

Basic Bartók

One-hundred-year-old Béla Bartók has fared surprisingly well on records. The big labels have recorded and rerecorded the big works, and several lesser labels have made important contributions, notably discs of Bartók playing the piano. A complete Bartók edition is available on Hungaroton in an award-winning 39-record series, and the quality is high. There is even a label called Bartók Records, run by the composer's second son, which has some marvelous performances in its catalogue.

A basic Bartók library should reflect the composer's essence as a man and his growth and range as a musician. Bartók was a composer, a pianist, an ethnomusicologist, a pedagogue, a pioneer of new music, an individualist—but above all a Hungarian who pledged allegiance to his roots in every musical gesture. Even at its most truculent, his passionate dissonance is always accessible to the senses and alive. He traveled far from conventional tonality and back again, but his harmonic vagrancy grew directly from the songs of peasants. His music is organic matter.

All of Bartók is in his six string quartets, which are culmination points of every phase of his composing and of the form in this century. The quartets, a veritable catalogue of string techniques, are the most compleat quartets since Beethoven, whom Bartók adored. Listen to Bartók's six alternately with Beethoven's last five. The earlier master's great C-sharp minor Quartet, strongly evoked in the first and last movements of Bartók's cycle, will fall revealingly before Bartók's fourth, one of his most intimate, animated, intimi-

dating, and unmitigated compositions. Telefunken's exquisite recording of the Bartók cycle with the Végh Quartet was recently deleted but is worth looking for anyhow and anywhere, in specialty shops or remainder racks. Meanwhile, the Juilliard Quartet, which will soon rerecord the cycle digitally, plays with raucous vigor (3-CBS D3S 717, \$17.98).

Bartók pays more homage to Beethoven as performer, in a duo-recital with Joseph Szigéti on violin, recorded live in 1940 (2-Vanguard SRV-304/5, \$9.96). After a magical "Kreutzer" sonata, this unbeatable pair sails through the Debussy sonata, storms

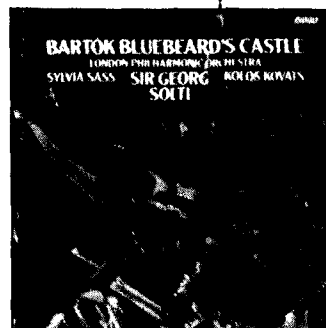
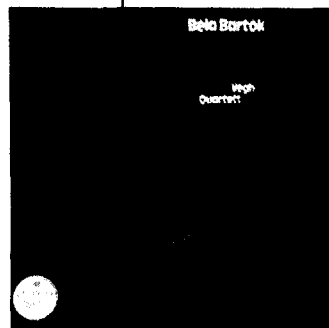
is a great stereo showcase. Herbert von Karajan was hot the day he recorded it with the Berlin Philharmonic for Deutsche Grammophon's meticulous microphones, along with Stravinsky's euphonious—and in this company tame—*Apollon Musagète* (DG 2530065, \$9.98).

Having fully assimilated his folk roots and explored harmony and the capabilities of the string and percussion families, Bartók relaxed into a less harsh idiom at the end of his life. His *Concerto for Orchestra* is really a concerto for everybody, a Noah's ark for instruments, and at the same time a

shadowgraph of his mature technique and style. Its euphony is no regression, rather the cadence of an ailing man's backward glance. There are several excellent recordings, but who better than Fritz Reiner—who with Szigéti brought about the commission for the work—to conduct it (the Chicago Symphony, RCA AGLI-2909, \$5.98)?

The best recording of Bartók's single opera, *Bluebeard's Castle*, is the most recent (London OSA 1174, \$9.98). Sir Georg Solti and his countrymen Sylvia Sass and Kolos Kovats revel in the ebb and flow of Bartók's *parlando rubato* style. Here are the pentatonic and modal scales, the falling lines, the open forms of peasant songs transmuted into tragic-elegiac night-music both deeply mysterious and poignant. The themes are autonomy defiled, individualism threatened, aloneness. I think Bartók's essence as a man is somewhere hidden in the mystery of this opera. ■

Stephen Wadsworth, former managing editor of *Opera News*, contributes articles to many musical publications here and abroad.



through Bartók's own craggy, vehement second sonata, and closes with his more sinuous Rhapsody No. 1, dedicated to Szigéti. Again, Beethoven—and Debussy—will help illuminate the language Bartók speaks. So does the power of Bartók's piano technique, from soft touch to hypnotic, percussive forte.

Bartók recognized the piano as a percussion instrument. When it appears unannounced in his *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta*, the ear is surprised. This work, perhaps Bartók's purest, germinates entirely from the subject of his opening fugue, growing slowly into a living organism. With its separated string orchestras and carefully positioned percussion, *Music*

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SR Competition No. 18

It is anagram time. This harmless and ever improving amusement has fallen to a pathetically low estate in these latter days. In its heyday, Louis XIII of France actually found it necessary to appoint one Thomas Billon "anagrammatist to the King," and it is well known that one of the most famous names in literature resulted when a certain Arouet, l.j. (Arouet the younger) transposed these letters into Voltaire. (The V and I are classical equivalents for U and J.) In modern times, the late Vladimir Nabokov was fond of in-

serting himself into his own works, Hitchcock-like, under the guise of Vivian Darkbloom, to name only one. Norman Mailer might turn himself into the utterance: "I'm near normal." Send us your transformations of at least four well-known names. The three winners will each receive "\$52," which is an anagram of what they will actually get.

Entries for Competition No. 18 must be received by April 3 and the winners will be announced in the June issue. Send submissions to SR Competition No. 18, *Saturday Review*, 150 East 58 Street, New York, New York 10155. All entries become the property of SR.

Winners of No. 15

The winner of our concrete poetry contest is H.L. Ehrlich of Saginaw, Michigan, whose poem is entitled "Regression."

We find the work melancholy, to say no more, but then where is it written that entries in this Competition must all be pieces of merriment? Besides, the faintly morbid subject seems to us nicely balanced by the cheerful eccentricity of the form. It reminds us of the vernacular carvings on Nantucket gravestones, some of which appear to have been made by artists who were far from inconsolable.

The honorable mentions, in no

The Winner

O M M O M M O M M
 M M M M M M M M M M
 M M M M M M M M M M
 Safe in Eden, free from
 M M M M M M M M M M M M
 worries, I was once, I used
 M M M M M M M M M M M M
 to be, some time long ago. If ever
 M M M M M M M M M M M M
 I could be again, I'd cling tight as
 M M M M M M M M M M M M
 the light appeared, I'd never let you
 M M M M M M M M M M M M
 go. But here I am, alive, full-grown, I
 M M M M M M M M M M M M
 stand upon my own two feet, yet
 M M M M M M M M M M M M
 if you offered me a chair
 M M M M M M M M M M M M
 I'd gladly take a seat.
 M M M M M M M M M M M M

#1

SNMIDPTEF

particular order below, are more light-hearted. Steven L. Brezzo is director of the San Diego Museum of Art. His beautiful poem speaks—if somewhat laconically—for itself (No. 1).

And everyone, surely, will respond to the gaiety of animated cartoon No. 2 by Gregory Lavzon of Acton, Massachusetts.

No. 3 may not appeal to those who earn their living by freelancing. It is by Richard Iannelli of Philadelphia and is entitled "Rejection Slip."

Finally, we greatly enjoyed the blank sheet of paper entitled "Writer's Block" by John Campbell of Columbus, Georgia, though it was, frankly, much too illiterate for these pages.

#2

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

fox

The quick brown jumped over the lazy dog.

fox

The quick brown jumped over the lazy dog.

The quick brown jumped over the lazy dog. fox

#3

Rejection Slip

We think your are quite
 work shows real orig inal
 pote nt ial; ,and well
 your id eas, hand led.
 your thoughts However...

Puzzles

Wit Twister No. 175

Edited by Arthur Swan

The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash with a blank corresponds to a letter of the word.

— — — — —, not in fact immortal,
 — — — — — to enter Heaven's portal.
 "— — — — —," fervently she prayed,
 "Take me in. My — — — — — are paid.
 "Life has — — — — — me hard indeed."
 "Enter, filia," God agreed.

Mrs. Thomas E. Harris
 Alexandria, Virginia

Literary Crypt No. 163

EPIC APPLE VOC UP AC
 UVEUCH, PURCOE UP AC
 EXVYYPXCH, VMH EPIC ZCK
 UP AC TRCXCH VMH
 HSQCEUCH.

ZOVMTSE AVTPM

Answers next issue

February Answers

Solution to Wit Twister No. 174

pirates, traipse, piaster, parties

Solution to Literary Crypt No. 162

The critic. . . scarcely saw the
 play at all for watching his reaction
 to it.

E.B. White

Middleton Double-Crostic No 204

NORMAN CORWIN: CORWIN
 ON MEDIA

So long as men and women of
 principle and good heart and clear
 conscience and fast film can go on
 creating documentaries that. . .
 exercise the better angels of our
 nature, then the Republic is not
 going to go to the dogs. No matter
 who is elected president.

From *Westways*, May, 1980