

Jacques de Menasce

SONATA FOR VIOLA AND PIANO

Lillian Fuchs, *viola* • Artur Balsam, *piano*

SONATINA NO. 2 for Piano

Joseph Bloch, *piano*

FIRST SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Joseph Fuchs, *violin* • Artur Balsam, *piano*

INSTANTANÉES (Snapshots) : Six Children's Pieces for Piano

Joseph Bloch, *piano*

Jacques de Menasce

(August 19, 1905–January 30, 1960)

the composer . . .

Although Jacques de Menasce was born in Austria and died in Switzerland, and although he was by background and temperament a cosmopolitan, he is nevertheless identified with American music in a significant fashion, and made a signal contribution to musical life in this country. De Menasce came to the United States in 1941 and became an American citizen; many of his finest works, including the Sonata for Viola and Piano were written here.

Menasce was born in Bad Ischl, Austria, August 19, 1905. Educated in Vienna, he studied piano from the age of seven. He worked later with Emil von Sauer, and studied composition with Paul Pisk and Joseph Marx. He had close and friendly relations with Alban Berg, under whose encouragement he composed his first Piano Concerto, and also with Béla Bartók. But Menasce's musical style, while absorbing much, was never directly influenced by anyone; it remained always his own. Menasce's music is graced, as was his writing, his conversation and his manner of living, by originality, impeccability of taste, distinction of style and elevation of tone. The music is of great sophistication, yet it has warmth, wit and strength. Menasce wrote little for orchestra, and hence little of immediate appeal to large audiences. His finest is to be found in works like the Viola Sonata, in the songs and in his delightful piano music. The discipline and craftsmanship in Menasce's music is remarkable; it exhibits to the highest degree that complete control which is perhaps the basic need in the composition of our century.

Menasce's activities during his years in New York made him seem not a distinguished visitor from abroad, but a valuable colleague and collaborator whose presence was as natural as it was stimulating. His occasional concert appearances, mostly as a performer of chamber music, left an unforgettable impression of pianism of the utmost intelligence and refinement, put to the service of the most distinguished kind. And it is in this category that the compositions here recorded must be placed.

the music . . .

The Sonata for “Viola and Piano, completed in March, 1955, was written for Lillian Fuchs, and was first performed by Miss Fuchs and the composer in April of that year. It is a completely realized essay in this difficult medium; because it is so successful and satisfying a piece of chamber music, one forgets that it is also a *tour-de-force*. The Sonata is in one movement, divided into five sections. The most important structural material is presented in the opening seven measures, marked *adagio*. The *adagio* movement quickens gradually to *allegro molto*, and subordinate material is introduced. The middle section, *allegro moderato*, is an extended contrapuntal development of a subject derived integrally from the viola line in the seventh measure of the opening. The composer called this section *fugato*, though it is perhaps more ample than this term indicates. A second *allegro* re-states the first one, although not literally, and one tone higher, and the Sonata concludes with an *adagio* that is a truncated evocation of the opening. The form is thus basically simple and regular: A-B-C-B-A; an arch, if one wishes so to designate it.

The texture of the Sonata is extremely rich. The harmonic idiom, as in much of Menasce’s music, derives basically from the superposition of perfect and augmented fourths; chords so constructed are handled with remarkable subtlety and variety, so that they sound at times acrid and biting and at other times gentle and veiled. A counterpoint of considerable complexity is woven into this consistently dissonant fabric. There is no triad or simple seventh chord in the work, yet there is also no great effect of dissonance for its own sake. The clue to the work’s distinction is perhaps its control, which one senses to be absolute, and its warmth and passion, which bespeak the work of a man both deeply musical and richly human.

The First Sonata for Violin and Piano was composed in 1940, and is dedicated to Menasce’s life-long friend, the conductor Edmond Appia. It is in three movements:

1. Espressivo—Allegro
2. Aria
3. Allegro vivo

The first movement opens with a slow introduction foreshadowing the material of the fugal *allegro*, which is of great brilliance and variety. The technical resourcefulness is impressive, but more impressive is the sense of life, vigor and warmth conveyed by the music. The second movement, a broad Aria, has Hebraic overtones; it is almost folk-like in melodic quality. Here again, the harmonic imagination and the ingenuity of the elaboration give the essentially simple melody a quality of moving eloquence. The third movement is a brilliant and vigorous finale. A twelve-measure chorale makes a surprising, but remarkably effective appearance halfway through the movement, which concludes in a burst of virtuosity.

The Sonatina Number Two for Piano was written in 1944-45, and is in four short movements:

1. Allegro
2. Scherzo
3. Adagio
4. Vivacissimo

The writing for piano is extremely brilliant, and in a style peculiarly Menasce's own. It is perhaps safe to say that only a pianist of extraordinary gifts would write piano music of just this kind, in which the balance of musical and pianistic attraction is so just. The Sonatina borders, not so much by length, on the territory of the Sonata proper; indeed, many works of less musical consequence have taken the title of Sonata. With all of its sophistication, it is lively, effective and original music, admirably proportioned and designed.

The *Instantanés* (Snapshots) is a set of six *Enfantines* for piano. They are short pieces composed in Gstaad between 1956 and 1959 for the children of some of Menasce's friends. They are among the last works to come from his pen, and represent in miniature the essence of Menasce's art.

The set consists of the following pieces:

1. Le Rondeau de Maria
2. La Promenade de Nicolas
3. La Rengaine de Julo
4. Le Cortège de Catherine
5. Le Rêve de Poppy
6. Le Tricycle d'Olivier

The *Instantanés* received their first performance at a concert in memory of Jacques de Menasce held at the Maison Francaise of New York University on May 4, 1961, with Joseph Bloch as pianist.

Notes by RICHARD FRANKO GOLDMAN

the performers . . .

JOSEPH FUCHS, a student of the great violin pedagogue, Franz Kneisel, emerged at the age of seventeen as a concert performer of high order. Yet, after a successful European recital tour, his teacher advised the supplementary discipline of symphonic music; so Fuchs walked right into the concertmaster's chair of the Cleveland Orchestra, under Rodzinski. Illness demanded a three-year retirement. A second debut, in New York in 1943, has established Mr. Fuchs as an artist of the violin.

LILLIAN FUCHS, an American by birth and education, has achieved considerable recognition as a violist. She has not only appeared with some of the world's leading orchestras, but has performed in duo with her renowned brother, Joseph Fuchs. A highlight of her distinguished career was participation in the Casals Festival at Prades, France. In addition to concertizing and recording, Miss Fuchs is a composer of parts, with several publications already to her credit.

JOSEPH BLOCK has successfully combined an international concert career with an active teaching schedule at New York's Juilliard School of Music. Since his debut in 1950, he has premiered major works by Honegger, Poulenc, Messiaen, Goldman, Persichetti, Goeb and Ward. About his performance, Virgil Thomson has written that "His intelligence makes him expert at solving the riddle of what a piece is about."

ARTUR BALSAM is one of the outstanding pianists and accompanists of today. Polish-born, educated in Poland and Germany, his public debut at the age of twelve began a career of concertizing throughout Europe. Mr. Balsam has partnered an unbelievable number of artists, among them: Milstein, Francescatti, Szigeti and Menuhin; the Budapest, Kroll and Vegh Quartets; and, more recently, the Albeneri Trio. Since coming to the United States, in 1932, Mr. Balsam has been in constant demand as a soloist and accompanist.

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