

**EDUCATIONAL VALENCES OF
SPONTANEUS
INTERCULTURAL
PHENOMENON PERCEIVED
BY BÉLA BARTÓK**

By Éva Fórika

Psychopedagogical and Educational
sciences Faculty, Aiud, Romania

- I live in Transylvania (Romania), as a member of the Hungarian national minority and teach music to Romanian and Hungarian young people in Romanian and Hungarian.



Map of Romania



The *Bethlen Gábor* College
where I teach



The togetherness and simultaneous existence of ethnic groups is typical for the Carpathian Basin even at the level of larger communities.

Hungarian Reformed Church Fortress (13th century)



Romanian Orthodox Church



This was in no way different during the time of Bartók's activity either. As he himself wrote in 1942,

- It is commonly known that Eastern Europe (save for the Russians, Ukrainians and Poles) is mostly inhabited by small nations, each of these numbering around or less than ten million souls and the borders of their countries do not have insurmountable geographical obstacles. Some territories have entirely mixed populations, which is due to war destructions, since the regions which became uninhabitable were repopulated again by the placement of settlers. The continuous connection between these nations was very easy. Furthermore, there were also conquests (for example the Turkish occupation of the Balkans). Conquerors and conquered became mixed, and their language as well as folk music influenced each other reciprocally.

In the following I shall speak of this reciprocal influence as a living model-example and shall often refer to Béla Bartók, who was the first one commending this phenomenon. I am quoting from the *Columbia Encyclopaedia*:



Bartók, Béla (1881–1945) Hungarian composer and collector of folk music. He studied (1899–1903) and later taught piano at the Royal Academy, Budapest. In 1905 he and Zoltán Kodály began to collect folk music of Eastern Europe, and throughout his life Bartók devoted much attention to folk music of varied origin.

From his essays and correspondence we may follow step by step how he discovered the worth of peasant music, the musical interaction between neighbouring people and the human values rooted in this interaction. In his essay 'What is Folk Music?' (1931) Bartók presented the following definition of peasant music:

The term 'peasant music', broadly speaking, connotes all the melodies which endure within the peasant class of any nation, in a more or less wide area and for a more or less long period, and which constitute a spontaneous expression of the musical feeling of that class.

Bartók among Hungarian peasants (fourth person from the left)



In another essay 'Hungarian Peasant Music' (1933) he made a further definition of this concept:

Peasant music, using the term comprehensively, is the complex of melodies which, in the peasant class – that is, in a class more or less removed from the culture of the town – now exist, or at any other period have existed, in whatever region or length of time, as a spontaneous gratification of the musical instinct or impulse. Or in a narrower sense, the complex of melodies so existing among the peasants and exhibiting a certain uniformity of style.

Transylvanian Hungarian Peasant 'Ceilidh' (1967)



He explains the birth of a homogeneous musical style in the following manner:

It is obvious, indeed, that no essential alteration of a musical element can come from one individual peasant. And there can be no doubt that with peasants who people one geographical unit, living close to one another and speaking the same language, this tendency to alter, in consequence of the affinities between mental disposition of individuals, works in one way, in the same general direction. It is thus that the birth of a homogeneous musical style becomes possible.

H. Stevens showed that Bartók discovered two opposite tendencies in peasant music:

‘the first to preserve their old traditions and customs without change and

the second to imitate at least the external signs of upper-class culture’.

Bartók considered folk culture as being equal to the organic natural life of the countryside, and like many other aspects of natural landscape, it could be subject to careful research and analysis.



Hungarian peasants
on their way to church
on Sunday

(Méra, Transylvanian
village - 1990)

*Hungarian folk song from
Méra*

Bartók extended his research to the folk music of Transylvanian Romanians, in order to determine the nature and extent of reciprocity between Hungarian peasant music and minorities of people living in greater Hungary.

His fieldwork alone comprised a further

2721 Hungarian melodies,

3200 Slovakian melodies,

3500 Romanian melodies,

**200 Ruthenian, South Slavic and
Bulgarian** tunes.

He adopted a pan-national, comparative approach to his continuing ethno-musicological work.

Romanian Peasant Dance from Maramures



The impressive richness in folk music of the researched area (including the large number of styles as well as variants) is explained by Bartók (1942) in the following manner:

What could be the cause of such richness? How could this come about? The answer to this question came only later when I had enough material already for scientific analysis from various Eastern European people. The comparison between the folk music of different nations made it clear that here a continuous exchange of melodies has taken place: a constant crossing and re-crossing, which has been going on for centuries already.

In the same place our author argues:

At this point I have to emphasise a very important issue. This exchange of melodies is not as simple as many would believe. Once a folk melody passes the language barrier of a country, sooner or later it will undergo certain changes required by the new environment and especially by the language difference. The bigger the difference between the two languages in terms of accent, syllable-building etc. the larger the changes will become through which the 'emigrated' melodies can – fortunately – go through.

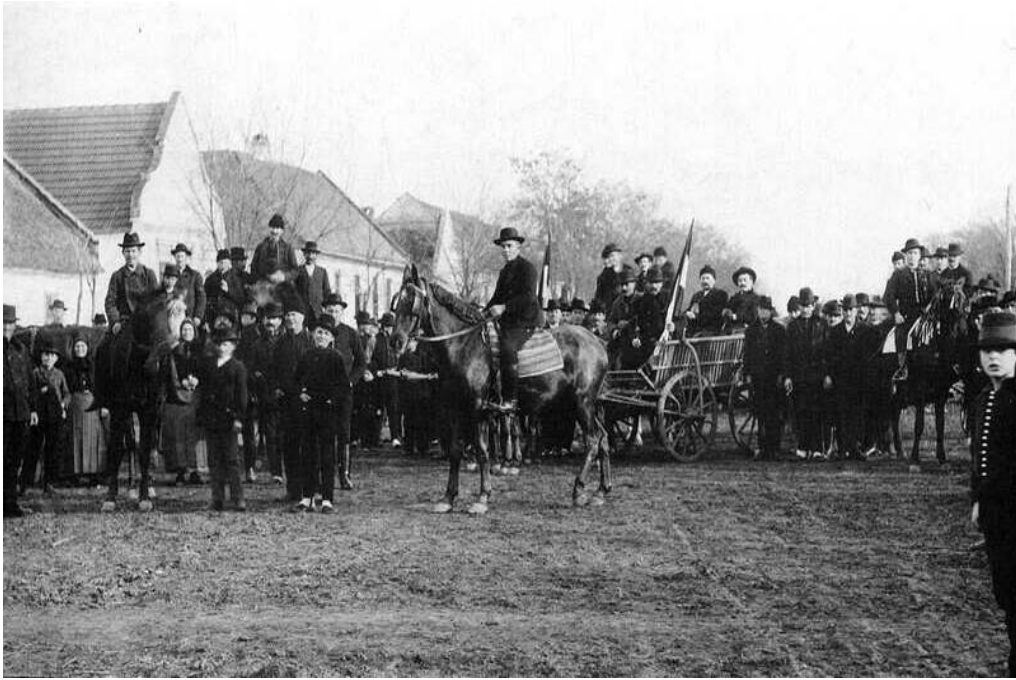
Fortunately, I say,
because this phenomenon by itself gives birth to types and subtypes, increasing their number. Above the terms 'crossing' and 're-crossing' have been used. This re-crossing normally takes place in the following manner: a Hungarian melody is taken over for example by the Slovaks who 'Slovakise' it. This 'Slovakised' form of melody may then be retaken by the Hungarians and the melody becomes 're-Hungarised'. Nevertheless, and again I say: fortunately – this 're-Hungarised' form will differ from the initial Hungarian one.

Let us listen to Transylvanian examples of this reciprocal enrichment from Romanian and Hungarian folk songs. I recommend here a Transylvanian Romanian dance as well as a Hungarian dance from Torontál, which are obviously related, being each other's variants:



Ardeleana – Transylvanian Romanian Dance

Hungarian peasants from Torontál
(beginning of the 20th century)



As we could observe, the decisive element of mutual enrichment was the creative attitude of the receiving community. Both communities recognise the melody as their own and vary it according to the rules of the folk song's natural existence.

How does the melody change and vary as a result of interaction? According to Ilona Szenik, a folk music researcher from Cluj-Napoca, Romania,

The constitutive elements of the melody do not change simultaneously and with similar intensity. The alteration or total change of one element is always built upon the firm ground of other elements or relations – thus, a linking element always exists between individual musical components.

While analysing the course of fertile interaction it is an important question for us what kind of factors and attitudes can be identified within this phenomenon? **Let us enlist the factors:**

- different ethnic groups are living near each other since long ago
- the consciousness of identity of ethnic communities impregnates the manifestations of the individuals within the given community
- within the community there is a specific mode of self-expression, language, style, i.e. an internal, inexpressible spirit or pattern
- the self-expression of the individual is in organic relationship with the life of the community
- there is an instinctive control over the mode of self-expression – in this case concerning the constitutive elements and their common effect within the musical language

Let us now review those **attitude-patterns**, which caused the rich interaction. These are the following:

- openness towards something new and different
- a free, unrestricted selection based on inner resonance to the values of the other community
- creative approach and readiness to change the borrowed material according to the internal pattern
- only partial modifications, while preserving some elements unchanged
- integration of new values within 'the organic whole'

The above outlined attitude-model derives from practical life, being a spontaneous and positive consequence of the Carpathian Basin's specific history.

That is why it represents a very good lesson both from the viewpoint of musical and intercultural education.

Of course, the social circumstances of neighbouring communities have profoundly changed today. Organic community life belongs already to the past. The organic relationship of 'part' and 'whole' between individual and community value-systems – a relationship praised by Bartók – is indeed non-existent anymore.

The challenge of the future

In my opinion the key problem of formal and non formal education in the near future will be our ability to recreate – at this time: through conscientious work – the relationship between the all-time part and whole in our thinking. It is utterly important not to attempt to assemble the whole merely from the parts but somehow to regard the part also from the elevated perspective of the whole. It is also encouraging that in scientific research such a model is gaining increased attention, a model in which the part and the whole constitute an organic unity. I am referring to the model of the hologram. The 'whole in every part' nature of a hologram provides us with an entirely new way of understanding organisation and order.

A possible model?

The hologram, as a model of relationship-system is analogous for me to the manner in which the individuals of ethnic communities with organic culture relate themselves to the unified values of the community – in this case, to the unified style of musical language. The preservation of values (in our example: folk music values) and of the internal value system as well as its further handing down in my opinion is exactly the natural consequence of a still existent spontaneous holistic concept of the world. With a little exaggeration one may conclude that disregarding this unified world-concept may lead to the loss of one's internal system of values. In my view the real challenge for value-transmitting educational behaviour is exactly this attempt to restore the holistic world-concept.

At present, however, I shall analyse this question only from the perspective of musical education.

As we have observed above, organic community life belongs already to the past. Nevertheless, the folk songs, the important elements of cultural heritage, have survived. The folk song, beyond its own value, perhaps exactly because of specific historical circumstances, fulfils a remarkable role within the musical life of the people living in the Carpathian Basin, and consequently, within the lives of the communities as well. Why did this happen so?

We can answer this question again through
Bartók's words (1931):

Folk music has an irreplaceably huge
importance especially in those countries
where other musical tradition hardly exists,
and even what can be found, is not
extensive. Most of Eastern and Southern
European countries are like this.

Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967), the colleague and fellow researcher of Bartók says the following about the same question:



We have so few written cultural memories [...] thus, folk music is forced to fill the gap left by missing historical accounts. From an artistic viewpoint it means more to us than to those people who created a self-standing classic musical style centuries ago.

There folk music was melt into classical music and a German musician finds in Bach or Beethoven also what we can seek for only in our villages: the organic life of a national tradition.

Intercultural education

It is important for every inhabitant of the Carpathian Basin to get acquainted with his/her own folk songs and those of neighbouring nations during the most receptive age, i.e. still as a child, since these represent his or her cultural roots. Children are more open and tolerant towards something new or unusual. Based on this they should be taught the music and culture of neighbouring ethnic groups as well. Intercultural education in the Carpathian Basin is not a matter of politeness or transitory necessity. Every ethnic group is *at home* there and one has to take that into serious consideration while thinking about intercultural education.



Hungarian
peasant from
Torockó
(15 miles from
my town)



*Bride and groom
from Szék
(Transylvania)*

As we have seen, the mature consciousness of identity is one of the key factors which made this creative acceptance possible during the history and would most likely be able to make it possible in the future also. Thus, the natural obstacle of homogenisation is at the same time the very means of mutual enrichment.

The task for the future

This is why it would be extremely helpful if we could make our young generations aware of what Bartók himself drew attention to for the first time: the nations living within the Carpathian Basin can thank the richness of their musical treasure to a large extent to creative interaction. It would be necessary to gather a lot of such didactical material, which presents multiple variants of individual melodies in the view of showing their mutual exchange. There is an imminent need for a collaboration of this type between specialists of the Carpathian Basin as well as for great-minded supporters of such a project in order to improve intercultural education effectively.

In fact, we could celebrate most befittingly the memory of Béla Bartók (who passed away 60 years ago already) with such an enterprise, thus honouring his invaluable spiritual legacy:



My guiding spiritual principle, of which I am completely aware since having found myself as a composer, is the ideal of fraternity between people, the realisation of their brother- and sisterhood despite all enmity and discord.

