



## Perspectives of Béla Bartók's *Mikroskosmos* for teaching

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this academic article is to demonstrate significant perspectives of Bartók's Mikroskosmos which consists of 153 progressive piano pieces in six volumes at the beginning to a certain higher degree written between 1926 and 1937. The background, objectives, and so forth will be examined in this article which indicates a method of teaching into piece in order to improve musical pupil's technical performances, and broaden their own musicianship or musical outlook in the 20th century music; in other words, the number of musical learners is able to encounter on several technical problems in style of contemporary music and modern music namely ostinato, whole-tone scale, syncopation, Irregular rhythm, pentatonic melody, chromatic invention, big dissonant tone, double counterpoint, delayed accents, mode mixture, free canon and changing meters. In consequence, Bartók's Mikroskosmos undoubtedly is one of the most essential modern piano lessons and education, especially in young children. Interestingly, there were a considerable number of music composers who were influenced by Bartók's Mikroskosmos; for instance, Inventions and Sinfonias by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), Etude by Frederic Chopin (1810-1849), Robert Schumann, (1810-1856) and even Claude Debussy (1862-1918) along with musical ideas from George Gershwin (1898-1937), and then its compositional techniques, particularly in materials from traditional peasant music in Eastern Europe or North Africa such as folk melodic and rhythmic patterns of Hungarian and Bulgarian dances including idiom of folklore tunes of Rumanian, Slovenian, Yugoslav, Ruthenian, Turkish and even Arabian origin. Furthermore, a group of music learners can become acquainted with all kinds of musical notations, all the shorthand of time signatures, key, modes and so on. Nonetheless, Mikroskosmos obviously is a combination of major/minor tonality with elements of the modes; the fact is that Bartók's Mikroskosmos combines technical skills with common practice music and modern music style. Eventually, this article will illustrate various piano skills and techniques in Mikroskosmos's, in order to aid both professional and amateur pianists who have a desire to develop their technical skills in playing this monumental work of 20th-century classical music.*

**Keywords:** Béla Bartók, Mikroskosmos, Teaching;

Béla Bartók (1881-1945), who was one of the most well-known Hungarian composers of the 20th century music, was an outstanding exponent of either contemporary classical music or modern art music; what is more, Bartók was a professional specialist in idiomatic expression of typical folk music and a music teacher, and then his own musical language used typical rhythms, modes and thematic melodies of the Hungarian origins and other genuine peasant music he studied. [1] Besides, he was not only a concert pianist, but also a distinguished ethnomusicologist, a completely nationalist, a literary academician, and even music educator; nonetheless, Bartók basically undertook research projects pertaining to traditional peasant music as a scientific discipline which focused attention on not only collection and transcription, but also a systematic classification. [2] In terms of his compositional processes, Bartók amalgamated the rustic nature of folklore materials in his modernist compositions of musical ideals. Interestingly, there is the number of composers who have acquired a profound effect from Bartók's idiomatic compositional outputs such as Benjamin Britten, Aaron Copland, Olivier Messiaen, Witold Lutoslawski, Alberto Ginastera, George Crumb, György Ligeti, and even Kálmán Oláh. [3] In particular, Zoltán Kodály, Chick Corea or Daniel Szabo; Bartók's art music of compositional techniques greatly affect several musical ideals of the 20th century's essential developments of music namely contemporary music, nationalism, jazz music, impressionism, primitivism, neoclassicism, expressionism, modern art music, and even non-Western music.

However, Bartók was desired to produce a particular modernist ideal by analyzing local folk elements of the Austro-Hungarian, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Slovak folklore music including principal materials of the German as well as French classical music, and then according to Elliott Antokoletz and Paolo Susanni in term of Bartók's music, "he arrived at this synthesis only after thorough grounding in both traditions and exposure to several modern trends." [4] In other words, Bartók's own characteristic style

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of musical compositions indicated the combination of Western classical music and local folk components to create a modernist language which are able to see into his using of neo-tonality [5]; nevertheless, Bartók never completely renounced tonal system in his creative works even though he sincerely demanded to avoid from common-practice function in his music.

Bartók began to write music at a young age that demonstrated progressive concept ideas from short character songs to longer musical works which modeled on expression of musical compositions of Johannes Brahms, Franz Liszt, Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and even Johann Sebastian Bach; moreover, Bartók faced with Richard Strauss's aesthetical tone poems in 1902, along with Claude Debussy's music idioms the following decade, and afterwards not only Schoenberg's musical language, but also Stravinsky's creative works between 1910s and 1920s that greatly stimulated Bartók's technical compositions. [6] Remarkably, in Bartók's compositional techniques of the 1920s, his characteristic style of musical language had become exceedingly dissonant or percussive sound, along with he often used innovative technique of polychords, tone-clusters, and many other sophisticated harmonic groupings; meanwhile, adopting not only ostinato, but also other primitivistic rhythmic patterns, using in fast tempo, while the rhythmic groups which were the slow movements was inclined to be either rhapsodic or impressionistic. [7]

There are some of the foremost detailed information regarding Bartók's music idioms of compositional process. According to Burkholder, Grout and Palisca, Bartók was truly interested in looking for native Hungarian music; thus, it led him to examine and collect typical musical folklore, and afterwards he generally collaborated with his close friend composer who was Kodály; in addition, it is explicit that he published roughly two thousand native Bulgarian music, Hungarian, Slovak, Serbian, Croatian, and Romanian song or dance tunes; Bartók had gathered in field investigation all around central Europe, North Africa, and Turkey.[8]

Notwithstanding, Bartók's compositional outputs of creative works mostly comprise piano pieces, approximately 436 rather than writing musical instruments.[9] As a result, a great majority of Bartók's piano compositions or works have obviously been the renowned and outstanding, preferably in from 1908 to 1937 such as *Fourteen Bagatelles*, Op.6, *Two Elegies*, Op. 8b, *Ten Easy Pieces*, *Two Rumanian Dances*, Op. 8A, *Four Dirges*, Op. 9a, *Allergo Barbaro*, *Three Burlesques*, Op. 8c, *Suite*, Op.14, *Etudes* Op.18, *Dance Suite*, *Out of Doors*, *Piano Sonata* and so forth; howsoever, there are one of the most crucial progressive piano pieces of his mature years of creative life which is *Mikrokosmos*. In fact, *Mikrokosmos* illustrates that Bartók's stylistic characteristics of several experimented compositional techniques; for instance, to adopt idiomatic materials of local peasant music which was from Eastern and Central Europe, Turkey or Northern Africa and then using tone clusters, percussive sound, polytonality or bitonality, synthetic scales (whole-tone scale and octatonic scale), sudden changes of meter, polychords, polymodalities, chromaticism, pentatonic scale, delayed accents, double counterpoint particularly in using of more dissonant sound, irregular rhythmic patterns or time signatures. Above all, *Mikrokosmos* has been applied a modern piano lesson for a number of young learners and adults throughout the world, preferably in young children including to music education, for *Mikrokosmos*'s musical systematic method demonstrates technical issues in every style of modern music as well as this procedure encounters on every technical or musical problem in every style of contemporary art music [10]; in other words, its methodical approach either develop or improve musical pupils' music techniques of performance and broaden their own pedagogical outlooks and aspects, along with comprehensive musicianship as well. Interestingly, while composing this piece, he was seriously music teacher or educator in order to greatly develop music education of system or piano teaching method for musical young children in his country which was Hungary. Nonetheless, Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* has originally aimed for the instruction of his own son, and then *Mikrokosmos* consists of 153 progressive piano techniques dividing into six volumes which were composed between 1926 and 1939; furthermore, according to K Marie Stolba concerning significant elemental and compositional process, "the 153 pieces in the series range from simple one and two-part pieces to extremely difficult works with complicated asymmetrical rhythms and bitonality; *Mikrokosmos* is a compendium of Bartók's styles and of many of compositional devices in use during the first half of the twentieth century." [11]

Significantly, *Mikrokosmos*'s idiomatic expression, musical ideal of educational compositions which direct influenced from *Inventions and Sinfonias* by Johann Sebastian Bach, *Etude* by Frederic Chopin,

Robert Schumann, and even Claude Debussy including towards musical styles of compositional outputs from Francois Couperin, George Gershwin as well as Sergei Prokofiev. [12]

Howbeit, in terms of the main purpose of *Mikrokosmos*, not only volume 1, but also 2 were devoted to Béla Peter who was Bartók's son. Additionally, these genre piano pieces normally indicate musical texture of ostinato, syncopations, and even variations on a folk tune, and subsequently they have been based on folk melodies as well as rhythmic patterns of both Hungarian and Bulgarian origin, for instance, *Song of the Fox*, *Bagpipes* or *Village joke*; remarkably, both volume 1 and 2: beginner level to display using both hands in unison at the distance of one octave or two to gradually develop the independence of the hands and fingers as well as the speed of music performance; nonetheless, in volume 3 and 4: moderate to advanced level that a group of learners, particularly children have become acquainted with all kinds of articulatory notation, all the shorthand of time signatures, keys, modes and so on; especially, the third volume has demonstrated that the register (music) of notes, which confine at first to the span of the 5 fingers for physical exercise, increased by means of replacing the hand up or down the piano. [13] Eventually, in Volume 5 and 6: professional level for aim as professionally performable concert pieces. Regarding the melodic structure of *Mikrokosmos*, it indicates that the rustic nature of peasant tunes of Hungary, Rumania, Yugoslav, Ruthnian, Bulgarian, Turkish and even Arabian origin has completely integrated with Bartók's characteristic style of modern compositions, makes the main theme in *Mikrokosmos* unusually interesting, along with to apply of irregular sets of bars in the thematic melody. In addition, Bartók sincerely aspired a group of musical learners to greatly develop methodical characteristics of several unique and innovative piano techniques from a large majority of these pieces; to illustrate, they encounter with sophistication of polyphonic idioms, double counterpoint, mirror technique, stretto, diminution, and even augmentation as well as irregular time signatures or rhythmic language from volume 5 or 6.

Concerning to *Mikrokosmos's* distinguished legacy for music education; Chick Corea's [14] own *Children's Songs* were influenced by Bartók's 153 progressive piano pieces; for instance, to contain exhilaratingly complicated and the Austro-Hungarian peasant rhythms so that musical learners develop skills of piano performances, or gain a body of musical knowledge; Corea greatly intended the music to express simplicity as beauty, as indicated in the spirit of a young children. [15]

In conclusion, *Mikrokosmos's* methodical approaches in music not only desire much technical ability from musical students, but also a test of the speed of their own comprehensive musicianship or mental reactions; furthermore, a systematic method is provided them to develop those reactions, and then *Mikrokosmos* is thereby able to give valuable for young children as well as music lovers who are whether professional or amateur. Ultimately, a considerable number of pupils who desire to learn *Mikrokosmos's* musical beauty will definitely obtain deeper insights not only into Bartók's musical language of artistic aesthetics, but into the elemental structure of all modern music or contemporary classical music which displays piano teaching methods in education from the beginning to a certain higher degree.

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- [11] K Marie Stolba, *The Development of Western Music a History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Wm. C. Brown Communications, 1994), 613.
- [12] David Yeomans. *Bartok for Piano* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 118.



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- [13] Ameringer, Ameringen and Goddard, "Teaching," 32.
- [14] Corea (1941-), he is regarded as one of the most prolific American composers and recording artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century music.
- [15] Timothy Judd, "Bartók's Surprising Influence on Jazz," Accessed March 5, 2018, <http://thelistenersclub.com/2017/10/27/bartoks-surprising-influence-on-jazz>