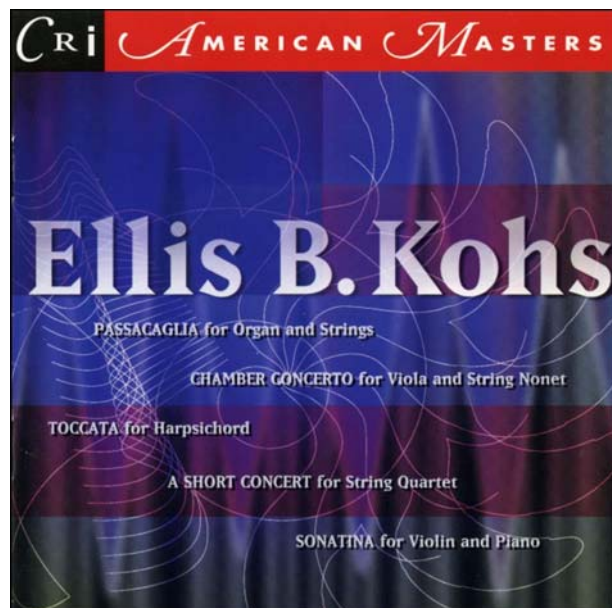


NWCR795

# Ellis B. Kohs

## Music for Keyboards and Strings



1. Passacaglia for Organ and Strings, K. 11 (1946) (6:24)  
Maija Lehtonen, organ; Manfred Gräsbeck, conductor

### Chamber Concerto for Viola and String

2. I Moderato molto energico ..... (7:08)
3. II Scherzo: vivace ..... (5:46)

4. III Andante cantando ..... (7:30)  
Ferenc Molnar, solo viola; Robert Mann, Robert Koff, F. Chaplin, Ralph Shapey, violins; Raphael Hillyer, S. Paeff, violas; C.C. McCracken, C. Ziegler, cello; Stuart Sankey, bass
  5. Toccata for Harpsichord or Piano, K. 25 (1948) . (7:02)  
Lionel Slater, harpsichord
- A Short Concert* for String Quartet  
(String Quartet No. 2) K. 28 (1948) ..... (25:43)
6. I Sonata ..... (9:49)
  7. II Forlane ..... (1:31)
  8. III Waltz ..... (1:44)
  9. IV Sarabande ..... (2:07)
  10. V Farce ..... (0:44)
  11. VI Gigue ..... (2:17)
  12. VII Dreams: Recollections ..... (7:30)  
Eudice Shapiro, violin I; Nathan Ross, violin II;  
Sanford Schonbach, viola; Gabor Rejto, cello
- Sonatina for Violin and Piano, K. 26 (1946-48) .. (11:32)
13. I. [Allegro] Quarter note = 126 ..... (2:51)
  14. II. [Slow] Theme and Variations ..... (5:17)
  15. III. [Vivo] Quarter note = (120) ..... (3:24)  
Eudice Shapiro, violin; Albert Dominguez, piano

Total playing time: 71:40

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## Notes

The Passacaglia for Organ and Strings, K. 11 (1946) was commissioned for a CBS radio network broadcast by noted organist E. Power Biggs and members of the Boston Symphony directed by William Strickland, from the Germanic Museum at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts and was performed again several times by Mr. Biggs with the Fiedler Sinfonietta on CBS. It was chosen for performance at a John F. Kennedy Memorial Concert at Christ Church Cathedral, St. Louis, along with works by Piston (Kohs's professor at Harvard), Poulenc, and Mozart (the Requiem Mass), in 1965.

The first of Kohs's compositions to employ serial techniques, these techniques are combined with tonal procedures so as to make the work, in effect, in the key of E-flat. Other unusual features include the embellishment of the tones in the "row" by passing-tones, etc., and the "theme" itself appears only after a few introductory variations.

The Chamber Concerto for Viola and String Nonet, K. 28 was composed for the first viola of San Francisco Symphony, Ferenc Molnar, during the tenure of Pierre Monteux as music director. The work was first recorded by Columbia Records in a pairing with Aaron Copland's Sextet for String Quartet, Clarinet and Piano. Members of the original Juilliard String Quartet were featured in both works.

Following its premiere in Berkeley, California, with members of the San Francisco Symphony, it has been performed with full string sections of symphony orchestras in New York,

Philadelphia, and Dallas in the United States, and in Europe by radio orchestras in Brussels, Frankfurt am Main and Norway. In the *New York Herald Tribune* Virgil Thomson called it a "meaty neo-classic work" with a "dignified and cohesive shape...every measure of it filled with music."

The first movement opens with the soloist at once, without introduction. Following a contrapuntal working-out, a bridge leads to lyrical second theme in which the solo is accompanied by the other strings, pizzicato. A brief cadenza and retransition lead to a modified recapitulation and codetta.

There are four principal sections in the second movement (scherzo). Following a rather brusque opening, the mood changes to leisurely, gracious, and this, in turn, to an even slower and sentimental sensibility. The opening section returns and leads to a coda based upon the two middle sections.

The slow finale is a species of variation. Solo viola first is accompanied by pizzicato chords. Variation I is a quasi-chorale with the theme in the violins, solo viola entering at mid-point. Later, the solo viola weaves a line around the nonet. The final variation is like the first but is slightly extended, and closes in an ambiguous tonality that suggests C (because of the bass) or E (because of the repeated E-based chords).

Written for Viennese harpsichordist Yella Pessl, founder of the New York Bach Circle, while associated with Columbia University, the Toccata for Harpsichord or Piano, K. 25 (1948) was never performed by her. The work was premiered

by pianist Evelyn Garvey at an all-Kohs concert at Ball State Teachers College, Muncie, Indiana in 1948. There have been other performances at various American music festivals, and also by Lionel Salter on the BBC in London in 1971.

The *Washington Post* music critic Paul Hume described the Toccata as “a proud guide to the Baroque...an excursion that includes a gigue, a fugue, ornamental trills and a rousing chorale finale.”

A *Short Concert* for String Quartet (String Quartet No. 2), K. 28, composed during the last months of 1948, while Kohs was completing his first year as faculty member of the Music Conservatory of College of the Pacific, Stockton, California, was written for (but never performed by) the Walden Quartet, and dedicated to John Garvey, its violist. The premiere performances were given by the Paganini String Quartet, headed by Henri Temianka at Brigham University, Provo, Utah, a year earlier in 1953; at McMillan Theater, Columbia University in 1954, and again at the University of Michigan First Contemporary Music Festival in 1954.

The quartet is regarded by me as an autobiography. If it is unlike Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* [A Hero's Life], perhaps it may resemble Proust in his recollections. The quartet begins with youthful vigor, continues with various mid-life experiences, and closes with a finale of remembered musical events, such as one might expect from a musician in later years, perhaps comparable to the ending of Strauss's *Don Juan*—with a taste of bitterness.

The *New York Times* review of the initial CRI release, on LP, described the Quartet as “more or less neo-classic” in style, “most satisfactory in its elegance and poise, in its ability to avoid the cute or cheap when being playful, in its haunting final section, with its shadowy overlay of musical quotations—a dreamlike sequence that the composer has indicated might be musically autobiographical.”

There are seven movements, the relatively longer outer movements enclosing a suite-like inner group of mostly short, contrasting dances.

The Sonatina for Violin and Piano, K. 26 (1946–48):

My first Sonata was written for Samuel Dushkin, Stravinsky's recital companion when on tour, premiered by him in Carnegie Recital Hall, 1948 and repeated by him in the main hall at a League of Composers concert, in conjunction with radio station WNYC's 1948 American Music Festival. Among the many subsequent performances were those by Louis and Annette Kaufman in Los Angeles (1959), Manuel and Sara Compinsky, concertmaster of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Sigmund Efron, and his wife Babetta.

In three closely related movements, the first and last are lively and suggestive of Milhaud's adopted Latinisms. The slow middle movement is a blues featuring major-minor triad clashes, leading without interruption to the finale in which there is a brief recall of the harsh blues. The ending is happy and optimistic.

—*Ellis B. Kohs*

**Ellis B. Kohs** (1916–2000), a former member of the USC Theory-Composition Department, and for many years its chair, had his early musical training at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Institute of Musical Art at the Juilliard Graduate School in New York, University of Chicago (M.A. 1938), and Harvard University where he studied with Walter Piston in composition and with Hugo

Leichtentritt and Willi Apel in musicology. He served on the faculties of the University of Wisconsin (summer only), Stanford (summer only), Kansas City Conservatory (summer only), Wesleyan University (1946-48), College of the Pacific (1948-50), and at USC.

His three textbooks, which grew out of his teaching, *Musical Theory* (Oxford University Press), *Musical Form* (Houghton Mifflin), and *Musical Composition* (Scarecrow Press), have been widely adopted. Some of his major works were written in response to commissions from,

inter alia, Pierre Monteux, E. Power Biggs, the Fromm Foundation, and USC (for whose centennial Kohs's Violin concerto was composed and performed by the USC Symphony under Daniel Lewis, with Eudice Shapiro, soloist). Major biographical data are included in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, (Nicolas Slonimsky, ed., Schirmer Books, 1986) and in *American Composers*, by David Ewen (Putnam, 1982).

For the listener unfamiliar with the music of Ellis Kohs, the following observations by music critics and historians may be of some interest:

“Recognition came to Kohs when his one-movement Concerto for Orchestra was performed at the 1942 Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in San Francisco. [Later works display the] rhythmic vitality and...the ‘exuberant musicalness’ that Kohs brings to all his compositions.”

—*Gilbert Chase, America's Music*,  
McGraw-Hill, 1955.

“By the mid-1950s, Kohs had evolved the style that would henceforth identify his music. It is harmonically dissonant, largely contrapuntal, and employs Bartókian asymmetric rhythms and variable meters, the structure is clearly defined and the texture pellucid. For the most part, his writing generates power but it also is capable of meditative repose and lyrical eloquence. When, on occasion, he employs the twelve-tone system, he modifies it radically to meet the demands of the composition at hand, often using the row as a motivically unifying element.”

—*David Ewen, American Composers*,  
G.P. Putnam, 1982

“In [Kohs's] work there was, above all, a close affinity to the neobaroque aesthetic of Hindemith...one typically found long, lively, chromatic lines; forms like the passacaglia and the toccata; and the two-and-three-part counterpoint every bit as dissonant as Hindemith at his most acerbic.”

—*Howard Pollack, Harvard Composers*,  
Scarecrow Press, 1992

“Kohs is a survivor...a quiet, reassuring constant, untouched by the changing of the avant-garde. A tower of the academic community and a composer of considerable scope and eloquence...an authoritative, sobering influence in an increasingly giddy profession...an innovator who knows how far he wants to go, and how to get there...an essential romantic in modernist clothing...[He] in variably capitalizes on the effect of orderly urgency.”

—*Martin Bernheimer, Los Angeles Times*,  
on the occasion of Kohs's 65<sup>th</sup>  
Birthday Celebration Concert,  
University of Southern California

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## Production Notes

CD Mastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Robert Wolff, engineer at Sony Music Studios, NYC.

This recording of Toccata for Harpsichord or Piano is originally from a European premiere over the BBC, October 1971.

Toccata for Harpsichord or Piano and Sonatina for Violin and Piano: Digitally transferred by Adrian Carr at Adrian Carr Studio Designs, NYC 1998.

From CRI SD 176:

*A Short Concert* for String Quartet, Recorded 1963.

From Columbia ML 4492:

Chamber Concerto, originally released in 1953. Under license from Sony Classical, a division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.

Publishing:

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