

ERICH ITOR KAHN

SHORT PIANO PIECE from Op. 2 (1951)

EIGHT INVENTIONS, Op. 7 (1937-38): 1, 2, 3, 5, 6

CIACCONA dei tempi di guerra, Op. 10 (1943)

ERICH ITOR KAHN piano

***Recorded from a Hessischer Rundfunk Broadcast, 1955,
and released by special permission***

EDMUND HAINES

STRING QUARTET No. 4 (1957)

OXFORD STRING QUARTET of Miami University

ELIZABETH WALKER and ADON FOSTER violins

JOSEPH BEIN viola ELIZABETH POTTEIGER 'cello

ERICH ITOR KAHN (b. 1905, Rimbach, Germany — d. 1956, New York City) was cut down by fatal illness in the midstream of a career as composer and performer that commanded a devoted and intense following both in Europe and in his adopted country. Among the listening public at large, Erich Itor Kahn was best known as a chamber ensemble pianist of surpassing power and sensitivity. Few who heard his collaborations in concert and on recordings with the Albeneri Trio and with mezzo-soprano Jennie Tourel will allow them to fade from affectionate memory.

Kahn's childhood in the picturesque German town of Koenigstein was spent in an atmosphere of the arts, science, and humanist politics, since his father was a teacher and cantor and his mother a fine amateur singer. It was as in his early 'teens that he discovered the music of Arnold Schoenberg, whose aesthetic was to play a major role in his subsequent creative work; and by his sixteenth year, despite parental objection, he entered the Conservatory of Music at Frankfurt. Luck was with Kahn when, upon graduating from the Conservatory in 1928, he joined the staff of Radio Frankfurt as a musical director, and there had as collaborators, colleagues, and guest artists such figures as Hans Rosbaud (then staff conductor), Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Webern, Bartók, Roussel, Berg, Albert Schweitzer, Vladimir Horowitz, and Erica Morini.

All this came to an end, however, with the coming of the Nazis; and Kahn and his pianist-wife, Frida, fled to Paris, there to begin a new life. By dint of constant playing and teaching, he became established once more. Again there came catastrophe, this time with the Nazi invasion of France; and after a harrowing series of internments in French refugee camps and desperate pleading with consular authorities, the Kahns finally made their way by boat to New York, again to begin a new career. That Erich Itor Kahn's work as performer and composer is still very much alive in the memories of his pupils, colleagues, and those who heard him in the concert hall and on records speaks sufficiently for his achievements as an adoptive American.

As composer, Erich Itor Kahn produced a catalog of acknowledged compositions numbering about two-score works, extending over a period from 1930 (the *Marienlieder*, Op. 4, for soprano and piano) to 1954 (the String Quartet, Op. 13, and Vocalise, Op. 14, for five-part a cappella chorus). Though the serial concept was basic to Kahn's musical thinking from first to last, his application of the Schoenbergian principle was essentially free — one might say even ecumenical in the Henry Cowell sense. For during his years in France, Kahn began working creatively with both French and Eastern European Jewish folk materials (*Les Symphonies bretonnes*, Op. 6a, *Petite Suite bretonne*, *Trois Chansons populaires*, Op. 6b, and the Three Madrigals and Chassidic Rhapsody comprising Op. 5). Understandably, too, Kahn was deeply affected by the fate of his friends and humanity at large caught up in the Nazi and subsequently general world holocaust. Hence the titles of such works as the *Ciaccona dei tempi di guerra* recorded here, *Nenia Judaeis qui hac aetate perierunt*, Op. 11, for 'cello and piano, and the *Actus Tragicus*, Op. 12, for ten solo instruments.

However, it should be emphasized that the use of folk material or evocative titles in no way vitiates the structural power of the works in question, but simply acknowledges the role of poetic impulse and inspiration in the creative act, together with those aesthetic principles that make for order and strength in the finished work of art.

We are indebted to Mrs. Frida Kahn and to the Hessischer Rundfunk in Frankfurt for the use of the broadcast tape done by Erich Itor Kahn in June, 1955, scarcely nine months before his premature death in New York. The three works played by Erich Itor Kahn from his own output show the gnomic (*Short Piano Piece*), epic (*Ciaccona*), and lighter aspects (*Inventions*) of his work as musical creator.

Notes René Leibowitz,

"The *Short Piano Piece* shares its dense texture and elaborate pianistic style with the *Bagatelles*, Op. 8. There exists, despite the density, a remarkable natural flow in the discourse. In form, the work represents an amazing succession of small contrasting sections. Kahn's individual 'variation technique' is based here on strict serial writing." It was after hearing the tape used for this disc that Kahn decided in performing the work for his last recital in December, 1955, to repeat the whole main section (all save the introduction and coda) of the piece.

"*Ciaccona dei tempi di guerra*," Erich Itor Kahn tells us, "was composed in 1943. In a general way it projects the war experience, as its title indicates.

"It is written in the old variation form which uses as its basis the constant repetition of the theme in the bass.

"Its strict structure employs all kinds of contrapuntal procedures. It uses a free dissonant harmonic language, in the core of which strong tonal elements are incorporated."

Again we turn to René Leibowitz for authoritative commentary on the *Inventions*, Op. 7:

"*Eight Inventions*, Op. 7, were composed in 1937-38. They are a group of pieces among which some express simplicity, some are complex. They represent different stages of the problems of tonality, serial writing, and strict 12-tone technique. They also reveal different approaches to pianistic problems as well as to the question of expansion. All this is treated with great variety of means, and with a constant Renewal of the musical inspiration.

"1. Invention in C is composed throughout in two parts. The right hand performs musical passages derived exclusively from the scale of C major, while the left hand uses the components of the melodic C minor scale only.

2. Invention is written on a little Cradle Song. The texture is serial, without any reference to tonality.
3. Invention uses a theme from Brahms' Horn Trio [slow movement]. Despite the serial texture, the tonality of this theme is preserved.
4. Invention is of large dimension, without any specific title [other than its basic expressive designation, *Energico*].
5. Invention, *Hommage à Ravel*, is one of the most important pieces of the cycle. As a 12-tone composition it is, of course, in no way related to Ravel's composition technique, but something of the spirit and the varied fragrance of Ravel penetrate these pages."

EDMUND HAINES (b. 1914, Ottumwa, Iowa) has composed a sizable catalog of works in which virtually every musical performance medium is represented, save opera. In the course of teaching, writing, and lecturing over a nearly 25-year period, he has voiced unhesitatingly his views regarding the propriety — indeed, need—of today's composer to take full advantage of the stylistic and technical resources offered in twentieth century music, this in accordance with the composer's own special needs and goals. Mr. Haines's own works exemplify this point of view in that they exhibit a wide variety of styles, some elements of which can be traced to Bartók and Stravinsky, while other aspects bespeak American regionalism and jazz, as well as cosmopolitan neo-classicism and atonality.

"In music, as well as in the worlds of painting and poetry," notes Mr. Haines, "one discerns in this century few common stylistic practices, but rather an explosion in all directions. I believe there are outlets and reasons for the coexistence of many idioms on the scene today. The accessibility of this variety of material frees the composer and at the same time inhibits his production. Each new composition represents to me, of course, a totally new problem in trying to weld style to content, a union perhaps more necessary during the past few decades than at any other moment in music history. I have tried to identify and accept my own spiritual and technical ancestors and I recognize that my idiom can shift unpredictably, but I am fairly certain that I shall stay in touch with some traditional information in my work. In this procedure, then, I have not been *avant garde*."

The first major milestone in Edmund Haines's professional career came in 1941 when he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his First Symphony, as well as a Ph.D. from the Eastman School of Music. His composition teachers there were Bernard Rogers and Howard Hanson. Among his mentors in subsequent composition study have been Roy Harris, Aaron Copland, and Otto Luening.

Since 1948, Mr. Haines has been on the music faculty of Sarah Lawrence College. In 1957-58 he held successively two Guggenheim Fellowships and the post of composer-in-residence at the La Napoule Art Foundation in France, following which he fulfilled major composition commissions from the Ford Foundation and from Miami University of Ohio on the occasion of its sesquicentennial.

Among the works of Edmund Haines recorded heretofore have been the Promenade, Air and Toccata for organ (Kendall), the Toccata for Brass Quartet (Golden Crest), and the Concertino for Seven Solo Instruments and Orchestra (CRI 153). Other major works in Mr. Haines's catalog include the Symphony in Miniature, Variations for Orchestra, Informal Overture, Three Dances for Orchestra, *Coronach* for Brass, Timpani, and Strings. four string quartets, a violin sonata, two piano sonatas, *Prelude, Blues, and Boogie*, Suite for Two Pianos, and three works for women's chorus

—*Mary Saw her Son*, Invocation for Women’s Chorus, and *Dialogue from Job*. The latter was commissioned by Harold Aks and the Sarah Lawrence Chorus on the occasion of their 1964 European tour.

Concerning the String Quartet No. 4, Mr. Haines tells us:

“The Quartet No. 4 was composed in 1957 while holding the post of composer-in-residence at the La Napoule Art Foundation, La Napoule, France. It was composed on commission from the Oxford String Quartet for the sesquicentennial celebration of the Founding of Miami University, Ohio. The Oxford Quartet, which is the University’s quartet-in-residence, first performed it during the season following its composition, and has played it many times since on tour. In 1963, the Quartet No. 4 served as the music for a ballet by the choreographer Josephine Schwarz and has been presented in that form by the Dayton Civic Ballet and by the Pennsylvania Ballet Company.

“Essentially, the Quartet No. 4 is a set of variations on three short ideas presented in the opening slow theme, freely treated and arranged to form groups that simulate ‘movements’ rather than to stand in sharply alternating contrast. As originally composed, the nine sections are: *Theme*, *Pastoral*, *Air* (omitted in this recorded performance), *Dance*, *Second Dance*, *Scherzo*, *Soliloquy*, *Toccata*, *Finale* and *Epilogue*.

“The first three sections represent a slow opening movement; the dances and scherzo a unit; the soliloquy and Toccata a movement-unit of contrasting moods and tempos; and the finale and epilogue a coda to the entire structure. The *Air* is an optional variation, and it is not performed on this recording.”

During the period of the Quartet’s composition, the composer became involved with variation form in a number of works, including the Rondino and Variations for Orchestra. In the Quartet he uses harmonic materials of a more or less tonal nature, and occupies himself with matters of form and with the essential texture of the string quartet medium.

NOTES PREPARED BY D. H.

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)