

Violin Concerto No. 2

BÉLA BARTÓK

B. March 25, 1881, Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary

D. September 26, 1945, New York City

Premiered April 23, 1939 with the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra, conducted by Willem Mengelberg with soloist Zoltán Székely.

Scored for solo violin, two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, one doubled by the English horn, two clarinets, one bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four French horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, two percussionists - bass drum, gong, snare drum, harp, celeste and strings. (approx. 36 minutes)

“My own idea, of which I have been fully conscious since I found myself as a composer, is the brotherhood of peoples, brotherhood despite all wars and conflicts. I try- to the best of my ability - to serve this idea in my music.” Béla Bartók

Béla Bartók and his music are inexorably associated with Eastern European folk melodies. His passion for both Eastern folksongs and complex musical structure may sound incongruous, but his skill in weaving emotional expression into formal structure created works that gratify both heart and the mind of the listener.

Bartók followed in the footsteps of composers such as Johannes Ockegem, J.S. Bach and Beethoven, all of whose works were creations of structural genius. Some of the methods Bartók used in his works are based on fugal techniques, symmetry, the Golden Mean, and the Fibonacci Series.

Considered Hungary's greatest composer, his life, like his works, are mosaics of different disciplines. In his career, he functioned successfully as composer, concert pianist, teacher, and ethnomusicologist. As a composer, he wrote major works in all genres: piano and chamber works, orchestral works, opera, ballet, and string quartets. Woven throughout these works are poignant threads of Eastern European folk melodies.

Bartók began collecting folksongs in 1904, shortly after his graduation from the Franz Liszt Academy of Music (originally the Royal National Hungarian Academy of Music). He continued to collect these songs during his tenure as piano professor at the Academy (1907-1934). This study of non-Western art music placed him as a pioneer in the development of the field of ethnomusicology. After retiring from the Academy, he immigrated to the US and began work transcribing a large collection of Yugoslav folk melodies for Columbia University. He wrote this violin concerto during the time between his retirement and his move to the US.

In 1936, violinist Zoltán Székely, a good friend and colleague, asked Bartók to write a concerto for him. He began the work in August of the next year. Bartók's vision of a one-movement theme and variations did not satisfy Székely, who wanted a traditional three-movement concerto. Bartók accommodated both ideals: a three-movement work in which the second movement, *Theme and Variations: Andante tranquillo*, contains six variations on a theme influenced by Eastern European folk songs;

and a third movement, *Rondo: Allegro molto*, that, section by section, includes variations on themes of the first movement, *Allegro non troppo*.

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra last performed Bartók's *Violin Concerto No. 2* on May 22, 1999 at Orchestra Hall with Neeme Järvi conducting.

DSO SHOP @ THE MAX RECOMMENDS:

Bartok, Violin Concerto No. 2, Sir Yehudi Menuhin (violin), Antal Dorati conducting the New Philharmonia Orchestra of London, EMI 85487.

Program note by Kelly Yoakam, master's candidate in Musicology at Michigan State University.