

Albany Troy CD 267
Liner Notes for Original Release

Mardi Gras (1923) (15:03)

Concertpiece in A Minor for Piano & Orchestra (1931) (20:44)

A Tragic Overture (1923) (14:04)

Valse Elegante (1933) (3:15)

Total Time = 53:20

The Concordia Orchestra
Marin Alsop, conductor
Leslie Stifelman, piano

Edward Collins - *an American Romantic*

During the first part of the 20th century, when American music was struggling to find a distinctive voice and a place on concert programs, Chicago composers were blessed with a nurturing champion in the person of Frederick Stock, the second conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Under his leadership, countless premieres of new American works would be given and an entire "Chicago School" of composers introduced.

Among the gifted musicians who would benefit from Stock's fatherly care was Edward Joseph Collins. Between 1924 and 1943 his music was often heard at Chicago Symphony concerts with the composer himself appearing as soloist in his piano concerti or as guest conductor of his various orchestral compositions.

Collins was born in Joliet, Illinois on November 10, 1889* to Irish-American parents. The youngest of eight musically talented brothers and sisters, he was giving piano recitals at the age of nine and at fourteen became a pupil of the renowned pianist Rudolph Ganz. When Ganz moved to Berlin, Collins accompanied him. He enrolled in the Königliche Hochschule, where he studied composition with Max Bruch and Engelbert Humperdinck.

The young pianist received glowing reviews at his European debut in early 1912 and in the fall of that year returned to America, touring on a double-bill with the great operatic soprano Ernestine Schumann-Heink. (Collins's sister, Kate Hoffman, was Schumann-Heink's accompanist for thirty-five years.) As a result of that tour, Collins was engaged as the assistant conductor of the Century Opera Company in New York. In 1914, he became an assistant conductor at the Bayreuth Festival in Germany.

When the U.S. entered World War I, Collins served as a Lieutenant for the 88th Division in France where his facility with language made him invaluable as an interpreter. He entertained troops not only by performing but also by composing an operetta "Who Can Tell?" which General Pershing and President Wilson attended on opening night.

After the Armistice, Collins returned to the concert stage, prompting the critic of the *Chicago Evening American* to note: "Handling grenades and guns in the awful business of battle has not harmed the subtleness of his talented fingers."

In 1919 he joined the faculty of the Chicago Musical College where he met and married Frieda Mayer, a voice student. In 1933 he moved his studio to the American Conservatory of Music and remained on their faculty until his untimely death in 1951.

Although the performances of his orchestral and piano works were primarily regional, the scope and quality of his writing was universal. The music is broadly romantic in gesture, the orchestrations colorfully reminiscent of early Mahler. One cannot help but marvel at the technical skill of the compositions, the richness of invention and the heartfelt conviction that fill his works.

* EDITOR: *During the preparation of the liner notes for this CD, descendants of the composer provided life dates of 10 November 1889 – 7 December 1951. Subsequent research of public records, by Joseph Collins, nephew of the composer, revealed that the composer was born on 10 November 1886 and died on 1 December 1951.*

It is an exceptionally happy occurrence that this recording of Collins's orchestral works by The Concordia Orchestra joins the recordings of his music by pianist Earl Wild, the Manhattan String Quartet and the William Ferris Chorale, offering listeners a long overdue opportunity to become acquainted with an unjustly forgotten composer.

Mardi Gras

In 1923, the Chicago North Shore Festival sponsored a competition for new orchestral works. Of the 47 scores that were submitted, five finalists were selected by a distinguished panel of judges that included George W. Chadwick, Henry Hadley and Gustav Strube. Two of those five works were by Edward Collins: *Mardi Gras* and *1914* (later to be called *A Tragic Overture*). All five were played at a public rehearsal held in the Northwestern University Gymnasium on May 26, 1923, with Frederick Stock conducting. The winning work was to be selected at the read through and the composer awarded a prize of \$1,000. Collins not only had the distinct pleasure of hearing two of his major orchestral compositions performed that day, he also took home the \$1,000 prize for *A Tragic Overture*.

He wrote the following description of *Mardi Gras*:

As the title indicates, the piece is boisterous and bizarre by turns, with now and then a romantic or even serious moment this latter the constant companion of wild frivolity. It begins wildly in the spirit of carnival, with cellos and horns shouting forth the main theme to a fiery accompaniment by the violins, trumpets and higher woodwinds. This theme is repeated by the full orchestra, and then suddenly gives way to subsidiary fragments.

The arrival of the enormous masks and the clowns on stilts is accompanied by the strings playing *col legno* (i.e., playing with the wooden part of their bows) and the hoarse notes of muted trumpets and the querulous tones of high woodwinds. Occasionally there is a loud guffaw in the brass. The final coda is the whole work 'boiled down.' Fragments of the entire thematic material are tossed back and forth until the wild scene reaches a culmination in a fanfare of trumpets sounding above the full orchestra. At this moment the carnival royalty arrives, thousands of colored streamers are thrown from upper windows, the air becomes thick with confetti, and lurid lights play upon the fantastic floats and the grotesque costumes of the revelers.

Concert Piece in A Minor for Piano and Orchestra

To escape Chicago's summertime heat and his teaching responsibilities, Collins spent each August with his family at a secluded retreat in Cedar Lake, Wisconsin. There he was able to unwind from his busy city schedule and enjoy doing what he loved the best - composing. Working at an old upright piano, Collins composed his *Concert Piece in A Minor* during August of 1931 and played its premiere performance with Stock and the Chicago Symphony that very December. According to the composer:

The *Concert Piece in A Minor* is a large work *en miniature*, that is the thematic material undergoes no working over, consequently what might have become a broad symphonic work is now condensed and episodic in character.

A slow introductory theme soon transforms itself into the main subject of the first section. A lyric idea follows and is spun out at some length, which gives way to a Scherzo Diabolico. The cadenza follows and leads into the theme of the last section in 3 1/2 - 4 time. At the climax of the work, the earlier lyrical theme returns, this time fortissimo, accompanied by violent arpeggios and octaves in the piano.

The work is scored for a classical orchestra with the addition of a glockenspiel and triangle.

A Tragic Overture

Although Collins asserted that "No definite program should be attached to the thematic material" of his personal impressions of the Great War, he did admit that "in one or two cases it will be impossible to avoid this as the meaning is perfectly clear and obvious. For instance, the battle scene with the pastoral interruption which constitutes the development section, and the coda, which is a funeral march with a fragment of 'taps' in the distance, are two places where only one impression could be

conveyed."

Frederick Stock was quite moved by *A Tragic Overture* when he gave the work a read through in 1923 as part of the Chicago North Shore Festival composition contest, but it wasn't until June of 1926 that he was able to give it a proper concert performance. He conducted the work twice again: at the Stadium in New York City in August of 1926 and during the Chicago Symphony's regular season the next year at Orchestra Hall. Collins himself conducted performances with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in 1926 and with the Chicago Symphony in 1942.

The work is scored for a large orchestra with triple winds and brass and includes a sizable battery of percussion as well as an inter-orchestral piano. Reviewing a performance by Dennis Russell Davies with the American Composers Orchestra in 1994, *New York Times* critic Bernard Holland noted that *A Tragic Overture's* "dire mood wells up from the bottom of the orchestra with tubas, trombones and double basses. There are moaning half-steps, nasty little snare drum figures and at the end, a funeral march set against solemn drums. Cinematic may be the best word for this music. Its methods are efficient, its tone theatrical and its language easily grasped."

Valse Elegante

Edward Collins was a formidable pianist in his own right, so it comes as no surprise that virtuosic piano music makes up the greater part of his compositional catalog. Aside from the three piano concerti, he wrote numerous smaller works - perfectly crafted for inclusion on his recital programs.

In 1921 he composed *Six Characteristic Waltzes*, Opus 18. *Valse Elegant*, the second piece in the set, is dedicated to his teacher and friend Rudolph Ganz. Collins orchestrated it in 1933. As with the other pieces in this collection, *Valse Heroique*, *Valse Romantique*, *Valse Limpide*, *Valse Pensive* and *Valse Capricieuse*, the title is an apt description of the musical content.

Notes compiled by John Vorrasi

Marin Alsop

Music Director of The Concordia Orchestra, the Colorado Symphony, the Cabrillo Festival in California, and Creative Conductor Chair of the Saint Louis Symphony, Marin Alsop is one of America's leading conductors. Since winning the coveted Koussevitzky Conducting Prize at Tanglewood in 1989, she has completed highly successful tenures as Music Director of the Long Island Philharmonic and the Eugene Symphony, where she holds the title of Conductor Laureate.

Ms. Alsop pursues an active guest-conducting schedule on three continents. In North America, she has appeared with the Philadelphia Orchestra, National Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cincinnati Symphony, Houston Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony and Toronto Symphony, among others. Recent international engagements include the Sydney Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Toulouse National Orchestra and the Bochum Symphony, as well as a tour of Norway and Germany with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie.

A champion of American music, Marin Alsop founded Concordia in 1984, a unique chamber symphony that combines classical repertoire with American jazz and 20th century works. Concordia's debut recording on Angel Records features the world premiere recording of Gershwin's chamber opera *Blue Monday*. *Victory Stride*, a release on MusicMasters, premiered the symphonic music of jazz great, James P. Johnson. Ms. Alsop's other recordings include a Warner Brothers release with violinist Mark O'Connor and a disc on BMG with the Colorado Symphony featuring the works of Christopher Rouse.

In 1988 and 1989, Ms. Alsop was awarded the Leonard Bernstein Conducting Fellowship at the Tanglewood Music Center where she studied with Mr. Bernstein, Seiji Ozawa and Gustav Meier. In 1989, she was a prize-winner in the Leopold Stokowski Conducting Competition. Marin Also is a native New Yorker, attended Yale University and received her Master's Degree from Juilliard School.

The Concordia Orchestra

Concordia is a dynamic orchestra established in 1984 by Marin Alsop to break down the barriers between jazz and classical music. Concordia enlightens a wide audience through innovative concerts combining American symphonic masterpieces, orchestral jazz, and commissioned premieres. The

orchestra is committed to the preservation and presentation of the American music tradition and has garnered praise for adventurous programming, artistic excellence, and its belief that art is creative, fun, and accessible to everyone. In 47 concerts in the past 13 seasons, Concordia has showcased over 100 American composers, including 27 world premieres. The *Village Voice* hailed the 1996 performance of *On The Town* as one of its Top Ten picks for that year.

Concordia's dedication to honoring new talent is highlighted by two programs, the American Composers Awards and "Celebrate America." The American Composers Awards, held since 1986, premieres new compositions by emerging artists at Lincoln Center. These Awards demonstrate Concordia's loyalty to American talent by offering young composers their first entrée into the professional music world. Concordia's "Celebrate America" recording project aims to compile an extensive discography of our country's symphonic music.

Concordia is completing a recording of music by Christopher Rouse, which will be released in 1997. This follows Concordia's release of *Victory Stride*, released by Music Masters, a presentation of rediscovered works by James P. Johnson, and a 1993 Angel Records release, *Blue Monday*, featuring the works of Gershwin and Levant. Concordia, led by Marin Alsop, also appeared on a 1995 Warner Brothers recording of Mark O'Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*. This Collins recording is to be the newest addition to "Celebrate America."

In addition to many performances at Alice Tully Hall, Concordia has appeared at Avery Fisher Hall, Town Hall, the World Financial Center, South Street Seaport, Lincoln Center's Damrosch Park, and Symphony Space. Featured guest artists have included Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, Marcus Roberts, Carole Shelley, Judy Kaye, David Garrison, William Sharp, Dick Hyman, Mark O'Connor, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Elmar Oliveira, and members of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company under George Faison's direction.

Concordia has received international exposure through live performance broadcasts by Japanese Satellite Broadcasting, WQXR, and National Public Radio. In the fall of 1993, "Concordia Celebrates Bernstein," a one-hour television special, aired on the BRAVO channel.

Leslie Stifelman

Distinctive performances as a soloist and collaborative musician, and an affinity for American music have won pianist Leslie Stifelman a reputation as a gifted and versatile artist. Ms. Stifelman made her debut recording of Gershwin's *Concerto in F* for Angel Records with Marin Alsop and The Concordia Orchestra, and her discography also includes world premiere recordings of music by James P. Johnson (MusicMasters), Paul Bowles (BMG) and Aaron Kernis (New Albion). Ms. Stifelman is also a featured guest artist on Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg's recording *Humoresque* and Dawn Upshaw's *I Wish It So*, both for Nonesuch.

Ms. Stifelman appeared on-stage in the Broadway smash hit musical *Chicago* and with the Carnegie Hall Theatre Orchestra in a performance and recording (DRG) of Irving Berlin's *Louisiana Purchase*. She was also Artistic Advisor and pianist for Concordia's New York concert premiere of Leonard Bernstein's *On The Town*.

Ms. Stifelman's other engagements have included appearances with The Concordia Orchestra and the EOS Ensemble at Lincoln Center, the Long Island Philharmonic, the Richmond and Eugene Symphonies, the New York City Ballet Orchestra, and from 1992-1996 she was the Artist-In-Residence for Oregon's Festival of American Music. As a chamber musician, she has collaborated with artists such as Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, Dick Hyman, Mark O'Connor, Dawn Upshaw, Judy Blazer and Alan Feinberg. Ms. Stifelman is a Steinway Artist.

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Producer: Karen Chester · Engineer: Tom Lazarus · Concertmaster: Mary Rowell · Piano by Steinway & Sons · Piano technician: Karl Roeder · Mastered at Classic Sound Studios · Photo of Marin Alsop by Angela Cappetta · Photo of Leslie Stifelman by Lisa Kohler · Cover Photo of Edward Collins, age 31 (1920) Cedar Lake, Wisconsin