

Bartók - Divertimento for String Orchestra

BÉLA BARTÓK 1881 - 1945

1. Allegro non troppo
2. Molto adagio
3. Allegro assai

The Divertimento was composed during August 1939 in a Swiss Chalet owned by Bartók's friend Paul Sacher, who had commissioned the work for performance by the Basle Chamber Orchestra. Unlike some of Bartók's music, the Divertimento offers comparatively few barriers to comprehension. The mood of the music is generally spirited and joyful, with the slow second movement serving as the only dark reminder of the turmoil raging across Europe at the time.

For the medium of the Divertimento, Bartók looked back to the 18th century "concerto grosso" form, with its concertino of solo instruments and ripieno, but using his own structural ideas in a very individual way. The opening of the sonata form first movement is announced by a single melody on the violins over a driving pulse of accented chords. The F major tonality progressively becomes less certain, and the development section is preceded by a persistent B flat clashing with successive sharp key harmonies.

Little use is made of the solo quartet in the somber adagio, where the slow chromatic climb upwards has much in common with the composer's earlier "Miraculous Mandarin". The joyous finale has a double fugato as its central section, from which the solo cello briefly emerges as the tempo becomes progressively slower. Near the end of the movement there is a good example of Bartók's violent humor, when part of the first theme is re-worked as an elegant polka. This is abruptly terminated by thirteen bars of rolling triplets, which pile up into clusters, and a vivacissimo coda.

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