Analysis and Performance: A Study in *Contrasts*

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The word "contrasts" in the title is meant to have multiple implications. While the focus of this essay is an analysis of the first movement of Bartók's *Contrasts*, the approach will underline the fundamental differences between theorists and performers when it comes to the application of analysis to performance.[1] The type of analysis that is truly relevant to performers is often different from the general theoretical analysis, as a recent essay by George Fisher and Judy Lochhead points out.[2] These authors suggest that a performer's analysis (or "piece-driven analysis") and a theorist's analysis (or "theory-driven analysis") are fundamentally different, and that perceptually-based relations are the most relevant to the performer.[3] In a pivotal article, Janet Schmalfeldt hints at this same problem, but solves it by creating a dialogue between performer and theorist, hence encouraging communication between differing points of view.[4] She further states that the mode of analysis with the most appeal and value to performers is one which presents a *dramatic* view of formal and motivic processes:

> The Analyst's interpretation of formal structure in terms of dramatic action attempts to capture the

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[1]For a bibliography on the topic of analysis and performance, see Cynthia Folio, "Analysis and Performance of the Flute Sonatas of J.S. Bach: A Sample Lesson Plan," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 5/2 (Fall 1991):154-159.

[2]George Fisher and Judy Lochhead, "Analysis, Hearing, and Performance," *Indiana Theory Review* 14/1 (1992):1-36.

[3]Ibid., 2.

[4]Janet Schmalfeldt, "On the Relation of Analysis to Performance: Beethoven's Bagatelles Op. 126, Nos. 2 and 6," *Journal of Music Theory* 29/1 (1985):1-32.

> active, diachronic experience of the performer. And though the metaphor of the rivalry and ultimate confrontation of ideas may seem highly subjective, it speaks directly to the performer's need to find the character of the work within its structure.[5]

The purpose of this essay is to present a performer's analysis of the first movement, "Verbunkos" ("Recruiting Dance"), of Bartók's *Contrasts* (1938).[6] Instead of beginning with theoretical questions to see whether details of the analysis can be somehow realized in performance,[7] I will follow several musical narratives through the movement as they develop through time. This analysis, combined with historical information, autograph sources,[8] and recordings of the work,[9] will provide support for interpretive decisions.[10]

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[5]Schmalfeldt, 18.

[6]Bartók, *Contrasts* for violin, clarinet, and pianoforte (London: Boosey & Hawkes, copyright 1942). Early edition: B. Ens. 49-73; recent edition: B. & H. 18756.

[7]Unfortunately, this is the approach that Wallace Berry takes, even though his preface states that he will do the opposite, in *Musical Structure and Performance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). See the review of *Musical Structure and Performance* by Steve Larson and Cynthia Folio in *Journal of Music Theory* 35 (1991):302.

[8]Photostats of the first sketch (catalog number 77Fss1; 15 pages) and final copy (77FSFC1; 18 pages) of *Contrasts* are located in Bartók Records, P.O. Box 399, Homosassa, FL, 34487. All references in this article will refer to these two autograph copies, along with the page number in parentheses.

[9]The earliest recording of *Contrasts* can be especially valuable for the performer since the three artists include the composer and the two individuals who commissioned the piece (Benny Goodman and Joseph Szigeti). Although it would be senseless to try to duplicate all aspects of this recording, it can be used as a resource.

[10]Although usually only one interpretation is suggested from the analysis of a particular area, I do not mean to imply that this is the only possible interpretation. As Schmalfeldt concludes, "*there is no single, one-*

After a brief introduction of the musical "plots," I will present an analysis of the movement, along with performance suggestions.

I

Although both the general title, *Contrasts*, and the movement title, "Verbunkos," suggest a general character and, perhaps, some specific characteristics, the piece itself is not programmatic. However, the performance of any work (whether programmatic or not) is a dramatic event, most obviously because it takes place in time. Fisher and Lochhead recommend an analytic approach that reflects this:

> In keeping with this perceptual basis, [analysis] will also favor those strategies that take explicit account of music's temporal unfolding. These may include both drama and narrative, in which the events of a composition are conceived as progressing chronologically from beginning to end. They may also include accounts in which events are perceived, retained, or projected in the listener's experience of the piece in more complex ways.[11]

The interpersonal quality of music is intensified when the piece requires multiple performers because there is always an interaction among the musicians, each of whom has a unique personality. (In the case of *Contrasts*, the original three performers were close friends.) This does not imply that the analyst should invent a program external to the music. Instead, the "story" naturally emanates from the musical transformations, and can be based solely on musical findings. These transformations become a metaphor for life

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and-only performance decision that can be dictated by an analytic observation" (Schmalfeldt, 28; italics in original).

[11]Fisher and Lochhead, 7-8.

experiences. Several conflicts and narratives clearly unfold in this movement:

1. The conflict represented by the tritone interval, particularly A and D♯. This manifests itself at many levels, from the small motive to large-scale tonal areas. A secondary conflict occurs between the pitch centers of A and C.

2. The gradual appearance of the "major-minor" tetrachord (e.g., A-C-C♯-E) as a motive and its climactic combination to form more complex structures. One might say that this sonority is itself schizophrenic, embodying the conflicts of major *versus* minor and consonance *versus* dissonance.

3. The reinterpretation of the traditional sonata-allegro form in a way that incorporates surprise and humor. The form is a kind of hybrid between A B A' and sonata, creating some confusion for the listener. This conventional organizing principle also contrasts directly with the use of folk-like themes.

4. The use of the circle of fifths (although in an unconventional way) to create harmonic direction. This tonality-affirming interval coexists with the tonality-destroying tritone.

5. Sequential transposition by whole step to create direction and structural unity.

Since the above "plots" are all interwoven from beginning to end (much like the interaction of characters and plots in a novel or play), I will not attempt to separate them, but will instead organize the analysis by beginning with the general framework and then working toward more specific details.

II

We shall begin with one of the greatest concerns of most performers: the general shape of the piece. Is there a single climax or structural point? Surface features point to several possible regions where energy is particularly focused. The piano's glissandi in mm. 45-54 make this section particularly exciting. The highest note in the clarinet (A♭) occurs at the beginning of m. 51, while the violin reaches its climax (C) on the last beat of m. 53, where the loudest dynamics also appear.

Before determining the shape, we must consider the enigmatic form of this movement. Is it essentially a sonata-allegro form? While a ternary form is evident (see Figure 1), Bartók seems to be playing with us: the recapitulation immediately assumes the characteristics of a development. Is this section a return, or is it a development section?[12] No matter which interpretation we choose, it is evident that m. 57 is the most important structural point of the piece, marking the beginning of a quasi-recapitulation and the return of the note A as pitch center (although combined with C–more on this later). As Lendvai points out, the exact point of return (the middle of m. 57) divides the movement into its golden section proportion.[13]

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[12]Various references to this work by Bartók scholars reveals a multiplicity of interpretations: Ernö Lendvai refers to m. 57 as the recapitulation in *Béla Bartók: An Analysis of His Music* (Humanities Press, 1971), 18; János Kárpáti calls this area a development in "Alternative Structures in Bartók's *Contrasts*," *Studia Musicologica* 23 (1981):204; Paul Griffiths refers to the movement as a ternary form in *Bartók* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1984), 162; László Somfai calls it A-B-A trio structure, but notes the developmental nature of the final A section, stating that it is "typically Bartókian in its complete transformation of meaning and form" in his program notes for the compact disc *Béla Bartók*, Hungaroton HCD 31038.

[13]Lendvai, 18. There are 93 measures; 93 multiplied by .618 (the so-called "golden section") equals 57.5. Lendvai proposes that Bartók's works often climax at a point that coincides with the golden section proportion.

A		B		A'		Coda
				Recap./Dev't		Cadenza
I	II	I	II	I	II	III
1-17	18-29	30-44	45-57	57-71	72-84	85-93

Figure 1. Diagram of Form

Traditionally, the retransition is the most tension-packed area of a composition in sonata form. In this quasi-sonata, the section that precedes the return (mm. 45-57) functions as retransition, supporting the idea that it is the formal climax of the piece. We shall see whether an investigation of harmonic events in the piece supports this premise.

Two primary narratives of the piece combine in this important section. These narratives are built around a motivic process, based on two different but related four-note motives (see Example 1): the major triad plus flatted fifth, which sets up a polarity between A and D♯ (motive a); and the major triad plus flatted 3rd, or major-minor tetrachord (motive b). The latter motive usually appears as shown in this example–in a symmetrical distribution of intervals 3-5-3 (ascending or descending). This structure is known by several other names: as one variation of the "alpha chord,"[14] or set-class 4-17[0347],[15] or what Kárpáti refers to as "alternative structures."[16] I will sometimes refer to the first motive by its "root" and tritone (such as A/D♯) and to the second motive by its "root" plus "Mm." It is surely more than coincidence that the flat third and flat fifth are two blue notes in jazz and

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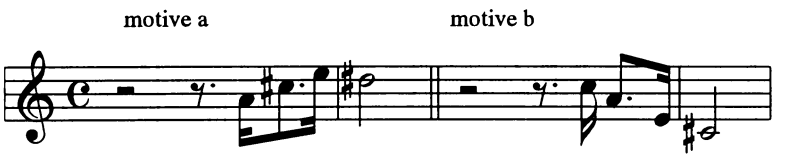
[14]Lendvai, 42.

[15]For an explanation of this nomenclature, see Allen Forte, *The Structure of Atonal Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

[16]Kárpáti, 201-7.

that Bartók was writing the piece for a jazz clarinetist.[17] Although Bartók was not fluent in the jazz idiom, aspects of the jazz style and harmonic language certainly resonate in this piece.

Example 1. Primary motives



The tritone skeleton of motive a (usually expressed as the pitch-classes A and D♯) is dramatized throughout the work at various structural levels. It is first introduced at the beginning with a whole-tone descent from a D♯-major triad to an A-major triad in mm. 1-2 (see Example 2).[18] The clarinet enters in m. 3 with motive a, initiating the first theme, a lydian-mixolydian melody (with A as the pitch center and D♯ as the lydian element). While A is the pitch focus for the beginning and end of the movement, the section from mm. 48-56 features a pronounced pedal D♯ in the bass, supporting D♯ Mm; D♯ acts as the "counterpole" to A for an overall structure of A-D♯-A.[19]

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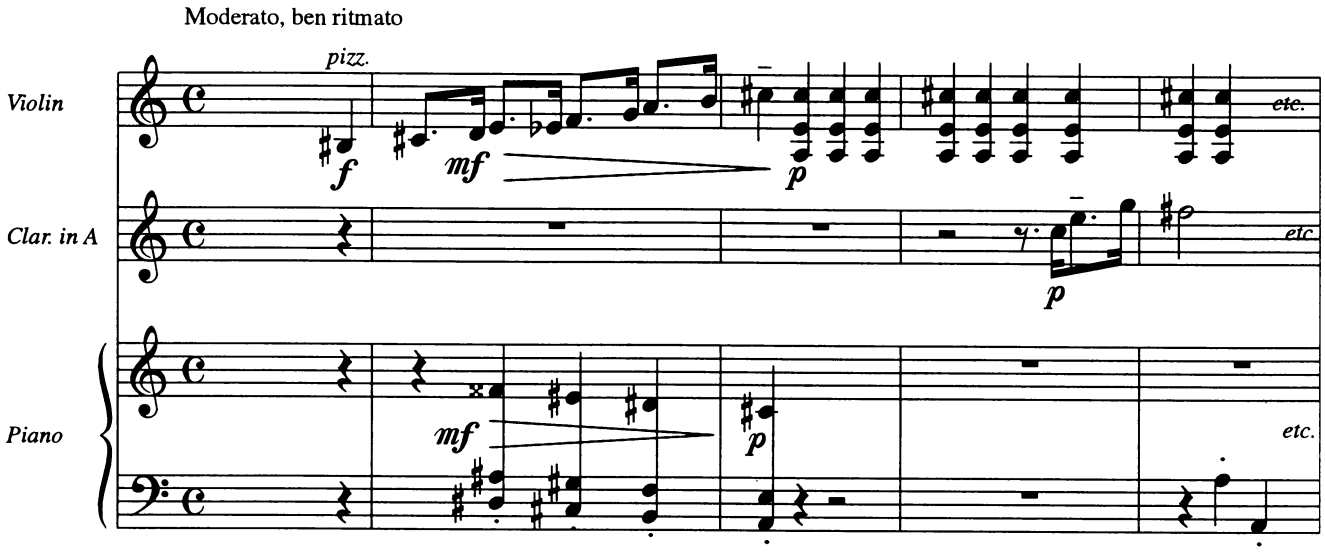
[17]These two blue notes occur most commonly in jazz over dominant seventh quality chords. The flatted third is usually labeled ♯9, while the flatted fifth is ♯11.

[18]Although I say this motive is first introduced in mm. 1-2, it does not imply that these two measures were written first; mm. 1-2 were most likely added later, since the first sketch begins at what is now m. 3; the first two bars are added in the final copy.

[19]This climax on D♯ in a movement that centers on A is reminiscent of the first movement of *Music for String Instruments, Percussion, and Celeste* (1936); Lendvai discusses this pole/counterpole relationship as a structural principle in all four movements of the latter work (Lendvai, 4-5).

Example 2. Measures 1-4



Motive b emerges much more gradually (first in the violin mm. 18-20 and the clarinet mm. 20-22), becoming most prominent in the passage from mm. 65-68, where it takes over completely. The Mm motive emerges in the climactic section (mm. 45-57), first as a three-note set (C-D♯-E) in the piano,[20] evolving into the complete four-note set in m. 49 (D♯-F♯-G-B♭, or "D♯ Mm"), and combining with A Mm at the most climactic moment on the fourth beat of m. 53 (see Example 3a). This combination of A Mm and D♯ Mm expresses the A-D♯ polarity.

When two Mm chords are combined at the distance of a tritone (as in m. 53), they form the octatonic scale.[21] When they are combined at the distance of a major third, they form another symmetrical set-class, 6-20[014589]–the so-called "magic" hexachord. Bartók exploits this property in the final measures of this section, a kind of *tour de force* in which five different Mm chords appear in *several directions simultaneously* (see Example 3b): D♯ Mm plus G Mm (in the piano) forms set-class 6-20[014589] (labeled "magic"), while F Mm (violin and first two notes of the clarinet), A Mm (violin and last two notes of the clarinet), and C♯ Mm (melody in clarinet only) combine in pairs to form 6-20. The combination of the two complementary "magic" hexachords, in turn, forms an aggregate, so that these final three bars of the retransition create a maximized level of tension just before the return.[22]

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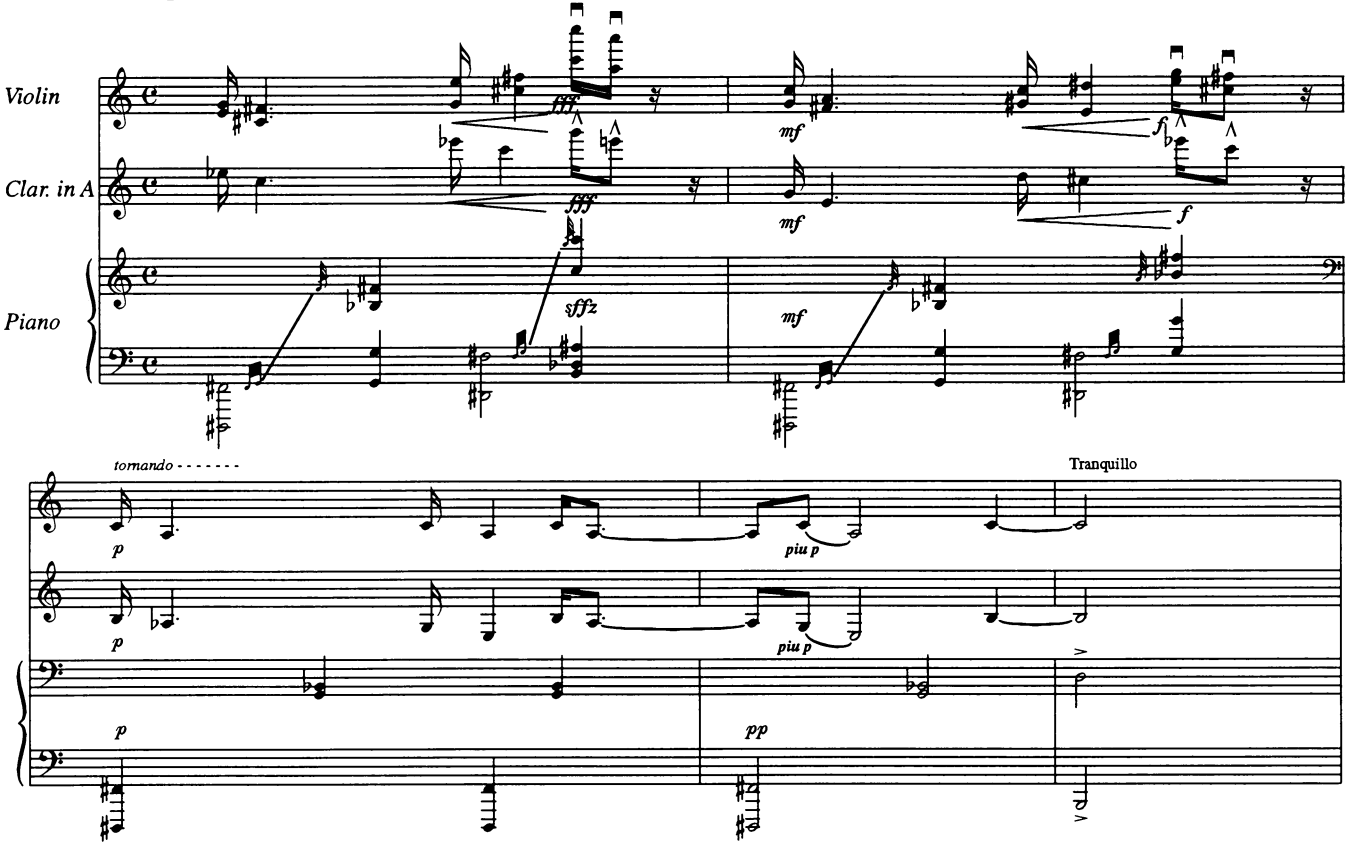
[20]I am considering the fixed boundary pitches, but excluding the glissandi.

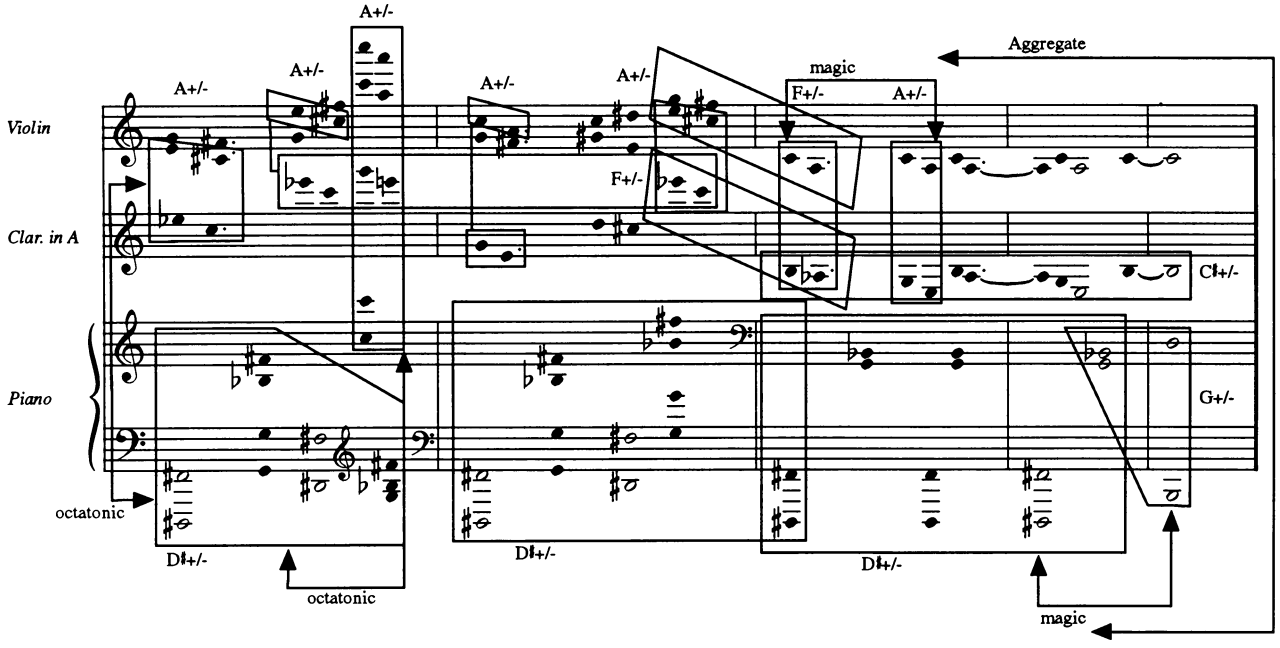
[21]For a theory of how Bartók combines several transpositions of small sets to form larger structures, see Richard Cohn, "Inversional Symmetry and Transpositional Combination in Bartók," *Music Theory Spectrum* 10 (1988):19-42.

[22]Bartók used this same process of combining Mm chords to form larger symmetrical sets in *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*, written only one year earlier (1937). For a detailed discussion of this see Richard Cohn, "Bartók's Octatonic Strategies: A Motivic Approach," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44/2 (1991):279-97.

Example 3a. Measures 53-57



Example 3b. Analysis of measures 53-57



It is interesting to note that in the first sketch (p. 3), Bartók wrote the notes B♭-A in the clarinet (concert G-F♯) on the fourth beat of m. 53, but crossed them out; the present G-E dyad (concert E-C♯) appears on a hand-written staff above (Example 4).[23] Perhaps Bartók changed the clarinet pitches to enhance the sense of climax (through higher register), or to make them fit into the intricate pitch-class network just described. Bartók originally wrote E-C♯ in the lower part of the violin double stop as well.

The analysis of this retransition suggests a number of possible performance implications. The climactic character of this whole section calls for a careful choice of tempo at Tempo I (m. 45). Although no tempo changes are indicated within this section, I suggest a slight acceleration into and/or space before m. 49 (at the appearance of motive b), at m. 51 (the registral peak of this phrase), and in the middle of m. 53 (the harmonic, registral, and dynamic climax of the movement). Although Bartók notates pauses only in the clarinet part before beats 3 and 4 of m. 53, all instruments should observe them, making the second one (before beat four) even longer than the first. The *fff* dynamics, downbow indications, and accent marks should be followed–perhaps even exaggerated.[24]

Another consideration for performers is the necessity of making motive b clear whenever possible: the clarinetist could phrase the F Mm and C♯ Mm separately; the pianist should articulate the main notes clearly and clear the pedal so that motive b is not hidden by the glissandi. The piano's dyad on the downbeat of m. 57 completes set-class 6-20[014589] (and, consequently, the aggregate), thus creating a cadence; the notes must therefore be clearly articulated. Observe that

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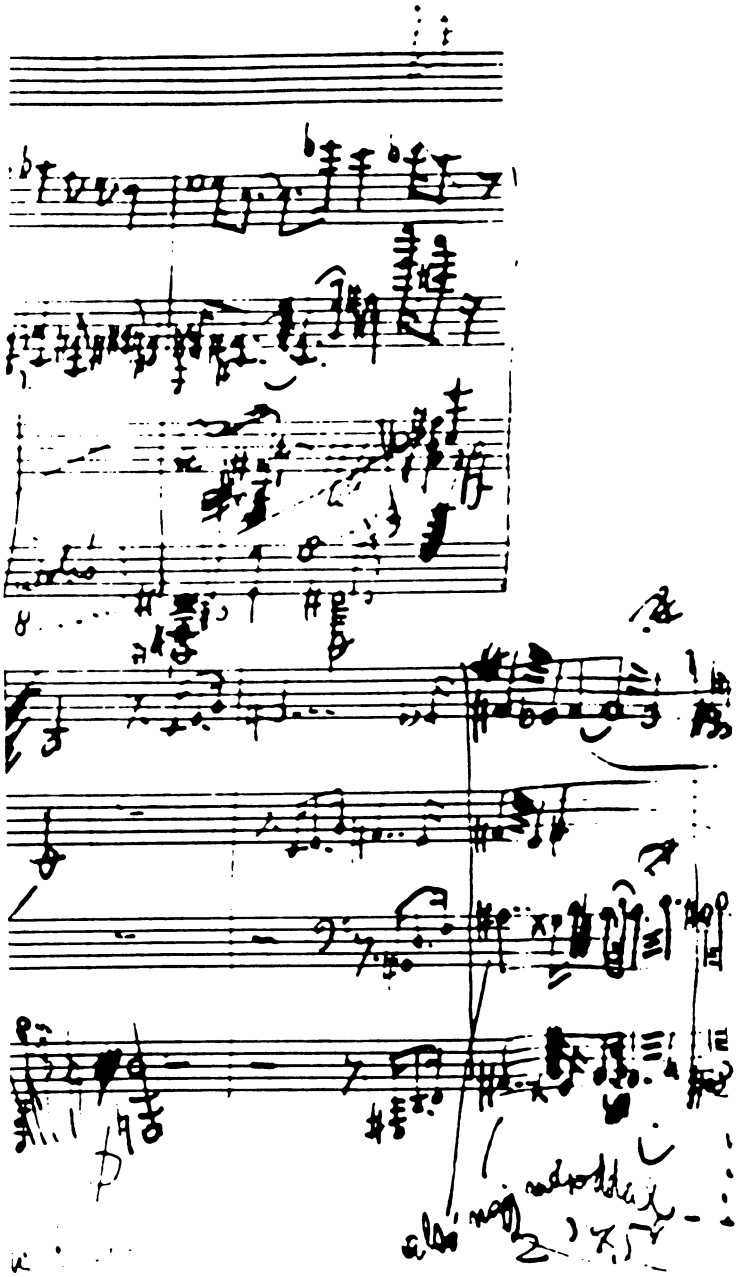
[23]Note that Bartók reversed the clarinet and violin lines in his sketches.

[24]Berry frequently observed that the analysis often simply reinforces the composer's instructions ("To draw conclusions for performance is largely to verify the composer's abundant directions." Berry, 110).

Example 4. Sketch of measure 53



Bartók writes accents on these notes, despite the *pp* dynamic marking. This cadence should be followed by a full 3/4 beat of notated silence before the clarinet enters.

III

Having discussed the form and shape of the movement, I shall trace other examples of the A/D♯ polarity and ways in which the performers might project the conflict in this movement.[25] I already mentioned the opening piano gesture, which outlines four parallel triads descending in whole steps from D♯ major to A major. The pianist might wish to stress the first and last chords slightly (within the diminuendo, of course) and play the bass notes somewhat louder to accentuate this root movement. A second example is the entire first theme (mm. 1-14), which outlines a movement from A to E♭ and back to A. The peak of the notated crescendo occurs in m. 10, with a clear arrival on an E♭-major triad. The return to A in m. 11 is sudden and requires a quick diminuendo. Again, Bartók's notated dynamics make this clear–the performers need only carry out the instructions. The piano simply provides support in mm. 4-14, doubling the lowest note of the violin most of the way. It is even left out altogether in the first sketch (p. 1). The pianist should remain in the background until m. 15.

The second part of the A' section illustrates another large-scale projection of the A/D♯ tritone. The piano line progresses from the note A toward an almost-achieved goal of E♭ in a way that creates a tremendous amount of momentum. The piano begins with motive a, outlining A to D♯–a diminution of

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[25]Ideally, we should consider this and other aspects in the context of the entire work, but such an analysis exceeds the scope of this paper. Performance decisions would certainly reflect observations about intermovement relationships. For instance, the A/D♯ tritone plays an especially prominent role in the scordatura tuning of the violin in the last movement.

what will take place from here to m. 85. Each phrase begins on A, sequences the motive through the circle of ascending fourths, reaches a dynamic and registral peak, and concludes with a descent through parallel seventh chords. Each new phrase takes us one step further along the circle (see Example 5). The fourth phrase (mm. 80-81) accelerates the pace of "root" movement while simultaneously decreasing the tempo by changing the dotted rhythm to sixteenth-notes. This increased momentum, however, is not enough to propel the sequence beyond B♭: the piano never attains the apparent goal of E♭ (or D♯). The note does, however, appear in both the clarinet and violin parts on the downbeat of m. 81.

As if to emphasize this frustration, Bartók incorporates a musical joke at this point: the clarinet and violin play the prototypical $\hat{5}$-$\hat{1}$ cadential figure off the beat in C and B at the same time (see Example 6). (Bartók writes "(sic!)"[26] under the clarinet part just to let us know his "mistake" is intentional!) Additionally, Bartók exploits the contrasting timbres of the violin and clarinet: separated by two octaves during the third phrase, the two instruments switch places in the fourth phrase so that the clarinet is on top. The clarinet's unnaturally strained sound emphasizes the humorous and climactic nature of the fourth phrase. The fifth phrase provides relaxation through a chromatic descent to the cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ in m. 53; this A-major $\frac{6}{4}$ launches the clarinet cadenza and provides another humorous flirtation with tonal references.

An awareness of the ascending fourths motion toward an almost-achieved goal should help the performers shape this section. There should be some distance between successive phrases (the boundaries of which are clearly delineated by contour, dynamics, and meter changes)[27] as well as a feeling

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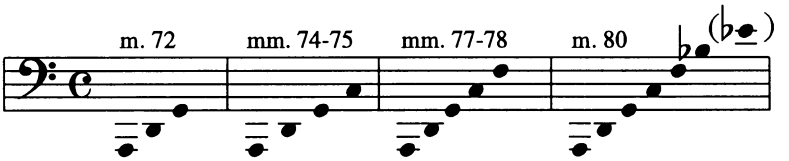
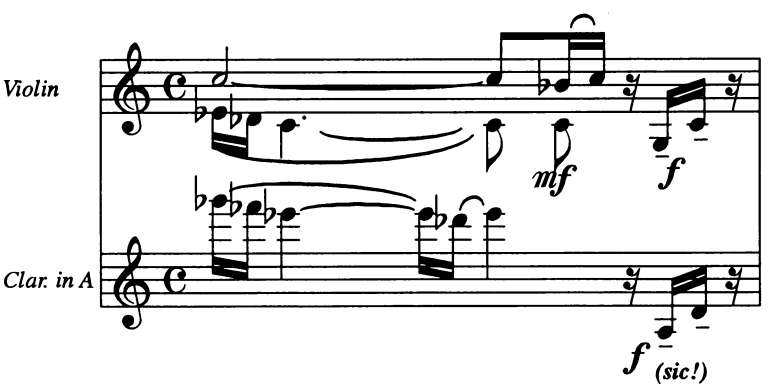
[26]This "(sic!)" appears also in Bartók's first sketch (p. 5) and final copy (p. 5).

[27]Bartók extensively rebarred this section in his first sketch (pp. 4-5) in a way that makes the phrasing more clear. His first inclination was to

Example 5. Circle of fifths, measures 72-80 (piano)



Example 6. Measure 81 (violin and clarinet)



of beginning again each time (especially in the piano, which always begins at *pp* or *p*). The peak of this section, coinciding with Bartók's joke at the end of m. 81 should be played with great gusto, and the dissonance should be exaggerated, perhaps by widening the semitone distance. In some recordings, this dissonance is not heard, either because the two notes are too close in pitch or because they are masked by the piano.[28] A slight pause just before the beginning of the next phrase is also an effective way to underscore the humor.

The A/D♯ polarity is again prominent in the last nine bars of the piece, which include the clarinet cadenza. The piano signals the start of the cadenza with a clear parody of a traditional cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ chord in m. 85, complete with proper doubling of the bass note (see Example 7). The pianist can make this chord more effective by prolonging the silence before it, rolling the chord extra slowly (with dramatic flair!), exaggerating its staccato articulation, and purposely muddying its already low voicing.

This A-major $\frac{6}{4}$ is followed immediately by motive a, beginning on A and ending on D♯, providing a connection to the E♭-major triad in the violin. From here, through the entire cadenza and through the last bar of the movement, the clarinet orbits around concert D♯. Note that the long run in the middle of the cadenza begins on a low D♯ and features quintuplets that each outline a tritone. Since the first tritone outlined is D♯/A, the clarinetist might linger a bit at the bottom to bring this out. When the violin and piano re-enter in m. 89 with material from the opening, it is apparently in the wrong key. This passage should again be played with humor, perhaps with some hesitation. After the "correct" transposition is restored, the piece ends with another whimsical

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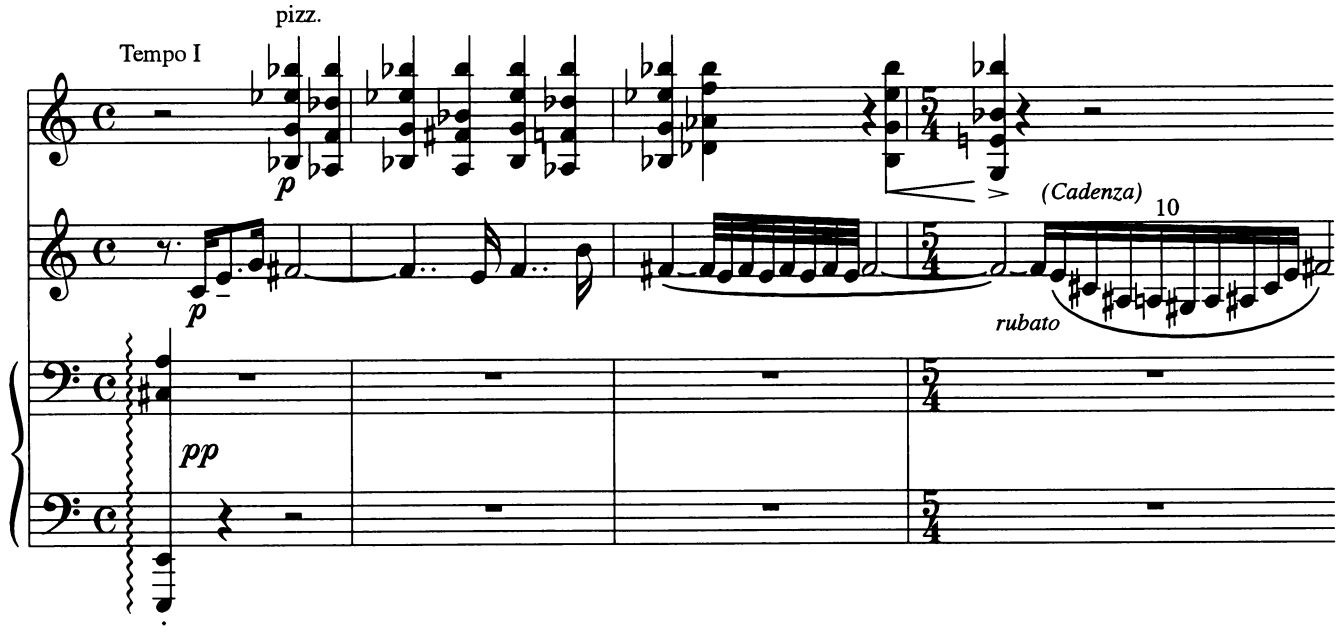
continue the 4/4 meter, but he later added some 3/2 bars to make the barlines coincide with the phrase boundaries.

[28]The recording of *Contrasts* by Stanley Drucker (clarinet), Robert Mann (violin), and Leonid Hambro (piano) (Bartók Records BRS 916) is the most humorous treatment of this joke that I have heard. The violin and clarinet are not only loud but raucous and out of tune.

Example 7. Measures 85-88



cliché–a staccato $\hat{5}$-$\hat{1}$ in the extreme low register of the piano juxtaposed with an A-major triad in the violin and the tenacious D♯ in the clarinet. Note that the A-major triad and D♯ combine to form a verticalization of motive a.

Motive a is even hidden in the clarinet runs in m. 15. In general, the virtuosic passages in the piece are not mere filigree, but are related to the main motives; even the smallest details contribute to the structure of the movement. The clarinet run begins on A (emphasizing the previous cadence of the first theme on A) and ascends to an F♯ peak on beats two and four.[29] The F♯ can be heard against the C-major triad in the violin on the downbeat of the measure, as a forecast of the entrance of motive a on the pitch C. The violin arpeggios in mm. 26-28 are also related to motive a: the highest notes of each gesture outline an A^7 chord plus E♭, and should therefore be highlighted somewhat in performance.

IV

Running concurrently with the tritone "plot" is the slow emergence and growth of motive b. Our first hint of motive b is in the first two notes of the piece–the pizzicato B♯ to C♯ (refer back to Example 1). Upon reaching the downbeat of m. 2, we realize that these two notes are the major and minor thirds of an A Mm chord. Bartók's dynamics clearly suggest that the first two notes are to be isolated, with a sudden shift to *mf* on the third note. The entire violin gesture travels from B♯, the first and lowest note, to C♯, the last and highest note (emphasized further by the notated tenuto). Note that the flat fifth (E♭) also makes a weak appearance in the ascending violin scale.

The first complete arrival of motive b occurs when the violin enters with an alteration of the first theme (previously

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[29]In the first sketch (p. 1), Bartók takes the clarinet up to G♯ (notated B), but crosses it out and changes it to F♯ (notated A) in the staff above.

stated by the clarinet). First, it begins on C instead of A (setting up a second polarity between A/D♯ and C/F♯ that will be explored later in the movement and also later in this essay). This statement of motive a is followed by a chain of Mm motives (first A Mm, then F♯ Mm) and then a progression up by fourths (a topic to which I will return presently). This sequence of statements outlines an F♯-major triad (see Example 8). By now, the only feature of the clarinet theme that is recognizable is the persistent dotted rhythm.

Motive b emerges in full force in the B section (mm. 30-57), reaching the previously discussed climax in m. 53. The theme for the B section is clearly folk-influenced: it follows the form of the traditional Hungarian folk song, with four lines of eight syllables each;[30] it also utilizes the accented short-long pattern that is characteristic of the Hungarian language.[31] The folk tune in the violin suggests a tonality of G♯ minor. The very expressive half step from C to B also hints at the M3/m3 characteristic in motive b and should be highlighted in performance. Measure 33 effects a quick shift to E Mm (although the left hand remains on the low G♯, G×, A♯ cluster),[32] then a quick shift back to a G♯-minor triad in m. 34. Both of these shifts are accompanied by a crescendo. The evolution of motive b reaches a peak at the end of the B section (in the retransition), when the A Mm and D♯ Mm are combined with other transpositions to create a complex network (refer to Example 3).

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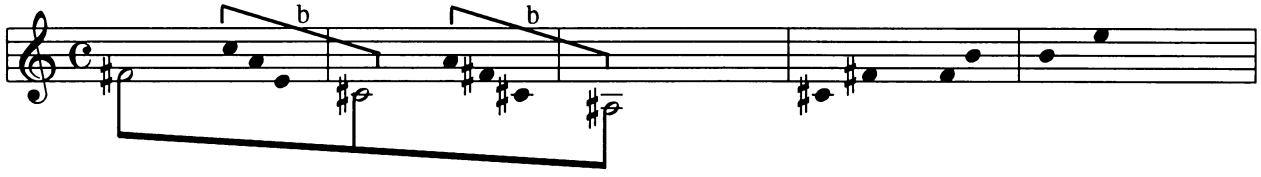
[30]Béla Bartók, *Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), 61.

[31]Bartók, 61.

[32]Bartók's first sketch differs from the final copy and published version in this regard: the notes were originally G♯, G♯ (octave lower), and F×.

Example 8. Outline of violin line, measures 18-22



The final major-minor outburst occurs much later, in the first part of the recapitulation (mm. 65-71).[33] Bartók evidently struggled with this passage, since several attempts in his first sketch are crossed out and the final version does not appear until the bottom of the third page, after the end of the movement. The section begins with a flourish of motive b in all three instruments in inverted canon; pairs of voices are separated by a major ninth, and the motives descend sequentially by whole steps (see Example 9a).[34] In m. 69, the perfect fourth is extracted from motive b while the whole-tone sequence continues (see Example 9b), but the clarinet and violin interlock at this point, creating a stream of chromatic scales, almost as if the two instruments have become entangled. In performance, a recognition of this interlocking suggests carefully matching note lengths and timbre. Also, a sensation of motion from mm. 65-71 (expressed ironically through a notated diminuendo and rallentando) is necessary.

The entire first section of the recapitulation (from m. 57 to m. 71) may be understood as a struggle between the two primary motives. While motive a is the first to be heard, it soon falters, and motive b seizes the opportunity to take over completely. The fragmentation of motive b in mm. 69-71 represents the final disintegration, and the interlocking lines of the violin and clarinet exemplify the conflict. The many silences in this section (mm. 57, 60, 61, 64, 65, and the breath mark before m. 72) are symptomatic of this struggle. It is

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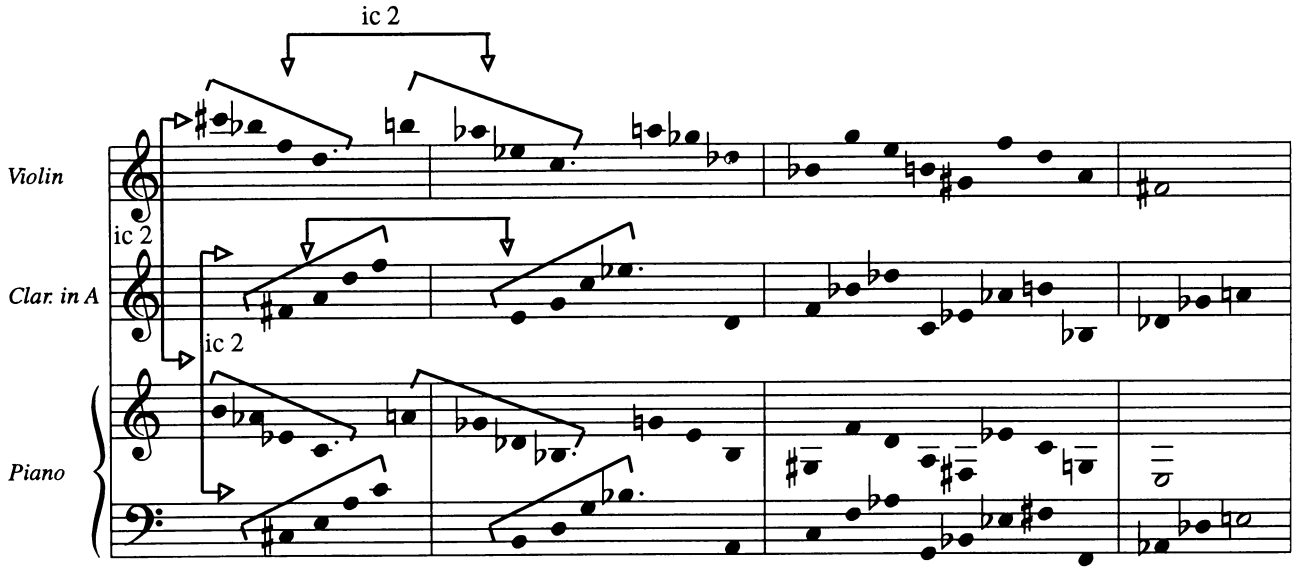
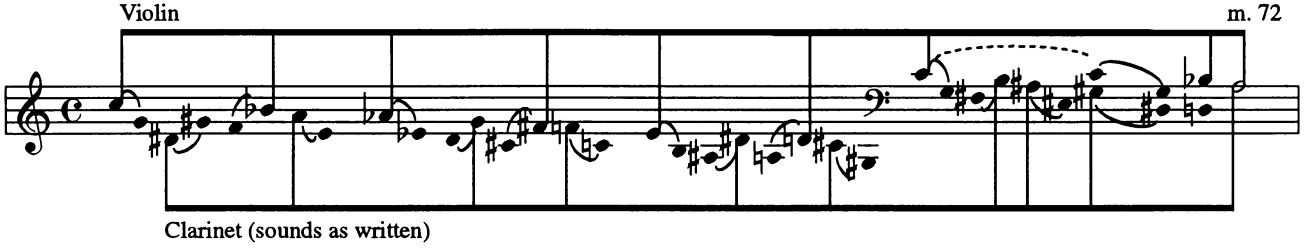
[33]The word "outburst" is used by Fred Everett Maus to describe a passage from Beethoven, in "Music as Drama," *Music Theory Spectrum* 10 (1988):60, as one of many descriptive words that heighten the analysis through drama. Maus points out that "the technical language and the dramatic language offer descriptions of *the same events*" (60, italics in original); by using both languages, one can explain events by regarding them as actions and suggesting motivation, reasons why those actions are performed (67).

[34]The analysis of this section by Kárpáti reveals a network of Mm chords connected by common tones (205). This analysis is an excellent example of a "theory-driven analysis"; while it provides a fascinating insight into Bartók's compositional technique, it does not have immediate relevance to performers.

Example 9a. Analysis of measures 65-68



Example 9b. Interlock of violin and clarinet, measures 68-72



important that the performers observe these silences. During the shorter ones, for instance, the piano should not sustain through so that the air can clear. It is also best not to rush through longer silences (although none of the six recordings I heard observes the full value of the long silences, especially Bartók's!). The breath mark at m. 72 is especially important as an articulation of this turning point. With the arrival on pitch-class A in m. 72, motive a now assumes complete control to the end.

A profound reinterpretation of sonata-allegro form is not uncommon in Bartók's music. Joseph Straus states that Bartók's sonata-form works are "fraught with a productive artistic tension between the traditional and the new."[35] Straus's analysis of Bartók's Piano Sonata is an excellent example of a dramatic description and provides a parallel to "Verbunkos":

> . . . the second theme makes an extraordinary attempt to break free of the gravitational pull of the first theme, shattering the boundaries of form. This attempt is suppressed, but the victory of the first theme is equivocal. The traditional order of things is reimposed uneasily and insecurely.[36]

A parting reference to motive b subtly appears in the clarinet cadenza, as the top note of the repeated run: the C/C♯ turnaround suggests the dual third of A Mm (motive b). These are the same two pitch classes that began the piece and that will return as a reminder in mm. 90-91. The clarinetist will want to play with these two top notes, either through sustaining or dynamic emphasis. The B♯-C♯ in the violin

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[35]Joseph Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 107.

[36]Straus, 108.

should also receive special treatment when they return in m. 90.

V

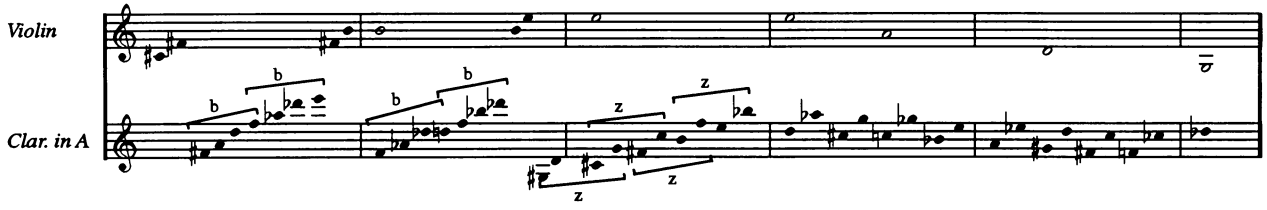
Questions about tonality are especially relevant to the performer: is the piece tonal, atonal, or a bit of both? What substitutes for the traditional progression of keys and the progressive power of functional harmony? How does Bartók create a sense of momentum from one point to the next, and how can the performers project this?

One of the fascinating aspects of Bartók's compositional style which is especially apparent in *Contrasts* is his gift for combining disparate styles and techniques into a language that is truly his own. Although the language of *Contrasts* is not tonal because it does not utilize functional harmony, it depends on many of the features of tonality for its meaning. Even the form experiments with the structure of traditional ternary and sonata form. At the same time, much of the motivic process depends on contemporary techniques (such as the combinatorial passage addressed earlier).

Although the tritone (particularly A/D♯) is the key structural interval for the movement, interval class 5–sometimes even the circle of fifths–plays a role in local events. In mm. 72-81 (discussed previously), motive a is transposed through the circle of fifths from A toward the almost-attained E♭. Bartók uses the suggestive circle in several other passages as well to create momentum toward (or away from) a goal.

For example, the violin's ascending fourths in m. 21 lead from F♯ to B to E, appearing to stop on a pedal E in mm. 22-23. However, the cycle then continues to A, D, and finally G, hidden within the ornamentation and double stops of mm. 24-25 (see Example 10). The clarinet also has a portion of a fifth cycle, heard in the first note of each quintuplet figure (the same idea that will later be used in the cadenza). Each quintuplet outlines a tritone, but moves through the circle of

Example 10. Analysis of violin and clarinet, measures 21-26



fifths, from E♯ to C♯, before descending. Interestingly, the boundary notes of these quintuplets form what Antokoletz calls "Z-cells,"[37] equivalent to set-class 4-9[0167], a sonority found in much of Bartók's music.[38] While the violin and clarinet outline fifth cycles, the piano part supports the forward drive with constantly rising transpositions of dominant seventh chords.

The ensemble should therefore be aware of the cycles and create momentum toward the downbeat of m. 26, despite the allargando in m. 25. The clarinetist might wish to emphasize the first and last notes of the quintuplets slightly, although the notated rhythm and articulation will tend to accentuate them naturally. The violinist might voice the double stops so that the main pattern can be heard.[39]

Further examination of Example 10 reveals another example of passage-work that is integral to the structure of the piece: the clarinet accompaniment in mm. 20-21 contains chains of motive b. The run in m. 20 connects B♭ Mm with A Mm through a common tone, D♭/C♯; similarly, the sequence down one half step in m. 21 links it to the previous measure by the common tone D (although register and distance make this connection harder to hear). In performance, a slight accent on each sixteenth-note triplet would emphasize the

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[37]Elliott Antokoletz, *The Music of Béla Bartók: A Study of Tonality and Progression in Twentieth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 71-72. Antokoletz, in turn, acknowledges Leo Treitler, who first referred to this tetrachord as *cell Z*, in "Harmonic procedure in the Fourth Quartet of Béla Bartók," *Journal of Music Theory* 3/2 (November 1959):292-98.

[38]Antokoletz shows that this sonority occurs as early as 1908 in Bartók's *Bagatelles* for piano, and that it plays an important role in many of the composer's works thereafter (see Antokoletz, chapter V, "Intervallic Cells," 78-137).

[39]The double stops were originally single notes in the first sketch (p. 1); double stops appear in the final copy (p. 2). One detail of the final copy (m. 23, p. 2) that does not appear in the published version is the downbow indications on each of the repeated E's. The violinist might want to consider this bowing.

various qualities of thirds: D, C♯, C, C♯, D in the first run, and D♯, D, C♯ in the second. This analysis also suggests that the clarinet should not be too subordinate to the main melody.

Bartók reverses the fifth cycle with a registral descent by perfect fourths in mm. 51-53; root motion of A♭-E♭-B♭-F is delineated by metric accents. This passage is a sequence of parallel triads in the violin and clarinet, again with boundary tones that outline tritones. One implication for the performers is to relax the tempo and dynamics just before the final explosive climax on the last beat of m. 53 (discussed previously). The downbeat of m. 53 is thus a kind of negative arrival point.

Aside from the primary tonal emphasis on A and D♯, there is a secondary pitch relationship within this movement between A and C. Hints of this conflict occur as early as the first theme, in which the violin accompaniment cadences on a C triad (triple stops) in mm. 12, 13, and 15. When the violin assumes the main theme in m. 17, it begins on C instead of A. Just as the clarinet theme emphasized the tritone A/D♯, this violin theme emphasizes C/F♯. Even before the violin enters, the A and C are juxtaposed in the clarinet's arpeggios: m. 16 outlines an A^7 (with added flat fifth), and m. 17 outlines a C^7 (with added flat fifth and flat third). The breath mark between these two bars separates these two tonal planes and should be performed dramatically. Bartók notates a crescendo into the breath, followed by the *piano* dynamic in the next measure.

Another example of the conflict between A and C is in the critical return at m. 57, when the clarinet and violin overlap statements of motive a on A and C. Tonality plays an especially important role here in creating a sense of recapitulation, especially after the agitated retransition that precedes it. However, Bartók muddies the waters: the passage that follows has distinctly developmental characteristics.

The stability of A is immediately jeopardized, first by the violin entrance on C, then by the clusters of trills and parallel runs that outline the tritone interval (m. 60). The next four

bars comprise a varied repeat at the "subdominant" level:[40] all three instruments are transposed a fourth higher (although the clarinet motive is inverted, the tritone F-B remains invariant). The second phrase climaxes again on the tritone runs, but with the violin added to the texture (see Example 11). While the interval outlined melodically is the tritone (E♭-A in the violin, G-C♯ in the clarinet, and F-C♭ in the piano), the interval between instruments is the major second (yet another appearance of the interval class 2 as an interval of transposition). After another long silence, motive b now asserts itself; once again, interval class 2 is the distance between instruments as well as the transposition level of each sequential voice (refer back to Example 9). The interlocking whole-tone passage discussed earlier functions as a chromatic transition into the second part of the recapitulation.

The pitch centers of A and C are again juxtaposed in the section from mm. 72-84. At this point, the clarinet and violin are playing in octaves. The first three phrases clearly center around A (even concluding with a $\hat{5}$-$\hat{1}$ cadence in m. 79), but the fourth phrase shifts to C (ending with the bitonal C/B cadence discussed previously). The last phrase is less clearly on C, ending with a $\hat{1}$-$\hat{5}$ cadence immediately before the piano's A-major cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ (m. 85)–a chord which leads us back to A, but seems to come out of nowhere, especially since it follows a half-cadence on C.

In contrast to the quasi-tonal areas mentioned above, there are a few areas of the movement which are dodecaphonic and atonal in character. These passages generally either serve as transitions or are reminiscent of a development section. For instance, the chromatic shift upward from A in mm. 23-25 and downward to G♯ in mm. 28-30

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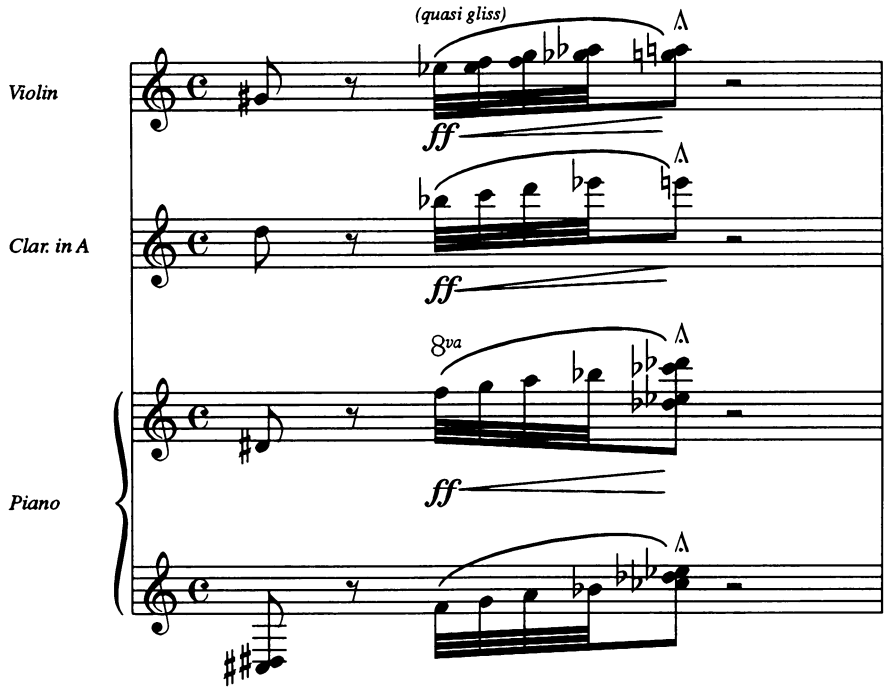
[40]Lendvai would probably analyze the first phrase as an outlining of the tonic axis A/D♯ and C/F♯ in the violin and clarinet; this is answered in the second phrase on the subdominant axis D/G♯ and F/B, with the clarinet and violin switched. Lendvai (9-16) devotes a chapter to a description of the tonic, subdominant, and dominant axis and their application to several compositions of Bartók.

Example 11. Measure 64



functions as a transition from the first to the second theme areas. The resulting aggregates in mm. 53-57 give that passage the tension required for a retransition.

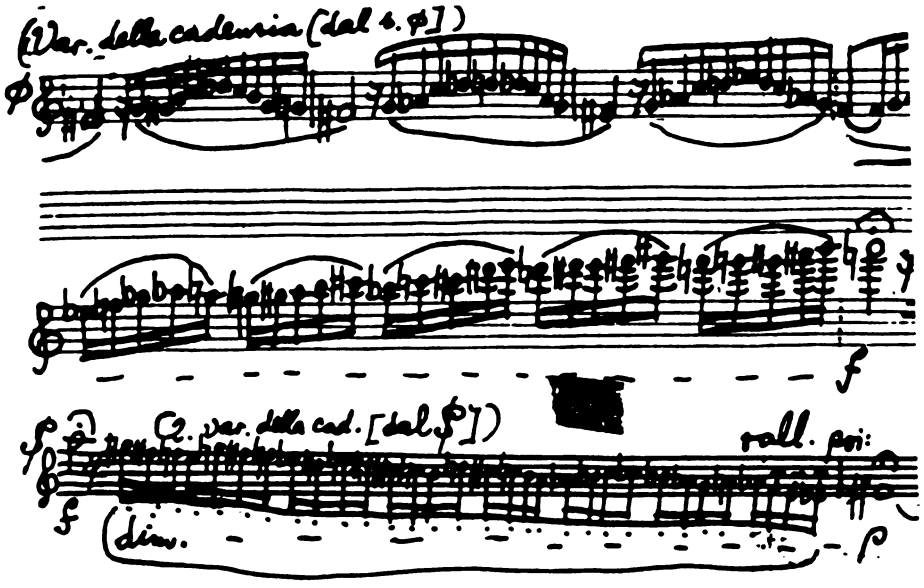
VI

Finally, let us consider several questionable notes in the score. This problem is of obvious importance to the performer; a combination of analysis and sketch study should help to determine which notes to play. One mistake is so obvious that it requires no real study to verify: in m. 67, the piano's last sixteenth-note (right hand) should be a G♮ to conform to the sequence of motive b. It is easy to see how Bartók might have forgotten to cancel the G♯ from beat one. In addition, one wrong note from the first edition (B. Ens. 49-73) has been corrected in the newer edition (B. & H. 18756): the second sixteenth-note of the piano's right hand at m. 80 was a G in the old edition, but should be an A, so that it doubles the left hand's statement of motive a.

Another note that cannot possibly be correct is the clarinet's written E♯ (concert D) at the beginning of the first alternate cadenza. As the analysis shows, D♯ is the pedal tone throughout, so this D is clearly out of place, but written E♯ appears in both scores and in the clarinet part. Apparently, the error occurred in Bartók's final manuscript copy (p. 6), where the alternate versions first appear (see Example 12). It seems that Bartók wrote E♯, then corrected it to F♯; since the accidental appears on the E line, it is easy to see how the publisher might have misread the note.

Measure 14 contains an apparent rhythm mistake: there is an extra sixteenth-note in the clarinet part. Which one should be omitted? There are several possible solutions. Bartók's sketch and final copy do not provide a final answer because they also contain too many beats. In the first sketch (p. 1), the half-note is followed by a sixteenth, double-dotted quarter, and sixteenth. In the final copy (p. 1), Bartók replaces the double dot with a single dot plus a sixteenth rest–

Example 12. Final copy, alternate cadenza



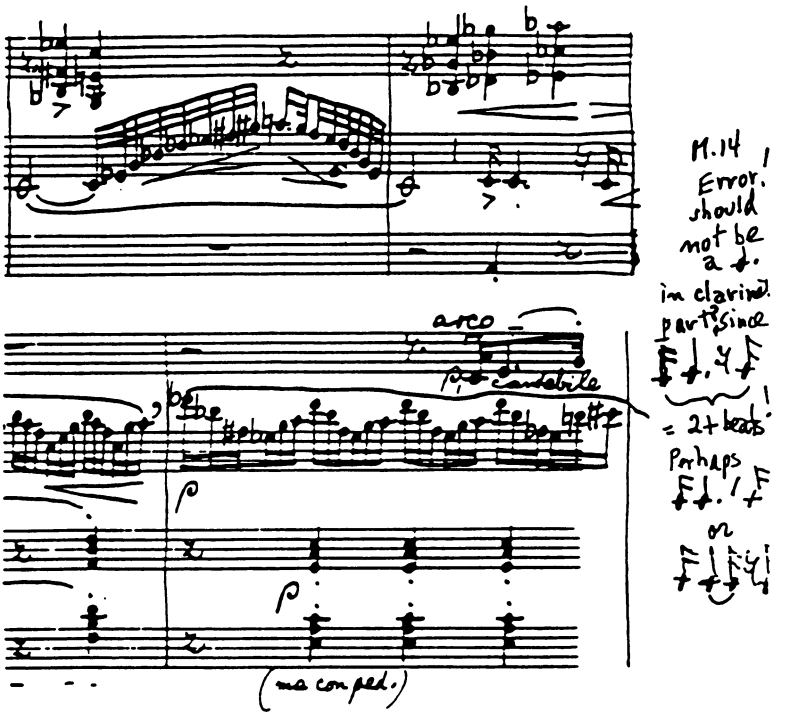
the same as in the printed score (see Example 13). The final copy also contains remarks (probably by the publisher) that present two possible corrections, but these corrections never made it to print. The rhythm in m. 14 anticipates the dotted rhythm that occurs several times at the climactic retransition in mm. 53-54 and then in augmentation in mm. 55-56 (refer back to Example 3a). The first of the two revisions in the margins of the final copy would match these measures exactly. It is interesting that Bartók originally notated the first three beats of mm. 53-54 as a sixteenth-note, two tied dotted eighths, sixteenth, quarter in the first sketch (p. 3–refer back to Example 4). In the final copy (p. 4), he changed the same passage to a sixteenth, double-dotted quarter, sixteenth, quarter, which also has one too many sixteenth-notes. There may be a psychological reason for Bartók's miscalculation: perhaps he deliberately double-dotted (in the manner of the French overture or a Hungarian folk dance) to ensure that the performance would have the required energy.

VII

At this point, we can make some conclusions about the general character of the movement. Some of the humorous moments have already been noted, such as the surprising play on the sonata form, the $\hat{5}$-$\hat{1}$ tonal references (especially the bitonal one!), the quasi-cadential $\frac{6}{4}$, and the return of the "wrong" key in m. 89. The musical clues suggest that the general mood is light and humorous, but we must consider the attributes implied by the title. The Verbunk is a Hungarian folk dance for men only, with a distinct and steady rhythm. While the movement is a dance, it is a robust dance. The dotted rhythms that permeate the movement might be performed in a steady and stately manner, and occasionally with a sense of urgency.

The obvious folk influences in the entire work, combined with the possible hint of jazz (mentioned earlier), also suggest the use of different colors and techniques associated with these

Example 13. Final copy, measure 14



idioms. For example, Benny Goodman and Richard Stolzman do not hesitate to add vibrato or a subtle glissando in appropriate passages. Szigeti slides from the C to the B in the second theme (mm. 30 and 35) in a typical Hungarian fashion.

Bartók's choice of the title, *Contrasts*,[41] seems appropriate for a number of reasons. As Halsey Stevens suggests, this piece is Bartók's first and only chamber work that uses such contrasting sonorities; he therefore decided to emphasize this disparity rather than try to achieve a blend.[42] The variation of register and timbre within each instrumental part and the distinct character of each movement are certainly other types of contrasts. This pluralistic piece also exemplifies many general musical conflicts, such as folk music *versus* art music, tonal *versus* atonal, triadic sonorities *versus* dissonant sonorities, circle of fifths *versus* tritone, and major mode *versus* minor mode. My use of the word "contrasts" in the title of this essay was also intended to point out philosophical contrasts that serve as a stimulus for the approach I have taken, such as theory *versus* analysis, performance analysis *versus* theoretical analysis, subjective *versus* objective, and intuitive decisions *versus* rational decisions.

In this essay, I have attempted to describe the musical "plots" which unfold in the first movement. Such a time-oriented description might help the performers "tell a story" as they try to create an exciting and convincing interpretation of the piece. Instead of a series of separate analytical conclusions and theoretical "facts," the many events in the piece are interwoven. Given a purely musical "story line," the performers can project this story in a live performance and

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[41]The original titles were *Two Dances* (before the middle movement was added), then *Rhapsody*; Bartók finally decided on the present name in 1940. See Cathy L. McCormick, "The Origin of Bartók's *Contrasts*," *The Clarinet Magazine* 13/1 (Fall 1985):32-33, for a discussion of this and other background information.

[42]Halsey Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 218-19.

more easily merge the analysis with intuition, emotion, and other subjective qualities. In the end, the seemingly problematic *contrasts* between analysis and performance are diminished.