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## Music: Columbia Bartók

### Serly Leads Symphony of Air at McMillin

By HOWARD TAUBMAN

**B**ELA BARTÓK lives on. Though he died ten years ago yesterday, he lives on in his music—sensitive, intense, lonely, tender and fiercely proud. He was an original master, as the world has been acknowledging these last ten years.

This truth was borne in on one again Monday night in the memorial program of Bartók music presented by Columbia University at its McMillin Academic Theatre. There were only four works on the program, interesting works all, but a mere trickle in the man's tremendous output. They were enough, however, to remind us of Bartók's scope.

The university obviously was proud to pay this tribute to Bartók. In the final years of his life, when things were not going well with the composer, Columbia found a place and a task for him, giving him a modest income and several years of relative relief from worry. There were others who came to Bartók's aid in those difficult times; Columbia's contribution was as valuable as any.

In his introductory remarks, Dr. Grayson Kirk, president of the university, set the tone of Columbia's attitude:

"So our feeling today is one of gratitude for his life and

work; and at Columbia we are especially grateful that circumstances permitted him to be one of us for a fruitful but all-too-brief time."

The concert began with the Concerto for Orchestra, which Serge Koussevitzky commissioned in a time of Bartók's great need. One of the last of the composer's works, it has become by far his most popular. It is played by orchestras everywhere; it has often been recorded. No doubt, it is a modern masterpiece. It sums up the major strands of Bartók's creative fabric—his lifelong interest in folk music at its truest, his boldness and independence as a musician, his capacity to fuse folk style and personal vision.

Tibor Serly conducted the Symphony of the Air in this work. Mr. Serly, a compatriot of the Hungarian composer, served Bartók well when he was alive, and helped to complete several unfinished pieces. He brought understanding and affection to his task Monday night. Unfortunately, the Concerto for Orchestra requires virtuoso conducting and playing, and the performance was ragged around the edges.

Joseph Szigeti, another musician out of Hungary and another close friend of Bartók, joined orchestra and conductor as violin soloist in two early works. The First Rhapsody, late romantic in mood, gives no inkling that the composer was to sink his roots deep in the folklore of his native land. In the "First Portrait," the



## Memorial

### Szigeti Is the Soloist in Two Early Works

folk spirit begins to shine, but it has not yet become wild and barbaric. Mr. Szigeti played both pieces with affecting warmth.

The evening ended with the most unfamiliar and arresting work on the program, the "Cantata Profana," which dates from 1930. With Robert Shaw conducting his Chorale, the Symphony of the Air and the two excellent soloists, Leslie Chabay and Mack Harrell, in a brilliant performance, the "Cantata" made a profound impression. Here was the Bartók of the deepest and most searching perceptions, the musician who could write the string quartets that belong to the finest work of our century.

It was a pity that the concert started at 9 o'clock, and one was unable to hear all of the "Cantata." It deserves to be heard again and again just as there are many other Bartók pieces that need to be performed and discovered by the public at large.

It is too bad that a composer like Bartók cannot have the equivalent of one of those comprehensive one-man shows modern masters in paintings get. Such a venture would require a lot of concerts. Now that Columbia has helped to show the way, perhaps someone else will carry the task forward.