

KAROL RATHAUS

String Quartet No. 5, Op. 72 (1954)

Allegretto con moto 5:13

Largo 6:39

Allegro vivace 3:34

Pro Arte Quartet (Norman Paulu, Martha Francis Blum, Richard Blum, Parry Karp)

Sweet Music, Op. 48, No. 2 (1943) 2:43

The Oblation, Op. 48, No. 3 (1943) 3:57

Constance Beavon, mezzo-soprano Donald Pirone, piano

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 21 (1921) 14:11

Allegretto

Recitativo, Allegretto

Allegro con brio

Richard Goldsmith, clarinet Donald Pirone, piano

Kujawiak, Op. 47, No. 2 (1942) 2:42

Ballade: Variations on a Hurdy-Gurdy Theme, Op. 40 (1936) 10:13

Donald Pirone, piano

Karol Rathaus (b. Tarnopol, Poland, September 16, 1895, d. New York, November 21, 1954) was one of the great talents who emigrated to the United States in the 1930's. His music manifests a broad and sensitive insight into the contrasting musical trends that arose in Europe during the earlier part of this century.

While living and working in Berlin (1920-1932), Rathaus quickly established his reputation. Walter Schrenk, the distinguished music critic, considered Rathaus "one of the strongest hopes for our new music." Having received wide acclaim and recognition, Rathaus' works were performed frequently throughout Europe by such distinguished conductors as Erich Kleiber, Wilhelm Furtwangler and George Szell. Daring and progressive in his early years, Rathaus succeeded in formulating an individual and personal creative style which manifests a subtle intermixture of late romantic and early 20th century elements. His affinity for the Polish tradition was very strong—his music often retains the rhythmic and dance-like character of the Polish mazurka and polonaise. Yet Rathaus cannot be categorized among the nationalistic composers of the early 20th century, such as Bartok or Kodaly. Moreover, although his music touches on atonality, heavy use of counterpoint and motivic development, he was not a follower of Schoenberg. Rathaus was quite right, therefore, when he often quipped, "They don't know what pigeon hole to put me in."

During the last 14 years of his life, the composer devoted much of his energy to the establishment of the Queens College music department (now known as the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College). Despite his busy teaching and lecturing schedule, he remained extremely productive, securing several major commissions and performances of his works by such conductors as Artur Rodzinski, Robert Whitney, Vladimir Golschmann and Dmitri Mitropoulos. One of his most important commissions, the re-orchestration of Moussorgsky's *Boris Gudunov*, came in 1952, towards the end of his life, and reconfirmed Karol Rathaus' extraordinary musicianship and scholarship to the musical world.

—Donald Pirone

The score of the ***String Quartet No. 5***, Op. 72, dated 23 July 1954, is the last work that Rathaus completed. That he was able to carry out the composition of such a piece despite serious illness is a tribute to both his high level of professionalism and his personal courage. Here is music of great concentration and intensity, one of the composer's finest works.

While in no sense serial, the first two movements of the ***Fifth Quartet*** feature a theme with twelve different notes. This melody functions somewhat in the manner of a Romantic motto theme, returning at crucial points during the course of the first two movements (but not the third) and serving as a unifying element. The three movements follow the traditional fast-slow-fast format, but the initial fast movement is quite leisurely at the outset, gaining momentum as it proceeds. The parenthetical marking *scorrevole* is a clue to an important aspect of Rathaus' style, the fluency that was his birthright. The movement rises to a climax of considerable power, ending with a statement of the twelvenote theme in the lower strings.

The spacious slow movement also has its dramatic aspects, along with the lyricism typical of the composer. Figuration, expressive melodies and chromatic chords contribute to a musical statement that is quite personal. The movement ends on a note of tranquility, with a sense of great space created by the distance between the high E of the violin and the low C of the cello. By contrast, the third movement is active and forceful, combining elements of the fugue, the gigue and the Polish dance idiom that was never far from the composer's thoughts. Highly contrapuntal and brilliant at the same time, this finale is a marvelous example of Rathaus' ability to fuse technique and expression into a persuasive artistic whole.

—Leo Kraft

The English Songs, Op. 48, written in 1943, are the first songs Rathaus set to an English text. Of the five songs, three were published: *As I Ride, As I Ride*, ***Sweet Music***, and ***The Oblation***. Shakespeare's ***Sweet Music*** is set in a fairly free rhythmic context. The contrasts in color and dynamics portray the wonderment of the work of Orpheus. The gently-repeated two and three-note chords in the piano accompaniment may remind one of the lute of Orpheus being strummed as he accompanies his own songs. The text of ***The Oblation***, by Swinburne, is treated with great regard for its meter and the gentle flow of its words. Through the repetition of the rhythmic motive at the start of the work, and the use of a stepwise, legato melodic motion through much of the song, Rathaus portrays the tender, almost hypnotic feelings of love represented in the poem.

The Sonata for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 21, was written in Berlin in 1927. The lyrical opening theme in the clarinet becomes the building block upon which the entire first movement is based. Portions of the theme are transformed, creating an extensive palette of colors and moods. There is a mysterious, disquieting tension pervading the movement that is only reluctantly resolved at the close. The second movement is a recitative in ABA form, in which the clarinet is the declamatory voice. The middle section *Allegretto* strongly contrasts with the outer sections in its aria-like lyricism. The transitional piano solo after the *Allegretto* comments on both the declamatory and lyrical aspects of the movement. The last movement, *Allegro con brio*, has a rustic, dance-like quality and is decidedly more down to earth in its approach than the first two movements. Its rondo form is fairly straight-forward with the opening theme embellished in its two repetitions.

—Richard Goldsmith

SWEET MUSIC

William Shakespeare

*Orpheus with his lute made trees,
And the mountain tops that freeze,
 Bow themselves when he did sing,
To his music plants and flowers
Ever sprung, as sun and showers
 There had made a lasting spring*

*Every thing that heard him play,
Even the billows of the sea,
 Hung their heads, and then lay by.
In sweet music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart
 Fall asleep, or hearing, die.*

—William Shakespeare,
The Life of Henry the Eighth,
Act 117, Scene I.

THE OBLATION

A.C. Swinburne

Ask nothing more of me, sweet:
All I can give you, I give.

Heart of my heart, were it more—
More would be laid at your feet;

Love that should help you to live,
Song that should spur you to soar.

All things were nothing to give,
Once to have sense of you more,

Touch you and taste of you, sweet,
Think you and breathe you, and live,

Swept of your wings as they soar,
Trodden by chance of your feet.

I that have love and no more—
Give you but love of you sweet:

He that hath more, let him give:
He that hath wings, let him soar;

Mine is the heart at your feet
Here, that must love you to live.

—Algernon Charles Swinburne,
from *Songs Before Sunrise*, Vol. II.

In 1942, Rathaus was invited by The Paderewski Foundation to contribute a piece to an album of special works which was being planned as a memorial to the great pianist. "I wrote . . . a dance known as ***Kujawiak*** . . . In composing this tribute to a great Polish musician and patriot, I became imbued with the desire to express my faith in the ultimate restoration of Poland and its noble people." After ***Kujawiak*** was written, Rathaus wrote two more dances, Oberek and Mazurka, and the three were published as the suite of ***Three Polish Dances, Op. 47***. "So my three dances, begun as a memorial to Paderewski, developed into a salute to a great musician-statesman and the proud land that will one day soon rise again and reaffirm the fine ideals he brought to it."

Rathaus' ***Ballade: Variations on a Hurdy-Gurdy Theme, Op. 40***, was inspired by a hurdy-gurdy playing outside the window of his London apartment in 1936. In a brief memo to his publisher in 1950, the composer described the work as "representing a closely knit set of appearances and metamorphoses' of an original tune." One of his finest piano works, the ***Ballade*** is colorful, virtuosic and, though thoroughly immersed in 20th century harmony, clearly points to the Romantic aesthetic and pianistic tradition.

—Donald Pirone

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