

A PERFORMER'S GUIDE TO BÉLA BARTÓK'S VIOLIN CONCERTO NO.1,  
OPUS POSTHUMOUS, 1907–1908  
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Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

August 2013

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Jobbágy, Szemőke. A Performer's Guide to Béla Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 1, Opus Posthumous, 1907–1908. Doctor of Musical Arts (Performance), August 2013, 43 pp., 28 music examples, 3 figures, bibliography, 40 titles.

Despite Bartók's lasting international fame, some of his works remain unjustly lesser-known. One of the pieces that still resides in relative obscurity is his Violin Concerto No.1—a gem of the violin repertoire that must be brought to the broader public's attention. The fact that the concerto was hidden definitely contributed to its little-known status at first. However, the most important cause for the lack of enthusiasm to tackle this terrific work lies in the unorthodox demands it puts on the violinist.

The purpose of this paper is to provide musical and technical suggestions based on Bartók's performing style and on his requirements for performer, which will help to create a more persuasive interpretation of the piece. The guide covers the questions of character, articulation, dynamics, and other performance aspects, and also provides practical suggestions, such as fingerings and bowings. It is hoped that this study will help violin performers to gain additional knowledge and insight into this composition and encourage more frequent performances of it.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to my major professor, Ms. Julia Bushkova, for her constant guidance, support, and motivation throughout my doctoral studies. I also express gratitude to Dr. Clay Couturiaux and Dr. Jaymee Haefner, the other members of the doctoral committee, for their helpful suggestions and feedback.

Grateful acknowledgement is extended to the Budapest Bartók Archives and László Vikárius, who provided me with the opportunity to study the drafts and the manuscript of Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 1.

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I also wish to thank my husband, Chuong Viet Vu, for his support, advice, and encouragement throughout the process of writing this study.

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Violin Concerto No. 1, SZ36 by Béla Bartók  
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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

Béla Bartók (1881–1945) composed two concertos for violin and orchestra: Concerto No. 1 for Violin and Orchestra, Opus Posthumous (1907–08) and Concerto No. 2 for Violin and Orchestra (1937–38). While the second violin concerto is frequently heard in concert halls, the first is rarely performed. The reason for this neglect is not that the first concerto has lesser value than the second. Bartók himself actually referred to it as his “dedication of love and best work”<sup>1</sup> in his letter to Stefi Geyer, the concerto’s dedicatee. The failure of Bartók and Geyer’s relationship, however, led to the rejection of the Violin Concerto No. 1. As result, the concerto was neither played nor published during the composer’s lifetime, and the score of this work was hidden for fifty years.

Most violin works of Bartók were composed for famous violinists whom he consulted regarding certain technical issues. The composer, however, did not discuss the Violin Concerto No. 1 with any violinist. Consequently, the violin part presents performing challenges and certain limitations in terms of violinistic quality. This, perhaps, contributed to the unpopularity of the concerto. The purpose of this paper is to provide musical and technical suggestions based on Bartók’s performing style and on his requirements for performers that will help to create a more persuasive interpretation of the piece. The guide covers the questions of character, articulation, dynamics, and other performance aspects, and it also provides practical suggestions, such as fingerings and bowings. This performance guide intends to minimize the concerto’s restrictions,

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<sup>1</sup> Béla Bartók, *Briefe an Stefi Geyer, 1907–1908*, ed. Paul Sacher, trans. into German by Lajos Nyikos (Basel: Paul Sacher Stiftung, 1979), facs. no. 25 (February 1908) (Translated from Hungarian into English by the author of this dissertation, unless otherwise indicated).

while remaining true to the composer's original ideas. The study should serve as a reliable and useful guide for violinists and encourage more frequent performances of this wonderful piece of musical art. It is hoped that this thesis would be a contribution to the field of violin performance.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

At the close of the nineteenth century, the young Bartók moved to Budapest to start his piano and composition studies at the Academy of Music. Hungary, at that time, was a part of the Habsburg Empire and was subject to Vienna's control.<sup>2</sup> The musical life of Hungary was strongly dominated by the German culture: the Wagnerian cult was promoted in the Budapest Opera,<sup>3</sup> and the atmosphere of the academy was greatly Germanized. Most of the teachers at the academy were brought from Austria or Germany, and they barely spoke Hungarian.<sup>4</sup> Bartók did not get along with his composition teacher, János Koessler, whose idol and friend was Brahms. In a letter to his mother, Bartók expressed his frustration: "Yesterday I took along the quintet. Professor Koessler said that none of it was any good at all, that I should not even continue it but should attempt simpler things, songs for example. I have no idea what was bad in it..."<sup>5</sup> Eventually, in his second year, he stopped composing. He was known only as a "first-class pianist."<sup>6</sup>

In his third year at the academy, Bartók heard a performance of Richard Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. It left such a powerful impression on him that he decided to write music again after two years of silence. Several years later, Bartók wrote in his autobiography about the impact of the work on him: "From this stagnation I was roused as by a lightning stroke. . . . it

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<sup>2</sup> Lynn Hooker, "The Political and Cultural Climate in Hungary at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók*, ed. Amanda Bayley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>3</sup> József Ujfalussy, *Béla Bartók*, trans. Ruth Pataki (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1971), 31.

<sup>4</sup> Tibor Tallián, *Bartók Béla: Szemtől Szemben* [Bartók Béla: Face to Face] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1981), 29.

<sup>5</sup> Ujfalussy, *Béla Bartók*, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Béla Bartók, "Autobiography," in *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 409.

filled me with the greatest enthusiasm. At last there was a way of composing which seemed to hold the seeds of a new life. At once I threw myself into the study of all Strauss's scores and began again to write music myself."<sup>7</sup>

Bartók's attention was not only caught by the music of Strauss, but also by a new nationalistic idea, which was arising in Hungary at that time. This cultural nationalism evolved into the desire by the population to be independent from Vienna. In music, nationalism was shown by the intention to create "specifically Hungarian music."<sup>8</sup> Bartók felt that, as a composer, he must save the musical culture of Hungary. He expressed his sense of mission to his mother: "Everyone, on reaching maturity, has to set himself a goal and must direct all his work and actions towards this. For my own part, all my life, in every sphere, always and in every way, I shall have one objective: the good of Hungary and the Hungarian nation."<sup>9</sup> As a result, he composed a patriotic symphonic work, the *Kossuth Symphony*, which is closely related to Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*. The work stirred up the emotions of the Hungarian people and created a sensation, turning the twenty-two year old Bartók into a nationally-famous artist.<sup>10</sup> His reputation grew further internationally as a successful concert pianist. By 1904, Bartók had a career as a performer and he was full of compositional plans.

In 1905 Bartók, with high hope for dual accomplishment in piano and composition, entered both divisions at the Rubinstein Competition in Paris, but no prize was awarded to him.<sup>11</sup> Disappointed by this failure, Bartók decided to depart from the "obsolete tradition" of writing music and to move towards what he called a "new musical model," which was associated with

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *Béla Bartók Letters*, ed. János Demény, trans. Péter Balabán and István Farkas (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), 29.

<sup>10</sup> Tallián, *Bartók Béla*, 51.

<sup>11</sup> Ujfalussy, *Béla Bartók*, 62.

folk music.<sup>12</sup> He “felt an urge to go deeper into this question”, and started to collect Hungarian folk songs.<sup>13</sup> In 1907, a “happy event” enabled the twenty-six year old Bartók to settle in Hungary and continue his research in folk music:<sup>14</sup> he was appointed to succeed his old piano teacher, professor Thomán, at the Academy of Music in Budapest. That same year, the academy moved to a new building, which was celebrated with a multiday opening ceremony in May.<sup>15</sup> It seems to have been during these days that Bartók met an old acquaintance and fell in love with her.<sup>16</sup> The young lady’s name was Stefi Geyer, a nineteen year old, exceptionally talented violinist, who would later become the dedicatee of his Violin Concerto No. 1.

Bartók composed the first eleven measures of his Violin Concerto No. 1 in July 1907 during his stop in Jászberény—a small town in Hungary. At this point, he was on a folksong-collecting trip to Transylvania.<sup>17</sup> Bartók stopped there because Stefi and her brother were in the same town at that time.<sup>18</sup> According to Geyer, “Bartók joined us under the pretext of collecting songs.”<sup>19</sup> She further explained: “It was obvious, however, that he was following me, because there is not much to be collected in Jászberény and he hardly found anything.”<sup>20</sup> After a few days, Bartók continued his trip to Transylvania, Geyer having agreed to correspond with him through letters. Bartók soon informed Geyer about the project he started in Jászberény. He wrote, “When I am working on the violin concerto, I will always keep your style of playing in my mind.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>13</sup> Bartók, *Béla Bartók Essays*, “Autobiography,” 409.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 410.

<sup>15</sup> Tallián, *Bartók Béla*, 77.

<sup>16</sup> As cited by Benjamin Suchoff, *Béla Bartók: Life and Work*, (Lanham, Maryland and London: The Scarecrow Press, 2001), 29, Bartók and Geyer had previously met each other. Bartók served as her accompanist on March 3, 1902, when Geyer was thirteen years old, and Bartók was twenty-one.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Suchoff, *Béla Bartók*, 53.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

I would not even compose it, if it were not for you.”<sup>21</sup> In a subsequent letter, Bartók did not address Stefi Geyer by name. Instead, he sketched three principal thematic ideas in place of her name. He identified them as her leitmotifs of the concerto: “Your leitmotifs flutter around me. I live with and in them all day long as if I were in a narcotic dream. And it is good like this. For my work I need this kind of opium, even if it is nerve-wrecking, poisonous, and dangerous.”<sup>22</sup>

As their relationship went on, their differences became obvious as they did not agree about the fundamental questions of life. Geyer, being a Catholic, could not accept the fact that Bartók was an atheist. They also disagreed about some basic ideas, such as marriage and meaning of life. While Bartók accepted the realities of divorce and suicide, Geyer was completely against those principles. Bartók tried to make her accept his values by involving her in philosophical debates and supplying her with various readings in hopes of changing her views. Geyer, however, refused to be influenced, and Bartók had to face the fact that he was unable to change her mind. Bartók started to have ambivalent feelings toward her and at one point accused her of misleading him: “It is cruelty to lead someone in a direction, then, at halfway, to turn him adrift.”<sup>23</sup> Although the relationship was doomed to fail, Bartók was still hoping that love could bridge the opposing convictions. In one of his letters he states: “Even though I saw from the beginning that everything was hopeless, still I blindly fell into it. I could not bear the unvarying grayness. I thought that I would perceive new emotions and might create something new. Only in this, I was not disappointed.”<sup>24</sup> According to the quote, the Violin Concerto No. 1 seems to be the only truly positive outcome of the relationship.

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<sup>21</sup> Bartók, *Briefe*, facs. no. 2 n.d.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, facs. no. 11 (September 20, 1907).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, facs. no. 21 (December 21, 1907).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, facs. no. 17 (November 26, 1907).

Bartók originally planned to compose a three-movement violin concerto, each movement of which would portray a different aspect of Geyer. On 29 November 1907, he wrote to Geyer: “I have completed the musical portrait of the idealized Stefi Geyer—it is heavenly and intimate. I also have completed the lively St. G. [Stefi Geyer],—which is funny, witty, and amusing. Now I should compose the picture of the indifferent, cool, silent St. G. But this would be ugly music.”<sup>25</sup> In December, he eventually rejected the three-movement structure: “One day of this week—maybe by higher inspiration—it suddenly occurred to me that your piece can have only two movements. Two contrasting portraits: that’s all. I am just wondering how I did not see this truth before.”<sup>26</sup> Excited by this new-found idea, Bartók was enthusiastic to finish the concerto before Christmas: “...I was composing from nine in the evening until six in the morning because I wanted to give you the concerto. Will you like it? Will you accept it?”<sup>27</sup> His plan was to ask Geyer to review it, and based on her suggestions he would correct that which she thought was not violinistic:

Would you please check the violin part in terms of instrumental quality? When can we talk about your opinion? . . . The reason I crazily hurried to finish it (I had to put it together from drafts, some pencil-marked parts still look like drafts), because I have plans with this concerto too, although the audience does not accept pieces like this easily. But I cannot help it. I think if it is not better than the Serenade, at least as good. But for me it is hundred times more favorable, because it is about you and for you (alone). I truly wrote it from ‘my soul’, and why would I care if nobody likes it, if you like it. I’m afraid you will not have enough time now to look through in details, however, I would love to hear it from you in case I need to correct things. I am really exhausted of working beyond my capacity. I might have written some foolish things. We will correct them anyway.<sup>28</sup>

The correction, nonetheless, never happened. Before Bartók even had a chance to send the manuscript, on 8 February 1908, he received Geyer’s parting letter, which brought their relationship to an end. Bartók’s response clearly states his despair:

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., facs. no. 18 (November 29, 1907).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., facs. no. 21 (December 21, 1907).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., facs. no. 22 (December 23, 1907).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

So, I need to say farewell forever. I am writing to you for the last time! The last time! . . . Does not this word only fit someone who prepares to die? . . . You cannot return the feelings I have toward you, and hence my position is hopeless, therefore I can never see you again. I will need to try to bury my memories of you forever. . . . You did not yet realize what this violin concerto means to me—the first movement, which is my confession to you. . . . I will not compose any more, I am disgusted at it. I will neither love friends any more, nor will correspond with anyone. . . . I feel and I am also convinced that nothing awaits me but long years of loneliness. I have to relinquish this inward happiness forever. . . . I finished the score of the violin concerto on February 5<sup>th</sup>, the same day you wrote my death sentence... I locked it in my drawer. I don't know if I should destroy it, or keep it locked, so people would find it after I die and throw away the whole pile of papers—my declaration of love, your concerto, my best work—into the waste. I cannot talk about it, and show it to anybody; this confession with its sad result does not concern the whole world anyway. I think nobody has ever been this miserable.<sup>29</sup>

Bartók even considered suicide to escape the pain of being brokenhearted. He confessed to Geyer in his last letter to her: “On Sunday, I was just about a hair away from choosing to die. . . . Today, on Tuesday, my only friend made me promise that I will not harm myself this year. My solemn promise is my holy word; everyone can be calm until the end of this year...”<sup>30</sup> With the belief that Geyer still loved him, Bartók made a copy of the score; then, he sent the manuscript to her.<sup>31</sup> He inscribed the first page of the manuscript with his dedication:

My confession—for Stefi—  
from the times that were still happy.  
Although it was only half-happiness...  
Bartók Béla<sup>32</sup>

On the last two pages Bartók expressed his state of mind by adding a poem by Béla Balázs—who later collaborated with Bartók as a librettist on his opera, the *Bluebeard's Castle*, and as a scenarist on his ballet, *The Wooden Prince*.

Neither Bartók nor Geyer wished to hear the Violin Concerto No. 1 performed after the painful ending of their relationship. Geyer kept the manuscript and, at her death, left it to Paul

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., facs. no. 25 (February 8, 1908).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., facs. no. 27 n. d.

<sup>31</sup> Suchoff, *Béla Bartók*, 59.

<sup>32</sup> *Béla Bartók*, pers. comm. Manuscript of the Violin Concerto No.1 by Béla Bartók, Budapest Bartók Archives, 1.



Sacher, her Swiss conductor friend, with the request to perform it. During his lifetime, Bartók seemed to deny the existence of the work. Violinist Zoltán Székely, to whom Bartók dedicated his Rhapsody No. 2, recalls Bartók's reaction to his question about the Violin Concerto No. 1: "During those visits I asked [Bartók] about the Violin Concerto, which it was rumored he had written for Stefi Geyer. I told him that I had heard that such a work existed and asked if it would be possible to see it."<sup>33</sup> Székely continued: "When I inquired about this concerto, he made no answer whatsoever. He simply turned away and went out of the room as though he hadn't heard my question. At the moment I thought he was going to get the music, but when he returned he never mentioned it at all."<sup>34</sup>

Bartók, however, used some materials from the Violin Concerto No. 1 in his other compositions. The Geyer leitmotifs were seen in many of his compositions, such as in the "Dedication" of the *Ten Easy Pieces* (1908), in the funeral music in Bagatelle No. 13 from the *Fourteen Bagatelles* (1908), in further variations in the *String Quartet No. 1* (1909), in the "Grotesque" of the *Two Portraits* (1911).<sup>35</sup> In the case of the *Two Portraits*, Bartók used the first movement of the Violin Concerto No. 1 as the first, "Ideal" portrait. The solo part, however, is played by the concertmaster, and not by a soloist. In the "Grotesque" portrait there is no violin solo included.

The Violin Concerto No. 1 was first performed thirteen years after Bartók's death, and fifty years after its creation—on 30 May 1958—by violinist Hans-Heinz Schneeberger and

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<sup>33</sup> Claude Kenneson, *Székely and Bartók: The Story of a Friendship* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), 52.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>35</sup> György Kroó, *A Guide to Bartók*, trans. Ruth Pataki and Mária Steiner (Budapest: Corvina Press, 1974), 42.

conductor Paul Sacher in Basel.<sup>36</sup> Boosey & Hawkes published the work the following year under the title Violin Concerto No. 1.<sup>37</sup> This is the only existing edition of the piece.

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<sup>36</sup> Günter Weiss-Aigner, "The 'Lost' Violin Concerto," in *The Bartók Companion*, ed. Malcolm Gillies (London: Faber and Faber, 1993): 476.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 3

### AN OVERVIEW OF BARTÓK'S OWN INTERPRETATION

In order to explore Bartók's ideas of interpretation as well as his intentions in terms of performance practice, I examined the *Centenary Edition of Bartók's Records*,<sup>38</sup> which is a complete collection of Bartók's recordings of his own works as well as other composers. Books and articles, which feature interviews with musicians who knew the composer personally and collaborated with him, also give more details about his performance style.

Bartók was an internationally-acclaimed concert pianist. After graduating from the Academy of Music in Budapest, he regularly had concert tours and continued playing until the end of his life. His precision and unique interpretation skills were widely admired. According to conductor Otto Klemperer, Bartók played with a beautiful tone, energy and a great freedom, which were unforgettable.<sup>39</sup>

As both composer and a pianist, Bartók had the opportunity to popularize his compositions. For the sake of authentic interpretation, he maintained performing rights of some of his own works almost exclusively to himself.<sup>40</sup> His recorded performances served this purpose as well. More than nine hours of recorded music—about half of which is his own compositions—preserved his musical artistry.

After the complete edition of Bartók's performances was released, several scholars analyzed Bartók's playing and compared the recordings with the scores. They all came to a

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<sup>38</sup> Béla Bartók, *The Centenary Edition of Bartók's Records*, ed. László Somfai, Zoltán Kocsis, and János Sebestyén, Hungaroton LPX 12326-38, 1981, long play.

<sup>39</sup> Malcolm Gillies, *Bartók Remembered* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1991), 98.

<sup>40</sup> Bertalan Pethő, "Béla Bartók's Personality," *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 23, 1/4 (1981): 447.

conclusion that Bartók, as a performer, played with considerable freedom and flexibility. He used a great variety of colors, dynamics, and clear articulations. He allowed some improvisations, used noticeable *rubato* and *sostenuto* where indicated, and oftentimes used *accelerandos*, which are not marked in the music. Bartók never played the repeated sections the same way; rather, he added ornamentations, grace notes, rhythmic alterations, or octaves, as variations. Flexibility within any given tempo was a very significant factor in Bartók's playing. Pianist Andor Földes, who was closely associated with the music of Bartók, found the exceptional sense of rhythm combined with flexibility as the main characteristic of his playing.<sup>41</sup> Laszlo Somfai, a Hungarian musicologist, concludes the issue of tempi of a Bartók work in the following way: "...a major constituent of a successful Bartók performance is indeed the just tempo, the proper contrast between tempi, the choice of a basic speed allowing adequate gestures to articulate the tempo (with ritardandos and accelerandos), and a natural declamatory rubato."<sup>42</sup>

Even though Bartók performed with flexibility, his intention was to remain faithful to the composer's ideas. According to musicologist Benjamin Suchoff, Bartók's philosophy about the authenticity of a performance was to "neither add to nor subtract from the composer's intention as expressed in the written score."<sup>43</sup> Yet, Bartók followed the musical instructions in a way which allowed room for individual expression. He did not expect great consistency in tempi and dynamics from an artist; moreover, he accepted liberties dictated by the temperament of the performer "within the frame of logic and good taste."<sup>44</sup> Bartók emphasized that a performer does not perform a work in exactly the same way every time, because "perpetual variability is a trait

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<sup>41</sup> Gillies, *Bartók Remembered*, 91.

<sup>42</sup> László Somfai, *Béla Bartók: Composition, Concepts, and Autograph Sources* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), 252.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin Suchoff, "Béla Bartók and a Guide to the Mikrokosmos" (Ed.D. diss., New York University, 1956), 46.

<sup>44</sup> Antal Dorati, "Bartók - An Indelible Impression," *The Long Player* 2/10 (October 1953): 14.

of a living creature's character."<sup>45</sup> One of his students, Ernő Balogh, confirmed that Bartók respected the individuality of a performer, and allowed some freedom of tempi, "but it had to be in proper place and in the proper proportion."<sup>46</sup> Likewise, the accents had to be well-placed in a correct proportion, and unnecessary accents were not tolerated, just like the excessive *rubatos* and *ritartandos*, which prevent the continuous flow of music.<sup>47</sup>

As a composer, Bartók had clear ideas about what he wanted to do. He meticulously marked his scores not only with metronome numbers, but, in his later pieces, he indicated the duration of the work as well. Conductor János Ferencsik once mentioned to Bartók that he conducted his *Dance Suite*. All that Bartók answered was that "if it was longer than 15 minutes, it was not good."<sup>48</sup> In the 1930s, Bartók started to revise the metronome numbers in his earlier works, because he realized that they were "very often inexact," or did not "correspond to the correct tempo."<sup>49</sup> He admitted that he probably "metronomized too harshly at the time," and perhaps his metronome "was working imperfectly."<sup>50</sup> Once, Ferencsik played through the *Wooden Prince* for Bartók, and the composer corrected several of his own metronome numbers. Bartók, however, always changed to a faster tempo, never to a slower one, according to Ferencsik.<sup>51</sup> Bartók's recordings show that he generally performed in a faster tempo than indicated. It may have been his personal trait as a virtuosic performer to go faster rather than slower.

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<sup>45</sup> *Béla Bartók Essays*, "Mechanical Music," 298.

<sup>46</sup> Gillies, *Bartók Remembered*, 46.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Ferenc Bónis, *Igy láttuk Bartókot: Ötvennégy Emlékezés*. [As We Saw Bartók: Fifty-Four Remembrances] (Budapest: Püski Kiadó, 1995). 195. (Translated into English by the author of this dissertation).

<sup>49</sup> *Béla Bartók Letters*, 218.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Bónis, *Igy láttuk Bartókot*, 193. (Translated into English by the author of this dissertation).

In his later years, Bartók was convinced that a work can be interpreted in several acceptable ways, and there is not only one ideal presentation of a musical piece.<sup>52</sup> Bartók left the interpretation of a composition to the performer, and he anticipated individuality from each performing artist. Speaking of the great violinist Yehudi Menuhin, he said: “When there is a real great artist, then the composer’s advice and help is not necessary, the performer finds his way quite well alone.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Vera Lampert, “Bartók at the Piano: Lessons from the Composer’s Sound Recordings,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók*, ed. Amanda Bayley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 240.

<sup>53</sup> Lampert, “Bartók at the Piano,” 241.

## CHAPTER 4

### PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FIRST MOVEMENT

The first movement, *Andante sostenuto*, is the musical portrait of the idealized Stefi Geyer. Bartók confessed to Geyer that “this idealized musical picture contains every thought and feeling I had at the time. I never wrote spontaneous music such as this.”<sup>54</sup> The whole movement is based on Geyer’s “leitmotiv,” and this motive is elaborated in a way that there is completely no contrast in the music. The main characteristics of the first movement are long phrases, seamless legato, and very even rhythmic flow. The movement, in the beginning, features chamber music setting in which the solo violin takes the lead. After the solo violin introduces the theme by itself, other players join the orchestra one after another. The writing is such that the joining players must carefully listen to the ones playing and, while obeying the conductor’s cues, be ready to adapt to the expressive phrasing of their predecessors. The flowing melody gradually grows both in dynamic and range until it reaches its peak and the solo violin soars over the orchestra. At the end, the music finally calms down, and returns to its original intimate mood.

The movement is atypically slow and very lyrical, which may appear deceptively easy to play at first sight. However, this is exactly what makes the movement tremendously difficult. For instance, the solo violin does not have a single moment of break in continuous legato for the first five minutes. Consequently, the main performing aspect of this movement is to achieve the gradually increasing intensity, utilizing the necessary right and left hand techniques.

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<sup>54</sup> Bartók, *Briefe*, facs. no. 17 (November 26, 1907) (English translation is taken from Csaba Horgász, “Object Representation in Music Illustrated by a Psychoanalytical Study of the Origins of Béla Bartók’s First Violin Concerto and Two Portraits,” *Psychiatria Danubia* 9, no.4 (December 1997): 199.

Among the right hand techniques, the smooth bow changes, the thoughtful bow division, and the proper control of bow speed are necessary to maintain the musical line. The long slurs marked by the composer are phrases rather than bowings. In a slow tempo, it is especially hard to build up a phrase under long slurs. The key point is that the continuous legato should not be broken due to technical deficiencies. To create good bowings, the performer needs to be aware of his or her ability regarding the slow movement of the bow. The decision for bowings should be based on the performer's right hand technique, as well as on the consideration of the player's sound and its balance with the orchestra. Another important issue is the use of different sounding points, which influence the colors and dynamics. The bow closer to the fingerboard produces softer sound, whereas closer to the bridge creates more intensity.

Among the left hand techniques, the constant vibrato and the effortless changes of positions are indispensable for the continuous flow of music. Vibrato has a significant role in creating colors. Different speeds of vibrato can portray many varieties of expressions. The slower and wider vibrato creates a warm and dolce sound, while a faster and narrower motion helps to produce a more intense expression. Another significant matter is smooth shifting. There are places where different type of shifts—*glissando* or *portamento*—should be used. Both vibrato and shifting requires the relaxation and suppleness of the left hand.

The basic feel of the tempo is slow, even though the tempo marking is *Andante sostenuto* (♩ = 72–76). As seen in the draft version located in the Budapest Bartók Archives, Bartók wrote “*quasi adagio*” after the *Andante sostenuto*. Later in the manuscript, he crossed it out, which may indicate that he wanted to have a flowing tempo rather than a pace that was too slow. There are several small tempo changes throughout the movement, such as *ritenuto*, *poco ritenuto*, *poco*



*agitato*, and *sostenuto*. One significant tempo change occurs at the orchestra interlude (mm. 58–72) to *poco meno sostenuto* (♩ = 92).

The range of dynamics in the whole movement is wide, from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*. Bartók, however, did not indicate dynamic changes for some passages, for instance in measures 8–17 and 28–35. The soloist, therefore, should include his or her own interpretative dynamic shadings. Indeed, according to Benjamin Suchoff, Bartók himself encouraged the performance practice of beginning a legato phrase with “slight dynamic shading.”<sup>55</sup>

The movement opens with Geyer’s “leitmotiv” played alone by the solo violin (mm 1–7).

Example 1. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement I, mm. 1–7.

Due to the singing quality of the melody, it is important that the performer keeps the musical flow and maintains the lyricism without breaking the melodic line. The serene *legato* can be served by several bowing possibilities, slurring half a measure or whole measure. It is recommended to start with an up bow, while choosing to slur half a measure. This way the phrase will lead to the second half of the measure as it is marked with a *crescendo* at the analogous place at measure 72. With this solution, the player will have more bow speed. Yet, this requires extraordinarily smooth bow changes, supported by the connecting vibrato in the left

<sup>55</sup> Benjamin Suchoff, *Guide to Bartók's Mikrokosmos* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1971), 15.

hand. If whole measures are slurred—as indicated in the music—starting with a down bow is preferable for creating the musical lines. However, it requires a very slow bow speed, and the player must maintain a good sound. The decision for bowing rests on the performer’s individual taste and technique. The same applies to the choice of fingerings. To preserve the long line of this phrase, the performer will look for fewer string crossings, playing the entire passage only on the G string, or on G and D strings in third position avoiding open D string in measure 5 for unity of timbre. Arriving on a down bow on the first beat of measure 7 helps to emphasize the first beat (*poco forte*). The dynamic of the next passage is *pianissimo*. Since this section needs to be very soft, the soloist should choose fingerings that introduce the lower—softer sounding—strings as soon as possible. A solution for fingering is given in Example 2.

Example 2. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement I, mm. 8–17.

The image shows a musical score for violin, measures 8 through 17. The score is written on a single staff in treble clef. Measures 8-13 are marked *pp* and *sempre pp*. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above the notes. A double bar line with a repeat sign is placed above measure 11. Measures 14-17 continue the piece with various fingerings and a *tenuto* marking above the first two notes of measure 22 (though the measure number 22 is not explicitly shown in the provided image, the text refers to it).

In measure 22, a *tenuto* sign appears over the first two notes. This is the only place in the first movement where the composer marked *tenuto*. According to Bartók’s explanation of articulation markings, which he included in his edition of the *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach*, if the tenuto sign is above a group of notes, they should be given the entire note value

“without linking them to one another.”<sup>56</sup> To serve this idea, it is suggested to follow the bowing provided in the example below.

Example 3. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement I, mm. 22–23.



In measure 25, the last sixteenth note is misprinted. As seen in the manuscript in the Budapest Bartók Archives, that note is a C. In the orchestral score it is also written as a C; however, in the violin part that note is a B. When played as a C, the intervals of the motive correspond with the intervals of the same motive in the previous measure. Over these two measures (mm. 25–26) a *crescendo* leads to the *forte* in measure 26. To maintain the *forte*, some slurs should be separated in measure 26. Example 4 offers a possible solution for bowing.

Example 4. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement I, mm. 24–27.



Even though Bartók marked the dynamics throughout the concerto, there are several noticeable ambiguities. For example, in measure 30, where it is a *pianissimo*, there is a short *crescendo* marked. The next dynamic level is a *pianissimo* again, but now in measure 34. In measure 32, the melody turns downward, creating a natural lessening of sound. A proposed solution is to allow the naturally-occurring *diminuendo* and add another *crescendo* in measures 32–33, and

<sup>56</sup> Béla Bartók, preface to *From the Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach*, by Johann Sebastian Bach (Boca Raton, FL: Master Music Publications, 1980), 2.

make a *subito pianissimo* in measure 34. This suggestion is actually based on the score, in which the orchestral accompaniment does have a *crescendo* marking in measure 33.

Example 5. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement I, mm. 28–34.

In measure 31, there are a series of syncopated notes. According to Bartók’s instructions in his editions of piano works, the “syncopated notes should be played with some weight and emphasis.”<sup>57</sup> In violin terms, a performer should put an accent on the beginning of the syncopated note and slightly release the end of it, while remaining in the given dynamic. This idea of articulation should be applied to his other violin works as well.

The music reaches its peak in the next section (mm. 34–40). The dynamic level grows from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo espressivo molto* over four measures (mm. 36–39). It contains the highest notes in the movement. It is recommended to keep this section on the E string in spite of the big leaps with the exception of the second note of measure 36. A possible solution for fingering is proposed in Example 6.

<sup>57</sup> Suchoff, *Guide to Bartók’s Mikrokosmos*, 15.

Example 6. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement I, mm. 34–41.

In measure 54, Bartók marked *sonore* in the violin part. To achieve a deeper, richer sound, staying on the G string is suggested.

Example 7. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement I, mm. 51–56.

After the orchestral interlude, which is a faster section ( $\text{♩} = 92$ ), the leitmotiv appears again in the original tempo ( $\text{♩} = 72\text{--}76$ ). *Ritenu*to is indicated for the first three notes of the motive, then Tempo I is marked in bar 73. It may be misconstrued by a performer that the tempo marking after the *ritenu*to indicates a return of the previous—faster than the original—tempo ( $\text{♩} = 92$ ). In fact, the indication of *tempo primo*—the very first tempo of the movement—does mean that the tempo in the next several bars ought to be as it was at the start of the movement ( $\text{♩} = 72\text{--}76$ ), before it starts to accelerate slightly due to *poco agitato* marking.

Example 8. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement I, mm. 72–74.



In measures 77–80 another ambiguity occurs regarding dynamics. The solo violin has *forte* in measure 77, and a *mezzo forte crescendo* in measure 80. The music, however, definitely gets more intense between measures 77–80. The piano reduction does include a *piano* and *crescendo* in the middle of measure 77, and the orchestral score indicates a *pianissimo* and *crescendo* at the same spot. Dropping the volume back in the middle of measure 77 definitely helps the *crescendo* until measure 80. Most likely a *piano* indication is missing from the violin part. A proposed solution is to go back to *piano* in the middle of measure 77 in order to build up the phrase, as it is indicated in both the piano reduction and in the score.

Example 9. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement I, mm. 77–80.



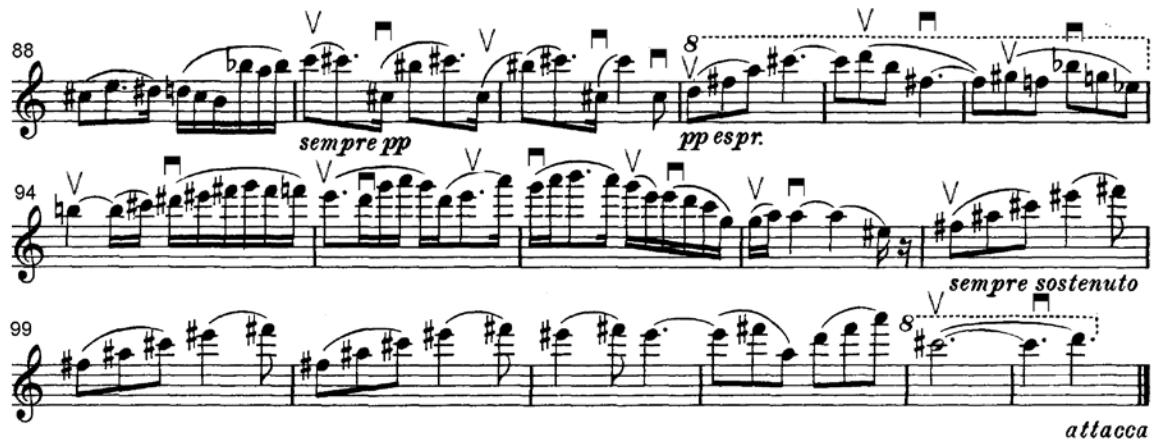
In measure 89–90, the same motive is repeated three times in a row. Since Bartók did not perform repeated sections the same way, it is suggested to make this passage different by changing the color. It can be done by sliding up on the A string in measure 90 either for the first note (B#) or the fourth note (C#).

Example 10. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement I, mm. 88–91.



In measure 91, the theme comes back two octaves higher than in the beginning. This time, the only instruction is *pianissimo espressivo*. There are no dynamic shadings or swells marked, and the slurs are also different than the first time. For this reason, it is not necessary to match the bowing with the first statement. Measure 97 should end with a down bow to start the following measure—a reminiscence of the motive—with an up bow. At *sempre sostenuto* in measure 98, the tempo should be slightly slower. According to Bartók’s notes, “sostenuto indicates a sudden retardation.”<sup>58</sup>

Example 11. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement I, mm. 88–104.



<sup>58</sup> Béla Bartók, composer’s note to *Fourteen Bagatelles for Piano Solo, Op. 6*, by Béla Bartók (New York, N.Y.: Edwin F. Kalmus, n.d).

## CHAPTER 5

### PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SECOND MOVEMENT

The second movement, *Allegro giocoso* (♩=120–132), counters the first movement in terms of texture, character, mood, and structure. The movement is clearly divided into several small sections, featuring contrasting elements. Tempo changes, accelerations and decelerations of pace occur in almost every measure. The idealized Geyer of the first movement becomes “the victim of a fantasy game, of a slight distortion” in the second movement.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps, that is how the composer reveals his ambivalent feelings about her. In one of his early letters to Geyer, Bartók quoted a short score and added: “G. St. when she is smoking a pipe.”<sup>60</sup> He may have seen a photograph of Geyer smoking a pipe, which probably collided with his image of the idealized Geyer.<sup>61</sup> He even suggested that she readjust the photograph, otherwise “depictions like this will appear throughout the composition.”<sup>62</sup> No one knows what exactly Bartók meant by saying that he wanted Stefi's photograph to be "readjusted". But it is obvious that he did not want Stefi's image to step out of his idealized picture of her. It looks like Geyer did nothing about the photograph since the musical quote turned out to be the opening theme of the second movement.

The grotesque theme is introduced by the solo violin. The first 13 measures include several demanding violin techniques, such as producing rich tone of the G string in high positions, the expanding arpeggios, and the chromatic staccato on one bow. It is important to use flat hair of the bow on the G string to achieve a full sound and somewhat uncouth tone quality.

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<sup>59</sup> Csaba Horgász, “Object Representation in Music Illustrated by a Psychoanalytical Study of the Origins of Béla Bartók’s First Violin Concerto and Two Portraits,” *Psychiatria Danubia* 9, no. 4 (1997): 200.

<sup>60</sup> Bartók, *Briefe*, facs. no. 7 (August 20, 1907).

<sup>61</sup> Horgász, “Object Representation,” 200.

<sup>62</sup> Bartók, *Briefe*, facs. no. 7 (August 20, 1907). English translation is taken from Horgász, “Object Representation,” 199.



Bartók added a footnote “*ohne Vibrieren*” [no vibrato] in a later copy that he revised, applying to the first five notes of the theme and to the quarter notes of measure 5.<sup>63</sup> This instruction, however, being a second thought, is missing from the autograph. The first note of the second measure should be played in the fifth position with first finger. Keeping down the first finger and staying in the same position for the whole measure allows more secure intonation through avoiding position change. In this case, both the grace note and the following A# note will be played with the fourth finger. There are several *sforzato* signs in this section. According to Bartók’s instructions, *sforzato* is the strongest accentuation.<sup>64</sup> The *sforzato* notes should be played with a down bow, since the down bow can produce the most powerful stroke. The staccato passage in measure 12 and 13 should be played as it is written, using the up bow staccato and maintaining one bow. This brilliant passage was most likely intended to show off Geyer’s staccato technique that, according to Geyer, Bartók greatly admired.<sup>65</sup> To begin the staccato passage with an up bow, the bowing needs to be adjusted in the previous measure. A possible solution is given in Example 12a. After the staccato section, there is a fermata above the measure line. According to Somfai, the fermata above the measure in Bartók’s earlier works perhaps means something like a “,” [comma] in the later notation, which is a hardly perceptible stop.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Somfai, *Béla Bartók*, 212.

<sup>64</sup> Bartók, preface, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Denijs Dille, “Angaben zum Violinkonzert 1907,” in *Documenta Bartókiana*, vol 2. ed. Denijs Dille (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1965), 92.

<sup>66</sup> Somfai, *Béla Bartók*, 263.

Example 12a. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 1–13.

The image shows a musical score for the violin part of Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, measures 1 through 13. The tempo is marked 'Allegro giocoso' with a metronome marking of quarter note = 120-132. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It begins with a 'sul G' instruction and a forte (*f*) dynamic. The first measure has a '1' above it, and the second measure has a '4 4' above it. The score includes various dynamic markings: *f*, *sf*, *mf*, *p*, and *ff*. There are also performance instructions like 'non rit.' and 'mf' at the end. The notation includes slurs, ties, and a sixteenth-note run starting in measure 8.

At the quickly rising arpeggio run (mm. 8–9) in the violin part, there is no *crescendo* indicated, just *piano* and then *fortissimo*. The score and the piano reduction, however, do have the instruction of *crescendo molto* for the solo violin. The absence of the *crescendo* in the violin part appears to be a printing error. Certainly, it should be performed with a *crescendo*, and not as a *subito fortissimo* because without the *crescendo* the passage would not contribute to the development of the phrase and the G note in *fortissimo* would sound thin and unsupported due to the violin volume limitation.

Example 12b. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 8–10.

The image shows a musical score for the violin part of Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, measures 8 through 10. It is a continuation of the arpeggio run from measure 8. The dynamics are marked *p* at the beginning, *sf* in measure 9, and *ff* at the end of measure 10. The notation includes slurs and a sixteenth-note run.

Another possible misprint regarding the dynamics occurs in the next section. In measure 27, there is a *crescendo* and a *diminuendo* marked in the violin part. The next dynamic marking

is a *fortissimo* in measure 29. The score, however, is supplemented with a *mezzo forte* and a *crescendo* in measure 28. The dynamic markings in measure 28 seem to be missing from the violin part. Once again, a *crescendo* should be done to lead to the *fortissimo*. Example 13a and 13b show the difference between the violin part and the score.

Example 13a. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 27–30. Violin part



Example 13b. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 27–30. Score



At measures 29–30, indications for the repeated eighth notes include *fortissimo*, *staccato*, *sforzato*, *crescendo* and *poco ritardando*. It is definitely necessary to use a down bow for all the repeated eighth notes as this produces a stronger, more accented stroke that helps to achieve *sforzato*, and also supports the *crescendo*.

Example 14. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 29–30.



The section in measures 35–48 includes two different types of accents: *sforzato* and “>”. These signs need to be distinguished. As mentioned earlier, *sforzato* is the strongest accent

according to Bartók. The accent “>” is a weaker accentuation.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, the *sforzato* notes should be played with a down bow. The following rhythmic pattern, which precedes the *sforzato* notes, can be used to adjust the bowing.



Figure 1. Rhythmic patterns in measures 35, 36, 40, 41, and 42

This dotted eighth and sixteenth note pattern could be played separately with a down bow and an up bow. However, a *crescendo* is indicated for this figure, and it is more difficult to make with separate bows in a fast tempo. A better solution is to hook the first two notes (down-down), then separate the middle two notes (up-down), and hook the last two notes (up-up). This bowing creates more line for the *crescendo* and also results in a down bow arrival on the *sforzato* notes.

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<sup>67</sup> Bartók, preface, 2.

Example 15. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 31–48.

The musical score for Example 15 consists of five staves of music. The first staff (measures 31-34) starts with the tempo marking 'a tempo' and includes dynamics *f* and *p*. The second staff (measures 35-38) begins with a circled '10' and the instruction 'sul G', followed by a *f* dynamic. The third staff (measures 39-40) continues the melodic line. The fourth staff (measures 41-43) starts with a circled '11' and includes *f* dynamics. The fifth staff (measures 44-45) features a *cresc. molto* instruction. The final staff (measures 46-48) begins with a circled '12' and ends with fingerings '1 2 1 1'.

The next fifteen measures are very detailed in both dynamic and tempo instructions. There are *crescendi* and *diminuendi* in nearly every measure. The tempo indications are numerous and quite precise. They include *poco a poco ritardando*, *meno allegro e rubato* ♩ =100, *ritardando*, *a tempo*, *a tempo ma piu quieto* ♩ =84, *poco ritardando*, and *a tempo* ♩ =88–92. The important issue in this section is not the exact achievement of tempi, but finding a declamatory type of expression that will naturally create all these changes in tempo and dynamics. In his earlier works, Bartók, provided a lot more *rubato* instructions.<sup>68</sup> An assumption can be made that his confidence in musicians rose later and he stopped micromanaging the

<sup>68</sup> Somfai, *Béla Bartók*, 264.

performer’s interpretation as he began to trust that the artists “would understand the proper meaning of his rubato.”<sup>69</sup> Somfai summarized Bartók’s *rubato* in the following way:

When Bartók prescribed rubato he did not refer to eighteenth-century “stolen time” (free performance within the bar), but for a time to Lisztian free rhythm, and after 1908 mostly to the parlando-rubato of folk music. The latter is not a rhapsodic rendition per se with romantic slowing down, but a characteristic declamation, often quite agitated, as if there were a text behind the themes.<sup>70</sup>

Example 16. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 54–68.

54  $\overset{V}{3}$  4  $\overset{V}{poco a poco ritard}$   $\overset{V}{Meno allegro e rubato} (\text{♩} = 100)$  12 4

60 rit. - - - a tempo  $\overset{p dolce}$  3 0 1 1 4 b 1 1 1 3 3 3 2 rit. 3 1

64 [13] a tempo (ma più quieto)  $\text{♩} = 84$  poco rit. a tempo 2 1 # rit. - - -

68 a tempo  $(\text{♩} = 88-92)$

To create a *pianissimo dolce* sound in measure 61, starting the passage on the A string is recommended. Fingering suggestions for this passage can be seen in the example above.

Starting from measure 68, the following rhythm appears:

Figure 2. Rhythm in measures 68–69, 71–72, 75, and 77

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

Above every quarter note there is a tenuto sign. According to Bartók, when the tenuto symbol is placed above the different notes of the legato parts, that note should be delicately emphasised “by way of a different tone coloring.”<sup>71</sup> The tenuto notes should be released, they do not need to have their entire value. This idea is supported by the fact that this rhythm, in the fragment of the composer’s autograph, was written with eighth rests in the following way.

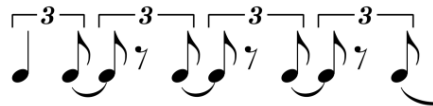


Figure 3. Original version of rhythm in measures 68–69, 71–72, 75, and 77

The slurs in measure 70, 73–74, 76, and 78 are certainly too long for one bow. Several bowing possibilities are acceptable to separate them as long as they do not break the flow of melody. Example 17 offers a possible solution for bowing. Interestingly, there is no dynamic instruction from measure 68–79. The last dynamic marking was a *pianissimo* in measure 61. Only hairpins, which indicate more phrasing than change in dynamic, occur until measure 68. It is tempting to make a big *crescendo* to measure 79 since the intensity is undoubtedly growing and the notes are in a higher register. However, there is no *crescendo* marked either in the violin part, or in the score, or in the piano reduction. The dynamics for the orchestra are clearly restricted to *ppp*, *pp* (*possible*), *sempre piano*, and *piano espressivo*. The change happens in measure 79 at the *Poco piu sostenuto* (♩ = 76) when the solo violin begins to play double-stops in *mezzo forte espressivo*. The orchestra stays in *pianissimo* until measure 81, where it changes to *mezzo forte*, while the solo violin grows to *forte*.

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<sup>71</sup> Bartók, preface, 2.

Example 17. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 68–83.

New thematic material is presented by the orchestra in measures 92–95. Bartók, in his memos, suggested for the orchestra to play “*vastagon, morgósan* [= thick, grumbling] and a series of *bumm!* [bang!] for the pesante notes.”<sup>72</sup> The orchestration corresponds with this description as it is scored for bassoons, cellos, and basses. The solo violin enters with the same thematic idea (m. 95), articulated with *legato*, *sforzato*, *tenuto*, and *staccato*. At the second entrance of the solo violin (m. 101), the motive is further developed by the alternations of slurred and separated eighth notes (mm. 103–107). There is no instruction how to articulate the separate notes. However, the same motive is marked with *staccato* at several places, such as measure 97 for the solo violin, measure 110 for the oboe and clarinet, and in measures 114–121 for the strings. For this reason, it is recommended to play the separate notes with a shorter articulation in measures 103–107.

<sup>72</sup> Somfai, *Béla Bartók*, 39.



Example 18. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 93–108.

The passage from measure 123 to measure 126 should be played on the G string in order to deliver fuller and richer tone and the *forte* dynamic. In measures 128–132 warm and expressive vibrato on non-harmonic notes is necessary to play *espressivo molto*.

Example 19. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 122–132.

There is another interesting matter to consider. Sometimes a performer may purposefully choose “riskier” fingerings that better-match the character of a given phrase. For instance, starting in measure 133, there are a series of *sforzatos*. The *sforzato* G# notes are recommended to be played on the E string (mm. 137, 138, 139), even though this may be less comfortable violinistically. Since the dynamic is *forte*, the *sforzato* G# notes project brighter on the E string

(in first or second position) than on the A string (in third position). Two options for fingering are given in Example 17. The fingering shown in the bottom indicates first position (m. 137), which requires a very quick shift from the third position since the tempo is fast. While choosing this fingering, the performer needs to avoid audible shifting. The fingering indicated above the G# shows the second position, and after the F# it is first position. This way the first finger can be extended down to second position, which eliminates a possible audible slide. In the next three measures (mm. 138–140), breaking the slur on the dotted rhythm is recommended, so the *sforzato* notes can be played with down bows. In measure 141, using shorter bow stroke helps to achieve the *subito piano*. The length of the bow stroke should gradually be longer together with the growth of dynamics. In measure 145, staying on the G string by going to third position on C gives a thicker, more projecting sound.

Example 20. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 133–153.

The musical score consists of six staves of music. The first staff (measures 133-136) begins with a dynamic of *sf* and includes a rehearsal mark [8]. The second staff (measures 137-139) continues with *sf* dynamics and includes first and second fingerings (1, 2) and bowing directions (V for up bow, ▢ for down bow). The third staff (measures 140-142) shows a dynamic shift from *mf* to *f* to *p*, with a *cresc.* marking and rehearsal mark [19]. The fourth staff (measures 143-145) is marked *molto*. The fifth staff (measures 146-148) features *sf* dynamics and sextuplets (6). The sixth staff (measures 149-153) includes a trill in measure 150 and ends with a first and fourth fingering (1, 4) in measure 153, which is marked with rehearsal mark [20].

The section from measure 184 is technically demanding for both right and left hands. The performer needs to be diligent that the bow strokes and string crossings are clear and well-articulated. In this case, starting the passage with an up bow and keeping it “as it comes” will make the string crossings easier. Crossing from the G string to the A string from a down bow to an up bow is also more natural. The fingering should follow the same pattern both for the triplets (2–1–3–1), and then for the quadruplets (3–4–1–2) until it reaches the first position.

Example 21. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 183–188.

To produce a *molto espressivo* tone at measure 216, the performer should keep this passage on the A and D strings (except the first note, where an open E string is indicated by the composer). According to Ernő Balogh, one of Bartók’s students, the composer by *espressivo* “meant a singing tone with feeling.”<sup>73</sup> The color of the A and D string is warmer, thus it is more suitable to express a singing tone in *piano*. A possible fingering is given in Example 22.

Example 22. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 216–223.

In the next section, *pianissimo* is the only dynamics indicated in the violin part between measures 229–235. The score and the piano part have a *crescendo* marked for the solo violin in

<sup>73</sup> Gillies, *Bartók Remembered*, 46.

measure 230. The passage should definitely include a *crescendo* to support the natural growth of dynamic as the music goes to a higher register. Two measures later, after a natural drop in dynamic due to the pronounced register change, another *crescendo* should be played for the same reason. The slurs marked in measures 230, 232–234 are too long to be played on one bow. It is necessary to break the slurs in order to maintain good sound. Suggestions for bowing as well as for fingering are given in Example 23.

Example 23. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 227–236.

The image shows a musical score for violin, measures 227 through 236. The score is written on a single staff in treble clef. It includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. Key features include:

- Measure 227:** Starts with a *molto cresc.* marking. Fingering suggestions (1, 2, 3, 4) are shown above the notes. A *pp* marking is present.
- Measure 231:** Features a *ritard.* marking and a tempo change to *poco agitato* with a quarter note equal to 76 (♩ = 76).
- Measure 234:** Includes a boxed number '29' and a *f* marking.

The score is annotated with numerous slurs and bowing marks (V) to indicate phrasing and bowing techniques. Fingering numbers (1, 2, 3, 4) are placed above specific notes to guide the performer.

As the dynamic level grows to *fortissimo* in measure 237, more of the slurred notes need to be separated to reach the climax. Using greater freedom of bow speed will help build up the phrase to the climax. This section includes the slowest tempo of the movement— *ritardando al* (♩ = 54)—at a *fortissimo* dynamic level (m. 239).

Example 24. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 237–246.

The bowings for the rest of the concerto are quite clear. A problem, however, arises in measure 263 to 265. The performer can potentially play *forte* with such a long slur in measures 263 and 264, but to create direction to the accented notes, more amount of bow may need to be available. A possible solution is to keep the two sixteenth and the eight note slurred the same way as it is printed in the first half of measure 263 and 264, as well as in measure 267, and in 133 (see example 20). This will allow more bow speed and, therefore, a clearer direction to the accented notes.

Example 25. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 262–267.

Measures 281 to 282 are technically challenging because of the wide string crossings in an extremely fast tempo. A slight change in bowing can make the passage become easier and cleaner. The *legato* marking will not be adversely affected, as on violin a smooth bow change sounds *legato*, i.e. very connected, as if it is slurred. Slurring only four sixteenth notes instead of five will result in clearer articulation. The string crossing from the E string to the G string is easier on up and down bow. For the sake of clean intonation, it is recommended to keep the first finger down in measures 283–286 while the same pattern is played.

Example 26. Bartók, Violin Concerto No. 1, Movement II, mm. 281–286.

The image shows a musical score for a violin part, measures 281 to 286. The notation is on a single treble clef staff. Measures 281 and 282 contain sixteenth-note passages with wide string crossings, marked with 'V' above the notes. Measure 283 is marked 'string.' and continues the pattern. Measures 284 and 285 are marked 'rit. e dim.' and feature triplets of sixteenth notes. Measure 286 concludes the passage with a final triplet. Fingerings '1' and '2' are indicated above the notes in measures 282 and 283 respectively.

The solo violin ends with a warm, *espressivo* color before the orchestra finishes the concerto in a *fortissimo* ending.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The Violin Concerto No. 1 was rediscovered thirteen years after Bartók's death and fifty years after its creation. The fact that the work was hidden definitely contributed to its less well-known status at first, and the concerto still resides in relative obscurity comparing to Bartók's other works.

The author of this study has created this performance guide with the hope that it would help violin performers to gain a deeper understanding of the work and minimize the concerto's restrictions, while remaining true to the composer's original ideas. Technical issues such as fingerings and bowings given in this guide are merely suggestions that help achieve a more persuasive interpretation of the piece. The decision, nevertheless, should be based on the performer's technique, individual taste, comfort, and other factors discussed in the dissertation. It is hoped that this study will be a contribution to the field of violin performance encouraging more frequent performances of this wonderful piece of musical art.



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