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# Bartok's Quartets Mixed With a Dose of Indie Rock

By VIVIEN SCHWEITZER

Bartok primarily wrote instrumental music, with a large catalog that features relatively few vocal selections. But his instrumental pieces owe a substantial debt to the voice, with inflections of his native Hungarian woven throughout works like his fourth string quartet.

[The Calder Quartet](#), an adventurous group founded in 1998 at the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California, is focusing on Bartok's quartets this season at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, accompanied by guest artists to highlight the connections between the quartets and vocal music.

On Friday evening in the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium, the ensemble was joined by David Longstreth, founder of the indie rock [band Dirty Projectors](#), for a program that opened with Bartok's String Quartets No. 3 and No. 4. Bartok undertook substantial research into local folk-music traditions, translating the findings in his daring set of six quartets.

The Calder Quartet performed No. 3 and No. 4 with flair, its lean, tightly wrought sound and impeccable ensemble work illuminating the intricacies and enduring strangeness of the pieces. In the [fourth quartet](#), Bartok incorporates a remarkable range of timbral effects like tremolos and glissandos, abandoning any vestige of traditional idioms for a startlingly modernist style. With this work, he escaped what he once [described as the "tyranny of major-minor"](#) Germanic music.

Mr. Longstreth's somewhat off-kilter, unpredictable voice, stretched languidly over ambiguous harmonies on his guitar, seemed an ideal vocal alter ego for Bartok's modal string writing. Standing against a projection of what appeared to be the gardens of Fontainebleau (whose classical forms were perhaps a reference to his collaboration with a string quartet), Mr. Longstreth sang alluringly in Dirty Projectors songs like the solo "This Weather," whose opening line — "When I start to feel this way" — unfolded enigmatically over gentle chords. The lineup also included the band's ["Swing Lo Magellan."](#)

The Calder musicians, sitting to the right of the stage like a backup band, joined him for Dirty Projectors selections like ["While You're Here,"](#) with its intense Beethovenian string opening. In

other songs, however, the string parts of Mr. Longstreth's arrangements didn't always match the interest and breadth of his vocal writing.

*The next concert in the Calder Quartet series is on Nov. 22 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; metmuseum.org.*



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