


is tempestuous, with the love motive recast as a dance tune. Malcolm Gillies has suggested that the stark contrast between the two Portraits indicates that they may have been intended as representations of two sides of Geyer's character, or just as likely, Geyer as seen by Bartók "in two different frames of mind." Bartók, for many years after the completion of the Portraits was reluctant to discuss their inspiration, and was reluctant to have them performed, perhaps because the feelings they expressed were too personal and too painful.

This is the orchestral version of the composer's 1915 Romanian Folkdances for piano, Sz. 56. They are, in either version, very short, light pieces, and while their quality is fairly high (what folk music of Bartók's is not?), they are ultimately less significant works in the output of the composer.

The first of the seven dances, "Stick Dance," is played at a leisurely tempo, and though the general pacing is lively, the music has a restrained quality. The theme is attractive and Bartók's approach is straightforward in presenting the ethnic elements, as it is throughout the set. The second item, "Round Dance," less than a minute in duration, is playful and subtle. The next, "In One Spot," is colorful in its mysterious character, having an exotic upper-register melody with all the flavor and allure of Gypsy music. The fourth entry, the "Horn Dance," is wistful in nature and borders on the reflective, though it remains essentially light and colorful. At nearly two minutes, it is the longest of the dances in the set. The ensuing "Romanian Polka" is lively and colorful, lasting about a half-minute. The last two dances are both entitled "Short and Sweet." The first is, indeed, quite short and the closing number, though longer, lasts less than a minute. Both are rollicking, joyous dances whose celebration perfectly caps this colorful set of folk-inspired pieces.

A typical performance of these dances would last about seven minutes. The piano version is more popular in the concert halls and has also received substantially more recordings.

BARTÓK dance suite • two portraits opus five • Rumanian dances • L'Orchestre De La Suisse Romande / ANSERMET



Like so many of Bartók's works, whether for orchestra or for smaller forces, Dance Suite has a folk-like character in its many themes. Yet, as was often the case, all of them are both original and manage to avoid sounding like ersatz folk creations. The work was written to mark the 50th anniversary of the unification of the once-separate Hungarian cities of Buda and Pest. Dance Suite quickly gained widespread popularity, and in response to the favorable reaction Bartók fashioned a version for piano solo (Sz. 77, BB 86b) in 1925. But it is the orchestral version here that has achieved the greatest attention over the years.

Cast in six short movements and lasting a little over a quarter-hour, the work is colorfully orchestrated, effectively capturing the often exotic flavors and rowdy moments in the score. Marked *Moderato*, the first movement exudes some of those exotic characteristics in the Arabic-tinged melody introduced at the outset by the bassoon. The music has a carefree, somewhat humorous quality throughout most of this chapter before turning serene and playful at the close.

The *Allegro molto* second movement exhibits the aforementioned rowdiness, particularly in the sassy trombone writing. But Bartók invests the music with a sense of urgency, too, though in the latter half the tempo slows and the mood tempers, falling into a mysterious haze near the end. The third movement (*Allegro vivace*) exudes both Hungarian and Rumanian thematic character, opening with a colorful, vivacious melody, probably the best known in the score. It alternates with another lively theme of similar festive character, and both are dressed in masterful orchestration.

The fourth movement (*Molto tranquillo*) conveys a mysterious, dreamy manner in its mixture of exoticism and Bartók's characteristic "night music" instrumentation. The string writing foreshadows the orchestration in the second movement of the composer's 1930-1931 Piano Concerto No. 2.

The fifth and sixth movements are played as one, with an agitated, tension-building transitional episode leading to a lively closing section, wherein themes from the first three movements reappear in different guises. Again, a rowdy, colorful manner predominates here, though a brief calm episode at the center of the final movement offers contrast and sets the stage for the brilliant, lively close.

The Portraits (2) for Orchestra are not original compositions as such, but actually modified versions of two other works by Bartók. The first Portrait is the first movement of his First Violin Concerto, which was only published posthumously; Bartók withdrew it in 1907 before its premiere. The second Portrait is an orchestrated version of the fourteenth of the Fourteen Bagatelles for piano (the piano version was composed in 1908, but was not orchestrated for the Portraits until 1911). Bartók had originally designated the First Violin Concerto as his Op. 5, and composed it while deeply infatuated with the violinist Stefi Geyer. Both the Concerto and Bagatelles bear the mark of Bartók's love for Geyer: the so-called "love motif," comprised of the notes of a D major seventh chord (D-F#-A-C#). This motive is found in the first movement of the concerto, and also in the fourteenth Bagatelle, hence Bartók's decision to combine these two pieces in the Two Portraits. Bartók's motivation, in part, for the Two Portraits, was to salvage something from the First Violin Concerto. The first Portrait is a gentle, tender piece of music, subtitled "Une idéale." The music from the first movement of the Concerto appears here virtually unchanged; Bartók shortened a few notes, and made only small changes to the orchestration. The first Portrait develops gradually, subtly, with the initial thematic statement made by the solo violin. Other instruments are added one by one as the movement progresses, and scholars have likened the tender swelling of the piece to the movement of waves. Textually, the first Portrait combines quasi-fugal moments with a Debussyian, impressionistic harmonic stasis. The second Portrait differs radically in character from the first. It is a wild dance, a Valse, subtitled "Une grotesque." Again, this Portrait, like the first, differs little from its original source; in orchestrating the Bagatelle, some of its pianistic effects are lost, necessarily, but in terms of the music itself virtually nothing is altered.

It has been suggested that the Portraits are the musical renderings of a particular subject, namely Bartók's unrequited love for Geyer. The first Portrait, "Une idéale," is exactly what its title suggests, with the idealized woman represented through a serene, delicate treatment of the love motive. The second Portrait, by comparison,

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- 1 Dance Suite 17:53**
- Two Portraits, Op. 5 (12:32)**
- 2 I. Ideal**
- 3 II. Distorted**
- Rumanian Dances (5:44)**

Producer: Michael Bremner Engineer: James Lock
Recorded by Decca 1964 Victoria Hall, Geneva



For more info e-mail us:
admin@highdeftapetransfers.com
or visit our website:
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