

## ULYSSES KAY : Sinfonia in E

### GORDON BINKERD: Symphony No. 2

#### The Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra; George Barati, conductor

Ulysses Kay, born on January 7, 1917, in Tucson, Arizona, began his education in the public school system of Tucson. He attended the University of Arizona where he earned a Bachelor of Music degree in 1938 and subsequently entered the Eastman School of Music as a student of Howard Hanson and Bernard Rogers. He was also a student of Paul Hindemith at the Berkshire Music Center and at Yale University. Following a three year tour with the United States Navy, Kay received an Alice M. Ditson Fellowship for work at Columbia University. Also he has been a recipient of a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship, Rome Prizes for residence at the American Academy in Rome for the seasons of 1949-50 and 1951-52, a Fulbright Scholarship to Italy for 1950-51, and a grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters. In addition to these accolades, Kay has won several awards for his music, including first prize from Broadcast Music, Inc. for his *Suite for Orchestra*, a Gershwin Memorial Prize for *A Short Overture*, and an American Broadcasting Company Prize for the overture, *Of New Horizons*.

In 1958 Kay was a member of the first delegation of American composers to visit the Soviet Union in the Cultural Exchange Program sponsored by the United States State Department.

The *Sinfonia in E* was composed in 1950 during a stay in Rome. The first performance was given by the Eastman-Rochester Symphony Orchestra, Howard Hanson conducting, on May 2, 1951.

The composer describes his symphony as follows:

“The first movement (*Larghetto*) opens with long sustained lines in the horn and strings; as the movement continues it gains momentum through the introduction of smaller note-values. The fast second movement makes particular use of fugal principles. The third movement opens with a slow introduction; in the main body of the movement (*Grazioso*) melodic interest lies largely in the woodwind and brass sections of the orchestra; after a climax for full orchestra, there is a slow epilogue. The last movement is an animated finale.”

Gordon Binkerd, born on May 22, 1916, in Lynch, Nebraska, was nearly 31 years old before his career as a composer really began. He had earned his Master's Degree at the Eastman School of Music where he was a composition student of Bernard Rogers. Following the Second World War, Binkerd attended Harvard University. For him, Harvard gave much; studying with Walter Piston, teaching theory as an assistant to Irving Fine and the stimulus of such fellow students as Allen Sapp, all made this a time when he “suddenly grew up musically.”

Among his most important works are the *Sun Singer* written for the 1952 Festival of Contemporary Arts at the University of Illinois. His First Symphony, commissioned by the University, the recently completed Symphony No. 3, a Piano Sonata, a Sonata for Cello and Piano and a String Quartet.

The Symphony No. 2 was made possible by a commission from the Fromm Musical Foundation and the University of Illinois. It was written in 1956-57 and first performed in 1957 by the University of Illinois Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Bernard Goodman.

In Binkerd's first work for orchestra, *Sun Singer* (1952), he initiated a particular approach to scoring that has continued through this symphony. This consists, in part, of great reliance on pure color: the grouping of similar instruments and the cultivation of solo writing. For example, the frequent solo use of three horns, three trombones, solo strings, string quartet, flutes in solo or in combination with each other, and by the juxtaposing of choirs against each other. The second movement in particular relies heavily on soloistic and chamber music scoring. It opens and closes with a solo for alto flute; in fact this beautiful instrument is prominent throughout the movement.

In addition to enriching the orchestral sound, the previously mentioned groupings tend to create striking antiphonal relationships reminiscent of the baroque concerto grosso.

The form of the symphony is unusual in that it consists of only two movements and they are in the unexpected order, fast-slow. The architectural plan of this piece involves an opening fast movement of very large proportion, which generates much tension and excitement and culminates in a triumphant brass triad. From this peak the slow movement leisurely begins to unwind at considerable length. Near the end the orchestra is activated as the strings and brass break into a brief incandescence, and the alto flute then closes the movement in much the same way that it had opened it.

—D.J.

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George Barati, in addition to enjoying increasingly widespread recognition for his ability as the conductor of the Honolulu (Hawaii) Symphony Orchestra and guest conductor throughout Europe and the Far East, is an outstanding composer noted for such works as the String Quartet (1944), the Chamber Concerto for Strings, the Concerto for Cello and Orchestra and his much-performed Sonata for Violin and Piano. Barati is also well known for his work as a cellist, having been a member of the San Francisco Symphony.

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