

Leafstedt, Carl S. 2021. *A Thorn in the Rosebush: The American Bartók Estate and Archives During the Cold War, 1948–67*. Reno, NV: Helena History Press. 422 pp.

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When Béla Bartók died in New York in September 1945, he left behind a divided estate. Some of his musical manuscripts, books, and other personal belongings remained in Hungary and elsewhere in Europe, while other materials resided with his publisher Boosey & Hawkes, as well as in his own apartment in New York. His survivors—his second wife, Ditta, and sons Béla Jr. and Peter—had to be provided for, and Bartók’s significance as a representative figure in Hungarian music (and musical modernism more broadly) meant that there were many interests in his estate. A difficult legal path through US and Hungarian inheritance laws had to be navigated by his survivors, the executors of his estate, and other interested parties, a process further complicated by shifting political systems in Hungary in the aftermath of World War II.

While numerous other figures are featured in Carl Leafstedt’s *A Thorn in the Rosebush*, his book highlights Victor Bator’s role in the handling of Bartók’s estate and the creation of the New York Bartók Archives. Bator was a prominent Hungarian lawyer and businessman who emigrated to the United States in 1939 and later became, along with Gyula Báron, a cotrustee of Bartók’s American estate. Although Bator and Bartók were acquainted in Hungary as early as 1919, they did not become friends until the 1940s, when both were living in the United States. Leafstedt reveals snapshots not only of their professional relationship, but also of the personal connections between their families, some of which is described in Bator’s own words.

Based on Bator’s writings, Leafstedt provides insight into Bartók’s reasoning for entrusting Victor Bator, who had no experience in musicology or archival studies, with his estate. Bator’s assistance in Peter Bartók’s emigration to the United States from Hungary during World War II, as well as Bator’s idea that Bartók enjoyed the privacy that the Bator family allowed him, seem to have contributed to the decision. Through one of Bator’s sons, Francis, Leafstedt gained access to numerous documents, letters, and photographs related to Bartók’s estate and further insight into the Bator family’s personal relationship with Bartók. Leafstedt’s presentation of Francis Bator’s perspective and his commentary on the network of prominent figures in Hungarian culture, politics, and business to which the Bators and Bartóks were connected further humanizes his analysis of Bator’s handling of Bartók’s estate.

A significant contribution of this book are transcriptions and translations of letters, memos, and other documents related, more generally, to the New York Bartók Archives and Bartók’s estate. Leafstedt’s book builds upon the materials Bator published himself, his conversations with Benjamin Suchoff (former director of the New York Bartók Archives), in

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addition to Leafstedt's own previous articles on the topic. For example, excerpts of Bator's unpublished 310-page memo detailing the New York Bartók Archives' activities during the Cold War are reprinted in the book, as well as correspondence demonstrating Bator's efforts on the Bartók family's behalf following the composer's death. Leafstedt's commentary on these excerpts provides context surrounding the events described in the primary sources, while allowing the reader to view documents not readily available to the public or even to some Bartók experts.

One of the most intriguing findings in Leafstedt's work is his rediscovery of one of Bartók's three wills. Bartók's first (and most famous) will was prepared and signed in Hungary in 1940. It is in this document that he made the widely known political statement refusing his name be used for public streets, buildings, or memorials in Hungary as long as the names of fascist leaders still appeared there. Leafstedt's chapter "One Will or Three?" provides an explanation of the legal battles over Bartók's estate, which stemmed from the existence of multiple wills. In addition to the composer's Hungarian will, two wills were prepared for him in the United States, in 1943 and 1945. The 1943 will was signed, and so was the legally effective will (at least in the US). The third will, prepared in the last days of Bartók's life, was left unsigned but, Leafstedt shows, may have reflected Bartók's last intentions for his estate. This third will was of great interest to Peter Bartók, who would have been saved protracted legal battles to gain control of his father's American estate if his father had been well enough to sign it.

Leafstedt's book represents an invaluable contribution to the history of the Bartók estate, which even today is divided between continents, with some private family collections' status still unknown to Bartók scholars. It is of enormous value to those studying Bartók and his work, but its reach goes beyond the scope of music studies. It has broader appeal to scholars studying Hungarian and other European émigrés in America during and after World War II, and those concerned with Cold War politics in Hungary and the United States. Today, Bartók's manuscripts reside in the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, Switzerland and in the Béla Bartók Archives in the Hungarian Institute of Musicology in Budapest. Correspondence and other relevant materials also are held by both archives, as well as by the University of South Florida Special Collections' Suchoff-Antokoletz Collection of Bartókiana. At the time of the publication of Leafstedt's book, other documents and materials were held in Homosassa, Florida, at the former business of Bartók's late son Peter, Bartók Records. Leafstedt is one of only a few Bartók scholars who have carried out research in all of these locations. As may be unsurprising considering the history of Bartók's estate, the status of the collection remaining in Homosassa is now uncertain, making Leafstedt's research and writing on its holdings in *The Thorn in the Rosebush* even more significant. As Leafstedt concludes, "from its holdings many tales remain to be told."