



Béla BARTÓK

Piano Concerto No. 3

Béla Viktor János Bartók (25 March 1881 – 26 September 1945) was a Hungarian composer, pianist, and ethnomusicologist. He is considered one of the most important composers of the 20th century; he and Franz Liszt are regarded as Hungary's greatest composers. Through his collection and analytical study of folk music, he was one of the founders of comparative musicology, which later became ethnomusicology.

Béla displayed notable musical talent very early in life: according to his mother, he could distinguish between different dance rhythms that she played on the piano before he learned to speak in complete sentences. By the age of four he was able to play 40 pieces on the piano and his mother began formally teaching him the next year. He gave his first public recital aged 11 in Nagyszőlős, to a warm critical reception. Among the pieces he played was his own first composition, written two years previously: a short piece called *The Course of the Danube*. Shortly thereafter László Erkel accepted him as a pupil. From 1899 to 1903, Bartók studied piano under István Thomán, a former student of Franz Liszt, and composition under János Koessler at the Royal Academy of Music in Budapest. There he met Zoltán Kodály, who made a strong impression on him and became a lifelong friend and colleague. In 1903, Bartók wrote his first major orchestral work, *Kossuth*, a symphonic poem which honored Lajos Kossuth, hero of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848.

The music of Richard Strauss, whom he met in 1902 at the Budapest premiere of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, strongly influenced his early work. From 1907, he also began to be influenced by the French composer Claude Debussy, whose compositions Kodály had brought back from Paris. Bartók's large-scale orchestral works were still in the style of Johannes Brahms and Richard Strauss, but he wrote a number of small piano pieces which showed his growing interest in folk music. The first piece to show clear signs of this new interest is the *String Quartet No. 1 in A minor* (1908), which contains folk-like elements.

Bartók, like Kodály, quickly set about incorporating elements of such Magyar peasant music into his compositions. They both frequently quoted folk song melodies verbatim and wrote pieces derived entirely from authentic songs. Bartók's melodic and harmonic sense was profoundly influenced by the folk music of Hungary, Romania, and other nations. He was especially fond of the asymmetrical dance rhythms and pungent harmonies found in Bulgarian music. Most of his early compositions offer a blend of nationalist and late Romanticism elements.

The *Piano Concerto No. 3* was one of the pieces composed by Bartók after departing Hungary following the outbreak of World War II. Lack of local interest, combined with Bartók's extended battle with leukemia and a general sense of discomfort in the American atmosphere prevented Bartók from composing a great deal in his early years in America. Fortunately, the composer was commissioned to create his *Concerto for Orchestra* which was extremely well received and decreased the composer's financial difficulties. The changes in the composer's emotional and financial state are considered by a few to be the primary causes for the third piano concerto's seemingly light, airy, almost neoclassical tone, especially in comparison to Bartók's earlier works.

The concerto was premiered in Philadelphia on February 8, 1946 under Hungarian conductor Eugene Ormandy with György Sándor as piano soloist.