

### SCHÖNBERG AND BARTOK, PATH-BREAKERS

**I**N the modern musical scene, peopled so thickly by figures of "path-breakers," the figures of Bela Bartok and of Schönberg emerge sharply defined, strong, two individual forces.

The modern path-breaker reveals himself but too repeatedly as the new academician—self-contented, and well fed on musical revolution, a "doctor of modernity" as Leigh Henry has so brilliantly put it. The new academicians, with their leaders in Paris and their satellites in Brussels and Vienna struggle merely to tame the stormy musical thought of today, to enslave the creator with new *clichés*.

For Schönberg and Bartok, however, the business of path-breaking is not a profession but a necessity. In their works are the three indispensable elements—conviction, vitality, and mastery.

Schönberg has absorbed the musical wisdom of the ages. In "Die Verklärte Nacht" and many later works he shows himself the master of past styles. But, with a hatred that is neurotic, he has rejected the old ways, the asylums of tedium. Having abandoned, with a formidable emotional strength

and technical power, the means of his musical heritage, he has, nevertheless, been unable to extinguish the spirit which inspired his early artistic life. In both amazing works which have the particular Schönbergian flavor and are imbued with his singular emotional strain, the string quartet with voice and "Pierrot Lunaire," we behold a being that has explored all ancient paths for one word of wisdom.

Behind Schönberg's angular design, inscribed by a stylo dipped in a pot of sombre color that conveys so peculiarly the stinging mixture of wisdom and suffering, one can perceive the heir to a great culture, a master of the ancient domains of art.

In Bartok we find a contrasting but no less virile modern figure. The unusual spontaneity of his deep gray designs, the biting freedom of his rhythms, the freshness of his forms could never have sprung from such a struggle as Schönberg's, with pyramids of old ideas and means.

Bela Bartok, the son of a new race, new culturally and spiritually, has the advantage of a clean slate before which he stands with hands untied. And in this great advantage also lie the sources of Bartok's weakness—the touch of infantilism and of barbarism in his music.

Yet one forgives Bartok the infantile polyphony harking back to Brahms in the *allegro* of his string quartet, the pianistic conception of sonority in its *scherzo*, for the gorgeous rhythms and designs in the *scherzo-finale* of his second violin sonata.

In the creations of two such men, so different in thought and expression, we find the evidence that brings them into the class of "contemporary." It is fear of the eloquence and nude lyricism of the old days, brevity and economy of expression, hatred of impressionistic cloudiness, and the nervous angularity of their language—the language of a new age.

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