



Review of *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók*. Edited by Amanda Bayley.

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[1] This volume is part of a continuing series of books designed to promote the understanding of composers and their work. The fifteen scholars who contributed to the book appear well qualified to undertake such an endeavor concerning the music of Béla Bartók. The volume succeeds in two principal areas. The first area, which one should expect from a book called a “companion,” is the discussion of the origin, style, and reception of a great many of Bartók’s works, and their relationship to one other. The other area of contribution is found in several essays which deal with the relationship of Bartók and his music to the political histories of Hungary and Europe.

[2] While the book succeeds in presenting the principal issues of Bartók studies to the uninitiated, it fails to present much that is new for those readers who are already knowledgeable in the area. The collection could be likened more to a mirror that reflects what is known and seen, rather than to a door through which new possibilities may be found. In addition, the book contains nearly as much discussion of Bartók’s early works as it does his later, more characteristic works. This emphasis seems unwarranted, even if it is an intentional reaction to previous studies that more or less dismiss Bartók’s early style.

[3] In “The Political and Cultural Climate in Hungary at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” Lynne Hooker aims to dispel the notion that Bartók was a nostalgic Nationalist. After contrasting the cultures of the urban areas (which were largely Germanic and Jewish in origin) to the myriad of cultures found in rural Hungary, Hooker points out that the growing population of nationalistic chauvinists at this time were either indifferent to or ignorant of the actual cultures of the Hungarian peoples, as brought to light at the 1896 Millennium Exhibition in Budapest.

[4] Stephen Ederly deals with Bartók’s collecting of folksongs, the methodology of which was actually based on a Finnish system of comparative musicology. Ederly uses primary and secondary sources and compiles the information in a large graph of Bartók’s collecting endeavors from the many regions in Hungary as well as from other nations. The most original contribution here is probably the introductory segment where Ederly traces the history of the Gypsy-influenced *Verbunkos* style, which urbanites mistook for genuine Hungarian folk music.

[5] David Cooper explores Bartók’s orchestral music and elucidates its modernist qualities. He concentrates mostly on his first and last orchestral works: the Straussian *Kossuth* Symphony and the Concerto for Orchestra, although he discusses other works as well. In his excellent investigation of Bartók’s three works for the stage, Carl Leafstedt finds a common theme of loneliness. Although, Leafstedt does not manage to substantiate his hypothesis that the composer was plagued by this emotion, this does not altogether nullify the theme of this insightful article. Rachel Beckles Willson finds Bartók’s vocal offerings to be stylistically rather conservative, with the exception of the *Village Scenes* and the *Cantata Profana*, whose motivically developed styles go beyond the simple arrangement of folksongs.

[6] The volume contains three essays on Bartók's piano music. Victoria Fischer concentrates on Bartók as a pedagogue and presents a catalogue of articulation marks which he devised for his own edition of *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach*. An important theme here (and one which might have been investigated further) is the relevance of the original text of folksongs (which were usually not included by the composer) to the dramatic aspects of interpretation in Bartók's many piano works based on folksongs. Susan Bradshaw's partly analytical discussion of Bartók's piano music is repeatedly marred by her overly creative terminology that obscures meaning. For instance, she speaks of "octave-based chords" and the "rolling reiterations of an intermittently formulaic bass." Vera Lampert's essay extemporizes on Bartók as an interpretive pianist whose generous rubato was akin to that of other master pianists of the turn of the century. Although we benefit greatly from the recordings that he left behind, Lampert emphasizes that Bartók thought of his works not as finished masterworks, but as living entities that ought to differ with each new performer and each new performance. The author also stresses that Bartók's playing was not particularly percussive even though his works employed the piano in a percussive manner. She provides an amusing anecdote which involved Bartók correcting a student's bombastic interpretation. The composer pleaded, "Please don't play it in such a Bartókian manner!"

[7] Nicky Loesseff satisfactorily explores the dramatic elements of the piano concertos and the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, while Peter Laki characterizes the violin works as having a distinct "warm" and melodic stylistic thread that draws across all periods of Bartók's career. In the collection's longest essay, Amanda Bayley (also the volume's editor) encapsulates for the reader many principal issues of the pithy string quartets, covering topics such as quartal harmony, intervallic expansion and compression, semitonal juxtaposition, bimodality, and the generation of harmony from melody, as well as the influence of Hungarian national and folk idioms.

[8] The most engaging essays of the volume are found in the third and final part, which is dedicated to the reception of Bartók's music. David E. Schneider traces Bartók's quick rise to fame with the tone poem *Kossuth*, followed later by the public's distrust of Bartók's cosmopolitan interests as well as a misunderstanding of his conscientious move from clichéd "gypsy" influences to true peasant Hungarian sources. In the 1920s, the important Hungarian writers Antal Molnár and Aladár Tóth did much to make a case for Bartók as the prototype of a progressive Hungarian national. Ironically, a communist governmental initiative in the year 1934 that increased budgetary support of folk culture helped Bartók to regain his status in his later years. Malcolm Gillies' essay dispels the widely-held myth that Bartók was misunderstood and mistreated by America, as he favorably compares Bartók's means in America with those of other composers and points to the abundance of folk music research that Bartók produced in his American years.

[9] Although most post-World War II German critics believed Bartók's music to be compromised for not following the musical thought of Schoenberg, Danielle Fosler-Lussier traces the lectures and essays of the Darmstadt school for both support and criticism of Bartók. At this time, the West confused Bartók's musical accessibility with the musical style of Soviet idealism, while at home in communist Hungary, the same music was under fire for evidencing Western "bourgeois decadence." The criticisms on both sides resulted in a dichotomy of Bartók's output, i.e., different works were being performed in Hungary than abroad.

[10] Ivan F. Waldbauer's essay on analytical responses to Bartók's music is a cogent summary of the history of Bartók analysis. The author finds six different pitch theories directed towards Bartók's oeuvre. Waldbauer summarizes theories of Edwin von der Nüll, Ernő Lendvai, Milton Babbitt, George Perle, Roy Travis, János Kárpáti, Elliott Antokoletz, Paul Wilson among others, and examines the level of self-containment of the various theories, as well as their relationship to traditional tonal systems. The author's neglect of the rigorous analytical writings of Malcolm Gillies appears to this reviewer as an oversight.

[11] It is difficult not to compare the *Cambridge Companion to Bartók* with Oxford's *Bartók's Perspectives*, which came into print only a year earlier. (This reviewer hesitates to compare the two since he has contributed to the Oxford volume.) Although the two volumes actually share four authors, it appears that the premise of the Cambridge book, in which the authors appear to be more or less assigned specific musical genres of Bartók's output, necessarily limits not only the topics of the essays, but also the amount of detail that the authors could provide. Therefore, the essays of the *Companion* appear in general to be less original and their analyses less probing than those of the Oxford volume.

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