



Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest

Judit Frigyesi

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Bartók's music is greatly prized by concertgoers, yet we know little about the intellectual milieu that gave rise to his artistry. Bartók is often seen as a lonely genius emerging from a gray background of an "underdeveloped country." Now Judit Frigyesi offers a broader perspective on Bartók's art by grounding it in the social and cultural life of turn-of-the-century Hungary and the intense creativity of its modernist movement. Bartók spent most of his life in Budapest, an exceptional man living in a remarkable milieu. Frigyesi argues that Hungarian modernism in general and Bartók's aesthetic in particular should be understood in terms of a collective search for wholeness in life and art and for a definition of identity in a rapidly changing world. Is it still possible, Bartók's generation of artists asked, to create coherent art in a world that is no longer whole? Bartók and others were preoccupied with this question and developed their aesthetics in response to it. In a discussion of Bartók and of Endre Ady, the most influential Hungarian poet of the time, Frigyesi demonstrates how different branches of art and different personalities responded to the same set of problems, creating oeuvres that appear as reflections of one another. She also examines Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, exploring philosophical and poetic ideas of Hungarian modernism and linking Bartók's stylistic innovations to these concepts.

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