



**From the Top at Carnegie Hall**  
**Episode 8: "Star Quality"**  
Airing on PBS (check local TV listings)  
Available online at [pbs.org](http://pbs.org)

## Learning Activity

### Title: *Folk Meets Classical*

**Description:** In this activity, students will compare classical music and folk music and explore the differences between consonant and dissonant sounds.

**Grade Level:** 5-8 (may be adapted for older students)

**National Music Standards:** **6**, Listening to, analyzing, and describing music; **9**, Understanding music in relation to history and culture

### Background

In this episode 10-year-old violinist Alice Ivy-Pemberton of New York plays the first movement of Bela Bartok's Rhapsody No. 1 (Folk Dances) called "Lassu," which means "slow" in English. She also plays an American folk tune, "June Apple." Bartok was famous for collecting folk music from all over his country, Hungary, as well as other Eastern European areas. The Rhapsody No. 1 is based on a Hungarian dance used to recruit soldiers during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (there's more about this in the Episode 1 activity, "Gypsy Music"). Rhapsody No. 1 is typical of Bartok's work, offering an exotic, foreign feeling, with strong rhythms and folk-style melodies.



Alice and violinist Gil Shaham meet in a violin shop at Lincoln Center in New York

After Alice plays those two pieces, she is joined on stage by world-famous violinist Gil Shaham and together they play a complex Bach concerto for two violins.

**Materials:** Computer with media player; projector and speakers if needed; paper and pencils

### Activity Instructions

1) **Play** several chords on the keyboard to show students the difference between *consonance* and *dissonance*. The familiar tune "Chopsticks" is a good example! The *Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music* says, "Dissonances are those combinations [of tones] that in Western tonal music, do not serve as points of repose but require, instead, resolution to some consonance." Because most Americans grow up in a musical environment dominated by Western tonal music, our ears are trained to expect that certain harmonies or melodies will "land" or resolve in a way that feels "right." A major chord is a good example of this. Many listeners find Bartok challenging, because of his use of "sharp" dissonances (like chords that contain minor seconds and major sevenths).

2) **Watch** the segment that includes Alice's performances of Bartok and "June Apple." Which sounds more familiar? What images do students "see" when they hear the Bartok, and what feelings do they associate with the music? How is "June Apple" different?

3) For an example of how our Western ears are trained to expect melodies to resolve in certain ways, **sing or play the last two lines of the four-line melody** of "June Apple" and let students fill in the final note. Can they think of other songs that have similar "last lines" (examples are "My Country Tis of Thee" and the refrain from "Oh, Susanna")?

3) If there is time, **play some classical selections** for your students that include popular or folk influences. Examples are Leonard Bernstein's "West Side Story," George Gershwin's "An American in Paris," Anton Dvorak's "New World" Symphony, and Aaron Copland's ballet "Billy the Kid."



**Extra Credit!** Whose violin is it? And how do they know?? Alice and Gil meet at David Segal's violin shop in New York City. While there, they play a game of "Guess Which Violin Is Yours." Both of them are able to pick out their own instruments just by listening. Just as people have different voices, violins do too. In the same way that one friend's voice is different from another friend's voice, even if they speak at the same pitch and with the same regional accent, they have distinct, individual sounds. The same is true of instruments.

**If several of the same instrument are available in your classroom,** have a student (or teacher) play a familiar piece like "Twinkle, Twinkle" on two or three of them. Can you tell which instrument is being played? How can you tell? Are some instruments easier to distinguish than others? Try having two or three people play the song together. Can they match their sounds so that it is more difficult, if not impossible, to tell each other apart? This is what members of ensembles do, such as a cello section in a symphony. The goal is to blend their sounds so that people can hear that there is more than one cello, but do not hear individual players "stick out."

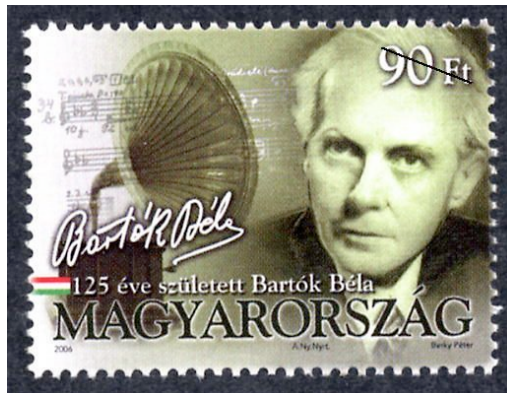
## Find out more!

### About Bartok and Hungarian music

Many other composers were influenced by Eastern European folk tunes, including Franz Liszt and Johannes Brahms. Compare Bartok's Hungarian music to similar music by Liszt, such as the "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 11." (You can hear this played by 11-year-old George Li in Episode 4, Season 1 of *From the Top at Carnegie Hall*).

For a good discussion about the music of Bela Bartok, visit this website:

<http://www.azstarnet.com/public/packages/reelbook/153-3986.htm>



Bela Bartok on a Hungarian stamp

### About folk influences on classical music

Leonard Bernstein's book *Young People's Concerts* has an excellent chapter on "Folk Music in the Concert Hall" (*Young People's Concerts*, Amadeus Press, 2005 edition. ISBN 1-57467-102-2)

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