



Béla Viktor János Bartók (March 25, 1881 – September 26, 1945) was a Hungarian composer and pianist. He is considered one of the most important composers of the 20th century and is regarded, along with Liszt, as Hungary's greatest composer. Through his collection and analytical study of folk music, he was one of the founders of ethnomusicology. Bartók began his musical training with piano studies at the age of five, foreshadowing his lifelong affinity for the instrument. Following his graduation from the Royal Academy of Music in 1901 and the composition of his first mature works - most notably, the symphonic poem *Kossuth* (1903) - Bartók embarked on one of the classic field studies in the history of ethnomusicology. With fellow countryman and composer Zoltán Kodály, he traveled throughout Hungary and neighboring countries, collecting thousands of authentic folk songs. Bartók's immersion in this music lasted for decades, and the intricacies he discovered therein, from plangent modality to fiercely aggressive rhythms, exerted a potent influence on his own musical language. In addition to his compositional activities and folk music research, Bartók's career unfolded amid a bustling schedule of teaching and performing. The great success he enjoyed as a concert artist in the 1920s was offset somewhat by difficulties that arose from the tenuous political atmosphere in Hungary, a situation exacerbated by the composer's frank manner. As the specter of fascism in Europe in the 1930s grew ever more sinister, he refused to play in Germany and banned radio broadcasts of his music there and in Italy. A concert in Budapest on October 8, 1940, was the composer's farewell to the country which had provided him so much inspiration and yet caused him so much grief. Days later, Bartók and his wife set sail for America. In his final years Bartók was beleaguered by poor health. Though his prospects seemed sunnier in the final year of his life, his last great hope - to return to Hungary - was dashed in the aftermath of World War II. He died of leukemia in New York on September 26, 1945. The composer's legacy included a number of ambitious but unrealized projects, including a Seventh String Quartet; two major works, the Viola Concerto and the Piano Concerto No. 3, were completed from Bartók's in-progress scores and sketches by his pupil, Tibor Serly.

Romanian Folk Dances is a suite of six short piano pieces composed in 1915 and orchestrated by Bartok himself for small ensemble in 1917. The suite is based on seven Romanian tunes from Transylvania, originally played on fiddle or shepherd's flute. The original name for the piece was titled **Romanian Folk Dances from Hungary** but was later changed by Bartók when Transylvania was annexed to Romania in 1920. It is nowadays available in the 1971 edition which is written with key signatures although Bartok rarely ever wrote key signatures. *Romanian Folk Dances* is well-known by violinists as it was transcribed by the prominent violinist Zoltan Szekely, for violin and piano. The movements are: *Jocul cu bâță* (a dance performed using a stick) – from Voiniceni, a district of Maros-Torda, today Mureș county, Transylvania in Romania; *Brâu* (a cloth belt worn by men or women) - from Igrîș (in the Banat); *Pe Loc* (on the spot) - from Igrîș; *Buciumeana* - dance from Bucium (Butschum), in the district of Torda-Aranyos (today Alba county in Romania); *Poargă Românească* - old Romanian dance similar to the Polka, from Belényes (today Beiuș, in Bihor county near the border between Hungary and Romania); *Mărunțel* - a fast dance using very small steps and movements, from Belényes (Beiuș).