

**THE
JUILLIARD
STRING
QUARTET**

**GUEST ARTIST CONCERT SERIES
KATZIN HALL
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2007 • 7:30 PM**

MUSIC

 **Herberger College**
of Fine Arts

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Bartók: A Juilliard Quartet Legacy

Celebrating its sixtieth anniversary, the Juilliard String Quartet re-creates a seminal moment in its history: the first cycle of the six Bartók quartets to be performed in the United States. Seven performances of the complete set across the country and in Japan during the anniversary season, 2006-07, will recall the landmark 1948 premiere at Tanglewood.

The Bartók cycle is one of what violist Samuel Rhodes, the ensemble's senior member, describes as "common threads that have been supremely important to the Juilliard String Quartet." These long-standing interests also include the Beethoven quartets; commissioning important contemporary composers, mostly American, to extend the quartet repertoire and tradition; and a strong commitment to teaching, both chamber music and the players' individual instruments.

Composed between 1908 and 1939, the Bartók quartets were not well known in the United States in the years just after World War 2. The Juilliard players had to learn the Sixth Quartet from parts copied by hand from the manuscript, and the first cycle met with little national attention. Today the six works are part of the standard repertoire, standing beside the quartets of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert and played even by student ensembles. The Emerson, Tokyo, Brentano, Saint Lawrence, Lark, and Colorado quartets are among the many that, either as a group or through individual members' studies, learned their Bartóks at the knee of the group that launched them into general circulation.

There had been sporadic performances of individual quartets in the United States before 1948. The Library of Congress, for instance, presented a 1934 performance of the First Quartet by the Roth Quartet of Budapest, a 1935 Fifth Quartet by the Kolisch Quartet of Vienna, and, in 1936, a repeat of the First by the Roth Quartet and a Fourth by the Pro Arte Quartet of Brussels. Significantly, these were ensembles from Europe, where Bartók was better established. Over the next decade four quartets based in the United States – the Coolidge, Budapest, University of Wisconsin Pro Arte, and Gordon – performed single quartets at the Library. The Juilliard began a series of Bartók performances there in December 1948 with the Fifth Quartet.

Brought together by Robert Mann, the Juilliard at its birth consisted of Mann as first violinist, Robert Koff as second violinist, Raphael Hillyer as violist, and Arthur Winograd as cellist. It was Eugene Lehner, then a violist in the Boston Symphony Orchestra, who introduced the four young men to Bartók's masterworks. As a member of the celebrated Kolisch Quartet, he had known and championed Bartók, Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern in prewar Vienna. Now an émigré and older man, he refused an invitation to become the new ensemble's founding violist. He offered instead to coach the players in the Bartók quartets.

Many years later Hillyer, whom Lehner recommended for the violist's job, recalled that the group thought, apropos Bartók: " 'People are not going to like this.' And it turned out that they didn't, very much. But we had such faith in him [Lehner] and the music itself, after we'd played it a lot, that we just didn't care about the reaction. 'We did it and it's good for you, listen to it,' we thought. And people began to see what's in it."

By 1948, at the invitation of Tanglewood's founder, Serge Koussevitzky, the two-year-old Juilliard was ready to spring the cycle on the unsuspecting world. The premiere took place on July 10 and 17. But it wasn't until the repeat of the set in New York, in two concerts in March and April 1949, that the world took notice. In a lengthy commentary in the Herald Tribune the prescient Virgil Thomson declared the six works "the cream of Bartók's repertory, the essence of his deepest thought and feeling, his most powerful and humane communication. They are also, in a century that has produced richly in that medium, a handful of chamber music nuggets that are pure gold by any standards."

Chamber music in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s was largely the province of European émigrés, epitomized by the Budapest Quartet, which stood as an emblem of the genteel, Old World values embodied in the genre. Encouraged to be daring by William Schuman, then president of the Juilliard School, its first resident quartet broke with the tradition. But new music was a hard sell. Hillyer recalled that, to get Bartók onto a prestigious chamber music series in Buffalo, New York, where the Budapest was a mainstay, the Juilliard had to agree to play the Bartók first on the program. That way, listeners could arrive late if they chose.

The Juilliard was not to be deterred. Subsequent cycles followed at Harvard and Princeton (1949), the Ojai Festival (1950), in Berlin (1951, in 12 concerts including Beethoven and Bartók cycles), New York (1952), San Francisco and Berkeley (1953), Vienna (1955), and at the Edinburgh Festival (1958). Other performances of Bartók, as well as other twentieth-century composers, were salted in among these programs. Now that someone was actually playing twentieth-century quartets, scores arrived at the Juilliard's doorstep by the dozen.

Program

Variations and Scherzo, Op. 81 Felix Mendelssohn
Tema con Variazioni: Andante sostenuto (1809-1847)
Scherzo: Allegro leggiero

Quartet No. 1 Op. 7 Béla Bartók (1881-1945)
I. Lento
II. Allegretto
III. Introduzione: Allegro; Allegro vivace

There will be a 10-minute intermission

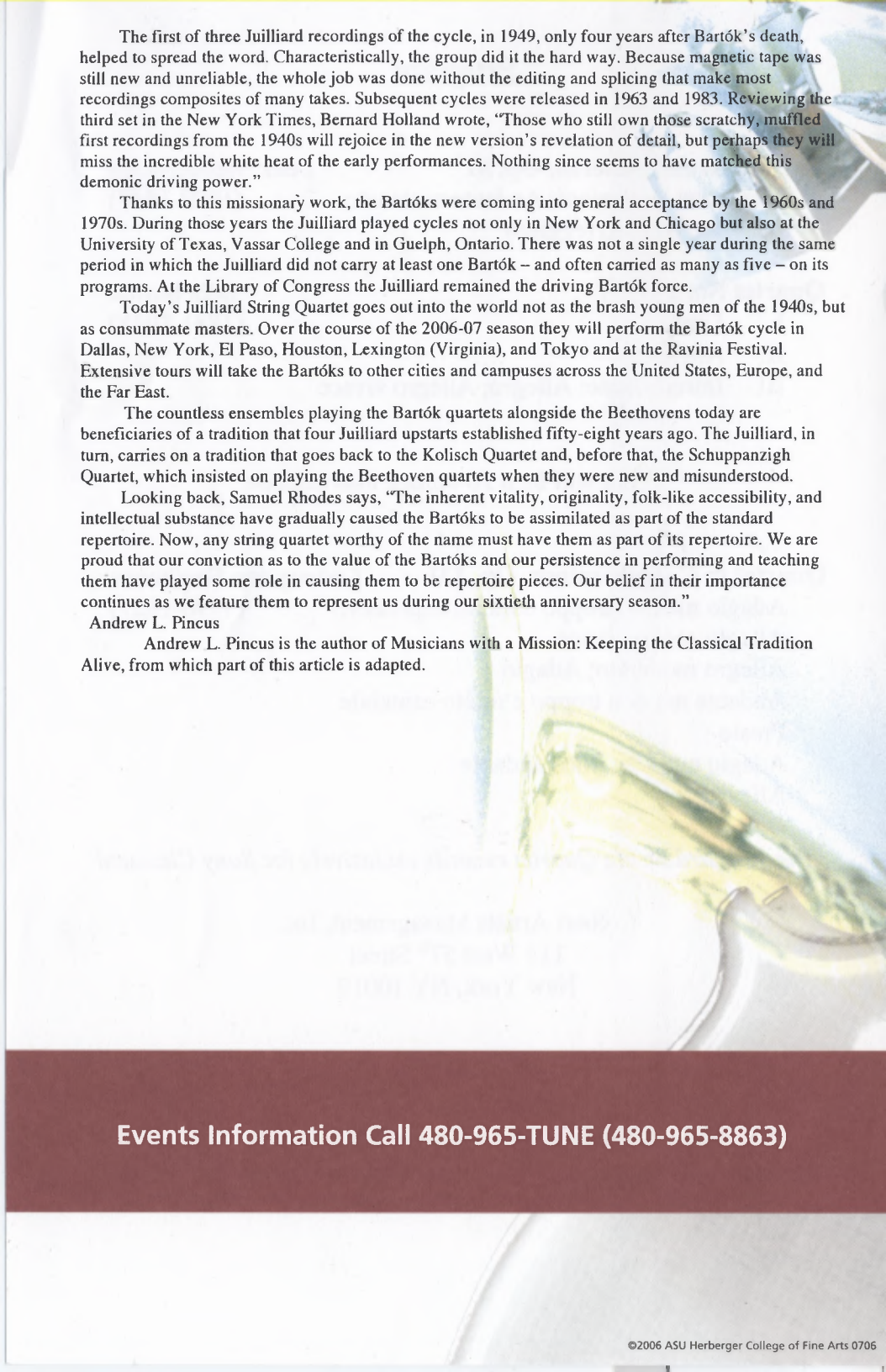
Quartet in C sharp minor, Op. 131 Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo
Allegro molto vivace
Allegro moderato; Adagio
Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Presto
Adagio quasi un poco andante
Allegro

The Juilliard String Quartet records exclusively for Sony Classical

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Out of respect for the performers and those audience members around you, please turn all beepers, cell phones and watches to their silent mode. Thank you.



The first of three Juilliard recordings of the cycle, in 1949, only four years after Bartók's death, helped to spread the word. Characteristically, the group did it the hard way. Because magnetic tape was still new and unreliable, the whole job was done without the editing and splicing that make most recordings composites of many takes. Subsequent cycles were released in 1963 and 1983. Reviewing the third set in the New York Times, Bernard Holland wrote, "Those who still own those scratchy, muffled first recordings from the 1940s will rejoice in the new version's revelation of detail, but perhaps they will miss the incredible white heat of the early performances. Nothing since seems to have matched this demonic driving power."

Thanks to this missionary work, the Bartóks were coming into general acceptance by the 1960s and 1970s. During those years the Juilliard played cycles not only in New York and Chicago but also at the University of Texas, Vassar College and in Guelph, Ontario. There was not a single year during the same period in which the Juilliard did not carry at least one Bartók – and often carried as many as five – on its programs. At the Library of Congress the Juilliard remained the driving Bartók force.

Today's Juilliard String Quartet goes out into the world not as the brash young men of the 1940s, but as consummate masters. Over the course of the 2006-07 season they will perform the Bartók cycle in Dallas, New York, El Paso, Houston, Lexington (Virginia), and Tokyo and at the Ravinia Festival. Extensive tours will take the Bartóks to other cities and campuses across the United States, Europe, and the Far East.

The countless ensembles playing the Bartók quartets alongside the Beethovens today are beneficiaries of a tradition that four Juilliard upstarts established fifty-eight years ago. The Juilliard, in turn, carries on a tradition that goes back to the Kolisch Quartet and, before that, the Schuppanzigh Quartet, which insisted on playing the Beethoven quartets when they were new and misunderstood.

Looking back, Samuel Rhodes says, "The inherent vitality, originality, folk-like accessibility, and intellectual substance have gradually caused the Bartóks to be assimilated as part of the standard repertoire. Now, any string quartet worthy of the name must have them as part of its repertoire. We are proud that our conviction as to the value of the Bartóks and our persistence in performing and teaching them have played some role in causing them to be repertoire pieces. Our belief in their importance continues as we feature them to represent us during our sixtieth anniversary season."

Andrew L. Pincus

Andrew L. Pincus is the author of *Musicians with a Mission: Keeping the Classical Tradition Alive*, from which part of this article is adapted.

Events Information Call 480-965-TUNE (480-965-8863)