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Bartok's Posthumous Score, Finished By Serly, Is Played by Primrose

By HOWARD TAUBMAN

IN the spring of 1945 William Primrose, the violist, commissioned Béla Bartók, the ailing and enfeebled composer, to create a Viola Concerto for him. On Sept. 8 of that year Bartók wrote to Primrose, reporting progress. The following paragraph is drawn from that letter:

"I am very glad to be able to tell you that your viola concerto is ready in draft, so that only the score has to be written, which means a purely mechanical work, so to speak. If nothing happens, I can be through in five or six weeks, that is, I can send you a copy of the orchestra score in the second half of October, and a few weeks afterward a copy (or if you wish more copies) of the piano score."

Something happened. Bartók died on Sept. 26. He had not had time to do more with this concerto. The draft consisted of fifteen unnumbered pages of manuscript. There were corrections in the margins and above the staves, and no erasures of passages Bartók had probably meant to eliminate. There were no indications of ideas for orchestration, and plans for harmonies were in the composer's private shorthand.

Tibor Serly, Bartók's compatriot and friend, became his musical executor, and undertook to complete the work. He knew the composer's approach and mind, and he set out to fulfill his intentions. It required two years for him to complete the job.

The result may be heard and appreciated on a new Bartók Records twelve-inch disk, recorded in England by the company headed by Peter Bartók, the composer's son. Primrose, of course, is the soloist and Serly the conductor. The New Symphony Orchestra of London is the ensemble.

It is clear that though Bartók's strength was ebbing, his skill as a composer was at its height. The viola has a wide gamut of possibilities—musical and technical—to exploit. The composition is intense and closely knit, and the slow movement, *Adagio Religioso*, has a touching directness and poignancy.

The performance is devoted and illuminating. The soloist plays with virtuosity and musicianship. The musical executor deserves admiration not only for his act of friendship but for his conducting.