

Concerto for Orchestra

Instrumentation: piccolo, 3 flutes, 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, 2 harps, strings.

Duration: 36 minutes in five movements (with pauses).

THE COMPOSER – BELA BARTOK (1881-1945) – With the situation in Europe worsening by the day, Béla Bartók reluctantly immigrated to the United States in 1940. He began to suffer the first symptoms of his long undiagnosed leukemia shortly after arriving and though never fully at home in America (he felt just as underappreciated as he had at home), it would be here that he received the 1943 commission that would forever define his place as a 20th century titan.

THE HISTORY – The new work premiered in Boston the following season and would become Bartók’s most popular and important masterpiece. Sadly, he would succumb to his illness in 1945 and never experience the Concerto’s ascendance to the first rank of 20th century compositions. Bartók didn’t necessarily break new ground with his version of the non-symphony since Hindemith and Kodaly had each already written a Concerto for Orchestra in the previous two decades. It was Bartók, however, who brought a level of perfection to the form and whose masterwork still serves as its finest example. The piece is structured as a large palindrome and Bartók himself often spoke to his Concerto’s “tendency to treat the single instruments and instrument groups” in a “soloistic manner.” Indeed, the writing is highly virtuosic and every section of orchestra is featured expertly. More importantly though, the piece offers us a glimpse of a composer’s voice in full maturity at a time when American orchestral talent was burgeoning under the leadership of many imposing European maestros. With all of the Bartók hallmarks on display – the depthless well of melodic ingenuity, the rhythmic vitality, the formal creativity, the scathing wit (note the Shostakovich parody that “interrupts” the Intermezzo movement) – this is the work of a genius who was in total, effortless possession of his skills. Not one note is out of place.

THE WORLD – Mount Vesuvius erupted in 1944. 1944 was also the year of the “Great Escape” from Stalag Luft III, the founding of the United Negro College Fund in America and Iceland’s final declaration of independence from Denmark.

THE CONNECTION – The *Concerto for Orchestra* has been a favorite of Music Directors and Guest Conductors alike at CCSO. Maestro _____ conducted it most recently in _____.
