

NAXOS

BARTÓK

Kossuth

Two Portraits

Suite No. 1

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra

JoAnn Falletta



Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Kossuth • Two Portraits • Suite No. 1

Béla Bartók is best-known today for his evocative orchestral settings, including the grandly scored *Miraculous Mandarin* and *Concerto for Orchestra*. His full list of compositions also features several concertos, various chamber works, diverse settings for voice and a trove of music for piano solo, including the 152 miniatures of *Mikrokosmos*.

All three orchestral pieces featured on this recording reveal a composer at the threshold of greatness. The works served as Bartók's passport to the vast 'new world' of symphonic music which prevailed at the downbeat of the twentieth century. His journey began at age five with piano lessons from his mother. In his teens he entered the Budapest Academy of Music, where he studied with the renowned István Thomán, a pupil of Franz Liszt. In composition, his formal training under János Koessler was based on the classic Germanic heritage from Bach to Wagner, with a lingering look at the Impressionist scores of Claude Debussy. Moreover, as the presumed heir to German Romanticism, Richard Strauss held special relevance to young Béla, who wrote:

"I was roused as by a clap of thunder at the first performance of *Also sprach Zarathustra* in Budapest in 1902. The work, received with horror by most of the listeners, brought me to a pitch of enthusiasm. I felt a reaching out to something new. I threw myself into the study of Strauss."

It was just a year later when Bartók ventured into the orchestral universe at age 22 with *Kossuth*, a narrative tone poem with historic relevance. (Strauss was just 24 when he broke the sound barrier with *Don Juan* in 1888). Bartók was likewise mindful of the flamboyant scores of his countryman, Franz Liszt, who is widely credited as the first to use the term 'tone poem' as a symphonic genre.

For reference, Lajos Kossuth (1802-1894) was a lawyer, journalist and Hungarian freedom fighter who led the failed War of Independence from Austria in 1848. Biographer Benjamin Suchoff notes that Bartók modeled the literal form of *Kossuth* after Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Life) of 1889.

Kossuth offers a series of ten vignettes, performed without pause. The composer provided an extensive, play-by-play description of the music, presented here in summation:

"1848 is a celebrated year in Hungarian history. Led by Lajos Kossuth, the nation fought for liberty from the Austrian Hapsburg dynasty. But Russia intervened and vanquished our army. The Hungarian nation appeared lost forever. Those events inspired this symphonic poem, and each section bears a descriptive title.

- I. *Kossuth* – a musical sketch of his character
- II. *What grief, dear husband?*
– the worry of his devoted wife
- III. *Hungary in danger!*
– Kossuth recalls the glorious past
- IV. *Once we lived in better times...*
- V. *Then our fate turned worse*
– the Hapsburg armies in tyrannical force
- VI. *On to battle* – Kossuth issues a 'Call to Arms'
- VII. *Come forth Hungarian warriors*
– Kossuth rallies the nation to his banner
- VIII. *Enemy troops approach*
– Hungary is vanquished with terrible vengeance
- IX. *All is over!* – Although forbidden,
Hungary falls into deepest mourning
- X. *All is silence, silence*"

Dramatic at every turn, the score reveals Bartók's early gift for alluring and provocative effects, blended with symbolic themes and vibrant orchestral hues. Kossuth's devoted passion is conjured by heroic horns and brass, around which Bartók casts the narrative with all stops pulled, as if from the console of a cathedral organ. Listeners will note several folk-like motifs, cast over symbolic Eastern harmonies and charged with rhythmic esprit, including a gypsy *csárdás* midway. Apart from the style influences from Wagner and Strauss, in section VIII the score also quotes the song *Gott Erhalt*, the former

national hymn of Austria. (The theme was originally written by Franz Joseph Haydn in 1797, and now serves as the national anthem of Germany). *Kossuth* concludes sadly, with a brief *in memoriam* descant by a solo violin, answered by ephemeral timbres in A minor.

In 1907, not long after beginning his tenure on the faculty of the Academy of Music in Budapest, Bartók began work on a *Violin Concerto* for a young violinist, Stefi Geyer, for whom he held a very deep infatuation. But the stars were crossed, at least that is how it must have appeared to the young composer, who presented the manuscript to Geyer, only to learn of their imminent estrangement. Although Geyer never performed the work, she retained the original score throughout her life. The work was not published until 1959, after her passing.

About the personal overtones of the music, Bartók had earlier written to Geyer that the opening phrase (which traces a D major seventh chord) was a *Leitmotiv* for her beauty and persona, and that it served as the emotive identity for the concerto overall.

After the breakup, Bartók was indeed a most disheartened swain. Perhaps as a memoir, in 1908 he completed a pair of orchestral tone poems, *Ideal* and *Grotesque*, like the theatre masks for comedy and tragedy.

In the first portrait Bartók recreates his heart's ideal by simply borrowing the first movement of his concerto, with very little change. Featured in the solo violin, the music begins with the 'Stefi theme', an enchanted aria for his *desiderata*. The evolving harmonies in the orchestral strings provide poignant nuance to the portrait overall, from dreamy and hopeful to ultimate despair on a singular B minor chord. A languid English horn echoes the mood, with exquisite tonalities in the strings, leading to full-voiced regret in the pleading brass. In turn, the 'Stefi theme' is replayed in variation, as the canvas fades at the close with a shimmering, D major echo in the celestial violin.

For the second portrait, Bartók again borrows from himself, quoting *Bagatelle No. 13*, originally written for piano in 1907, just after the 'breakup' news arrived from Stefi. We are hardly surprised that the main theme of the

original bagatelle was derived from the same Stefi motif. Hector Berlioz had a name for such a lovelorn mindset: *idée fixe* (fixed idea). In *Symphonie fantastique* the French master conjures the image of a heartbroken musician: "He plunges in to heavy dreams with strange visions. His beloved becomes a melody which he finds and hears everywhere." We note that Bartók's original *Bagatelle, No. 13* also carries inscriptions in French which relate directly to the composer's chagrin: "*Elle est morte*" - "Love has died."

As for the music of *Grotesque*, the piece is brief but replete with biting irony and malevolent humor, all painted from a palette of fluorescent color. Mocking woodwinds, snarling brass and punchy percussion are brushed-in over the devil's fiddles, including a facetious motif in the high clarinet – again as in Berlioz. Here and there the music seems to verge near a diabolical waltz à la Liszt, but stays the course with profane gestures and sinister resolve clear to the final, delirious low D.

Suite No. 1, Op. 3, was composed in Vienna during a period when Bartók sought to establish himself as a virtuoso pianist-composer. Completed in 1905 (revised in 1920), the piece is scored as a show-case of symphonic effects, with a robust instrumentation that includes two harps and rich, divisi writing for the strings. After the première performance in late November of 1805, Bartók added a note to his personal journal; "Despite all of the Hungarianisms, my suite caused a sensation in Vienna."

Marked *Allegro vivace*, the first movement opens with a grand orchestral fanfare. In turn follows a gallery exhibit of tuneful episodes, with a blend of plaintive and dance-like motifs. The principal theme behind the scenes is the Austrian national hymn, which Bartók had earlier parodied in *Kossuth*.

The second movement, *Poco adagio*, begins with dark and pulsing accents in the lower staves, serving as a brief introduction to a nostalgic English horn. The suggestion continues in variation, with no less than nineteen separate lines in the divisi strings. A highwire solo in the violin adds a final recap of the mood.

The following *Presto* has all the flair of a Viennese dance divertimento, with many changes in tempo. In fact,

Bartók described the movement as a “jumping dance – a wild boisterous scherzo”. Cross-rhythm highlights and yin-yang mood swings add contrast for good measure.

A haunting *Volkslied* (folk tune) of Bartók’s own invention opens the scene for the fourth movement *Moderato*. Introduced by the clarinet, the theme bears an Eastern European passport, which is then taken up by the full orchestra in several variations.

For the Finale, marked *Molto vivace*, Bartók again sets out on the dance floor with an ebullient tune, highlighted by coy, off-beat accents and sassy turns of harmony. Again, we are treated to a gallery of vignettes in variation, with alternate modes from zest to romance and back again. A final reprise of the Austrian hymn ties the ribbons in robust F major.

Edward Yadzinski

Michael Ludwig



Photo: Mark Dellas

Hailed by *The Strad* magazine for his “effortless, envy-provoking technique ... sweet tone, brilliant expression, and grand style,” Michael Ludwig enjoys a multi-faceted career as a soloist, recording artist and chamber musician. As a soloist, he has performed with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Philadelphia Orchestra, Boston Pops, KBS Symphony in Seoul, Korea, Beijing Symphony, and the Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra, collaborating with such conductors as JoAnn Falletta, Sir Georg Solti and John Williams. He has recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Lithuanian National Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic and the Virginia Symphony. As a chamber musician, he has performed with Christoph Eschenbach, Wolfgang Sawallisch, Yefim Bronfman, Sarah Chang and Jean-Yves Thibaudet. His chamber music performances include appearances at the Prague Spring Music Festival, New Hampshire Music Festival, and a benefit appearance for the Terezin Music Foundation at Symphony Hall in Boston. Michael Ludwig studied violin with his father, Irving Ludwig, who was a violinist in The Philadelphia Orchestra and Music Director of the Lansdowne Symphony Orchestra. For more information, see: www.michaelludwig.com

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra

Photo: Enid Bloch Photography



Founded in 1935, the GRAMMY® Award-winning Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, under the direction of Music Director JoAnn Falletta, is Buffalo’s leading cultural ambassador and presents more than 120 Classics, Pops and Youth Concerts each year. Since 1940, the orchestra’s permanent home has been Kleinhans Music Hall, a National Historic Landmark, designed by Eliel and Eero Saarinen, one of the finest concert halls in the United States. The BPO has toured widely across the United States and Canada including the Florida Friends Tour with JoAnn Falletta in March 2010. The BPO performed at Carnegie Hall as a participant in the *Spring For Music* festival in 2013, as one of five orchestras selected from a national field. This was the orchestra’s 24th appearance at Carnegie Hall and its first since its performance there under JoAnn Falletta in June 2004. Over the decades, the BPO has matured in stature under some leading conductors, including William Steinberg, Josef Krips, Lukas Foss, Michael Tilson Thomas, Maximiano Valdés, Semyon Bychkov and Julius Rudel. During the tenure of JoAnn Falletta the BPO has rekindled its distinguished history of radio broadcasts and recordings, including the release of 24 new CDs of a highly diverse repertoire on the Naxos and Beau Fleuve labels. The Philharmonic’s Naxos recording of composer John Corigliano’s *Mr. Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan* (8.559331), featuring soprano Hila Plitmann, won GRAMMYs® in two categories of the three for which it was nominated: Classical Vocal Performance and Classical Contemporary Composition.

JoAnn Falletta



Photo: Cheryl Gorski

JoAnn Falletta serves as Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic and Virginia Symphony in the United States and Principal Conductor of the Ulster Orchestra in Northern Ireland. She has guest conducted over a hundred orchestras in North America, and many of the most prominent orchestras in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa and is the Principal Guest Conductor of the Phoenix Symphony and Brevard Music Center of North Carolina. Recipient of the Seaver/National Endowment for the Arts Conductors Award, winner of the Stokowski Competition, and the Toscanini, Ditson and Bruno Walter conducting awards, Falletta has also received eleven ASCAP awards and serves on the U.S. National Council on the Arts. A champion of American music, she has presented over five hundred works by American composers including 110 world premières. Her Naxos recordings include the double GRAMMY® Award-winning disc of works by John Corigliano and GRAMMY® nominated discs of works by Tyberg, Dohnányi, Fuchs, Schubert, Respighi, Gershwin, Hailstork and Holst.

www.joannfalletta.com

All three of the works in this programme reveal a young composer on the threshold of greatness, serving as his passport to the vast new world of orchestral music prevailing at the beginning of the 20th century. Inspired by the tone poems of Richard Strauss, Bartók's *Kossuth* dramatically commemorates the struggle for Hungarian independence in 1848 with an alluring and provocative orchestration. The *Two Portraits* set moods of love and painful heartbreak into stark contrast, while the *First Suite* is a showcase of symphonic effects which caused a sensation in Vienna at its première in 1905.

Béla
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(1881-1945)

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| 1 | Kossuth – Symphonic Poem, Sz.75a | 19:52 |
| | Two Portraits, Op. 5, Sz.37* | 12:40 |
| 2 | I. Ideal: Andante | 10:08 |
| 3 | II. Grotesque: Presto | 2:32 |
| | Suite No. 1, Op. 3, Sz.60 | 37:09 |
| 4 | I. Allegro vivace | 7:25 |
| 5 | II. Poco adagio | 8:26 |
| 6 | III. Presto | 7:39 |
| 7 | IV. Moderato | 6:14 |
| 8 | V. Molto vivace | 7:25 |

Michael Ludwig, Violin*

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra • JoAnn Falletta

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