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Chapter 12 Bartok Pizzicato Sounds

Contents

12.1 Sound .......................................................................................................................................... 222
12.1.1 Pitch range ........................................................................................................................... 222
12.1.2 Timbre possibilities ............................................................................................................... 223
12.1.3 Dynamic range .................................................................................................................... 224
12.1.4 Vibrato ................................................................................................................................. 224
12.1.5 Pitch bends and microtones ............................................................................................... 225
12.2 Vertical cells ................................................................................................................................ 225
12.3 Horizontal cells ............................................................................................................................ 225
12.3.1 Single lines .......................................................................................................................... 226
12.4 Textures ....................................................................................................................................... 230
12.4.1 Textures as combinations of horizontal cells ................................................................. 230
Chapter 12 Bartok Pizzicato Sounds

Bartok pizzicato sounds materialize when the string is pulled away from the guitar and released to bounce back to its original position. The sound is sometimes also referred to as snap pizzicato (Schneider, 1985, p. 124). This chapter shows ways in which the composer can handle the characteristics of the Bartok pizzicato sound, use it to build horizontal as well as vertical cells, and finally, how these cells can be creatively combined to form musical textures playable on the guitar.

12.1 Sound

12.1.1 Pitch range

The full guitar range can be used for Bartok pizzicato sounds, as well as natural harmonics. Bartok pizzicato sounds can be used for single notes or for two open strings at the same time.

![Figure 12.1 Bartok pizzicato](SEQUENZA XI, BERIO)

In all ranges, the Bartok pizzicato sound is performed by lifting the string and releasing it, causing it to snap back onto the fretboard (Lunn, 2010, p. 24). The string is lifted a few centimeters above its normal position with the thumb alone or in combination with another finger and subsequently released. On the sixth string, it is easy to perform a Bartok pizzicato with the thumb alone, because there is no string that complicates the ease with which the thumb can get under the string to anticipate the lift. On the other strings, it is easier to perform a Bartok pizzicato by gripping the string with fingers p and i.

Bartok pizzicato notes are notated as regular notes, accompanied by a symbol of a circle with a vertical line or diagonal line (Figure 12.1).
12.1.2 Timbre possibilities

Attack
When the string is released in the performance of the Bartok pizzicato, it snaps back onto the fretboard with great speed, causing a high-pitched, percussive sound. Out of this noise, the resonating pitch of the string emerges. The Bartok pizzicato sound is thus a mix of the percussive snap of the strings and the subsequent resonating of the string.

Sound color and playing position

Bartok pizzicato sounds are rather immune to differences in playing position, because the initial impulse of the sound is caused by the strings rattling onto the fretboard, rather than the position in which the string is lifted.

Stopping position

As is the case with all stopped sounds, playing a note from the middle or high range in a high position on a low string changes its timbre. The composer should specify in a fingering where she wishes a particular note to be performed in order for it to have a particular sound color.

Etouffé

*Figure 12.2 Etouffé Bartok pizzicato sounds*

The timbre of Bartok pizzicato sounds can be changed by muffling. Etouffé Bartok pizzicato sounds are performed by attacking a note and simultaneously slightly damping it with the side of the right hand or by lightly touching a string with the left hand. Sounds scored etouffé have a reduced resonance and dynamic range.

Prepared guitar
The timbre of Bartok pizzicato sounds can be changed by attaching an object to one or more strings, turning the guitar into a prepared guitar (Figure 12.3). The initial sound of a Bartok pizzicato note prepared with a paper clip is very similar to that of a non-prepared Bartok pizzicato note, as the impulse of the sound is caused by the snapping of the string onto the fretboard. In the subsequent resonance, the effect of the paper clip preparation becomes apparent, turning the tone color into a gamelan-like sound. In the video example of Figure 12.3, the effect of the paper clip preparation is only audible for a short moment per note, due to the small note values in the score.

12.1.3 Dynamic range

A Bartok pizzicato has a dynamic range that is positioned at a high dynamic level and this range is relatively limited. It can be performed at a dynamic level louder than a regular note due to the dynamic force of the snapping of the string onto the fretboard, but it is not possible to play a soft Bartok pizzicato; if the string is not lifted high enough, the snapping sound that is characteristic for the Bartok pizzicato sound cannot be heard. When the string is lifted higher and the snapping sound can be heard, the dynamic level is already high (Figure 12.4).

12.1.4 Vibrato
Vibrato is possible on stopped notes, as the finger of the left hand that stops the note performs the vibrato (Figure 12.5). As with all stopped notes, both lateral and vertical vibrato can be scored.

### 12.1.5 Pitch bends and microtones

*Figure 12.6 Bartok pizzicato pitch bends*

Pitch bends for strummed notes are to be prescribed in the same manner as for regular plucked notes. Microtones are also be prescribed in the same manner: they can be attained through a microtonal scordatura or through bending the string.

### 12.2 Vertical cells

*Figure 12.7 Concurrent performance of two Bartok pizzicato notes*  
*Figure 12.8 Two-note vertical Bartok pizzicato cell (TROIS GRAPHIQUES, OHANA)*

The possibilities of combining Bartok pizzicato sounds into vertical cells are limited to combinations of open strings (Figure 12.7) and of stopped and/or open string notes on adjacent strings (Figure 12.8). In the first case, the performer uses the right hand to lift and release one string, while the left hand is simultaneously used to lift and release the other string. In the second case, the performer pulls two instead of one string up and lets both strings snap back onto the fretboard.

### 12.3 Horizontal cells

Bartok pizzicato sounds can be scored into two types of horizontal cells: single lines and vertical cell sequences. Since the possibilities of vertical cell sequences are limited to vertical combinations of two open strings, only single line horizontal cells are discussed here.
12.3.1 Single lines

Design

A single line Bartok pizzicato horizontal cell is a succession of single Bartok pizzicato sounds.

Resonance

It is possible to score Bartok pizzicato sounds in such a way that they do not ring on; this happens when the intervals are relatively small, or when staccato articulation is used. In order to stop the resonance of the string, the performer damps the string with the left or right hand or lifts the stopping finger. Horizontal cells of Bartok pizzicato sounds can also be scored in such a way that they do sound on into the temporal space of subsequent notes; this is possible when they are scored within one left-hand position or with open strings that ring on after position changes. To this effect, ties or a verbal instruction such as l.v. (let vibrate) should be used.

Harmonic possibilities

As is the case for single line horizontal cells of plucked sounds, single line horizontal cells of Bartok pizzicato sounds have a very broad range of harmonic possibilities, because the performer only has to be concerned with the performance of one line. Because of the wide range of possibilities to combine pitches, single lines lend themselves well to writing in keys not directly associated with the pitches of the open strings, as well as for twelve-tone and serial writing.

Speed

Single line horizontal cells of Bartok pizzicato sounds can be scored at low to moderate speeds. Because each sound has to be prepared by moving one or more fingers under the string, higher speeds are excluded. The speed of the Bartok pizzicato sequence in Figure 12.4 is the approximate maximum speed for consecutive Bartok pizzicato sounds.

Articulation

Single line horizontal cells of Bartok pizzicato sounds can be scored with a variety of articulations, including slurs, accents, staccato and glissando. Because of the percussive qualities of the Bartok pizzicato, legato articulation of Bartok pizzicato sounds is not very effective; legato articulation is best achieved with sounds other than Bartok pizzicato sounds, such as plucked sounds and harmonics.
**Slurs**

*Figure 12.9 Bartok pizzicato slurs*

One or more notes in a sequence of single line horizontal cells of Bartok pizzicato sounds can be connected to a subsequent note by means of a slur (Figure 12.9). The slurred note should fit within the hand span. Due to the way the ascending or descending slur is performed, the sound characteristics of the slurred note differ from that of the Bartok pizzicato sound.

**Accents**

*Figure 12.10 Bartok pizzicato articulation*

Because of the wide dynamic range of Bartok pizzicato sounds, the composer can effectively make a Bartok pizzicato sound stand out with an accent (Figure 12.10).

**Staccato**

Single line horizontal cells of Bartok pizzicato sounds can be scored with staccato articulation. The guitarist performs the staccato either by lifting the stopping finger off the fretboard after attack (Figure 12.10), or by damping the string with the left or right hand.

**Glissando**
Glissando can be used to connect notes in a single line. As is the case with single line sequences of plucked sounds, this can be done literally, by prescribing a literal glissando between two notes (Figure 12.11), or as a partial glissando. Additionally, single line horizontal cells of Bartok pizzicato sounds can be scored with a tuning key glissando.

**Embellishment**

Embellishments can be employed in single line horizontal cells of Bartok pizzicato sounds by attaching a left hand trill to a note in the sequence. The trill can continue to be performed with the left hand, while the right hand alone engages in the performance of Bartok pizzicato sounds or other sounds.

**Non-functional writing**

Examples of non-functional writing in single line horizontal cells of Bartok pizzicato sounds:

- Rapid successions of Bartok pizzicato notes
- *Pianissimo* scoring of Bartok pizzicato notes (Figure 12.12)

**Combinations with other sounds**

Single line horizontal cells of Bartok pizzicato sounds are often scored in close conjunction with other sounds. In this section, combinations from the repertoire are discussed.

*Bartok pizzicato sounds combined with plucked sounds*
Brouwer lets a sequence of Bartok pizzicato sounds follow a sequence of regular plucked sounds (Figure 12.13). These two sounds can be connected at moderately high speeds: the performer needs some time to shift the hand position to change from one sound to the other.

*Bartok pizzicato sounds combined with strummed vertical cells*

Titre places a Bartok pizzicato sound at the end of an arpeggiated strum (Figure 12.14). These sounds can be connected at high speeds when the final note of the arpeggiated strum is located on the same string as the Bartok pizzicato sound. If the final note of the arpeggiated strum is located on another string than the Bartok pizzicato sound, the composer will need a short moment to change the hand position and prepare the finger for the performance of the Bartok pizzicato.

*Bartok pizzicato sounds combined with percussion*
Kampela scores a Bartok pizzicato glissando that is performed with the right hand while the right hand performs percussion sounds (Figure 12.15)

Bartok pizzicato sounds combined with one-string rasgueado
See Chapter 7

Hammered sound sequenced with Bartok pizzicato and a percussion sound
See Chapter 11

12.4 Textures

Textures containing Bartok pizzicato are usually scored in combination with other cells. The composer may be completely free in the choice of the cells she combines into a texture; the following examples are presented primarily for the purpose of illustrating how some textures in repertoire pieces have been put together.

12.4.1 Textures as combinations of horizontal cells

Texture of Bartok pizzicato sounds, plucked sounds, rasgueado and strumming
Berio creates a texture in which two-part horizontal cells of plucked sounds, two hand hammering, arpeggio horizontal cells of plucked sounds, rasgueado and arpeggio strums are combined, and where the Bartok pizzicato sound emphasizes the accented quality of the notes it is attached to (Figure 12.16). When scoring Bartok pizzicatos in this passage, Berio primarily uses open strings, which ensures long resonance on these notes. The use of open string basses also makes scoring with a broad pitch range possible, as the low basses ring on while plucking continues in higher positions. The Bartok pizzicato is used here as a coloristic tool for single notes, and the accented Bartok pizzicato notes are presented as louder cousins of their accented and plucked single note counterparts (such as the plucked c sharp in the first half of line one, and the plucked open d string in the first half of the second line). Bartok pizzicato is also used as a dynamic effect: sometimes as the outcome of a crescendo (second line), or as a sudden forte (third line). Subsequent notes succeed Bartok pizzicato notes no faster than a sixteenth note after, which allows the guitarist to move the hand back into plucking position after performing the Bartok pizzicato. Despite the many position changes in this passage, they are not difficult to perform, due to the abundant use of open strings, which in turn also promote resonance.
Kampela creates a texture in which Bartok pizzicato sounds are alternated with plucked sounds, percussion sounds and percussive tambora sounds (Figure 12.17). Apart from adding sound color to this passage, Bartok pizzicato sounds boost the dynamic range; they are the loudest sounds of the passage, and are placed at the end (second line) or toward the end of a crescendo (first measure of Figure 12.17). In the penultimate measure, Kampela scores an inventive simultaneous combination of sounds; the right hand performs the Bartok pizzicato and subsequently performs body percussion on the guitar top. Meanwhile, the left hand makes a downward glissando on the sixth string, which is resonating from the Bartok pizzicato attack. The result is, as often in Kampela’s guitar scores, rapid braiding and mixtures of sounds, made possible by simultaneously using the left and right hand for the production of different sounds.