

The Background

In 1930, Eric Dorflein, a German music educator engaged in compiling a student anthology of violin music, wrote to Béla Bartók, asking his permission to transcribe some pieces from Bartók's *Folk Songs for Children* for two violins. In this letter, Dorflein suggested that Bartók might prefer making his own transcriptions, an invitation Bartók turned aside, offering instead to compose some new two-violin pieces for Dorflein's anthology. Meeting with Bartók in December of 1930, Dorflein agreed.

Dorflein had intended Bartók's contributions to be only part of his anthology's third and fourth volumes which he had reserved for Hungarian composers past and present but, by May 21, Dorflein had already received 16 duos from Bartók and more were on the way. In his letter of acknowledgment, realizing his expectations had been exceeded, Dorflein suggested the possibility of a special Bartók volume. The educator then initiated a correspondence with the composer designed to produce study pieces more simple to play than the 16 already received. The correspondence proved successful: Bartók's final consignment, acknowledged by Dorflein on September 21, was indeed the simplest of the *44 Duos*.

However, Erich Dorflein's hopes for a special Bartók volume were dashed when Bartók's publisher, Universal of Vienna, refused music publisher Schott of Mainz permission to publish the complete set of *44 Duos*. Only 18 of 44 appeared in Dorflein's anthology but he continued to advise the composer as the complete set was being prepared for publication by Universal. The *44 Duos* were published in a complete edition by Universal in March 1933.

Since 42 of the 44 violin duos are settings of folksongs and dances from Central and Eastern Europe (the other two are Bartók's own imitations), it perhaps will be useful to understand the background and import of this seemingly curious circumstance. Béla Bartók's on-the-spot researches into Hungarian and other European folkmusics began in 1905 when, in company with his older and more recognized compatriot, Zoltán Kodály, Bartók collected and studied peasant music of Transylvania. The two composers, together, published in December 1906 a volume of twenty Hungarian folksong arrangements for voice and piano. Between 1907 and 1917, Bartók arranged eight more Hungarian peasant songs for voice and piano that Bartók considered representative of the oldest strata of Magyar peasant music in existence. Hungarian peasant songs found their way into Bartók's instrumental music as early as 1908 (*14 Bagatelles for Piano, op. 6*). In fact, many of Bartók's compositions up to the time of the *44 Duos* show the direct influence of Bartók's continuing researches into the folkmusics of Central and Eastern Europe and even North Africa.

In an autobiographical essay, first published in Vienna in March, 1921, Bartók credits his study of peasant music with the critical development of his own compositional language: "The outcome of these studies was of decisive influence upon my work because it freed me from tyrannical rules of the major and minor keys."

In fact, the composer recognized at this time of his more radical two violin sonatas that, because of the influence of this folkmusic, "The new way of using the diatonic scale 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."

While composing his 44 violin duets, however, Bartók kept in mind their essentially educational purpose. On the one hand, Bartók's language is somewhat constrained by the pedagogical advice of Erich Dorflein and, on the other, it is both constrained and freed by the modal diatonicism of the folkmusic Bartók borrowed. We should note that the folk music Bartók selected was not only of Hungarian origin but Rumanian, Ruthenian, Slovakian, Serbian, Ukrainian and even one of Arab origin. One of Bartók's own two imitations is after the Ruthenian dance, the kolomejká (No. 35) and the second, immediately following, imitates peasant bagpipe music. In Universal's complete edition, the 44 *Duos* are ordered roughly by performance difficulty and they are so ordered by Négysesy and Nykter in this recording.

1. Teasing Song

Apparently, Bartók considered the tune and his arrangement of it to be among the simpler of the 44 duos to play since the duo is in a commonly known mode and since the tune is placed registrally to allow the entire tune and its transposed repetition in G major to be played on single strings in first position.

2. Circle Dance

This Rumanian kalamajkó is also easily heard in a major key, this time G major. Its repetition is a fifth higher and its final statement returns to the G level. Bartók's accompaniment to the third strain uses expressive, chromatic inflections (5 to 6 and 6 to 5) and then, finally, reiterates the lowered leading tone, giving the closing cadence a curiously disquieting mixolydian cast.

3. Minuetto

Bartók prefaces the tune with a rhythmic introduction, played on open-string double stops G and D,

whose phrasing has been derived from the unequal phrase structures of the tune itself. The quasi-imitative counterpoint below the tune overlaps the two phrases of its five-bar antecedent and connects the antecedent and consequent clauses as well. As in *Circle Dance*, the lowered leading tone finally unsettles the major tonality as does Bartók's coda, a repetition of only the tune's first phrase closing on the fifth degree, suggesting again the mixolydian mode.

4. Midsummer Night Song

Bartók's accompaniment to the repetition of this five-bar, A major tune a fifth higher is especially curious since it is placed so early among the 44 duos. It begins innocently enough, the repeat being harmonized in E major but then it modulates to an implied mediant, C minor, that is never secured by a tonic resolution. The tune is really B dorian rather than A major since B is the final. Bartók confounds the situation even more by retaining B, the leading tone of the implied C minor, as the dominant of his accompaniment's final, E, a tritone below the tune's own final. It is a marvelous little composition that Bartók obviously could not resist fashioning.

5. Slovak Song

This tune has an asymmetrical phrase structure consisting of 2+2+3+3 measure phrases. The first repeat of the tune is transposed down a fifth while the second returns to the original tonal level but shortened to include only the last five measures. Bartók's accompaniment holds the tune firmly to the B mixolydian mode in spite of the apparent E major of the tune's first and third statements and the A major of its second.

6. Hungarian Song (1)

This first of four Hungarian songs in the 44 *Duos* possesses a tune consisting of only two three-measure phrases. Bartók's accompanying counterpoint balances the brevity and regularity of the tune by its own seamless length that extends through two statements of the tune.

7. Rumanian Song

This song, from the Eastern province of Wallachia, is strongly characterized by intervals of the augmented second and the persistence of a long-short rhythmic pattern and its retrograde (LSSL).

8. Slovak Song (2)

An introductory phrase, contrapuntally imitated a fifth higher, precedes the song itself. The phrase structure of the twelve-bar AABB tune is 2+2+4+4 measures, the last four measures slightly altered to allow a final cadence. Bartók's counterpoint imitates the repeated two-measure phrase in stretto, creating a dissonant clash between the tune's D and the D# on which the stretto begins. Imitation is abandoned during the following four-measure phrases but not dissonances which, although milder (whole steps, minor sevenths and tritones), are often contrapuntally controlled. Chromatic sequencing of the introductory motive in the accompaniment prepares the second statement of the tune.

9. Play

This eight-bar tune contains a subtle structural ambivalence, causing us to question, when listening, whether its two phrases are articulated as 4+4 measures or 3+5. Bartók's non-imitative counterpoint, with its lower seventh degree, treats the tune as mixolydian in its first and second statements, but a raised seventh in the third suggests A major before a series of contrapuntal imitations, forming a bridge to the tune's final statement in the original key, plays on the cross-relationship between the two seventh degrees.

10. Ruthenian Song

The first strain of this quiet, expressive song is accompanied by an equal-note counterpoint whose phrygian, step-wise movement is wave-like in contour. Above it, the tune's two-measure phrases alternate dotted-note and equal-note motives, the former involving the short-long pattern so typical of Hungarian folk music.

11. Lullaby

The introduction to this parlando-type melody implies a pentatonic scale, an implication continued during the tune's first statement. The melody itself, which includes a range of only three notes, is centered on B a tritone removed from the E final of the accompaniment's mode.

12. Hay-Harvesting Song

This quiet song, marked *Lento religioso*, is evidently a song of thanksgiving. The tune's four phrases are essentially three measures long or, perhaps more accurately, each phrase includes three strong beats. The second and third phrases are varied repetitions of the first and the fourth is a cadence 19.

phrase. Although the modal relationship of Bartók's counterpoint to the first two phrases is mixolydian, Bartók sharps the fourth degree (E) during the tune's second half, creating a dissonant cross-relationship between itself and the normal fourth degree (e) heard in the melody.

13. Wedding Song

In the accompaniment to the first strain, double stops, always with one open string, are continuously present while in the second, the violin presenting the tune includes these double stops.

14. Cushion Dance

This lively dance in A major is preceded by a rhythmic, repeated note introduction that also concludes the dance. Its reduced rhythmic pattern, contrapuntally imitated in stretto and then repeated an octave higher, also forms a bridge between the tune's two statements.

15. Soldiers' Song

A repeated but transposed accompaniment phrase constantly undergirds both statements of this clearly articulated melody whose characteristic interval of the fourth helps identify it as Hungarian.

16. Burlesque

The four, equal-measured clauses of this light-hearted allegretto form an AABABA pattern, B being a more assertive contrasting phrase. Bartók composes a canon at the unison to the first two clauses and a heavier, double-stopped countermelody to the third and fourth that is continued rather than repeated.

17. Marching Song (1)

An Hungarian characteristic, the short-long rhythmic pattern, graces this tune, an eight-measure AABA structure. Bartók's chromatic accompaniment to the tune's first statement is quite individual, its first phrase being a transposed inversion of the famous BACH motive.

18. Marching Song (2)

Bartók integrates the running eighths of the tune into his countermelody's first two phrases. The accompaniment's chromatics add both melodic and harmonic tension.

19. Fairy Tale

The most salient feature of this quiet little song is its metrical rhythm, a 3+3+2 subdivision of the measure's eight eighth notes. The tune is repeated a tenth lower, allowing an attractive harmonic cross-relationship between the transposed tune's C minor cadence and an imitation at the original tonal level.

20. Song

The tune proper begins after a forceful introduction which is repeated before both the second and third stanzas of the song. As is typical in the 44 *Duos*, the accompaniment changes with each new statement of the tune. The third statement of the tune is indicated as *piu p, dolce* and *meno mosso*. Its accompaniment is more harmonic, double stops forming cadential major triads to four of the tune's six phrases, including the final phrase, which closes on an A major triad.

21. New Year's Greeting

This *adagio* song, although metrically notated by Bartók, but with *allargandos* and *fermatas*, is a *parlando*-type melody that encourages performance *rubatos*. The accompaniment to the first strain, derived from the repeated three-note motive of the three-measure introduction, subtly varies the metrical placement of the four repetitions of its single phrase. Its muted delicacy is enhanced by the open-string timbre of two of its three notes, A and E. Open-string double stops in the accompaniment to the second and third strains enrich the harmony, although supporting no particular tonal center.

22. Mosquito Dance

Mosquito Dance might well rival *Flight of the Bumblebee*. An illustrative tune, *allegro molto* and *pianissimo*, is repeated once and accompanied throughout by canonic imitations. The tune's four phrases are extended by a coda that uses canonic *stretti* to intensify the mosquito's attack before the big sting.

23. Wedding Song

Marked *lento rubato* and *forte espressivo*, this celebratory song is set with strong *appoggiatura* dissonances, the first two *sforzando*. Its first two-measure phrase, *parlando* in style, is followed by a two-measure phrase whose dotted-note motives, beginning with fourth intervals, have a particu-

larly Hungarian flavor. Bartók lowers the level of dissonance in the more intermittent accompaniment to the tune's repetition a fifth lower, in keeping with its decreasing levels of loudness.

24. Gay Song

The phrase structure of this D major tune is unique among the 44 duos, being articulated into five plus seven measure phrases with the second phrase subdivided by content into two plus five measures.

25. Hungarian Song (2)

This brief tune contains only two phrases, articulated into three plus six measures. Although its diatonic scale avoids the second degree, suggesting a quasi-pentatonic mode, the tune is essentially A aeolian, a mode to which Bartók's accompaniment pays little attention.

26. Teasing Song

The complete song and its freely canonic accompaniment are repeated with no apparent change except for the two violins exchanging parts.

27. Limping Dance

This dance tune's limp is caused by sforzandos on the first beat of every other measure which Bartók complicates by placing sforzandos in the other violin on the last eighth-note of every measure. The result is especially ilimpý when the sforzandos of the two violins fall on successive eighth notes at the strong beat of each two-bar phrase.

28. Sorrow

The two stanzas of this expressive, modal folksong are introduced, connected and followed by Bartók's own quiet musical commentary, characterized by chromatic inflections.

29. New Year Greeting (2)

Bartók has grouped together three New Year songs (No. 28, 29 and 30), all three characterized by vigorous tempi and, in general by forte dynamic levels. The tune of the first of these songs is asymmetrical. The return of only the first phrase unbalances the symmetry of the tune as follows: $4(2+1+1)+2$ measures. Bartók reverses this $4+2$ -measure imbalance in his accompanying counterpoint which then covers the caesuras between phrases.

30. New Year's Greeting (3)

All five stanzas feature canonic imitation at a measure's distance. The two transitional links, the first between the second and third strain of the *meno mosso* and the second connecting the third *meno mosso* strain to the return of the opening statement, are also canonically imitated but in *stretto* at a half-measure distance.

31. New Year's Greeting (4)

The mode of the tune is Aeolian but Bartók complicates the mode polyphonically by the accompaniment's chromaticism, especially in the final stanza where the accompaniment is entirely chromatic.

32. Dance From Máramáros

Bartók's accompaniment rhythm takes its cue from that of the tune. Both are isorhythmic ostinatos, a single pattern constantly repeated (something like the samba) and the accompaniment pattern is first heard as an introductory vamp. Bartók drops this accompaniment rhythm during the third statement, using instead constant, off-beat, double stops. The coda that follows is quite ingenious: the original accompaniment rhythm pattern, transferred to Bartók's quiet melodic phrase, is imitated by the quadruple stops of the accompaniment involving three open strings G, D, E. The pattern is quickly liquidated, leaving, in the melody, a reiterated triple eighth-note pattern that destroys the 2/4 meter.

33. Harvest Song

This duo is heard as an *ABABA* rondo, A being a slow, quiet, two-phrase introduction (3+2 measures) that returns between the *piu mosso*, *parlando* refrains which are of normal 2+2+4 measure phraseology. The most curious feature of the duo is the bitonal relationship of its two lines at the tritone, a condition which persists during the duo's first four sections. In the coda, however, the tonal polarity is brought into agreement, the accompaniment confirming the E aeolian of the melody.

34. Counting Song

During his ethnological travels, Bartók noticed that peasants he heard singing would sometimes shift octaves either as a vocal convenience or even, he speculated, for the effect itself. Perhaps the tune of this counting song is a case in point. The ambitus of the tune is narrow, a mere fourth which, of course, is relatively common in these folksongs but during the first two statements of the tune, phrases shift

octaves several times. Counting occurs during the second phrase of the song's antecedent clause, the phrase being expanded one measure by repetition in each successive stanza.

35. Ruthenian Kolomejká

This is Bartók's own folkdance, imitating the kolomajká. It is a vigorous allegro, its introductory doublestops pounding out a 3+2+3 eighth-note rhythm at odds with the tune's meter. Each statement of the tune is followed by a kind of vamp, sounding to this listener like exultant shouts coming from the dancers themselves.

36. Bagpipes

While one violin intones a reiterated accompaniment pattern over an open G-string ostinato, the other plays the bagpipe tune. The bagpipe harmony is primitive, only two alternating chords. This duo's form differs from others in the collection: Typically, both songs and dances repeat their tunes once or twice, some beginning with an introduction, perhaps inserting transitional links between tune repetitions, and perhaps ending with a coda. The form of this particular duo is composite, a rounded binary form but, curiously, with two second parts, each repeated.

37. Prelude and Canon

The slow Prelude and the quicker Canon that follows are both built on a dorian tune that spans an octave and is shaped as a 2+2+4 measure sentence. During the course of the prelude's two sections, the tune is repeated four times: Bartók balances the progressively slower pace of the Prelude's opening section with an *accelerando* spanning the extent of the Canon's second and third repetitions of the tune in its first section. This *accelerando*, as did the decelerating pace of the Prelude's first section, prepares the new tempo of the following section in the Canon, a *molto allegro*.

38. Rumanian Whirling Dance

Knowing its name, one readily accepts the repeated figurations with sixteenth notes as pictorial. Bartók adds his own slower, whirling motif and an open-string D pedal in the A clauses of the first strain. In the second stanza, Bartók is interested in the dissonances caused by contrapuntal conflict between adjacent notes of the mode, especially the half step that occurs between the raised fourth and the fifth degrees.

39. Serbian Dance

Bartók's contrapuntal accompaniments to the tune and its transposed repetitions are quite individual although always derived from some feature of the tune. The final section, or coda, dispenses with the tune and, in its accelerated progress to the close, functions as a *stretta*.

40. Rumanian Dance

This dance tune from the eastern Rumanian province of Wallachia is strongly characterized by the exotic interval of the augmented second, often associated in our minds with music of the Near East and which we will find in the Arabian dance (No. 42). Bartók's rather dissonant accompaniments during the first three sections always use double stops, resulting in a three-voice texture. As is so common throughout the 44 *Duos*, these double stops consistently involve an open string.

41. Scherzo

The second and third sections are playful developments of the tune. The tune's phrases are presented in order but jostled by interruptions, transpositions and even octave displacements within the phrases, especially in the middle section of the scherzo. In the final section, the tune's phrases are again presented in order and entirely within the key of D. Transposed interruptions and partial repetitions are interjected until single-measure motives, forming a *stretta*, accelerate and crescendo to a final, abrupt cadence.

42. Arabian Song

There are three repetitions of the Arabian song in this duo, the first transposed up a ninth (F# G A B), the second pitched a fifth lower (B C D E) and the last, returning to the original pitch level, followed by a *stretta*-like coda whose three eighth-note motives, first plucked and then bowed, crescendo with imitations and then canonic stretti, driving the duo to a powerful fortissimo ending.

Bartók's accompaniments to these four stanzas are highly contrasted to each other. In the second stanza, surging double-stopped phrases, using bowed tremolos, expand their range and then become arpeggiated. These arpeggios span an octave and a major seventh which creates a sharp half-step dissonance with the melody. An ostinato drum-pattern, at first over Bartók's famous pizzicato that forces the string to strike the fingerboard, introduces and then accompanies the first three phrases of the third stanza.

43. Pizzicato

After three statements of this allegretto, four-phrased tune, the second and third statements each transposed a fifth higher, Bartók develops its opening motive by presenting it as a descending sequence of fifths with canonic imitations.

44. Transylvanian Dance

This tune is one of the most complex among those of the 44 Duos in regard to both pitch content and phrase structure. The descending pattern of its first motive spans an octave and involves two disjunct, symmetrical tetrachords, A G# F E D C# Bb A, each made up of two half steps separated by an augmented second interval. An added post-tune, cadential phrase is simply an extension of the open-string double stops that introduce and remain the basis of the tune's syncopated accompaniment. The third and last statement of the tune is accompanied throughout by canonic imitation a fifth lower at the distance of a single beat. The texture is thickened to four parts by adding open-string pitches to each voice of the canon.

—Will Ogdon

Complete liner notes by Will Ogdon on the Bartók duos are available from NEUMA Records, 71 Maple Street, Acton, MA 01720. Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope with your request.

János Négyesy was born in Budapest, Hungary. He studied at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Hungary and in Detmold, Germany. After 1965 when he left Hungary, his career took him to Berlin, where he was concertmaster at the Berlin Radio Orchestra, Paris, Vienna and New York. In 1979, he joined the Music Faculty at the University of California, San Diego. Long an advocate of new music, Mr. Négyesy has appeared at major festivals throughout the world. Included among his landmark recordings is the first European recording of the complete *Violin and Piano Sonatas of Charles Ives* with pianist Cornelius Cardew. He has also completed a recording of works dedicated to him by such composers as Attila Bozay, Carlos Fariñas, Vinko Globokar, Robert Wittinger and Isang Yun. Roger Reynolds, has written two works for him, *Aether* and the violin concerto, *Personae* was released by *Neuma* in the Spring of 1992. In 1984, Mr. Négyesy performed the world premiere of John Cage's *Freeman Etudes I - XVI* in Torino, Italy, and in 1991, of *etudes XVII - XXXII* in Ferrara. A recording of the complete *Freeman Etudes* will be released early in 1993 on the Newport Classics label.

Päivikki Nykter is a native of Finland and studied at the Sibelius Academy of Music in Helsinki. Ms. Nykter gave her debut performance in 1983, after which she was appointed to a principal position with the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. Ms. Nykter was a founding member of the Finnish contemporary ensemble, AVANTI!. In 1986, she moved to San Diego to continue her studies at the University of California, San Diego. In the United States, she has performed with the Phoenix Symphony and the San Diego Symphony Orchestra and with the contemporary music ensemble, SONOR. Ms. Nykter has appeared as a soloist frequently, both in the United States and Europe. Her repertory extends from Johann Sebastian Bach to Luigi Nono and beyond. She was also appointed to a research position at the Center for Research in Computing and the Arts at UCSD, where she has worked with an Electronic Violin Performance System. Her research interests there have placed a strong emphasis on a balance between live electronic music and its visualization.

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BÉLA BARTÓK

The Complete Violin Duos

NEUMA

János Négyesy
Päivikki Nykter

Books 1-4

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