

Towards analytical synthesis: folk idioms, motivic integration and symmetry in Béla Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra* (1943)

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The Hungarian composer Béla Bartók (1881–1945), unquestionably the twentieth-century's most authoritative collector and analyst of Eastern European, Asian and Balkan folk music, composed the *Concerto for Orchestra* (1943) near the end of his career.¹ His output was consistently marked by a stylistic synthesis of Western art music and the folk music of Eastern Europe, along with techniques of his own invention, often incorporating musical geometry. He also turned to styles such as neo-Classicism (or more specifically, neo-Baroque) and Primitivism, which, in common with Stravinsky, he explored along with the compositional technique of bitonality. Bartók pioneered the technique of polymodal chromaticism, using diverse modes derived from art music and folk music simultaneously. His use of dissonance never extended to atonality, as his chromatic compositions retained a fundamental pitch, and from the 1930s his compositional style became more tonal. The *Concerto for Orchestra* has been described as 'the culmination of a process of simplification and crystallization of Bartók's style in terms of density of dissonance and increased use of triadic harmony'.² This increasingly consonant style developed after a decade in which the more dissonant aspects of folk music and contemporary art music were assimilated into his compositions. Bartók's exploration, in the 1920s, of techniques generated by the second Viennese School gave way to a style that incorporated the absorbed folk influences into a tonal, though often chromatic, sound world, frequently framed in the traditional classical forms of Western art music. Bartók himself stated at the time of the *Concerto's* composition that atonality and folk music

¹ Béla Bartók: *Concerto for Orchestra* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1946).

² D. Cooper, *Bartók Concerto for Orchestra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2. Hereafter referred to as Cooper, *Bartók Concerto*.

could not be reconciled.³ His *Concerto for Orchestra* however is by no means a simple expression of an adopted folk idiom, but incorporates techniques developed throughout Bartók's career, such as implied mistuning (as described by Kárpáti), most often involving the alteration of the fifth scale degree, and also the pervasive use of palindromes in formal outline, rhythm, intervallic structure and melody.⁴

Many analysts, including Ernő Lendvai, Milton Babbitt, Elliott Antokoletz and Paul Wilson have focussed on pitch collections and the internal construction at intervallic level in the *Concerto*,⁵ while some have explored parallels with Bartók's ethnographic collections. Antokoletz attributes individual themes and sections of the work to specific folk music sources.⁶ Analysing the first subject theme of the *Concerto's* opening movement, he states that 'cyclic-interval interactions are again fused with the tempo *giusto* rhythm and tritone so characteristic of Slovak folk tunes'.⁷ It must be noted however that the rhythmic style could also be attributed to a Hungarian influence. Halsey Stevens notes a Bulgarian influence on rhythm, especially in the first and fourth movements, but also perceives a Magyar (Hungarian)

³ Béla Bartók, 'Harvard Lectures', in *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. by Benjamin Suchoff (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), pp. 354–92 (p. 376).

⁴ János Kárpáti, *Bartók's Chamber Music* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1994), p. 188. Hereafter referred to as Kárpáti, *Bartók's Chamber Music*.

⁵ Ernő Lendvai, *Béla Bartók: An Analysis of his Music* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1971). Milton Babbitt, 'The String Quartets of Bartók', *Musical Quarterly*, 35 (1949), 377–85. Hereafter referred to as Babbitt, 'The String Quartets of Bartók'. Elliott Antokoletz, *The Music of Béla Bartók: A Study of Tonality and Progression in Twentieth-Century Music* (California and London: University of California Press, 1984). Paul Wilson, *The Music of Béla Bartók* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992). Hereafter referred to as Wilson, *The Music of Béla Bartók*.

⁶ Elliott Antokoletz, 'Concerto for Orchestra', in *The Bartók Companion*, ed. by Malcolm Gillies (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), pp. 526–37 (p. 527). Hereafter referred to as Antokoletz, 'Concerto for Orchestra'.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 528.

connection throughout.⁸ While acknowledging the pervasive Hungarian elements, this chapter puts forward an analysis that reflects the plurality of styles that Bartók derived from folk and art music, and compositional techniques that he developed. It will be argued that the integrative and symmetrical devices, along with Hungarian stylistic features and rhythmic characteristics, reach a culmination in the work, and that Hungarian features come to prominence at dramatic peaks and in the universally accepted, alternative ending. It is also in the closing passage that the most complete motivic and thematic integration occurs. As the composer's output, including the *Concerto for Orchestra*, is characterized by synthesis, a combinational approach is adopted for this analysis.

As well as analysing correlations with folk music, this chapter will examine the many levels of vertical, horizontal and formal symmetry in the *Concerto for Orchestra*. The extent to which a single motif is central to the work's tonality will also be discussed, and also the ways in which motivic development and symmetry are combined, exemplified by two motifs from the first movement's exposition, which recur in many permutations and inversions.

The first of these motifs is an octatonic scale segment, spanning a tritone or six semitones. The second is a tetrachord of interlocking fourths; both are stated at the start of the sonata-form exposition that follows the slow introduction.

Following an introductory pentatonic passage of ascending fourths, which resumes in the third movement, the main theme of the 'Introduzione' consists of a varying motif of four semiquavers, interspersed by sustained notes (bars 39–63). The almost ubiquitous stepwise motion in this theme is characteristically Hungarian, as is the combination of long and short note values, with increasingly dotted rhythms towards the passage's conclusion. Concurring with Somfai's theory,⁹ endorsed by Schneider,¹⁰ that the 'Hungarianness' of the music

⁸ H. Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 196, p. 283. Hereafter referred to as Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*.

⁹ László Somfai, 'A Characteristic Culmination Point in Bartók's Instrumental Forms', in *International Musicological Conference in Commemoration of Béla*

increases at climaxes or ‘culmination points’ that occur just before the end of sections, the introductory *verbunkos* theme progressively ascends in pitch,¹¹ becomes more densely orchestrated and builds in volume towards its close.

Frequent contrary motion, a technique Bartók developed independently of the largely monodic folk music of his collections, accompanies the build-up, increases the tension, and contributes to the subsequent climax, in which imitative polyphony also features. Thus the Hungarian aspects of style are paramount, while additional forces heighten the orchestral drama. In this case, geometric techniques such as symmetry and diminution form part of the texture while the rhythm and melody are of Hungarian derivation.

It is possible that Bartók made subconscious reference to the folk music of his collections, especially to Hungarian music, and that the diverse scale structures and Eastern rhythms became inherent parts of his overall style. While composing the *Concerto for Orchestra*, he was working on transcriptions of Yugoslav folk music, including Dalmatian two-part chromatic melodies that he had discovered.¹² At this time he was also editing Romanian and Turkish material collected on his field trips. The *Concerto for Orchestra* was sketched in the Turkish field book, verifying this.¹³ He had also transcribed Serbo-Croatian melodies from the Milman Parry collection, and all of his ethnographic transcriptions and analyses of music from other regions were by now complete.

Bartók 1971, ed. by József Ujfalussy and János Breuer (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1972), pp. 53–64 (p. 59).

¹⁰ D. Schneider, *Bartók, Hungary and the Renewal of Tradition* (California: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 243–45. Hereafter referred to as Schneider, *Bartók, Hungary*.

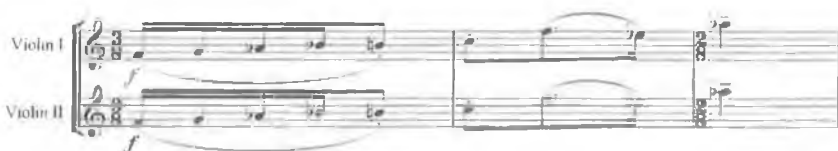
¹¹ *Verbunkos*, from the German word for recruitment (*werbung*), is a dance with music derived from Hungarian traditional folk music, performed largely by employed gypsy musicians for the purposes of encouraging Hungarian peasants to enlist for the Habsburg army.

¹² Antokoletz, ‘Concerto for Orchestra’, p. 526.

¹³ L. Somfai, *Béla Bartók: Composition, Concepts, and Autograph Sources* (California: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 72–75. Hereafter referred to as Somfai, *Béla Bartók*.

The first subject theme following the introductory passage (bar 76) consists of a five-note scalar motif ascending in semiquavers, and a four-note motif in dotted rhythm (example 1). The five-note figure (motif A) is an octatonic scale segment, as noted by Antokoletz.¹⁴ The motif spans a tritone, thereby dividing the octave in half. The tetrachord of interlocking fourths that follows has a regular pitch formation, its intervals in the semitonal ratio 5:2:5. This motif is closely related to the fourth progressions of the pentatonic opening passage of the 'Introduzione' (bars 1–29), and to the expanded fourth pattern at bars 35–41. In the third movement ('Elegia') the pentatonic material resumes (III: bars 1–9; bars 101–05).

Example 1. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, I, bars 76–78: theme A



After the first, ascending statement of theme A, the three-bar theme then descends in approximate inversion. The ascending motif is interpreted by Cooper as a group of six pitches that he refers to as a 'germinal motif' (example 2).¹⁵ However, this designation, which he reinforces by referring to similar ascents in three Serbo-Croatian folk tunes that Bartók transcribed from the Milman Parry collection,¹⁶ disregards the rhythmic structure and octatonic construction of theme A, as well as the existence of the first five pitches as a recurring figure that is repeated, varied and developed independently of the tetrachord.

Example 2. Five-note motif and Cooper's germinal motif



¹⁴ Antokoletz, 'Concerto for Orchestra', p. 528.

¹⁵ Cooper, *Bartók Concerto*, p. 36.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

The five-note motif itself contains two minor thirds and is part of a scale of alternating tones and semitones: an octatonic scale. Another feature of this scale is that it consists of two adjacent diminished chords, thus containing eight of the twelve pitches.

The six notes described as ‘germinal’ by Cooper are not part of an octatonic scale due to the presence of two consecutive semitone intervals, and only rarely feature in succession. They could not be described as a pitch set in the same way as the often-recurring five-pitch scale. The rhythmic and tonal content itself suggests that a clear division exists between the octatonic five-note motif and the dotted tetrachord. This writer believes that the five-note and four-note motifs are manifestations of Bartók’s tendency to merge elements of different ethnic origins with geometric processes, but also that they are permeated by Hungarian rhythms.

Example 3. Octatonic scales



There are two possible octatonic scales (example 3), commencing on C and C sharp, each of which consists of alternating tones and semitones. Thus the octatonic scale, like the tritone, divides the octave in equal proportions. According to Antokoletz:

One senses in Bartók’s total output an all-encompassing system of pitch relations [...] Certain fundamental principles are related to a larger system that has been referred to by George Perle as ‘twelve-tone tonality’ [...] Pitch relations in Bartók’s music are primarily based on the principle of equal subdivision of the octave into the total complex of interval cycles. The fundamental concept underlying this equal-division system is that of symmetry.¹⁷

¹⁷ E. Antokoletz, cited in Ivan F. Waldbauer, ‘Analytical responses to Bartók’s music’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók*, ed. by Amanda Bayley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 215–30 (p. 228).

In addition to Cooper's six-note motif not taking account of transpositions by a tritone that the five-note motif undergoes, the 1:2:1 intervallic structure is disrupted.

Also contradicting Cooper's six-note germinal motif is the temporal gap between the pentachord and the tetrachord of Theme A. A feature termed the 'hiccupped pickup' by Schneider is implicit in the staccato quaver that halts the scalar semiquaver ascent.¹⁸ This derives from nineteenth-century arrangements of Hungarian tunes, and is a recurrent feature of the *verbunkos*-style 'Intermezzo' of Zoltán Kodály's *Háry János* (1926) and also of Bartók's *Rhapsody for Violin*.¹⁹ The 'hiccupped pickup' is a form of upbeat in which a rest separates a group of grace notes from the ensuing theme, and while 'motif A' does not occur as a metrical upbeat, it otherwise corresponds to the 'hiccupped' rhythmic layout. The ascending scale used as part of the *Concerto for Orchestra*'s first subject is typical of this style feature.

Despite the rhythmic contrast between the two motifs of theme A, it is argued here that both reflect *verbunkos* rhythms, but that Bartók's use of elements of the style is not indicative of a purist approach in this work. Dotted rhythms including the *scotch snap* (short-long) and Hungarian *choriamb* (long-short-short-long) are common features of the merged ancient Magyar and urban gypsy styles that constituted *verbunkos* music. This eighteenth-century dance style was used for military recruitment,²⁰ and was characterized by duple metre, fast stepwise movement and dotted rhythms, with alternate short-long and long-short note values. Also typical of the style was a progressively increasing tempo.

Bartók's use of triple instead of duple metre is the semiquaver theme's most obvious deviation from the *verbunkos* tradition. While supporting 'genuine' Hungarian peasant music over the 'contaminated' sources that included the ornamented gypsy style (which, through performance, was an element of *verbunkos* music), he also invoked

¹⁸ Schneider, *Bartók, Hungary*, p. 208.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

²⁰ Schneider, *Bartók, Hungary*, p. 17.

'corrupt' influences as he deemed necessary.²¹ The mixing of elements will also be shown to contribute to Bartók's structural devices, such as his frequently inexact use of intervallic symmetry and contrary motion. The dichotomy between geometric precision and the combined folk and art music influences will be examined in this analysis.

Hungarian rhythmic devices are integral to the entire first movement, with a *verbunkos*-style passage forming a large part of the 'Introduzione' and recurring, like the pentatonic opening, in the third movement ('Elegia'). Motivic material is integrated throughout the *Concerto*, with a marked Hungarian strand throughout. Even where musical gestures are derived from different regions, they are constantly interrelated. This differs from Antokoletz's view, which is of discrete influences on different sections and themes of the work. To counter his theory, it is necessary to show the inextricable nature of Bartók's ingrained influences. In the case of the first theme (Theme A) alone, elements of Serbo-Croatian and Slovak tonality, including the tritone-bound pentachord, are combined with Hungarian rhythms.

Antokoletz, Milton Babbitt and Ernő Lendvai have all identified internal pitch relationships within Bartók's compositional system. Regarding pitch sets, Antokoletz observed interval relations in groups of notes, and found that horizontal inversional symmetry often occurred, whereby a succession of notes, whether read forwards or backwards, would produce the same succession or alternation of interval types.²² The concept had earlier been central to Lendvai's theory, especially the 1:3 distance model which he identified (example 4). Built on alternating minor thirds and semitones, the 1:3 model occurs in the *Concerto's* central movement (III: bars 10–18; bars 22–28). This interval model shapes Bartók's major–minor tonality, as it contains two vital pitches from both the major and minor modes. It is therefore a cornerstone of his bimodality. Milton Babbitt found that Bartók's music was

²¹ Béla Bartók, 'Gipsy Music or Hungarian Music' in *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. by Benjamin Suchoff (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), pp. 206–23 (p. 222).

²² E. Antokoletz, 'Organic Development and Interval Cycles', *Studia Musicologica* 36 (1995), 249–61.

characterized by balance between tonal motivation and 'internally defined relationships' between pitches.²³

Example 4. Lendvai's 1:3 distance model



Intervallic symmetry and inversion of motifs shape the *Concerto* and account for much of the orchestral texture. Before examining the tonality of the work in intervallic detail, the overall structure will be discussed.

Formally, the *Concerto for Orchestra* has a palindromic or arched structure. Its five movements form a symmetrical pattern, with the central slow movement (III: 'Elegia') framed by two dance-like movements (II: 'Giuoco delle Coppie' and IV: 'Intermezzo Interrotto'). The fast outer movements are in sonata form, with tonality based on F, and both contain fugues.

I: 'Introduzione'

Of the five movements, four have symmetrical structures. The first movement's sonata-form plan is modified by the reversed order of themes in the recapitulation. The movement's structure is outlined in the table below, and the main themes illustrated.

Table 1. Structure of 1st movement

Bars 1–75	Introduction
Bars 76–148	Exposition — first subject
Bars 149–230	Exposition — second subject
Bars 231–71	Development — first subject
Bars 272–312	Development — material derived from first and second subjects
Bars 313–95	Development — first subject
Bars 396–487	Recapitulation — second subject
Bars 488–521	Recapitulation — first subject

²³ Wilson, *The Music of Béla Bartók*, pp. 9–10.

The slow introduction's theme, which is initially pentatonic, is built on interlocking fourths (example 5). Its opening is similar to a Hungarian melody of the Transdanubian region, 'Idelátszik a temető széle', a lament that refers to maternal death, the use of which Cooper relates to Bartók's grief at the death of his mother.²⁴ The interlocking fourth motif recurs in the movement's first subject, after the five-note octatonic motif is first stated, and is expanded and varied in this movement and the third (example 6). A variant of the five-note motif precedes the entry at bar 76 of the first subject theme; the pitches span a tritone but include the major instead of the minor third. Thus the theme is assembled from earlier fragments.

Example 5. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, I, bars 1–6

Andante non troppo

Example 6. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, I, bars 77–78:

'interlocking fourths' motif

The exposition's second subject (bars 149–230), led by oboes, provides total contrast to the first, by virtue of its undulating two-note range and slower, dotted rhythm (example 7). This theme has been likened to two-note Arab melodies, and to North African (Biskran) desert chants that are traditionally accompanied by the rabab, a two-stringed instrument.²⁵ Fifth harmonies, characteristic of Hungarian and Russian instrumental music, run parallel to the melody, and a string passage of

²⁴ Cooper, *Bartók Concerto*, p. 37.

²⁵ Lenoir, cited in Cooper, *Bartók Concerto*, pp. 40–41.

chords containing only C and G underlines the prominence of open fifths, using rhythmic palindromes (bars 149–50 and 151–52).

Example 7. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, I, bars /155–58



The development section, from bar 231, reintroduces the scale fragments and angular fourths of the first subject, which are then inverted. Rising and falling scale fragments are played against each other in contrary motion. A statement of the first subject theme, in canon (bar 248), is developed into a fugato (bars 254–71). Example 8 illustrates the fugato's opening bars (bars 254–58).

Example 8. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, I, bars 254–58

A multi-staff musical score for six instruments: Oboe, Bassoon, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The tempo marking 'f, ben marc.' is placed below the first staff of each instrument. The Oboe part starts with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, and a half note G4. The Bassoon part starts with a half note G3, followed by quarter notes A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, and a half note G3. The Violin II part starts with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, and a half note G4. The Viola part starts with a half note G3, followed by quarter notes A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, and a half note G3. The Violoncello part starts with a half note G2, followed by quarter notes A2, B2, C3, B2, A2, and a half note G2. The Double Bass part starts with a half note G1, followed by quarter notes A1, B1, C2, B1, A1, and a half note G1. The notes are mostly tied across bar lines.

The central part of the development (bars 272–312) introduces material related to the first subject in its angular melody, and to the second subject in its slow tempo and even rhythm (example 9). This blending of themes and the subsequent return to the first subject for the remaining part of the development, supports the idea of symmetry in this movement's plan.

Example 9. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, I, bars 272–77

This is reinforced by the second subject taking precedence in the recapitulation, reversing the traditional order of themes and mirroring the exposition.

II: Giuoco delle Coppie

The second movement, *Giuoco delle Coppie*, ('pair-wise presentation'), consists of a series of folk-like dance themes, in regular 2/4 rhythm, dominated by paired woodwind parts. The 'chain' of dances (dance *A*, *B*, *C*, *D* and *E*) is followed by a central chorale-based section, which contrasts with the light, jocular mood of the five dance sections. The dances are then recapitulated with slight variation. The insertion of the chorale as a trio superimposes ternary form on the chain structure of the movement.

Being a short movement, the second appears to act as a structural counterpart to the fourth ('*Intermezzo Interrotto*'), which is similarly light in texture and mood, and whose material is also folk-related and led by woodwinds. These factors, and the placing of the second and fourth movements around the central 'Elegia' and between the fast, climactic outer movements, compound the perception of symmetry.

The five-note octatonic scale segment is outlined by paired bassoons with the fourth pitch omitted in the first of a chain of dances that make up this light second movement (example 10). The first theme (bars 1–24), a folk-style dance tune, 'has something of the character of a Yugoslavian round dance called a *kolo*'.²⁶

²⁶ Cooper, *Bartók Concerto*, p. 45.

Example 10. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, II, bars /9–12

The image shows a musical score for two bassoons. The tempo is marked "Allegretto scherzando". The score consists of two staves, both labeled "Bassoon". The music is in 2/4 time and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with various accidentals. The first staff has a treble clef and the second has a bass clef. The music is written in a key with one sharp (F#).

In the third phrase, the five-note octatonic motif is framed between two diminished-chord arpeggios in the first bassoons, first descending from A to B sharp (bar 17), and subsequently from G to A sharp (bars 18–19) (example 11). While the second phrase cadences on F sharp (bar 16), its inversion in the fourth phrase cadences on D major, setting the tone for the second dance in the chain.

Example 11. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, II, bars 17–20

The image shows a musical score for two bassoons, covering bars 17 through 20. The score consists of two staves, both labeled "Bassoon". The music is in 2/4 time and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with various accidentals. The first staff has a treble clef and the second has a bass clef. The music is written in a key with one sharp (F#).

The melody of dance B (bars 25–44), played in parallel thirds by oboes, appears to be suggested by dance A, and shares its use of sequence (example 12). The theme spans a diminished fifth or tritone, and is answered by a rhythmic phrase played by violas, cellos and double basses. Interjections such as this in the lower strings recur as interludes between themes (example 13).

Example 12. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, II, bars 25–30

The image shows a musical score for two oboes. The score consists of two staves, both labeled "Oboe". The music is in 2/4 time and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with various accidentals. The first staff has a treble clef and the second has a bass clef. The music is written in a key with one sharp (F#). Dynamics markings include *p* (piano) and *f* (forte).

Example 13. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, II, bars 40–45

Musical score for Example 13, showing Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass parts for bars 40–45. The score is in 2/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and slurs. The Viola part starts with a *f* dynamic. The Violoncello and Double Bass parts also feature *f* dynamics and include a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure.

Dances *C*, *D* and *E* are illustrated in the following three examples.

Example 14. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, II, bars 45–52

Musical score for Example 14, showing Clarinet in A and Clarinet parts for bars 45–52. The score is in 2/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and slurs. The Clarinet in A parts start with a *p* dynamic and include a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure. The Clarinet parts also feature a *p* dynamic and include a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure.

Example 15. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, II, bars 60–64

Musical score for Example 15, showing Flute parts for bars 60–64. The score is in 2/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and slurs. The Flute parts start with a *mf* dynamic and include a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure.

Example 16. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, II, bars 90–98

These dances exemplify Bartók's variational treatment: while the octatonic motif forms the basis of four of the five themes in the chain, its presence is inconspicuous. The dance themes are themselves inverted, with parallel harmonies throughout in thirds, fifths, sixths and sevenths on similar instruments. The melodic structure corresponds to Serbo-Croatian melodies in which pairs of folk oboes are played in roughly parallel minor sevenths.²⁷ After a solemn trio (bars 123–57: example 17) that has been related to a Bach chorale, the dance chain is reprised with further variation.²⁸

Example 17. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, II, bars 123–27

The tonality and form of the recapitulated dances echo their initial statements. They are altered in texture and expression, as accompaniments are varied and the use of dynamics increases. While

²⁷ Cooper, *Bartók Concerto*, p. 46.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.47.

the movement is not formally symmetrical, the many instances of contrary motion and inversion exemplify Bartók's use of symmetry at a motivic level. The rhythmic bass lines that separate the sections each echo the metre and character of the preceding theme and have a counterbalancing effect on the chain of dances. The movement's final cadence (bars 252–58) incorporates the intervals with which the dance melodies were harmonized in instrument pairs, forming a seventh chord (D–F sharp–A–C).²⁹ This closing gesture subtly unifies the harmonic design of the broadly ternary second movement.

III: 'Elegia'

The 'Night Music' of the third movement, 'Elegia', constitutes the emotional as well as the structural centre of the *Concerto*. This is the only movement that does not refer to the octatonic motif. Its tonality is shaped by pentatony (example 18) and the use of the 1:3 distance model (example 19), deriving material from the first movement. The 'interlocking fourths' motif from the first movement re-emerges, but is disguised, inverted and brought into the bass. Its use as a smooth harmonic progression contrasts with its previous incarnation as an angular, abrasive trumpet theme.

Example 18. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, III, bars 1–5



Also deriving from the first movement, a dramatic theme based on four semiquavers is developed in 'Elegia' (example 20). The most dramatic passage of the movement, it is rooted in the *verbunkos* style. This exemplifies Bartók's use of exaggerated Hungarian gestures at the culmination point of passages. A trumpet motif with accentuated *scotch snap* rhythms punctuates this theme, which again escalates in pitch and dynamics.

²⁹ Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, p. 196, p. 282.

Example 19. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, III, bars 10–13

Flute
Oboe
Clarinet in B♭

Fl.
Ob.
Cl.

Example 20. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, III, bars 34–40

a tempo
Violin II

The metre of the third movement's opening builds from dotted minims to crotchet motion in the latter half of the first 'Night Music' section. The momentum further increases to quavers and ultimately semiquavers. Subsequent sections bring a gradual reversal of note values, via quavers, back to the dotted minims of the opening, thus revisiting the 'Night Music'. The Elegia contains repeated references to and inversions of the first subject figure of the first movement. However, the strongest and most Hungarian themes, which constitute all of the climactic music of this central movement, occur one-third (bars 34–53) and two-thirds (bars 84–100) of the way through, giving it a complex but overarching symmetrical structure.

IV: Intermezzo Interrotto

Table 2. Structure of fourth movement

A	Bars 1–42
B	Bars 43–74
C	Bars 75–119
B	Bars 120–35
A	Bars 136–51

The Intermezzo is comparable only to the second movement, ‘*Giuoco delle Coppie*’, in its duration, texture, and mood. The shortest movement of the work, the fourth is not only the structural counterpart of the second, but shares its black humour, folk style and tonality due to the derivation of themes from the five-note octatonic motif. A symmetrical *ABCBA* form is defined by a lilting, sardonic dance, then a *cantabile* ‘serenade’, interrupted by ‘brutal band-music’ as Bartók is said to have called it;³⁰ this is a carnivalesque parody of Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony, part of which Bartók likened to ‘a Viennese cabaret song’.³¹ The *cantabile* and dance themes complete the movement’s mirror structure.

The fourth movement initially uses the four outer pitches of the five-note octatonic motif in a parodic dance tune (example 21). Inversion and extension of this melody give rise to a combination of sarcasm and playfulness.

The second section, from bar 43 to bar 69 (*B*) introduces a flowing melody in varying rhythm, which incorporates the ascending five-note motif in full, and extends it diatonically (example 22).

³⁰ B. Bartók (verbal statement), cited in David Cooper, ‘Bartók’s Orchestral Music and the Modern World’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók*, ed. by Amanda Bayley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 45–61 (p. 54). Hereafter referred to as Cooper, ‘Bartók’s Orchestral Music’.

³¹ Antokoletz, ‘Concerto for Orchestra’, pp. 533–34.

Example 21. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, IV, bars /5–12

Allegretto
Oboc
p
Ob

Example 22. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, IV, bars 42–46

Calmo
Viola
f. cantabile

The three themes of the movement are juxtaposed abruptly, cited by Cooper as one of many ‘disruptive forces’ which is balanced against ‘integrative forces’ in the *Concerto*.³² To quote Cooper:

Bartók’s accommodation of heterogeneous material is seen at its starkest in the curious fourth movement, ‘interrupted serenade’, which brings together without trying to reconcile music from three different worlds: an opening theme with a Slovak peasant-style melody and a ‘Balkan’ rhythm which sways between 5/8 and 2/4; a second idea modelled on a melody from Zsigmond Vincze’s popular 1926 fairy-tale opera *The Bride of Hamburg*, harmonized by a cyclic tonal progression; and a parody of a theme from Shostakovich’s *Seventh Symphony*.³³

While the second and third sections, *B* and *C*, inhabit different sound worlds (section *B* being a smooth rising melody on strings, and section *C* a comical brass-led burlesque), it becomes apparent that the theme in *C* approximately inverts and answers the main musical idea of *B* (example 23). *Glissandi* played by trombones and tubas add to the

³² Cooper, ‘Bartók’s Orchestral Music’, p. 61.

³³ *Ibid.*

humorous vulgarity (bars 90–91) and mock the interlocking fourth theme, using diminished fifths instead.

Example 23. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, IV, bars /77–84

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is for Clarinet in Bb and the bottom staff is for Clarinet (Cl.). Both staves are marked 'accelerando' and 'mf'. The Clarinet in Bb part features a melodic line with a fermata over the final notes. The Clarinet part features a more rhythmic line with triplets and a fermata over the final notes.

Rhythmic figures in the lower strings conclude the movement, after the cantilena and dance themes return, with falling fourths to a cadence on *B* (bar 151). String motifs of three to six bars that provided brief interludes between dance sections of the second and fourth movements, are recalled by this abrupt gesture with which the movement comes to an unceremonious ending. The black humour persists, and the impression that the music is parodic does not depend on a prior knowledge of the music being parodied.

The fourth movement's symmetry is marked by the return of the first two themes in reverse order after a distinctive central interruption (*ABCBA*). In the context of the entire concerto, it acts as a counterpart to the similarly folk-inspired second movement, and also uses the octatonic motif to construct themes.

V: Finale

The fifth and final movement of the *Concerto for Orchestra*, described as 'life-asserting' by Bartók,³⁴ is dominated by 'perpetuum mobile'³⁵ passages in the style of a Romanian *horă*.³⁶ Horncalls that introduce sections and recur as transforming motifs can be related to the calls of Transylvanian shepherds.³⁷ Referring to Bartók's fast finales, Kárpáti

³⁴ Béla Bartók, 'Explanation to the Concerto for Orchestra' in *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. by Benjamin Suchoff (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), p. 431. Hereafter referred to as Bartók, 'Explanation'.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Cooper, *Bartók Concerto*, p. 59.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

has pointed out that ‘a common characteristic of the musical material in these movements is a regular semiquaver rhythm, here not against the traditional background of the baroque prelude or toccata but of Rumanian instrumental dance music’.³⁸

As well as representing the maturity of Bartók’s ‘folk-dance finale’,³⁹ the *Concerto*’s final movement fulfils a symmetrical function. Corresponding to the first movement, the thematic material is developed as a fugue. In the fifth movement, as in the first, the ‘more or less regular sonata form’⁴⁰ designated by the composer is tempered by symmetry, which superimposes the composer’s distinct style of regularity on the historical form. Structurally, the movement completes the mirror form of the work, but within it, symmetry is most in evidence in the intervallic structure and motivic inversion.

Table 3. Structure of Finale

Exposition	Horncall and first subject group (<i>horǎ</i>)	Bars 1–147
	Transition (horncall)	Bars 148–87
	Second subject group (trumpet theme)	Bars 188–255
Development	Trumpet theme and fugue	Bars 256–383
Recapitulation	First subject group (<i>horǎ</i>)	Bars 384–448
	Transition (<i>tranquillo</i>)	Bars 449–81
	Horncall and inversions	Bars 482–555
	Second subject group	Bars 556–625

The prevalent theme in the finale is a whirling ‘perpetuum mobile’ with an incrementally thickening texture. The unceasing strings play variations on the acoustic scale of A (A, B, C sharp, D sharp, E, F sharp, G, A) (example 24). This scale contains the five-note octatonic segment C sharp, D sharp, E, F sharp and G. This circling, ascending theme dominates the finale, and while the second subject begins as a lilting, folk-like theme (example 25), it too builds up to perpetual motion.

³⁸ Kárpáti, *Bartók’s Chamber Music*, p. 446.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

⁴⁰ Bartók, ‘Explanation’, p. 431.

Example 24. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, V, bars 8–15

Presto

Violin II

Violin I

Vln. II

Vln. I

Example 25. Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, V, bars 188–91

Oboe

Clarinet in B \flat

The development of this movement is based on the fragmentation of motifs from the exposition, the combining of themes and the inversion of secondary themes that are brought to prominence. The contrapuntal mirroring of thematic material is paramount, and generates a distinctively Bartókian style of neo-Classicism.

The existence of two endings to the *Concerto for Orchestra* illustrates Bartók's tendency to revise and rewrite. With the addition of an alternative ending in 1945, it is likely that the intention was to give a more expansive ending to an expansive work, the revision replacing an ending that was characteristically abrupt. It can be noted that in Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste* (1936) and *Divertimento for String Orchestra* (1939), the conclusions of final movements consist of short, rapid gestures lasting only a few bars, following a slow section. While a large part of the *Concerto for Orchestra's* finale may be of Romanian derivation, the temporal characteristics of the closing passages of this work, as of the other two, can be linked to the Hungarian *verbunkos* tradition and thereby to the gypsy rhapsody. Much of Hungary's folk music is structured, like

verbunkos, in a series of dances that incrementally move from slow to fast. While Bartók often composed fast final movements, the endings were frequently preceded by slow music, accelerating to *presto*.

The *Concerto for Orchestra* was premiered under Koussevitzky's baton on December 1–2, 1944, in Boston, and repeated there on December 29–30. Two performances in New York's Carnegie Hall followed on January 10 and 13, 1945. All of these performances used the original ending, until a slightly longer alternative ending, sketched by Bartók in early 1945, became the universally performed option.⁴¹ While Koussevitzky reportedly requested a new ending,⁴² it is also suggested that the twenty four bars proffered as an alternative to the existing last five bars were 'a self-critical second thought by Bartók'.⁴³ Whether the impetus came from Koussevitzky or Bartók, the revision was apparently preferred by both, and by subsequent conductors. The inclusion of both endings allows the revision to be compared both with the original version and with the endings of other orchestral works.

The original ending of the *Concerto for Orchestra* is notably abrupt, a recurring feature in Bartók's orchestral compositions. A long, predominantly *presto* movement, the finale's prevalent theme is a folk-dance based on scales that include the octatonic motif. The ending departs from this theme after a series of five-note scale fragments that use this motif with a major instead of a minor third (bars 585–93). The woodwinds then sustain a unison E flat while the strings begin an ascending scale on G (bars 594–97), including the pitches of the octatonic motif (A, B, C, D and E flat) in the scale. Rising to F sharp, the strings play a sustained cadential figure (bars 598–602) that introduces an air of finality. A rising piccolo scale incorporating the octatonic motif reintroduces the upper register (bar 602). A sudden *crescendo* builds the atmosphere, and a two-bar *accelerando* further heightens it. The last four bars (bars 603–06) consist mainly of a triadic descent, with falling arpeggiated chords on C minor, E flat major and G minor before the final chord of F major.

⁴¹ Somfai, *Béla Bartók*, p. 198.

⁴² Cooper, *Bartók Concerto*, p. 25.

⁴³ Somfai, *Béla Bartók*, p. 198.

A large part of the extended ending comprises the falling triad motif of the original ending. In the revision, the piccolo's ascent is delayed by one bar by the inclusion of an extra bar of tied notes (bar 602), prolonging the sustained unison G. With the exception of dynamics, bar 603 of the new ending is identical to the original bar 602. The more forceful arrival of the descending triad motif in the revision (bar 604) is achieved by the entry of piccolo, flutes, oboes, clarinets in B flat, bassoons and strings, all *fortissimo* and in unison on G. Thus the texture of the alternative ending is denser than the original. The expansion of the ending revolves mainly around the falling triads, now predominantly C minor and E flat minor. The short ending's three-bar, descending sequential passage uses falling triads only in the last four bars (bars 603–06). For the alternative version, this idea is developed into an antiphonal passage between woodwinds and strings, with counterpoint and some inversion from horns in F and trumpets. Tonal alterations include the use of E flat minor (bar 610–14) instead of the original E flat major (bar 604).

During the last two bars of the triadic descent on E flat minor in the alternative ending, a fully chromatic scale, not found in the original ending, descends in semiquavers from B flat to B natural on piccolo. This scale and the triads are briefly resolved by trills on C in the first violins, violas and cellos (bars 615–18). Sustained for four bars and with a *decrescendo*, the strings are joined by *fortissimo* horns in F and trumpets in C (bar 616). While the strings fade to *piano*, the horns and trumpets jubilantly play a variant of the trumpets' fanfare or repeated note theme that was introduced in the fifth movement at bars 201–11. During this final statement, on the pitches of C and E flat, F emerges as the underlying tonality, giving C minor the role of dominant. The resolution to F is underscored by a perfect cadence in the timpani, which is completed as the flutes and bassoons initiate a sweeping scale ascending from F, with sharpened fourths. All woodwind parts are added during the ascent, with paired flute parts in major and minor thirds. First and second oboes also play a third apart, as do first and second clarinets.

The layers of ascending and overlapping scales, which are reinforced by unison scales on strings, culminate in a glissando built on an arpeggiated chord of F7 and a combination of scalar and arpeggiated ascents, to a final *fortissimo* chord of F major.

Commonalities between the two endings are many, despite the more flamboyant and exaggerated gestures of the revision. Both versions finish on a *fortissimo* F major chord, reached via a two-bar *crescendo*. In accordance with the more expansive nature of the revision, the *accelerando* in the alternative ending lasts for six bars (bars 604–09) instead of the original two (bars 603–04). In both versions, the onset of the *accelerando* coincides with the falling minor triads, and both endings are ultimately played *a tempo*. The *a tempo* final passage, like the *accelerando*, is longer in the alternative ending, with seventeen bars instead of two. The expansion of the falling triad motif, additional fanfare and scales account for the prolongation. However the motivic material, tonality, dynamics and tempo of the original version were largely retained in the second ending.

While the falling triads are not obviously derived from earlier in the work, they provide the basis for both endings. The theme to which they bear most resemblance is the finale's trumpet fanfare theme, from which the closing fanfare is derived. Following the falling triads on E flat minor, the fanfare on C and E flat unifies the material, while providing a strong air of finality. Its decisiveness anchors the jubilant mood evoked by the triads, while adding to the 'life-affirming' ethos of the finale.

Scales on the natural notes from F take flight five bars from the end (bars 621–25). The sharpened fourth (B natural) that featured in some of the scales in the finale's prevalent *horǎ* theme, and in the horncall theme, is thus re-invoked in a final unifying gesture. The momentum is generated from the finale's main themes, and sweeps upwards to a dramatic F major.

Bartók's extended ending, which was written as a post-script to the completed concerto, contains no material that is not derived from existing themes. The fanfare and sharpened-fourth scales, while absent from the original ending, are based on themes that recur throughout the final movement. While the first ending may have been more typical of Bartók's late orchestral works due to its peremptory abruptness, the alternative ending expands and exaggerates the first. Using more of the movement's signature themes to take this abruptness to a more dramatic level, the rewritten ending maintains the atmosphere and vision, as well as the thematic material of the original.

The original ending was retained, rather than replaced by the alternative version, making self-criticism a less likely factor in the revision than Koussevitzky's reported request. The more flamboyant finality of the second, longer ending is achieved by expanding the motivic material of the first and by adding derivatives of earlier themes.

Greater momentum is ultimately attained by the longer *accelerando*, which in turn reaches *presto* sixteen bars before the end (bar 609) in the alternative version, compared to three bars in the original. The main result of the new ending was to make existing gestures more jubilant and dramatic. The progressively increasing speed at the end of the final movement, and the abrupt endings that feature in *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste* (1936) and *Divertimento for String Orchestra* (1939) as well as *Concerto for Orchestra* (1943) are likely to have been influenced by the Hungarian *verbunkos* style. The arrangement of Bartók's finales somewhat corresponds to the traditional arrangement of suites of dances in order of increasing tempo.⁴⁴ Bartók's arrangements of folkdances, especially those from Hungary and Romania, frequently speed up towards the end. Correspondingly, the increasing tempo of Zoltán Kodály's *verbunkos* inspired *Dances of Galánta* (1933) illustrates the Hungarian roots of this phenomenon.

While Bartók rejected the developments or distortions that *verbunkos* music underwent in the hands of gypsy performers, in his music Erdely argues:

The *verbunkos* element becomes a symbol of the nation, of its moods and expressions, at times in passionate outburst, other times in calm reflecting mood, and at yet other times with a dignified pose or echoing the historical spirit. It is never how it was, but how it could have been if, in those promising times of national awakening, Hungarian music had evolved out of the roots of folk tradition.⁴⁵

Whether or not the revision represents a compromise on Bartók's part has been debated since its addition. Reviewers of the earliest performances were already questioning the *Concerto's* artistic integrity,

⁴⁴ Schneider, *Bartók, Hungary*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Stephen Erdely, 'Bartók and folk music', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók*, ed. by Amanda Bayley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 24–42 (pp. 25–26).

and the more grandiose alternative ending may have been considered a concession to popular appeal. René Leibowitz, who considered Bartók's authentic style to have peaked with the Fourth String Quartet, criticized the 'continual symmetry' and parallel melodies, along with 'a loss of real harmonic control, or rather, a chaotic harmonic structure'.⁴⁶ The trend towards consonance that had occurred in Bartók's compositions in the late 1930's was identifiably linked to the composer's wish to maintain integrity to the tonality of folk music. Paradoxically, the use of the dissonant tritone, which is a feature of much of Bartók's output, is in keeping with folk styles, especially the modes of Romanian and Slovak folksongs.⁴⁷ The tritone occurs in harmonies formed by his frequent contrary motion scales, and coincides with diatonic and chromatic modes. Bartók had, in 1931, clearly explained his imminently declining use of dissonance in the essay: 'On the Significance of Folk Music'.⁴⁸ As he was pioneering a synthesis of art music and folk music, the more consonant late works are more likely to have been influenced by tonality derived from folk idioms than by a wish to compromise to popular taste, which was still struggling with twelve-tone music. In the same essay, Bartók argued that artists necessarily have 'roots in the art of some former times', and, while emphasizing creativity, reaffirmed his roots in folk music.⁴⁹

Eclecticism and balance

The importance of symmetry as a structural, melodic and harmonic device in the *Concerto* is clear from the analysis above. The tritone range of the fundamental motif, and the use of octatonic scales and the 1:3 model can also be related to divisions of the octave, and the invertibility of themes. Instead of representing an 'all-encompassing system', however, this symmetrical principle is balanced against tonal concerns in a work that invokes many scales and modes, as well as

⁴⁶ Cooper, *Bartók Concerto*, p. 28.

⁴⁷ Amanda Bayley, 'The String Quartets and works for chamber orchestra', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók*, ed. by Amanda Bayley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 156.

⁴⁸ Béla Bartók, 'On the Significance of Folk Music', in *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. by Benjamin Suchoff (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), pp. 345–47. Hereafter referred to as Bartók, 'On the Significance of Folk Music'.

⁴⁹ Bartók, 'On the Significance of Folk Music', p. 346.

major–minor diatony and chromaticism. Eastern European modes such as pentatony, Hungarian rhythms and folkdance tempos used throughout the work indicate the level of synthesis between Eastern, Western and original style characteristics. Elements of *verbunkos* and other styles of folk music often heighten the colour and mood, especially in climactic passages, during which their use intensifies. Folk references are never ‘pure’ invocations of a single folk style. Interwoven into the texture are Bartók’s use of variational treatment, symmetry and a vast array of modes from diverse sources. Many instances of contrary motion or motivic inversion are only approximately symmetrical, with intervals altered for reasons of tonality. While symmetrical devices are pervasive, their modification in the interests of tonality calls into question Antokoletz’s emphasis on symmetry as fundamental to Bartók’s pitch structures. It must also be noted that the tritone or diminished fifth does not perform only a mathematical or inversional function, as implied by Lendvai, but that it also acts as a dominant in Bartók’s compositions. This ‘mistuning’ was proposed as a theory by Kárpáti,⁵⁰ and endorsed by the composer.

The question of whether or not the recurring motifs, especially the five-note octatonic motif, unify the work is largely subjective. While less recurrent than the five-note octatonic motif, the interlocking fourth pattern and the 1:3 model are more recognisable when they do recur, as they are not significantly altered. The octatonic motif generates a wide variety of themes considering its narrow range, and these are often disguised beyond recognition. The tritone span is the motif’s most distinctive interval, and strongly influences the sound world of the first, second, fourth and fifth movements.

Symmetry operates as an integrative device in the *Concerto*, contributing to a tonality that merges diatony and chromaticism in the process of inverting themes and accompaniments. The influence of Eastern European folk music involves the combination of modes in polymodal pitch structures. Bartók’s compositional techniques comprise a system that counterbalances symmetry with tonal inspiration, as well as combining the techniques and forms of Western art music, such as fugue, counterpoint and sonata form, with rhythmic and modal influences from the East, many of which are inseparable.

⁵⁰ Kárpáti, *Bartók’s Chamber Music*, p. 188.

Where symmetry is used in pitch construction, tonal considerations often depend on its modification. Balance is an overriding concept in the work, perhaps more than integration, as low-register sections answer high passages, themes are repeated in reversed order and also inverted, melodies are turned into harmonies, and above all as the work, on a large scale, forms a structural palindrome. Babbitt's conclusion that Bartók strove for 'assimilated balance' between 'internally defined relationships' and 'tonal motivation' applies to the balance between symmetrical constructions and tonality,⁵¹ but the *Concerto* exemplifies the balance that also exists between Eastern and Western music, and Bartók's system of many interrelated components without a single underlying principle.

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⁵¹ Babbitt, 'The String Quartets of Bartók', pp. 377–78.

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