

**Bela Bartók** (1881 -1945) *Contrasts, for clarinet, violin & piano, BB116*

*Verbunkos* - Recruiting Dance

*Pihenő* - Relaxation

*Sebes* - Fast Dance

*Contrasts* was commissioned by Joseph Szigeti and Benny Goodman. Szigeti originally wanted Bartók to write a short piece with two movements in the style of the Hungarian lassu (slow) and friss (fast) and a total duration of 6-7 minutes so that a recording would fit onto the two sides of a 78rpm record. The two-movement first version of the work, *Rhapsody*, was performed in 1939 at Carnegie Hall, by Szigeti, Goodman, and pianist Endre Petri. Bartók subsequently added a middle movement and changed the work's title to *Contrasts*, emphasizing the contrasting sounds of the three instruments. Szigeti, Goodman and Bartók first performed the final, three-movement work at Carnegie Hall on 21 April 1940, and subsequently recorded it for Columbia - on two 78s. The work falls between Bartók's fifth and sixth quartets around the time that Bartók moved to the USA.

The *Verbunkos* is a recruiting-dance performed by the Hussars to lure soldiers to serve in the Imperial armies. The second movement uses gamelan-like sounds in the piano and evokes the atmosphere of the night. The final fast movement is an improvised dance that the recruits performed before signing on. It opens with a mistuned (G#, D, A, Eb) violin playing devilish tritones on the open strings. The clarinettist also switches instruments to the brighter Bb for the fast outer sections of the last movement.

Chris Darwin