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Sándor VERESS

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STROLLING IN THE OPEN MEADOWS

by Claudio Veress

In his later years my father Sándor Veress used to emphasise that, after more than six decades of continued practice, his composing had reached a state of considerable freedom. His favourite metaphor for this state was 'strolling in the open meadows'.¹ Admittedly, Veress would never have considered using this freedom other than within a dialectic of independence and self-control. His own reflections on his 'free' treatment of twelve-tone technique, for instance, employed from the first years of his exile, make clear that this freedom was always deployed within the constraints of a strict approach to composition, and in no way an abandonment of the musical subject to the contingency of the next whim. How else should one interpret his frequent remark that 'to write one note is well and good, but a second one?'? For Veress freedom could only evolve in a context of conceptual rigour.

But evolve it did, conspicuously and from the very outset, so that one can speak of an enduring trend in Veress's formal tendency to make room within the demands of structural rationality for the diverse, improvisatory element, the musical realisation of the passing moment, familiar to him from early childhood experiences of Hungarian peasant music. This can already be observed in the richly ornamented melodic *parlando* of the second subject of the opening movement of his early Piano Sonata (1929).

The phenomenon can be seen to intensify over the decades through a process of separation: first the 'free' episode (*Quasi improvvisando, semplice, poco rubato*) in the first movement of the String Trio (1954) which lives by its thematically strict connection to the tone row, then the introduction of a punctuated form, whereby frame narrative and the ever-freer cadenza alternate, as is found in both the first movement of the Concerto for String Quartet (1961) and the *Musica Concertante per dodici archi* (1966), a model which from then on until his final completed work, the *Tromboniade* (1990), became one of the most important paradigms of Veress's concept of form.

¹ He seems to have used the metaphor 'Spaziergänge' (in twelve-tone fields) for the first time in a radio interview with Clytus Gottwald ('Einzeltgänger und Weggefährte', SüdWestFunk, Stuttgart, recorded in February 1982 (CD SV CD 117, Sándor Veress Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel)). The statement 'Ich fühle mich so, als würde ich auf einer grossen, wunderbaren Wiese herumspazieren' occurred in a radio conversation with Walter Kläy for Swiss Radio DRS 2, recorded in February 1987 (CD SV CD 124, *ibid.*).

in Budapest. He is principal conductor of the Hungarian Symphony Orchestra. He also founded the St Moritz opera festival, which he led as artistic director and conductor until 2012, and is currently Intendant of the Engadin Festival in St Moritz, Switzerland.

He has contributed to a number of radio and television programmes, and has won several awards and scholarships. He also has a number of CDs to his name. He has conducted works for piano and orchestra by Frédéric Bolli, Robert Suter and Jost Meier with the Neuchâtel Chamber Orchestra (soloist Hans Joerg Fink) on Gall; arias from operas by Schubert (with the baritone Oliver Widmer) on Hyperion and by Bellini, Charpentier, Delibes, Donizetti, Gounod, Mozart, Richard Strauss and Verdi (with the soprano Elena Moşuc) on Arte Nova, and from operettas by Heuberger, Kálmán, Lehár, Mackeben, Millöcker, Johann Strauss II and Zeller (with the soprano Noëmi Nadelmann) on Oehms Classics. As a pianist he has recorded the complete chamber works with piano of Joachim Raff for Divox, as well as the Piano Quintet by Hermann Goetz; on Harmonia Mundi CDs he accompanies the tenor Werner Güra in Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin*, Schumann's *Dichterliebe* and *Liederkreis* and Wolf's *Mörike-Lieder* and the mezzo soprano Birgit Remmert in Strauss Lieder, and on Berlin Classics Oliver Widmer in Schubert Lieder.

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Friedrichson, Daniel Glaus, Charles Koechlin, Mathias Ruegg and Chris Weinheimer. In 2009 they gave the first performance of *Zweigung* by Roland Moser, a composition dedicated to the Quartet. In 2012, the Basel String Quartet commissioned a work from Cécile Marti; the result was *Trapez*, and the Quartet gave its premiere in Zurich in October of the same year.

The conductor **Jan Schultz** was born in Amsterdam, where he first took piano lessons at the age of four and began horn at ten, studying both instruments during his student years at the Sweelinck Conservatoire in Amsterdam. In 1986 he moved to Basel, where he continued his study of the horn, among other instruments, at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and at the Conservatoire in Lausanne, where he was awarded the Premier Prix de Virtuosité. As a horn-player he performed in such orchestras as the Concertgebouw, the Netherlands Radio, Hilversum, the Basel orchestras and the Camerata in Berne, and in various Baroque ensembles, such as the Concerto Cologne, the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra and the Clementi Consort. His piano studies were completed at the Basel Conservatoire, and as a concert pianist he went on to give concerts with singers and instrumentalists in many countries of Europe. He was a co-founder of the Basel Chamber Ensemble and appeared as a soloist with the Basel orchestras and with various chamber orchestras. He accompanied the master-classes of Hermann Baumann and Paul Tortelier and led the Lieder and Oratorio Class at the Bruckner Conservatoire in Linz. In 1996 he made his Carnegie Hall debut with the Finnish cellist Marko Ylönen. He has also worked in the Zurich Opera House. He is currently a professor at the Hochschule für Musik in Basel.

From 1991 Jan Schultz studied conducting in Basel, Berne and Zurich under Horst Stein, Manfred Honeck, Wilfried Boettcher and Ralf Weikert, graduating in 1995. He took part in Jorma Panulä's course in Helsinki and studied under Sir Edward Downes in the Kyrill Kondrashin Conductors' Master-Classes in the Netherlands. He has also studied at the St Petersburg Conservatoire under Ilya Musin. In his early days as a conductor he especially enjoyed working with youth and conservatoire orchestras and has since appeared as a guest conductor with many European orchestras, among them the Orchestre de Chambre in Neuchâtel of which he was musical director from 1999 until 2010. His operatic work includes stints at the Norwegian Opera in Oslo and the Hungarian State Opera



However, at least some early works from the Hungarian period, particularly the two string quartets, show not merely a tendency towards confrontation of opposites – abandoning the musical discourse mid-flow – but rather towards their resolution, a characteristic inherited from the tradition of sonata form. An example can be found in the opening movement of the First String Quartet, where the dense counterpoint of the first subject gives way to a simple singing lullaby, whose seemingly innately incorruptible melody founders in spite of its initially confident intervallic structure as it is sucked with growing relentlessness into the momentum of the opening theme.

By contrast, the final movement of the Second String Quartet demonstrates what can happen musically, when conversely the improvisation principle takes hold of a given structure and through a process of deconstruction utterly dismantles it. In this example a first reprise leads, not into the strict counterpoint of its original formulation, but instead into the (paradoxically *non rubato*) *Quasi recitativo*, an internal coda which serves to prepare the final fugue. In this coda two core elements of the exposition – the scale and the interval of a second – are superimposed to such a degree that through the fragmentation of individual, second-interval, declamatory phrases and their almost airborne hovering over a prolonged, slowly vibrated closing note (*vibrato lento*), the continual motion of the scales is gradually brought to a complete standstill.

The compositional dialectic of freedom and restraint, made tangible through these and other examples across Veress's *œuvre*, corresponds to his open-mindedness about the freedom of the performer. His reassuring comments regarding impractical metronome markings are well testified, particularly in relation to the idealistically fast tempi of certain first and last movements. He didn't want to perceive through these tempi the hollow mechanics of virtuosic patina, but rather their meaningfulness, arising from the immediacy of improvisation. Mindless virtuosity was anathema to Veress, and it is often tellingly evoked in his later works in ironically fragmented, innocuously cheerful form, for example at the end of the Clarinet Concerto (1982) and the Tingly-Coda of 'Verticale e orizzontale' from *Orbis tonorum* (1986). And therein lies some consolation for the risk inherent in every Veress interpretation: his interpreters are invited through the very construction of the music, even when the score makes extreme virtuosic demands, to realise the inherently spiritual, the declamatory within it, which lies far and away from empty metronomics.

Claudio Veress teaches philosophy at a cantonal grammar school in Bern and, as violinist and violist, is a passionate chamber musician. Since 1992 he has been involved in the musicological and editorial side of Sándor Veress's legacy.

SÁNDOR VERESS'S MUSIC FOR STRING QUARTET

by Malcolm MacDonald

Sándor Veress was a man whose career piercingly illustrates the state of exile that permeates so much twentieth-century music. Fiercely attached to his native Hungary – though his birthplace, Kolozsvár, was ceded to Romania as Cluj-Napoca in 1920¹ – he was permanently sundered from it half-way through his life and spent his remaining years in Switzerland, which may in some ways have been a congenial environment yet did not allow him to feel himself anything other than an alien.

The son of the historian Endre Veress (1868–1953) – a circumstance which perhaps accounts for his ability to view his music, and music in general, in a long historical perspective – Sándor Veress was born on 1 February 1907 and spent childhood holidays by Lake Balaton; he was immersed in music from his earliest years, both the classical repertoire and the folk-music of his native region, then the object of research by Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók. He moved to Budapest in 1916, studied composition at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest with Kodály and piano with Bartók, and also collected folk-music with Bartók and László Lajtha as their assistant in field research on Hungarian, Moldovan and Transylvanian music. With fellow students, composers and performers, he founded MoMaMu (Modern Magyar Muzsikusok, Modern Hungarian musicians), who organised concerts in the Small Hall of the Academy. Bartók's ambition – to produce a new Hungarian music that would be equal to the best music being composed in other countries, yet rooted in the soil of the newly discovered folk music – became Veress's ambition also.

He began to make a name for himself as an independent-minded composer in the 1930s. Performances at the ISCM Festivals brought him to international notice, and his ballet *The Miraculous Shawm* (*A Csodafurulya*), composed for the choreographer Aurél M. Milloss, was performed in Budapest, London and Rome. In the early 1930s Veress also began his career as a teacher. He founded the Music Education seminar in Budapest and on trips to Berlin (1933) and London (1938 and 1939) studied music-education in Germany and Britain. Veress was in London on the outbreak of World War II, but decided to return to Budapest. He had an extended residence in Rome in 1942–43 (during which the experience of hearing Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* rehearsed and performed by Tullio Serafin came as a revelation) and then – though he could have returned to London (he had signed a publishing agreement with the London-

The Basel String Quartet was founded at the Basel Music Academy in 1996. Their mentors included such prestigious musicians as Walter Levin and the Alban Berg Quartet. Further inspiration came from members of the Amadeus Quartet, from Leon Fleisher, György Sebök, Sándor Zöldy of the Végh Quartet and from Samuel Rhodes of the Julliard.

The Quartet's themed programmes, often in collaboration with actors, artists, dancers and writers, are an established part of Swiss cultural life, and have opened new sound-worlds to listeners young and old.

In 1998 the Quartet won the Basel Orchestergesellschaft competition and went on to win the international Max Reger Quartet Competition in the following year. The year 2000 brought a career-development prize from the Basel Landschaft Kanton, and the release of their first CD on Amphion Records, with works by Haydn, Beethoven, Wolf and Kurtág. Invitations soon followed to international festivals in Paris, Schleswig-Holstein and Jerusalem, where they were received enthusiastically by both public and press.

The Quartet has performed at the Internationaler Musikmonat Basel, the Davos Festival, and the IGNM in both Basel and Bern. As part of the Schoenberg Exhibition at the Frankfurt Schirn they gave a lecture-recital with Walter Levin.

In 2006 the Quartet gave its Zurich Tonhalle debut. Highlights from 2007–10 include a tour of Romania, performances at the Bern Veress Festival, at the Espace 2 Schubertiade, and at the composition workshop of the Ernen Musikdorf Festival.

Commissions and first performances form an integral part of the Quartet's activities. Over the years they have premiered works by such composers as Daniel Biro, Martin Derungs, Gustav



¹ 'Not a bad birthplace', Veress used to say, 'considering that even the great Renaissance King Matthias Corvinus was born there' (cf. <http://2007.musikfestivalbern.ch/main.php?mod=portrait>).

harp and some of the orchestral strings. There is a return to and development of the ‘concerto grosso’ music, the quartet now playing much more as individuals in counterpoint with one another. The coda, again by contrast, does not feature the quartet at all, starting as a cadenza for timpani and percussion and ending in Bartókian flurries for harp and celesta.⁷

The title of the central *Andante tranquillo*, ‘Gli Ornamenti’ (The Ornaments) [8], immediately reveals something of what may be expected from it – long, wavering, elaborately decorated melodic lines, intricate and involute. At the outset they are presented as duets, one instrument doubling the other but two octaves below, alternating between the quartet and the woodwind. Gradually more instruments join in, intensifying the mood of ecstatic cantillation, in a kind of timeless, free-floating sublimation of Hungarian folksong, in a vast, quiet, imagined nocturnal landscape. Then the lines are broken up into fragments in the quartet and come together again in a different, much more agitated form, opening out to span the entire gamut of available pitches and then zeroing in so that a single line is played in rhythmic unison by the whole quartet. This fierce unison precipitates a climactic *Con moto, appassionato* section and then a return to the *tranquillo* mood of the opening. The cello has the last word, *quasi improvvisando*.

Veress calls the *Presto leggero* finale ‘Le Fanfare’ (The Fanfares) [9], but it seems to be a development of what I have called the toccata-like, repeated-note idiom used in the finale to Quartet No. 2. Again, too, there is the sense of a sublimated folk-dance, though yet further removed from mere reproduction of folk features. After an excited build-up shared between quartet and orchestra, the quartet launches out on its own with tremendous verve and energy and dominates the proceedings at an unflagging pace, the orchestra reduced to an accompaniment. Then the quartet falls silent and the orchestra takes up and runs with the material in its own way until the quartet re-enters, unexpectedly with a waltz-like *Poco allegretto*, a faint, brief whiff of nostalgia before the movement vanishes in a few soft taps from the percussion.

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Malcolm MacDonald is the author of the volume on Brahms in the ‘Master Musicians’ series (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2002). He has also written The Symphonies of Havergal Brian (three vols., Kahn & Averill, London, 1974, 1978 and 1983) and edited the first two volumes of Havergal Brian on Music (Toccata Press, London, 1985 and 2009); further volumes are in preparation. His other writings include books on John Foulds, Schoenberg, Ronald Stevenson and Edgard Varèse.

⁷ Veress seems here to allude to Bartók’s *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*.

based publishers Boosey & Hawkes at the same time as Bartók) – he again made his way back to Budapest, succeeding Kodály in 1943 as professor of composition at the Liszt Academy, where his pupils would include György Kurtág and György Ligeti.

After enduring first the Nazi occupation, then the Soviet ‘liberation,’ Veress experienced all the political ambiguities of the post-War coalition period including the final shift into a Stalinist dictatorship, triggered by the forced fusion of all left-wing parties under Communist leadership in 1948. He had joined the Communist Party already in 1945, partly as a tactical move to avoid harassment.² But the Zhdanovist attack in the USSR in 1948 on composers employing the methods of ‘western formalism’ was felt with equal force in the Soviet satellites.³ It was in that year that Veress composed an orchestral *Respublica Overture* and the mixed-voice chorus *In fury rose the ocean (Föltámadott a tenger)*, each inspired by the poetry of Sándor Petőfi and the Hungarian revolution against the Austrian Empire in 1848. These works, superficially ‘historical’ but celebrating an impulse of national republican independence inimical to Soviet hegemony, seem to have been composed in a spirit of provocation. That same year Veress visited Switzerland as a delegate to the International Folk Music Council in Basel where he made contact with Paul Sacher. In February 1949, on the eve of the Stalinist political show-trials in Hungary, he travelled to Stockholm via Prague for the premiere of *Térszli Katicza*, his second ballet with Milloss, and decided it would not be safe to return, even though he had just been awarded the Kossuth Prize.

Eventually, after some months in Rome and Milan (where he concluded a publishing agreement with Edizioni Suvini Zerboni), Veress accepted a visiting professorship at Bern University in Switzerland, from where he moved on to Bern Conservatory as a Professor of Composition. Here he introduced the Kodály method of solfège teaching and the study of folk-music; he also lectured on musical ethnology and music of the twentieth century as Professor at the University of Bern (1968–77). For over thirty years he was, according to some – notably his pupil and most consistent champion, Heinz Holliger – the most important teacher of composition in Switzerland, and his pupils included many of the leading personalities in Swiss music: Holliger, but also Theo Hirsbrunner, Heinz Marti, Roland Moser, Urs Peter Schneider and Jürg Wyttenbach. He also taught on visiting professorships in the USA, in Baltimore and Portland, Oregon; and in Adelaide, Australia.

² Cf. Claudio Veress, ‘Komponieren im Zeichen skeptischer Parteilichkeit,’ in Doris Lanz and Anselm Gerhard (eds.), *Sándor Veress, Komponist – Lehrer – Forscher*, Bärenreiter, Kassel, 2008, pp. 36–76 (especially pp. 41–45); and Rachel Beckles Willson, ‘Letters to America,’ in Friedemann Sallis, Robin Elliott and Kenneth Delong (eds.), *Centre and Periphery, Roots and Exile. Interpreting the music of István Anhalt, György Kurtág, and Sándor Veress*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo (Ontario), 2011, pp. 129–73 (especially pp. 129–38).

³ Danielle Fosler-Lussier’s *Music Divided: Bartók’s Legacy in the Cold War Culture* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2007) is informative on its effects on Hungarian musical life and the kind of pressure to which composers were subjected.

Yet, apparently, Veress's presence was resented by some of the German-Swiss musical establishment. For 42 years (1949–91), though working in Switzerland, he was stateless: 'he had I.D., but was classified as "without papers" (*Schriftenloser*)'.⁴ He spent his first five years in Switzerland attempting to emigrate to the USA, but his former membership of the Communist Party made that impossible. He was not accepted as a member of the principal Swiss association of professional musicians until 1974, and it took him decades to get Swiss naturalisation. (He could not obtain a Swiss passport because of a ruling that married couples had to become naturalised together, and Veress's English wife did not want to give up British citizenship.) Thus he faced bureaucratic difficulties whenever he wanted to travel outside of Switzerland, and was in fact never able to revisit Hungary. He had almost despaired of success against the Kafka-esque Swiss bureaucracy when Paul Sacher and Heinz Holliger intervened on his behalf (Holliger, for whom Veress had composed several works, wrote personally to the Federal President); eventually naturalisation was granted three months before Veress's death in Bern on 4 March 1992, after months of serious illness, at the age of 85.

Veress was a refined, fastidious composer, whose music shows a development of the principles of Bartók and was always infused by a more or less stylised sense of Hungarian folk-melody; on the other hand, he was one of the first Hungarian composers to adopt the twelve-note method and was constantly open to new musical developments. In his Swiss years he was able to adopt a more radical idiom than most of his contemporaries who had stayed in Hungary, taking what he wanted from the ideas of the younger *avant-garde* and leaving whatever he felt he did not need. Along with quite extraordinary powers of sonic and structural invention, rhythmic dynamism, focussed passion and sardonic wit there is sometimes a whiff of medieval scholasticism (in the best sense, as a means of preserving and exemplifying precious knowledge) about Veress's work and his attitude to it. Formal and motivic clarity remained absolute essentials for him, along with a sense of moral responsibility for every note.⁵ Above all, he seems to have been an absolutely dedicated artist committed to producing work of the highest quality, that had something original and personal to say without abandoning either the great compositional principles of western music from J. S. Bach onward, nor the fructifying and ever-refreshing influence of Hungarian folk-music.

Veress's output spans more than sixty years, and encompasses many genres, from opera and ballets to folksong arrangements and sonatas for unaccompanied string-instruments. There are songs for voice

⁴ Rachel Beckles Willson, 'A New Voice, A New 20th Century? An Experiment with Sándor Veress', *Tempo*, Vol. 64, No. 243, January 2008, p. 36.

⁵ 'One tone – that's nice. But the second ...!' (cf. <http://2007.musikfestivalbern.ch/main.php?mod=portrait>).



The opening of the Second String Quartet in Sándor Veress's manuscript
(Sándor Veress Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel)

In an extended development section, the music retreats into swirling mystery and the players come forward as individuals rather than a massed body. There are recitatives from viola and violin, and resonant chordal *glissandi* from the cello before a chorale-fragment leads into the *Prestissimo*, a fully developed fugue on a new version of the viola theme, which re-thinks the material of the toccata-like opening section in smaller note-values and turns it into a wild, Dionysiac closing dance.

Veress wrote no further string quartets, though the superb *Musica concertante* for twelve solo strings (1965–66) might be thought of as a triply expanded quartet. He did, however, write one major work featuring the quartet as a group of soloists: his **Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra** composed in Bern in 1960–61.

The string-quartet concerto seems to be an almost exclusively twentieth-century genre (though there is a much earlier example by Louis Spohr). Bohuslav Martinů may have initiated it with his *String Quartet with Orchestra* (1931), which like most of such works relates to attempts to imitate the Baroque *concerto grosso*, with the quartet playing the role of *concertino* to the orchestra's *ripieno*. In this connexion the prime exhibit is surely Schoenberg's 1933 Concerto after – increasingly distantly after, as the work progresses – Handel's *Concerto Grosso* in B flat, Op. 6, No. 7 (the only work in Handel's Op. 6 that does not, in fact, feature a concertino).⁶ Veress's Concerto also has concerto-grosso elements but encompasses much more in terms of formal and textural invention. Scored for double woodwind, two horns, two trumpets, one trombone, strings, timpani, harp, piano, celesta, xylophone and various unpitched percussion, it is a brilliantly inventive and often very witty work, which again explores concepts of compositional as well as instrumental virtuosity while seeming to test the limits of freedom within strictness, fantasy within order.

Freedom and strictness are the essence of the first movement, 'Le Cadenze' (The Cadenzas) [7], which opens *Molto allegro, risoluto* almost as a Cubist parody of Neoclassical, concerto-grosso style, the orchestra very emphatic, establishing a headlong rhythmic momentum, and the quartet playing not as individuals but as a solid block, note for note in rhythmic unison. But at the heart of the movement is a series of unbarred cadenzas for the quartet as individuals, each accompanied by a different set of instruments of the orchestra, which play in repeated patterns independent of the featured string instrument or instruments. Thus violin II, the first soloist, is combined with timpani and percussion, the viola with harp (deep in its register), percussion and orchestral violins), and violin I and cello, working as a duo – but becoming independent even of each other – have by far the longest cadenza and are accompanied by a kaleidoscopic series of different ensembles, starting with E-flat clarinet and percussion but later involving piano, celesta,

and piano or orchestra, and he even wrote a set of madrigals in English, to words by the Australian poet Christopher Brennan. His orchestral works include two symphonies, a *Sonata per orchestra* and a *Threnos in memoriam Béla Bartók*. There is a substantial body of *concertante* music, including works featuring solo piano, violin, clarinet and string quartet as well as the *Passacaglia concertante* for oboe and strings and *Tromboniade* for two trombones and orchestra, his last completed work (he was working on a flute concerto, the first movement of which was finished at the time of his death). There were chamber works for large or non-standard ensembles, such as *Musica concertante* for twelve strings and *Orbis tonorum* for ensemble, and major works for chorus and orchestra, notably *Sancti Augustini Psalmus* written in Budapest in the terrible last year of World War II and *Das Gasklängenspiel*. He also worked for several years on a large-scale Requiem in memory of President John F. Kennedy, which was never completed.

During the 1930s, which Veress characterised as his 'sonatina period' because he wrote so many examples of that genre, he admitted to being influenced not only by Bartók and Kodály but also by the contrapuntal mastery of Hindemith and the harmonic colour-sense of Debussy; and, beyond those near-contemporaries, the great exemplars of Bach and Beethoven. His two string quartets are perhaps the major chamber works of this period, dating from 1931 and 1937 respectively. Although this period was when he was most intensively engaged in folksong collecting, the folk-impulse coexists in them alongside decidedly modernist tendencies, especially in intense dissonance.

String Quartet No. 1, composed in 1930–31 when he was 23 and completed in Budapest in January of the latter year, but not published until 1953, was among the earliest works that Veress acknowledged. Listening to this brilliantly virtuosic yet harmonically uncompromising piece one can hardly fail to be reminded of aspects of Bartók's Third (1927) and Fourth (1928) Quartets – obvious influences, and yet ones that Veress does not follow slavishly. There is no overall key, though the repeated pitch G at the start of the first-movement *Presto* has implications for the finale, where G seems more obviously a centre: instead, the work is unified by a 'composition set' that is not a twelve-tone row, though it encompasses, with some pitch-repetition, all twelve notes of the chromatic scale. It furnishes, rather, melodic and motivic shapes, closely related to one another, that extend throughout the three movements.

The first movement [1] opens with a *Rubato, quasi recitativo* introduction, introducing violin I, viola and cello in turn, before launching into a mercurial and aggressive *Presto*, in constantly shifting metres, characterised by busy repeated notes, in which the players are urged to exaggerate the dynamic contrasts. The repeated-note pulse persists under a longer-breathed idea from violin II, moving within a narrow compass and using Bartók's technique of filling in the chromatic notes missing from one phrase in the next. This passage forms a transition to a very quiet and more lyrical *Poco quieto*, initiated by the viola,

⁶ Other notable concertos for string quartet include those by Benjamin Lees (1964), Gunther Schuller (1988), Wolfgang Rihm (*Morphonie*, 1972) and Vagn Holmboe (for string quartet and string orchestra: his last work, 1995–96).

which seems to be the true ‘second subject’ of this design. The music stabilises on a pedal D in the cello, which instrument then leads off a development section at the *Presto* tempo with what seems to be the subject of a fugue. In fact it is not, but the instruments enter one by one, in fugal style, each with their personal variant, and build up a texture of daunting contrapuntal complexity. This prodigious polyphony drives to an *fff* climax and then subsides into a much-varied reprise of the original *Presto* music. The *Poco quieto* returns, also in varied form, and leads into a brief, almost laconic coda in which violin I alludes to its solo at the beginning of the movement.

The *Andante* slow movement [2], which more obviously takes D as its tonal centre, is in a clear ternary form. The opening section presents each instrument in turn, beginning with violin I, with its own version of a lyrical, chromatically inward-turned melody derived from the ‘composition set’; the accompaniment, a little chromatic ostinato in detached notes, is equally important, as each instrument joins in with it after its solo. The central section is warmer, in a freely floating polyphonic texture that makes subtle use of canon. The return to the first section is heralded by the accompaniment figure in *pizzicato*, with the expressive solos led off by the cello. Violin I adds plangent comments, and the movement fades out as a duet between violin I, *pizzicato*, and lyric cello.

The *Vivace* finale [3] is a breathtakingly energetic movement with occasional hints of folk-fiddling but also the widest range of textures and playing techniques in the work, not to mention the Bartókian obsession of the opening subject, with lines moving in contrary motion, an idea that generates some substantial episodes later in the movement. With aspects of both sonata and rondo forms, the movement is full of vibrantly contrasting music and a plethora of themes, still derived from the basic set. At one point, in a gesture that recalls the first-movement development, the viola propounds what seems to be an obvious fugue theme, only to have the other instruments join in one by one with more or less distantly related ideas, creating a free polyphonic texture. The fun gets faster and more furious with the *Vivacissimo* coda that begins over a repeated G in the cello: G has been attracting a gravitational pull at various points in the movement, and the emphatic final bars end on a triumphant chord (though not a triad) of G.

String Quartet No. 1 was performed by the Hungarian Quartet (led by Sándor Végh) at the 1935 Festival of the ISCM in Prague, and **String Quartet No. 2**, composed in November 1936–March 1937, was given its world premiere by the New Hungarian Quartet (in which Végh literally played second fiddle to Zoltán Székely) at the 1937 ISCM Festival, which took place as part of the World Fair in Paris. The latter event, especially, brought Veress international recognition as a leading Hungarian composer, and with this work he felt he had achieved a truly personal idiom. Certainly, although there is a palpable kinship of expression and technique with the Quartet No. 1, No. 2 is even bolder in bringing together a wide range

of contrasting ideas, exhibiting a ceaseless compositional virtuosity along with the virtuoso playing it demands of its performers.

This time there is no introduction: the *Allegro* first movement [4] begins immediately with the permutation and proliferation of a serpentine chromatic motif, a gruff snatch of tune from the cello, and a sweeter melodic idea from violin I over the sort of pulsing quaver pedal (cello again) familiar from Quartet No. 1. The serpentine figure then twists in a convulsive unison, leading straight into a highly contrapuntal four-voice texture, the instruments all in close canon. These elements, all so rapidly introduced, are developed and shuffled until the arrival of a slightly macabre ‘folk-like’ episode, centred on a nagging dactylic rhythm in the viola before the music splits into shards and fragments. And so it continues, Veress continually seeming to introduce new ideas with remarkable freedom and spontaneity while at the same time recurring to, varying and modifying those already heard. Towards the end of the movement there is an extended, somewhat slower episode where the cello plays metrically independently of the other players, while violin I has an invention in almost gypsy fiddling style. In the coda the close canonic music returns, as does the serpentine motif, but it is the cello theme from the opening that has the last word, now transferred to violin I.

The deeply elegiac slow movement [5], an altogether more complex conception than the equivalent movement in Quartet No. 1, does have a scene-setting introduction, *Andante*, before the principal *Adagio* tempo is reached. There are two main themes, the first a lament that rises and falls low in the register of violin I, the second more like a folksong, first heard in violin II in a serenade-like *Poco Andante* episode. Elements of the introduction are developed, too. The whole movement is like a melancholic nocturne in which tears, passionate appeals and sighs can all be heard at different points. At the centre is a fantastic passage of free polyphony, somewhat reminiscent of Bartók’s ‘Night Music’ style, in which the four instruments play almost independently of one another in floridly decorated melismatic lines. The serenade-like episode returns, much changed in texture, and the movement eventually dissolves hauntingly into silence.

The whirlwind finale [6], which starts *Presto* and ends *Prestissimo*, might be characterised as a kind of toccata for string quartet, full of percussive repeated-note figures and daunting demands on playing technique. The thematic material, at first, seems to be little more than modally inflected rising and falling scales, and the rapid quaver-pulse is virtually unvaried. A better-defined viola theme will have fugal repercussions later on. Veress’s taste for the fantastic and surreally witty comes to the fore as the movement careers on its way, as fractured references to folk-fiddling collide with fierce dissonance, canonic writing, melodic inversions and rich chromaticism. Fugal entries presage the nature of the concluding *Prestissimo*.