



Béla BARTÓK

Concerto for Orchestra, Sz. 116, BB 123

Béla Viktor János Bartók (25 March 1881 – 26 September 1945) was a Hungarian composer, pianist, and ethnomusicologist. He is considered one of the most important composers of the 20th century; he and Franz Liszt are regarded as Hungary's greatest composers. Through his collection and analytical study of folk music, he was one of the founders of comparative musicology, which later became ethnomusicology. From 1899 to 1903, Bartók studied piano under István Thomán, a former student of Franz Liszt, and composition under János Koessler at the Royal Academy of Music in Budapest. There he met Zoltán Kodály, who made a strong impression on him and became a lifelong friend and colleague. In 1903, Bartók wrote his first major orchestral work, *Kossuth*, a symphonic poem which honored Lajos Kossuth, hero of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. The music of Richard Strauss, whom he met in 1902 at the Budapest premiere of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, strongly influenced his early work. When visiting a holiday resort in the summer of 1904, Bartók overheard a young nanny, Lidi Dósa from Kibéd in Transylvania, sing folk songs to the children in her care. This sparked his lifelong dedication to folk music.

The *Concerto for Orchestra, Sz. 116, BB 123*, is a five-movement musical work for orchestra composed by Béla Bartók in 1943. It is one of his best-known, most popular and most accessible works. The score is inscribed "15 August – 8 October 1943". It was premiered on December 1, 1944, in Symphony Hall, Boston, by the Boston Symphony Orchestra conducted by Serge Koussevitzky. It was a great success and has been regularly performed since. It is perhaps the best-known of a number of pieces that have the apparently contradictory title *Concerto for Orchestra*. This is in contrast to the conventional concerto form, which features a solo instrument with orchestral accompaniment. Bartók said that he called the piece a concerto rather than a symphony because of the way each section of instruments is treated in a soloistic and virtuosic way.

The first movement, *Introduzione*, is a slow introduction of Night music type that gives way to an allegro with numerous fugato passages. This movement is in sonata-allegro form.

The second movement, called "Game of Pairs" (but see note below), is in five sections, each thematically distinct from each other, with a different pair of instruments playing together in each section. In each passage, a different interval separates the pair—bassoons are a minor sixth apart, oboes are in minor thirds, clarinets in minor sevenths, flutes in fifths, and muted trumpets in major seconds. The movement prominently features a side drum that taps out a rhythm at the beginning and end of the movement.

The third movement, "Elegia", is another slow movement, typical of Bartók's so-called "Night music". The movement revolves around three themes which derive primarily from the first movement.

The fourth movement, "Intermezzo interrotto" (literally "interrupted intermezzo"), consists of a flowing melody with changing time signatures, intermixed with a theme that quotes the song "Da geh' ich zu Maxim" from Franz Lehár's operetta *The Merry Widow*, which had recently also been referenced in the 'invasion' theme of Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 7 "Leningrad"*. The question as to whether Bartók was parodying Lehár, Shostakovich (or both) has been hotly disputed, without any clinching evidence on either side. The theme is itself interrupted by glissandi on the trombones and woodwinds.

The fifth movement, marked *presto*, consists of a whirling *perpetuum mobile* main theme competing with fugato fireworks and folk melodies. This is also in sonata-allegro form.