

Danielle Fosler-Lussier. 2007. *Music Divided: Bartók's Legacy in Cold War Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

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During the Cold War, the ideological split between East and West manifested itself in a stark divide in the critical response to the works of Béla Bartók. Throughout much of his career, Bartók had developed a compositional style that incorporated modernist aesthetic techniques with melodic and formal attributes of the rural folk music that he collected during his ethnomusicological fieldwork in East Central Europe and elsewhere. Many critics in the West praised his modernist compositional innovations but associated his use of folk music with antiquated methods and reactionary Soviet policies; cultural critics in the Eastern Bloc, on the other hand, typically rejected Bartók's modernist techniques as decadent cosmopolitanism, while, at least temporarily, hailing his use of folk themes. In a new book, *Music Divided: Bartók's Legacy in Cold War Culture*, Danielle Fosler-Lussier addresses this intriguing but under-explored chapter in the history of the reception of Bartók's music.

As Fosler-Lussier explains, Bartók's reception during this period is unique among his peers' through an "accident of biography" (xiii): because of his early death in 1945, Bartók, unlike Stravinsky and others, did not have the opportunity to exercise control over the reception of his compositions by writing prose and adapting his compositional techniques to new stylistic developments and tastes. Instead, music critics, composers, and musicologists throughout Europe and the United States were able to discuss Bartók's music freely and speculatively, offering revisionist readings of his works from opposing political and aesthetic perspectives. In *Music Divided*, Fosler-Lussier deftly wades through a variety of documents to demonstrate the subtle changes in individuals' opinions and government policies regarding Bartók's music in Hungary and some Western nations during the 1940s and 1950s.

Fosler-Lussier compares and juxtaposes the approaches to Bartók adopted by central cultural figures in the movements of aesthetic modernism in the West and socialist realism in the East. She posits that this ideological divide in culture and politics, which she identifies as the dominant binary of Cold War aesthetic modes, colored all European and American musical activity during this period, including composing, listening, and performing.

She explains, “These metamusical meanings played a crucial role in listeners’ experiences on both sides of the cold war conflict” (xii).

Music Divided is a valuable addition to the current body of scholarship on Bartók, which, despite the relatively broad range of analytical and historical perspectives available, rarely addresses his posthumous reception. David E. Schneider has addressed Bartók’s reception among his contemporaries in his essay “Hungarian Nationalism and the Reception of Bartók’s Music 1904–1940” (2001), as have Tibor Tallián in “Bartók’s Reception in America, 1940–1945” (1995), and Malcolm Gillies in *Bartók in Britain: A Guided Tour* (1989). There is, however, a paucity of scholarship addressing Bartók’s reception after 1945; *Music Divided* fills a conspicuous lacuna.¹ Rachel Beckles Willson’s book *Ligeti, Kurtág and Hungarian Music During the Cold War*, which also deals in part with the reception of Bartók’s music after his death, was published in 2007 as well.

Music Divided is also a welcome contribution to the musicological genre of reception history, joining a handful of books dealing with the posthumous discourse surrounding individual composers. Most of the books in this genre thus far have considered the reception of Ludwig van Beethoven and other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century composers from the German tradition; examples include Scott Burnham’s *Beethoven Hero* (1995) and David B. Dennis’s *Beethoven in German Politics, 1870–1989* (1996). In its focus on a twentieth-century composer—and one from an East Central European country—Fosler-Lussier’s book is particularly revealing of the ways in which music and biography have been appropriated by critics from both Eastern Bloc and Western anti-Communist political perspectives.

In her study, Fosler-Lussier alternates her focus between discussions of reception in the East and West and clearly demonstrates the ambivalence of cultural and political figures towards Bartók’s music after his death. Chapter 1 addresses the Hungarian reception of Bartók during the first few years after the end of World War II. Chapter 2 explores Western European approaches to Bartók, focusing particularly on the writings of Theodor W. Adorno and René Leibowitz. In chapter 3, Fosler-Lussier brings together documents from both sides of the ideological divide, as she discusses the broadcast of Bartók’s music on American and Hungarian radio. Chapter 4 investigates the treatment of Bartók’s works as “modern classics” in Western Europe and the United States; and in the following chapter, Fosler-Lussier returns the discussion to Hungary to interpret Hungarian socialist realism. The sixth chapter describes in detail the Hungarian government’s case against the composer and music critic András Mihály. Finally, *Music Divided* ends with a pair of epilogues in which Fosler-Lussier looks at changes in Bartók’s reception in Hungary, Western Europe, and the United States after the middle of the

1950s. Fosler-Lussier's methodology leads her to a conclusion that will be important to scholars of music during the Cold War: "It seems advantageous to regard the competing paradigms of East and West not as separate cultural systems, but as two parts of a single, larger system in which musical values were determined by global processes of engagement and negation as well as by local judgments about music" (165). With her chapter structure, she is able to represent the important role that the analysis of musical meaning plays in the development of political systems, and the malleability of music as an object of interpretation.

In chapter 1, Fosler-Lussier explains the precarious situation of Bartók's oeuvre in relation to the developing musical policies of the Communist government of Hungary during the years after World War II. Bartók's incorporation of Hungarian musical folklore and his fame as a Hungarian composer suited the government's early goals to create a quintessentially "Hungarian" national musical style. For several years during the second half of the 1940s, many Hungarians sought to define a "Third Road," Hungary's unique brand of Communist government, which would differ from Western European and Russian models. These cultural leaders hailed the more "accessible" style of Bartók's late works, such as his *Concerto for Orchestra* and a number of pieces based on folk music, as models for a corresponding musical "Third Road." The modernist compositional techniques Bartók had employed earlier in his career, by contrast, were rejected as formalist and bourgeois, and thus antithetical to the guidelines for the creation of a socialist realist style of music in Russia and the Eastern Bloc states laid out in the 1948 decree by the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. By the end of 1948, Stalin insisted that Hungary adhere more directly to the Soviet model, and the concept of the "Third Road" was abandoned, leaving Bartók's legacy in doubt. While some Hungarian composers, such as Mihály, continued to cling to Bartók's late style as an example for the way Hungarian socialist music should sound, the increasing pressure to follow Soviet standards meant a turn away from Bartók's influence, as composers were discouraged from modeling their music on Bartók's.

The second chapter of *Music Divided* outlines the Western European approach to Bartók during the early post-war years. Many critics involved in undertaking the resuscitation of musical culture in Germany—in the wake of Nazi restrictions against compositions that did not represent a clear commitment to the state, and in opposition to the developing tenets of socialist realism in Eastern Europe—favored the concept of art for art's sake, promoting an ideological turn to a musical practice that maintained autonomy from social and political life. Fosler-Lussier examines the writings of Adorno, Leibowitz, Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, Bruno Maderna, Karlheinz

Stockhausen, Olivier Messiaen, and others, tracking the development of these new standards of musical taste and their influence on the reception of Bartók's music. Treating writings by Adorno and his contemporaries as historical documents allows Fosler-Lussier to identify the political ideologies that colored their aesthetic theories. Under the influence of these authors, a dominant view developed among Western intellectuals that a more austere musical modernism, as represented by the works of Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, and their followers, was ethically preferable to music incorporating folk elements that could be associated with the musical policies of fascist and Stalinist governments.

In chapter 3, turning again to the East, Fosler-Lussier shows that Hungarian Radio under the Communist government instituted a selective ban on Bartók's works: while station managers continued to play many pieces that were based on folk music, they cut from their repertoire any works incorporating chromaticism and dissonant harmonies that appeared to reflect what they viewed as the bourgeois, decadent modernism of Schoenberg and Stravinsky. Thus, Western and Eastern cultural leaders engaged in a tug-of-war over which of Bartók's works they preferred, and as a result both circles advocated against the use of Bartók as a model for new composition: "For the Hungarian Workers' Party no less than for Stockhausen, Bartók was to be consigned to history" (65).

The legacy of Schoenberg's musical innovations plays a prominent role in the development of the reception of Bartók's music in these chapters, and indeed it is critical again in chapter 4, in which Fosler-Lussier addresses "Bartók and His Publics" in Western Europe and the United States. Bartók's compositions became popular among general audiences, with the increasing availability of higher education and the growing value placed on cultural literacy after the war. The accessibility of much of Bartók's music made it useful for educational programs aimed at raising awareness of modern music among listeners and performers. Countering this movement to popularize modern music, commentators and musicians such as Pierre Boulez argued that Bartók's greatest achievements were his compositions that appealed to more rarified audiences—that is, those works that incorporate dissonances and chromaticism that resemble Schoenberg's techniques. This argument resulted in the labeling of Bartók's works as "modern classics," and, in the United States, with the class-based description "middlebrow." Fosler-Lussier tracks a trend in musicology in the 1940s and 1950s, in which the influential writers Alan Forte, Leo Treitler, Milton Babbitt, and George Perle—who recognized Bartók to be an important figure in twentieth-century music, but found it difficult to reconcile this with his more "middlebrow" appeal—justified Bartók's importance by analyzing his works according to a "serialist

yardstick,” purporting to find resemblances between his compositions and Schoenberg’s twelve-tone techniques (89).

The next two chapters return to the subject of Bartók’s reception in Hungary. In chapter 5, Fosler-Lussier describes the complicated nature of Hungarian socialist realism and the government’s nearly indecipherable policies regarding the use of folk music in the creation of new compositions. The problem stemmed in large part from the difficulty in applying to musical composition Stalin’s pronouncement that art must be “natural in form and socialist in content” (95); it also arose from the Party’s ambivalent assessments of the potential utility of employing the music of the Hungarian rural peasantry in new works to represent and prescribe how life should be for urban workers. In this context, Bartók’s use of rural musical artifacts in simple musical arrangements, as in his *Romanian Folk Dances* and *Romanian Christmas Carols*, appeared to contradict the ideals of Hungarian socialist realism. Chapter 6 continues this discussion, detailing a critical turn in the Cold War history of Hungarian music: the Party’s case against Mihály. His trial dealt directly with what some called the “Bartók question”—the problem of evaluating Bartók’s legacy and determining whether or not Hungarian composers should use Bartók’s music as a stylistic model for their new works.

Fosler-Lussier’s two concluding epilogues address later changes in the reception of Bartók’s music. In “Epilogue East,” she demonstrates that in the lead-up to and aftermath of the 1956 revolution in Hungary, Bartók’s more “difficult,” dissonant music, such as the previously banned *Miraculous Mandarin*, was adopted by revolutionaries as a potent icon of the struggle for freedom. Whereas in this instance Eastern listeners reappropriated Bartók’s dissonant music, “Epilogue West” tells of the reconsideration of Bartók’s more “accessible” compositional techniques among the composing avant-garde in the West. Specifically, Fosler-Lussier shows the influence of Bartók’s compositions on Rochberg’s String Quartet No. 3 and his anti-modernist essays. Rochberg found in Bartók’s style the potential for emotional expression; furthermore, he considered pastiche and the return to music that had been condemned by modernist commentators to be valuable for critiquing the Cold War.

Music Divided summons a wealth of perspectives, addressing composition, writings on music, and recital and radio programming, and brings to light important documents from the 1940s and 1950s, many of which Fosler-Lussier has translated from Hungarian for the first time. She has found many of these sources in European archives, and in her study she introduces readers to several prominent Hungarian musical figures of the time who are generally unknown to English-speaking musicologists. Indeed,

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a vast number of the essays, letters, and lectures she has quoted have never before been printed in English. In revealing these less familiar Hungarian musicians and music commentators to readers, this book is likely to inspire future study into the roles played by Mihály, Szabó, Endre Szervánszky, and others in the development of musical life in Cold War Hungary, as well as into the ways in which Bartók's own essays on music were influential to the pronouncements of his critics. *Music Divided* also has the potential to motivate musicologists to question the ways in which the treatment of Bartók and his works during the Cold War, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, has affected the current academic approaches to the study of Bartók and assessments of his place in the history of Western music.

Note

1. Fosler-Lussier published an earlier chapter on the subject of Bartók's reception during the Cold War, "Bartók Reception in Cold War Europe," which appeared in *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók* (2001).

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