

83 Romanian Dances for 2 Violas

**Melodies Transcribed by
Béla Bartók**

**Arranged and Edited by
Fred Sherry**

LUDWIG *Masters*
PUBLICATIONS

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Preface

Fred Sherry has done it again! This new book is devoted to selections from Béla Bartók's transcriptions of 809 Romanian instrumental melodies. It is a student/teacher book, an entertainment for cello enthusiasts, and a romp for any two instruments. Sherry clearly stated that he was aware of these melodies for a number of years before he tracked down the manuscripts to their home at Columbia University's Butler Library. It was there that Jennifer B. Lee offered encouragement and allowed Sherry to see Bartók's vellum manuscripts which were still held together with the original tape.

In a telephone interview, Sherry complained about the amount of time spent poring over the material, but his voice softened as began to talk about the joy of transcribing the dance tunes for two cellos. His tone then morphed into a kind of religious fervor as he described Bartók's magnificent work and his assertion that these melodies are "an enticing and important part of music history." Sherry confessed that the titles were derived from free association; a few are autobiographical. The dedications are his way of thanking people past and present for what they had done or not done to help him.

—Esmeralda Katz, Buenos Aires

Introduction to Béla Bartók

You are invited to meet Béla Bartók the ethno-musicologist. Perhaps you are thinking, "No! He is a composer." Yes! He is a great composer, and he also spent a good portion of his life studying folk music in Eastern Europe, Turkey, and Algeria. Bartók was born in an area that is now part of Romania, thus it is not surprising that the Romanian folk music attracted him so deeply that the essence of this music, and sometimes the melodies, crept into his compositions. Bartók's commentary is unexpected; "We may take over a peasant melody unchanged or only slightly varied, write an accompaniment to it and possibly some opening and concluding phrases. This kind of work would show a certain analogy with Bach's treatment of chorales." He did not mention that 200 years before Bach, Martin Luther and Johann Walter made arrangements of well-known tunes from their time. Many of these Lutheran melodies were reharmonized by Bach.

It should be remembered, based on what we know today, that these Romanian melodies had never been written down before Bartók's time, and this brilliant musician lamented that he could never capture all the subtleties of pitch, rhythm, and phrasing with standard notation. He observed that there were very few literate people in the remote villages that he visited, and unlike its neighbor, Hungary, Romania was not integrated into the rest of Europe. Bartók understood the importance of education, but he remarked that urban civilization would spell the end of the unspoiled nature of this folk music which had been handed down along with the dances from generation to generation. If you are curious, you can listen on YouTube to the scratchy sound of a few of Bartók's Edison cylinders recorded 1908–1917 with the help of Martha Ziegler and Jenő Deutsch. No wonder the task of notating the songs was so difficult. (B.B. liked the Edison cylinders because he could slow them down in order to hear more details.) I recommend, also on YouTube, that you listen to Bartók's elegant piano playing.

What I Did and Didn't Do

I started by hearing the tunes in my head or whistling them. Then I got serious and whittled down the 809 melodies to a list of 83; a few were used twice, in transposition or variants. What follows is a brief explanation of what was done to “fix” Bartók’s original work.

After studying the melodies I began to change keys (they are not really in keys), registers, occasionally time signatures, and in a few cases, pitches, in order to make the music work for two instruments. Then, from Bartók’s impeccably written (in English) preface to the melodies, I followed his description of how the tunes were performed, and studied his own arrangements for solo piano. The next step, the long one, was writing the introductions, accompaniments, and codas. I then played them over and over, sometimes with Michael Nicolas, to weed out mistakes and sharpen the accompaniments. Finally, the dynamics were added.

The instruments that Bartók heard were violin, two different flutes, bagpipes, alpenhorn, and jew’s harp. Most often I chose violin pieces, but some flute pieces were too good to pass up. Bartók wrote about the tendency of violinists to touch an adjacent string, the differences of the same melody played by various musicians, and the fancy tricks of Hungarians who adopted some of the Romanian tunes. This information led me to question some of the bent notes, double stops, and rhythmic irregularities. Many of the dance melodies are short; I imagined, after looking at Bartók’s diagrams of the dances, that the music was designed to be repeated in order to accommodate the duration of the dance. I added repeats, and so can you.

This music defies common practice harmonies. The tunes are modal: mainly Dorian, Lydian, and Aeolian. In some cases, for example *La Chitarra* and *Big Waves*, I opened up Bartók’s transcriptions to my pencil; in *Slow Dance* and a few others I filled in spaces between notes for my own enjoyment. When choosing fingerings, stick to low positions and open strings whenever you can. I indicated bowings with an old-fashioned sensitivity to up and down bows. The accompaniments are meant to augment the melodies, not cover them; they are based on my understanding of the tunes and knowledge of Bartók’s music. About half of the metronome marks cited in this book are the super-sensitive ones that are listed in Bartók’s manuscripts; in the $\frac{7}{16}$ and $\frac{5}{16}$ dances he gave the speed of the 16th notes. The other metronome marks are mine. They suggest an area of tempo (not specific). I chose them to match my impression of the character of the music. Practicing with a metronome is not a good idea, but okay when the mechanical beat is used sparingly.

The dances have been divided into 8 suites which I thought of as performance material, and they are graded from simple to more complex. The suites were organized with variety of texture, “key,” and length in mind.

Performance Tips

ATTENTION PLEASE: These spirited dances are not etudes; do not drain them of all life by too much practice. And you don't need a license to change the ornaments, dynamics or repeats. I would be surprised if you didn't get hooked by this music after playing it.

1. The bar lines are there for convenience of reading, and are not meant to be inflected in a "classical" music style. Instead, try to internalize a lightly accented style of playing which suggests a dance. Search for a mode of playing that fits with your imagination; and you might want to experiment with a variety of tempos. When preparing to play, look at the key signature and time signature, take a breath in tempo, and go.
2. Pretend you are playing for real dancers. They need strong rhythm. Play *tempo giusto* with clear and precise bowstrokes.
3. If you don't like the suggested metronome mark, choose one that fits the character of the music as you understand it.
4. Don't automatically follow the dynamics, fingerings, and bowings. You might find solutions that are better; again, try to use open strings and remember that some care was taken to establish the editorial markings.
5. The introductions either anticipate the dance, or are meant to portray the opposite mood.
6. You can repeat phrases or sections of these melodies, but don't make a mess of the flow. Sometimes I like to change the repeats: the change makes life more interesting. (Bartók did not address the subject of repeats.)
7. Switching parts between Viola 1 and Viola 2 at cadences or repeats is entertaining.
8. The upper line can be played by another bass or treble clef instrument instead of viola, and Viola 2 can be played by a bassoon, contrabass, trombone, or baritone sax.

Bonus

Here are elements of playing you can strengthen by learning these melodies:

- A. Appreciation for open strings (especially the A string)
- B. Learning to master rhythms of 5 and 7
- C. The ability to bend notes convincingly
- D. Improving ensemble sensitivity
- E. Treasuring simplicity

Table of Ornaments, Signs, and Symbols

Bartók's manuscript of the tunes uses two sizes of noteheads, the normal size, and small noteheads which "are sung with less intensity." I did not use these but tried to indicate them with dots, dashes, and accents.

Ornaments can be confusing: they are difficult to explain, not consistently understood, and often misunderstood. I think of them as the equivalent of Christmas tree decorations, earrings, ribbons, wind chimes, pendants.

Music is flexible and so are ornaments; they should feel good to you whether played on the beat or before the beat. If your response to them is negative, you can change or delete them.

Bartók suggests the Romanians knew no other songs but those (like the ones in this book) that were centuries old. His description of the ornaments reminds me of Bach's table of ornaments in the W.F. Bach Notebook.

Below are the ornaments and symbols you will find in this book.

—Fred Sherry

B.B., the sign or is played in the same manner as the fully notated version.

<p>sustain a little</p>	<p>hold longer</p>	<p>a short or "catch breath," not a break in continuity</p>	<p>hammer on</p> <p>See "Baby Steps" for examples.</p>	<p>Bartók left hand pizz. or snap pizz. thumb position</p> <p>See "La Chitarra" for examples.</p>
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<p>separate from the next note</p>	<p>smooth</p>	<p>accent</p>	<p>heavy attack</p>	<p>"bow vibrato" executed with a wavy wrist</p>	<p>ricochet bow starts from above the string and "bounces"</p>
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slightly sharp

slightly flat

(not necessarily a 1/4 tone)

Play 4 notes in the space of 3

or

or

*in memoriam Luciano Berio***Chasing the Cat**

♩ = 112

Intro

tap the left rib

pizz.

to Manny and Yoko Ax
Is It True, Is This True?

$\text{♩} = 80$
Intro

$\text{♩} = 80$
Melody

f Is it true, is this true?
 p meditative

$\text{♩} = 96$
Fine

mf
 p leggiero

6

11

16

21

f
 mf
 p

\oplus = damp with left hand

D.S.