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Bartók and the Topic of Drunkenness. Theory in Performance

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INTRODUCTION

When I mentioned the title of this essay to some friends, one of them promptly quipped "is this a case of practice-based research?!" Although the question was meant as a pleasantry, in this case, the answer is "yes" in that research into the subject was directly prompted, not by constant bouts of inebriation, but by having learned, practised and performed Bartók's *Three Burlesques* Op. 8/c for solo piano, in particular, the second one. The first two Burlesques carry subtitles which, in the Budapest edition from which I was working, are shown in Hungarian and French; for No. 2 these are "*kicsit ázottan…* " and "*un peu gris…* ". Somewhat unfortunately, my limited command of French led me to understand that the subtitle meant "a little grey", which admittedly appeared to be rather at odds with both the suite's collective title ("Burlesques") and the obviously quirky nature of the music. But, at the time, the only recording I had listened to was Sviatoslav Richter's somewhat sober, straight-down-the-line, live recording from 1989 and so I did not think much further, largely confining myself to score-based directives and musical intuition as interpretative guides. It was only after my first two or three performances of the Burlesques that I discovered the subtitle actually translated as "a little tipsy" and, after watching a short YouTube talk by András Schiff, my approach to the music changed dramatically. In fact, once the humorous nature of the music has been grasped and is fully projected in performance, "a little tipsy" seems almost like an understatement, "rather drunk", even "very drunk", seeming to provide a better match for the musical imagery.

Bartók's "burlesque" style[1] is familiar from works such as his early Scherzo (Burlesque) for Piano and Orchestra, the *Burletta* from String Quartet No. 6 and the *Intermezzo Interrotto* movement from Concerto for Orchestra. But here I attempt further to narrow this topical style down within Bartók's own *œuvre* whilst simultaneously expanding it to intersect with related topicality found in other composers' work. But can drunkenness be thought of as a topic? Although no firm criteria for what counts or does not count as a topic have been universally agreed, there is a general consensus that a degree of conventionality, a common understanding of a sign's referentiality, is necessary. Furthermore Raymond Monelle (2006)

[1] Julie Brown regards the grotesque as an important Bartókian style and links it with his use of "irony, parody and burlesque". J. Brown, *Bartók and the Grotesque*, Abingdon–New York 2016 [2007], p. 2.

asserts that "[s]ocial and cultural history must be investigated for the central meaning of the topic".[2] In other words, topical status cannot be attributed to a musical style on a whim but should have at least some basis in a historical trend and be witnessed across a range of musical works: "recurring references" as Joan Grimalt puts it.[3]

The remainder of this article will therefore examine how society has viewed drunkenness, how composers have responded to it, how it may be regarded as a musical topic and how this has operated, and how recognition of the topic of drunkenness in a specific work (Bartók's *Burlesque* No. 2) can influence performances, including my own.

DRUNKENNESS IN SOCIETY

It is probably safe to say that drunkenness is generally not considered to be socially desirable in organised societies. As far back as Ancient Greece, the Athenian in Plato's *The Laws* describes the condition of a "man who fills himself with drink" as "very bad indeed".[4] Hungarian writer, Sebestyén Tinódi Lantos (c. 1510–1556), in his poem *About the Many Drunkards* wrote: "Drunkards, consider your sins by which you have offended your God […] let us live with moderation and sobriety."[5] The nineteenth-century American psychiatrist, Isaac Ray, considered drunkenness to be a form of insanity,[6] and in Ann Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), the heroine, Helen Graham, bemoans her husband's frequent intoxication: "I fear he is losing the little self-command and self-respect he once possessed: formerly, he would have been ashamed to act thus".[7] No doubt we have all experienced the social discomfort engendered if a guest at a polite gathering becomes embarrassingly drunk, but from a more legalistic point of view, in the UK, there is a criminal charge for being drunk and disorderly. This is defined by Gray & Co. Solicitors as being "a person who in any public place is guilty of behaving in a disorderly manner whilst under the influence of alcohol. This means that the police can arrest you if they deem you to be creating a public disturbance whilst drunk".[8] Given the focus of this article, it is also relevant to mention that there are currently quite strict laws controlling alcohol consumption in Hungary, for example, there is a fine in Budapest for drinking in public.

Bakhtin

Nevertheless, as long as there have been alcoholic beverages there has been drunkenness. This can be historically traced in fiction – for example, Trimalchio's behaviour at dinner, described by Petronius (c. CE 65) in *The Satyricon*, not to mention John Falstaff's in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* parts one and two (c. 1597 and c. 1599). But there are some contexts in which inebriation may be absorbed into the socially acceptable, one of these being the carnival (in a particular sense of the word). Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), wrote at length on the phenomenon of the carnival, as typified by the Roman saturnalia and later medieval manifestations in which

> [t]he laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is, noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it – that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people […].[9]

Bakhtin identifies four types of carnival behaviour: a new mode of interrelationship between individuals; eccentricity; carnivalistic misalliances; and

[2] R. Monelle, *The Musical Topic. Hunt, Military and Pastoral*, Bloomington 2006, p. 30.

[3] J. Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, Cham 2020, p. 82.

[4] Plato, *The Laws*, London 1975 [360 BCE], pp. 32–33.

[5] Lantos, *About the Many Drunkards*, 1548, Tinódi Lantos Sebestyén: Sokféle részögösről (1548) (borneked.hu) (access: 12.02.2023).

[6] J. M. Quen, *Isaac Ray on Drunkenness*, "Bulletin of the History of Medicine" 1967, vol. 41, issue 4, p. 342.

[7] A. Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, London–Glasgow 1969 [1848], p. 210.

[8] Gray & Co. *Drunk and Disorderly* blog, https://www.grayandcosolicitors.co.uk/what- HYPERLINK "https://www.grayandcosolicitors.co.uk/what-happens-if-youre-convicted-of-being-drunk-and-disorderly/"happens-if-youre-convicted-of-being-drunk-and-disorderly/ (access: 18.03.2022).

[9] M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Minneapolis–London 1984 [1929], pp. 122–123.

profanation. It is the second of these, eccentricity, that concerns us here: "it permits – in concretely sensuous form – the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves".[10] Bakhtin does not mention drunkenness specifically, but in most carnival settings – and certainly in the saturnalia – eating and drinking, and concomitant drunkenness, were very much part of the day's activities. As far back as ancient Greece, "eccentricity" as a behaviour type in a carnival setting had been accepted by no less a figure than Plato who wrote: "[t]o drink to the point of inebriation is improper whatever the place (except at the feasts of the god who made us the gift of wine)".[11] And in his essay *Carnival, Creativity and the Sublimation of Drunkenness*, Marty Roth (1997) argues that there is a "widespread affirmation of the necessity and intensity of this link between carnival and intoxication".[12]

However, as time passed, there were regular attempts to curb the licentiousness of real-life carnivals which sanctioned the behaviour types described by Bakhtin. Stallybrass and White (1986) contend that "in the long-term history from the seventeenth to the twentieth century […] there were literally thousands of acts of legislation which attempted to eliminate carnival and popular festivity from European life".[13] A consequence of this, Bakhtin (1984) proposes, is that the carnival legacy has been largely preserved in literature: "From the second half of the seventeenth century on, carnival almost completely ceases to be a direct source of carnivalisation, ceding its place to the influence of already carnivalised literature".[14] As an example, Bakhtin cites Dostoevsky's short story *Bobok* in which at one point a funeral is described: "The entire description is permeated with a markedly *familiar* and *profaning* attitude toward the cemetery, the funeral, the cemetery clergy, the deceased, the very «sacrament of death» itself […] it is […] full of the *symbol-system* of carnival".[15] So by the displacement from everyday life to literary conceit, what is socially unacceptable, outside of a carnival context, becomes not only socially but also artistically acceptable. Furthermore, shorn of its societal strictures, it becomes, in the case of drunkenness, something humorous[16] – as Julia Skelly (2015) puts it, "[d]runkenness […] has frequently been represented as a source of laughter, particularly in graphic satire both historically and in the more recent past".[17] And how many comedy films – from *Carry on Regardless* (1961) to *Arthur* (1981), *Sixteen Candles* (1984) and many more – have relied on the intoxication of one of its characters to draw laughs?

BARTÓK, CARNIVAL, AND THE TOPIC OF DRUNKENNESS

So where does Bartók – a teetotaller, according to his wife[18] – fit in to this? Firstly, the focal piece of this essay is the second of his *Three Burlesques* Op. 8/c and, as *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* has it, a burlesque is "an action or performance which casts ridicule on that which it imitates […] a mockery"[19]– indicating parallels with the literisation of carnivalistic behaviour in which normal relationships and practices are inverted. Bakhtin does not discuss such behaviour as captured in music, yet there is a tradition, albeit limited. Naturally there are plenty of instances of music celebrating the consumption of alcohol (for example Purcell's drinking songs, Beethoven's *Trinklieder*, the Brindisis in Verdi's *Macbeth* and *La Traviata*, not to mention *In Taverna* from Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*.) However, the real-life praise of alcoholic drinks is not socially incorrect and requires no carnivalistic reinvention via music or any other

[10] Ibidem, p. 123.

[11] Plato, *The Laws*, op. cit., p. 210.

[12] M. Roth, *Carnival, Creativity and the Sublimation of Drunkenness*, "Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal" 1997, vol. 30, no. 2, p. 1.

[13] P. Stallybrass, A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London 1986, p. 176.

[14] M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Minneapolis–London 1984 [1929], p. 131.

[15] Ibidem. p. 138.

[16] A not dissimilar observation may be made about funerals; see for example the graveside sketch by Mel Smith and Griff Rhys-Jones, (1) Smith and Jones – Grave Sketch – YouTube

[17] J. Skelly, *The Politics of Drunkenness. John Henry Walker, John A. Macdonald and Graphic Satire*, "Canadian Art Review" 2015, vol. 41, no. 1, p. 71.

[18] D. Cooper, *Béla Bartók*, New Haven–London 2015, p. 118.

[19] *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Volume 1*, ed. C. T. Onions, London 1988 [1983], p. 254.

art form to become correct, so does not fit Bakhtin's eccentric behaviour category.

But there is also a tradition of representing the socially unacceptable side of drinking, that is drunkenness, in music. An early example of this comes in Heinrich Biber's *Battalia* (1673) for string orchestra during which there is a section called "*Die liederliche Gesellschaft von allerley Humor*" [the dissolute society with all kinds of humour] which depicts drunkenness by means of polytonality and, in some performances, the use of pitch-sliding as well (as in the recording by Ricardo Doni and Accademia dell'Annunciata). Another instance is the third movement of Mahler's Symphony No. 1, wherein the second theme has been likened by Yaakov Beasley (2020) to the music of a "drunken klezmer band":[20] and there is Malcolm Arnold's overture *Tam O'Shanter*, the opening stages of which portray the eponymous anti-hero's intoxication. Then there is the present case, the second of Bartók's *Three Burlesques* Op. 8/c which, as already mentioned, the composer heads with the words "*A Little Tipsy*".[21] Here we can see a parallel with the literisation of carnival in that in the aforementioned portrayals, drunkenness is no longer a *part* of society but is rather presented as a reflection of an undesirable aspect of society. Thus by a process of artistic transfer and amelioration, as with literature and film, drunkenness becomes both socially and artistically acceptable, presenting the recontextualised humorous aspects in a way that will entertain but not threaten the audience which is now no longer in direct contact with the source.

Can drunkenness count as a topic in music?

It was noted earlier that for topics to have any signifying power, there should be a degree of conventionality – that is the referent must have been invoked repeatedly – and some kind of history to support the idea of "signification by association".[22] In two of the cases cited earlier, signification by association is provided by the composer's own text description, so there is no problem here, because the association (or "indexicality") is specified and will be recognised by all those who know the music. This is also true of the Arnold piece which was inspired by a Robert Burns poem, about the drunkard Tam O'Shanter, which provides a programme for the music. In the case of the Mahler – and there are no doubt others – a musicologist has heard a representation of drunkenness in a piece of music and ascribed a label accordingly. These four examples, and a few others, do establish a history, albeit a rather erratic one, for the topic – but what have they got in common to enable the composers and an informed listener to arrive at the referent? I would propose that musical instability is the common factor and one that provides a certain amount of conventionality: unstable tonality in the case of the Biber; unstable rhythm and tempo in the case of the Mahler; unstable rhythm and pitch (via brass glissandos) in the opening section of *Tam O'Shanter* and instability of pulse and rhythm in the Bartók.[23] But does this give them conventionality? Clearly a listener who does not know the pieces might not, on hearing them for the first time, immediately think of inebriation (although the reference is really not hard to identify for an experienced auditor) but this is true of most topical awareness and appreciation. Even in the eighteenth century, where topic theory has often been at its most trenchant, topical listening relied on prior knowledge and education, so I would argue that the same is true of what I am calling the topic of drunkenness. It is recognised by those in the know, and is likely to spread as the music and related literature gain more traction.[24]

[20] Y. Beasley, *The BEST. Gustav Mahler: Symphonies 1–6*, "Tradition" 2020, https://traditiononline.org/the-best-gustav-mahler-symphonies-1-6/ (access: 21.03.2022).

[21] There is a Hungarian saying that drunkenness does not make any faults, it only reveals your existing ones.

[22] R. Monelle, *The Sense of Music*, Princeton–Oxford 2000, p. 80.

[23] Other examples include the Overture from Thomas Adès's *Hotel Suite* with its glissandos and erratic rhythms and, possibly, Baron Ochs's waltz *Ohne mich* from Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, with its shifting tonalities and variable tempos. Both exhibit similar traits to the examples given above.

[24] Márta Grabócz identifies "*Le grotesque*" as a topic in Bartók's music, into which category she assigns the second burlesque. M. Grabócz, *Musique, narrativité, signification*, Paris 2009, p. 263. Under this guise, one might regard drunkenness as a token of the topical type (or field) "grotesque". However, I am not identifying drunkenness as an exclusively Bartókian topic whereas both Brown (see p. 2 above) and Grabócz discuss the grotesque as it relates internally to the composer's own compositions.

Pictorial (or "iconic") topics, into which category drunkenness clearly falls,[25] have had something of an uncertain existence since Leonard Ratner first hinted at their possibility.[26] They have been embraced by some (notably Monelle) but rejected or ignored by others. Danuta Mirka's definition of topics as "musical styles and genres taken out of their proper context and used in another one"[27] does not accommodate pictorial topics because "they do not form cross-references between musical styles and genres".[28] I have argued elsewhere (2020)[29] that many standard topics such as dances and marches, inherently carry pictorial associations which are unavoidably invoked in any passages that cross-reference such topical types. In the latter instances the pictorialism is secondary, whereas with an iconic topic it is primary, the first stage of musical transfer being removed, so perhaps the two are not so very far apart. Endorsing iconic topics may be another move away from the "sharp profile"[30] of Ratner's original notion but we are now in a much more richly diverse place than we were in the 1980s when topic theory was largely confined to eighteenth-century musical "quotation" practices, a place which has greater adaptability, the potential of which continues to be explored.

BARTÓK, THE TOPIC OF DRUNKENNESS AND PERFORMANCE

How might a recognition of the drunkenness topic be reflected in performance? Earlier I cited Accademia dell'Annuciata's performance of the relevant section of Biber's *Battalia*. Here, the director Ricardo Doni adopts a fairly slow Allegro tempo and also adds short glissandos between some of the notes. The score does not require this but, by acting on a topical signal, the performers are depriving the music of a strong sense of direction and pitch precision, and the music is thereby made to sound even more "drunk" than is heard in many other accounts. In the case of Bartók's "tipsy" second burlesque, there is much more interpretative aid to hand. There is the piano score (dating from 1911), the composer's own recording, dating from 1929 and the orchestral transcription made in 1931 when it became the fourth of the composer's *Six Hungarian Pictures*.[31] By far the plainest of these sources is the solo piano score. Bartók's recording, made almost twenty years later, adds interpretative features not indicated in the latter, and many of these find their way into the orchestral transcription which, coming just two years after, may be regarded as confirmation of the composer's more mature conception of the piece. Taking these informants into account, my own interpretative approach would be twofold: to project the topic so that it is unmistakable to the initiated listener, but to preserve musical coherence at the same time. There is, after all, a pretty clear ternary design to the music which may be thought (and in performance can be heard) to underpin the pictorialism and bind the elements together. In other words, the pianist can seek to balance what Kofi Agawu (1991) has called the extroversive with the introversive elements. Agawu also suggests that "referential signs […] sustain structural procedures on a deeper level"[32] and it will become apparent, as this essay progresses, that the topical allusions described are often also structurally embedded.

Before moving on, a word about the composer's recording is due. Clearly, it has a privileged status, but does this mean that subsequent performers should seek to copy it to achieve "authenticity"? Bartók himself wrote in 1937 that "our notation records on paper the idea of the composer more or less inadequately; therefore the existence of instruments with which one can record precisely virtually every intention and idea of the composer is indeed of great importance". But in the same article, he qualified this statement

[25] Iconic topics overlap with Ratner's "style" category (L. Ratner, *Classic Music, Expression, Form, and Style*, New York 1980): "galloping horse" music (R. Monelle, *The Sense of Music*…, op. cit.) and "drunk" music conjure images to the mind by means of a particular stylistic configuration. The relationship between the two is symbiotic.

[26] L. Ratner, *Classic Music*…, op. cit., p. 25.

[27] D. Mirka, *Introduction*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Eadem, New York 2014, p. 2.

[28] Ibidem, p. 35.

[29] J. Hellaby, *Topicality in the Piano Music of John Ireland. A Performer's Perspective*, "ÍMPAR, Online Journal for Artistic Research" 2020, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 33.

[30] D. Mirka, *Introduction*, op. cit., p. 2.

[31] The *Six Hungarian Pictures* are all arrangements of earlier piano pieces which were influenced by East European folk music, suggesting that the context of the *Pictures* is rural rather than urban.

[32] K. Agawu, *Playing with Signs. A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music*, Princeton 1991, p. 51.

by writing: “the composer, when he is the performer of his own composition, does not always perform his work exactly the same way. Why? […] because perpetual variability is a trait of a living creature’s character”.[33] However, using a composer’s recording as a blueprint for authenticity would surely limit, possibly stifle, the work’s afterlife. Philosopher Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990 [1987]) invokes the term “poietic” to describe the creative process – in this case Bartók’s – and “esthesic” to describe the perceptual process – here the performer’s – stating that “the esthesic process begins at the instant the performer *interprets* the work […] the performer makes a personal selection of interpretants from the moment of the first reading of the work (i.e., he or she gives the work a meaning)”.[34] From this Nattiez deduces t performance is “the last stage of the poietic as wel the first stage of the esthesic”.[35] This suggests that recreative process is also creative and that the m copying of a sound recording involves little if any thesic acumen, any more than does a literal *Texttreue* realisation of a score (which might best be achieved by a well-programmed computer). Peter Kivy (1995) goes further when he avers that

> what bestows upon the performer the status of artist and on the performance the status of art, is the real, full-blooded possibility of the performer finding a better or at least *different* way of performing the music from the way the composer has specifically envisioned and specifically instructed. This is … what makes it the performer’s “version” of the work and not just the composer’s “version”.[36]

Of course, we can and should, with due deference, refer to and learn from the score and we can also listen to Bartók’s recording respectfully, and in our interpretations we can aim not to distort. However, as independent performers we can filter these inputs through our own processing mechanisms to discover our own preferences, our own solutions and our own ways of communicating.

[33] L. Somfai, *Béla Bartók Complete Critical Edition* (Volume 38), Budapest 2019, p. 34.

[34] J-J. Nattiez, *Music and Discourse. Towards a Semiology of Music*, Princeton 1990 [1987], p. 72.

[35] Ibidem, p. 72.

[36] P. Kivy, *Authenticities*, Cornell 1995, p. 142.

Tempo and timing

But to return to the music, apart from the contrast of key, the first big difference between the piano score and the orchestral version is the tempo. The piano score indicates an opening tempo of “Allegretto” (crotchet = 104–112), whereas the orchestral score indicates “Allegretto rubato”(crotchet = 80), and Bartók’s recorded performance broadly adopts the latter rather than the former, although as befits drunken manoeuvres, his beat is not steady.[37] The piano score does show “*rubato*” (Example 1) but it seems that Bartók felt the need to give this aspect more specificity when he recorded the piece and orchestrated it.

Example 1. Bartók, *Three Burlesques* Op. 8/c, ii, bars 1–2.

In terms of representing drunkenness (via rhythmic instability), a broader tempo allows more scope for speeding up and slowing down according to the inherent feel, or humour, of the music. In any case, inebriates do not tend to move quickly, nor are their steps steady! Many performances both pianistic and orchestral introduce regular fluctuations of beat and tempo. For example, Adam Fischer, with the Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra (1990), pulls the tempo around significantly, only loosely following Bartók’s metronome indications, and even more extreme is Edward Kilenyi’s 1940 solo piano recording, in which the pulse and many of the rhythms are unstable throughout.

The piano score does not indicate many changes of speed and where they do occur, they are not accompanied by any metronome indication, although crotchet = 104–112 allows for latitude (Example 1). The orchestral score, on the other hand, specifies quite a number of tempo shifts, many of which are accompanied by metronome marks. For example, the

[37] László Somfai provides details of Bartók’s tempo oscillations during the first ten bars. L. Somfai, *Béla Bartók, Composition, Concepts and Autograph Sources*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1996, p. 292.

rising and falling chords in bar 10 are marked "*accel. … rall.*" (Example 2) whereas the equivalent bars in the piano score carry no such instruction.

Example 2. Bartók, *Hungarian Pictures*, iv, bars 9–11.

After bar 10, the orchestral score indicates a general accelerando commencing around bar 12 where the original tempo marking of crotchet = 80 is raised to 92, thence to 104 by bar 14 and 112 by bar 16. Bartók broadly follows this in his recording, although, for example, he omits the "*rall.*" (see Example 2 above in the orchestral score) in the second half of bar 10. My own solution here is not to do a general accelerando – so I am following the piano score rather than the orchestral score or the Bartók recording – but to include small tempo fluctuations which seems to me better to reflect drunken progress, at least at this stage in the proceedings, leaving a more pronounced tumbling forwards effect to the final stages whereby both topic and structure (approaching the end) can be highlighted. However, I do follow the "*accel. … rall.*" in bar 10 and mirror this with another such in bar 13, thereby acknowledging the general "*rubato*" instruction at the top of the piano score, ensuring unsteadiness but not hurrying.

In the middle section, from bar 18 – effectively the 'B' section of a ternary design – our represented drunk apparently stops attempting to walk and starts to sing. This is suggested by a more lyrical style of writing (a singing topic if you will), the "*molto vibrato*" indication for the violins in the orchestral arrangement also providing an important clue in this regard. These snatches of song – Schiff (2020) suggests operetta – mostly come in single bars, so they really are no more than snippets. During a conference presentation, it was suggested to me that these snatches might even be invoking a religious topic, given the adjacent pitches and parallelism of the writing (Example 3) with their suggestion of plainchant.[38] It is impossible either to rule this idea in or to rule it out, but if there is some allusion to an ecclesiastical topic, then this only adds another layer to the humour of the piece, given the incongruity of drunkenness and ecclesiasticism – almost Saussurean in their binary opposedness. However the vocal passages are interpreted, they are surrounded by very non-cantabile bars marked "*ruvido*" (rudely)[39] in the piano score (though not in the orchestral one) wherein the music is in the low register, staccato, accented and plentifully decorated with acciaccaturas (see Example 3, bar 17) which creates a musical opposedness – "hiccoughs" or ruder (suggested by Schiff) versus singing.

Example 3. Bartók, *Three Burlesques* Op. 8/c, ii, bars 17–18.

As may be seen in Example 3, the vocal passage (in the piano score) is marked "*molto espr.*" which, despite the absence of a metronome mark, suggests a broader tempo and one in which a degree of rubato may be incorporated. The orchestral version indicates a reduction in tempo from crotchet = 112 down to 100. The latter is not in fact very much slower than the tempo given for the ruvido bars so it is perhaps not surprising that, in the recording by Antal Doráti and the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (1959), the tempo drops to crotchet = c. 68[40] for the vocal bars. The divergence from the composer's metronome mark is even greater in the recording by Adam Fischer and the Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra, in which the speed drops to crotchet = c. 48. In contrast to

[38] I am grateful to Professor Timothy Jones of the Royal Academy of Music, London, for this suggestion.

[39] According to László Somfai, Bartók occasionally used Hungarian words as performance directives. In bar 16 he wrote "*kicsit durván*" (a bit rudely), but most editions show "*ruvido*". L. Somfai, *Béla Bartók, Composition…*, op. cit.

[40] An online tempo tapping programme was used to determine the metronome readings.

this, Bartók, in his solo piano recording, only slightly changes the tempo, initially adopting crotchet = c. 81 although none of the vocal passages is played in a rhythmically even manner, and the later ones are taken faster. My own view is that a substantially slower tempo for the vocal snatches conveys the idea of burlesque song (be it operetta or even plainchant) better than a faster one, quite apart from offering more contrast with the ruvido bars, thus projecting the humorous opposition of hiccoughing and vocality (Video Example 1 https://youtu.be/EoIaGPw26oE). Topical awareness may also be allied to structural awareness in that the abrupt tempo shifts and espressivo manner, not heard in the 'A' sections, make audible the central episode's formal status.

At bar 30, the orchestral score marks a gradual accelerando ("*poco a poco accel.*") going from crotchet = 112 to 126 (Example 4a). The piano score merely indicates "*sempre tranquillo*" (Example 4b) pretty much in direct contravention to the orchestral instructions. Bartók follows the accelerando indication (though not the metronome suggestions) of the latter in his recording, starting at crotchet = c. 126 (so already the goal tempo of the notated passage in the orchestral score), reaching a pretty heady crotchet = c. 158 by bar 35. In my own interpretation, I favour a middle way, adopting a more moderate accelerando but avoiding a sense of "*sempre tranquillo*" which seems at odds with the rhythmically cumulative nature of the passage. However, an exponentially increasing accelerando might sound rather too organised for the topic. As mentioned earlier, it is a matter of balancing the external elements with the internal.

Example 4a. Bartók, *Hungarian Pictures*, iv, bars 29–31.

Example 4b. Bartók, *Three Burlesques*, Op. 8/c, ii, bars 28–33.

Where I do follow the orchestral score is in including a rallentando in bars 36–42. This is not marked in the piano score, but is shown in the orchestral one as "*rall. - - - al-* crotchet = 112" and then at bar 41 "*rall. - - - al* -crotchet = 88". Bartók slows down substantially from bar 37 and I also include a significant rallentando because, apart from the pictorial element, it also serves a separate function as preparation for the abbreviated recapitulation, thereby providing a structural signal. The abbreviated recapitulation starts at bar 42 with crotchet = 88 marked in the orchestral score – there is no marking in the piano score – so just a little faster than the 80 given at the start. Going at roughly the same speed as the opening (or just a shade faster), thus broadly aligning tempos and pitches, makes sense from a structural viewpoint. A steep accelerando starting at bar 42 – as if our inebriate is gradually losing control – leads to "Vivace crotchet = 144" at bar 51. Again the piano score does not carry any such indication, but in this instance I follow the orchestral score (and Bartók's recording) to create a tumbling forwards effect. As mentioned earlier, pictorially, this suggests the loss of human control but doubles up structurally as a final rush to the closing gestures of the piece. Bartók, in his recording, certainly carries out the accelerando but reaches full speed well before bar 51. Antal Doráti and the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra start the passage at crotchet = c. 80 and finish at c. 158. Adam Fischer with the Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra adopts a not dissimilar tactic although the whole passage is slightly slower starting at crotchet = c. 60 and reaching crotchet = c. 145 by bar 51, the latter an almost exact match with Bartók's indication. Starting the passage somewhat below the score's crotchet = 88

allows more scope for an effective accelerando, although the less calculated manner of the composer's performance at this point could be thought more appropriate to the topic, if perhaps musically less persuasive.

During the last few bars (52–55), the only tempo change indicated in the piano score is a pause mark over the semiquaver rest at bar 54, beat 4 and then "*poco sostenuto*" over the anacrusis into the last bar. Indeed prior to this the score indicates "*non rubato*" at bar 52, which might seem rather incongruent with the insobriety of the music. However, Bartók's recording effects a substantial rallentando, thereby following the orchestral score's "*rallentando - - - molto*" which reflects the element of instability, earlier identified as indicative of the drunkenness topic. If the final gesture (marked "Largo crotchet = 44") can be taken to represent the drunk sliding onto the ground, then this further slowing down makes pictorial sense as well as structural sense in that it betokens the end. A drunken collapse is often sluggish rather than precipitate, so I tend here to follow the orchestral "Largo" rather than the piano score's "*poco sostenuto*" indication.

Example 5. Bartók, *Hungarian Pictures*, iv, bars 1–4.

Articulation and dynamics

Turning now to articulation, the quavers at the opening in the piano score are marked staccato but with a small tenuto on the second, fourth and sixth (Example 1), whereas according to the orchestral score these offbeat quavers are marked, in the flute, oboe and clarinet parts, as slurred to the downbeat quavers (Example 5). However, in his recording, Bartók is closer to the piano score on this occasion and here I too follow the piano score and the composer's recording. I favour the lean rather than the slur because it sounds less "organised" and, in terms of mimesis, more like an irregular walk, especially when combined with an unstable beat.

Bartók plays the grace note,[41] in terms of timing, very close to the chord but for me slightly more separation of the two gives a more unstable effect and seems to me better to match the topic (Video Example 2 https://youtu.be/b_fxte5Yq9Q). In this case there is less to be learned from listening to the orchestral version as the wind instruments to some extent disguise the acciaccaturas in the violins and, in any case, such grace notes naturally have less "bite" when played by stringed instruments than they do when executed on the more percussive piano. Here one can go for a purely pianistic effect. At the recapitulation (bar 42, Example 6) Bartók plays the chords, now notated with arpeggiandos rather than acciaccaturas, quite abruptly, the spread barely noticeable, perhaps brought on partly by his steeply rising tempo which allows less scope for a more spacious spread. For me, a slower tempo allows time to roll the chords a little more broadly – and a moderate accelerando also helps here – a slower spread yielding a drunken "lolloping" effect (Video Example 3 https://youtu.be/2YaEsuPGeeY).

[41] Bartók's idiosyncratic use of grace notes here could be thought of as a development of those used in the roughly contemporaneous eighth bagatelle from Fourteen Bagatelles Op. 6, although the mood is very different.

Example 6. Bartók, *Three Burlesques* Op. 8/c, ii, bars 42–47.

The vocal snatches, mentioned earlier, heard on and off between bars 18 and 27 are, as previously stated, marked "*molto espr.*" in the piano score, and each is provided with a single phrase mark. Both indications, along with the singing-style topic, suggest a warm, super-legato delivery, probably supported by pedal. In his recording, Bartók adopts this approach to an extent, although it is certainly not "milked" for all its worth, partly because the tempo does not slow down all that much. Here I would take a cue from the orchestral arrangement in which the vocal sections are allotted to the violins playing "*molto espr e molto vibrato*" thereby maximising the contrast with the surrounding staccato, acciaccatura-laden wind parts and col legno lower string parts, the humorous effect being heightened in the process (Video Example 1 https://youtu.be/EoIaGPw26oE). So, within reason, an "over-the-top" reading of this passage in terms of contrasting articulations (as well as tempos) seems to me to be the most topically effective way of playing it on the piano (and, as noted before, serves to reinforce the ternary structure).

In the piano score, dynamic rises and falls are indicated and an initial ***mp*** level is suggested (above the stave). Also one would assume from the accented ***mf*** chord, marked at the end of bar 4, that the previous bars are quieter. The orchestral score tends to confirm the opening dynamic in that the wind and lower string parts are marked ***p*** with the muted violin parts instructed to play ***pp*** – a strategy clearly heard in Adam Fischer's orchestral performance which, presumably prompted by micro-structural considerations, also introduces some unsanctioned (but effective) dynamic shaping. Bartók, on the other hand, does not project dynamic nuances very strongly until he reaches the pronounced ***sf*** lurches (or hiccoughs) in bars 9 and 11 (Example 7) – which are also requested in the orchestral version. For the latter, these disruptive interjections are provided by the orchestration: staccato wind chords with muted horn and trumpet plus lower strings. The pianist on the other hand has to achieve the effect through an abrupt downward attack into the keyboard, and agogic manipulation in line with the rubato directive also aids the outcome – one which is very apparent in the composer's recording and one which I strive to emulate.

Example 7. Bartók, *Three Burlesques* Op. 8/c, ii, bars 9–12.

More offbeat ***sf***s appear in bars 33–35 of the piano score, whereas the orchestral version, although barred slightly differently at this point, again relies on orchestration, muted trumpet (in C) and later, horn, providing the rhythmic hiccoughs. In Bartók's recording the offbeat accents start at bar 30, earlier than indicated, and are brought out to some extent. In the interests of instability – or perhaps that should be dynamic-rhythmic instability within structural stability – I prefer to make more of them, especially as they progress, so that the innate sense of musical momentum is reinforced and the characterising element, the topic, is also highlighted.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

A possible danger of detailing a performance strategy such as the one outlined above is that the performer can become so enmeshed in the details of hermeneutic analysis, that the "big picture" is all but lost when one actually comes to play the music. This approach can perhaps be heard in Kelenyi's performance of the second burlesque, mentioned early on

in this article, in which he projects the "drunken" elements so much that the structural coherence is in danger of being dissipated. Robert Hatten (2018) warns that "a performer's attempt to point out every significant event in the music by foregrounding it through dynamics or temporal placing can lead to a depressingly didactic mode of communication".[42] In the present case, over-projection (with the possibility of sounding "didactic" or just plain absurd) could even end up weakening the music's humour. On the other hand, a performance such as Richter's (again mentioned earlier) in which the pianist sounds so intent on preserving line and direction that the comedy is all but lost, seems too severe an approach. Balancing the external pictorial elements (that is, the topics) with the internal (the music's inner coherence) appears to be key although, admittedly a little less so with a "character" piece such as the one under discussion than with, say, a classical sonata movement.

With regard to Bartók's recording, László Somfai observes that the composer's "exaggerated rhythmic freedom … has cohesion and directionality".[43] Certainly Bartók preserves musical coherence and apparently chooses, if anything, to under- rather than overplay the comic elements, which nonetheless are clearly conveyed despite the occasional reservations I have expressed. To return to the idea of carnivalisation, a performance which balances the outer with the inner processes invites listeners to join in a once-removed (or "virtual" as Hatten (2018)[44] might call it), socially sanctioned, humorous entertainment but also presents them with a musically satisfying experience. The inner and outer worlds of the music are experienced as acting in tandem through the medium of performance: the structural balances the pictorial. This would certainly be my aim.

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[42] R. Hatten, *A Theory of Virtual Agency for Western Art Music*, Bloomington 2018, p. 221.

[43] L. Somfai, *Béla Bartók, Composition, Concepts and Autograph Sources*…, op. cit., p. 293.

[44] Ibidem, pp. 1–5.

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SUMMARY

Julian Hellaby

Bartók and the Topic of Drunkenness: Theory in Performance

This article considers Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of carnivalisation (1984 [1968]), which he divides into four categories, the second of which is eccentric or inappropriate behaviour where conventionally unacceptable behaviour becomes normalised in a carnival setting. Bakhtin believed that real-life carnivalisation, as practised in ancient and medieval societies, had gradually become eclipsed by its transfer to literature, and this essay further transfers it to music. Burlesque may be regarded as a particular manifestation of the Bakhtinian carnival and the focus of this article, the second of Bartók's *Three Burlesques* Op. 8/c ("*A Little Tipsy*"), features what is here regarded as the topic of drunkenness. The carnivalisation of drunken behaviour is very much apparent in this music because outside the context of the

carnival, drunkenness is generally the object of official censure whereas within the carnival context, as processed through Bartók's music, it is rendered harmless, humorous and socially acceptable to the attentive listener. The notion of drunkenness as a topic is defended and this is followed by an examination of how best to portray it in performance – how to project the topic but without so much musical distortion that the piece's coherence collapses. There are three principal sources for the performer to consult: the piano score (1911), the orchestral score of the composer's later transcription (1931) and Bartók's own recorded performance (1929). The author negotiates between these three sources, assessing a variety of performances both orchestral and pianistic, offering a personal interpretative strategy in the process.

Keywords
Bartók, Burlesques Op. 8/c, drunkenness, performance, topics