



taires : la première partie propose un cadre à tonalité philosophique et soulève des questions relatives au langage, au contexte historique voire à la biographie de Mallarmé. Dans la seconde partie, une approche de nature esthétique constitue le pan pour ainsi dire musical de la recherche, amenant, entre autre, à une perspective musicologique de la poésie mallarméenne.

Cet ouvrage est donc une étude pluri-disciplinaire qui relève avec élégance le défi collectif qu'elle se pose. Œuvre ouverte, ce livre dessine également les contours de la rencontre entre philosophie et esthétique, et ce de manière accessible et cependant savante. Que ce soit pour la philosophie de l'art et l'esthétique au sens large, mais également pour tout lecteur de Mallarmé, pour tout poète ou musicien intéressé par la rencontre entre les arts et la nature de l'expérience artistique, il ne fait aucun doute que ce travail constituera une excellente référence.

Marc Haas

### The String Quartets of Béla Bartók. Tradition and Legacy in Analytical Perspective

Dániel Péter Biró, Harald Krebs (eds.)  
 New York, Oxford University Press, 2014, 368 pp.

Composed between 1908 and 1939, the six string quartets of Béla Bartók constitute a monument in Western musical canon. As the Italian musicologist Massimo Mila affirmed in his 1960 lectures dedicated to the Hungarian composer at the University of Turin (published in 1995 as *L'arte di Béla Bartók*), "Bartók's quartets occupy a prominent position both in his oeuvre and in twentieth-century chamber music. They span the arc of his stylistic development and appear almost like a jealous, lyrical diary to which the composer confides his highest and ultimate thoughts. His model is Beethoven, namely Beethoven's third style, that of the last five string quartets and late piano sonatas." Moreover, according to Elliott Antokoletz, Bartók's quartets highlight the core of his poetics, that is "the evolution of [this] style towards increasing synthesis of divergent folk-music and art-music sources" (*The Bartók Companion*, ed. by M. Gillies, Faber and Faber, 1993, p. 257).

Edited by Dániel Péter Biró and Harald Krebs, the collection of essays published in 2014 and entitled *The Strings Quartets of Béla Bartók. Tradition and Legacy in Analytical Perspective* rounds up fourteen scholars in order to cope with the challenging issues raised by these twentieth-century landmarks. This essay collection investigates the role of European classical tradition in the quartets, i.e. the persistence of sonata form and Beethoven's stylistic features; the deep integration of folk music elements, especially in regard to harmony and rhythm; the multifaceted and lasting legacy of the quartets for subsequent composers, listeners and performers. As

suggested by its subtitle, the volume places particular emphasis on musical analysis, conceived in broad terms. Indeed, in spite of their pleas for interdisciplinarity, the assumption of the authors is that only music analysis, i.e. the most esoteric sub-discipline of musicology, is sufficiently robust for the string quartet, the most highbrow genre of the Western musical tradition.

Since it is impossible to review the entire book in detail, I will mention its highlights. After an introduction by the editors, which is perhaps too brief, and an elegant essay by Paul Wilson, Jonathan W. Bernard (pp. 22-40) focuses on Bartók's often-celebrated quest for symmetry and the formal tensions that this generates with classical structures, such as sonata form. The Fifth String Quartet composed in 1934 represents the best example in this sense. In this five-movement piece the large-scale arch form constructed around the central Scherzo: *alla bulgarese* is echoed by the arch-like sonata form of the first movement. Following Lászlo Somfai, Bernard points out the formal contradiction consciously raised by Bartók between the teleological progression of the sonata form and the sense of eternal return evoked by the use of the palindromes. In the first movement, "the recapitulation of the first theme, transition, and second theme not only in inversion but in reverse order is a particularly daring graft of a palindromic structure onto a formal plan that, in its traditional manifestation, is not at all palindromic" (p. 35).

Further into the text, the chapters of Daphne Leong (pp. 108-133) and Elliott Antokoletz (pp. 134-146) discuss the "synthesis of divergent folk-music and art-music sources" in Bartók's output. On the one side, Leong analyses the rhythmic structure of the trio section of the Scherzo: *alla bulgarese*, the afore-



mentioned nucleus of Bartók's Fifth Quartet. On the other side, Antokoletz sheds light on the magnificent integration realised in the Fourth Quartet (1928) between the "abstract symmetrical principles of pitch organization" and the so-called Romanian *hora lungă* (literally, "long song"), a musical style discovered by Bartók in the region of Maramureş on the northeastern Carpathians.

The crucial question of the performance is addressed in Judit Frigyesi's fascinating chapter entitled "How Barbaric Is Bartók's *Forste*?" (pp. 200–242). Through studying musical dynamics alone, Frigyesi is able to disentangle the stratification of commonly held beliefs supporting the Bartók myth. "There exist two determining views with regard to Bartók's music: first, it is dissonant, even brutal, aggressive, and ugly – but for the right emotional and moral reasons. And second, it is based on a perfect system. Ultimately both views feed the same conception: Bartók is infallible and uncompromising in every aspect of life and art" (p. 202). In other words, to demonstrate that Bartók's *forte* is not so straightforwardly percussive, hammering and barbaric means to unveil the ideological and political values nestled in Bartók's legacy and, more importantly, to touch upon the historiographical constructions of the last century, when "dissonance and ugliness had been elevated to the rank of a moral stance" (p. 201).

The political legacy of Bartók's quartets rises to prominence in the essays of Martin Iddon (pp. 243–260) and Biró (pp. 261–284), who analyse selected chamber works by two of Bartók's outstanding heirs, namely Ligeti and Kurtág. Biró and Iddon also contribute the co-authored "Epilogue: Bartók's Present" (pp. 306–315), in which they track the "spectres" of Bartók into the musical

present. After a long search, they discover the legacy of Bartók in the fundamental synthesis of different musical cultures, since "Bartók's concern was really with a music (or musics) that, while celebrating dialectical opposites, opposed actual conflict" (p. 315).

Surely Bartók's quartets are haunting our world because they evoke the troubling presence of the 'Other' in the core of our cultural paradigms. Even if timbre is not so frequently evoked in the volume (attesting more of a defect in our aged analytical approaches than any shortcoming on the part of the editors), this is maybe the most parlous heritage of Bartók's spirit. As Mila observed more than fifty years ago, "in his quartets Bartók forces himself assiduously to cross the noise threshold, which is the acoustic presence of Nature, a key to unveil its secret. [It is] this anxiety to open all the doors that, in the only opera of the composer, leads Judith to her self-destruction."

Nicolò Palazzetti



### William Blank: *Einklang*

*Quatuor Sine Nomine, Barbara Zanichelli*  
*Genuin classics GEN 16422*

Triptyque formé de trois « quatuors mouvements » (*Satz, Traces* et *Trakl Lied*) pouvant être joués indépendamment les uns des autres, *Einklang* explore la dimension picturale et poétique de l'écriture pour quatuor à cordes et voix. L'utilisation de quarts de tons combinés à des effets de glissandi donne au premier mouvement une fluctuation du grain sonore qui joue sur des variations d'intensité et de matière. Les circulations de flux dialoguent avec des modes de jeux, échos d'une tragédie très bartokienne de volume et de couleur. Le recours à une polyrythmie proliférant en démultiplication d'effets disparates finit par créer une tension acérée du discours sans saturer l'écoute pour autant. D'une construction plus espacée et aérienne, *Traces* laisse entendre un jeu plus homophonique. Travaillant une surface sonore élargie, le quatuor navigue à vue sur des textures qui semblent plus resserrées au fur et à mesure qu'on progresse vers le terme du mouvement. Impossible de ne pas penser au dernier mouvement de l'opus 10 de Schoenberg (et dans une moindre mesure au dernier verset du *Pierrot lunaire*) lorsque la ligne aiguë stratosphérique de la soprano Barbara Zanichelli fait irruption dans le dernier mouvement (*Trakl Lied*). Point de fuite autant que conclusion, le poème de Georg Trakl fait ici l'objet d'une transposition quasi figurative. On admire chez les interprètes du Quatuor Sine Nomine cette approche déneuvée, presque blanche et flottante qui donne aux vers une très forte dimension emblématique. La brûlure du désir contredit l'épaisseur du charnel dans une forme ambiguë de dramaturgie et d'onirisme – du très grand art.

David Verdier