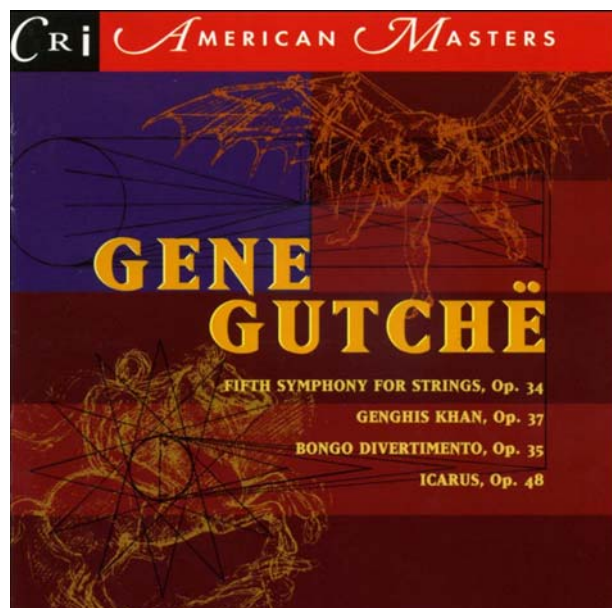


Gene Gutchë



- Icarus*, Op. 48 (1975) (25:09)
1. I. Cristóbal Colón (6:22)
 2. II. The Sea (6:37)
 3. III. Insurrection (4:56)

4. IV. Isthmus (7:14)
Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra; David Zinman, conductor
 5. *Genghis Khan*, Op. 37 (1963) (8:59)
Louisville Orchestra; Jorge Mester, conductor
 - Bongo Divertimento*, Op. 35 (1962) (12:07)
 6. I. Rondo (2:49)
 7. II. Perpetuo (1:53)
 8. III. Pettifoggery (2:43)
 9. IV. Bluebottle Fly (1:21)
 10. V. Pasticcio (1:09)
 11. VI. Magpie (0:34)
 12. VII. Rondo (finale) (1:38)
Marvin Dahlgren, percussion; Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra; Leopold Sipe, conductor
 - Fifth Symphony for Strings Op. 34* (1962) (18:14)
 13. I. Quarter note = 96 (6:23)
 14. II. Burletta (3:16)
 15. III. Mesto (4:17)
 16. IV. Lesto (agile, nimble, quick) (4:18)
Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra; Max Rudolf, conductor
- Total Playing Time: 64:29
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Notes

An Elder Statesman Among Minnesota Composers

"I like to think that in each of us a greatness resides...music is a reflection of what we are, and in this sense we, as artists and composers, herald the quality of greatness which is in all mankind."

—*Gene Gutchë*

Is this a cautionary tale to parents whose children are determined to be involved in the arts? In the case of **Gene Gutchë** (*b* 1907; *d* 2000), the proffered opinion of the estimable European pianist/composer Ferruccio Busoni confirmed this young boy's gift, but his parents were unwilling. If a Cliburn or a Copland were to tell you that your kid had musical talent and should be encouraged, would you say 'no' to advanced lessons? I mean, these days we'd send the child to a State High School for the Arts, wouldn't we? The story follows.

"Gene" Gutchë [Romeo Maximilian Eugene Ludwig Gutschë] was born in Berlin, Germany, on 3 July 1907. He has been resident in the United States since 1925, and for the past four decades has lived in White Bear Lake, MN. What brought him to this country, and why was he in his forties before his compositions first began to be heard?

In a story as old as music history (and not unlike the father-son scenarios of Handel and Telemann, for instance) Gutchë's father, a well-to-do European businessman, was not amused by the notion of his son "wasting" himself on music. An eventual truce was reached to make possible piano lessons with Busoni, but Gene also pursued business, philosophy, and linguistics studies at the Universities of Heidelberg, Lausanne, and Padua. However, his heart was elsewhere.

In 1925 at age eighteen, Gene cut loose from the parental leash, left his German homeland—forsaking a sizable inheritance in the process—and followed his muse, as far away from home as possible. Since an uncle was a priest in Minnesota, Gutchë came to the United States, arriving at Galveston, Texas, with little of either money or practical experience, and few prospects. For the better part of a year he wandered through the heart of America, earning his keep by working at various odd jobs, including migratory grain harvesting and piano teaching. He finally got to Minnesota, only to discover that his uncle had been reassigned to Canada. Nonetheless, Gene's piano playing attracted some local patrons and he chose to settle in the Twin Cities. Soon afterwards, he began composition studies with Donald N. Ferguson at the University of Minnesota. And he married.

Still struggling with the demon 'practicality,' Gene and his young wife Marion moved to New York City in 1935, where his early business training and innate linguistic ability stood him in good stead. But his heart yearned to compose, and after eight years of variously successful employment adventures, he returned to Minnesota. Marion got a day job and Gene studied composition in a graduate program at the University of Minnesota under Dr. Ferguson and James Aliferis. By special dispensation, he also attended Minneapolis Symphony rehearsals under Mitropoulos and Dorati, a very special sort of classroom.

In 1950 Gutchë received his master's degree in music from the University of Minnesota (with a First Symphony and Third String Quartet as his theses) and three years later earned a doctorate at the University of Iowa under Philip Greeley

Clapp (with a Third Symphony and *Asymmetric Ballet*). By the middle 1950s, his compositions were being performed with increasing frequency in the midwest, and soon were gaining added national and international recognition in the form of prizes and awards. Principal among his works are six symphonies, three piano sonatas, five concerti, four string quartets, and more than a dozen programmatic orchestral scores. Conductors from Stokowski to Schippers to Skrowaczewski, and ensembles such as the Fine Arts, Composers, and Lark String Quartets have been advocates of Gutché's music. His magnum opus, an hour-long symphony *Akhenaten* (Op. 51, No. 2, scored for orchestra, tenor soloist and large chorus), was premiered by Leonard Slatkin and the Saint Louis Symphony in 1983.

"Humanity is a deep well. The artist throws a pebble into the well. Despairingly he turns when, suddenly, he hears the splash. So our artists in the creation of a culture search for a response in the deep well of the American people."

—G. G.

Gene's notoriety came relatively late in life. He has pursued his special path with single-minded and meticulous determination, has not followed trends, taught students, or joined composer alliances. If the politics of art or the smile of fortune have not been on his side consistently, Gene has had his share of moments in the light and does not complain. Indeed, in the 1960s, '70s and early '80s, hardly a year passed without a new Gutché work being played somewhere. Prizes were won, commissions offered, and recordings and broadcasts made. Some of that legacy is on display here.

But now the pen has been set aside. After more than forty years of writing, and sixty-four years of marriage, Gene and Marion (his dauntless wife, business manager, proofreader, part-writer, and devoted soulmate) continue in their modest cottage near the south shore of White Bear Lake, enjoying their garden, rejoicing in the bounty of nature and the blessing of friends, and reflecting on the amazing life journey they have shared.

"Every artist is compelled to egomania, a delusion of grandeur, which hypnotizes him to express his ideas in a grand manner."

—G. G.

This music is grand, and it does hypnotize. It is persuasive, powerful, even awe-inspiring, yet also poetic and nourishing. The inquisitive and attentive listener will be rewarded with a soul-warming, life-affirming experience.

—Michael Barone

The following notes are derived from the composer's texts and the original, largely unattributed LP album annotations:

Icarus, Op. 48

Icarus, Op. 48, is a programmatic suite divided into four movements. Two melodic subjects only serve as principal theme: the "Columbus Motif" and a paraphrase of "America the Beautiful." The latter enters with the fourth movement, while the first is the dominant subject throughout. In this suite, the Icarus myth is treated freely and should only be regarded as symbolic. In essence, Columbus, a seafaring adventurer, measures his wits against the sea and comes to grips with his rebellious men. Countering these obstacles is the promise of a vast new continent.

The music is austere and assumes a raw physical power. Power can mean many things. Wealth is power. Position can direct our lives. Ideologies have destroyed civilizations. Today we need the strength which Columbus implanted into our new world. It is the strength Washington/Lincoln/Ken-

nedy possessed...a deliberate aim to set all men free. By this means we become powerful.

I don't know about you, but I love this country. Tolerate everything. Dismiss the doubt. Accept. Overlook. Break many cups. In compassion is joy.

One of these days our earth shall be likened to the moon. When that happens, another Icarus will rise and take us to a new star.

Genghis Khan, Op. 37

The orchestral piece *Genghis Khan*, Op. 37, dates from a productive and rewarding period of the early 1960s. It is scored for a full complement of winds (in threes), brass, and percussion, but dispenses with all the strings except for the basses, thus giving the orchestra the hard-edged texture beloved of Stravinsky and other twentieth-century colorists. The omission makes a certain sense, since one hardly needs the lyric flow of orchestral strings as an accompaniment to the exploits of the Mongol conqueror (ca. 1167-1227) who parlayed daring and savagery into control of a kingdom that stretched half-way across the known world and managed the feat in less than two decades of campaigning.

As befits its subject, the music plunges straightway into its argument with little in the way of polite or picturesque introduction. A quick march that begins at a jogging tempo bears forth a warbling tune in trumpets and winds; its doublings a tritone below conjure up an oriental atmosphere from the start, with the diabolical dissonances involved providing an indication of the rascally Genghis's less-than-benign character. A second, quite similar phrase, is quickly broken off as before by a series of *staccatissimo* grunts from the tuba and bassoons. As might be expected, the contrasting material offers no quarter; the tramping chords of the accompaniment are every bit as grim as the opening pages, while the flourish of scale passages in the winds offers a portent of more abandoned moments still to come.

The middle section is set off by a powerful march episode with blocks of brass chords over a threatening bass line. Now the tempo slackens as plaintive woodwind fragments seem to lament the hardships attendant to life on the barren steppes and arid mountain plateaus. The original idea is heard on the flute in a more tranquil setting. In the richest passage yet, a colloquy of fragments from the opening episodes are woven together like the tales of old campaigns exchanged before the evening fire. But all too soon, arpeggio figures in the clarinets leap up and the music is on the march once again. Rather than merely repeating the initial statements, the composer creates a novel and effective transformation wherein long chains of descending motives are worked against a rising dynamic curve; the final result is the portrayal of a relentless but dispassionate force with no possibility of compassion or mercy. As one reviewer put it, this brief but colorful work "speaks of a harsh spirit. The outlines of a Genghis Khan and his day are there; the listener must fill them in."

Bongo Divertimento, Op. 35

The bongos and their related instruments, timbales and conga, are popularly accepted everywhere by dance bands. The *Bongo Divertimento* is a departure from the typical Latin American concept of these instruments. In its rhythmic syntax, the *Divertimento* borrows heavily from neoclassic and post-romantic literature, but it assumes a new concept. To effect the many possible sonorities and rhythmic devices, the percussionist uses his hands, elbows, and a special set of wooden sticks. The piece is divided into two outer sections: a "Rondo-Entrada," which is not quite an overture, and a closing Ritornello, a reprise of the "Rondo-Entrada." The

inner sections are programmatic: “Perpetuo” sets a quiet pace. “Pettifoggery” is a type of ‘con game,’ a moment of dishonest jazz interrupted by sobering strains in the orchestra. “Bluebottle Fly” is a musical duel between soloist and pest. “Pasticcio” is an imitation. A muted trumpet sounds a neoclassic theme against which the timbales strum a bygone rhythm. “Magpie” presents two birds chattering noisily in the cool of a summer morning while their neighbors in the forest protest.

As this recording was made in concert, you will enjoy with the audience some of the stage antics of the soloist, particularly during “Bluebottle Fly,” in which, from the beginning, the percussionist conveys that he is bedeviled by an imaginary insect. The stages of his discomfort increase from annoyance to irritation to fury. Whenever his hands are busy on one drum, his head is turned to the other. During the extended tremolo, a vindictive smile begins to appear on his face, and when he strikes the conga a violent blow at the final bar, it is a complete surprise to the audience. Now, the imaginary bluebottle fly lies dead on the conga, and he whisks it off with a wire brush.

Fifth Symphony for Strings, Op. 34

Gutché’s Fifth Symphony for Strings is derived from his Fourth String Quartet. It won the 1962 Oscar Esplá International Composition Competition. According to the composer, the piece is based on the time-honored principle of motive-

exposition and variation. Structurally, the main weight of the symphony falls in the two outer movements.

The first movement is almost perpetual motion, based on one sinuous melody and the frenetic triplet rhythm that bursts forth for the first time (though tentatively) in the cellos in the third measure. The rhythmic development of this triplet figure, the ways in which it is pitted against other rhythmic outlines, and the constantly shifting phrase lengths create a tour de force of 460 bars.

The inner movements, despite their intrinsic interest, act almost as foils for the much more complex and expansive first and last movements. The second movement, “Burletta” (musical farce) is a pizzicato ostinato. It is relaxed and ever sardonic in humor. The compact slow movement is a distillation of carefully conceived lyricism.

The finale is a combination of the powerful rhythmic drive of the first movement with a touch of the jocularity of the *burletta*. The main theme, suggested in the third bar after a series of hammering chords, is soon followed by the germ of another motive and, finally, after only nine bars, a hint of the third motive of the movement. With this ‘thumbnail’ exposition of the germ motives of the finale, the movement plunges headlong, first into their complete exposition and then into a full-scale development of all materials.

Production Notes

Publishing:

Icarus: Regus Publishing

Genghis Khan, Bongo Divertimento and *Fifth Symphony for Strings*: G. Schirmer (BMI)

Icarus: Recorded April 4, 1977. Originally released on Vox Turnabout TV 34705, 1978.

Genghis Khan: Recorded March 16, 1972. Originally released on Louisville LS-722, 1973. Under license from First Edition Records and the Santa Fe Music Group.

Bongo Divertimento: Originally released on OSP 4426 in 1964.

Fifth Symphony for Strings: Originally released on CRI SD 189, 1965.

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