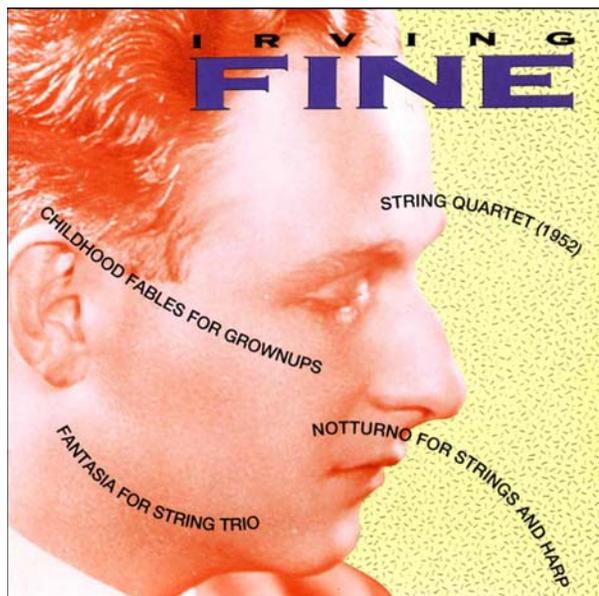


Irving Fine



String Quartet (1952) (18:41)

1. Allegro risoluto (7:44)
2. Lento (10:52)

The Juilliard String Quartet: (Robert Mann, Robert Koff, violins; Raphael Hillyer, viola; Arthur Winograd, cello)

Notturmo for harp and strings (1950-51) (15:44)

3. I. Lento (6:48)
4. II. Animato (2:22)

5. III. Adagio (6:29)
Janet Lynn Hill, viola; Alyssa Hess, harp;
members of the Brooklyn Philharmonic;
Lukas Foss, conductor

Childhood Fables for Grownups, Sets 1 and 2

Set 1 (1954)..... (6:52)

6. I. Polari, dedicated to Arther Berger (1:34)
7. II. Tigerroo, dedicated to Harold Shapero . (1:16)
8. III. Lenny the Leopard,
dedicated to Leonard Bernstein (2:33)
9. IV. The Frog and the Snake,
dedicated to Lukas Foss (1:15)

Set 2 (1955)..... (6:23)

10. I. Two Worms, dedicated to Arthur Cohn (3:19)
11. II. The Duck and the Yak,
dedicated to Alexei Haieff (2:56)
Susan Davenny Wyner, soprano; Yehudi
Wyner, piano

Fantasia for string trio (13:52)

12. I. Adagio ma non troppo (3:16)
13. II. Scherzo: Allegro
molto ritmico (5:46)
14. III. Lento assai tranquillo (4:40)
Linda Quan, violin; Lois Martin, viola;
Chris Finckel, cello

Total playing time: 61:45

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Notes

Irving Fine wrote a collection of graceful, eloquent, exquisitely crafted compositions that can legitimately be called “beautiful.” This new CRI compact disc reissue restores four of them to the catalogue.

Fine’s mature work might be described as a particularly Romantic neo-Classicism. In lieu of the desiccated brittleness that typifies much American work in the neo-Classical genre, we find in Fine’s music a lush, heartfelt, and seemingly spontaneous lyricism that always remains within the formal boundaries the composer has set for himself.

The late critic David Ewen put it well in his book *American Composers: a Biographical Dictionary*, “The best of [Fine’s compositions] are of the highest standards in craftsmanship, creative imagination, and in the realization of a personalized style. He started out as a neo-Classicalist, digressed into the twelve-tone system, which he bent to his own artistic needs, and finally, fashioned a mature style, rich in cohesive melodic, polyphonic, and rhythmic invention.”

Irving Gifford Fine was born on December 3, 1914 in Boston; he died there forty-seven years later on August 23, 1962 at Beth Israel Hospital of a sudden heart attack. He studied composition at Harvard with Edward Burlingame Hill and Walter Piston; he then worked with Nadia Boulanger in Cambridge and Paris. He also studied orchestral conducting under Serge Koussevitsky at Tanglewood.

From 1939 to 1950, Fine taught at Harvard; thereafter, he was a professor of music at Brandeis School of Creative Arts. His honors include two Guggenheim Fellowships, a Fulbright Research Fellowship for France and an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters; he received commissions from the Ford Foundation, Louisville Orchestra, Library of Congress, League of Composers, and others.

Fine’s active career was a relatively short one—only two decades separate the *Alice in Wonderland* choruses (1942) that brought him to public attention, from the Symphony (1962), his last and most ambitious work, which he conducted at Tanglewood only eleven days before his death. The works on this disc, some of Fine’s most affecting and representative, were all composed within a particularly fruitful five-year period in the early 1950s.

The earliest of them is *Notturmo* (1951), a placid, singularly lovely serenade in three thematically connected movements for viola, harp, and string ensemble. It was first performed in Boston on March 28, 1951, by the Zimble String Sinfonietta (made up of players in the Boston Symphony Orchestra, with whom Fine enjoyed a close association for much of his career). According to the original program notes, *Notturmo* aims at “a certain romantic effect and perhaps it may not be too far-fetched to imagine its overall character as a blend of Chopin and Mozart expressed in present-day idiom.” It may

be Fine's most beloved work; certainly it is among his most played.

The Quartet was written in the spring of 1952, sponsored by a commission from the Koussevitzky Foundation. It is a work in two movements, each of which, as the composer himself noted, is "essentially tripartite" in form. The work was first performed by the Juilliard String Quartet on February 18, 1953 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

"This is the first work in which I have employed the twelve-tone technique with some consistency," Fine wrote in his liner notes to the Columbia record on which this performance was initially released. "While all of the melodic material, the harmonies and the figuration have been generated by the 'row,' the use of the 'row' technique is fairly free; and the work as a whole is frankly tonal, C being the prevailing tonality."

The *Childhood Fables for Grownups* were inspired by Fine's friendship with the poet Gertrude Norman, whom he met during one of the several summers he spent at the MacDowell colony. These terse, charming, and multi-faceted songs were written in two sets, the first of them (1954) commissioned by the Juilliard School for its fiftieth anniversary; the second (subtitled *Two Arias for Medium Voice and Piano*) composed in 1955. The songs are regularly performed, both individually and as sets.

Fine dedicated each of these songs to a different composer-friend, and, according to his widow Verna Fine, dedications, verses, and music are interrelated. This listener finds an extra musical fascination in the knowledge that *Polari* was dedicated to Arthur Berger, *Tigeroo* to Harold Shapero; *Lenny the Leopard* to Leonard Bernstein; the *Frog and the Snake* to Lukas Foss; *Two Worms* to Arthur Cohn and the *Duck and the Yak* to Alexei Haieff. Whatever messages Fine may have been sending to his illustrious friends must remain open to speculation.

The disc closes with the *Fantasia* for string trio, a work dating from 1957. When it was first performed at the University of Illinois, Fine provided the following program notes: "The *Fantasia* for string trio is a composition in three connecting

movements. The first is a kind of fugato and is lyrical in character. The second is a Scherzo, fairly extended and developed but without formal recapitulation or contrasting trio. The third, of more varied character, opens with a freely imitative section followed by a rhapsodic or declamatory middle section and concludes with the same quiet reflective quality of its (the Lento's) beginning. All of the melodic and much of the harmonic material of the entire work derive from the opening statement by the viola at the beginning of the first movement."

Three decades on, there is not much for a commentator to add, except to note the care with which *Fantasia* is fashioned, the idiomatic writing for the strings, and the patrician sweetness of the discourse.

"To my mind his outstanding quality was his musical sensitivity—he had an ear that one could trust." Aaron Copland wrote shortly after Fine's death. "His students and his fellow composers depended on him to tell the truth about their music, and in the sureness and rightness of his judgment we recognized ourselves. The loss of that kind of instinctive musicianship cannot be replaced."

"This sureness of musical instinct informed his every activity, as composer and teacher and performer," Copland went on. "He worried considerably about each new work in the process of composition. And yet, when we came to know them, they had elegance, style, finish, and a convincing continuity. . . . All his compositions, from the lightest to the most serious 'sound,' they have bounce and trust and finesse; they are always a musical pleasure to hear.... There is intensity and movement in all his music, and sometimes a surprising pathos, yet one is always aware of the craftsmanship that shapes the composition with a sure hand."

Elegance, intensity, movement, and pathos—all of these words unquestionably apply to Irving Fine. But Copland had the accent right when he emphasized the pleasure that Fine's music provides. It is genuine, it is essential, and it is undiminished.

—Tim Page

Production Notes

String Quartet (1952) - Published by Boosey & Hawkes (ASCAP)

Notturmo for harp and strings (1950-51) - Published by Boosey & Hawkes (ASCAP)
Recorded by David Hancock at the Church of the Holy Trinity, NYC, March 20, 1981
Producer: Carter Harman

Childhood Fables for Grownups - Published by Boosey & Hawkes (ASCAP)
Recorded by David Hancock at the Church of the Holy Trinity, NYC, March, 1981
Producer: Carter Harman

Fantasia for string trio - Published by Boosey & Hawkes (ASCAP)
Recorded by David Hancock at the Church of the Holy Trinity, NYC, March 4, 1980
Producer: Carter Harman

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