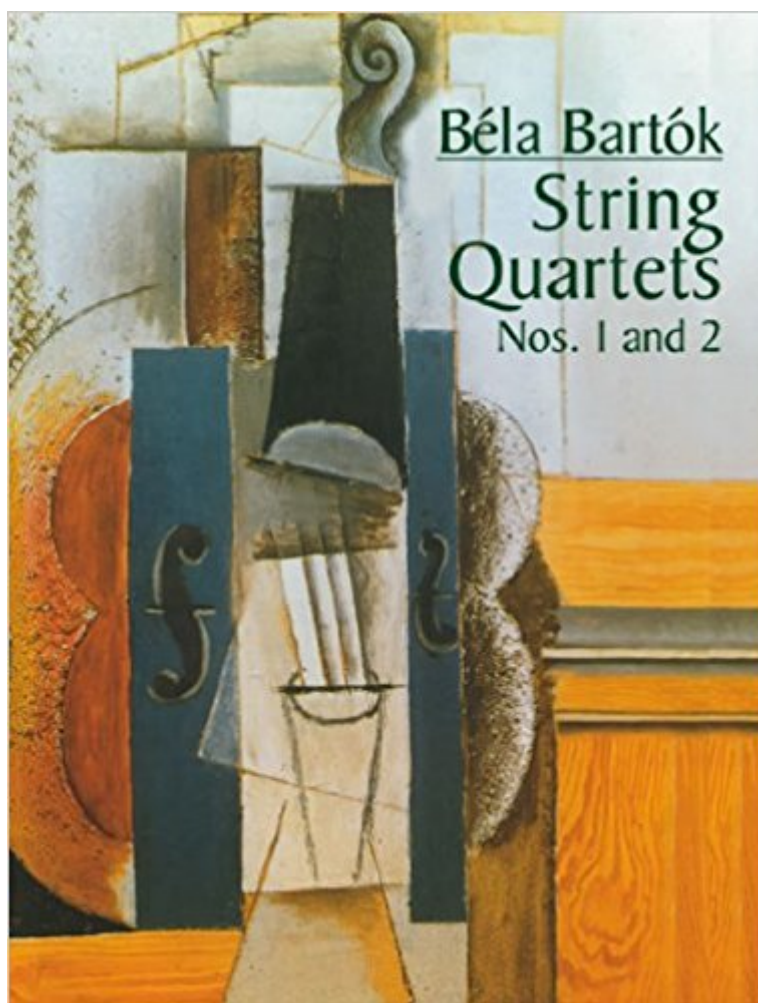


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Acclaimed as the most important quartets since Beethoven, the six string quartets of Béla Bartók offer a summation of the composer's compositional style and development, and they constitute one of the great monuments of twentieth-century music. This outstanding new volume unites the first two of Bartók's chamber masterpieces. The stirring first quartet, written in 1908, captures the composer's great stylistic rebirth, as the intense Romanticism of the opening movement gives way to a propulsive finale reflecting the composer's growing interest in Hungarian folk music. The second quartet, written during World War I, finds Bartók's creativity unimpeded by wartime privations. The three-movement work echoes the meditative qualities of the first quartet in its outer movements, but its lively central movement suggests the traditional music of North Africa. A combination of boldly disparate influences, it remains a work of astonishing force and originality.

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