

Contrasts

Béla Bartók

Verbunkos

Pihenő

Sebes

Contrasts was commissioned by the American clarinetist Benny Goodman who sought a piece that would fit on the two sides of a 78 rpm gramophone record. Bartók completed a two-movement *Rhapsody* in September, 1938 and Goodman, the Hungarian-born violinist Joseph Szigeti and the pianist Endre Petri performed it at Carnegie Hall the following January. Bartók subsequently added a slow middle movement, renamed the work *Contrasts*, and in 1940 recorded it with Goodman and Szigeti.

Contrasts is Bartók's only chamber work that employs a wind instrument, and is one of the milestones in the repertoire for violin, clarinet, and piano. The title refers to the inherent tonal dissimilarity of the three instruments, a feature which Bartók accentuates in his scoring throughout the work. The violin writing, besides calling for a considerable amount of multiple scoring, also requires *scordatura* (the G string is tuned to G-sharp and the E string to E-flat) for the beginning of the third movement; thirty bars later the violinist is directed to "take another violin, tuned as usual."

Harris Goldsmith writes: "The opening *Verbunkos* starts with a march-like figuration from the violin and gradually expands into a truly brilliant essay in swirling roulades and intertwining melodic lines. *Pihenő* is one of Bartók's characteristic night pieces with wondrous nature sounds and a reposeful out-of-doors quality." The final *Sebes* starts humorously with a slashing violin part through which the clarinet gives out the main tune. There follows a central section in Bulgarian rhythm, after which the first part of the movement returns; the violin has a cadenza; and the work accelerates to a close.

Contrasts was the inspiration for the Verdehr Trio and the impetus for its project, *The Making of a Medium*, which has resulted in a large repertoire for violin, clarinet, and piano trio, including nearly two hundred new works commissioned from major composers during the years 1970 to 2018. The Trio has premiered each of these trios and presented them in subsequent concerts worldwide, along with transcriptions of trios for other instruments and arrangements of works from various genre that the Trio has commissioned or written themselves.

Béla Bartók (1881–1945) was a Hungarian composer, pianist, and ethnomusicologist. He is considered one of the most important composers of the twentieth century. He and Liszt are regarded as Hungary's greatest composers. Through his collection and analytical study of folk music, he was one of the founders of comparative musicology, which later became ethnomusicology.