For years, the Concerto for Orchestra has been not only the most played of Bartók's works, but also the most frequently performed among other contemporary scores. Between 1945 and 1955 it had more than two hundred performances, here and abroad.

In a very real way, Fritz Reiner is the conductor preordained to conduct this masterful score, written during the difficult last years of Bartók's life, when he was a self-exile from Nazi-occupied Hungary and far from adjusted to life in America. Beset by economic difficulties, plagued by an undiagnosable illness which restricted his activities, Bartók was nevertheless a proud man to whom charity was abhorrent. One of his occasional engagements in 1943 was with the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York. In writing about it to a friend, Bartók described it as "a 'unique' engagement...a 'family' business...made through my friend Fritz Reiner who is guest conductor in some of these concerts. So we [Bartók and his wife] live from half-year to half-year..."

Before the "half-year" was out, Bartók was again hospitalized, inactive, with little mind for composition. Alerted to these circumstances by my article in the New York *Sun*, Reiner, in association with Joseph Szigeti, set in motion means to stimulate Bartók's mind for work. It took the form of a commission from the Koussevitzky Foundation, personally conveyed to the composer in his room at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York by the man who often said, "If we do not encourage the music of today, there will be no music of tomorrow."

The mood for work came to Bartók in August at Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks, and he brought the finished score to New York with him in October. Early in December, he visited Boston for the first performance, of which he wrote: "...the performance was excellent. Koussevitzky is very enthusiastic about the piece, and says it is 'the best orchestral piece of the last 25 years.'..."

This qualifies Koussevitzky for honors not only in generosity but also in prophecy; and gives to Reiner the rare distinction, among conductors, of having assisted in the creation of a work, as well as in its re-creation.

Concertos for orchestra and solo instrument are, of course, common commodities in the concert hall. For that matter, the work for orchestra alone in which the word

"concerto" appears was an equally common commodity in the eighteenth century. But the connotation was quite different, even as the orchestra itself was; and Bartók may be credited with inventing a pattern and perfecting it, all in the space of three months. "The title of this symphony-like orchestral work," he commented in a note written for the Boston premiere, "is explained by its tendency to treat the single orchestral instruments in a *concertant* or soloistic manner. The 'virtuoso' treatment appears, for instance, in the fugato sections of the development of the first movement (brass instruments) or the *perpetuum mobile*-like passage of the principal theme in the last movement (strings), and especially in the second movement, in which pairs of instruments consecutively appear with brilliant passages...."

The movements are as follows:

Allegro vivace

Two main themes dominate this movement: an active, chromatic one, in shifting 3/8, 2/8, 3/8, 2/8, etc., which promises much for development; and a leaping, chordal one, with contrapuntal implications. All sorts of instrumental effects are utilized.

Allegretto scherzando

This second movement is subtitled *Giuocco delle Coppie* or "Game of Pairs." Pursuant to the description, the bassoons have the first duet, followed by oboes, clarinets, flutes (each at different intervals) and then muted trumpets in major seconds. Out of this varied but harmonious plan Bartók evolves a charming series of permutations.

Andante, non troppo

In this *Elegia*, Bartók utilizes the introductory material of the first movement, shaped to folk-songlike contours. It has a kind of nocturnal quality, described by the composer as a "misty texture of rudimentary motifs."

Allegretto

An intermezzo intrudes, interrupted by a reference to the "Leningrad" Symphony of Shostakovich, which Bartók heard broadcast while at work on this Concerto.

Pesante

Bartók described the Concerto's mood as "apart from the jesting second movement, a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death-

song of the third, to the life-assertion of the last...." Dance rhythms predominate in this finale, as the virtuoso demands on the orchestra accumulate.

Notes by IRVING KOLODIN
(1956)

Fritz Reiner first met Béla Bartók, whose friend he was for forty years and whose music he has championed for nearly half a century, in 1905. Both were piano students of István Thomán at the Budapest Academy. The conductor-to-be, only son of a prosperous metropolitan merchant, was seventeen and an undergraduate; Bartók, at twenty-three, had begun the final year of his formal education in music. Although the "Kossuth" Symphony of 1903 had gained him the reputation of composer both at home and in England, the young Bartók was far better known as a concert pianist—and as a patriot. He was a slender youth, withdrawn and quietly dignified, always dressed in the Hungarian national costume: black embroidered jacket, black sash tie, and black boots. Despite his orientation as a keyboard virtuoso, Bartók's passions already were folk music and composition, destined ever increasingly to dominate his life's work. In 1907, however, Bartók succeeded Thomán at the Academy, as professor of piano—not then, or ever, of composition.

Reiner, a pianist in whom the conductor was just awakening, studied a full year with Bartók, and when Reiner graduated in 1909, it was Bartók who recommended him for honors and signed his diploma. Thirty-one years later Reiner was able to return that recommendation and signature—on an affidavit that permitted Bartók's entry into the United States as a resident alien.

In 1910 Reiner went to Laibach (Ljubljana today) as conductor at the local opera, and this forced a suspension of direct contact with Bartók. His appointment to Dresden in 1914 took Reiner entirely from Bartók's personal orbit, though not so distant as to lose contact with Bartók the composer and correspondent. In Dresden, at a concert of the Saxon State Orchestra, Reiner conducted his senior countryman's music for the first time. His domain there, however, was principally operatic, and not until he was invited to America in 1922 as music director of the Cincinnati Symphony

Orchestra was Reiner able really to promote his controversial colleague's bold, spiky scores. There, in staid southern Ohio, Reiner gave the music of Bartók its first American performances—*Suite No. 1* in 1923; *Suite No. 2* in 1924; the *Dance Suite* and *Deux Images* in 1925, and two scenes from *The Miraculous Mandarin* in 1926.

The composer himself finally came to the United States in 1927, as a pianist, bringing with him a new concerto for the occasion. It was scheduled for performances by the New York Philharmonic under Willem Mengelberg's direction. One look at the score of the *Concerto No. 1*, however, convinced Mengelberg that the music would be impossible to prepare in the allotted rehearsal time; Bartók played, instead, his early *Rhapsody*. When Reiner heard the news, he asked for first-performance rights, received them, prepared the music, and conducted performances with Bartók as soloist not only in Cincinnati but on tour in New York and Boston. If the Ohio premiere was sensational, the audience in Carnegie Hall disapproved vocally. Bartók's press was savage, yet his career had been importantly served: the entire nation knew his name in a matter of days.

Reiner moved to Philadelphia in 1931 as teacher at Curtis Institute and guest conductor, but he continued to champion Bartók's cause. With the Philadelphia Orchestra he introduced to America the five *Hungarian Sketches* on this recording (orchestrations of early piano music, undertaken by Bartók at Mondsee, in Austria, during the summer of 1931 "on account of the money" he was sure would accrue from frequent performances). When Reiner went in 1938 to Pittsburgh, his professional home for a decade, not only did he continue to play Bartók's earlier music but added the *Divertimento for Strings* to his list of first performances in North America.

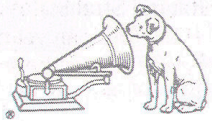
Only *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, the suite in four movements composed in 1936, found no place in the Reiner repertoire until, at concerts of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in December 1958, he conducted this music for the first time, with overwhelming success.

Bartók, for his part, revisited the United States briefly in 1939. Then, in 1940, he returned here, never to leave. His American years were neither prosperous nor at all happy ones—through no neglect, it must be said, on the part of his friends. As a man of pride, Bartók steadfastly refused any help so labeled, and made it, for that

matter, increasingly difficult to render even indirect assistance. Nevertheless, on January 21, 1943, in New York, Reiner conducted the first performance of the *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra* with the composer and his wife as soloists—Bartók's last public appearance as a concert artist.

It was Reiner that same year who apprised Serge Koussevitzky of Bartók's American residence, and urged that the Koussevitzky Foundation commission a work: the *Concerto for Orchestra* of 1943. And it was Reiner who opened his home near Westport, Connecticut, whenever Bartók cared or was able to visit. Here at "Rambleside," in the final years of an austere life, ravaged by illness, in the company of a colleague and friend he respected, Bartók spent many of the too few happy days remaining to him in a land far from his own. A land, however, that did give him haven in time of need, and that has paid his memory unexampled tribute—this in major part because of Fritz Reiner's devoted and unceasing service to music he believed in, long before the rest of the world came to share his vision.

Notes by ROGER DETTMER
Music Editor, Chicago's American
(1960)



Fritz Reiner was internationally recognized as one of the foremost conductors of his time. Born in 1888 in Budapest, he received his musical education at the Academy of Music there. At the age of 23 he became conductor of the Budapest Volksoper and two years later was appointed principal conductor of the Royal Opera in Dresden; while there he worked with Richard Strauss on productions of his early operas and conducted the German premiere of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. In 1922 Reiner became conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra; nine years later he went to the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia to head the orchestral department. After a decade (1938-48) as music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, he joined the Metropolitan Opera. Then in 1953 he became music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which he built into one of the world's great ensembles. Ill health forced him to resign his post in 1962, and he died the following year.

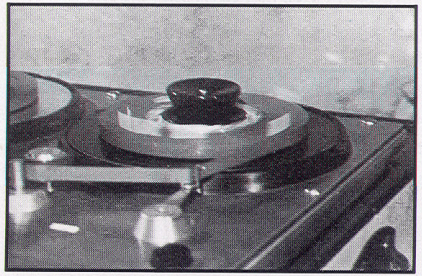
Reiner was extraordinary not only as an orchestra builder but also for his broad range of repertoire, both symphonic and operatic. He was equally the master of the delicately balanced sonorities of Mozart and the massive richness of Richard Strauss; he was a champion of 20th-century music, and he could give incomparably lilting performances of the waltzes of Johann Strauss.

THE HISTORY OF LIVING STEREO

In February 1954, RCA Victor conducted pioneering experiments in multi-track recording in Boston's Symphony Hall, where Charles Munch and the Boston Symphony were recording Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*. For the first time, RCA engineers captured the performance on both mono and two-track tape. These experiments, combined with further technological refinements employed in Chicago's Orchestra Hall in March 1954, were the first forays into the world of stereo.

An early Living Stereo session, on location at Webster Hall, NYC—1958

At the time that RCA initiated multi-track sessions, disc mastering and consumer playback technology were monaural. RCA Victor proceeded to use two- and three-track equipment to record the world's greatest artists—Heifetz, Piatigorsky, Reiner, Munch, Rubinstein, Fiedler—in anticipation that home technology would catch up to stereo sound. Finally, in 1955, ¼" 7½ ips stereophonic tape players arrived on the consumer market, and RCA released its first Stereo Orthophonic tapes.



Ampex 3-track tape recorder (model 300-3) at Orchestra Hall, Chicago—1958

Stereo Orthophonic tapes redefined high fidelity. In 1958, the Western Electric Company produced the breakthrough Westrex stereo disc cutter, thereby revolutionizing master disc production. Stereo playback equipment was developed to coincide with the new disc-cutting technology. The same year, Living Stereo LP records were launched, ushering in the golden age of stereo high fidelity.