

MUSIC OF ERICH ITOR KAHN

ERICH ITOR KAHN (b. 1905, Rimbach, Germany; d. 1956, New York City) died in the middle 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 Kahn was best known as a chamber ensemble pianist of power and sensitivity. Few who heard his performances with the Albeneri Trio, with violinist Samuel Dushkin, with mezzo-soprano Jennie Tourel and many others, will forget him.

Kahn's childhood in the German town of Koenigstein was spent in an atmosphere of the arts, science and humanist politics; his father was a teacher and cantor and his mother a fine amateur singer. It was in his early teens that he discovered the music of Arnold Schoenberg, whose aesthetic was to play a major role in Kahn's subsequent work; in his sixteenth year, despite parental objection, he entered the Conservatory of Music at Frankfurt. Upon graduating from the Conservatory in 1928, he joined the staff of Radio Frankfurt, where he was engaged by Hans Rosbaud, the musical director and staff conductor, as assistant director and pianist. There he worked with such composers and guest artists as Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Webern, Bartók, Roussel, Schweitzer, Horowitz, and Morini.

With the coming of Nazism, Kahn and his pianist-wife, Frida, fled to Paris, there to begin a new life of constant playing and teaching. The Nazis invaded France only a few years later, and the Kahns underwent a harrowing series of internments in French refugee camps and desperate pleading with consular authorities. Finally, the couple made their way by boat to New York to begin again in a new land.

As composer, Kahn produced about forty works, extending over a period from 1930 to 1954 (the *STRING QUARTET*, Op. 13). Though the serial concept was basic to Kahn's musical thinking, his application of the Schoenbergian principle was essentially free. During his years in France, he began working creatively with both French and Eastern European Jewish folk materials. Understandably, too, Kahn was deeply affected by the fate of his friends and humanity at large caught up in the world holocaust. Hence the titles of such works as the *CIACCONA DEI TEMPI DI GUERRA* recorded here.

However, it should be emphasized that the use of folk material or evocative titles in no way compromises the structural power of the music.

SHORT PIANO PIECE (1951)

INVENTIONS NOS. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 from EIGHT INVENTIONS, OP. 7 (1938)

CIACCONA (1943)

Robert Black, pianist

The *SHORT PIANO PIECE* is written in a dense texture and elaborate pianistic style. 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 a broadcast tape that Kahn decided, in performing the work for his last recital in December, 1955, to repeat the whole main section (save the introduction and coda) of the piece. This repeat is played by Robert Black.

EIGHT INVENTIONS, Op. 7, were composed in 1937-38. They are a group of pieces among which some express simplicity, some complexity. 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 musical inspiration.

Invention No. 1 in C is composed 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. Invention No. 2 is written on a little lullaby. The texture is serial, without any reference to tonality. Invention No. 3 uses a theme from Brahms' *Horn Trio* (slow movement). Despite the serial texture, the tonality of this theme is preserved. Invention No. 5 is of large dimensions, without any specific title (other than its basic expressive designation, *Energico*). Invention No. 6, *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 compositional technique, but something of the spirit and the varied fragrance of Ravel penetrates these pages.

"CIACCONA DEI TEMPI DI GUERRA," Kahn said, "was 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."

STRING QUARTET OP. 13 (1953)

**Bernede Quartet (Jean-Claude Bernede and Marcel Charpentier, violinists;
Michel Laleouse, violist; Pierre Penassou, cellist)**

Kahn's STRING QUARTET, Op. 13, is his most mature work. It is written in one movement divided into three sections: Allegro, Presto, and Adagio. Each of these sections is preceded by an Andante mosso, which serves as an introduction or a transition. Despite this apparent freedom one finds formal strictness. The initial row offers a symmetric division: two groups of six tones, the second one being the mirror of the first. Thus the serial function permits elaboration of the different structures, which in their turn are articulated with great richness. Kahn succeeded in achieving a musical discourse of steady and varied renewal that gives the music a solid form within freely moving elements.

-- notes by Rene Leibowitz

The BERNÈDE QUARTET was founded in 1964. All four members had received the Premiers Prix du Conservatoire de Paris, where they studied with the Maestro Joseph Calvet. The following year the Quartet was the winner of the International Competition in Munich, and after that it gave its first concert in Paris, at the Salle Gaveau. Since then the Quartet has enjoyed an international career, playing numerous concerts in Europe and America, and it soon became one of the foremost French chamber music groups. The Quartet's repertory consists of standard classical works as well as many contemporary compositions. It has recorded quartets by Beethoven, Debussy, Ravel, Bartok, Stravinsky, Berg, Webern, Xenakis, Ballif, Philippot, Enesco and Penderecki.

ROBERT BLACK is a titan among pianists. Conductor (the New York New Music Ensemble) as well as ensemble pianist (Speculum Musicae), he is known for his stunning performances of the most difficult music. He plays on CRI SD 428 and 481.

This record contains Kahn's piano music from CRI SD 188, re-recorded for this occasion by Robert Black, plus a new recording of the String Quartet. CRI wishes to thank Madame Anne Gruner-Schlumberger and Mrs. Frida Kahn for their generous assistance with this project.

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)