

# records and recording

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**BARTOK:** *Suite, Op 4B. 14 Pieces from Mikrokosmos.* Richard and John Contiguglia (two pianos). Connoisseur CS 2033. £2.80.

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## ATES ORGA

With the exception of the Sonata for two pianos and percussion, Bartók's two-piano works are virtually unknown. The present disc, first released in America in 1970, accordingly offers a splendid opportunity to get to know two of them, both arrangements by Bartók himself. The most substantial is the four-movement Suite, Opus 4B. This was originally written for orchestra in 1907, but in 1941 Bartók rewrote it for two pianos and played it with his wife during a concert tour of America in 1941-42. In the process of re-writing, Bartók freely adapted the original, tightened the form, deleted material, and created what was, in effect, a new work. Subsequently, in 1943, he issued a revised edition of the orchestral score: significantly this was a revision based on the two-piano concept rather than the 1907 version. Stylistically eclectic, the music is of early vintage, and the influence of Liszt, Strauss, Debussy, Ravel and Magyar folk music is clearly traceable.

The pieces from *Mikrokosmos* comprise those originally conceived for two pianos, those initially intended for voice and piano in which the voice part is doubled in octaves on a second piano, and the *Seven Pieces from Mikrokosmos* which Bartók newly arranged for two pianos, and which were published posthumously in 1947. In their new guise some of these later movements emerge as totally new, almost orchestral experiences. *Ostinato* is a brilliant example.

A good deal of the impact of this music must, I think, be attributed to the way the Contiguglia brothers play it. Frankly they are an amazing duo, possessed of extraordinarily magnificent pianism, precise ensemble, an acute sense of rhythm and timing, and a fullness of tone which is quite glorious in the Suite. For breathtaking virtuosity, something like *Ostinato* has to be heard to be believed. Graduates of Yale, and pupils of Myra Hess, the Contiguglias already have a glowing career behind them: I can recall their 1962 London debut being greeted with justifiable ecstasy. With such talent one wants to hear much more of them. Perhaps they could now be taken up by one of the major record companies and be given the opportunity to show us what they can really do.

In the meantime the present, excellently produced Connoisseur recording will have to suffice. Whether you beg, borrow or steal, I urge you to get hold of a copy.