

Set of Four [1933] (1924)

Edward Joseph Collins, composer

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

Collins mentions this composition only in two journal entries, referring to an Illinois competition that likely involved the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and its conductor Frederick Stock:

28 May 1925 One day nearer to catastrophe. After hearing the rehearsal this morning I am certain that my "Set of Four" has no chance in Evanston. Lord help me! I am discouraged today and don't know exactly what to do. If I could only land the Evanston prize. Well, damn it—I suppose that would be a miracle and there are no miracles in life—only drab half successes.

29 May 1925 The third ordeal has been met and overcome. This time the wound is not so painful but the effect will be more deadly than the other two. This time it is more like a slow poison which will gradually destroy my trust in things and convert me into a masterful cynic. Time is flying and leaving me very little in its flight.

Despite the disappointing competition results, these four short orchestral pieces are typically well-crafted and full of atmosphere.

Prelude is bright and energetic, with constantly modulating, often angular harmonies.

Moonlight and Dance is among Collins's most magical orchestral works. Thrice the length of the other pieces, it begins with twittering *arpeggi* and *glissandi* invoking the soft night. The dance gathers gradually, more enticing than insistent. As it subsides, the pregnant night air once again trembles with sounds barely heard.

To Her was surely prompted by a dazzling vision of womanhood: the luminous, mysterious melody is voiced first in the low strings before being spoken more boldly by the orchestra as a whole.

Passacaglia is sprightly and abundant in its rhythmic motion. Arresting counter-themes and flexible pacing add to this brief work's interest.