

KNOW YOUR CLASSICS

THIS series of articles, written for "The Listener" by BESSIE POLLARD, is designed to help the student and the interested listener towards a more complete appreciation of good music. Each article deals in outline with one accepted masterpiece and illustrates its main themes.

(4) String Quartet No. 5 (Bela Bartok)

BELA BARTOK'S Fifth String Quartet, written in 1934, has five movements, with thematic relationship established between the first and fifth, and the second and fourth movements. Throughout the entire work one is conscious of the emphasis Bartok places upon architecture and construction, as there is a great deal of strict canonic and fugal writing.

The first movement follows the contours of Sonata form: it is built upon associated groups of thematic motifs, of which this is the first:



There is, also, a secondary transitional group, made up again of three motifs. The development consists of various combinations of these figures, using different devices such as augmentation (longer note values), diminution (shorter note values), and inversion ("mirror-reflection" of the theme).

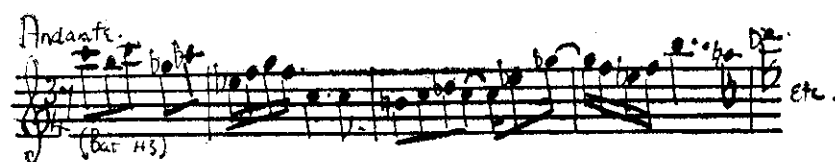
The second movement begins rather intangibly with trills and melodic fragments until at the tenth bar we hear motif (a), and at the thirty-first bar, motif (b). After some development and re-statement, the movement finishes, as it opened, with short phrases and trills disappearing, as it were, into thin air—



The Scherzo and Trio is based upon those Balkan rhythms with rather complex time-groupings which Bartok uses so frequently in his later works. In the Scherzo theme (a) the 9/8 signature is grouped 4+2+3, while the Trio theme (b) has even more complicated rhythmic subdivisions—10/8, divided into 3+2+2+3, alternating with two other formulas—



The fourth movement shows thematic affinity with the second, opening in the same elusive fashion but with pizzicato glissandos replacing the trills; this is the main theme—



The Finale is of the Rondo type with contrasting episodes complementing a main theme which first emerges after a short introduction—

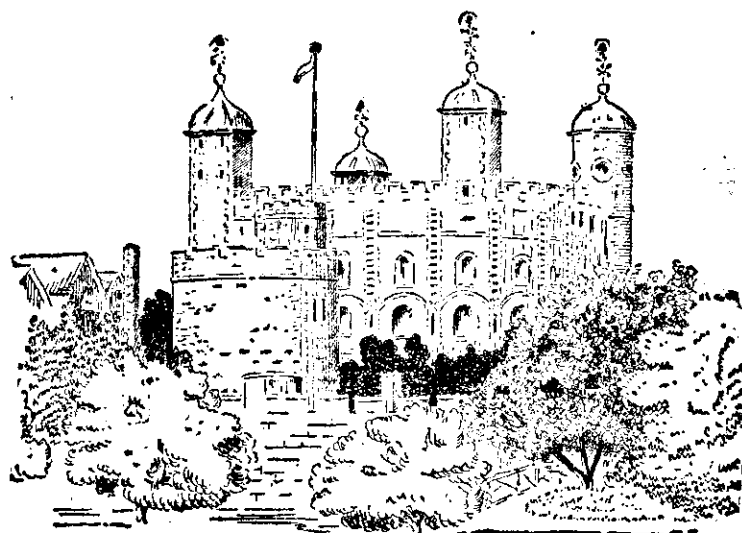


Two notable passages are heard near the end of the work (1) the fugue based on a theme from the first movement, and (2) the odd passage rather resembling a barrel-organ in its absurd mechanical application.

Bela Bartok's String Quartet No. 5 will be heard from Station 4YO at 8.0 p.m. on Friday, August 6.

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