

BARTÓK

Béla

New Records

Béla Bartók published only six string quartets, but as far as many a musician is concerned, they gave the intimate and delicate world of chamber music its rudest shock since Beethoven. With his *First Quartet*, composed in 1908 when he was 27, Bartók stalked into a field of harsh, hybrid harmonies and fierce rhythms that jolted Budapest listeners upright in their seats. In the *Second* (1917), *Third* (1927) and *Fourth* (1928), he cultivated the field; his harmonies became more astringent, the rhythms more incisive, the textures ever tighter. Listeners found much that was either impenetrable or unpalatable, but they also heard tonal colors never

produced by four stringed instruments before. In the *Fifth* (1934) and *Sixth* (1939), Bartók reaped his harvest. Like Beethoven's last (*Op. 135*), Bartók's final quartet, composed six years before he died, is full of deep and timeless beauty.

Last year, when the Juilliard String Quartet performed the entire cycle of six, Columbia saw a chance to get them all recorded in one set. Out this month, on three LP records, is the result. The performances are superb, and so is the recording.

~~1/10/50~~

Sept. 4