

Rediscovered Bartok

1973

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There's a special reason to note this week's Library of Congress concerts: the Juilliard String Quartet, assisted by pianist Beveridge Webster, will be playing a "lost" Piano Quintet by Bela Bartok written in 1904 which never has before been performed in the United States.

The Quintet is a substantial 35-minute work in Hungarian folk idiom which Bartok, newly graduated from the Budapest Conservatory, had composed as a vehicle for his own performance with the Prill and Waldbauer quartets. Much different in style from his later, more dissonant music, the piece was a considerable success with the public.

The fact that audiences seemed to prefer this lightweight composition to others which Bartok considered more consequential irritated the composer to the point where after one performance, he threw the score across a room and said he never wanted to play it again. He never did. Furthermore, he also told his friend Imre Waldbauer that before he would allow

anyone to play it again, he wanted to revise it drastically.

Bartok did, in fact, revise the Quintet and entrusted the altered manuscript to Waldbauer, who eventually turned it over to the Bartok Archives in Budapest, where it languished unseen and unheard for more than 60 years.

A few years ago, a son of Waldbauer told Robert Mann, first violinist of the Juilliard, about the manuscript, and Mann began trying to gain access to the revised version. The Quintet was not released for performance by the Bartok Archives until a year or so ago, when it had its world premiere in Budapest. The Juilliard was provided with the materials for the first U.S. performance, which is to take place in New York's Alice Tully Hall (also with Webster at the piano) on Tuesday.

