



Béla Bartók

BORN 1881, Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary. **DIED** 1945, New York, New York.

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Bela Bartók was born March 25, 1881, in Nagyszentmiklós, a little Hungarian village in a part of what is now Romania.
2. By the time Bartók was 7, he was a skilled piano player, and by age 9, he was composing. He called it “remembering.” He was only 10 when he gave his first concert as solo pianist of his works.
3. Bartók had a series of private teachers until, at age 17, he was accepted to the Music Academy in Budapest.
4. Bartók became obsessed with folk music and launched a survey of folk songs from Hungary to North Africa.
5. He spoke through his music, but in person Bartók was private, withdrawn, usually somber, and often depressed. He once wrote to his mother. “I prophesy, I have foreknowledge that spiritual loneliness is to be my destiny.”

BACKGROUND & TIMES

1. Bela Bartók trekked through the countryside of Eastern Europe visiting one nomadic tribe after the next, trying to convince the peasants to sing and dance for him.
2. Bartók hated the Communist gov-

MAJOR WORKS

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Romanian Folk Dances; Music for Strings; Percussion and Celesta; Concerto for Orchestra; Piano Concerto No. 3; Piano Concerto No. 1; Piano Concerto No. 2; Violin Concerto No. 2; Concerto for Viola and Orchestra.

CHAMBER MUSIC

String Quartet No. 1; String Quartet No. 2; String Quartet No. 3; String Quartet No. 4; String Quartet No. 5; String Quartet No. 6.

STAGE WORKS

Miraculous Mandarin; Duke Bluebeard's

ernment that took over after World War I. It oppressed the peasants and minorities, whom Bartók saw as the heart and soul of his country and his music. The government condemned him for his association with these ethnic groups, and newspapers printed editorials that criticized him artistically and personally. “I have never meddled in everyday politics,” Bartók said. “but every bar of music, every folk tune I have recorded has been a political act.”

3. Unlike many composers, he had no disciples or schools of followers that flattered him and promoted his work. He was far more a loner than a leader.

INNOVATIONS IN STYLE

1. After hearing a young woman singing an old village tune to her child. Bartók knew that among the peasants of his own country was a rich deposit of original, undiscovered music just waiting to be mined. Not music to be forced into the framework of conventional scales and rhythms but music with its own unique character.
2. His music was based on powerful, irregular folk-music scales and used original folk-music orchestration that some found fierce and aggressive. He integrated the past of Hungary with the future of classical music in a way that sounded strange and different but

has since earned the love and respect of millions.

3. In spite of his reputation as an avant-garde modernist, Bartók never saw himself as a revolutionary. “In art,” he said, “there are only fast or slow developments. It is a matter of evolution, not revolution.”

UNIQUE INFLUENCE

1. Bela Bartók, along with Franz Liszt, is one of the greatest Hungarian composers and probably the world’s greatest folk music expert. He was born at the very end of the Romantic period of classical music and took his place among the leading composers of the 20th century, or Modern period.
2. By the time Bartók was 37, he had gathered more than 9,000 folk songs. He wrote 12 volumes of songs, 5 books, and countless articles on the subject and collated and edited the songs with such precision that he became known as one of the most important music scholars in history.
3. It was Bartók’s string quartets that established his international reputation as a “modernist” and a composer to be reckoned with.
4. Experts consider *Music for Strings* his finest work and musicians consider it his most challenging.

Castle; The Wooden Prince.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Hungarian Folk Songs and Peasant Songs; Mikrokosmos; Sonata for Piano; Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion; Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano; Solo Violin Sonata.