

relatively large orchestral forces (large, that is, by Bartók's standards): he calls for not only the usual complement of horns, trombone, tuba, percussion, two harps, and strings, but also extra woodwinds (each woodwind group tripled instead of paired), an extra trumpet (totaling five), and a celesta. The first Picture is subtitled "Bloom," and clearly bears the mark of Debussy, with its whole tone scales, pedals, and ostinati. It is cast in a simple ternary form, and features music that would, in later years, be developed into motives for the opera *Bluebeard's Castle* and the ballet *The Wooden Prince*. This is a slow piece, an Adagio, and all of the pastel colors of Impressionism are in evidence here. The second Picture is subtitled "The Village Dance," and stands in sharp contrast to the first Picture, in terms of mood, form, and tonal language. While Debussyian whole tone scales are still used in this Picture, they are heard in the context of Bartók's folk tune-like melodies, which have a modal flavor. "The Village Dance" is in rondo form (ABACA), but the formal scheme is sometimes blurred in the course of Bartók's development of thematic material. The character of this second Picture is also radically different from its predecessor; the first Picture is gentle, suggestive, and Impressionistic, while the second Picture is loud, boisterous, and more folk-inspired. Musicologists have pointed out the similarities between the Two Pictures and some of Debussy's music, including his *Images* for piano, and the *Nocturnes* for orchestra. Debussy's *Images* really only share with Bartók's pieces a title (Bartók first published *Two Pictures* as *Deux Images* and some harmonic effects. The *Nocturnes*, however, are similar to the *Two Pictures* in orchestration, harmony, melody, and meter. *Two Pictures*, despite its success early in the century, has been criticized for its lack of balance--the second Picture is much more substantial than the first--and for its old-fashioned style.



Bartók The Miraculous Mandarin & Two Pictures **Eugene Ormandy - Philadelphia Orchestra**

Bartók composed the complete *Miraculous Mandarin* ballet in 1918 – 1919, orchestrated it in 1923, and called the first six sections as a suite in 1927. Ernő Dohnányi conducted this suite in Budapest on October 15, 1928. Incorporating both a grim modernist outlook and the folk influences that would come to the fore later in Bartók's is scored for large orchestra including triple winds, four percussionists, celesta, and piano. Designated a pantomime, it is of an unusual length for a stage presentation -- a long single act. But longer would have diluted both the visceral music and enthralling eroticism. Consider the plot:

Three ruffians hire brothel space and a girl, who stands in the window as bait; those who venture inside are robbed. The first to enter is an old, shabbily dressed cavalier; he is ejected when they discover him penniless. An impoverished young man is likewise thrown out. Then an apparition appears. In the score we read that "the Mandarin enters and remains motionless in the doorway; the girl flees terrified to the far part of the room. Urged by the [hidden] ruffians, she overcomes repugnance and begins to dance hesitantly, then faster. The Mandarin looks at her with a fixed, impassive stare. But when she sinks down to embrace him, he begins to tremble in feverish excitement. She shudders at his embrace and tries to tear herself from him. Briefly free, she runs but is stalked and finally caught. They struggle. The ruffians leap out...."

Here the suite ends (merely a section of the whole ballet, it is not a true suite). But the ballet proceeds: "The ruffians seize the Mandarin and strip him of his jewelry and money. They drag him to a bed and try to smother him with pillows and blankets. Then they stab him three times with a rusty sword. He staggers, but still tries to embrace the girl. They drag him to the center of the room and hang him from an overhead lamp-hook; it falls, and in the darkness the Mandarin's body begins to glow with a greenish light. At last the girl realizes what will save them. She embraces the

Mandarin. His longing now stilled, his wounds begin to bleed, he weakens, and dies after a short struggle."

Bartók said, during a 1929 interview in London, that "people had [only] read the plot and decided it was objectionable. [The piece was not performed in Hungary until 1946.] From beginning to end the speed is almost breathless, and the effect accordingly is quite different from what had been imagined. The Mandarin is very much like an eastern fairy tale and contains nothing to which objection can be taken." (It wasn't reported whether his nose then grew six inches.)

A vertiginous first section depicts the city's streets and the girl's instructions. Each of her "decoy games" (so called in the score) is lured inside with clarinet arpeggios and ejected clamorously. A lewd trombone glissando characterizes the old man; a solo oboe the young man. The clarinet's third lure is more shrill, accompanied by a long orchestral tremor, interrupted by trombones, that ends in a shriek when the Mandarin stands in the doorway. After a sudden hush, he begins a slow waltz that accelerates until the orchestra shudders convulsively at his embrace of the girl.

She frees herself to whooping, pounding chords. A scurrying, Middle Eastern subject in the low strings gets hotly pursued by violins -- a fugue of scaring intensity, twice interrupted when the Mandarin stumbles before he finally clutches the girl. This signals the ruffians' attack, and the crashing, crushing end of the concert suite.

The *Two Pictures* are early orchestral works by Bartók, dating from the period in which the composer was becoming familiar with the music of French composer Claude Debussy. This work was among Bartók's most successful compositions, and was the orchestral work most performed during his lifetime. It is a vivid memento of Bartók's discovery of Debussy, and the French imprint on this work, though anachronistic, nonetheless contributes significantly to its charm. *Two Pictures* demands

Bartók

The Miraculous Mandarin

Two Pictures

Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra

- 1 The Miraculous Mandarin - Suite, Op. 19 (Sz 73) 19:39
- Two Pictures For Orchestra, Op. 10 (Sz 46) (16:16)
- 2 I. In Full Flower. Poco Adagio 7:36
- 3 II. Village Dance. Allegro 8:40

Recorded by Columbia Records

Miraculous Mandarin - Suite recorded at Town Hall, Philadelphia, PA, November 15, 1962

Two Pictures for Orchestra recorded at Philadelphia Athletic Club, Philadelphia, PA, March 31, 1963



For more info e-mail us:
admin@highdeftapetransfers.com
or visit our website:
www.highdeftapetransfers.com