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To play Bartók well does not require one to be Hungarian. But in order to interpret any composer we must be acquainted with the environment in which his work has been conceived. In my pedagogical experiences with students from other European nations and, more recently, with young people in America, I have found that the background from which Bartók's music was born, that is, history, folk traditions, customs, and national atmosphere, is mostly unknown or misunderstood. The interpretations of Bartók's works thus become an abstraction, spiritually and idiomatically uprooted.

In my opinion the book by Damiana Bratuž, modestly entitled The Folk Element in the Piano Music of Béla Bartók, contains in effect more than its title promises. By its approach to the question and by knowledge of the people to whom it is addressed, this book is at this moment a unique pedagogical help in the field. It makes accessible the musical material and it makes alive, as far as a book can, the musical 'humus' from which has germinated the work of Bartók. By analyzing the connections between folk music and the music of Bartók and by demonstrating at the same time some practical consequences in the performance, this essay is of great service to all interested.

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