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PASC 463

BARTOK *Concerto for Orchestra*

PISTON *Symphony No. 3*

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This Orchestral Concerto was written for the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in memory of Natalie Koussevitzky. The score is dated October 8, 1943. This orchestra gave the first performance of the Concerto December 1 and 2 last.

"The general mood of the work represents," so writes the composer, "apart from the jesting second movement, a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death-song of the third, to the life-assertion of the last one." This remark is interesting, in that Béla Bartok composed the piece during the period of recovery from a serious illness.

He further explains why he has not called it a symphony: "The title of this symphony-like orchestral work is explained by its tendency to treat the single instruments or instrument groups in a 'concertant' or soloistic manner. The 'virtuoso' treatment appears, for instance, in the fugato sections of the development of the first movement (brass instruments), or in the 'perpetuum mobile'-like passage of the principal theme in the last movement (strings), and, especially, in the second movement, in which pairs of instruments consecutively appear with brilliant passages.

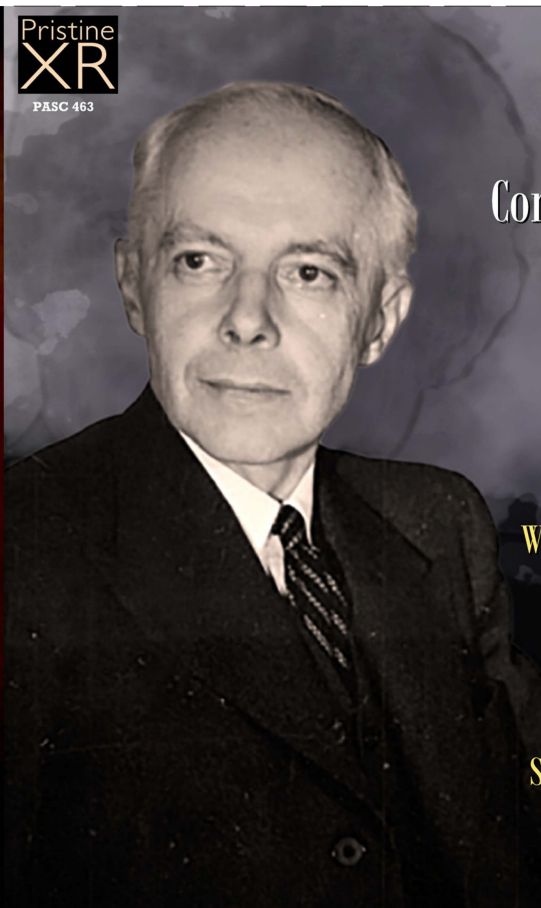
"As for the structure of the work, the first and fifth movements are written in a more or less regular sonata form. The development of the first contains fugato sections for brass; the exposition in the finale is somewhat extended, and its development consists of a fugue built on the last theme of the exposition. Less traditional forms are found in the second and third movements. The main part of the second consists of a chain of independent short sections, by wind instruments consecutively introduced in five pairs (bassoons, oboes, clarinets, flutes, and muted trumpets). Thematically, the five sections have nothing in common. A kind of 'trio' — a short chorale for brass instruments and side-drum — follows, after which the five sections are recapitulated in a more elaborate instrumentation. The structure of the fourth movement likewise is chain-like; three themes appear successively. These constitute the core of the movement, which is enframed by a misty texture of rudimentary motifs. Most of the thematic material of this movement derives from the 'Introduction' to the first movement. The form of the fourth movement — 'Intermezzo interrotto' ['Interrupted Intermezzo'] — could be rendered by the letter symbols 'ABA — interruption — BA.'"

BSO Programme notes (excerpt) on Bartok's *Concerto for Orchestra*, 30 December 1944

Producer's Note

Serge Koussevitzky was responsible for the commissioning of a large number of important works during his time with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the list of world premières he conducted with the orchestra is exceptionally impressive. Although the majority of these premières went unrecorded, the regularity of the orchestra's radio appearances meant that many very early performances were broadcast, and of these broadcasts a good number have survived on disc recordings. In most cases these broadcast performances preserve the only known recordings of Koussevitzky conducting the music in question, and this appears to be the case with both works here. The Bartok is heard in its fourth performance of six, having been first heard some thirty days earlier. Following these early outings, the composer decided to make revisions to the work, the most significant being the lengthening of the final movement. Thus we hear the first version of the Concerto — both versions are still in use today. Walter Piston's Symphony No. 3 had been premiered by Koussevitzky at Symphony Hall in Boston on 9th January 1948, the first of ten performances given over the course of the next twelve months. The Eighth of these took place on 31 December, from which this broadcast recording was taken. Piston's composition had won the Pulitzer Prize for composition in 1947, and its finale has been seen as a celebration of the end of the Second World War. Both recordings have been reasonably well preserved, with the later Piston apparently demonstrating an early commercial use of tape technology, allowing for a much wider dynamic range and frequency response than heard in the Bartok. Although the latter is somewhat noisier, I have done my best to preserve and highlight what upper frequencies were available.

Andrew Rose



BARTOK

Concerto for Orchestra

PISTON

Symphony No. 3

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

Boston Symphony Orchestra
Serge Koussevitzky conductor

Live recordings, 1944 & 1948

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Bartók

Bartók Concerto for Orchestra
Concert of 30 December 1944

Piston Symphony No. 3
Concert of 31 December 1948

Performed at Symphony Hall, Boston

Total duration: 67:34

KOUSSEVITZKY *Bartók & Piston Premières*

BARTOK Concerto for Orchestra

- 1 1st mvt. - Introduzione: Andante non troppo (10:11)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Presentando le coppie: Allegro scherzando (6:12)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Elegia: Andante non troppo (6:46)
- 4 4th mvt. - Intermezzo Interrotto: Allegretto (3:59)
- 5 5th mvt. - Finale: Pesante - Presto (10:02)

PISTON Symphony No. 3

- 6 1st mvt. - Andantino (7:44)
- 7 2nd mvt. - Allegro (5:00)
- 8 3rd mvt. - Adagio (12:18)
- 9 4th mvt. - Allegro (5:22)

Boston Symphony Orchestra
Serge Koussevitzky, conductor

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