

Cowboy's Breakdown (1936)

Edward Joseph Collins, composer

Notes by Erik Eriksson, Collins biographer

Cowboy's Breakdown was completed in 1938 and finds Collins in his most rhythmic mode. The vitality of the piece is infectious, the harmonizations bold and appealing. In three parts (marked "pretty lively," "songlike" and "pretty lively" again), it dances by in little more than two minutes.

Cowboy's Breakdown (piano solo, 1936; orchestra, 1944)

Edward Joseph Collins, composer

Notes by Erik Eriksson (1940-2008), the composer's biographer

Introduced by solo clarinet, this work's delightful theme is put through a series of interesting orchestral effects such as plucked strings and figures that divide and tug at each other. A piano emphasizes the dance rhythm that dominates, while a xylophone adds piquancy and sparkle to the closing measures.

The earliest version of this composition, for piano solo, is found in a music notebook. Collins initialed and dated the score 10 December 1935 near the title; above the final measure he wrote the date of 10 January 1936. It is interesting to note that Aaron Copland's "cowboy" ballets, the 1939 *Billy the Kid* and the 1942 *Rodeo*, thus came after Collins's concise, though equally energetic, *Cowboy's Breakdown*, published in 1938.

Edward Collins, Jr. recalls a Chicago Symphony Orchestra performance during a children's Saturday afternoon concert in the early 1940s: "On that particular day, Frederick Stock conducted and my father played *Cowboy's Breakdown* with the full orchestra. They ripped through it so quickly that Stock turned around to the audience and asked, 'Would you like to hear it again?' The cheers and applause drove them to a second run-through."