

### Bela Bartók (1881-1945) String Quartet No. 3, Sz. 85 (1927)

**Seconda parte – Allegro (6min)**

*Ricapulazione della prima parte – Moderato (3min)*

**Coda – Allegro molto (2min)**

The third quartet has four sections which are played continuously for its 15 or so minutes duration. They alternate slow and fast ABAB with the shorter second two sections referring back to the longer initial two. A & B differ not only in speed: the mood of the slow is 'static and introverted, the other highly mobile and demonstrative' (Stephen Walsh). Throughout the quartet the style of writing is based on brief, almost cramped, melodic material which Bartók extends by, for example, repetition and variation across the different instruments. The music however has immense contrasts. For instance, after the subdued opening builds to three sustained fortissimo chords, the ensuing silence is followed by a sinister scurrying played *sul ponticello* (on the bridge) by the two violins over *pianissimo* alternating fourths and seconds (important intervals in the piece) on the viola and cello. This passage provides some of the thematic material for the fast second section.

(*illustrated*) which is elaborated with powerful and complex rhythms and cross-rhythms which carry the music forward. This tune also links to a subsequent ingenious fugue

(*illustrated*) that

Stephen Walsh considers the best piece of fugal writing for string quartet since Beethoven's



The brief recapitulation regains the calmer more introspective mood of the first section. Its material appears in altered form, as if refracted through the turbulence of the intervening music. The final Coda section starts with fast *sul ponticello* semiquavers; the cello plays a rising-falling motif similar to the fugue subject above and the other instruments follow rapidly a few semiquavers behind. The dance theme reappears and things get wild, breaking apart again with huge glissandi and a sudden and rhythmically unexpected end.