

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2013 AT 8:00PM

Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

Pre-concert talk by Professor Scott Burnham, 7pm
Post-concert talk back with the members of the quartet
moderated by Professor Steven Mackey

TAKÁCS STRING QUARTET

Edward Dusinberre, violin

Károly Schranz, violin

Geraldine Walther, viola

András Fejér, cello

Béla BARTÓK (1881-1945)

String Quartet No. 1, Op. 7

Lento

Poco a poco accelerando all'allegretto

Allegro vivace

Béla BARTÓK

String Quartet No. 3

Prima parte: Moderato

Seconda parte: Allegro

Ricapitolazione della prima parte: Moderato

Coda: Allegro molto

— INTERMISSION —

Béla BARTÓK

String Quartet No. 5

Allegro

Adagio molto

Scherzo: Alla bulgarese

Andante

Finale: Allegro vivace

The Takács Quartet appears by arrangement with Seldy Cramer Artists, and records for Hyperion and Decca/London Records.

The Takács Quartet is Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado in Boulder and are Associate Artists at Wigmore Hall, London

Please celebrate the opening of our season by joining us for a reception for the artists in the Richardson Lounge following the post-concert talk back.

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TAKÁCS STRING QUARTET

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Béla BARTÓK (1881 - 1945)

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 17

Moderato

Allegro molto capriccioso

Lento

Béla BARTÓK

String Quartet No. 4

Allegro

Prestissimo, con sordino

Non troppo lento

Allegretto pizzicato

Allegro molto

—•••• INTERMISSION —••••

Béla BARTÓK

String Quartet No. 6

Mesto – Più mosso

Mesto – Marcia

Mesto – Burletta

Mesto – Molto tranquillo

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ABOUT THE TAKACS STRING QUARTET

In 2012, *Gramophone* announced that the Takács was the only string quartet to be inducted into its first Hall of Fame, along with such legendary artists as violinist Jascha Heifetz, conductor Leonard Bernstein and mezzo-soprano Dame Janet Baker. The ensemble also won the 2011 Award for Chamber Music and Song presented by the Royal Philharmonic Society in London. Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the Takács Quartet performs ninety concerts a year worldwide, in North America, throughout Europe as well as in Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea.

Appointed in 2012 as the first-ever Associate Artists at Wigmore Hall in London, the Takács will present six concerts per season at the prestigious venue. Other European engagements include performances in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Musikverein in Vienna, and the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

In 2013-2014, the Takács returns to Japan and Singapore, and will also perform Bartók Cycles throughout the United States, including performances at the Ravinia Festival, Carnegie Hall, the

Kennedy Center, Stanford University, UC Berkeley, Boston and Cleveland, in addition to Princeton. The Quartet recently toured in North America with pianists Marc-Andre Hamelin and Garrick Ohlsson, including concerts at New York City's Lincoln Center.

The Quartet has made sixteen recordings for the Decca label since 1988 of works by Beethoven, Bartók, Borodin, Brahms,



photo by Peter Smith

Chausson, Dvořák, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert and Smetana. The ensemble's recording of the six Bartók String Quartets received the 1998 *Gramophone* Award for chamber music and, in 1999, was nominated for a Grammy. In 2005 the Late Beethoven Quartets won Disc of the Year and Chamber Award from *BBC Music*

Magazine, a *Gramophone* Award and a Japanese Record Academy Award. Their recordings of the early and middle Beethoven quartets collected a

Grammy, another *Gramophone* Award, a Chamber Music of America Award and two further awards from the Japanese Recording Academy.

In 2006 the Takács Quartet made their first recording for Hyperion Records, of Schubert's D804 and D810. A disc featuring Brahms Piano Quintet with Stephen Hough was released to great acclaim in November 2007 and was

subsequently nominated for a Grammy. Brahms' Quartets Op. 51 and Op. 67 were released in the fall of 2008 and a disc featuring the Schumann Piano Quintet with Marc-Andre Hamelin was released in late 2009. The complete Haydn "Apponyi" Quartets, Op. 71 and 74 were subsequently released, followed in 2012

by the Schubert Quintet CD with Ralph Kirshbaum.

The quartet is known for innovative programming. In 2007 it performed, with Academy Award-winning actor Philip Seymour

Hoffman, "Everyman" in Carnegie Hall, inspired by the Philip Roth novel. The group collaborates regularly with the Hungarian folk ensemble Muzsikás, performing a program that explores the folk sources of Bartók's music. The Takács performed a music and poetry program on a fourteen city U.S. tour with the poet Robert Pinsky.

The members of the Takács Quartet are

“We love Richardson Auditorium's classic, amphitheater-like shape, coming all the way from ancient Greece, which has been the ideal acoustical layout — along with the shoebox form — for concerts for centuries.”

— *András Fejér, Cellist of the Takács String Quartet*

Christoffersen Faculty Fellows at the University of Colorado Boulder. The Quartet has helped to develop a string program with a special emphasis on chamber music, where students work in a nurturing environment designed to help them develop their artistry. The Quartet's commitment to teaching is enhanced by summer residencies at the Aspen Festival and at the Music Academy of the West, Santa Barbara. The Takács is a Visiting Quartet at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London.

The Takács Quartet was formed in 1975 at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest by Gabor Takács-Nagy, Károly Schranz, Gabor Ormai and András Fejér, while all four were students. It first received international attention in 1977, winning First Prize and the Critics' Prize at the

International String Quartet Competition in Evian, France. The Quartet also won the Gold Medal at the 1978 Portsmouth and Bordeaux Competitions and First Prizes at the Budapest International String Quartet Competition in 1978 and the Bratislava Competition in 1981. The Quartet made its North American debut tour in 1982. Violinist Edward Dusing joined the Quartet in 1993 and violist Roger Tapping in 1995. Violist Geraldine Walther replaced Mr. Tapping in 2005. In 2001 the Takács Quartet was awarded the Order of Merit of the Knight's Cross of the Republic of Hungary, and in March of 2011 each member of the Quartet was awarded the Order of Merit Commander's Cross by the President of the Republic of Hungary.

Come Back Friday Night ...

Like what you hear tonight but don't have tickets for the Bartók String Quartets "Part Two?" Tickets will be on sale in the lobby this evening at intermission and following the concert at a reduced price - \$20, \$15, \$9 **Thursday night only.**

THE STRING QUARTETS OF BÉLA BARTÓK (1881-1945)

By Peter Laki



Bartók's signature on his high-school graduation photograph, dated September 9, 1899

The string quartets of Béla Bartók have long been recognized as one of the peaks of 20th-century chamber music. In these six masterworks, Bartók created a classical sense of harmony and balance using entirely new and non-classical means – an achievement to which few of his contemporaries can lay claim. His non-traditional harmonies can sound harsh and dissonant at first hearing, but he used them in such a coherent and logical way that the

ear soon accepts them as a natural idiom, organically evolving from the past.

It is noteworthy that each of the quartets has a different sequence of movements, and there is not a single one that adheres to the classical allegro-adagio-scherzo-finale scheme. Devising the unique form to best serve his intentions in each case was one of Bartók's most important contributions to the genre of the string quartet.

In his numerous writings on music, Bartók rarely discussed the harmonic and structural innovations found in the quartets. On the other hand, he had a great deal to say about the relationship between his compositions and folk music. A leading expert in the then-new discipline of ethnomusicology, Bartók had collected, notated and analyzed thousands of melodies of Hungarian, Romanian, and Slovak origin, and quite a few from other ethnic groups. The influence of these melodies was easy to see in the arrangements and straightforward folksong imitations found in many of Bartók's works. Yet the composer maintained that all his

works had folk music as their basis, even, he stressed, the string quartets, “except their setting is stricter.” These words have puzzled many commentators ever since, but in fact they are not only true but probably offer the best key to an understanding of the music. Bartók did not quote any actual folk songs in his quartets; instead, he isolated certain structural elements from those folksongs, such as a melodic turn, a rhythmic pattern, or a typical scale. He



combined these elements with a harmonic language following its own inner logic, and used them to fashion musical forms that were sometimes indebted to the classical sonata or scherzo but also reflected his own personal approach, with a distinct predilection for symmetrical, mirror-like designs.

The six quartets span a time period of more than three decades – all but the very first and the very last years of Bartók’s career. The First Quartet dates from a time when

Bartók was just beginning to find his own voice as a composer. To have it performed, he had to organize his own concert venue, co-founding the short-lived Association for New Hungarian Music (UMZE). The Third won a major prize in Philadelphia; the Fifth was commissioned by Elizabeth Sprague

Coolidge, the great American patron of new music; and the Sixth was premiered by the Kolisch Quartet in New York City. To tell the story of the six

quartets is then, in a sense, to tell the story of Bartók’s growing international recognition.

PETER LAKI is a native of Budapest, Hungary and a graduate of the Ferenc Liszt Academy (now University) of Music. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania in 1989 and served for many years as Program Annotator for the Cleveland Orchestra. The editor of the volume Bartók and his World for Princeton University Press in 1995, he has published articles and book chapters on Bartók and contemporary Hungarian music in Musical Quarterly, Studia Musicologica, Schweizer Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft, Cambridge University Press, among others. He has presented papers at numerous international conferences, and currently serves as Visiting Associate Professor at Bard College (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY).

ABOUT THE PROGRAM - OCTOBER 10, 2013

By Peter Laki

Béla Bartók String Quartets Nos. 1, 3 & 5

String Quartet No. 1 (1908)

Looking back on his early years from the vantage point of his mid-forties, Béla Bartók considered his String Quartet No. 1, written at the age of 27, to be his first composition truly representative of his mature style. He had written a great deal of music before that time, including highly successful orchestral works like the "Kossuth" Symphony. But these were written in a nationalistic-Romantic manner that Bartók later disavowed, having discovered the old Hungarian peasant music that changed his life and his artistic outlook forever.

The First Quartet, completed in 1908, is one of the first Bartók works to show signs of this major change. The work stands on the cusp of a new era, combining the influence of folk song with the other important influence that had reached Bartók at around the same time, namely, the new French music of Debussy and Ravel. On a personal level, Bartók was going through an emotional crisis at the time, having been rejected by the violinist Stefi Geyer, with whom he was passionately in love and for whom he had written a violin concerto the previous year. The opening motif in the quartet's mournful first movement is a kind of reversal of the Stefi Geyer theme (so identified by Bartók) from the concerto; it is developed in a dense, highly chromatic post-Romantic polyphonic style introduced by a duo of violins. The fog lifts, first in an impassioned viola solo written in a distinctly Hungarian style (though not yet in the style of the old folksongs Bartók had discovered), and then in a flowing pentatonic melody intoned by the cello. One feels why Bartók's friend and colleague Zoltán Kodály referred to this quartet as "return to life." The polyphony later returns, but, as Hungarian musicologist János Kárpáti has noted, it has been "transposed an octave higher into an 'ethereal sphere'[representing] a tone of 'transfiguration'," and bringing "solace" to the music.

The "return to life" continues in the second movement, which is in a moderately fast allegretto tempo, reached gradually after a transitional passage written, like the beginning of the first movement, for instrumental duos (viola-cello followed by first and second violins). The Allegretto begins as a lyrical waltz but it eventually gathers momentum; tender, expressive passages alternate with intense dramatic outbursts. The ending, once more, is quiet and almost "transfigured."

The third and last movement is preceded by an Introduzione which presents a cello recitative, somewhat like in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. But this cello recites it in a distinctly Hungarian manner. It is still closer to 19th-century popular songs than to the ancient repertoire Bartók had discovered in the villages, but even so, it serves to announce the stylistic change that is about to occur, in the manner of Beethoven, who had his soloist in the Ninth Symphony sing: "nicht diese Töne!" (not these sounds!)



Béla Bartók collecting folksongs in Turkey.

And in fact, the Allegro vivace that ensues makes the “return to life” complete with its exuberant and playful tone. At the movement’s culmination point, the tempo suddenly slows down to a solemn adagio, and the first violin plays an expressive pentatonic melody which is, finally, in the style of the ancient folksongs which Bartók had saved up until this strategic moment. The folksong episode is rather brief, and is followed by a return of the allegro material, including a humoristic *fugato*. The excitement keeps increasing to the end. There is a single moment of introspection before the end, when the ancient folksong makes a second appearance, even shorter than the first, evidently to drive home the point that this old-new style — which symbolizes spiritual renewal and the attainment of a new authenticity — is definitely here to stay.

String Quartet No. 3 (1927)

The Third and Fourth Quartets, written in short succession, have been seen as the acme of Bartók’s modernism. In fact, it may well be that at first hearing, the listener’s attention is engaged by the highly advanced harmonic and rhythmic idiom of these works. Yet the folk-music influence is never too far from the surface, only the “setting” is really “strict” this time. For all its “modernity,” the Third Quartet is full of references (sometimes veiled, sometimes more overt) to Hungarian folk music. Bartók’s strategy consists of using only one parameter of his folk sources at a time: he will either quote a typical pentatonic cadence from Hungarian folk music (G - C - A) without the rest of the tune, or use a symmetrical melodic structure derived from folk music but filled out by markedly non-folkloric pitch material. In this way, the traditional and non-traditional elements of his style are fused in a seamless unity.

The Third Quartet is in a single movement but is divided into four clearly demarcated segments. A slow Prima parte and a fast Seconda parte are followed by a varied recapitulation of Part I and a Coda based on Part II. The Prima parte is a masterful example of “organic growth:” a complex and variegated movement arises from two or three tiny motifs that are themselves interrelated. One of the most important

moments comes at the end of the section, where these tiny motifs coalesce into a long, pentatonic musical phrase (played by the second violin and the viola). The *Seconda parte* brings together a string of themes in various dance meters, both symmetrical and asymmetrical. The dance becomes more and more excited; the themes are developed in contrapuntal imitation, almost as if the dancers tripped over one another. The end of the section was best characterized by Kárpáti in his book *Bartók's Chamber Music* (Pendragon Press: Stuyvesant, NY, 1994): "The composer's 'scalpel' continues to strip off the thematic and motivic layers – penetrating right down to the 'skeleton' of the themes." This is followed by the return of the slow tempo (*Ricapitolazione della prima parte*) in which the short motifs of the work's opening are "reconfigured" to form a completely new musical entity. Finally, the Coda presents the main thematic material of the *Seconda parte* in a condensed version, culminating in a climactic ending.

String Quartet No. 5 (1934)

Like the Fourth, the Fifth String Quartet follows a symmetrical five-movement layout, only this time the Scherzo is in the center, framed by two slow movements (Nos. 2 and 4) and two fast ones in the extreme positions. This scheme, which makes for a regular alternation of fast and slow tempos, actually results in a seven-fold symmetry, since the central scherzo is itself in an A-B-A form.

The main theme of the first movement grows out of a single note, repeated many times by the four instruments in rhythmic unison. Similarly to the first movement of the Fourth Quartet, this Allegro follows sonata form, and the contrast among the various themes (the opening *ostinato*, the angular rhythms of the second theme and the long legato lines of the third) propels the movement on its path. Bartók's fondness for mirror symmetries is further expressed in the thematic inversions during the recapitulation: in that section, all the themes return "upside down," with ascending intervals substituted for descending ones and vice versa.



Béla Bartók's portrait on 1,000 Hungarian forint banknote (printed between 1983 and 1992; no longer in circulation)

The second movement is one of Bartók's so-called "night musics" – a gripping evocation of the mysterious noises of the night as heard by a solitary observer lost in contemplation. A theme of an almost Romantic tenderness, harmonized with conventional triads that sound entirely non-conventional in their 20th-century context, emerges out of the isolated trills of the opening, representing the voice of the individual. The tremolos and pizzicatos that soon appear, including pizzicatos with the nail of the left index finger, create an eerie atmosphere, which is relieved by a return of the pure chords of the earlier melodic section. True to his concept of symmetry that governs the entire quartet, Bartók returns to the opening trills at the very end.

The third movement is a scherzo in "Bulgarian rhythm," that is, in the characteristic mixed meters often found in the folk music of the Balkan nation. The basic pattern of the scherzo is one-two-three-four one-two one-two-three (in a rather fast tempo). Two different melodic motifs are made to fit into the "regular irregularity" of the rhythm: an idea that moves up and down in a chain of thirds, and another one that evokes Hungarian folk music with its melodic outline. The Trio section (which is

the center of symmetry for the entire work) brings a particularly striking folk melody played by the viola in its high register, answered by the cello, against the agitated figurations of the first violin. The return of the scherzo is a free recomposition rather than a literal repeat, again involving inversion of the themes.

In many ways, the fourth-movement *Andante* harks back to the second movement: again we hear isolated gestures and mysterious noises gradually giving rise to more sustained melodies. But this time, Bartók includes an additional element: a powerful cry in the form of a terse motif of only two notes – an ascending minor third. This motif becomes the basis of a passionate middle section that is the total emotional opposite of the quiet and meditative *Adagio*. A few slow pizzicato chords played by the cello serve to bring some calm to the final measures of the movement.

The music of the last movement is driven forward by rambunctious dance rhythms and playful imitations (as though the instruments were playing catch). The many repeated notes recall the *ostinatos* of the first movement (another symmetrical touch), but the earlier thematic contrasts have all but disappeared. A startling episode occurs just before the end: a passage marked “*Allegretto con indifferenza*” where the second violin plays an intentionally banal little melody to the *meccanico* accompaniment of the viola. When the first violin takes over the melody a jarring half-step higher, the joke becomes cruel, and is finally brushed aside by a return of a fast tempo and a mad rush which will last to the end.

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM - OCTOBER 11, 2013

By Peter Laki

Béla Bartók String Quartets Nos. 2, 4 & 6

String Quartet No. 2 (1917)

A decade after the First Quartet's "return to life," we find Bartók in the throes of a new crisis in the Second. This time, the crisis had to do with the hardships of World War I, and with the vehement opposition to Bartók's music on the part of the Hungarian critics, an opposition that in 1912 had caused the composer to withdraw from the musical life of Budapest and to move to a relatively distant suburb. A mood of pessimism took hold of Bartók during these years – witness the tragic endings of the *Four Pieces for Orchestra* and the *Suite for Piano*, Op. 14, and the two dark song cycles Opp. 15 and 16, all from the years immediately preceding the Second Quartet.

“the most psychedelic rock music I had ever heard.”

—*Princeton Professor and Composer Steven Mackey on hearing the Bartók Quartets for the first time*

The Second Quartet, too, ends with a desolate slow movement, preceded by a Moderato filled with nostalgic longing and an extended, ferocious dance. The three movements represent wide emotional extremes, even more polarized than was the case in the First Quartet.

The first movement contains its own inner polarity, between the opening theme (a languid melody with ever-widening intervals) and a second, "bittersweet" idea that appears only twice, harmonized in a much more consonant way. The contrast of these two themes could correspond to an imagined contrast between a melancholy state of mind and the world of ideal dreams. Powerful surges and desperate climaxes punctuate this movement which – roughly – follows the outlines of sonata form. One of the most memorable moments occurs shortly before the end: a five-

note motif, played by all four instruments in a menacing, fortissimo unison, turns out to be identical to the beginning of the “bittersweet” theme, which immediately follows, ushering in a coda in which both themes are united in a farewell gesture of great tenderness.

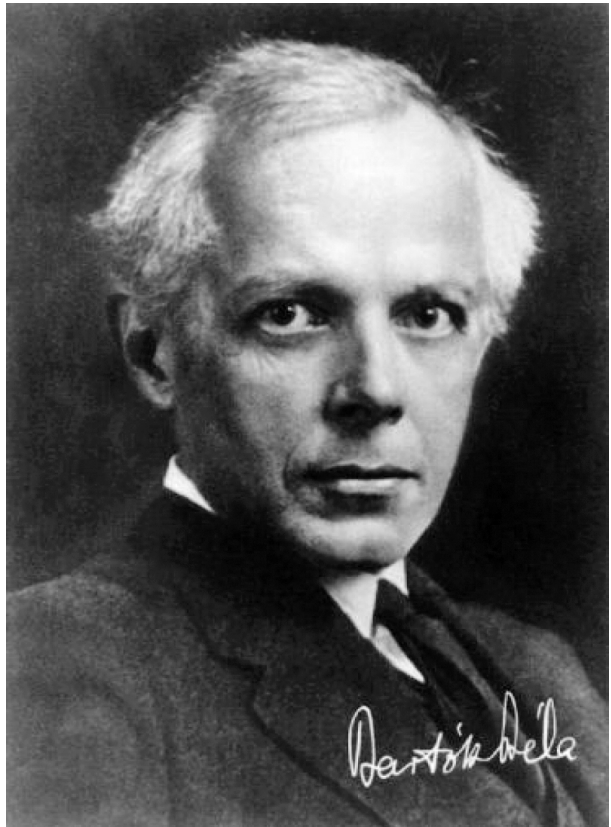
For most of its duration, the second movement has a single interval – the minor third – for its theme. It is hammered home in a relentless *ostinato* in which Kárpáti sees a reflection of the Arabic drumming Bartók had heard during his visit to Biskra, Algeria in 1913. On the other hand, as Kárpáti also notes, a very similar *ostinato* can be found in Bartók’s piano piece *Allegro barbaro* from 1911 – that is, two years before the Biskra trip. It should come as no surprise that Bartók was most receptive to external impulses that confirmed what he was already exploring in his own creative work.

In the central movement of the Second Quartet, this ostinato theme is developed in spectacular ways, in turn serious and comic. Toward the middle of the movement, the tempo slows down for a while and a lyrical melody appears, only to be brushed aside by the returning ostinatos that become wilder and wilder to the end. The concluding fortissimo unison recalls the similar passage from the first movement mentioned above. Only this time there is no relief in a dreamlike conclusion; the third movement that follows is one of the darkest pieces of music Bartók ever wrote.

Isolated melodic fragments, played with mutes, set a desolate stage, preparing the appearance of the melody modelled after a certain type of Hungarian folksong of a mournful character. The contours of the melody, and the fact that the phrase is repeated a fifth higher, are reminiscent of folk music, but the chromatic inflections of the theme speak an intensely personal language of Bartók’s own. In fact, the pitches derive from the languid opening theme of the first movement. The two kinds of sadness – the personal grief of the composer and the communal lament of folksong – reinforce one another as the music moves through successive stages of anxiety and despair. The final sonority of the work is the same minor third that figured so prominently in the second movement – now played twice, pizzicato (plucked) by the viola and cello, muffled and austere.

String Quartet No. 4 (1928)

The five-movement layout of Quartet No. 4, with two thematically related fast movements in the first and fifth place, respectively, two scherzo-type pieces (also related) as movements No. 2 and 4, and an emotionally intense central slow movement has inspired many analyses and spawned countless imitations, yet is essentially both unexplainable and unrepeatable. No theory can account for the irresistible rhythmic energy that characterizes the first movement, though its patterns can be (and have been) laid bare. Nor could the symmetrical structures produce the impact they do, if they weren't filled out with an extraordinary timbral and textural imagination, with double and triple stops, tremolos, glissandos and other technical devices adding their dramatic contributions to musical form. The breath-taking coda of the first movement (*Più mosso*, "Faster") caps a movement that has been powerful and exciting from the start.



In the second movement (*Prestissimo, con sordino*) all four instruments keep their mutes on throughout. Much of this dashing and mysterious scherzo, which constantly

plays the metric game of having three notes in one instrument against two in another, consists of chromatic scales scurrying up and down. Only in the middle section does a “theme” (a musical idea with a sharp rhythmic and melodic profile) emerge, only to be buried again in a vibrant texture of glissandos, harsh chords and rapid chromatic scales.

The third movement, the centerpiece of the work, begins with an expressive cello solo, played in a precisely notated rhythm that nevertheless gives the impression of *tempo rubato* (free rhythm). Commentators have seen in this passage a reflection (though not a direct recreation) of the Romanian *hora lunga*, an improvisatory form that was one of Bartók’s most cherished discoveries during his ethnomusicological fieldwork. The extended cello solo eventually yields to an anguished passage led by the first violin, reaching an *agitato* climax. When the original tempo resumes and the cello reclaims its leading role, it receives a counterpoint from the first violin, and the rubato rhythm becomes more regular, as if “tamed” by the intervening events. Yet the last word belongs to the anguished micro-motifs of the first violin.

The fourth movement takes up the ascending and descending scales of movement 2, yet the chromatic scale is now stretched out to diatonicism (many of the half-

“Under any circumstances, hearing all six of Bartók’s string quartets is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. To hear them played by the Takács Quartet, who embody chamber music royalty, is a memorable way to open PUC’s 120th season.”

— *Princeton Professor Scott Burnham*

steps widened to whole steps). Again, a special playing technique is called for, but instead of the mutes used in the second movement, this time the four players put down their bows and use pizzicato (plucked strings) throughout. Sometimes these pizzicatos are of the variety known as the “Bartók” pizzicato, in which the string is plucked so strongly that it rebounds off the fingerboard. The rhythmic complexity of

the movement is considerable, yet the overall impression is a humorous one.

The last movement, based on the same thematic material as the first, nevertheless regularizes the rhythmic structure so that the melody fits into a dance pattern with phrases of equal length, which was not the case before. The accompaniment, with strong offbeat accents and playful grace notes, greatly enhances the dance mood. The high jinks are only briefly halted by a light and graceful melodic episode; the wild dance soon returns and culminates in a concluding passage that recalls the ending of the first movement almost literally.

String Quartet No. 6 (1939)

The Sixth Quartet was the last work Bartók completed before his emigration to the United States. The first three movements were written in Saanen, Switzerland, during the summer of 1939. From the surviving sketches, scholars have been able to trace how Bartók's ideas about the unique form of this work took shape. Originally he had planned a four-movement string quartet with a dance finale preceded by a slow introduction. Then it occurred to him to use that slow introduction as a motto, appearing before the other movements as well. The compositional work had to be interrupted in September when, after the outbreak of World War II, Bartók had to return to Budapest. He had also received news of his mother's grave illness. At some point during this time, Bartók dropped his plans for the dance finale, and fashioned the material of the slow introductions into an entire movement to conclude the work. This *Mesto* ('sad') finale was finished in Budapest in November 1939. (Bartók's mother died a few weeks later.)

In the final form of the work, each of the first three movements is introduced by a *Mesto* motto, which then provides the entire material of the finale. In the case of the first movement, the motto – a lyrical, intensely chromatic melody, is played by the viola alone. After a short transition section (where the unison of the four instruments anticipate the main theme of the movement), the *vivace* tempo begins with more

instrumental solos (unaccompanied first and then second violin). This suggests a certain lightness of the tone that remains constant throughout this predominantly lyrical and lively movement.

Two character pieces follow: a Marcia (March) and a Burletta (Burlesque), both in ABA form and, as mentioned before, preceded by an ever-intensifying Mesto motto. In each case, Bartók created subtle motivic links to connect the Mesto sections to the subsequent scherzos. The characteristic dotted rhythms of the Marcia are related to the *verbunkos*, a 19th-century Hungarian instrumental tradition which had inspired Bartók at the beginning of his career and again during the last decade of his life. (One commentator, however, has drawn attention to the "Scherzando" movement in Beethoven's String Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 127, as another possible model.) At times, the march takes on a decidedly parodistic tone, which makes the beginning of the middle section all the more shocking. For here the cello bursts out in a passionate, declamatory outcry, accompanied by dramatic tremolos in the violins and strumming pizzicato chords in the viola. It is a traumatic interlude after which the March melody returns transfigured, played piano instead of forte, with delicate harmonics in the first violin.

The Burletta is one of Bartók's most sarcastic movements. The crude puppet from his ballet *The Wooden Prince* comes back to life, even more grotesque than in his first incarnation more than twenty years earlier. Strong rhythmic accents and the "out-of-tune" effect produced by the second violin playing a quarter-tone lower than the first leave no doubt as to the character Bartók had in mind. The middle section this time recalls the gentle lyricism of the first movement, but then the merciless satire returns with a vengeance.

Expanding upon the opening motto, the fourth-movement Mesto is full of nostalgia and resignation. Bartók's instruction in the score, *senza colore* ("without color"), is extremely revealing. The two themes of the first-movement Vivace return, in a slow tempo this time, as faint reminders of a happiness long past before the music unmistakably says farewell.

HUNGARY BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

By Peter Laki

Is Hungary part of Central Europe or Eastern Europe? The question is not trivial and involves more than mere semantics. What hinges on it is the decision as to whether we want to consider the country closer to its Eastern or its Western neighbors. True, all those years of domination by Eastern powers—the Ottoman Turks in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the Soviets in the 20th—temporarily cut Hungary off from the West. Yet can a country that embraced Roman Catholicism in the year 1000 really be “new Europe,” as the formerly Communist members of the European Union are often called by politicians and journalists?

History has often cast Hungary in the role of buffer zone between East and West. It was the last country the Mongol invasion devastated in the 13th century and it was also the endpoint of the Ottoman expansion in the 16th. All this earned Hungary the title “protector of Christianity,” for which there was a great price to pay in terms of the country’s development. It cannot be denied, however, that the country always looked to the West for its political and cultural contacts. In the 15th century, the

court of King Matthias became an outpost of the Italian Renaissance. And much later, when Hungary was incorporated in the Habsburg Empire, the Austrian oppression also brought with it a definite process of Westernization.

The poet János Batsányi wrote in a 1789 poem: “On Paris keep a watchful eye.” What he meant, of course, was that Hungarians should pay close attention to the unfolding events of the French Revolution because they were themselves in dire need of political renewal. Yet the line eventually became a general slogan, frequently quoted by Francophiles in the 20th century who went to Paris whenever they could and were inspired by French culture (in part to counteract the long-standing Austro-German influence). Hungary was temporarily thrust back into “Eastern Europe” during the forty years of a Communist interlude (1949-89), but the pendulum has now swung the other way with membership in the European Union and NATO.

It is clear, then, that the question posed at the beginning of this article cannot be answered unequivocally. Hungary belongs to *both* Eastern and Central Europe, and

this duality is one of the defining features of its unique culture. The duality has deeply marked even in the structure of the language, that notoriously difficult tongue that always baffles visitors. Hungarian belongs to a rather obscure linguistic family, the Finno-Ugrian group, whose ancestral home was on the banks of the Volga river. Finnish and Estonian are rather distant relatives; the languages closest to Hungarian are spoken by dwindling ethnic minorities in some remote regions of Russia. However, in the course of the last millennium, the Western influence on the Hungarian language has been considerable. Not only has the language absorbed a great many loan words from Latin and German (as well as, of course, from Turkic and Slavic languages), but a large number of German idioms have also been adopted through literal translation.

One of the most powerful voices to articulate this duality was the great poet Endre Ady (1877-1919). Born four years before Bartók (both men's hometowns are now located in Romania), Ady loved Paris and was influenced by French symbolist poetry; at the same time he was an ardent Hungarian patriot, a passionate critic of what he called "the Hungarian wasteland"

and a great champion of social and political progress at home. A lot of Ady's poetry—which revolutionized Hungarian literature—revolved around this duality between East and West.

In many ways, the life and work of Béla Bartók embodies the same duality. The composer's mother was a native German speaker. Young Béla, going through an intensely nationalistic phase, had to fight for the use of the Hungarian language at home and demanded in particular that his sister's German first name, Elsa, be Magyarized. His musical pedigree was equally Germanic as he was a direct artistic descendant of Beethoven: Beethoven's student Carl Czerny taught Franz Liszt, whose own pupil István Thomán became Bartók's piano teacher. Yet Bartók didn't find his true musical voice until he discovered his Eastern heritage—the ancient peasant traditions of Transylvania, a region close to his own birthplace. As a composer/pianist/ethnomusicologist, he was equally at home in Paris and in the villages of the Carpathian Mountains; in his works he achieved a perfect synthesis between the two. It is fair to say that Hungarian music couldn't make a significant contribution to the international scene until it

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fully embraced its Eastern European identity and merged it completely with the Western tradition.

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In the light of what has been said, it will hardly surprise anyone that Hungary's leading literary journal, founded in 1907, was called *Nyugat* ("The West"). The first issues of this journal, of which Ady was one of the principal collaborators, came out shortly after Bartók and his friend Zoltán Kodály had started their ethnomusicological fieldwork and right around the time they wrote their first compositions based on old-style folk music. Bartók appeared as a pianist at several literary evenings organized by *Nyugat*, which occasionally published excerpts from his compositions in score. In 1916, Bartók set five poems by Ady to music as his Op. 16. Although Bartók, a rather private and withdrawn man, did not cultivate any personal friendships with literary figures, he gave one of his most revealing interviews to the major *Nyugat* poet Dezső Kosztolányi. And some precious documents of Bartók's piano playing survived thanks to the writer Sophie Török, who was married to another major poet from the *Nyugat* group, Mihály Babits, and who recorded a radio broadcast of

Bartók (in a piano duo with his second wife Ditta Pásztor) by means of a primitive tape-recorder at home.

Babits and Kosztolányi were two of the most important Hungarian poets after Ady's premature death in 1919. Both were steeped in Western literature and were also outstanding translators (Babits translated the entire *Divina Commedia* and Kosztolányi's translations from an extremely wide variety of sources fill several volumes). In spite of significant differences between their artistic temperaments, both were accomplished virtuosos of the language; many of their poetic images have become ingrained in the consciousness of all well-educated Hungarians. Their colleague Zsigmond Móricz, who co-edited *Nyugat* with Babits, was an important novelist who, like Bartók, drew inspiration from rural culture, as did many Hungarian painters of the time, whether they were traditional realists or showed modernistic influences in their works.

Móricz and Bartók also inspired a group of younger intellectuals who, starting in the 1930s, conducted extensive sociological and ethnomusicological research in the Hungarian countryside.

From the generation coming after the founders of *Nyugat*, we must mention Attila József (1905-1937), not only because he was one of the greatest poets Hungary had ever produced but also because he left a fascinating outline of an essay in which he showed a deeper understanding of Bartók's music than almost anyone at the time, with the exception of a handful of close associates of the composer's.

In short, the decades during which the six Bartók quartets were written were a period of intense artistic and intellectual activity in Hungary, in spite of the repressive political regime of Admiral Miklós Horthy. Horthy, a former high officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army who had fought in World War I, defeated the short-lived Communist regime in 1919 and instituted the infamous "white terror." As governor-regent of a country that had not formally abolished the kingdom but had no king, Horthy introduced *numerus clausus* (a cap on the number of Jews that could be admitted to university) as early as 1922, eleven years before Hitler came

to power in Germany. In the course of the quarter-century of his reign, he brought Hungary into a fateful alliance with Nazi Germany, presided over a succession of governments that were increasingly pro-German and instituted a series of stringent anti-Jewish laws starting in the late 1930s. As Hungary was descending deeper and deeper into this quagmire, all the literary luminaries mentioned above disappeared from the scene: Kosztolányi and Babits both died of throat cancer (in 1936 and 1941, respectively), Móricz of a stroke in 1942; Attila József committed suicide by throwing himself in front of a train in 1937. Bartók, one of the last remaining artist members of his generation, left for the United States in 1940 where he died in 1945. Kodály stayed home, to re-emerge after war's end as the Great Old Man of the Hungarian artistic scene, perhaps the most important artistic survivor of the "Golden Age," while the "Iron Curtain" descended on the country. But that is a different story, to be told another time.