



Bela Bartók (March 25, 1881 – September 26, 1945) was born in Hungary. He started playing piano at an early age. At first, he was taught by his mother; later he attended and graduated from the prestigious Budapest Academy of Music.

Bartók was very interested in the folk music of his native land and, with Zoltán Kodály, traveled throughout Hungary and other neighboring countries recording thousands of old songs. He wanted to use this music in a very natural way in his own compositions. You can hear the strong rhythmic patterns of the folk tunes and their unique sounds in many of his pieces. One of his most famous works is the *Mikrokosmos*, which consists of over 150 pieces for teaching piano that are based on Hungarian music.

In 1940, Bartók moved to the United States to escape from Hitler and Nazism. He settled in New York City with his wife, where he taught at Columbia University and continued to compose. His health was never good, however, and he had constant financial problems. Bartók's music was not very popular during his lifetime, but after his death he became one of the most well known composers of the 20th century.

Mikrokosmos consists of 153 progressive piano pieces in six volumes written between 1926 and 1939. The individual pieces progress from very easy and simple beginner études to very difficult advanced technical displays, and are used in modern piano lessons and education. In total, according to Bartók, the piece "appears as a synthesis of all the musical and technical problems which were treated and in some cases only partially solved in the previous piano works." Volumes one and two are dedicated to his son Péter, while volumes five and six are intended as professionally performable concert pieces. Bartók also indicated that these pieces could also be played on other instruments; Huguette Dreyfus for example has recorded pieces from Books 3 through 6 on the harpsichord.

In 1940, shortly before they emigrated to the United States, he arranged seven of the pieces for two pianos, to provide additional repertoire for himself and his wife Ditta Pásztory-Bartók to play.

In addition to being a piano pedagogy, *Mikrokosmos* is also a study in 20th Century composition techniques. Bartók used a variety of compositional devices in creating *Mikrokosmos*. The two used in the short excerpts we will study are *parallel motion* and *reflection*. In *parallel motion*,

two musical lines move in the same direction at the same time (line A and line B move up). In *reflection*, two musical lines move simultaneously in the opposite direction (line A moves up while line B moves down).