

BÉLA BARTÓK

String Quartet No. 3 (arr. Stanley Konopka)

BÉLA BARTÓK

Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*

**THE
CLEVELAND
ORCHESTRA
WELSER-MÖST**

BARTÓK

This recording pairs two of Béla Bartók's most challenging and ingenious works. In the String Quartet No. 3 (which Assistant Principal Viola Stanley Konopka arranged for string orchestra) and Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*, Bartók creates a new musical path forward by masterly combining influences from folk tunes and elements of the avant-garde to create works of lasting power. — *Franz Welser-Möst*

The name 'BARTOK' is rendered in large, bold, uppercase letters. The letters are filled with a complex, marbled texture in shades of orange, brown, and red, resembling aged paper or stone. The letters are stacked vertically: 'B' and 'A' on the top line, 'R' and 'T' on the second line, and 'O' and 'K' on the bottom line. The 'O' is a solid circle, while the other letters have various shapes and cutouts.

BARTÓK

String Quartet No. 3 (arr. Stanley Konopka)

Composed 1927



Stanley Konopka performs Bartók's String Quartet No. 3, which he arranged for double string orchestra.

During the summer before I entered seventh grade, I would often stay up until three or four in the morning listening to WFMT, the classical music station in Chicago, where I grew up. With my tape deck and a stack of blank cassettes at the ready, I would record works off the broadcast. Later, I would find the scores to the music so I could study the inner workings of these pieces — so I too could become a composer one day.

One night I heard something unlike anything I had ever heard before: the pizzicato movement of Béla Bartók's Fourth String Quartet. The harmonic language was like nothing I'd ever encountered, the interaction of the lines was so interesting and complex, and the fourth movement was as wild as any of the heavy metal my friends were listening to at that time.

The next morning, I ran straight to our local library — I arrived before the doors were unlocked — I had to verify that music like this really existed. I found the 1940 Juilliard String Quartet mono recording of Bartók's Third and Fourth string quartets and quickly began to wear out the vinyl. It was like an alien language, but somehow, I intuitively knew what everything meant in detail. While my middle-school peers listened to Iron Maiden and Judas Priest, Bartók was my Metallica.

AT A GLANCE

Born

March 25, 1881, in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary (now Sânnicolau Mare, Romania)

Died

September 26, 1945, in New York City

Composed

1927 for string quartet; arranged for double string orchestra in 2023

World Premiere

December 30, 1928, in Philadelphia with violinists Mischa Mischakoff, and David Dubinsky, violist Samuel Lifschey, and cellist William Van der Berg

Cleveland Orchestra Premiere

January 11, 2024, led by Music Director Franz Welser-Möst

Orchestration

Double string orchestra

BARTÓK

String Quartet No. 3 (arr. Stanley Konopka)

(cont.)

One of the reasons that it resonated with me profoundly was that these discordant and often brutal sounding works accurately reflected what I was witnessing in my life. My parents were going through marital conflicts, and this aggressive and hostile music represented very powerfully the discordance I felt at home. Bartók wasn't depicting an ideal or the way things should be, he was depicting the way things often are.

The idea of arranging Bartók's string quartets for orchestra came to me much later, around 2000. At the time The Cleveland Orchestra was touring with a string orchestra arrangement of Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*, which was originally written for string quartet. It occurred to me that some pieces of music, like the *Grosse Fuge*, are bigger than their original orchestration; they can be expanded tenfold and still sound like themselves. I immediately started thinking about what other quartets would benefit from this treatment. Bartók's quartets immediately came to mind, but they are so difficult to play that the idea initially seemed impractical. However, the orchestral writing style in the Third String Quartet, as well as its structure as one continuous 17-minute piece in four seamless movements, made that work the best candidate for such an arrangement.

I proposed the idea to Franz Welser-Möst — he had been music director for a few seasons at that point — and he was interested in the idea. After going through the proper channels to complete such a project, we encountered a sudden disappointment: Peter Bartók, the composer's son, had heard about our undertaking, and he would have none of it! We suspended our efforts.

While researching Bartók's original Hungarian folk music sources recently, I discovered that Peter Bartók had passed away in late 2020. I immediately contacted Franz, and we decided to give the arrangement idea another go.

From the beginning of the Third String Quartet, you perceive these blatant, definitive interruptions. An idea will be proposed, and then it will be countered. I originally thought that this back-and-forth depicted the internal dialogue of a single person with multiple different personalities. And my first attempt at an arrangement reflected this impression. However, the more I studied the piece, the more I realized that there were two consistent and distinct voices that emerged: one is often calmer and more levelheaded; the other is much more reactionary and hostile; and together they make up two passionate and complex characters.

With this realization, I turned to Bartók's Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta for inspiration. In this piece, Bartók divides the string section in two and places them antiphonally on stage. I made a bold choice to follow this model as a means of capturing these two characters. At the same time, I tried to be as faithful to the original score as I could. Compositionally, it showcases Bartók's genius and his ability to take a tiny, little musical idea and run it through every permutation: forwards, backwards, inverted, and recapitulated. ■

— Stanley Konopka

BARTÓK

Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*

Composed 1918–24, Suite 1927

The one-act play *The Miraculous Mandarin* by Menyhert (Melchior) Lengyel struck a deep nerve in Béla Bartók, who decided to set it to music as soon as he had read it in the literary magazine *Nyugat* (The Occident). Lengyel was a successful Hungarian playwright who later worked in Hollywood (writing screenplays for Greta Garbo, among others). *The Miraculous Mandarin* abounded in gruesome details that instigated adverse consequences for the performance history of Bartók's pantomime ballet. Its premiere in the predominantly Catholic city of Cologne sparked a major scandal, leading the city's mayor to ban the work. However, this should not prevent us from recognizing the intense drama that arises from the fatal conflict between trivial everyday experience and something that transcends it.

The action of the pantomime is summarized in the score as follows:

In a shabby room in the slums, three

tramps, bent on robbery, force a girl to lure prospective victims from the street. A down-at-heel cavalier and a timid youth, who succumb to her attractions, are found to have thin wallets and are thrown out. The third "guest" is the eerie Mandarin. His impassivity frightens the girl, who tries to thaw him by dancing — but when he feverishly embraces her, she runs from him in terror. After a wild chase he catches her, at which point the three tramps leap from their hiding place, rob

him of everything he has, and try to smother him under a pile of cushions. But he gets to his feet, his eyes fixed passionately on the girl. They run him through with a sword; he is shaken, but his desire is stronger than his wounds, and he hurls himself on her. They hang him up, but it is impossible for him to die. Only when they cut him down, and the girl takes him into her arms, do his wounds begin to bleed and he dies.



Photo Roger Mastroianni

AT A GLANCE

World Premiere

The ballet premiered in Cologne on November 27, 1926. The suite was first performed by the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra on October 15, 1928, led by Ernő Dohnányi.

Cleveland Orchestra Premiere

March 31, 1966, under the direction of Louis Lane

Orchestration

3 flutes (2nd and 3rd doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (2nd doubling E-flat clarinet, 3rd doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tenor drum, triangle, tam-tam, xylophone), harp, celesta, piano, organ, and strings

BARTÓK

Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*

(cont.)

The scenario is intentionally unappealing, typical of the expressionist dramas created during the Weimar era, a wild interwar period of artistic experimentation. In his harmonies, in his treatment of rhythm and orchestration, Bartók was at his most experimental here, coming closer than ever, as László Somfai states in *The New Grove Dictionary*, “to the aspirations of the Second Viennese School,” whose intentions were to create a new kind of music vocabulary.

Bartók’s music depicts the successive stages of the action with great vividness. After a frenetic introduction, which portrays the hustle and bustle of a large city, the curtain rises. The three tramps appear, and order the girl to stand by the window and lure men from the street. The girl will play her “decoy game” three times, with her seductive motions rendered by a clarinet solo in rubato (free) rhythm. Each time, the clarinet solo gets more involved and more agitated.

The first visitor, an old cavalier, enters. His awkward gestures are expressed in

humorous trombone glissandos. He tries to woo the girl (mock-romantic English horn and cello solos) but the tramps seize the old man and throw him out, in a short Vivace section dominated by the repeated-note figures of the trumpets.

The second “decoy game” lures a shy young man to the door. He is represented by a dreamy oboe solo; the dance begins with the entrance of the harp, with a theme played by bassoon and violin. Does the girl forget her role for a minute and become attracted to the youth? At any rate, the tramps set her straight and throw out the young man as before.

The third “decoy game” leads to the appearance of the Mandarin in a menacing theme for trombones and tuba, set against woodwind tremolos and glissandos for violins and piano. The music hesitates before the girl begins her dance. Out of short melodic fragments played by solo woodwinds, a waltz theme gradually emerges. As the Mandarin begins his frenzied chase after the girl, a wild fugato starts in the

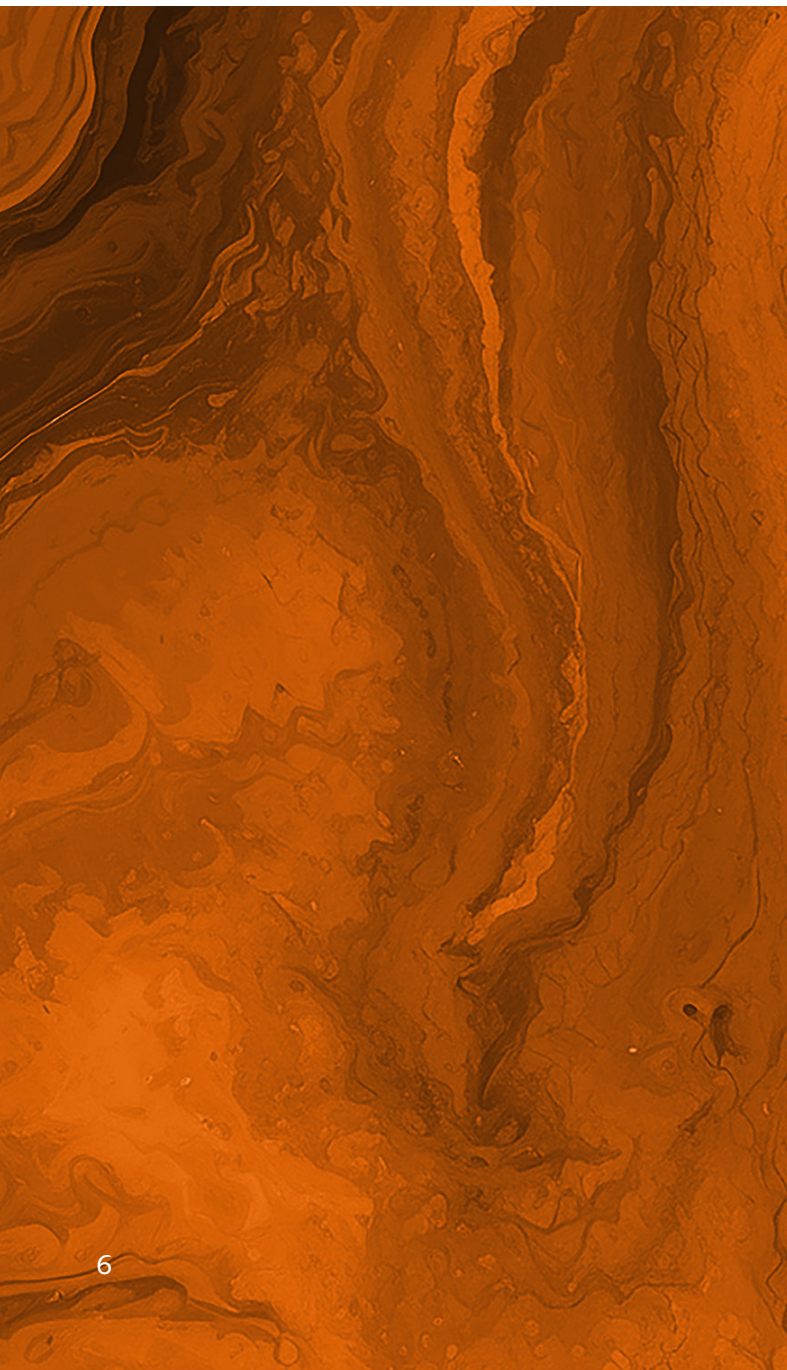
orchestra, to the thudding accompaniment of the low winds and percussion. At the climactic point of the chase, the Mandarin catches the girl.

The suite version, prepared by Bartók in 1927, ends at this point. The suite is in fact nothing but the first two-thirds of the original score, with a few concluding measures added for concert use. The rest of the action, including the three-fold murder and final catharsis, was cut off to provide a rousing concert ending.

— Peter Laki



The Recording



THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA
conducted by **FRANZ WELSER-MÖST**

BÉLA BARTÓK
**String Quartet No. 3 (arr. Stanley Konopka
for double string orchestra)**

Track 1.....16:02

BÉLA BARTÓK
Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*

Track 2 - I. Introduction.....2:45

Track 3 - II. First Decoy Game..... 3:27

Track 4 - III. Second Decoy Game..... 3:09

Track 5 - IV. Third Decoy Game.....2:19

Track 6 - V. The Girl Dances.....4:31

Track 7 - VI. The Chase..... 2:04

*Recorded live in Mandel Concert Hall
at Severance Music Center
in Cleveland, Ohio,
on January 11–13, 2024*

*Recorded at 24bit 96kHz PCM
Stereo and Dolby Atmos mixes available*

About the Orchestra

Now in its second century, The Cleveland Orchestra, under the leadership of Music Director Franz Welser-Möst since 2002, is one of the most sought-after performing ensembles in the world. Year after year, the ensemble exemplifies extraordinary artistic excellence, creative programming, and community engagement. *The New York Times* has called Cleveland “the best in America” for its virtuosity, elegance of sound, variety of color, and chamber-like musical cohesion.

Founded by Adella Prentiss Hughes, the Orchestra performed its inaugural concert in December 1918. By the middle of the century, decades of growth and sustained support had turned it into one of the most admired globally.

The past decade has seen an increasing number of young people attending concerts, bringing fresh attention to The Cleveland Orchestra’s legendary sound and committed programming. More recently, the Orchestra launched several bold digital projects, including the streaming broadcast series *In Focus*, the podcast

On a Personal Note, and its own recording label, a new chapter in the Orchestra’s long and distinguished recording and broadcast history. Together, they have captured the Orchestra’s unique artistry and the musical achievements of the Welser-Möst and Cleveland Orchestra partnership.

The 2023/24 season marks Franz Welser-Möst’s 22nd year as music director, a period in which

The Cleveland Orchestra earned unprecedented acclaim around the world, including a series of residencies at the Musikverein in Vienna, the first of its kind by an American orchestra, and a number of acclaimed opera presentations.

Since 1918, seven music directors — Nikolai Sokoloff, Artur Rodziński, Erich Leinsdorf, George Szell, Lorin Maazel, Christoph von Dohnányi, and Franz Welser-Möst — have guided and shaped

the ensemble’s growth and sound. Through concerts at home and on tour, broadcasts, and a catalog of acclaimed recordings, The Cleveland Orchestra is heard today by a growing group of fans around the world.

For more information, please visit clevelandorchestra.com. ■



The Cleveland Orchestra

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Franz Welser-Möst

Franz Welser-Möst is among today's most distinguished conductors. The 2023/24 season marks his 22nd year as music director of The Cleveland Orchestra. With the future of their acclaimed partnership extended to 2027, he will be the longest-serving musical leader in the ensemble's history. *The New York Times* has declared Cleveland under Welser-Möst's direction to be "America's most brilliant orchestra," praising its virtuosity, elegance of sound, variety of color, and chamber-like musical cohesion.

With Welser-Möst, The Cleveland Orchestra has been praised for its inventive programming, ongoing support of new music, and innovative work in presenting operas. To date, the Orchestra and Welser-Möst have been showcased around the world in 20 international tours together. In 2020, the ensemble launched its own recording label and new streaming broadcast platform to share its artistry globally.

In addition to his commitment to Cleveland, Welser-Möst enjoys a particularly close and productive relationship with the Vienna Philharmonic as a guest conductor. He has conducted its celebrated New Year's

Concert three times, and regularly leads the orchestra at home in Vienna, as well as on tours.

Welser-Möst is also a regular guest at the Salzburg Festival where he has led a series of acclaimed opera productions, including *Rusalka*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Fidelio*, *Die Liebe der Danae*, Reimann's opera *Lear*, and Richard Strauss's *Salome*. In 2020, he conducted Strauss's *Elektra* on the 100th anniversary of its premiere. He has since returned to Salzburg to conduct additional performances of *Elektra* in 2021 and Giacomo Puccini's *Il Trittico* in 2022.

In 2019, Welser-Möst was awarded the Gold Medal in the Arts by the Kennedy Center International Committee on the Arts. Other honors include The Cleveland Orchestra's Distinguished Service Award, two Cleveland Arts Prize citations, the Vienna Philharmonic's "Ring of Honor," recognition from the Western Law Center for Disability Rights, honorary membership in the Vienna Singverein, appointment as an Academician of the European Academy of Yuste, and the Kilenyi Medal from the Bruckner Society of America. ■



Franz Welser-Möst conducts The Cleveland Orchestra in Béla Bartók's String Quartet No. 3 in Mandel Concert Hall at Severance Music Center.

Mandel Concert Hall at Severance Music Center

Home of The Cleveland Orchestra



Photo Roger Mastroianni

Hailed among the world's most beautiful concert halls when it opened as Severance Hall in 1931, Severance Music Center has served as home to The Cleveland Orchestra for over 90 years. Its famed acoustics have helped shape the Orchestra's renowned sound and refined performance style. The building was named to honor John Long Severance (president of the Orchestra's board of trustees, 1921–36) and his wife, Elisabeth, who donated most of the money for its construction.

Designed by Cleveland's Walker & Weeks, the building's elegant Georgian exterior was constructed to harmonize with the classical architecture of the surrounding University Circle neighborhood. The interior of the building reflects a combination of design styles, including Art Deco, Egyptian Revival, Classicism, and Modernism.

An extensive renovation and expansion of the facility was completed in January 2000, including careful enhancements to the clarity and warmth of the 2,000-seat concert hall's acclaimed acoustics, a project designed by David M. Schwartz Architects and Jaffe Holden Scarbrough Acoustics.

More recently, the main performance space has been augmented with a state-of-the-art robotic video camera system to capture and create a new generation of streaming programming. In 2021, the concert space was named in recognition of a generous grant from the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation, whose gift is funding the video equipment outfitting along with other initiatives to further The Cleveland Orchestra's ongoing success and to expand its reach for audiences around the world in the 21st century. ■

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