

The East, the West, and the In-Between in Music

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Folklorism, Symmetry and Tritone: Béla Bartók's Piano Quintet from 1904 as a Key Work for the Composer's Development

Hartmut Schick

Béla Bartók wrote his Piano Quintet in C (DD 77)¹ at the age of 22, immediately after the symphonic poem *Kossuth*, with which he celebrated his national breakthrough as a composer in early 1904. According to his own note on the first page of the score autograph, he began composing in October 1903 in Berlin – where he tried in vain to come into contact with his idol Richard Strauss² – and finished the score in July 1904 in Gerlice Puszta/Hrlica, during a summer vacation in the countryside that was very fruitful for his work.

As early as 1897 he had written his first Piano Quintet in C major (DD 46), which had not survived. In both cases, the choice of the genre was certainly connected with the prominence of Ernst von Dohnányi's Piano Quintet in C minor op. 1, composed in 1895, which Johannes Brahms had praised very much and about which Brahms is reported to have said to Hans Koessler, the composition teacher of Dohnányi and then also of Bartók, that he could not have done better himself.³ In his short autobiography of 1918, Bartók also admitted that during his school years in Pozsony/Bratislava he was particularly influenced by Dohnányi's work, writing about his years there:

I also had the opportunity to perform chamber music and up to my 18th year I got to know the music literature from Bach to Brahms – Wagner, however, only

1 Denijs Dille, *Thematisches Verzeichnis der Jugendwerke Béla Bartóks 1890-1904*, Kassel et al. 1974, pp. 151–57; there also description of the sources.

2 Cf. Bartók's letters from Berlin to István Thoman of October 1903, in: *Béla Bartók. Briefe*, vol. 1, ed. by János Demény, Budapest 1973, pp. 50–51 ('I can't reach Strauss at all; but I will get a recommendation from Etelka Freund's brother'). On 17 March 1904 he wrote from Berlin to Lajos Dietl: 'I got to know wonderful Strauss songs. Truly, I can tell you: since Wagner we have not had such a great master as Strauss' (ibid., p. 55) [my own translations].

3 Cf. Heinz-Jürgen Winkler, "Ernst von Dohnányis Klavierquintett in c-Moll op. 1: Rezeption und Codagegestaltung", in: *Zwischen Volks- und Kunstmusik. Aspekte der ungarischen Musik*, ed. by Stefan Fricke et al., Saarbrücken 1999, pp. 91–109.

up to *Tannhäuser* – relatively well. In the meantime I have been busy composing under the strong influence of Brahms and the youth works of Dohnányi, four years my senior, namely his op. 1.⁴

During his studies at the Budapest Academy of Music, he became interested in the later works of Wagner and the orchestral works of Franz Liszt, which in retrospect Bartók described as paralyzing his own work. From this stagnation, he said, the first performance of Richard Strauss' *Also sprach Zarathustra* in Budapest in 1902 had torn him 'like a bolt of lightning': 'The work, which most musicians listened to with horror, put me in the greatest enthusiasm: at last I saw a direction that contained something new. I rushed into the Strauss scores and began composing again.'⁵

Ernst von Dohnányi, with whom Bartók still had private lessons for a while after completing his studies brilliantly in 1903, could not understand Bartók's enthusiasm for Strauss at all and also rejected his symphonic poem *Kossuth* as well as the political attitude of the young Bartók. In 1902, Bartók had adopted a decidedly national, even chauvinistic political and cultural attitude and from then on saw it as his mission to create only specific Hungarian works, and even to dedicate his entire life 'to the welfare of the Hungarian nation and the Hungarian fatherland'. In public he now demonstratively wore traditional Hungarian costumes, and in September 1903 he even rigorously forbade his German-speaking mother and sister from using the German language.⁶

Although Dohnányi's Piano Quintet op. 1 was still very present for the young Bartók in 1903 – he played it in a concert at the Budapest Music Academy on March 21 – it could no longer serve as a model for Bartók in view of the dissent with Dohnányi regarding his basic musical and political convictions. Rather, it can be assumed that Bartók's intention in choosing the genre of the piano quintet again in the autumn of 1903 was to present an alternative to Dohnányi's celebrated Opus 1 with a more advanced and decidedly Hungarian tonal language, a musical critique of Dohnányi's strong dependence on Brahms and the tradition of chamber music. With *Kossuth*, Bartók had just found his own, decidedly Hungarian tonal language. Thus, apparently, the new Piano Quintet also served to showcase this style in the field of chamber music, in direct confrontation with Dohnányi.

4 Bartók's biography from 1918, in: *Documenta Bartókiana* 2, ed. by Denijs Dille, Mainz 1963, p. 113.

5 Ibid., pp. 113–14.

6 Cf. Bartók's letter to his mother of 8 September 1903 (also on the dissent with Dohnányi concerning Strauss, *Kossuth* and politics), in: *Béla Bartók. Weg und Werk. Schriften und Briefe*, ed. by Bence Szabolcsi, Leipzig 1957, pp. 225–28, the citation on p. 226.

Today, however, Bartók's Piano Quintet DD 77 is hardly regarded as a departure to new horizons, but rather as the conclusion of a stylistic phase. One sees in it the last work of the composer's late romantic youth period. The fact that Bartók himself never published this Piano Quintet – later even withdrawing it and denying it an opus number in his third and last opus numbering of his works (which is why it figures last in Dille's list of youth works) – certainly contributes to this. Later on, the Rhapsody for Piano written directly after the Quintet was given the opus number 1, followed by the Scherzo for Piano and Orchestra from 1904 as Opus 2. At first, in contrary, the Piano Quintet was anything but unsuccessful – rather it was its acceptance by the audience which led to its downfall. After its premiere in November 1904 in Vienna together with the Prill Quartet,⁷ Bartók also presented the work in 1910 at his first concert in Budapest featuring his own works exclusively. The public and the press reacted with some decisive rejection to the more recent works. All the more praise was given to the six-year-old Piano Quintet as an opus whose style Bartók should have preferred to remain faithful to.⁸ Bartók was very angry about this, and even more so when the situation repeated itself eleven years later. In 1921, the Waldbauer Quartet played the concert program of 1910 again, including the Piano Quintet, which Bartók had meanwhile revised and, above all, shortened. While the more recent works were received with great reserve, the Piano Quintet was met with rapturous applause. According to an eyewitness, the audience shouted: 'Give us this music and not the other one' – the current one. The composer was blind with rage about this and never wanted to allow any performance again.⁹ His wife Márta Ziegler and Zoltán Kodály later also reported that Bartók had torn the score apart and burned it. In fact, however, he kept the score and parts of the work secret. These were re-discovered in 1963 by Denijs Dille, who was able to publish the revised, shortened version of the Quintet for the first time in print in 1970.¹⁰

7 A planned performance in Budapest in December 1904 by the Grünfeld-Bürger-Quartett was cancelled at short notice due to lack of rehearsal time. A reviewer who apparently had not noticed the refusal, expressed himself afterwards in his review nevertheless with praising generalisations about the quintet unknown to him, see Tadeusz Zielinski, *Bartók. Leben und Werk*, Mainz 2011, p. 73.

8 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 135 f., with a quotation from a review by Pester Lloyd, in which 'bizarre series degenerating into the morbid' ('bis ins Krankhafte ausartende Bizarrerien') are criticized in the more recent works.

9 Communicated by Denijs Dille in: *Documenta Bartókiana* 1, ed. by Denijs Dille, Mainz 1964, p. 101, footnote 1.

10 Béla Bartók, *Quintetto per 2 violini, viola, violoncello e pianoforte*, ed. by Denijs Dille, Budapest: Editio Musica 1970; on the history of performance cf. the preface. This edition is also the basis for the following work analysis and sheet music examples.

Even though Bartók himself seems to have been ashamed of the catchy, late Romantic style that dominates this work and withdrew it, the situation is not so easy. As this article will demonstrate, it is unfair to regard the Piano Quintet as, above all else, a conclusion – the end of the late Romantic, youthful style period. Admittedly, it was composed shortly before Bartók came into contact with authentic Hungarian peasant music for the first time, in order to explore it intensively from 1906 onwards – which, as is well known, put his composing on a new footing. Under the late Romantic surface with its conventional Hungarisms, however, the Piano Quintet has a number of features that clearly point to the future and can be perceived as roots for many things which then constitute the peculiarity of the later Bartók and his specific modernity. This will be worked out in the following sections.¹¹

*

At first sight, Bartók's Piano Quintet ties in with Dohnányi's successful Piano Quintet in C minor op. 1, not only in terms of the instrumentation, but also the key: his first movement is also in C minor, at least from the beginning of the Allegro. Bartók, however, does without key signatures in all movements, as if to demonstrate that the work falls outside of the rule system of conventional major-minor tonality. Dohnányi's work can also be regarded as a starting point in the formal ground plan: a four-movement arrangement with a fast Scherzo in second place, an Adagio as the third movement and a rapid final movement, which among other things also contains a longer fugato. The link to Dohnányi, however, is part of a consistent demarcation strategy.

If Dohnányi's four-movement cycle was the starting point, Bartók, in any case, strongly transforms it in his Piano Quintet through other principles. On the one hand, Bartók precedes the first movement with an extensive slow introduction, the motifs of which also radiate a little to the following Allegro, but above all then characterize the slow third movement and the final movement. On the other hand, all movements merge without a long pause: *attacca* or even – as in the last two movements – by means of a transition. Bartók thus falls back on models of multi-movement in single-movement, as they are realized in various 'double function' forms,¹² especially in the orchestral works (studied by Bartók at that time)

11 A coherent analysis of the work has not been found in the literature. Most fruitful are the scattered remarks in Günter Weiß, *Die frühe Schaffensentwicklung Béla Bartóks im Lichte westlichen und östlicher Traditionen*, Diss. University of Erlangen Nürnberg 1970, especially pp. 305–06; 311–13; 387–89.

12 See Bartók's essay "Die Musik Franz Liszts und das Publikum von heute" (1911, published in German in 1972), and his essay, published 25 years later, "Liszt-Probleme", in: Béla Bartók,

and the Piano Sonata in B minor by Franz Liszt, without following exactly one specific model. In very simplified terms, one could say that the slow movement and the finale of the Piano Quintet behave in some respects like a recapitulation of what the introduction presents as an exposition. Brahms and Dohnányi are to some extent replaced as role models by the Hungarian Franz Liszt. With the idea of a theme spanning the movement cycle, the work on the one hand follows on from the French piano quintet tradition of the César Franck school; on the other hand it points to similar 'double-function' forms which a few years later would play a significant role in string quartets of Viennese and Prague Modernism: in Arnold Schönberg's op. 7 and Vítězslav Novák's op. 35 (both 1905 respectively), Josef Suk's op. 31 (1910) or Alexander Zemlinsky's op. 15 (1916).

Bartók's large-scale form is original and unquestionably programmatically meant by a reference to a decidedly Hungarian formal principle. Both the introduction and Allegro of the first movement as well as the third and fourth movements relate to one another according to the principle of *lassú-friss*, the formal principle of *verbunkos* and *csárdás*: a slow, rhapsodically improvised part is followed by a fast, more or less dance-like second part. In both cases, the typical accelerating transition from slow to fast tempo is also encountered. The four-movement nature of the cycle, in which the principles of a superordinate sonata movement can be discerned, tends to be conceived at the same time as a symmetrical three-part structure with a folkloristic background: 1st part *lassú-friss*, 2nd part Scherzo, 3rd part *lassú-friss*. The formal orientation towards the *czardas* that is shown here is thematically and motivically underpinned, too, and as a compositional strategy, also perceptible at the detailed level – already in the first bars of the work (Fig. 1).

Bartók introduces two motifs here in close succession, which then gain significance for the entire work. Remarkably, he begins outside the fundamental key (while Dohnányi in his Piano Quintet op. 1 immediately starts with the first group of the Sonata Allegro and a Brahms-like theme in stable C minor). The introduction begins with an upbeat sixth-jump motif of impassioned character, harmonically based on the note *fsharp*, as subdominant with *sixte ajoutée* of C sharp minor. Both gesturally and harmonically, it strikingly resembles the beginnings of the 1st and 3rd acts of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. The one-bar sixth-jump motif is repeated immediately and then cadences somewhat brusquely to C major in the third bar, whereby in the rubato sixteenth movement of the first violin the C major scale still contains a *fsharp* foreign to the scale, as does the following fourth bar.

Musiksprachen. Aufsätze und Vorträge, ed. by Bence Szabolcsi, Leipzig 1972, pp. 133–36, 138–54. In both essays Bartók emphasizes the boldness of many of Liszt's works, especially in formal aspects, especially the 'first perfect form of the cyclic sonata based on common themes and variations', among others in the Piano Concerto in E flat major. 'This formal solution became more and more important in the period after Liszt' (p. 143).

The musical score for the beginning of the Piano Quintet DD 77 by Béla Bartók, bars 1-6, is presented in a five-staff format. The top staff is Violin I, followed by Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The piano part is shown in grand staff notation. The tempo is marked 'Andante' and 'rubato'. Dynamics include 'f', 'dim.', 'p', and 'mf'. The score shows a complex interplay of rhythmic motifs and melodic lines across the instruments.

Fig. 1: Béla Bartók, Beginning of the Piano Quintet DD 77, bars 1–6

In this bar, a second characteristic motif is heard in C major, which is clearly Hungarian in its syncopated rhythm and melody and is also repeated immediately. Because of its proximity to verbunkos and czardas, I call it the czardas motif. Thus, at the beginning, Bartók demonstratively juxtaposes an upbeat, non-folkloristic, with its *Tristan* appeal more or less German motif, tonally labile, circulating around the note *f* sharp, and a down-beat syncopated, decidedly Hungarian or 'gypsy' motif in clear C major. The whole work then develops from both motifs and the two stylistic spheres that each embodies.

After a brief processing of both motifs, another thought appears in bar 15 of the introduction, a wide-ranging song-like theme in F sharp minor (Fig. 2). The melody and rhythm of the theme introduced by the viola are reminiscent of Brahms

or Dvořák; the piano accompaniment, however, adds a Hungarian element with its cimbalom-like chord breaks. The introduction then turns back to C, whereby the minor variant is now also included. The opposition between the notes *f sharp* and *c* which is echoed in the first bars thus becomes the tonal ground plan of the whole introduction, which spans the poles *c* and *f sharp* in the key sequence: C major – F sharp minor – C major/C minor.

The image shows a musical score for Béla Bartók's Piano Quintet, DD 77, bars 15-16. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano quintet ensemble. Bar 15 is marked "a tempo (quieto)" and "pp". The piano part has a "mf espr. molto" dynamic. Bar 16 is marked "pp dolcissimo" and "p espr. molto". The piano part features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sextuplets, and a cimbalom-like chord break.

Fig. 2: Béla Bartók, Piano Quintet DD 77, bars 15–16

The subsequent Sonata Allegro then begins in C minor with a main theme of more Brahmsian character (bar 44). In the 2nd group, a theme in E flat major that is clearly Hungarian in character follows (bar 95, see Fig. 3): above a cimbalom-like accompanying layer in the piano, the low strings play a melody to the rhythm of

the Hungarian so-called choriambus (which was also heard in the middle of the introduction).

98 a tempo

p dolce

pp

Fig. 3: Bartók, Piano Quintet DD 77, second subject of 1st movement, bars 98–101

The development processes and combines both themes, and it leads to a recapitulation that is built in reverse: the recapitulation of the exposition themes begins in bar 189 with the 2nd group, now in A flat major, and only then does the 1st group follow, now in the major variant of the fundamental key, C major (bar 219).

That the secondary theme in the recapitulation is not transposed from E flat to C, but is set one fifth lower than the exposition (as in sonata movements in major keys), which means that it is placed on the lower mediant, is nothing completely unusual in itself. This can be found occasionally in Beethoven, for example in the *Waldstein* Sonata op. 53 or the *Appassionata* op. 57. Unlike Beethoven, however, Bartók still combines this procedure with an exchange of the order of the 1st and 2nd groups in the recapitulation. This, however, considerably changes the overall form of the sonata movement. Thus the tonal recapitulation, the recovery of the fundamental key C, is shifted to the area after the recapitulation of the 2nd group, and the overall form of the sonata movement is given a strongly symmetrical arrangement, both in the sequence of themes and form parts and in the key disposition (compare the form overview in Fig. 4). The result is a five-part bridge form – to use Bartók's own term from the analysis of later works – with the development as centre and mirror axis. 1st group, 2nd group and development plus recapitulation form the symmetrical form A–B–C–B–A. And the sequence of keys, too, can be understood symmetrically, as a quasi oscillation curve which reaches from the fundamental C first to the upper octave E flat and then after the modulatory section of the development to the opposite side, to the lower octave

I										
Allegro molto										
Andante										
1	15	26	44	95	136	189	219			
sixth-jump motif + czardas motif (‘cimbalom’ accomp.)	song subject (‘cimbalom’ accomp.)	czardas motif	exposition 1st group	2nd group (chortambus)	development	recapitulation 2nd group	1st group			coda
~ C Major	f# Minor	C Major	c Minor	Eb Major	~ ~ ~	Ab Major	C Major			f# Minor / C Major

II										
Vivace scherzando										
Moderato										
Vivo										
Moderato										
Vivace scherzando										
262	356	410	479	545	753	795	895			
1st subject (‘bulgarian rhythm’, ‘gypsy scale’)	2nd subject	1st subject	3rd subject	4th subject (2/4)	3rd subject on tritone	1st subject (+ ‘cimbalom’)	2nd subject	1st subject		1st subject
f# Minor – A Major – f# Minor – A Major	Bb Major	F# Major	F Major	f# Minor	/Gb \ Db \ C /	f# Minor	F Major ~			F# Major

III										
Adagio										
Adagio molto										
Maestoso										
Adagio Molto										
Maestoso										
Adagio molto										
Maestoso										
Maestoso – Prestissimo										
961	973	1008	1047	1067	1227	1337	1435	1583		
sixth-jump motif distorted to tritone	sixth-jump motif as Hungarian theme	apotheosis	subject varied + var. main theme 1st movement	apotheosis	czardas theme from motif bar 4	fugue (2nd subject)	czardas hymnic	coda		
f#-c	c Minor	C Major	c Minor	c Minor	C Major	f# Minor	C Major			C Major
whole-tone scale						~ ~ ~				
SCORDATURA										

Fig. 4: Form overview of Bartók's Piano Quintet DD 77

A flat, only then finding its way back to the fundamental key which is the quasi horizontal axis of this oscillation curve.

But that's not all: the slow introduction is also included in this symmetrical construction, at least in tonal terms. In the recapitulation, the 1st group of the sonata form turns again to F sharp minor at the end, i.e. to the key of the song-like theme of the slow introduction. The end of the movement is then again in C major, but the last bars oscillate strikingly between C major and F sharp minor or G flat minor. This is reminiscent of the very first bars of the work, which oscillate between F sharp and C. The symmetrical, five-part bridge form of the Sonata Allegro is thus surrounded by a frame which, with its tritone polarity C–F sharp, extends the symmetry of the form even further (but without the slow introduction itself returning, which would have destroyed the *czardas*-analogue form *lassú–friss*).

Following *attacca*, the second movement of the work is a Scherzo with many elements, whose main theme again combines rather Central European with decidedly Hungarian features in a very peculiar way (see Fig. 5). The basic key of the movement is not, as in Dohnányi's Piano Quintet Scherzo, the minor parallel A minor, but F sharp minor – i.e. the key that is a tritone away from C and thus as far away as possible, just the key that already played such a major role at the beginning and end of the first movement. The underlying scale here, however, is neither minor nor major, but the double harmonic minor scale, i.e. the harmonic minor scale with a sharpened 4th step, a scale that contains two augmented seconds: *a–b sharp* and *d–e sharp*. Bartók also emphasizes the unusual structure of the scale by accentuating the two successive semitone steps *b sharp–c sharp–d* at the beginning of the melody and then letting the sharpened second *d–e sharp* sound twice. A striving for symmetrical structure can be seen both horizontally, in the arrangement of the violin melody that resembles a symmetrical oscillation curve, and vertically: in the first five bars, the viola plays a (slightly reduced) mirrored version of the melody of the first violin. But the rhythm, too, is unusual and folkloristic, without being specifically Hungarian or 'gypsy'. The fast triple time is transformed strongly hemiolically – what one knows from the Viennese waltz or also (as a change of metre) from the Bohemian *Furiant* and the Bavarian *Zwiefacher*. However, in the Scherzo theme, unlike in these dances, the two-bar hemiola is always followed by a single bar in the regular three-quarter metre. The metre of the music is therefore basically additive: $2/4 + 2/4 + 2/4 + 2/4 + 3/4$ | $2/4 + 2/4 + 2/4 + 3/4$ etc., or even if one counts first in half notes: $3/2 + 3/4$ | $3/2 + 3/4$ etc. Instead of the dance-typical 'quadratic' syntax of four-bar groups, units of three – moreover metrically unequal – bars result.

262 **Vivace (Scherzando)**

The musical score for the beginning of the 2nd movement of Bartók's Piano Quintet, bars 262–267, is presented in a five-staff format. The top two staves are for Violin I and Violin II, the next two for Viola I and Viola II, and the bottom staff is for the Piano. The time signature is 3/4. The tempo and mood are marked 'Vivace (Scherzando)'. The score begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The piano part features a steady bass line with chords, while the string parts have more melodic and rhythmic activity. Performance instructions such as *pizz.* (pizzicato) and *arco* (arco) are used for the strings. Accents (*>*) are placed over certain notes in the violin parts.

Fig. 5: Bartók, Piano Quintet DD 77, beginning of the 2nd movement, bars 262–67

Such an additive metre is alien to Central European music per se. But there is at least one prominent work of the chamber music tradition in which exactly this metre is already preformed.¹³ The main theme of the final movement of Johannes Brahms's String Quartet in A minor op. 51 no. 2 (Fig. 6) begins with the same metrical basic structures consisting of hemiolas spanning two bars and a subsequent single bar in triple metre, and the dotted rhythms of the first two bars are also the same here as in Bartók; they are only introduced somewhat more bindingly by the three-eighth upbeat. Because the lower voices insist on three-quarter time throughout, there is also a latent vertical polymetry. Bartók even adopts this characteristic from his obvious model by accentuating the first two quarters of each measure in the piano accompaniment and leaving the third beat free.

Finale
Allegro non assai

The musical score for the beginning of the final movement of Brahms's String Quartet in A minor, bars 1–8, is presented in a four-staff format. The top staff is for Violin I, the next two for Violin II and Viola I, and the bottom staff is for Viola II. The time signature is 3/4. The tempo and mood are marked 'Allegro non assai'. The score begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The violin parts have a melodic line with dotted rhythms, while the lower voices (violin II and viola) have a steady bass line with chords. The piano accompaniment (represented by the bottom staff) has a prominent bass line with chords.

Fig. 6: Johannes Brahms, String Quartet in A minor op. 51 No. 2, beginning of the final movement, bars 1–8

13 Cf. also Weiß, *Die frühe Schaffensentwicklung*, pp. 39–40.

Working with this additive metrical principle appears on the one hand as a recourse to Brahms, from whom Bartók had long since distanced himself. At the same time, however, it seems like an unconscious anticipation of the distant future. Decades later, Bartók found exactly such an additive metre in his exploration of South Slavic folk music, especially in the music of the peasants in Bulgaria. He described this phenomenon, which was first opened up to him through a study by Vasil Stoin in 1927, as ‘Bulgarian rhythm’ in connection with Bulgarian music researchers, and even wrote an essay about it – although what he meant is strictly speaking not a rhythm, but a metric principle involving the ordering of unequal units.¹⁴ In a whole series of works, he himself experimented with this so-called Bulgarian rhythm, both in the *Mikrokosmos* and especially in the Scherzo of his Fifth String Quartet of 1935. Headed with *Alla bulgarese*, this movement works with various metres in which even and odd-numbered units are combined asymmetrically (Fig. 7). At the beginning it is (although notated on an eighth basis and with units of 4+2+3 eighths) in principle the constellation already found in Brahms and in Bartók’s Piano Quintet Scherzo, i.e. the metrical scheme: 1–2–3–123 | 1–2–3–123 etc. The tempo, however, is so fast that a somewhat different musical effect results: instead of three-measure groups, one hears only large measures consisting of counting times of different lengths.

Alla bulgarese
Vivace, $\text{♩} = 46$

The musical score is for the beginning of the Scherzo from Bartók's String Quartet No. 5. It is titled 'Alla bulgarese' and 'Vivace, ♩ = 46'. The score is in 4/8 time and features an additive 4+2+3 eighth-note meter. It shows the first four bars of the piece, with the piano part playing pizzicato chords and the string quartet parts playing melodic lines. The tempo is marked 'Vivace' with a quarter note equal to 46 beats per minute.

Fig. 7: Bartók, String Quartet No. 5, beginning of the Scherzo, bars 1–4

In this respect, the Scherzo of the Piano Quintet – although its tempo is strictly speaking much too slow for this – can be regarded in a sense as Bartók’s first composition in the so-called Bulgarian rhythm, written long before Bartók discovered this kind of additive metre in Bulgarian peasant music and then consciously

14 Béla Bartók, “Az úgynevezett bolgár ritmus” [The so-called Bulgarian Rhythm], in: *Énekszó 5* (1938), pp. 537–41; German in: Béla Bartók, *Musiksprachen. Aufsätze und Vorträge*, ed. by Bence Szabolcsi, Leipzig 1972, pp. 94–105. Here, Bartók also mentions a study of Dobri Christov’s published in 1913 but not received outside Bulgaria for a long time, which he had only just come across (p. 97).

appropriated it in artistic stylization – as something foreign, even exotic, which was nevertheless already subliminally familiar to him from his own work (and ultimately even from Brahms).¹⁵

The Scherzo of Bartók's Piano Quintet works with four different themes in different keys, metres and tempos. The ground plan of the form is in five parts (see Fig. 4), but not in the conventional five-part Scherzo form with two trios, i.e. A–B–A–C–A. Rather, Bartók gives the movement a symmetrical five-part bridge form A–B–C–B–A, with a fast *czardas* theme¹⁶ in 2/4 time at its centre as the fourth theme. The frame parts working with two themes are arranged symmetrically in three parts (according to the scheme a–b–a), so that one could also speak of a nine-part symmetrical bridge form in which the fundamental key not only dominates the first and last complex, as in every Scherzo, but also – emphasizing symmetry – the middle of the movement.

A very peculiar passage after the middle of the movement, at the recapitulation of the third theme, reminds one of the tritone ratio in which this F sharp minor stands to the fundamental C of the work. While this third theme is in clear F major (from bar 479) and sounds like a conventional waltz theme, it is strongly alienated in the recapitulation (from bar 753): it is nailed, as it were, to a peculiar drone bass, which does not consist of the usual fifth, but of the tritone or diminished fifth *c–g flat*. This alteration of the tone *g* to *g flat* (or *f sharp*), which here destroys the waltz character of the theme and its Central European habitus, soon confuses even the tuning of the instruments. After the Scherzo movement ends with a large F sharp major chord, the two violinists have to tune down the *g* strings of their instruments to *f sharp* in the short pause. In the following Adagio section, which is an introduction to the slow 3rd movement, the sixth-jump motif from the introduction to the 1st movement returns in unison, but now with a decisively altered interval: the opening sixth-jump is replaced by the tritone *f sharp–c* (Fig. 8). The fact that this is an altered, distorted interval is surely apparent to any listener through the preceding, spectacular scordatura: the motif begins in the violins with the open string *f sharp* – on an irregular tone that does not normally exist on the violin.

The fact that this scordatura has eliminated the violins' normal tuning in fifths has consequences for the music of the entire section: it is in a C tonality in which the note *f sharp* has become a regular step of the scale. The tone material for almost the entire Adagio introduction is a whole tone scale on *c*, in which the octave is passed through with six instead of the usual seven steps: *c–d–e–f sharp–g sharp–a sharp–c*. The main motif, sounding Brahmsian or Central European at

15 Bartók, however, does not refer to this connection in the above-mentioned essay.

16 This is also how it is called by Weiß, *Die frühe Schaffensentwicklung*, p. 313.

961 Adagio

Fig. 8: Bartók, Piano Quintet DD 77, beginning of the introduction to the 3rd movement, bars 961–64

the beginning of the work, is thus deprived of any tonality, and the ornamental figures and rhythms of the following bars still refer to the rhapsodic tone of a czardas introduction, but at the same time the whole-tone scale structure removes it from the folkloristic background to such an extent that it becomes a decidedly new music – music that is no longer of the 19th, but of the 20th century.

The Adagio molto, beginning in bar 973, then works again with violins tuned throughout in pure fifths, and with music that more or less returns to the Hungarian folklorism of the late Romantic period. The sixth-jump motif from the beginning of the work is mocked and expanded in such a way that it is now based on the so-called ‘gypsy’ or ‘Hungarian’ (or double harmonic) minor scale on *c*, with the characteristic high alteration of *f* to *f sharp* (see Fig. 9). But this also clarifies what is essential for understanding the entire work, for it reveals where the irritating tone *f sharp* comes from, which in the entire Quintet constantly penetrates the C tonality (C major as well as C minor): it is the raised 4th step of this double harmonic minor scale, the step that turns the common minor scale into the ‘gypsy minor’ scale and thus, according to popular understanding, into a ‘Hungarian’ scale.

The whole Adagio then sounds very Hungarian (or in ‘gypsy style’) and relates to the following finale like the rhapsodic slow part of a czardas to the fast, whirling second part: *lassú-friss*. The finale is reached by the czardas-like multiple acceleration (*Vivace* bar 1113) and has as its main theme the syncopated second motif of the introduction to the first movement (see Fig. 1 above). Here the short motif is expanded into a complete czardas theme which serves as basis for a late Romantic folkloristic movement with a comparatively conventional tone – quite comparable to the Hungarian Dances by Brahms or the Hungarian Rhapsodies by Liszt.

After the whole-tone scale and the double harmonic minor scale, C major has now once again established itself as the key. In contrast to the first Allegro, however, both themes of the movement are now Hungarian in form, and no sonata form is created. The rhapsodic 2nd theme (bar 1230), which is then also performed as a fugue, draws on the vocal theme of the introduction to the 1st movement (see Fig. 2 above) and, like this one, is in F sharp minor. The introduction of the quintet thus becomes in almost every respect the nucleus for the entire final movement, thematically as well as with the tonal disposition in the tritone arc: C major – F sharp minor – C major (cf. Fig. 4 above).

The image shows a musical score for the 3rd movement of Bartók's Piano Quintet, starting at bar 972. The tempo is marked 'Adagio molto'. The score is written for five instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Piano. The time signature is 2/4. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The piano part features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and quintuplets. Dynamics include 'p molto expr.' and 'pp'. The score ends with a tritone symbol.

Fig. 9: Bartók, Piano Quintet DD 77, 3rd movement, bars 972–74

*

Folklorism, symmetry and tritone: these three keywords have been used time and again in an attempt to describe the essential in this Piano Quintet with a cursory analysis. It should have become clear that the phenomena named with these terms are inseparably linked with each other, or also: that the three phenomena emerge from each other.

Folklorism proves to be a dynamic principle that dominates the music more and more from movement to movement. The neutral, quasi-Western motifs and themes still appearing in the first half of the work are immediately confronted with decidedly 'Hungarian' motifs (of the verbunkos style), and they themselves are then increasingly permeated by Hungarian or 'gypsy' musical characteristics – until the music in the last two movements has become completely 'Hungarian' (in the sense of verbunkos and czardas).

This dynamic move towards folklorism, which in Bartók's case naturally has a programmatic quality and in 1903/04 had to be understood as massive criticism of Dohnányi's Germanophilia, is at the same time transformed by the principle of symmetry. On various levels, this principle dominates parts of movements, whole movements as well as the large form of the cycle: with complex, symmetrical bridge forms in the individual movements as well as with the symmetrical correspondence of the frame parts. The final movement appears as a strongly elaborated and extended recapitulation of the introduction to the first movement, and the symmetrical centre of the Scherzo movement is at the same time – at least in the revised version examined here – the centre of the overall form (by the way almost also in the playing time). The principle of symmetry is in turn – on the micro level – interlocked with folklorism. The rhythm of the Hungarian choriambus, used several times concisely, is itself also a symmetrical formation: long–short | short–long (see Fig. 3 above).

Finally, the tritone: this interval unites folklorism and symmetry, as Bartók makes obvious. First of all, it marks the main characteristic of the 'gypsy' or 'Hungarian' minor scale: its altered 4th step. At the same time, the tritone is a symmetry phenomenon: it marks the exact middle within the octave, whereby the symmetry is perfect when the octave scale is divided in six instead of seven steps, as in the whole tone scale which Bartók uses as the central point of the music – demonstratively exactly where the violins have to retune their *g* string to *f sharp* and also in the middle of the entire work. The tritone distance between keys again marks the symmetrical opposite pole in the circle of fifths which Bartók composes out on both a small and a large scale: with the tonal tritone arc C–F sharp–C in the introduction and at the end of the first movement, with the same, but much larger tritone arc in the final movement, and – superior to both – with the tritone arc C–F sharp–C constituted by the three large complexes first movement, Scherzo plus Adagio and final movement.

The scordatura of the violins – which could easily have been avoided with other instrumentations (and is possibly inspired by the same scordatura in the middle of the tone poem *Ein Heldenleben* by Richard Strauss, often played by Bartók at the time) – does not only point to the structural significance of the *f sharp* note in the whole work. It even seems to raise the question of whether the traditional tuning of the violins in fifths can still be in keeping with a music that radically adheres to the principle of folklorism or the symmetrical division of the octave. To put it bluntly, are conventional violins still the right instruments for such music?

Bartók himself, by later withdrawing the Piano Quintet (as well as the symphonic poem *Kossuth* and others from this period) and no longer having it performed, signalled that he wanted the works of this stylistic phase to be understood as a false path and meaningless for his actual work. Throughout his life he then

emphasized that it was only the encounter with authentic Hungarian peasant music and its intensive exploration from 1906 onwards that had put him on the right compositional path. However, this self-interpretation of his stylistic development, which is not free of ideology, conceals essential moments that must be taken into account if one is to do justice to the position of the Piano Quintet in Bartók's work.

Of course, the 'Hungarian' folklorism from which Bartók's Piano Quintet emanates – the urban (salon) music of the verbunkos style played by 'gypsy bands' and written by bourgeois composers – has little to do with what Bartók heard for the first time during the completion of the Piano Quintet in Gerlice Puszta¹⁷ and then collected and researched intensively from 1906 onwards: the orally transmitted, authentic peasant music sung in villages in rural areas of Hungary and various Balkan countries. There, the so-called 'gypsy scale' and the instruments of the 'gypsy bands' (namely the cimbalom) do not play a role; rather, there are essentially two types of songs, which are usually based on modal church tonal scales and only show (language-related) rhythmic parallels to the verbunkos repertoire. The tritone is alien to this peasant music both as an interval and as a regular step of the scale. Melodically, seconds, thirds and fourths dominate; structurally, the most important principle is the transposition of phrases a fifth upwards.

When Bartók extended his research in 1913 to Arabic folk music by peasants and nomads in Algeria, he found completely different structures: a two-string plucked instrument tuned in the tritone, called *gombri*, and scales working with only a few neighbouring notes (also in quarter-tone distance) and correspondingly large 'holes' in the filling of the octave frame.¹⁸ These experiences were clearly reflected in Bartók's 2nd String Quartet composed in 1915–17, namely in the 2nd movement, where the tritone becomes the structurally most important interval. Non-diatonic scales also permeated Bartók's music from about 1914 onwards and, as Bartók research has repeatedly pointed out,¹⁹ the tritone became a central interval for Bartók's tonality and formal thinking – especially in composing with

17 Lidi Dósa, a young girl from Transylvania who had accompanied Bartók to Gerlice Puszta, was asked to sing to him Transylvanian village songs which she had learned from her grandmother. Bartók wrote them down and later published one of them with a piano accompaniment; see Denijs Dille in: *Documenta Bartókiana* 4, ed. by Denijs Dille, Mainz 1970, p. 23–25, and Malcolm Gillies, *Béla Bartók im Spiegel seiner Zeit*, Zürich and St. Gallen 1991, pp. 70–71.

18 Cf. his essay "Volksmusik der Araber von Biskra und Umgebung" (first published in Hungarian in 1917), in: *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 2 (1920), pp. 489–522.

19 Cf., among others, Ernő Lendvai, *Béla Bartók. An Analysis of His Music*, London 1971; Peter Petersen, *Die Tonalität im Instrumentalschaffen von Béla Bartók*, Hamburg 1971; Elliott Antokoletz, *The Music of Béla Bartók. A Study of Tonality and Progression in Twentieth-Century Music*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1984.

the two axes or four poles of the circle of fifths, the so-called 'axis system' of interlocking tritone polarities (e.g. *c–f sharp/a–e flat*).

The phenomenon of symmetry, which can hardly be derived from Hungarian peasant music, is also becoming an increasingly central compositional principle in Bartók's oeuvre.²⁰ Thus, as a 'bridge form' or palindromic arrangement, it meets the overall form almost paradigmatically in the 4th and 5th String Quartets (with two complementary types of symmetrical five-movement form), but also in the opera Duke Bluebeard's Castle (*A kékszakállú herceg vára*, op. 11) or in the ballet The Wooden Prince (*A fából faragott királyfi*, op. 13). In the 5th String Quartet, moreover, the first movement has a palindromic type of sonata form, which is basically already preformed in the form of the first movement of the Piano Quintet: the three thematic complexes of the 'exposition' are recapitulated in reverse order after the 'development'; in exactly the middle of the movement (two bars after number 105), even a mirror axis is literally composed out, and the tonality of the movement progresses, integrating the tritone, in whole-tone steps: *c–d–e–f sharp–a flat–b flat*, as a consequence of the main theme, which vehemently circles the whole-tone step at the beginning and then reaches out to the tritone.

The use of the whole-tone scale as a scale form integrating the tritone is also present in the Piano Quintet (in the scordatura passage), and there are also already, as indicated, features of a vertical mirror symmetry of the musical movement, which then also gain enormous importance for the later Bartók. The first movement of the 5th String Quartet, for example, closes with a cadenza in which the importance of symmetry for the movement as well as for the work seems to be condensed in a mirroring structure. The first movement of the Music for String Instruments, Percussion and Celesta then comes to an even more perfectly symmetrical conclusion shortly afterwards. Here, the circular figure of the last bars (taken from the main theme) with the simultaneous melodic reaching out to the tritone in both directions suggestively summarizes – even visually – the symmetrical overall form of the movement, which is known to be a double circular fugue: it begins and ends with the same note *a* and unfolds in symmetrical entries in fifths, reaching its dynamic climax at the tritone tone, the maximum ambitus as well as the reversal point of its palindromic form.

20 For basic information about this (and especially about the String Quartets No. 4 and 5, as well as the Music for String Instruments, Percussion and Celesta) cf. Frank Hentschel, *Funktion und Bedeutung der Symmetrie in den Werken Béla Bartóks*, Lucca 1997; see also e.g. Oramo Ilkka, "Modale Symmetrie bei Bartók", in: *Die Musikforschung* 33 (1980), pp. 450–64; Wallace Berry, "Symmetrical Interval Sets and Derivative Pitch Materials in Bartók's Quartet No. 3", in: *Perspectives of New Music* 18 (1979–80), pp. 287–380, and Jonathan W. Bernard, "Space and Symmetry in Bartók", in: *Journal of Music Theory* 30 (1986), pp. 185–201.

If, however, in a major work such as the Music for String Instruments, Percussion and Celesta – many other examples of comparison could be mentioned in Bartók's work – the phenomena of Hungarian folklorism, symmetry and tritone dominate the music from the micro to the macro level, then this cannot be simply attributed to the reception of the Hungarian or South-East European peasant music. It seems that Bartók's overall compositional disposition for symmetry phenomena was as important for the work of the mature composer as the politically and ethically motivated impulse for the integration of folk music style characteristics. And the Piano Quintet of 1903/04 seems to play a key role in Bartók's compositional development: this was probably the first time he became aware of how scalar-interval tritone structures (up to the whole-tone scale) could be derived from folkloristic material, namely the so-called 'gypsy scale', which led out of conventional major-minor diatonics and at the same time were suitable for developing symmetrical tonal structures as well as symmetrical probably palindromic movement forms via the tritone.

Bartók himself seems to have withdrawn the Piano Quintet later primarily because he was embarrassed by the late Romantic style and the inclination to the verbunkos style. After all, the work embodied exactly that kind of salon and 'gypsy' musical Hungarianism in the sense of the 19th century, from which he vehemently distanced himself, from 1906 onwards, with his ethnomusicological research and his musical oeuvre (and which in 1911 he also criticized in Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies).²¹ Nevertheless, the Piano Quintet already contains remarkably much of the 'genetic code' from which the work of the mature Bartók was to develop.²² In this respect, it would probably be appropriate to view this Quintet not so much as the conclusion of Bartók's youthful work, but rather as a signpost for the future: an important step towards what then constitutes the musical thinking of the later Bartók. The kind of folklorism may still be the wrong here, but structurally the contours of the 'actual' Bartók with its specific musical-constructive ingenuity are already emerging very clearly under the surface of its late Romantic sound.

21 Cf. his essay "Die Musik Franz Liszts und das Publikum von heute", p. 135.

22 Wolfgang Rathert recently pointed out that a motif from Bartók's Piano Quintet Scherzo (bars 649 and 760) was taken up again 42 years later in the opening movement of his Third Piano Concerto (bars 48 sqq.) ("Adagio ohne Liebe? Hans Koessler, der Lehrer Bartóks", in: *Musiktheorie* 31 [2016], pp. 307–8).

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