

BÉLA BARTÓK AND THE PRO-MUSICA SOCIETY:  
A CHRONICLE OF PIANO RECITALS IN ELEVEN AMERICAN CITIES  
DURING HIS 1927-1928 TOUR

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ABSTRACT

An important component of Béla Bartók's 1927-28 transcontinental tour of the United States was a series of eleven lecture-recitals sponsored by the Pro-Musica Society—an international organization founded in 1920 as the Franco-American Musical Society—to promote the exchange of musical ideas between Europe and America. Bartók (1881-1945)—then already established as a pianist, composer, and scholar in Europe—embarked on this endeavor, which also included fourteen other engagements, to enhance his reputation with the American concert public, an audience that had been slow to warm to his efforts. During his first American tour he fulfilled engagements from 22 December 1927 through 27 February 1928, appearing in Pro-Musica recitals in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland (Oregon), Denver, Kansas City, St. Paul, New York City, Detroit, Cleveland, and Chicago. In addition to these recitals Bartók performed with major orchestras in New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, and Cincinnati, and presented chamber music concerts in Philadelphia, New York City, and Washington, D.C. Published criticism and other accounts of the performances before chapters of the Pro-Musica Society have been brought together in this discussion, providing evidence that while listeners were generally impressed with Bartók's skill as a pianist, they were often disparaging of his modernist compositions, which lacked the familiar Romantic qualities they found appealing.