the spirit of the resolution of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party of the Soviet Union: was he a formalist or not? The sharpness of this debate is not diminished by the fact that, as I say, it runs under the surface.³⁶

Since party officials had explicitly assigned the title of the lecture, Mihály had little choice about whether to bring Bartók into the discussion of formalism; rather, he had discretion only about how to treat him within the terms set out by Zhdanov. Furthermore, since Bartók had obviously been influenced by modernist Western European music, Mihály could not truthfully portray him as an entirely "realist" composer. Here began a complex series of negotiations around the evaluation of Bartók's legacy. From this point forward, those who wanted to keep his music in the repertory had to find ways—no matter how distorting—to justify this music politically. For some dedicated Communists, a battle between their musical and political allegiances was inevitable.

Some aspects of Mihály's lecture reflected the optimism certain socialist composers had felt about Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra as a path ahead for an independent Hungarian music. Mihály portrayed Bartók as a great artist who imbued the forms of Western art music with the true content of folk music.³⁷ In Mihály's reading the dialectical combination of these elements—the synthesis—became the salvation of Bartók's music. The transcendence of both the Western and the folk elements was a crucial element of this argument because the folk music used most prominently by Bartók was specifically not the gypsy music of the urban folk, but rural peasant music.³⁸ Allowing peasant music to stand for the Hungarian folk in general would not have been at all appropriate, since the peasant class, in its traditionalism, was always by and large resistant to Communism and a problem for Marxist theory. Mihály's lecture therefore stressed that the concerto transcended all its models, Eastern and Western, to become an example of the new socialist music.

Mihály's selection of the Concerto for Orchestra as the pinnacle of Bartókian synthesis was a logical continuation of the positive commentary

with which Communists greeted Bartók's late works. Contrasting his interpretation of the concerto's accessible style with a memorably caustic remark heard after its Hungarian premiere, he explained: "It is not coincidental that at the first Budapest performance of Bartók's concerto some composers were at a loss in the presence of the work. Bartók betrayed the revolution—they said—but it turned out that it was just the opposite; this was the crowning of the true revolution of Hungarian music."³⁹ Defining socialist values in contradistinction to the values traditionally central to the Western European art-music tradition, Mihály claimed that rather than representing the moral weakening of the composer, the *Concerto for Orchestra* showed Bartók's true conscience coming to the fore. Here Mihály made explicit again what had already been affirmed by other Communist composers: that Bartók's concerto, despite its formalist elements, was both Bartók's vindication and a potential path for the future of Hungarian music.⁴⁰

Other aspects of Mihály's lecture, however, undercut this optimism, and in some respects the lecture can be regarded as the turning point at which the party officially began to set Bartók's music aside in favor of less problematical styles.⁴¹ Mihály allowed Bartók to remain at the center of the tradition by asserting that Bartók's career traced one long progression away from formalism and toward a closer connection with the people. He provided a brief history of Bartók's style to support this claim, explaining that Bartók's early serious engagement with the music of Richard Strauss and his attraction to some of the same techniques that Arnold Schoenberg used were moderated over the course of time by his desire to compose music in a more accessible style. Since Bartók did not live long enough to complete this project, Mihály declared, it was the duty of modern Hungarian composers to pick up where he left off and rejoin music with the people. This rhetorical move echoes one of Zhdanov's: for both Zhdanov and Mihály, the classics represented a standard that must be respected but also surpassed.⁴² This strategy allowed Mihály to marginalize Bartók for the moment and yet keep him as an important part of the Hungarian tradition, in effect saving him by damning him. In this sense, Mihály's reading of Zhdanov's lecture might be regarded as ambivalent. Although he did choose a route that might preserve Bartók's works as a historical foundation for the new repertoire, Mihály also implied that new works could not actually be modeled on Bartók's, even the late ones; in so doing, he acknowledged that Bartók's music might have to be left behind in the interest of socialism. The negative undertone of many of Mihály's comments was noteworthy, especially coming from a composer who declared himself an admirer of Bartók's music. It is Mihály's implied dismissal of most of Bartók's music, not the redemp-

tive tone of his remarks about the Concerto for Orchestra, that has left the more enduring impression on Hungarian discussions of the musical events of 1949.

Another lecture a few weeks later conveyed the party's message more directly. The Hungarian Workers' Party organized a Soviet Culture Month in Budapest from February to March 1949, during which time Soviet artists and scholars came to Budapest as cultural ambassadors. During his visit to Hungary, the Soviet composer Mikhail Chulaki attended numerous concerts, observed the activities of music educators and performing groups, and passed judgment on the music of Hungarian composers. In a lecture at the Music Academy on 24 February 1949, Chulaki revealed a new perspective on Bartók's music. According to the diary of the music critic Sándor Jemnitz, Chulaki "rejected [Bartók's] *Miraculous Mandarin* as formalist and called Bartók bourgeois."⁴³ It is significant that Chulaki's visit brought *The Miraculous Mandarin* to the forefront. Although Hungarian Communists had pinned their hopes on Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, tactfully leaving his more obviously unsuitable works out of the discussion altogether, the Soviet composer felt no such loyalty. By bringing up a work that obviously violated every principle of socialist art with its dissonant style and overtly violent sexual content, Chulaki emphasized what Hungarians had refused to acknowledge: that as a modernist and as a Hungarian, Bartók could not possibly serve as a model for the new socialist music. As a pro-Soviet agenda began to determine the course of Hungarian music criticism in 1949 and 1950, *The Miraculous Mandarin* was increasingly cited as the characteristic example of Bartók's art, while the Concerto for Orchestra all but disappeared from critical assessments of his music.

Both Mihály and Chulaki had raised serious questions about the role Bartók's legacy should play in Communist Hungary. Mihály had even specifically invited open public debate on the questions he raised.⁴⁴ Yet the two lectures evoked little open response from critics or the musical public. This lack of noticeable effect was cited as one of the reasons for the formation of a new Musicians' Association: the very fact that Mihály's lecture had not sparked open debate, it was said, indicated that a new forum for debate among composers was urgently needed.⁴⁵ On 10 August 1949 the party secretariat created new organizations for the support and regulation of the arts, with the stated aims of bringing artists into the socialist movement, promoting Soviet artistic practices and ideology and suppressing those who spoke against those practices, and fostering socialist realism.⁴⁶ In addition, the Musicians' Association was to further the "political, ideological and ethical" education of artists, organize working groups for their mutual support,

and work out common issues among different branches of the arts, not only for the membership of the organization but also for the benefit of the wider artistic community. It was also to help the Institute for Cultural Relations Abroad (Külföldi Kulturkapcsolatok Intézete) in strengthening connections with the Soviet Union and other friendly states and to continue to produce the *Music Review*, now guided in content by specifically socialist criteria. Though Kodály, Hungary's most renowned living musician, served as the association's honorary president, Szabó became its acting president and de facto leader.⁴⁷

The new Musicians' Association would have within it a party action committee (*aktiva*), a small group that would organize the Communist membership to carry out the party's agenda within the association. In accordance with the Soviet model, membership in the new association was not open to all musicians: political and musical criteria determined who could join, although all the talented composers who were crucial to the party's goal of developing high-quality Hungarian music had to be admitted, even if they had shown resistance to the party's politics. The presence of dissenting viewpoints within the association was necessary; otherwise, several of Hungary's most distinguished composers, including Kodály, would have had to be excluded. But their presence also prevented the unity of opinion the party sought.

Besides the founding of the Musicians' Association, the creation of a new government ministry for the assistance and regulation of cultural work gives evidence of increasing bureaucratic supervision over artistic matters. The press announced the founding of the Ministry of Education (Népművelési Minisztérium) on 10 June 1949, with Révai as minister and director of the agency.⁴⁸ (Like Rákosi and Szabó, Révai was a "Muscovite"—a Hungarian Communist who had spent most of the interwar period in the Soviet Union.) The Ministry aimed to foster culture of all kinds, to bring the arts into line with the party's goals for a worker-oriented culture, and particularly to propagate Soviet culture in Hungary. The last goal was so important that the Ministry's official magazine would bear the title *Soviet Culture*. As the article announcing the creation of the Ministry observed:

Powerful support is offered for our cultural tasks by Soviet culture—the culture of that nation that stands at the forefront of progress, not only in economics and politics, but also in intellectual, artistic, and ideological matters. We already have much to be grateful to this culture for. . . . If in our artistic life any purification has taken place, the merit belongs to *Soviet models*. . . . There is no doubt that with this great alliance of support our victory is certain, and the Ministry of Education

will soon give an account of decisive results in the area of the creation of new public thought.⁴⁹

This statement effectively denied the possibility that Hungarians could progress toward a socialist culture by their own methods or on the basis of their own traditions. The new viewpoint promulgated by the Rákosi regime contrasted sharply with the optimistic third-road politics of the Hungarian musicians who had believed that Bartók's late style might form the basis for a new international socialist music. The emphasis on Soviet styles would increase dramatically from this point on, and hopes for an alternative Hungarian path to socialism would eventually yield to official recognition of Soviet models for all the arts as unequivocally preferable to Hungarian traditions.

Despite the intent of the Musicians' Association and the Ministry of Education to stimulate public debate, Hungarians hardly touched the question of Bartók's position in musical life for months after Mihály and Chulaki delivered their lectures. Bartók was still cited occasionally in positive terms: in the pages of the party newspaper, *Free Folk*, he was described as a model of socialist internationalism because of his love for peasant songs from all nations.⁵⁰ When he was mentioned at all, he continued to be presented to the public in the same glowing terms in which socialists had first framed the arrival of his late works in Hungary—with claims that his career demonstrated a progression of conscience away from formalism and toward the people.⁵¹ By and large, though, the questions raised by Mihály and Chulaki were ignored in print and in public forums for almost a year following their lectures. Communists and non-Communists alike respected Bartók, and no one wished to continue the public criticism of his music. If the leaders of the Hungarian Workers' Party sought to establish a clear policy against Bartók's formalist and modernist works, more concentrated efforts would be necessary.

A "SHARPER" DEBATE

The next attack on Bartók was much more decisive. On 5 February 1950 *Free Folk* sharpened its rhetoric against the composer and against formalism with the publication of an article asserting that "we do not approve of the *too frequent* performance on the opera stage of Béla Bartók's stage works—especially the work entitled '*The Miraculous Mandarin*.'"⁵² Exactly who was meant by "we," and indeed the very authorship of the article, has been called into question by some Hungarian scholars, but the available ev-

idence indicates that the journalist Géza Losonczy produced the screed on the direct orders of the government's Ministry of Education.⁵³ Losonczy, who then was serving as a state secretary at the Ministry, was a close associate of Révai and often wrote such articles at the behest of the party; according to his own 1955 testimony, he wrote the article at the Ministry's request after the Ministry had decided upon its content.

In the context of a critique of the practices of the Opera House in general and its repertory in particular, Losonczy considered whether certain works of Wagner and Bartók should remain in the repertory. His article reversed the balance Mihály had so carefully established. Whereas in Mihály's analysis Bartók's late works mitigated the earlier ones, in this new account the modernism of some works cast doubt on all of Bartók's music:

Let there be no misunderstanding: we consider Béla Bartók to be *one of the greatest musical geniuses*, and we rank his art among the most precious treasures of Hungarian musical culture. . . . It is not possible, however, to turn one's eye away from the fact that in Béla Bartók's art deep traces were left by the decadence and formalism of bourgeois music. Béla Bartók's genius was nourished not only by the pure sources of Hungarian folk music, but also by the bourgeois, decaying art of his time. Bartók's entire oeuvre carries with it the signs of this unceasing struggle that was carried on in him between the positive inspiration of the Hungarian folk music tradition and Western bourgeois decadence.⁵⁴

Despite the nearly obligatory tribute offered at the outset, the tone of Losonczy's article became more and more strident, criticizing *The Miraculous Mandarin's* explicit sexual content and its "choreography that reminds one of the writhing in Hollywood films." The article called for a more distanced and critical standpoint with regard to Bartók's music and warned against fetishizing any musical repertory. Indeed, as Mihály reported later that year, "Most musicians interpreted Comrade Losonczy's claims about the formalist signs perceptible in Bartók's work as a serious attack on all of Bartók's work."⁵⁵

Losonczy's article was particularly important because it forced back into public debate questions that had been tabled for nearly a year. It was surely no coincidence that this grand gesture was made in February 1950, the second Soviet Culture Month, scant weeks before the arrival in Hungary of the Soviet composers Anatoly Novikov and Vladimir Zakharov. Like Chulaki's of the year before, Novikov and Zakharov's visit was designed both as an educational opportunity for Hungarian musicians and as an intelligence-gathering opportunity for the Soviet Union. The appearance of Losonczy's article just ahead of a new Soviet delegation would give Rákosi,

Révai, and their Hungarian colleagues something concrete and dramatic to show the Soviets about the battle against musical formalism in Hungary—evidence that would be important in shoring up their own reputations in Moscow.

Rákosi's position with respect to his mentor, Stalin, had always been precarious. He had been installed as secretary general not because of any particular leadership ability, but rather because he was already well known in Hungary as a Communist who had been persecuted for his political beliefs during the 1920s and 1930s. Like many other Hungarian Communist leaders, Rákosi was of Jewish descent, making him an easy target for anti-Semitic charges of "cosmopolitanism." This touchy situation may explain why Rákosi always leaped to do Stalin's bidding, ever on the alert for ways to outdo the leaders of other East Bloc nations in Stalinist orthodoxy. Because of Rákosi's eagerness to anticipate the Soviet agenda, it is difficult to discern the extent to which Soviet leaders demanded the Sovietization of the arts in Hungary and, conversely, the extent to which policy was driven by local leaders eager to accomplish the task on their own initiative. The available archival evidence suggests that Rákosi and his "Muscovite" cohort took up the program of Sovietization without specific written instructions from abroad.⁵⁶ In any case, they acted with alacrity, possibly because as 1949 wore on they felt increasing pressure to provide visible demonstrations of their fealty to Stalin and to his policies. Losonczy's article serves as one instance of the desire to impress the Soviets through renewed efforts to enforce the artistic policies that had lain fallow for a year.

The two Soviet visitors arrived sometime on or before 19 February. These emissaries represented the Soviet vision of the future of socialist music: Novikov as a composer of popular songs and "mass songs" for workers to sing in large groups, and Zakharov as the leader of the Piatnitsky folklore ensemble. They stayed for several weeks, observing the activities of performing ensembles and critiquing Hungarian composers' work. Both gave lectures before the Musicians' Association, in which they publicly offered criticism of individual composers' contributions and of general musical trends, and they answered numerous questions about musical life in the USSR. The Soviet composers' remarks about Hungarian music were personal and pointed; no formality stood in the way of their blunt commentary. In a lecture on 16 March 1950, Zakharov enumerated the faults of many of the most prominent composers in Hungary. Among these, he criticized Szabó's *Homecoming* concerto as too "individualistic," but he said that since Szabó had more recently written better film music, at least he was progressing in the right direction.⁵⁷ Szabó did not fare as well in Novikov's es-

say about Hungarian music, first published in the main Soviet music journal, *Sovetskaya muzyka*, and later reprinted in *Free Folk*. Novikov stated that "Ferenc Szabó is one of the most talented of contemporary Hungarian composers. Unfortunately, he still clings to his less successful work, such as the symphonic poem entitled 'Homecoming,' which is a formalist work. . . . The sooner he gives up toying with antiquated modernist 'relics,' the greater the contribution he will make to Hungarian musical life."⁵⁸ The reliance on Bartók in Szabó's work may well have contributed to Novikov's accusation of formalism. Not until the 1970s were Hungarian critics willing to comment in print on the striking similarities between Szabó's concerto and Bartók's; the homage remained an unmentionable open secret while radio broadcasts continued to feature both works. Novikov's criticism also fulfilled more general purposes: as Szabó ascended to power in the administration of Hungarian musical life, the Soviet visitors found it especially important to reprimand even this most loyal follower to ensure Hungarians' complete submission to Soviet cultural domination. Szabó took the hint, and he soon became one of Bartók's harshest Hungarian critics. Although he continued to admit behind closed doors that he still felt strongly drawn to Bartók's music,⁵⁹ within a few months he published several articles denouncing it as "pessimistic" and claiming that it reflected "every oppression, horror, and inhumanity of the time of imperialism."⁶⁰

As one might imagine, the Soviet composers were not warmly received. In a later report for the Musicians' Association on the achievements and failings of the year, jointly authored by Mihály, Szabó, and Endre Székely, the three Hungarians reported euphemistically that "even among our leading composers there were some who, for a time, related badly to the criticisms of the Soviet comrades," largely because "in the course of Comrade Zakharov's and Comrade Novikov's stay here no comradely or collegial contact was established between the two Soviet comrades and the Hungarian composers."⁶¹ It is not at all surprising that, in the face of severe criticism that aimed specifically to undermine any sense of Hungarian independence, Hungarian composers bristled at or rejected outright Zakharov's and Novikov's comments.

Once Hungarian officials adopted the Soviet policy, turning away from the third road, Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra underwent a remarkably rapid rehabilitation. As time went on, it became apparent that the state would need showpieces of Hungarian music that reflected a populist outlook while still maintaining the highest artistic quality. Though the concerto was not to be emulated by composers of new music, it was played more and more often on the radio and in public concerts as an example of Hungarian or-

chestral music that seemed to communicate to a broad audience. Not only did this and other showpieces highlight the new outlook for audiences at home, but they also were supposed to demonstrate for Western broadcast audiences that Hungary was not a mere satellite, that it was maintaining its own indigenous traditions.

The party also found Bartók's concerto useful as it sought to measure the loyalty of individual composers. Party officials viewed with suspicion the composers who had first rejected the concerto as too simple for their modernist tastes, and they used those past statements about the concerto against them as proof of their deviation from socialist ideals. Thus, during a 1950 inquisition into the errors that had been committed in the administration of musical life, the composer Pál Kadosa reluctantly admitted that he had not liked the concerto or Bartók's other late works. Under questioning from Minister of Education József Révai, who was presiding at the meeting, Kadosa conceded that "there were many among our composers who reacted badly to Bartók's late works. I myself the most badly."

RÉVAI: Was it so bad that these works pleased you?

KADOSA: I did not approve of the late works; I did not see new directions in them.⁶²

As Kadosa well knew by this time, his admission had not only aesthetic but also political implications; his dislike of Bartók's more accessible works left him open to the charge that he did not truly support the socialist ideal of music for all. Thus, the very work that had once represented a vital hope for Hungary's third road became instead a tool with which the Hungarian state enforced the aesthetic conformity of composers and maintained the mere pretense of cultural autonomy.

The influence of ideological factors on the reception of Bartók's late works was not a uniquely Eastern European phenomenon. On the contrary, these works raised similar questions upon their arrival in Western Europe shortly after the war's end. A different but related set of political pressures—particularly the urgent need to overcome the artistic legacy of Nazism and the perceived threat of socialist realism from the East—would shape the fate of Bartók's music in Western lands.