

JUILLIARD QUARTET IN 3 BARTOK WORKS

Second Program at Times Hall
Includes First, Fourth, Sixth
Pieces by the Composer

By OLIN DOWNES

The Juilliard String Quartet gave the second of its concerts at which it has presented all six of Bela Bartok's quartets last night in Times Hall. The fame of the first concert when this remarkable organization gave three of the Hungarian master's works in the chamber music form a month ago had spread, to judge from last night's audience. For the auditorium had grown too small for the number of those who wished to attend, so that the stage was crowded to the last seat and the listeners eddied about the quartet which had just enough elbow room, and no more, for its performance.

The program was suggestively arranged, since the First Quartet was placed between the Fourth and the Sixth. The comparison was very interesting, because of the growth in clarity and concentration shown by the later scores. The Fourth and Sixth quartets date, respectively, from 1928 and 1938; the First Quartet from 1907. The First Quartet is astonishingly new for its time and must have frightened the conservatives no end when first it was heard. But it is diffuse and tortuous, compared to the later works. The composer has so much to say that he crowds his style. It is like a writer of endless sentences who has to learn to state things compactly before he can express himself with clarity. In the late quartets the sentences, as it were, are cleared up and devoted each to an idea.

These later works are, of course, more advanced in style than the earlier one, if no richer in thought. But with Bartok of the quartets there is never a shortage of ideas. It is a question of the manner of their statement and the various conceptions of form which each quartet embodies. It is also a question, or rather an astonishingly original method, of making the music sound.

And here it seems to us that Bartok is without a rival in point of bold, brilliant and idiomatic scoring. Regardless of the beauty or the harmonic bite of a given passage, everything sounds as vividly as if the man had been born a gypsy, with a fiddle in his hand and in his ears from birth. He hesitates at no device of which a stringed instrument is capable, whether the effect comes in the classic category or not. There is every variety of spacing and other instrumental effects, of pizzicato, of the slide through quarter-tones—whole melodies played in this fashion—or the thud of a drum or thrumming of guitar. Yet it is all germane to the thought, and never out of kilter with the context, the architecture and the intellectuality of the concept.

Let these passing observations suffice for comment at this time upon these highly individual scores. They are still too unfamiliar in a majority, and too fascinating in variety of color, rhythm, and treatment of the themes for the writer to have much perspective or even any very settled ideas about any of them. The thing is that they "sound" marvelously, and show incorrigibly original and racial approaches to quartet problems, at the same time that each one of them proposes a different architectural idea.

The musical public is greatly indebted to the Juilliard String Quartet, Robert Mann and Robert Koff, violins; Raphael Hillyer, viola; Arthur Winograd, 'cellist, for their superb presentations of this very difficult and unfamiliar music. It is not easy to think of any quartet which could surpass them in their understanding of each work, their variety and subtlety of shadow, and elan and sensitivity. This has been a most significant contribution to the music of the season in New York.