

**JULY 22—NOTABLE ENCOUNTER AT VINA ROBLES**

**Wednesday, July 22, 2009, 6-7 PM**  
**Vina Robles Hospitality Center, Paso Robles**

***String Quartet No. 4, Sz. 91*** (1927)

**Béla BARTÓK** (1881–1945)

Whereas the Jewish klezmer tradition gave inspiration to Prokofiev's *Overture on Hebrew Themes*, Béla Bartók turned to his Hungarian heritage for many aspects of his Fourth String Quartet. Echoes of Hungarian folk songs can be found in the asymmetrical rhythms, modal scale passages, ornaments and the overall "mood" of many sections. At the same time, though, Bartók incorporated much of his own personality into the work; he was becoming increasingly celebrated for his innovative treatment of the "old" string quartet genre. This blend is perhaps Bartók's most celebrated achievement: his ability to mix folk traditions with the experimentalism of 20<sup>th</sup>-century art music.

Both traits are evident in the opening moments of the first movement. The initial violin melody makes heavy use of half-steps, a small melodic interval that figures prominently in Magyar music—but the melody is quickly imitated in the other instruments, reflecting the interest in counterpoint that modern composers were exploring. In other sections of this "Allegro," some of the strings play hammered rhythms that resemble the pulsation of a folk dance underneath sinuous, gliding melodies.

Bartók regarded the "Allegro" and the fifth movement as a pair of outer shells, so the two movements have much in common. The outer shells frame a pair of "inner shells," the second and fourth movements; these, too, create a "mirror" effect, sharing a frenetic character that resembles a relentless "scherzo," or joke. The fourth movement uses pizzicato throughout, including an occasional "Bartók pizzicato," requiring the string to be plucked with such energy that it snaps back against the fingerboard. Bartók called the third movement the "kernel" of the quartet, and it seems to float in space—contrasting sharply with the drive of the other movements.

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