

# BARTOK'S "BLUEBEARD"

BARTOK'S only opera is based on the children's tale of Bluebeard and his Seven Wives in the version prepared by the Hungarian poet Balazs. When Judith arrives at Bluebeard's castle she insists on having the keys to all the doors because she loves him and will not allow any secret to come between them. "Let your castle light up, your poor, dark, cold castle," she cries. "Give me the key, because I love you." One by one the doors are opened. Behind the first is a torture chamber, behind the second an armoury and behind the third a treasury filled with jewels, stained with blood. "Open the fourth door," says Bluebeard, and here Judith finds fragrant flowers whose soil is saturated with blood and behind the fifth door an immense landscape whose clouds throw a blood-tinged shadow. Two more doors remain to be opened. Bluebeard knows that these secrets will break Judith's heart, but he cannot hinder her. Behind the sixth door is a vast lake, a lake of tears, and when

she comes to the last door Bluebeard tells her that here she will find his former wives. She opens it to find three women wearing crowns and loaded with treasures. She steps back, surprised to find they live. Bluebeard's last tragic secret is out. He tells her he met the first wife at dawn, the second at noon, the third one in the evening, and as he turns to her, the fourth one at night. "Stop, stop, I am still here," she cries, but he goes to the third door, fetches the crown, mantle and jewellery, places them on her, and she follows the other women through the seventh door. The castle is now in complete darkness, and Bluebeard merges into it.

The minstrel in the spoken prologue suggests that the tale takes place both inside and outside our own minds. Who then shall find the meaning? Here Bluebeard enshrines the women as for some reason they cannot share his life, although they are the source of his inspiration. Bluebeard and Judith are forever apart—they talk to each other alternately. In only one place does their dialogue merge, but even here they cannot reach one another. She cannot understand his secret no matter how passionately she tries, until in the end he withdraws into solitude.

The opera owes some of its effects to the archaic Hungarian poetry of the libretto which, with its eight syllable, four beat line similar to the old Hungarian folk ballads, exerts a curious rhythmic compulsion. The vocal parts are in a kind of rhythmical speech, but the essential content of the music is in the orchestral parts, each section of which has its own colour and atmosphere. (YCs, Sunday, May 26, 7.0 p.m.)



BELA BARTOK

## PEPYS PIPES

"BUT what did please me beyond anything in the whole world was the wind musique when the angel comes down; which is so sweet that it ravished me, and indeed in a word, did wrap up my soul so that it made me really sick, just as I have formerly been when in love with my wife; so that neither then, nor all the evening going home, was I able to think of anything, but remained all night transported, so as I cannot believe that ever any musique hath that real command over the soul of man as this did upon me; and makes me resolve to practise wind-musique, and to make my wife do the like." This is from the diary of Samuel Pepys who had just been to a play he did not think much of—*The Virgin Martyr*. But it started him off on another instrument and six weeks later he went to Drumbleby's and bought a recorder. These and other amusing scenes can be heard in *Musical Gleanings from the Diary of Samuel Pepys*—a series of programmes with narration in dialogue form by R.



SAMUEL PEPYS

R. Beauchamp and G. C. A. Wall, at present being broadcast from 3YC on Tuesday evenings at 7.0 p.m.

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 17, 1957.

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