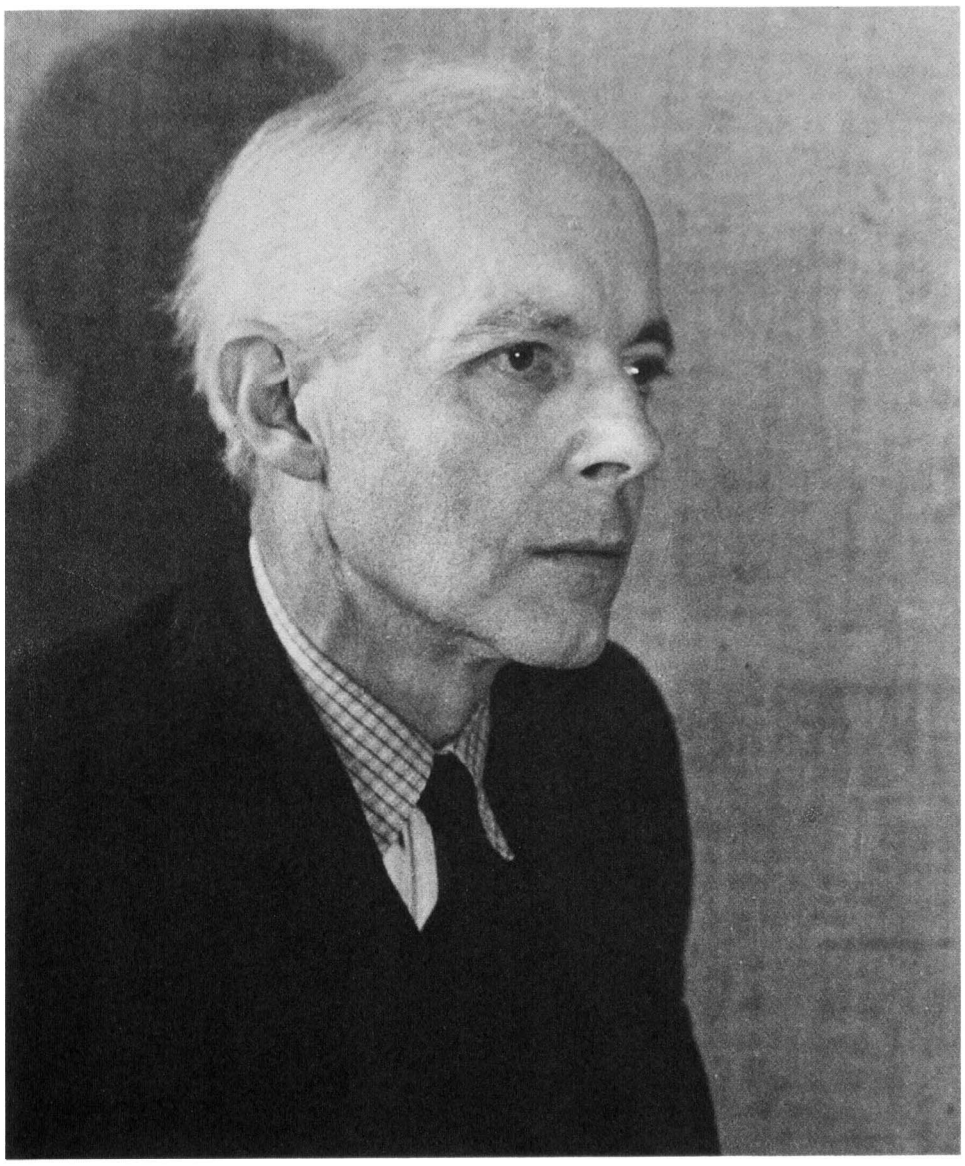
Béla Bartók

VIOLA CONCERTO

Facsimile of the autograph draft



C. LEIRENS

Béla Bartôk

G. D. HACKETT

William Primrose

P. BARTOK

89 Riverside Drive, Saranac Lake, N. Y.

Béla Bartók

VIOLA CONCERTO

Facsimile Edition of the Autograph Draft

with a Commentary by Laszlo Somfai

&

Fair Transcription of the Draft with Notes

Prepared by Nelson Dellamaggiore

Bartok Records

1995 ·

Preface

My father and mother spent the summer of 1945 in very simple circumstances, where he found the peace and tranquillity suitable for composing. He described the place, in the village of Saranac Lake, New York, in a letter to me (July 7, 1945), following their arrival:

> The place here is very quiet, but very simple. Although we have electricity for light and cooking, the bath water must be heated in a stove. The bathroom has a tub, but no lavatory. The ice-box must be fed real, natural ice (delivered every second day). There is no delivery of goods to the house (except for dairy products and, once a week, eggs), but the owners of the house drive into town almost daily and we may avail ourselves of this.
>
> I do not read newspapers here...

Once I was discharged from the U.S. Navy in the middle of August, I promptly travelled to Saranac Lake. Having announced my arrival at the house bearing my parents' address for that summer, 89 Riverside Drive, I was directed to the cottage behind the main house, on top of a long flight of wooden steps.

The cottage matched my father's description. It may have been the servants' quarters for the main house at one time. My father was obviously contented; his surroundings were as sparten as the interior of a Hungarian peasant cottage — a reminder of a world with such fond associations for him.

While my mother went shopping for groceries, my father showed me what he was working on. A pile of music paper was resting on the table, with many pencil notations. "This is going to be the Viola Concerto, one of the commissions I wrote you about," he said, pointing at the pile and, lifting up the top few sheets, continued: "but underneath is the piano concerto I am writing for your mother. You must not talk about it, for it is a surprise, it will be her birthday present[1], that is why I keep it always covered."

I was not given a more detailed introduction to this music then — my father seldom spoke about his work until he was finished with a composition. In September, back in New York City, when he was suddenly ordered by his physician to go to a hospital, I had to draw 17 bar lines on the last, nearly blank page of the Third Piano Concerto score — in the event that someone else would have to fill those in with orchestration, up to the last double bar which my father marked: "end". Only later, when he was gone and I was assembling the various papers scattered around his bedroom-study, I came upon the brown envelope marked:

Viola Concerto
and song [2]

Eventually the manuscripts were added to those my father had brought to America, in care of his executor.[3]

Thanks to the efforts of our friend, Tibor Serly, the concerto can be heard today The orchestra score must, of necessity, differ from the sketch; not only respecting instrument assignments either not yet decided, or at least not noted down by my father, but also on account of the few gaps in the sketch as well as the need to determine the intended sequence of musical material found on the 14 pages. For the composer this was purely "mechanical work", but much of the essential data were only in his mind; he must have planned to decide many details or make some modifications only when actually transferring the composition onto the final score paper.

These determinations and decisions had to be made by Tibor Serly, who exercised his judgment and discretion in assembling the mosaic and filling the gaps. The question has been asked: how much is Bartók, what details come from Serly? Or, if different solutions to the problems are attempted by others, the same question can be posed regarding their decisions.

To provide answers to such questions is the objective of this publication.

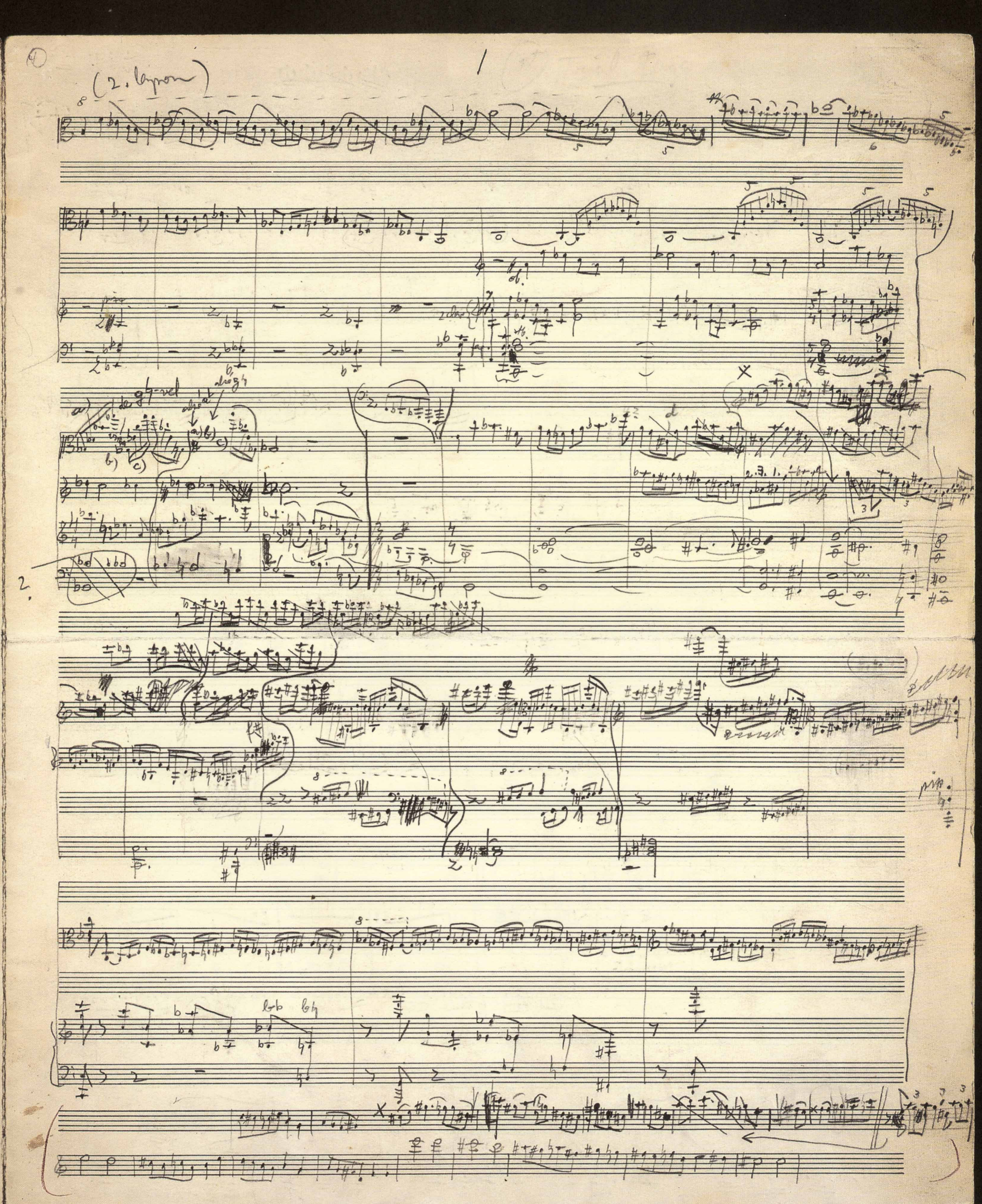
Peter Bartók

Homosassa, Florida, March, 1994

1. October 31.

2. The song in question was not related to the concerto, it was just stored in the same (used) Manila envelope.

3. From about 1954 until 1972 whereabouts of the Viola Concerto sketches could not be determined, having apparently vanished without a trace. They were found, in 1972, in a foot-locker.



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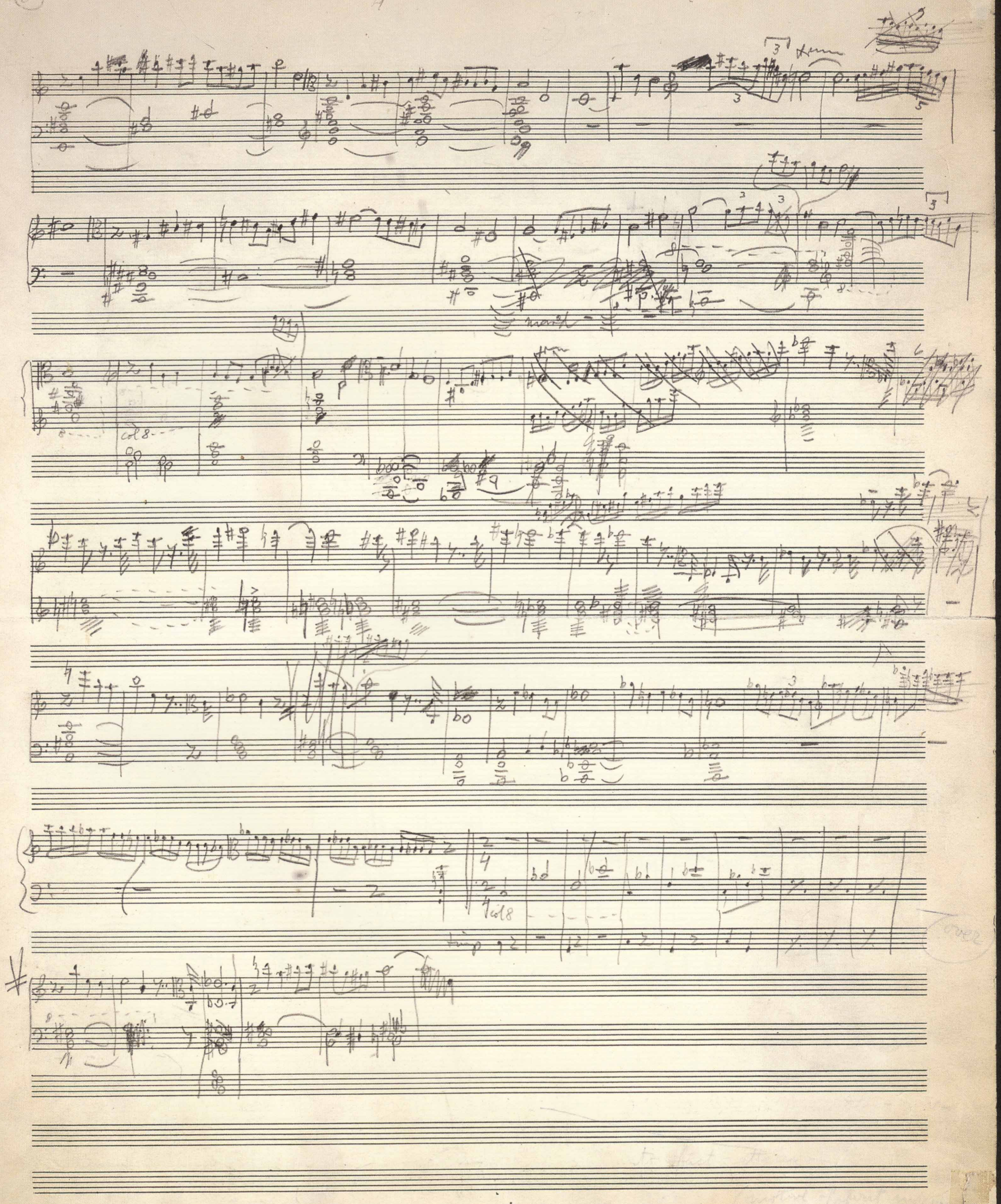

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harmonics

a) b) a) b) a)

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Carl Fischer, Inc. New York.
No. 22–24 lines.

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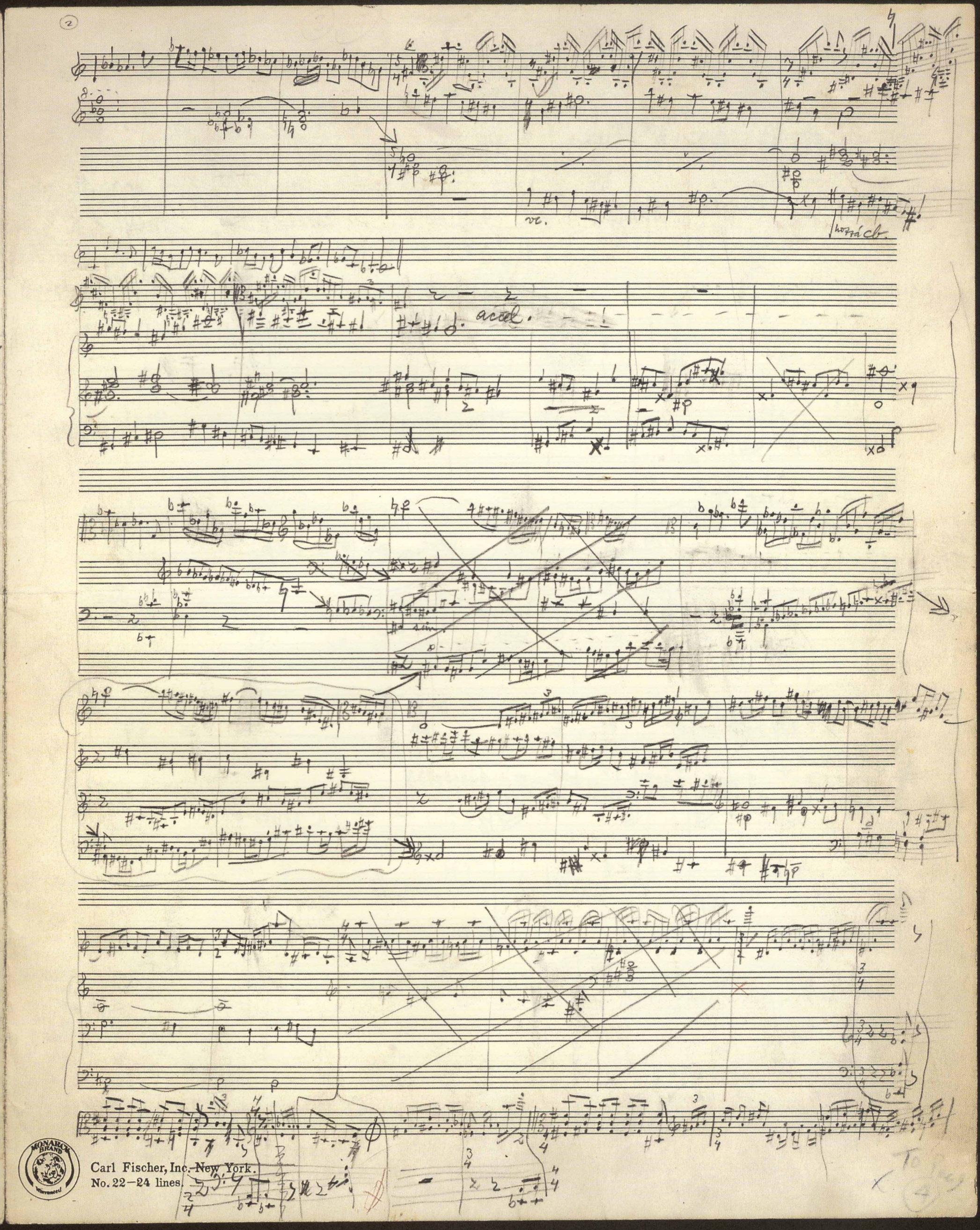
No. 22–24 lines.

Viola



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3. : 4' 45" } 20'15"

Carl Fischer, Inc. New York.
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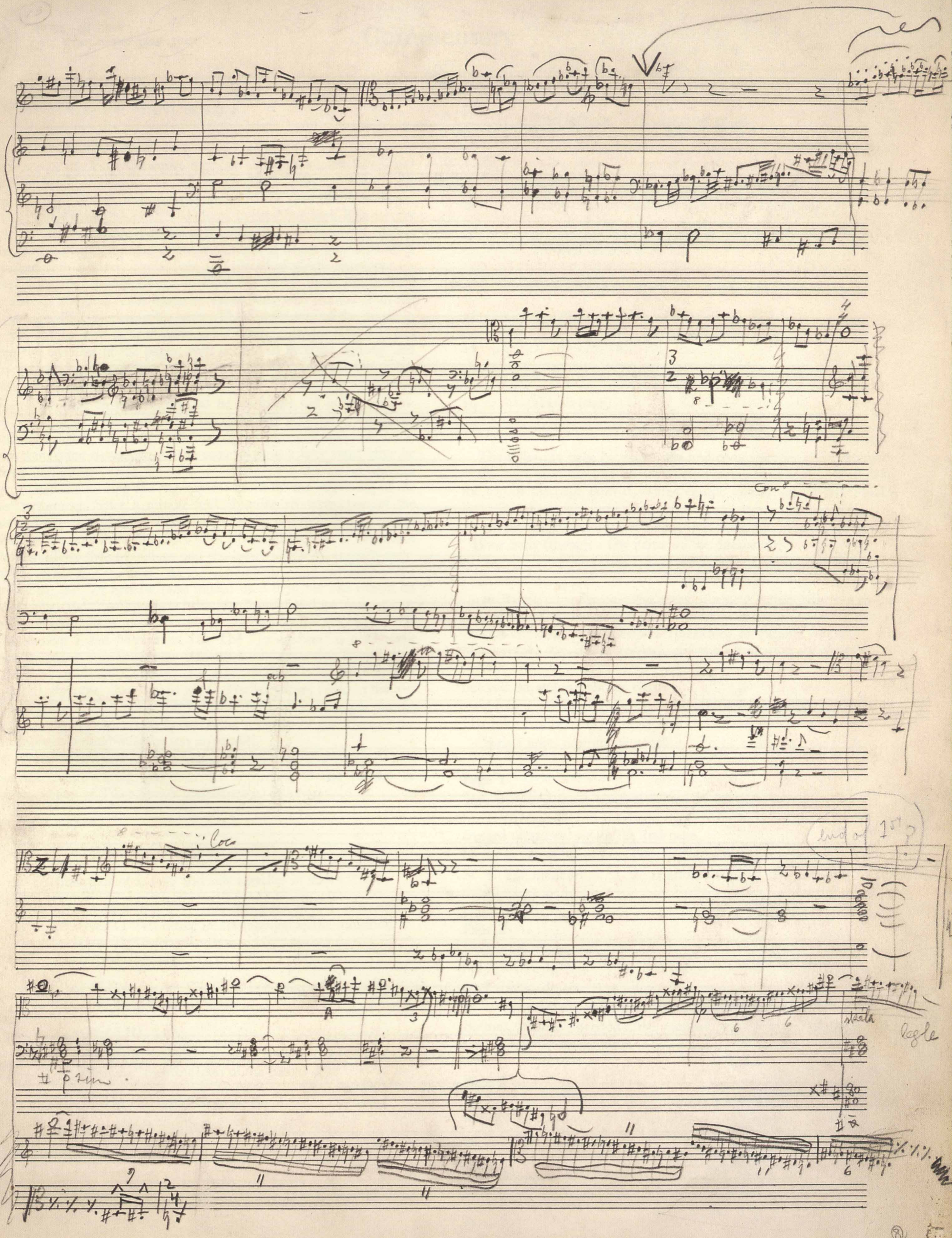

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Commentary

I
THE AUTOGRAPH MANUSCRIPT

The "draft" (Bartók's word, see his letter of Sept. 8, 1945, to William Primrose) of the Viola Concerto, together with preliminary forms and sketches, in all probability the full autograph complex written for the work in progress, survived on four bifolia.[1] At the time of the establishment of safekeeping the estate's holdings in the New York Béla Bartók Archives this manuscript was not in the collection. Therefore — unlike most of the autograph manuscripts, the bifolia of which were separated, furnished with arbitrary pagination, and placed in plastic envelopes — these bifolia are still in the form in which Bartók left them, except for a few distinct marginal notes made by Tibor Serly who worked from the manuscript while preparing his score. The distribution of the music in the four bifolia as it is, with continuous notation or disconnection between the contents of the pages, with occasional inverted writing, and even the blank pages, is a valuable source of the reconstruction of the compositional process.

Bartók worked on the concerto, as he habitually did in the preliminary stage of a multi-movement composition, with more than one bifolium at hand. Opening measures at the top of a sheet of music paper were often developed on the same page at a later time, after he notated preliminary ideas for another movement at the top of another page, sometimes turning the page upside down for the beginning of the other movement. Since a minute and objective reconstruction of the steps and sequence of the composition is hardly possible, the pagination printed at the bottom of the pages of our facsimile edition is not meant to be a guide to the chronology and the layers of the manuscript complex but rather as a reference. As to the numbering and sequence of the four bifolia: the *"1st bifolium"* was indeed used first, but one cannot be sure whether the *"2nd"* preceded the *"3rd"* and *"4th"*, or reversed, or Bartók alternatingly worked on the elaboration of what is known today as Movement I and Movement III. The *"1st bifolium"* is a 24 stave American paper with Parchment trademark (the same that Bartók used in the draft of Piano Concerto #3, Mov. I-II and the beginning of Mov. III), the other three bifolia are C. Fischer papers (used in the rest of Mov. III of Piano Concerto #3). Thus the paper itself might outline the chronological connection between the progress of the draft of the two concertos written more or less in parallel.

A survey of the paper structure and the contents of the pages (with reference to movement and measure according to the Boosey & Hawkes edition of Tibor Serly's orchestration) follows:

page	paper	contents
		"1st bifolium" (sketches, first drafts)
1	┌	first draft of I, 1-43 and side sketches in staves 23-24;
2	└	second draft of I, 1-11, as a correction to p. 1; (inverted in staves 13-24:) music in 2/4 (applied as the transition to III = II, 70-85); sketches to III, 116-141 (st. 3); unused sketches (st. 4-7);
3	┌	draft of II and in st. 17-19 the beginning of the music in 2/4 (applied as II, 58-69);
4	└	(inverted:) III, 1-71;
		"2nd bifolium" (continuation of the finale)
5	┌	III, 72-145 (continuation of p. 4);
6	└	III, 146-ca.210;
7	┌	III, 211 to end;
8	└	(blank page);
		"3rd bifolium" (opening movement)
9	┌	I, 44-65 (continuation of p. 1) and side sketches in st. 23-24;
10	└	I, 66-98;
11	┌	I, 99-137 and sketch in st. 5 (see p. 15, st. 6);
12	└	(beginning of a third draft, in ink:) I, 1-43 only (revised version of p. 1);
		"4th bifolium" (end of the opening movement)
13	┌	I, 138-165 (continuation of p. 11);
14	└	I, 166-174, 185-194;
15	┌	I, 195 to end (of I);
16	└	(blank page)

1. Peter Bartók's archive (Homosassa, Florida), 85FSS1

The following page by page notes and commentaries (with reference to the number of the staff on the 24-stave paper, always numbered from the top of the page even if written upside down) do not individually list:

– the markings in red and blue pencil, because all were written by Tibor Serly (though a few items will be discussed);

– Serly's pagination (numbers encircled or in parentheses at the top or bottom of the pages);

– in Bartók's handwriting the name of a note, letters referring to the repetition of figures or measures, the unambiguous names of instruments or Italian words like *pizz.* (pizzicato), *bis* (again), *col* (with), *loco* (as written) etc., if easy to read, and the Hungarian abbreviation *stb.* (etc.);

but will list and explain (or clarify):

– Hungarian words, special abbreviations, groups of numbers in Bartók's handwriting;

– Serly's notes in graphite pencil.

Page 1

Top, middle: *1* (page number written by Bartók).

St. 1: *(2. lapon)* [(on the 2nd page)], i.e. the corrected form of the crossed measures, see on the 2nd page.

St. 7: *de g♮ - vel* [but with **G♮**]; *alsó a♭*, *alsó g♮* [lower **A♭**, lower **G♮**].

St. 9, 8th measure: *2. 3. 1.* (Bartók corrected the sequence of the notes).

Page 2

St. 2: *timp.* = timpani.

St. 6 (inverted): *rep.* = repetition (when repeated or in the repetition).

St. 7 (inverted): *sim.* = simile.

St. 19 (inverted): *2 tr. és corni* [2 trumpets and horns].

Bottom, middle (inverted): the number, written in pencil by Bartók, seems to be his temperature.

Page 3

Top, middle: the number (page number?) *4* looks like Bartók's handwriting.

St. 6: *marad* [remains].

Bottom: the numbers are in Bartók's hand, on the left presumably the rough timing of the 3-movement form (*10, 5, 3½*, total *18½*), on the right *(25?)* which could have been the estimated time of the longer version (a 4-movement form? See Bartók's letter of Aug. 5, 1945, to Primrose).

Page 4

St. 5 (inverted): *át f-be* [over into **F**], a note in pencil, probably by Bartók, apparently a reminder to change enharmonic spelling.

Page 5

St. 18: the word *harmonics* presumably is in Bartók's handwriting, but the red encircling is Serly's.

Page 6

Top, middle: the numbers *37'3/99'2* etc. written by Bartók seem to be data on his temperature in Centigrade and Fahrenheit respectively.

Page 7

St. 5: *eredeti?* [original?], Bartók's note for himself that the notes in st. 6 should probably remain in the original form (**E-E-A-F♯-E-E-B-D**); the red parentheses by Serly.

Page 10

St. 2: *marad* [remains].

Page 11

St. 4: *hozzá cb.* [add Cb.].

Bottom lower right corner: the reference *to page 4* is by Serly.

Page 12

Top: the number *I* is Serly's note.

St. 2-24: the additions in pencil to the light blue ink ground layer were written by Bartók, except that in st. 23 the faded encircled *Pizz.* is by Serly.

St. 12: *(fag. is?)* [(bassoon too?)].

Page 13

Top left corner, the timing of the three movements: the shade of the pencil suggests that *4'45"* and *20'15"* and perhaps the correction of *9'20"* to *10'20"* could be additions.

Above stave 1: the crossed circle and the bracket in pencil (referring to st. 24 of p. 11) written by Bartók (but the blue and red markings and the reference to *4* are by Serly).

St. 7: the warning *(sic)*, i.e. that in the doubling the middle octave has to be left out, was written by Bartók.

Page 15

St. 6-12: *felcs. (=felcserélni)* [invert].

St. 17: *end of 1st?*, in blue pencil, is by Serly, referring to possible ending of the first movement.

St. 20: *skála legle* [scale to the very bottom].

It has to be stressed that among the drafts of the mature works of Bartók, written under normal conditions on normal sized bifolia, it is quite rare that (1) he drafted in pencil instead of ink, and (2) he erased to this extent. We suppose that the normal routine of his composition —with extensive improvisation at the piano in the isolation of the study in his home, before he went to the desk to fix the developed longer sections onto the paper in ink — was hindered by the lack of the necessary isolation and/or instrument in Saranac Lake, N.Y.

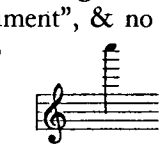
II
DATA ON THE GENESIS OF THE VIOLA CONCERTO

According to William Primrose (interview in 1970),[2] under the impression of a Menuhin performance of the Violin Concerto (#2) he went to Bartók's New York apartment to commission a viola concerto. The exact time of this interview can not be determined, but by mid January 1945 the composer made up his mind as Primrose's letter written from Ellensburg, Washington, testifies:

January 22, 1945

Dear Mr. Bartok,

Need I tell you how gratified and thrilled I am to learn from Mr. Heinsheimer that you have so kindly consented to write for me a Viola Concerto. I really am very excited & will contact you immediately I return East in March. Please do not feel in any way proscribed by the apparent technical limitations of the instrument. I can assure you that they belong to the day when the viola was merely a "penzions instrument", & no longer, in reality, exist. You can range anywhere up to



in technical passages & a third lower in melodic line.

All my good wishes to you & my warmest congratulations on your truly magnificent "Concerto for Orchestra" which I heard the Boston people play.

Cordially yours,
William Primrose

Except for an indirect reference (that, in late January, Bartók wanted to see the score of Harold in Italy by Berlioz, a four-movement work with a viola solo), there is no data indicating he was working on the idea of the composition prior to mid July. In a letter (Feb. 8, 1945) to his son Peter, then serving in the U.S. Navy, Bartók mentioned the commission:

> Three people (independent from each other) would like to commission works from me: one a viola concerto, another a piano concerto, the third a two-piano concerto. ... Well, this is very nice, the only problem is, I do not know where and when I could write such a large volume of music! Hardly here in New York.

He was invited by Primrose to hear him play the Walton Viola Concerto at a rehearsal, on March 10, for the concert the following day[3]. Between March 8 and 18 he became ill, however, and could not attend the rehearsal but, according to Primrose, Bartók did hear the broadcast. Most of what we can learn about the composition and the concept of the new work in progress is based on a fragmentary letter of Bartók written August 5, 1945[4], which he apparently did not mail to Primrose, who was on a concert tour in South America at that time.

Aug. 5, 1945

89 Riverside Drive
Saranac Lake, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Primrose:

about mid July I was just planning to write you a rather desponding letter, explaining you the various difficulties I am in. But, then, there stirred some viola-concerto ideas which gradually crystallized themselves, so that I am able now to tell you that I hope to write the work, and maybe finish at least its draft in 4-5 weeks, if nothing happens in the meantime which would prevent my work. The prospects are these: perhaps I will be able to be ready with the draft by beginning of Sept., and with the score by end of the same month. This is the best case; there may be, however, a delay of the completion of the work until end of Oct. So, about end of either Sept. or Oct. you will get from me a copy of the orch. and the piano score — if I am able to go through the work at all. Then, certain time must be given for the copying of the orch. parts; this, of course, will be done by B. 𝄞 H. who are, as far as I know, short of copyists.

I must ask you to make no plans yet and not yet divulge the news about this work as long as the draft is not completed. I will send you news about the completion without delay.

---

2. David Dalton, "The Genesis of Bartók's Viola Concerto", in: *Music & Letters*, lvii/2 (April, 1976), 117-129; excerpts in: Malcolm Gillies, *Bartók Remembered* (Faber and Faber, 1990), 190-191.

3. Studio concert of the NBC Symphony conducted by Malcolm Sargent, March 11, 1945.

4. The crucial part of the letter (kept in the Budapest Bartók Archives) was first published in the commentaries to the *Bartók Complete Edition* (Hungaroton SLPX 11421); re-edited and discussed by Sándor Kovács, "Reexamining the Bartók/Serly Viola Concerto", in: *Studia Musicologica* 23 (1981), see p. 302. We print the complete document, tacitly correcting a few minor spelling and grammatical errors.

However embrionic the state of the work still is, the general plan and ideas are already fixed. So I can tell you that it will be in 4 movements: a serious Allegro, a Scherzo, a (rather short) slow movement, and a finale beginning Allegretto and developing the tempo to an Allegro molto. Each movement, or at least 3 of them will [be] preceded by a (short) recurring introduction (mostly solo of the viola), a kind of ritornello.

As you perhaps know, I was ill with a kind of pneumonia when you came to take me to that Saturday rehearsal. This illness caused a considerable disturbance in our home, and prevented me to make arrangements at least to return [to] you the umbrella (which we still keep!), or to let you know in advance about my sickness.

When you came to see me we did not mention the commission fee ($1000) which, however, I mentioned as early as Dec. to Mr. Heinsheimer who [*end of the page and the fragment*][5]

The other letter which Bartók wrote after his Aug. 30 return to New York, dated Sept. 8 and mailed to Primrose, seems to speak about the form of the autograph draft as it came to us.

Sept. 8, 1945

309 West 57th St.
New York 19, N.Y.

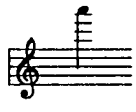
Dear Mr. Primrose:

I am very glad to be able to tell you that your viola concerto is ready in draft so that only the score has to be written which means a purely mechanical work, so to speak. If nothing happens I can be through in 5 or 6 weeks, i.e. I can send you a copy of the orchestra score in the second week of Oct., and a few weeks afterwards a copy (or if you wish more copies) of the piano score.

I had immense *externe* difficulties in writing it. I could not do any composing work in this unfortunate and inadequate apartment of mine in New York. In addition, a sequence of various illnesses visited us: not only I was ill several times but also Mrs. Bartók. (You know when you came to fetch me for that rehearsal I was just in bed developing a pneumonia.) Finally end of June we went to our summer place in Saranac Lake quite ex[h]austed and with little hope of being able to do there some work. However, we had such a nice *quiet* place there, that about mid July some ideas came to me which I did not hesitate to grasp and develop. Alas, the quiet and undisturbed period did not last very long! About mid August Mrs. Bartók fell again ill, and we had to leave our summer place for New York where again I got ill (with a common but obstinate sore throat). But with the main work — the rather detailed draft — I am through, and the remaining work is a rather mechanical one, I repeat it.

When you came to see me we did not mention the commission fee ($1000) which, however, as Mr. Heinsheimer told me was already settled with you or Mrs. Primrose earlier. Now another question must be settled: how long do you want to retain the exclusive performing rights? It is completely up to you to fix this period. However, it should be fixed, because as long as it lasts the work should not be published. — As for the use of orchestral material, you have to settle this question with Boosey & Hawkes.

Many interesting problems arose in composing this work. The orchestration will be rather transparent, more transparent than in a violin concerto. Also the sombre, more masculine character of your instrument exerted some influence on the general character of the work. The highest note I use is



but I exploit rather frequently the lower registers.

It is conceived in a rather virtuoso style. Most probably some passages will prove to be uncomfortable or unplayable. These we may discuss later, according to your observations.

There developed an unfortunate circumstance about my New York apartment. May be we will [be] turned out on Oct. 1.— This will then mean a few weeks delay, which I can not help. Looking for a new place to live in where no such places are available, and moving etc. are not very favorable for speeding up even a "mechanical" work. Maybe we will have to go back to Saranac Lake, if we do not find anything here.

My best regards to Mrs. Primrose and to you.

Yours very sincerely,
Béla Bartók

Primrose, as he remembered, received this letter in Philadelphia but could not see Bartók on his way driving through New York. About two weeks later he learned of the composer's demise from the New York Times (Bartók was taken on Sept. 21 to the West Side Hospital where he died Sept. 26, 1945), thus they could not discuss the viola part. According to Tibor Serly,[6] he had seen the Viola Concerto manuscript in Bartók's apartment just before the composer had to go to the hospital, and Bartók made remarks about the state of the composition more or less as he had written to Primrose in the letter of Sept. 8. (Incidentally, Serly seems to have not known about the content of the other, fragmentary letter and thus about the concept of a four-movement form with ritornelli.) Since Kodály, the natural choice to ask for advice, was not available and Serly was the composer's American friend whose Mikrokosmos Suite orchestration Bartók had acknowledged, it simply arose out of a natural association that the unfinished full score of Piano Concerto #3 and the draft of the Viola Concerto were later given by the widow and her son Peter to Serly "to look these manuscripts over carefully" (Serly's words).

III
NOTES ON THE CONCEPT AND THE SURVIVED FORM OF THE MUSIC

The reader of this facsimile edition must keep in mind that the manuscript complex includes different sorts of notation (preliminary sketches of ideas; continuity draft of complete movements; side sketches written during the drafting process; corrections on the spot, at the margin or at the bottom of the page, on another page; and even the beginning of a copy in ink). Furthermore the concept of the multi-movement form changed considerably between August 5 (when Bartók gave a short description of the planned 4-movement form with ritornelli) and September 8 (when he announced the completion of the draft). There seem to exist ideas outlined for four movements, but in the final analysis only three were realized, so there are unused themes as well as others that, on second thought, Bartók apparently applied into another context.

The *"1st bifolium"* is the crucial document of the compositional process. All of the four pages of it have several "layers": on each Bartók first fixed basic ideas, then in a next step added more, either further thematic ideas or the development of the fixed notation. The sequence of the composition in the first layer probably was this:

1) On p. 1 Bartók noted the beginning of a "serious Allegro" (in 4/4[7] in **A**, or at least with tonal focus in **A** and **C**), ca. up to the third measure in the third brace (= st. 8-11) but first only 5 mm. in st. 1,[8] altogether ca. 15 mm. Probably as an early correction

2) on p. 2 he rephrased the opening measures; the idea of the timpani accompaniment of the viola solo is already present.

3) Next, on p. 3, he began to draft what appears to be a slow movement in 4/4 in **E**, ca. 20 measures as a first step.

4) Taking p. 4, but turning it upside down, Bartók wrote the opening theme of a dance-style movement, clearly a finale in his style, in 2/4 in **A**; he may have ended the notation in the second brace i.e. after ca. 16 mm.

5) Keeping the bifolium upside down, after turning to p. 2, Bartók wrote some music in 2/4 beginning on **C**: as a first step maybe 16 measures only, which in a next step he continued, indicating a repeat of phrases *A* and *B* in different scoring, and adding 7½ additional

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5. The first four paragraphs of the letter are crossed out in pencil, the closing one not; the content of it appears in the letter of Sept. 8.

6. See in Dalton, op. cit. (see note 2), 118-126, and Gillies, op. cit., 193-194.

7. No actual time signature appears at the beginnings of movements in the manuscript, but the initial measures contain the indicated values.

8. The last 3 measures in st. 1 were written in a next step, as the direct continuation of the corrected version on p. 2.

measures (altogether ca. 40 mm.). In its original form this is neither a "transition" nor a "ritornello", but a fast piece — the beginning of a movement. We presume that this could have been Bartók's preliminary idea of "a Scherzo", a *2nd movement* of the 4-movement plan.[9] As he left a few staves blank, the 7 mm. long solo viola passage in **C** could also have been meant as a part of the Scherzo, and the other unused theme under it, again in 2/4 and in **C**, could have been a trio or episode theme of the same Scherzo movement. — Note that the last sketch on this page, the theme in 2/4 in **E♭** which in **A♭** became an episode theme of the finale (see p. 5), has a darker shade of pencil than the unused themes above it. Yet one cannot be sure whether Bartók sketched it as part of the planned "Scherzo" or already as a theme of the finale.

As to the continuation of writing the music on p. 1 or on p. 4, there is no direct evidence to suggest which step preceded which. If Bartók worked first on the finale, it was an easy-flowing composition (immediately continued on another bifolium: on p. 5, probably up to the 4th brace). However, Bartók could have returned first to p. 1, to shape the opening allegro form, a laborious creation as the notation evidences. Here he also took a blank bifolium for the continuation (p. 9) and for some time wrote and rewrote on p. 1 and p. 9 side by side. (Thus he sketched the first form of a lyric theme in augmented rhythm, at the bottom of the two pages, and rephrased the viola passage in the deleted last three measures in stave 8 of page 1.)[10]

The following commentaries do neither intend to go into a detailed discussion of the problems of the Viola Concerto manuscript, per se, or in comparison to other concerto drafts by Bartók, or to review any reading, reconstruction, and instrumentation of the printed score. Some fundamental questions about the state of the composition, however, have to be raised.

Links between the movements

The end of Movement I on page 15 (the end of staves 17-19) has a distinct cadence in **C** followed by a double bar.[11] May the key of **C** (instead of closing in **A**) be somewhat irregular in Bartók's general tonal concept, it rounds off the movement with a return to some opening thematic material, including the variant of the timpani motive. Is this, however, the actual end of Movement I, or already the end of an attacca modulatory "recurring introduction" (as Bartók called it in his letter) leading to the next movement in **C**? Another question: was the rhapsodic "ritornello" following the double bar (in the five bottom staves of the page) written at the same time and had been meant as the actual continuation, i.e. the introduction to the next movement? And then to which movement: the 2/4 Scherzo beginning with **C** (therefore with a 2/4 time signature before the last note)? Or was it, as a second thought, not a subsequent piece of music but rather a variant ending? Significantly enough, the goal of both endings is **C**, the lowest open string of the viola. — Traces of a special modulatory passage leading to the slow movement cannot be found; from a tonal point of view it is not needed anyway.

The link between the slow movement and the finale seems to have been created at the time when Bartók gave up the 4-movement concept and outlined a more traditional 3-movement concerto form. The end of the slow piece in 4/4 includes the "recurring introduction" (it has a reference to the opening motives of Movement I), leading attacca to 10 measures in 2/4 after the double bar, which then makes a perfect bridge to use the 2/4 music on page 2. This could have been Bartók's basic idea at the time he informed Primrose that the draft had been completed. There are, however, questions without clear answers in the autograph manuscript. Such as: why does the 2/4 introduction to the finale start in **C** without any sign of modulation to **A**?[12] What did Bartók refer to as the *Allegretto* beginning of the finale which, according to the description of the 4-movement *urform,* developed into an *Allegro molto?* (Perhaps the Rumanian-style dance theme in **A**, on page 4, was the *Allegretto* and the acceleration started only ca. on p. 6?) — To sum up: the manuscript does actually not clarify exactly how Bartók intended to link the slow movement and the finale.

The page written in ink

Page 12 is the only page in the manuscript which, at least in its ground layer, was written in ink. Is this already the beginning of a "piano score" promised to Primrose? The position of the page in the *"3rd bifolium"* (it is the last verso, sandwiched between pages of the first draft written in pencil) speaks against it. The plausible explanation is that p. 1, heavily corrected over and over again, even for Bartók had to be substituted by a clear copy which he made in ink. Nevertheless, the last notes of the orchestra were finished in pencil and Bartók went back to make additions and changes and to make notes for the scoring also in pencil.

The elaboration of the texture of the orchestra

There is no objective way to tell how much music — contrapuntal, melodic, or just filling in and doubling voices, fixing the actual tessitura of the chords, the rhythm of the percussions etc. — is missing from the Viola Concerto draft, in addition to the actual missing measures in the recapitulation of Movement I (see p. 14). Bartók's declaration that "the orchestration will be rather transparent" and that writing the score for him means "a purely mechanical work" has to be understood in context. Different sections of the Viola Concerto draft were elaborated differently: the slow movement is indeed a sketch only; in the finale very sketchy and more detailed sections alternate; in the opening movement the texture has to a great extent been developed, but extremely sketchy sections occur too. Manuscripts of other Bartók compositions show that before scoring he used to check the draft again, adding and changing notes, writing counter-voices, maybe even partial sketches on another page to elaborate intricate textures of the score. In spite of scattered notes with the name of instruments, this preliminary checking seems to be missing here.

Notes about the instrumentation

Abbreviated names of instruments occur on pp. 1-2-3, 9-10-11-12; reference to pizzicato on pp. 4 and 7 too; a note about harmonics on p. 5. Furthermore there are indirect notes like *con 8, 16* (doubling in two octaves) on p. 12. Altogether there seem to be ideas conceived immediately with the notes (some highly original and Bartókian e.g. the timpani accompaniment of the beginning)[13] or written at a first survey, but not as a systematic preparation for the scoring. And note that the distribution of these references is uneven: denser in the first half of the opening movement, none in the slow piece, some in the 2/4 music beginning with **C**, no instrument name in the finale. Also note that at the maximum a pair of an instrument was indicated by Bartók (e.g. *2 clar* on p. 1, *2 tr*[umpets] on p. 2). However, there is no indication besides the concept of a "transparent" scoring that the selection of instruments Bartók planned to apply would differ from his routine.[14]

The single tempo marking in the draft, an *accel.*, occurs on p. 11. As to the tempi of the movements, Bartók's description in the letter of Aug. 5 is authoritative. Movement I should probably be *Allegro moderato,* Movement II *Adagio,* the finale beginning *Allegretto,* increasing to *Allegro molto.*

László Somfai
Budapest Bartók Archives

9. This meaningful interpretation was raised by Sándor Kovács, op. cit., 303 ff, and id., "Formprobleme beim Violakonzert von Bartók/Serly", *Studia Musicologica* 24 (1982), 381-391, see specifically 386 ff.

10. This passage was corrected by Bartók above it in st. 7; marked with *X* in st. 23 of p. 1; in the same stave with the two inserted passages; in st. 9, under the original notation; on p. 9, in the right end of st. 23, a temporarily final form (copied in ink on p. 12, which he then revised again).

11. In this double bar the second line continues in a wiggly line, the composer's mark for the end of a movement.

12. S. Kovács ("Formprobleme", 387/388) speculated on the possibility, that these 10 measures in 2/4 on p. 3 might even refer to the return of the Scherzo thematics of the original plan, thus reminding of a scherzo-adagio-scherzo kernel of a Bartókian symmetrical form.

13. See e.g. the opening chords of the 1911 scoring of the 1st Rumanian Dance on two pairs of drums.

14. Bartók's most frequent instrumentation has been 2-2-2-2 woodwinds (eventually with piccolo and English horn), and 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones (with or without tuba), instead of the 3-3-2-1 brass combination of the 1950 Boosey & Hawkes edition.

timp.

pizz.

ob.

2 clar.
1 fag.

con 8,16

cl.

(fag. is?)

(con 8 ------

[page 9]

con 8 ----------

3

[con 8]

fl.

8

tr

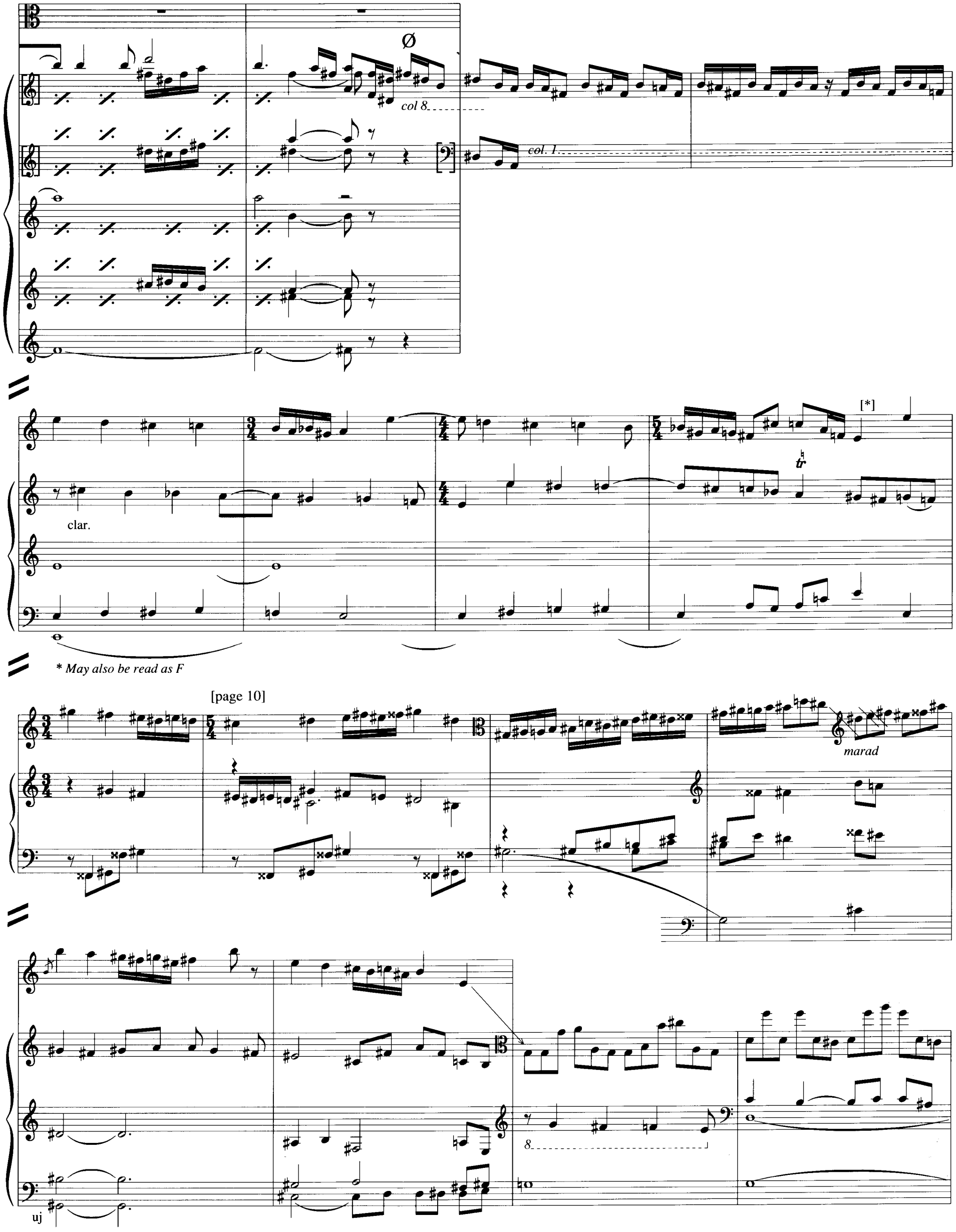
tr

tr

trp.

vl.

cor.


Ø
col 8
col. 1
clar.
[*]
tr
* May also be read as F
[page 10]
marad
8
uj

tr

6

[*]

a)

3

* May also be read as B♭ or C

f

[page 11]

[1] *Lowest note may be C♭*
[2] *Lowest note may be C♮*
[3] *May be G♮*

vc.

hozzá cb.

3

accel.

3

3

Ø

[see on page 13]

8

con 8

1[1] 2[1] 3[1]

[1] *These numbers do not appear to be in B. B.'s hand.*

[page 13]

con

(sic)

3

sim.

[page 14]

8

col

tr

[page 15]

con 8

8

8

8

loco

end of 1st?[1]

[1] *This text does not appear to be in BB's hand*

sim.

3

6

6

skála

legle

9

11

11

11

6

[*]

* *May also be read as G*

[1]

[1] *May also be read as F#*

marad

[8]

col 8

8

3

col 8

timp

A

B

[*]

* *May also be read as E♮*

2 tr. és corni

A B 8

A B

(*f*)

bis ?

con 8

8

[8]

8

pizz.

át f-be

[page 5]

a

b

b

a

b

a

b

a

b

harmonics

a)

b)

a)

b)

a)

8

[page 6]

8

3

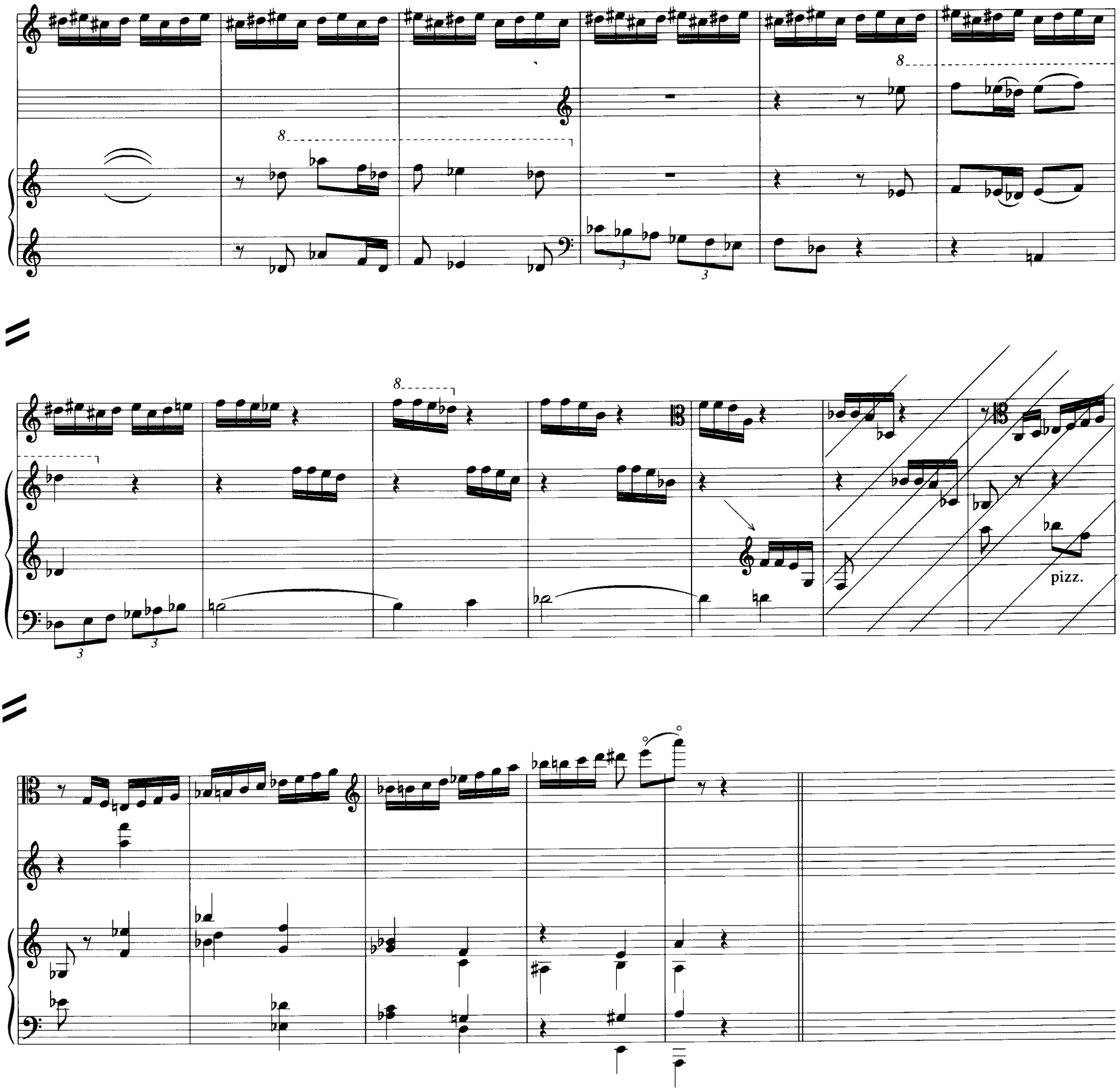
3

col 8

col 8

[page 7]

eredeti?


pizz.

[page 1]

(2. lapon)

8

pizz.

ob.

2 clar.

stb.

fag.

a)

de g♮-vel

vissza

b)

c)

alsó a♭

alsó g♮

a)

b)

c)

?

d

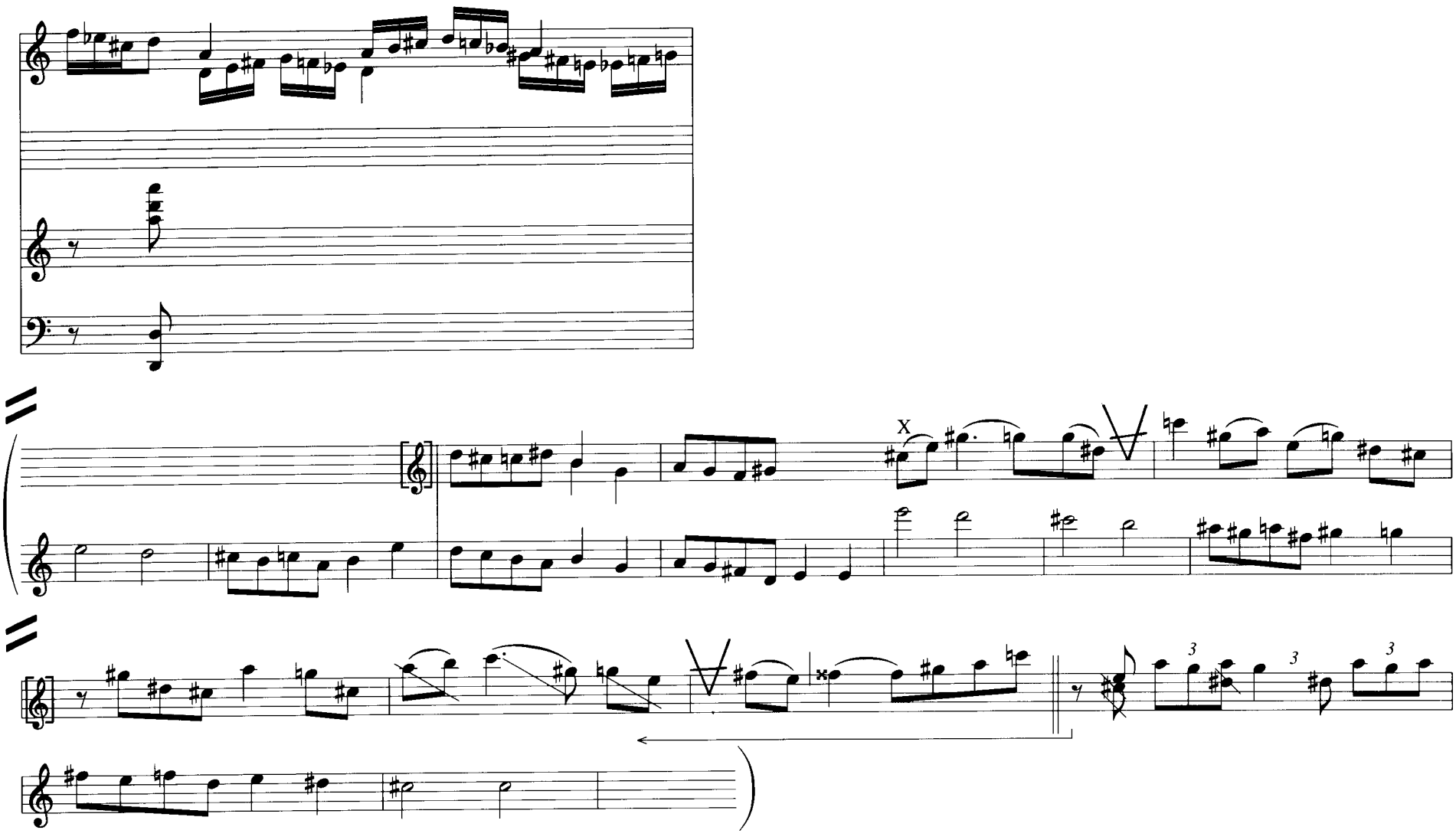
X

2. 3. 1.

f#

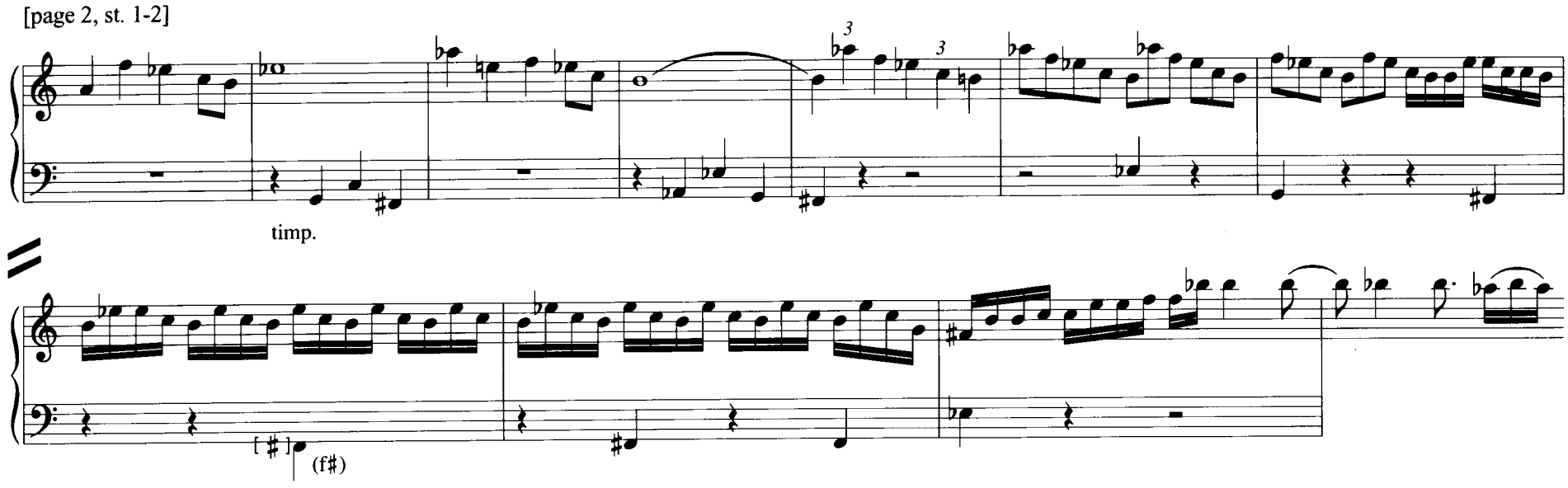
pizz.

bb bb

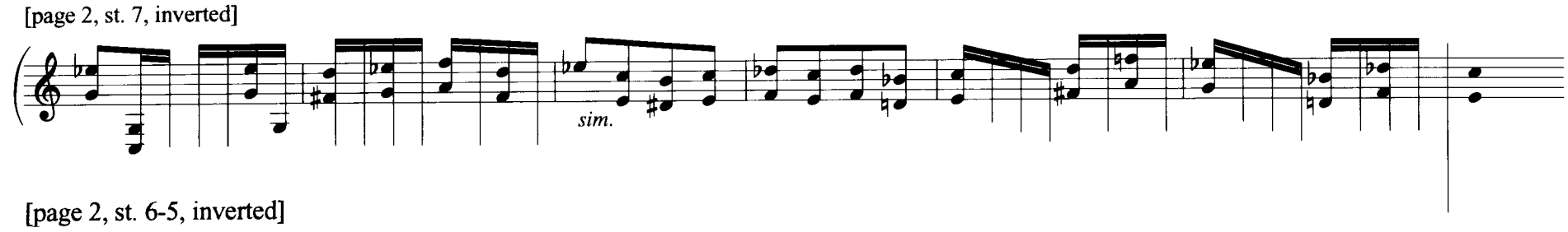


[SIDE SKETCHES]

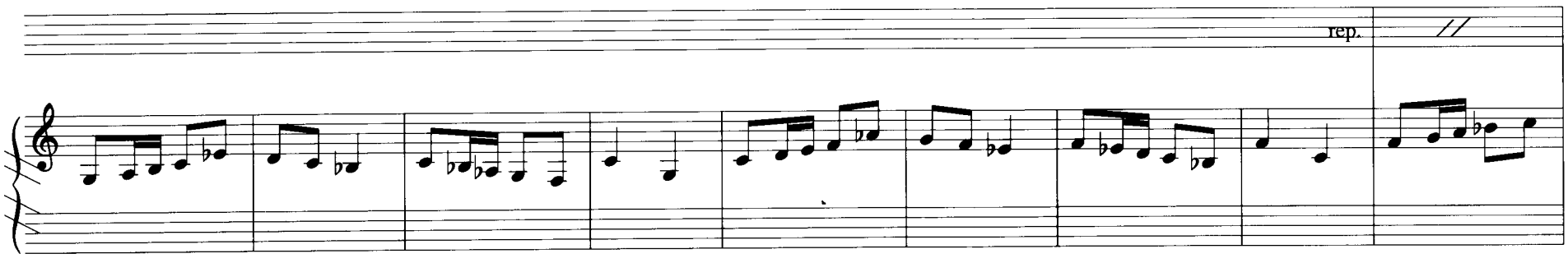
[page 2, st. 1-2]

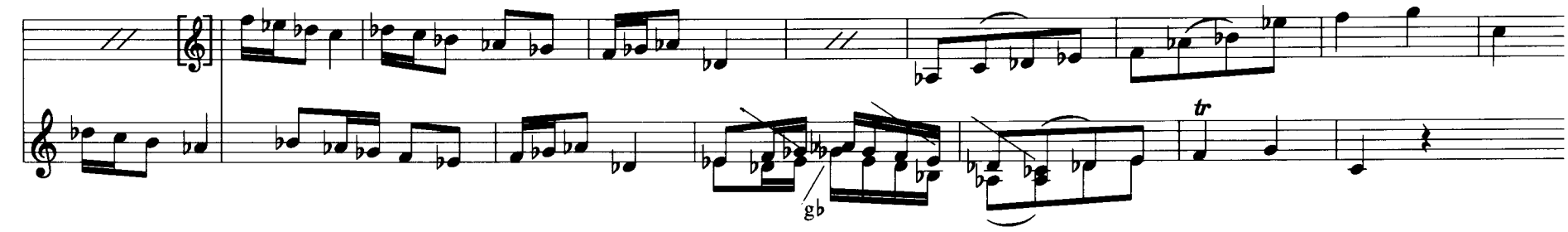


[page 2, st. 7, inverted]

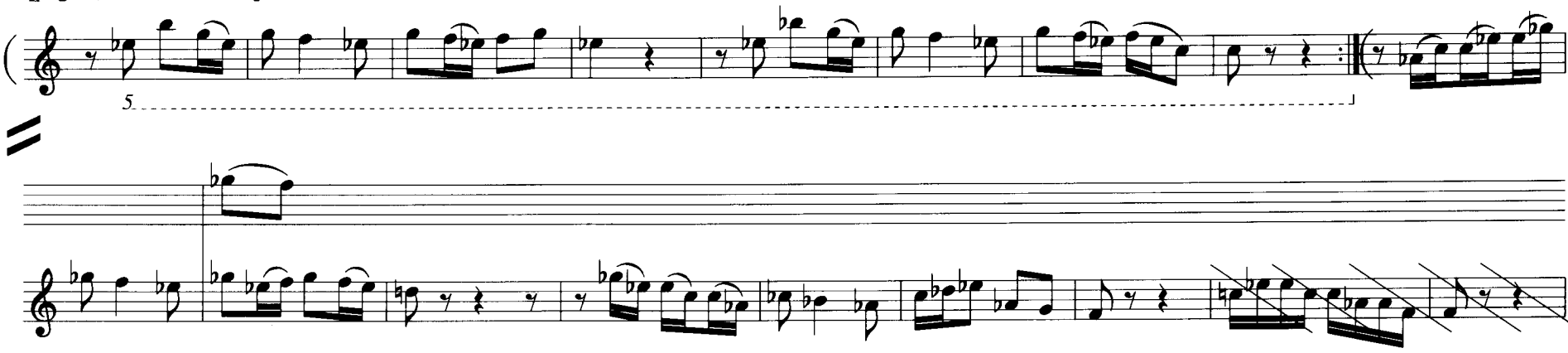


[page 2, st. 6-5, inverted]





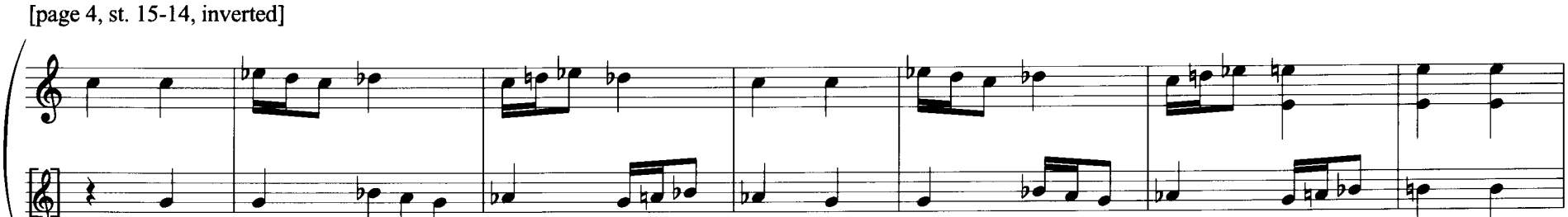
[page 2, st. 3-4, inverted]

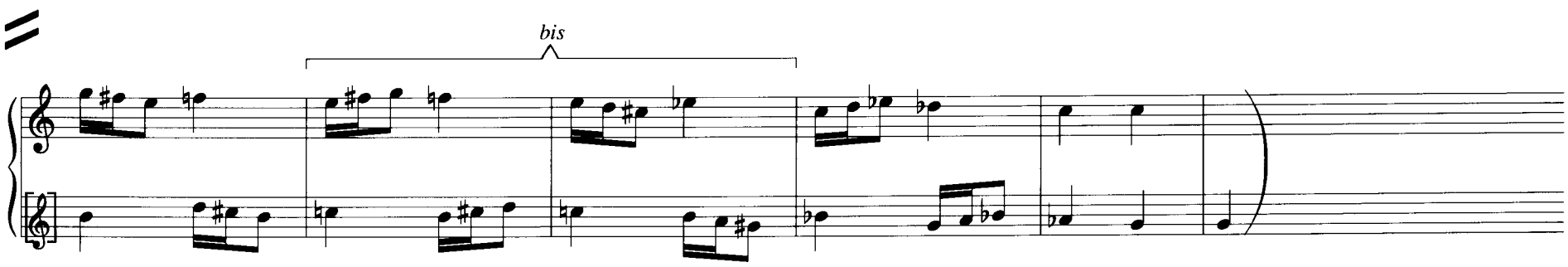


[page 3, bottom of page]

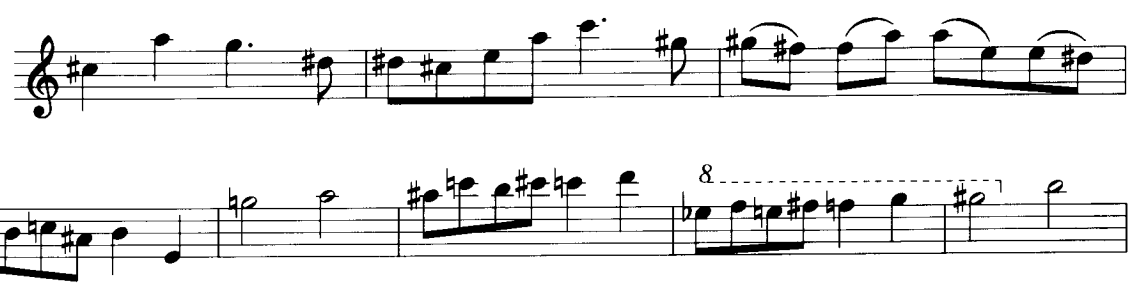
10
5
3 1/2 (25?)
18 1/2

[page 4, st. 15-14, inverted]

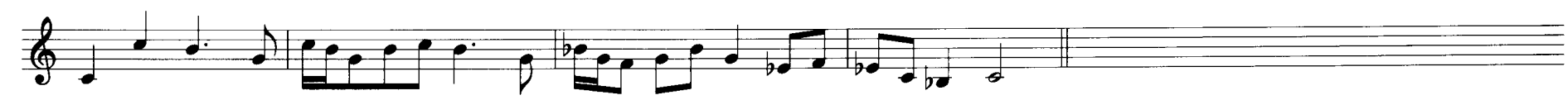




[page 9, st. 23-24]



[page 11, st. 5]



[page 13, upper left corner]

1. tétel: 10'20"
2. : 5'10"
3. : 4'45"

} 20'15"

Notes

As part of an overall program aimed at correcting the printed editions of Béla Bartók's compositions, review of the Viola Concerto was undertaken. This project was expected to be more difficult than any other, since there is no final Bartók manuscript to refer to, only his preliminary sketches. As a first step it was necessary to prepare an easy-to-follow fair copy of the sketches (short score) that could be compared with details in the printed score without, in each instance, having to locate and decipher the corresponding place in the sketches.

The fair copy, to be a useful tool, had to embody every significant aspect of the autograph sketch, but with the data consecutively arranged and details in what appeared to be their final intended form. In principle this idea was quite clear but, as the copying progressed, it was apparent that many problems had to be solved. The criteria used in solving such problems will be listed individually.

The engraved reproduction of the fair copy in this edition is merely to provide a legible reference and to aid the reader to better understand Béla Bartók's various shorthand notations, and it is certainly not intended in any way to take the place of the facsimile.

Whereas in the sketches each movement was started on a separate page of the same bifolium, the longer movements continuing on others, in the fair copy the movements are arranged consecutively; i.e., opening movement (followed by the first ritornello), slow movement (incorporating near its end the second ritornello), scherzo and finale. The continuity is not to be considered an interpretation (it is known that the composer earlier intended the scherzo to precede the slow movement); it merely follows the sequence of movements in the orchestra score already published.

Since the fair copy contains less music per page than the sketch, the beginning of each facsimile page needed to be clearly identified. One exception is on page 11: here the already crowded notation at the bottom of the page did not allow the composer to make any more additions, a problem he solved by utilizing space on another page and connecting it by the use of a symbol found at the top of page 13 indicating that the new material is to be inserted at the bottom of page 11 where the matching symbol is.

It should be noted that not until the pages of the manuscript were scrutinized carefully over a period of time did it become apparent that certain details (which in the beginning did not appear to be of significance), perhaps, were there as hints or reminders that something needed to be incorporated at the time the orchestra score was to be prepared; maybe a change of instrument, maybe the end of one phrase and the beginning of another, etc.

The list that follows describes how some of these details were approached while preparing the fair copy:

Stems

Stem directions: These had to be transcribed exactly as they appear in the original, even if at times there was no apparent reason for deviating from the usual custom, since it is possible that these directions have a significance not recognized at the time the fair copy was prepared. See bifolium 3, page 11, stave 7: here a single voice was written quite high in the stave where one would normally expect downward stems. However, there are many other places where the reason for the direction of the stems seemed readily apparent. Such a place, for instance, is in bifolium 3, p. 9, st. 22 and p. 10, st. 4: here the same phrase (starting with 𝄢 **F**𝄪) was written three times; the first with stems down, the second with stems up and finally, the third with stems down again – notice that for the beginning notes of the first and third phrases he apparently started to draw the stems in one direction but reversed them afterwards.

Double stems: A decision had to be made as to which of these carried a significance and which were the result of a change of mind after the composer drew one stem in a direction that later he reversed. One example can be seen in bifolium 3, p. 9, st. 19 (bar in 5/4) (in 𝄞): the second stem of ♪ **C**♮ in the solo viola line does not appear to have any musical significance (and is not reproduced in the fair copy), but in the same bifolium, p. 12, st. 12 (beginning with 𝄢 **D**♭), in the first two bars the upward stems appear to have been added in pencil, perhaps as a new entrance by one or more instruments in unison.

Clefs

Redundant clefs: The apparent arbitrary placement of clefs was a problem, the basic reason for this being the fact that the fair copy layout cannot be the same as the original (not a "mirror transcription"). See bifolium 4, p. 13, st. 18: this phrase begins with 𝄢, then two bars later another 𝄢 follows and three bars later yet another. One wonders if they were indeed redundant or had a specific purpose, perhaps as a reminder that at such places a different instrument, or group of instruments are supposed to enter. In this respect the fair copy is not an exact reproduction. Note: since the fair copy is not intended to be used for performance, the usual clef change warnings at the ends of systems have not been added.

Missing clefs: In connection with clefs missing in the manuscript, it was decided to include the appropriate symbol, especially at the beginning of each system to make the fair copy musically correct. Different kinds of problems were encountered:

1) See bifolium 3, p. 12, st. 5-6. No music was written in the first four bars of stave 5 so there apparently was no reason for drawing any clef (there are many other similar places, empty printed staves or empty bars without clefs) but, beginning with the bar in 7/4 an oboe part is found written without a clef. Did Béla Bartók forget the clef, or regard the abbreviation *ob.* as enough information for himself? The appropriate clef is printed, however, in a smaller character and in brackets.

2) In stave 6 some music is written in 𝄢 but for only four bars, then a change to *2 clar* (clarinets) and *1 fag* (bassoon) starts, but without a clef change for the clarinet line. The 𝄞 was added in brackets; similar instances occur throughout the manuscript.

Accidentals

Redundant accidentals: Although it was tempting to eliminate certain obvious ones, it was decided to transcribe them exactly the way they appear in the manuscript. Consequently, those which would normally be eliminated according to the rules (in the next stage of working on the composition) were found in many places. See bifolium 2, p. 5, st. 18, m. 7, viola solo (in 𝄞): it seems unnecessary to write ♭ signs for two successive **B**♭ within the same measure; similar redundancies are found in this section of the music. For a different situation, see bifolium 3, p. 10, st. 6-9, bars 2-3: originally this music was written in two separate bars, one in 2/4, the other in 3/4 but later combined into one in 5/4 leaving what appears to be redundant accidentals in the second part of the bar.

Missing accidentals: Putting these in with brackets was considered but even obvious ones were not added since the general criteria for this fair copy called for transcription of the manuscript as accurately as possible. For example, see bifolium 1, p. 2, st. 24: (the first stave after turning the page upside down), m. 2, solo viola (in 𝄡): the ♭ sign for high **E** is apparently missing. See bifolium 3, p. 12, st. 9, m. 1, solo viola (in 𝄡): the missing ♭ for **C** in the last group of 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯 appears to be an oversight; verified by an earlier sketch of the same passage, in bifolium 1, p. 1, st. 8, where the content of this bar is a repeat of the previous one. The transcription, however, shows only the way it was copied by the composer from page 1 to page 12.

Unused data

Crossed out notes, contents of bars or bar lines: With the exception of page 1, which was purposely transcribed in its entirety, the general principle was not to reproduce anything crossed out or unrelated to the music so as not to clutter up the fair copy. It had to be considered in each case, however, what meaning, if any, these notes or bars had in relation to the preceding or following music. Where one idea was exchanged for another, only the part not crossed out was transcribed as it was clear that the new information was the composer's last choice. See bifolium 3, p. 12, st. 7, m. 7 (in 𝄢): 𝅝 **C** at beat 1 was changed to a 𝅗𝅥. **B♮** and ♩ **C** at beat 5 was changed to 𝅗𝅥 instead. Also see bifolium 3, p. 11, st. 11 through 14, mm. 3-4: these two bars were crossed out but the replacement is clearly marked below them with an arrow.

In other cases it was necessary to reproduce the entire crossed-out section, since it was not certain what the final choice was going to be. See bifolium 1, p. 3, st. 5-6: the composer wrote the Hungarian word *marad* (remains) preceded by four unconnected ties below a crossed-out chord; however, it is not entirely clear which of these ideas is to be transcribed: is the crossed-out chord to remain valid or the preceding chord to continue? In bifolium 2, p. 7, st. 16-20: about two bars are crossed out near the end of the system, their contents having been rewritten in a somewhat modified form later. The crossed-out section, however, contains the directive *pizz.* which originally could have applied to the remaining few bars of the work; this section was, therefore, transcribed.

In another situation (bifolium 2, p. 7, st. 6) the solo viola part was altered somewhat after having been first written down; nevertheless, the reminder *eredeti?* (original?) appears above it indicating the composer was not entirely certain and thought of maybe using the original version after all. In such a case both versions have been transcribed.

The crossing out of bar lines seems to have been final, so none appear in the transcription. See bifolium 3, p. 10, st. 6-9: the second original bar line is crossed out, also, the first bar line on this page has been eliminated by use of the eraser.

Empty staves: Stave lines that are actually "empty bars" were reproduced but all other unused printed staves, that were simply left empty as a result of their proximity to notes written with too many leger lines in the adjacent stave, were not included in the fair copy. For the former situation see bifolium 4, p. 14, st. 1-15: these bars were left empty with the exception of the solo viola part, but the bar lines extend to all four staves of the system; it is possible that the composer intended to fill in these at a later date or, perhaps, directly in the final score. On the other hand, in bifolium 3, p. 12, st. 18 and 22: the "empty bars" became unusable, as the viola solo and the upper orchestra part encroached into their space.

Ambiguities

Note heads: It was not possible or practical to reproduce the placement of every indeterminate note head that was written neither exactly on a line nor only in a space of the stave, but could be interpreted either way. The ones that appear problematic are identified with footnotes. See bifolium 3, p. 12, st. 6, m. 8, beat 2.5 (in [𝄞]): this 𝅘𝅥𝅮 was transcribed as **D♮**, although the note head occupies also most of the **C** space and the ♮ in front of it is entirely on the 3rd space for **C♮**; this decision was based on a comparison with another page of the manuscript, containing an earlier sketch of the same music, where the **D♮** is not ambiguous (see bifolium 1, p. 1, st. 10, m. 1).

Accidentals: Each of these symbols had to be analyzed individually:

1) If a notehead was unambiguous but with a misplaced accidental, then the accidental was positioned on the fair copy where it would normally be written. See bifolium 2, p. 5, st. 3, m. 2, beat 2 (in 𝄞): the ♩ **G** is clearly visible, but the ♭ sign in front of it, seems to favor first space **F** instead.

2) If an accidental happens to be misplaced on the wrong side of a bar line as a result of either an afterthought or lack of physical space, it was transcribed in its correct position. See bifolium 4, p. 15, st. 22: in this whole note chord some of the accidentals were added on the other side of the bar line for obvious reasons.

3) If an accidental was misplaced but a definite decision could not be reached it was transcribed "as is". See bifolium 3, p. 10, st. 4, m. 3: a ♯ sign was written in the fourth space (in 𝄢) but the closest note head to it, is **B** (above the staff). Was the ♯ intended for the **B** or for the **G♯** that later became tied and moved to a lower staff?

Ties

Unconnected ties: Ties were often written inaccurately and many times there were fewer ties than the number of notes written (the composer, of course, knew exactly where they belonged). This uncertainty was reproduced as accurately as possible using today's available engraving technology. See bifolium 1, p. 3, st. 2, mm. 1-3: merely on the basis of their physical position, the five pitches (whole note chord) and three ties drawn in this bar do not seem to be precisely related to specific notes.

Redundant ties: These became so as a result of rewriting (where the corresponding notes were crossed out, bars added, etc. leaving the original tie without function) and were not transcribed to avoid unnecessary confusion. See bifolium 3, p. 12, st. 15-16, mm. 1-4: originally in ink, these were only three bars written with whole notes tied to the next two bars; since one more bar was squeezed in and new notes added in pencil, some ties as a consequence, became obsolete.

The above list is by no means complete and not every detail encountered in making the fair copy could be covered here, but should illuminate the general principles followed in its preparation. The fair copy is intended to give a first clear impression, as accurately as possible, of the composer's work at different stages and, of necessity, reflects compromises. The final conclusions can be drawn only by reference to the manuscript itself — or its facsimile. Unfortunately, not all the problems can lead to a clear-cut solution and some questions will never be answered; these, however, carry us into the realm of the next phase of the work involving this composition: its realization as an orchestral score, beyond the scope of this publication.

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