

# BARTÓK

## Fourteen Bagatelles Nine Little Piano Pieces

Jenő Jandó, Piano



## Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

### Piano Music • 7

#### Fourteen Bagatelles, BB 50, Sz. 38 (Op. 6)

<b>1</b>	1. Molto sostenuto	1:28
<b>2</b>	2. Allegro giocoso	0:50
<b>3</b>	3. Andante	0:41
<b>4</b>	4. Grave	1:09
<b>5</b>	5. Vivo	1:07
<b>6</b>	6. Lento	1:41
<b>7</b>	7. Allegretto molto capriccioso	1:52
<b>8</b>	8. Andante sostenuto	1:42
<b>9</b>	9. Allegretto grazioso	1:44
<b>10</b>	10. Allegro	2:19
<b>11</b>	11. Allegretto molto rubato	1:51
<b>12</b>	12. Rubato	3:33
<b>13</b>	13. Lento funebre (Elle est morte)	2:05
<b>14</b>	14. Waltz Valse-Walzer (Presto) (Ma mie qui danse)	1:56

#### Nine Little Piano Pieces, BB 90, Sz. 82

Volume I. Four Dialogues		
<b>15</b>	1. Moderato	1:40
<b>16</b>	2. Andante	1:26
<b>17</b>	3. Lento	1:51
<b>18</b>	4. Allegro vivace	1:06
Volume II		
<b>19</b>	5. Menuetto	1:50
<b>20</b>	6. Air Lied	1:01
<b>21</b>	7. Marcia delle bestie	2:00
<b>22</b>	8. Tambourine	1:14
Volume III		
<b>23</b>	9. Preludio – All'ungherese	3:25
<b>24</b>	<b>No. 1, from Three Piano Pieces, D 45/1</b>	1:33
<b>25</b>	<b>Adagio, from Three Piano Pieces, D 53/2</b>	1:18
<b>26</b>	<b>Intermezzo, from Three Piano Pieces, D 53/1</b>	1:22
<b>27</b>	<b>Scherzo, D 50</b>	4:40
<b>28</b>	<b>Rhapsody, Op. 1 (shortened version)</b>	12:19

'At last, something really new.' Such was the verdict of Ferruccio Busoni when he heard the *Fourteen Bagatelles* by the 27-year-old Hungarian composer and pianist Béla Bartók. That was in June 1908, four months after the violinist Stefi Geyer finally made it abundantly clear that Bartók's obsessive love for her would get him nowhere. Bartók's compatriot and fellow composer Zoltán Kodály observed that his friend's distress was bringing him 'to the verge of non-existence', and in a letter to his mother, Bartók wallows in his misery: 'I have a sad misgiving that I shall never find any consolation in life save in music. And yet...'

And yet his grief appears to have acted as the catalyst for the *Bagatelles* that pleased Busoni so much. Even though the last two numbers, with their subtitles '*Elle est morte* – ' and '*Ma mie qui danse* – ', are shot through with melancholy, the set as a whole is unashamedly experi-mental, frequently sketchy and decidedly forward-looking. The individual numbers display, in embryonic form, many of the characteristics that we associate with Bartók's mature style. Only the first of them employs key signatures, and even here the performer has to contend with two different key

signatures simultaneously – four sharps in the right hand, and four flats in the left. Busoni approached his own publishers, the venerable Leipzig firm of Breitkopf and Härtel, and tried to interest them in Bartók's new pieces, but he was told that the music of his young protégé was 'too difficult and modern for the public'. In the end, the *Bagatelles* were issued by the Budapest firm of Károly Rozsnyai in 1909.

Over the ensuing two decades, Bartók's music was ever more valued by a wide range of distinguished international composers, including Vaughan Williams, Stravinsky, Milhaud and Janáček. Not surprisingly, Bartók was irked that he should be so highly esteemed abroad while at home he was being accused of 'un-Hungarian activities'. The reactionary political forces that controlled his native land routinely dismissed his music. It took a Czech conductor, Václav Talich, to persuade Hungarians in general of Bartók's greatness. When the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra gave a powerful performance in Budapest of Bartók's *Dance Suite*, it had to be encored in its entirety. That was in 1925.

Buoyed by this success, Bartók felt inspired to refresh himself, not least as a concert pianist, and the following year

he composed several major piano works for himself to play, the first new pieces for his own instrument since 1920. In them Bartók continues his retreat from Romanticism. The contrapuntal ingenuity of the *Nine Little Piano Pieces* places them in the same camp as the neo-Classical works of Stravinsky, Poulenc, Hindemith and Martinů, but that does not mean that Bartók agreed with Stravinsky's dictum that music is incapable of expressing anything other than itself. He reminded students and listeners alike that Bach's music is full of life and that it expresses far more than just itself. The *Little Piano Pieces* owe a great deal to Baroque composers, especially to Italians such as Marcello and Frescobaldi, but Bartók's musical argument and lack of artifice place this collection far out of reach of any charge of pastiche. The nine diverse pieces are not primarily intended as a cycle. Published in three separate volumes, they have been described as Bartók's musical scrapbook of the period. *Volume One* consists of four *Dialogues*. The most characteristic elements of these pieces are imitation and variation, devices that were essential stock-in-trade tools of any Baroque composer. *Volume Two* again has four movements, but with titles that allude to eighteenth-century musical forms. The rather grumpy *Menuetto* that opens the set is followed by a sprightly *Air* in the manner of a folk-song. The *Marcia delle bestie*, replete with ostinato figures, conjures up images of stamping animals, while the final *Tambourine* suggests a world inhabited by peasants from the time of Rameau. *Volume Three* consists of just a single piece that is considerably longer than the other numbers. It is in two parts: a slow prelude followed by a faster '*all'ungherese*' section marked *molto ritmico*.

The remaining works on this disc are youthful essays composed when the composer was between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three. During his teens, Bartók lived in

Pozsony (now Bratislava in Slovakia), which enjoyed what he later described as 'the most flourishing musical life of all provincial Hungarian towns'. His teacher, László Erkel (son of the opera composer Ferenc Erkel), made his young charge study the Austro-German classics from Bach to Wagner. Among these luminaries was Johannes Brahms, whose influence on the teenage Bartók was profound. Another figure to inspire Bartók at this time was Ernő Dohnányi, who was only four years his senior. Dohnányi quickly went on to become one of the most influential figures in Hungarian music. His post-Brahmsian style made a deep impression on his younger friend. The three short piano pieces and the *Scherzo* presented here were all composed around 1897, and they clearly demonstrate the impact of Brahms on Bartók: both directly and as filtered through Dohnányi. It was Dohnányi who suggested that Bartók should complete his studies in Budapest rather than going to Vienna. In following this advice, Bartók secured his future reputation as a truly Hungarian composer, along with Kodály.

The *Rhapsody*, which is dedicated to Kodály's future wife Emma Gruber, has a rather complicated history. It was originally composed as a piano solo at the end of 1904. There is also a version for piano and orchestra, as well as a version for two pianos. Finally, there is a shortened form, which was first published in 1907. The piano writing is grand with massive chords and octave runs in the manner of Liszt. Bartók also makes great play of the supposed gypsy style favoured by Hungary's growing middle classes. By the time the *Rhapsody* reached its final version, Bartók had of course discovered authentic Hungarian folk-song during his excursions to the remote parts of Transylvania with his friend Zoltán Kodály.

© Anthony Short, 2013



### **Jenő Jandó**

The Hungarian pianist Jenő Jandó has won a number of piano competitions in Hungary and abroad, including first prize in the 1973 Hungarian Piano Concours and a first prize in the chamber music category at the Sydney International Piano Competition in 1977. He has recorded for Naxos all the piano concertos and sonatas of Mozart. Other recordings for the Naxos label include the concertos of Grieg and Schumann as well as Rachmaninov's *Second Concerto* and *Paganini Rhapsody* and the complete piano sonatas of Haydn and Beethoven. He has performed and recorded a wide repertoire of chamber music, in addition to his recording of the complete piano music of Bartók. Jenő Jandó is a professor of the Liszt Academy Budapest.

*Photo by Márton Csíkszentmihályi*

From the misery of a failed love affair came a work that Ferruccio Busoni hailed with the words: ‘At last, something really new’. This was Bartók’s 1908 *Fourteen Bagatelles*, unashamedly experimental, decidedly forward-looking and displaying, in embryonic form, many of the qualities associated with his mature style. Buoyed by the success of his *Dance Suite* at a concert in Budapest in 1925, Bartók felt inspired to compose major works for himself to play as a concert pianist. These include the neo-classical *Nine Little Piano Pieces* (1926) which owe something to Baroque composers, especially to Italians such as Frescobaldi and Marcello, and have been described as a kind of musical scrapbook.

**Béla  
BARTÓK**  
(1881–1945)

**Piano Music • 7**

<b>1–14</b>	<b>Fourteen Bagatelles, BB 50, Sz. 38 (Op. 6)</b>	<b>24:59</b>
	<b>Nine Little Piano Pieces, BB 90, Sz. 82</b>	<b>16:07</b>
<b>15–18</b>	<b>Volume I. Four Dialogues</b>	<b>6:15</b>
<b>19–22</b>	<b>Volume II</b>	<b>6:16</b>
<b>23</b>	<b>Volume III</b>	<b>3:25</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>No. 1, from Three Piano Pieces, D 45/1</b>	<b>1:33</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>Adagio, from Three Piano Pieces, D 53/2</b>	<b>1:18</b>
<b>26</b>	<b>Intermezzo, from Three Piano Pieces, D 53/1</b>	<b>1:22</b>
<b>27</b>	<b>Scherzo, D 50</b>	<b>4:40</b>
<b>28</b>	<b>Rhapsody, Op. 1 (shortened version)</b>	<b>12:19</b>

A detailed track list will be found in the booklet

**Jenő Jandó, Piano**

Recorded at Phoenix Studio, Diósd, Hungary, 25–26 August 2012 (tracks 1–27) & 31 January 2013 (28)  
Producer: Ibolya Tóth • Engineer: János Bohus • Editor: Ádám Boros • Booklet notes: Anthony Short  
Publishers: Editio Musica Budapest (tracks 1–14, 24–28); Universal Edition AG, Vienna (15–23);  
Cover Image: Lake Balaton, Hungary (© Udvarházi Irén / Dreamstime.com )