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Transformations in Musicological Interpretations of Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra: From Biographical Context to Integrative Reading

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Abstract. This article presents a critical review and synthesis of research approaches to Béla Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, one of the key works created by the composer during his period of American emigration. The article traces the evolution of musicological thought from the early formal-structural interpretations that predominated until the 1980s to the contemporary interpretative strategies that emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The reviewed researchers tend to examine the work through the lenses of biographical context and the sociopolitical circumstances of the World War II, as well as in terms of the distinctive features of "night music" and Hungarian folk heritage. Particular attention is given to the psychoanalytic interpretation, with an emphasis on the parallels between the structure of the concerto and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's theory of the "stages of dying." The study substantiates the value of an "integrative reading" method that combines the political and psychological dimensions of analysis. The score's multilayered semiotic structure supports an understanding of Concerto for Orchestra both as a unique musical requiem and as a metaphor for the disintegration of European culture. The study seeks to move beyond narrow specialisation in musicological research by offering a more holistic understanding of the work's artistic and philosophical significance in the context of Bartók's tragic experience of exile.

Keywords: Béla Bartók, Concerto for Orchestra, musicological interpretations, theory of dying, integrative approach, semiotics of music

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Трансформация интерпретационных стратегий Концерта для оркестра Бартока в музыковедении: от биографического контекста к интегративному чтению

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Аннотация. Настоящая статья представляет собой критический обзор и синтез исследовательских подходов к Концерту для оркестра Белы Бартока — одному из ключевых произведений, созданных композитором в период американской эмиграции. В статье прослеживается эволюция музыковедческой мысли: от ранних формально-структурных трактовок, преобладавших до 1980-х годов XX века, к современным интерпретационным стратегиям конца XX – начала XXI века. Произведение рассматривается исследователями через призму биографического контекста, социально-политических условий Второй мировой войны, а также особенностей «ночной музыки» и венгерского фольклорного наследия. Особое внимание уделяется психоаналитической интерпретации с акцентом на параллели между структурой концерта и теорией «стадий умирания» Элизабет Кюблер-Росс. В работе обосновывается продуктивность метода «интегративного чтения», объединяющего политический и психологический аспекты анализа. Автор указывает, что семиотическая многослойность партитуры позиционирует Концерт для оркестра как уникальный музыкальный реквием и метафору распада европейской культуры. Исследование направлено на преодоление узкой специализации в музыковедческих исследованиях, предлагая более целостное понимание художественного и философского значения произведения в контексте трагической эмигрантской судьбы Бартока.

Ключевые слова: Бела Барток, Концерт для оркестра, музыковедческие интерпретации, теория умирания, интегративный подход, семиотика музыки

Introduction

Béla Bartók (1881–1945) is a key figure in 20th-century music. In addition to his work as a composer, he was engaged in ethnomusicological research, and frequently performed as a pianist. Having spent most of his life in Hungary, the composer was forced by a combination of circumstances to leave his homeland in 1940 and emigrate to the United States. There he created one of the iconic works of the 20th century, the Concerto for Orchestra (first performed in 1944 in Boston), which became his first composition written on American soil. Current musicological approaches vary considerably in their analytical premises, resulting in a broad range of interpretations of the work. The present work presents a critical review of the scholarly views on Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, as presented in the literature mainly of the late 20th – early 21st centuries. Despite the publication of a number of studies over the past two decades, the article concentrates on the foundational work of the period in question, which established the methodological basis for contemporary interpretative strategies. At the same time, recent research from the early 21st century shows a growing tendency to integrate analytical and contextual approaches, reflecting

both an expansion of the interpretative field and increasing methodological complexity in music analysis.

Before turning to contemporary interpretative strategies, it should be noted that a formal-structural approach to the Concerto for Orchestra dominated musicological scholarship until the 1980s. Scholars of that period, in particular Ernő Lendvai [1] and Halsey Stevens, [2] focused primarily on the analysis of the internal organisation of the work and its stylistic characteristics. Lendvai mainly emphasises formal-structural principles (symmetry, the "golden section"), while Stevens considers the Concerto in a broader biographical and aesthetic context. This approach undoubtedly laid the foundations for a deeper understanding of Bartók's compositional technique. In contrast to the traditional approach that regarded the score as a self-sufficient structure, by the end of the 20th century an interest had developed in the semiotic and contextual layers of a work, which became central to the modern research paradigm.

Taking into account the evolution of musicological thought, this work seeks to synthesise existing interpretations, offering a holistic view of the semantic complexity of Bartók's work, as well as the search for conceptual foundations conditioned both by the biographical context and the motif of deep longing for Hungary that is characteristic of Bartók's American period.

Bartók's American Period

Born in the heart of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Bartók developed a youthful nationalism rooted in a profound engagement with culture. The son of two teachers, Bartók was exposed to a wide range of music from childhood, his mother exerting an especially strong influence on his musical development. At eighteen months, Bartók was already asking her to play particular pieces on the piano[1]; by the age of four, he was performing folk melodies himself.

Throughout his life he suffered from poor health. In 1939, he was ill at Christmas and then again in the spring. Because of this, the trip to the United States was postponed until April. In the summer, he showed the first signs of leukaemia, which manifested themselves in the form of pain in his right shoulder; however, according to Kenneth Chalmers, the diagnosis was made only four years later. In 1940, the composer was experiencing physical discomfort and considerable psychological pressure, one of the main causes being the death of his beloved mother. [3, p. 14] Against the background of the World War II, Bartók's sense of moral obligation to protest resulted in him being compelled to leave his homeland. Benjamin Suchoff writes that the composer was thrilled to receive an offer from Columbia University: it offered him "the chance to escape from life under a evil, dictatorial regime" and instead devote himself to teaching or researching folk music. [4, p. 123]

Thus, it may seem that his true compensation lay not so much in escaping the war as in the genuine intellectual fulfilment he found there. After arriving in America, Bartók gave his first concert in Washington, one of the most memorable being the concert at Carnegie Hall in New York. At Harvard, he lectured on problems in the study of Eastern European folk music. [3, p. 192] At the time he was studying Serbian and Croatian folk songs from the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature at Harvard University, which were "waiting to be discovered." However,

[1] As a child, Bartók remembered the melodies he particularly liked: after hearing several pieces, he could unerringly recognise the one that had made the strongest impression on him and would ask for that particular piece to be played. [3, p. 14]

according to the composer's son, Béla Bartók Jr., his father's intentions never included emigration. [Ibid., p. 193]

Bartók's years in America were perceived in different ways. Stravinsky regarded the Hungarian composer's exile as a forced necessity and one of the tragedies of modern society, whereas others saw it primarily as a means of earning a living until illness weakened him. [Ibid., p. 196] Existing characterisations of Bartók range from accounts emphasising his profound personal isolation to those foregrounding his identity as a Hungarian émigré. This duality of perception is characteristic of most representatives of European emigration of that period. Biographical evidence—particularly Bartók's professional contacts with former pupils and his continuing reliance on Hungarian specialists, including a Hungarian doctor and lawyer—indicates that he maintained strong national and professional ties.

Things were initially promising in America, thanks to his work with recordings of Serbo-Croatian folk songs from the Milman Perry collection. Bartók also transcribed Native American folk music. Columbia University extended his contract until December 1942, [Ibid., p. 198] but the composer was disappointed to learn that the contract would not be renewed in 1943. [4, p. 123] However, with the help of friends, he completed his research into Serbian and Croatian folk music.

Bartók lived in a house where many other musicians had lived before him. Agatha Fassett notes his attachment to nature. [3, p. 201] During his first two years in America, he did not create any new works, but only produced arrangements of two earlier works to form a repertoire for himself and his wife, Dita Pasztory. Following his last concert, his life turned into a struggle between health and illness.[2] He died two and a half years later.

The creation of the magnificent Concerto for Orchestra was accompanied by homesickness, lack of funds and illness. However, despite all the difficult circumstances, Bartók never compromised his ideals.[3] Discussing the originality of the composer's contribution, Kenneth Chalmers also points to his biography, which is invaluable when carrying out a "reading" of his works. [3, p. 204] In any study of Bartók's work, the connections between his life, music, and the upheavals of World War II are clear.

Context and Conception of Concerto for Orchestra

That summer, Serge Koussevitzky, chief conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, visited the composer in hospital and invited him to write a work for his orchestra. The idea, in fact, came from Fritz Reiner and Josef Szigeti, who were the ones who organised Koussevitzky's visit. The Koussevitzky Foundation offered a fee of one thousand dollars for a work dedicated to the memory of the conductor's late wife. [Ibid., p. 204]

In mid-August, while on summer vacation with Dita at Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks (near a tuberculosis sanatorium), Bartók began work on the Concerto for Orchestra and worked on it continuously until his return to New York in October. Based on the title of the work itself, it indicates Bartók's rejection of the symphonic genre. Despite the fact that the author's comments contain the definition "like a symphony," the composer fundamentally considered the symphony form to be outdated. [Ibid., p. 205] Bartók offered a simple

[2] Bartók's son wrote about his father's health problems, which started from early childhood. [5]

[3] In the article "A Hungarian Patriot in American Exile," Nándor F. Dreisziger writes about Bartók's patriotic actions during his stay in America and the character of his patriotism in contrast to the cosmopolitan aura of other composers. See: [6].

explanation of the work: "The tendency to treat the single instruments or instrument groups in a 'concertant' or soloistic manner."

The work consists of five movements arranged according to Bartók's palindromic principle: a central slow movement is flanked by two scherzos, while the outer movements are in sonata form. According to Chalmers, there is little that is fundamentally new in the work's content; its value lies rather in "the sense of Bartók finding the right place for everything." [Ibid.] Even the humour here is softer than before. The playful title of the first scherzo, *Giocoso delle coppie*, was originally intended to mean "presentation of couples" rather than "game." [Ibid.] In the second scherzo (that is, in the fourth movement, *Intermezzo interrotto*) the composer may be parodying Leningrad Symphony by Shostakovich. However, as Chalmers notes, this is done only to emphasise the pathos and nostalgia for the semi-quoted Hungarian song *Magyarország, szép vagy, bájos vagy* ("Hungary, you are beautiful, you are wonderful") from Zsigmond Vincze's operetta *Hamburgi ifjú* (1928). Chalmers finds the quote from the Leningrad Symphony somewhat inexplicable, given that Bartók considered the symphony genre to be "dead." What is particularly surprising, according to the musicologist, is that Bartók gives the work a programmatic meaning: "A gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death-song of the third, to the life-assertion of the last one." [Ibid., p. 206] Chalmers finds this reminiscent of the programme for a symphonic poem by Richard Strauss. He concludes: "If the concerto is a kind of summation of a lifetime of composing, then there may indeed be a place in it for a recollection of the very beginnings of Bartók's orchestral work." [Ibid.] It is important to note that the work perfectly corresponded to the spirit of the times in American musical life, when the largest American orchestras were under the direction of European emigrants.

Klára Móricz emphasises that the Concerto for Orchestra is particularly well suited to an approach combining biographical study with analysis of all available sources. The conclusions drawn on this basis not only provide a chronology of the composition, but also reveal the programmatic elements and narrative of the work. Let us recall that the Concerto for Orchestra was the first work written by Bartók in America. Prior to undertaking this, he had been arranging some of his early works (Table 1).

Table 1. Works created by Bartók during his stay in America

Title of the Work	Year of Creation
Suite for two pianos, Sz. 34	1941
Petite Suite, Sz. 105	1936, 1943
Concerto for Orchestra, Sz 116	1943
Rhapsody No. 2 for violin & orchestra, Sz. 90	1928, 1944
Sonata for Solo Violin, Sz. 117	1944
Piano Concerto No. 3, Sz. 119	1945
Viola Concerto, Sz. 120	1945
Ukrainian folk song for voice and piano, Sz. 118	1945

During that period, the composer was immersed in ethnomusicological research: he was preparing Romanian, Serbian, Croatian and Turkish folk music material for publication. Biographical and compositional documentation, as Móricz calls it, is preserved in Bartók's correspondence (partly in Peter Bartók's archive) and in musical sketches. The principal musical source for investigating the work's genesis is the so-called "Turkish research notebook." [4] Bartók used this while collecting Turkish folk songs. During his hospital stay in 1943, the composer was busy translating the lyrics of Turkish folk songs. It was in this notebook that the general outline of the Concerto was preserved.

On the basis of her study of the sketches, Klára Móricz concludes that the compositional process unfolded in two phases: the sketch and the final version. However, the two phases cannot be clearly separated, since they developed in parallel rather than in a strict chronological sequence.

The second movement was the first to be completed. Based on the sketches, Móricz concludes that Bartók began composing it only after he had developed a clear concept of the entire form, and therefore changed only minor details in the final version. [7, p. 190] The first part, which was created in stages, has noticeably more edits than the second. According to Móricz, the thematic connection between the introduction and the slow movement gives the Concerto a romantic narrative. Using the same musical material, Bartók connects it symbolically with the beginning and end of human existence: birth in the Introduction and death in the Elegy. [Ibid., p. 192] However, the researcher perceives the ending as a symbol of hope for Bartók, and not as a reflection of reality. She sums up the dilemmas identified in the sketches for the third and fifth movements with the phrase "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." [Ibid., p. 198] As will be discussed later, all of this can be linked to psychological interpretations of the state of consciousness of a person who is dying. Moreover, the work raises other questions that require further reflection.

"Inclusion" of Politics in a Work?

Howard S. Meltzer notes that any work of art grows out of the real circumstances of the era in which the creator lives. In his opinion, Bartók's work acquired "a political profile." [5] The author points out that the Concerto for Orchestra reflects Bartók's reaction to World War II and his own status as an émigré. Meltzer identifies two criteria for classifying musical works as political: 1) an overtly political text (a poem read or presented in a program), the stated intentions of the composer, or the function of the work (an anthem, part of a ceremony); 2) the work can be perceived as "a political statement" due to the circumstances of its creation or reception. It is the second criterion that is relevant to Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, which, according to Meltzer, was conceived as a political statement but was not presented as one.

How did the Concerto for Orchestra come to be perceived as a political work? According to Meltzer, the work has no obvious biographical or textual connection to the war: Bartók was in exile, suffering from poor health and financial difficulties, but was not in immediate physical danger. Since the 1920s, the composer had been creating absolute music—string quartets, concertos, as well as Music for Strings,

[4] The composer typically composed "between the piano and the desk," [7, p. 182] using notebooks only when a piano was unavailable. In such cases, the notes contain more information about the compositional process.

[5] Howard S. Meltzer. *Music, Politics and the Imagination: Béla Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra*. URL: https://www.academia.edu/70215010/Music_Politics_and_the_Imagination_Be_la_Barto_k_s_Concerto_for_Orchestra (accessed: 23.04.2026).

Percussion and Celesta. The orchestral concerto could well have become another work free from extra-musical associations. Indeed, Bartók's very approach to composition confirms this interpretation. His only public explanation of the work discusses its structure and mood, but does not address the war or his personal experience of exile.

The fourth movement contains a musical quotation—the work's only explicitly political element. The source of the quote remains controversial, and, as Meltzer aptly concludes, this leads to "two different interpretations of the movement's political significance." [6] The question of the semantics of "pure" (absolute) music invariably gives rise to discussions. The claim that a musical work can comment on or reflect politics is itself problematic, since instrumental sounds are not as readily identifiable as signs or symbols as images or words. Meltzer notes that early reviews of the Concerto for Orchestra did not interpret the work as political—it would only acquire this status later. Its interpretation in this light may be a product of the listener's imagination, informed by knowledge of the historical context and extramusical factors. The author rightly notes that the sense of historicity in modern performances arises from awareness of the origin of the work. David Cooper writes that the work is "historically embedded in a world in crisis." [7] Composed at a turning point in World War II, the Concerto forms a powerful requiem—and one that perhaps only an atheist could have written. Although it is a response to the tragedy of humanity, at the same time, it presents a positive conception of a world in which chaos and order, those eternal antagonists, are maintained in dynamic equilibrium. However, as Meltzer emphasises, the political interpretation "takes place" in the mind of the listener, and not in the work itself—it is a product of his or her imagination.[8]

Parallels Between the Concerto for Orchestra and Kübler-Ross's Theory of Dying

Beverly Lewis Parker attempts to draw a parallel between the structure of the Concerto for Orchestra and the phases described in Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's theory of dying. This theory examines the processes through which a dying patient passes. Parker believes it is reasonable to see parallels given that Bartók suffered from a serious illness while working on the Concerto. Although the composer was not officially informed that he was terminally ill, it is assumed that he himself was aware of it. Parker concludes that Bartók's face-to-face encounter with death played a key role in the formation of the work. At the same time, the researcher does not deal with the conscious intentions of the composer, but "reads" the deep layers of the work and, in her own words, contributes to humanitarian research with her subjective interpretation. [8, p. 533]

According to Kübler-Ross's theory of dying, there are five stages preceding death. The first stage is a state of shock and concomitant denial of the seriousness of the disease. Kübler-Ross defines denial as the result of a person's unconscious belief in his own immortality, but considers it a healthy defence mechanism. The second stage begins when the patient becomes fully aware of the situation, experiences anger, and adopts an increasingly hostile and critical attitude towards those around him or her. The third stage is the so-called "attempt

[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.

at bargaining," when the patient's sole wish is to live for a few more days without pain or suffering. At the fourth stage, he or she comes to terms with the inevitability of death, begins to grieve, and becomes depressed. Distinguishing between two types of depression, Kübler-Ross emphasises that patients who are able to express their grief are better able to accept what is happening to them. Parker identifies two different psychological states that are included in the fourth stage: 1) grief over death and 2) pathological depression. [Ibid., 534] Joseph Mendel describes depression as a state of sadness, pessimism, self-hatred, along with loss of energy, motivation and concentration. The fifth stage is a state of acceptance and silent waiting. At these moments, the patient does not feel happy, wants to be alone or at least away from the problems of the outside world, and withdraws from his or her surroundings. It is important to remember that, although every terminally ill person goes through five stages, the nature of their "transition" depends on the characteristics of the person themselves and their lifestyle, as well as how those around them treat them.

Bartók's program notes for the Concerto itself hint at a connection with death: from the severity of the first movement, through the mournful mood of the third, to the glorification of life in the finale. Parker's distinctive approach to interpreting the relationship between the concerto and these stages, which involves comparing specific musical characteristics with corresponding psychological states, leads to a number of persuasive conclusions.

The first movement of the Concerto opens with ascending fourths, which Parker associates with the nature of illness, while William Kimmel describes them as a "death movement." The movement is in sonata form; both the force of the chordal progression and the treatment of the musical material convey a sense of certainty and the inevitability of illness. The ostinatos that recur throughout the work, together with the growing musical intensity, convey the strength of Bartók's anxiety and his heightened emotional state. Parker compares the treatment of the first theme to the composer's inability to cope with illness. The circle of fourths, introduced in the first theme, appears even more intensely in the development section, while the tremolo in the wind instruments symbolises the composer's fear. [Ibid., p. 542]

The second movement has a playful character, which Parker interprets as an escape from seriousness and denial. According to this interpretation, the mechanism of denial at the second stage of dying in this case is creative activity—"the creative fantasies of the dying Bartók." [Ibid., p. 543] Parker's association of the prominent role of the percussion and the glissando from measure 32 onwards with death leads her to the plausible conclusion that "denial is never complete denial." [Ibid., p. 546]

In the *Elegia*, which has the form *ABCBA*, the oboe is associated with Bartók's night music and the experience of grief in the fourth stage of dying. The fourth movement, in addition to reflecting—in Parker's view—the anger and fury of the second stage, may also express indignation at the then popularity of the young Shostakovich, whose compositions had displaced Bartók's works on the radio and in concert halls. The first section of this movement contains a reference to the second movement, which Lajos Lesznai interprets as a darkly comic dance of death.

The fifth movement represents Hungary as graceful and beautiful, while the section with the cantabile melody evokes an imagined journey home [Ibid., p. 550]. According to Parker, the concerto can be linked to the demise of Hungary as Bartók knew it, as well as to the composer's own acceptance of the inevitability of death. Given that biographical factors undoubtedly influence the creation of a work of art, and in view of the circumstances in which the Concerto for Orchestra was written, both interpretations may be regarded as valid.

Significance of "Night Music" and Hungarian Folklore in Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra

Bartók identified Hungarian folk music with natural phenomena. Maria Anna Harley writes about Bartók's connection with nature—the creative force and the created world. [9, p. 330] In one of his letters, the composer states that creative work entails a profound interest in the living world. "Night music" is present in a number of Bartók's works (Table 2); in the Concerto for Orchestra, the third movement, *Elegia*, represents its most significant manifestation.

Table 2. Works by Bartók, parts of which are written in the style of "Night Music"

Piano suite *Out of doors*	1926
String Quartet No. 3	1927
String Quartet No. 4	1928
Piano Concerto No. 2	1931
String Quartet No. 5	1934
Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta	1936
Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion	1937
Concerto for Orchestra	1943
Piano Concerto No. 3	1945
Viola Concerto	1945

Bartók's love of birds, which has been noted repeatedly in the literature, is also mentioned in Harley's study. The musicologist notes that the "the 'immortal' nightingale" symbolises the mystery of love and life, as well as the profound immutability of the natural world, which continues to exist after the disappearance of many generations of people. [Ibid., p. 343] This aspect of the nightingale's meaning is expressed in the *Elegia*, a piece that Bartók called "the lugubrious death-song." The nightingale's voice is represented by the piccolo part, which repeats the same melody with intervening pauses, echoing the characteristic phrasing of the bird's song (measures 29–32). Thus, the limited pitch range becomes a characteristic feature of the nightingale's song in Bartók's "night music." Harley compares the tremolo and two-note motivic cells to details from the String Quartet No. 4. In the *Elegia*, the five nightingale phrases begin on the same pitch—B^3—which is repeated several times (measures 14–18, 29–33, 57–60, 107–111 and 123–128). The "nightingale" appears within what Bartók describes as a "misty texture of rudimentary motives," which provides an effective "background" for the three mournful melodies that form the core of this movement. [Ibid., p. 343] According to Harley, these themes express human pain in the face of death. The nightingale's voice at the end proclaims the continuation of the natural world following the end of man's short life. The researcher's interpretation can also be related to the different stages of dying; in this case, the grief associated with the fourth stage may be linked to the patient's critical attitude towards those around him or her, which is characteristic of the second stage. Considering both the individual features of the movement and the composition as a whole, Harley arrives at the interesting conclusion that Bartók follows a broader isotopy of nature in the Concerto for Orchestra, leading from alienation to reconciliation and from constraint to freedom. [Ibid., p. 344]

In the middle of the second movement, the folkloric atmosphere of "The Game of Pairs" is interrupted by a brass chorale beginning at measure 123. The fourth movement opens with an oboe melody reminiscent of a Romanian folk tune. The violas and violins create a new mood—a serenade that can be interpreted as an expression of nostalgia for the homeland. Bartók spoke of this movement to György Sándor: "The composer declares his love for his home country, but the serenade is suddenly

interrupted by an outbreak of brute violence. Coarse men in boots break in on him and even smash his instrument."[9] This interruption, which is a quotation from Shostakovich's symphony, can be taken in the light of Bartók's statement to suggest that the Concerto is simultaneously a political reflection and an expression of the composer's psychological state—provided that part of the statement is understood metaphorically.

The finale opens with a horn fanfare, after which the entire movement takes on a dance-like character. The expansive pentatonic theme that emerges in the wind and string parts may be related to the elemental motifs that Bartók had written about earlier.

Conclusion

In summary, the existing interpretations of the Concerto share a common tendency to relate the work to Béla Bartók's biography and to the sociopolitical context in which it was composed. It seems appropriate to synthesise these approaches within the framework of a single interpretative model. Such a comprehensive analysis can reveal the work's semantic multiplicity more fully, as supported by the composer's own statements concerning the ambiguity of his artistic conception.

It is important to note the use of folklore, which was driven by a longing for his homeland, which Bartók loved immensely and to which he returned in his thoughts, at least through works composed in the style of "night music," which he associated with Hungarian folklore. If it were necessary to choose a single, most compelling interpretation from among the several well-argued readings, preference would be given to the parallel between the Concerto and the theory of dying—chiefly because of the logical coherence and correspondence of affective states across the positions and stages of dying. A study of the genesis of the work based on sketches and the second part as the first final part confirms this interpretation. The connection with the phases of death allows us to understand that Bartók could also write about the death of Hungary, so we can conclude that in this work he identified his tragic fate with the military events in his homeland. The music, written as it was in the spirit of Hungarian folklore, confirms all of the above.

The analysis presented here suggests that attempts to set biographical, political and psychoanalytic approaches against one another now appear methodologically outdated. The most productive approach appears to be that of "integrative reading," within which Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's theory of the stages of dying does not conflict with the political interpretation, but rather complements it. If the political dimension reflects the composer's response to an external catastrophe—war—the psychoanalytic layer, represented by the stages of dying, reveals the profound inner drama of the individual. The synthesis of these approaches supports an understanding of the Concerto for Orchestra not only as a distinctive "summation" of Bartók's oeuvre, but also as a unique musical requiem in which the composer's personal tragedy becomes a metaphor for the disintegration of European culture. It is precisely this multilayeredness that gives the work its enduring relevance and requires performers and scholars alike to move beyond the confines of narrow specialisation.

[9] *Discovering Masterpieces of Classical Music, Béla Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra*, Season 1, Episode 4, 2007. Director: Güntter Atteln.

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