

VOLUME VII

# Music of Edward Joseph Collins

*Ballet~Suite: The Masque of the Red Death*

*Irish Rhapsody* ■ *Set of Four*

Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Marin Alsop, conductor



# Edward J. Collins ■ *An American Composer*

BY ERIK ERIKSSON

Composer and pianist Edward Joseph Collins was born on 10 November 1886 in Joliet, Illinois, the youngest of nine children. After early studies in Joliet, he began work with Rudolf Ganz in Chicago. In 1906, Collins traveled with Ganz to Berlin, where he enrolled in the *Hochschule für Musik* in performance and composition. Upon graduation, he made a successful concert debut in Berlin, winning positive reviews from several critics.

When Collins returned to the United States in the fall of 1912, he toured several larger eastern cities, again winning strong reviews. After serving as an assistant conductor at the Century Opera Company in New York, he traveled again to Europe, to become an assistant conductor at the Bayreuth Festival, a position cut short by the outbreak of World War I.

During that war, Collins rose from Private to Lieutenant. He served as an interpreter, received a citation for bravery, and entertained the troops as pianist.

Upon return to Chicago, he began a career in teaching, joining the faculty of the Chicago Musical College. He later married Frieda Mayer, daughter of Oscar Mayer.

Collins had co-authored *Who Can Tell?* in Europe near the end of WW I; the operetta was enjoyed in Paris by President Wilson. Collins continued composing on return to the USA. Two compositions submitted to a Chicago competition in 1923 were among the finalists, one the outright winner. Both works attracted the attention of Frederick Stock, Music Director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Stock conducted the first performance of 1914 (later re-titled *Tragic Overture*) and, eventually, many of Collins's subsequent orchestral compositions as well.

Collins died on [REDACTED], leaving an oeuvre comprised of ten major orchestral works (including a symphony, two overtures and three suites), three piano concerti, Hymn to the Earth (for orchestra, choir, and four solo voices), several chamber works, eighteen songs for voice and piano (four arranged by Verne Reynolds for chamber/string orchestra), and more than a dozen piano solo and duo scores.



Edward Collins, year and location unknown.

**EDITOR:** Research of public records, subsequent to the release of this CD, by the composer's nephew Joseph Collins, revealed that the composer died on 1 December 1951.

*Composition dates enclosed in brackets are drawn from a catalogue prepared in the 1990s by the composer's daughter, Marianna. Dates in parentheses are drawn from source scores or from the composer's journals.*

## Ballet–Suite: The Masque of the Red Death [1932] (1926–1940)

Some clues to the genesis this work may perhaps be found in the composer's journal entry of 3 April 1922:

We went to the moving pictures at the Chicago theatre tonight. The Americans are getting away from the Occident and borrowing the heavy, sensuous atmosphere of the orient. This theatre might have been a palace in Babylon or a harem in Persia. It needed only a heavy odor of musk and incense. In spite of our reformers and our religious sects, we are pagans; the bizarre and the barbaric are the only things which attract our attention and music, to move us, must be weird and intense. Why not succumb to this color and this intensity? Why not borrow everything our senses are capable of comprehending? Why not throw over their walls and burst those chains and let the imagination descend into Hell, mount to Heaven and absorb all the romance of the earth—the universe? Borrow from history and stories of all the beautiful women who have loved so much—let them inspire me with the violence of their passions and let the whole world breathe romance and the sighs of lovers.

On 26 December 1926, Collins wrote:

. . . in a few days I shall begin on the "Masque." This is so new to me that I am violently curious about my ability to go through with it. Have I really the imagination and daring to throw off my training and embark on unknown seas? Strapping me down is my early "moral" training at home and my complete immersion in the classic in Germany. Now here is something not sanctioned by the authorities—something shocking! Have I the courage to shock everyone? A month or so will tell.

However, *Masque* is not mentioned again until 7 November 1939, when Collins briefly notes that he is working on the score. It was not completed until almost fifteen months later, and during that period Collins often reflected in his journal on death. The passing of a favorite sister prompted him to question the nature of individual mortality; disturbing developments in Europe, as war clouds gathered, caused him to ruminate on man as both political and cre-



**The composer and his wife Frieda, occasion, year and location unknown.**

ative animal, and what future there might be for a species so self-destructive. With *Masque*, he was prepared to add 'sinister' to his range of temperaments.

On 7 January 1940, the composer wrote in his journal:

Got up around 8 A.M. and finished the instrumentation of the "Propos Subtil" by noon. Took a wonderfully bracing walk just before dinner and a good nap early in the afternoon. . . . After my nap I had a great yearning to get on with my Ballet-Suite and began to improvise in the hope of finding an idea for the fourth dance—"Chez le Sultan." If you please, it came tumbling toward me—not only the main theme but a bridge and the second theme, in fact the whole piece crowded into my feverish brain and I trembled with fear of not being able to get it down on paper before forgetting it. Ideas tripped over each other and within an hour I had probably written one hundred measures. With the themes came the instrumentation and I scarcely breathed as I wrote frantically, notes alternating with the abbreviations of the instruments. My dears, I don't believe I have ever had a like experience and it has left me with a feeling of uninspired contentment. At dinner tonight I was very agreeable to everyone and talked small talk with the children.

Collins's *Ballet-Suite* was completed on 29 January 1940. He was not entirely pleased with the composition process, however. In his journal entry that same day, Collins noted:

Finished the 'Masque' at five o'clock. I was terribly sick of it at the end, but I just had to finish it and I fear the Invocation Profane suffered, as it was the final fragment in the order of composition. I brought the last two pages to the copyist right after dinner and spent the evening correcting the remaining one hundred and eight pages of the score.

Submitted as an entry for a competition sponsored by the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, *Masque* also caused its composer some other discomfort. He worried about the reaction of his former teacher and friend Rudolf Ganz. Collins complained in his 30 January journal entry:

. . . I was compelled to write in many tempo indications all the time worrying that R. Ganz will recognize my hand and vote against my work. For the last few years I have noticed a polite hostility on the part of my old master. We are prone to put such behavior down to jealousy which may or may not be true, however I am convinced that he would rather see someone else with the prize in St. Louis.

Two days after completion of *Masque*, Collins was more positive, noting in his journal that "I wrote the 'Masque' faster than anything in my life." Despite the composer's caveats, the lurid drama of *Red Death* prompted a vivid score, before which Collins included his synopsis of the story by Edgar Allen Poe:

The "Red Death" had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal or so hideous - - - - -

But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys- - - - -

The prince had provided all the appliances for pleasure. There were buff[o]ons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet dancers, there were musicians, there was beauty, there was wine- - - - -

It was toward the close of the fifth or sixth month of his seclusion that the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence. It was a voluptuous scene, that masquerade! - - - - - In the black chamber there stood a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and, when the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound of so peculiar a note that, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily; and thus the waltzers ceased performe their [r]evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company.

But when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly- - - - - after the lapse of sixty minute there came yet another chiming of the clock and then were the same disconcert as before. - - - - - but now there were twelve stokes to be sounded and there were many individuals who had found leisure to be come aware of the presence of a masked figure which had arrested the attention of no single individual before.

When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell on this spectral image his brow reddened with rage. He bore aloft a drawn dagger - - - - - there was a sharp cry and the dagger dropped gleaming upon the sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterward, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero. - - - - - and now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revel[l]ers- - - - -

And the life of the ebony clock went out. And the flames of the tripods expired. And the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

A tolling ends each section leading to the arrival of midnight. Among many striking moments are trumpet and horn flourishes introducing the *Invocation Profane* and the sinuous oboe theme in *Propos subtil et mysterieux*. The *Valse seduisante* exhibits forced gaiety, with numerous busy accents. A scurrying flute precedes an intense, emphatic massing of orchestral sound before the mood returns to one of lightness and whispered intimacy. *Chez le Sultan*

evokes the Middle East through English horn, tambourine and subtle pulses from the double basses, suggestive of sensual languor.

The final section, *Orgie*, opens at a steady *allegro moderato* in alternating and 2/4 timing. As the music gathers intensity and fullness, shadows intrude through heavy, falling figures. When a lighter mood returns to insinuating rhythmic figurations, themes collide, some falling, others rising in confusion. Energy spent, the orchestra ruminates on what has passed: with the plague's arrival has come death.

## Irish Rhapsody (1927)

This is likely the first of several orchestral and piano solo variations on the Irish "potato famine" folksong. *O! The Taters they are small over here!* On 21 May 1927, Collins's entry in his journal reads, "Only ten more days to complete the 'Irish Rhapsody.' The college orchestra will have a difficult time learning the piece by the 20th of June (Commencement date)." Students of the Chicago Musical College performed the premiere, conducted by Collins, then a member of the college's faculty.

Collins begins with bassoon voicing the melody over strings. An oboe provides a counter line and the score offers a choice between harp and piano as an addition to the orchestral texture. Much of the shimmering timbre evident in *Hibernia* and *Variations on an Irish Folksong*, the composer's other two "Irish works," is present here, but Collins perhaps felt a little constrained by the occasion; fuller realizations of his intentions would come later.

## Set of Four [1933] (1924)

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.

### **Marin Alsop, conductor**

Marin Alsop is currently Music Director of the Colorado Symphony and of the Cabrillo Festival of contemporary music in California, where she has received the ASCAP award for adventurous programming several years running. In 2002 she was appointed Principal Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony, and from 1999-2003 was Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. She won the 2003 Gramophone Artist of the Year Award, and earned the Royal Philharmonic Society Conductors Award for outstanding achievement in classical music during 2002. She guest-conducts major orchestras worldwide, including the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, London Symphony, London Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris, and Munich Philharmonic.

Marin Alsop studied at Yale University, taking a Master's Degree from the Juilliard School. In 1989 she won the Koussevitzky Conducting Prize at the Tanglewood Music Center, where she was a pupil of Leonard Bernstein, Seiji Ozawa, and Gustav Meier.

Alsop is an important champion of American music and was featured in the New York Philharmonic's Copland Festival. With the Royal Scottish National Orchestra she has recorded a Barber cycle for Naxos, the first disc of which was nominated for a Gramophone Award and a Classical Brit award; she has also recorded Gershwin's youthful opera *Blue Monday* and works by American composers such as Christopher Rouse, Michael Torke, Libby Larsen and Joan Tower.



## Royal Scottish National Orchestra

The Royal Scottish National Orchestra is considered to be one of Europe's leading symphony orchestras. Formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra, the company became the Scottish National Orchestra in 1950, and performed under such renowned conductors as Walter Susskind, Karl Rankl, Sir Alexander Gibson, Bryden Thomson and Neeme Järvi, who is now Conductor Laureate. In 1991, in celebration of the orchestra's centenary, it was granted Royal patronage. The RSN0's internationally acclaimed artistic team is now led by Alexander Lazarev, formerly Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. Walter Weller is now Conductor Emeritus, having been Principal Conductor from 1992 to 1997. Garry Walker was recently appointed to the post of Principal Guest Conductor.

The Royal Scottish National Orchestra gives over 130 performances in Scotland each year, and appears regularly at the BBC Proms in London and at the Edinburgh International Festival. In the past few years, the RSN0 has recorded a varied and exciting range of works including Bruckner, Bax, Holst, James MacMillan and Rautavaara, as well as a highly acclaimed cycle of Barber's symphonic works with former Principal Guest Conductor Marin Alsop. Previous recordings by the RSN0 to have received outstanding critical acclaim include a complete cycle of Prokofiev symphonies, as well as Strauss tone poems, and the symphonies of Shostakovich, Dvořák, Martinů, Nielsen and Mahler.

The Orchestra is also gaining a worldwide reputation for its recordings of film soundtracks, including *Titanic*, *Superman*, *Somewhere in Time*, *Jaws*, *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Vertigo*, which won the first ever film music Gramophone Award. In addition, the RSN0 has collaborated with Hollywood legends Jerry Goldsmith and Elmer Bernstein on projects such as *Viva Zapata!* (winner of the *Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik*), *The Magnificent Seven*, and *The Great Escape*. Recent overseas tours have included visits to Austria, Switzerland, Norway, Greece and Spain. Future plans include a Swedish tour in October 2004 and a return to Austria in May 2005.

The RSN0's award-winning education program continues to develop musical talent and appreciation with people of all ages and abilities throughout Scotland. In education and outreach work, members of the Orchestra work with schoolchildren and community groups, in some of the biggest projects to be undertaken in the United Kingdom, to ensure the continuation of music as an integral part of life for future audiences.



# Royal Scottish National Orchestra

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Nigel Mason  
Alison McIntyre  
Gail Digney  
Gerard Doherty  
Caroline Parry  
Ursula Heidecker  
Lorna Rough

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Jacqueline Speirs  
Marion Wilson  
David Yelland  
Michael Rigg  
Wanda Wojtasinska  
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Carole Howat†

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Olwen Kirkham  
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Fiona West  
Nicola McWhirter\*  
Claire Dunn  
Neil Gray  
Katherine Wren  
Michael Lloyd†

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Jeremy Fletcher  
Betsy Taylor  
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Robert Mitchell  
Michael Rae  
Paul Sutherland  
Gordon Bruce\*  
John Clark  
Sally Davis†

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Emer McDonough\*  
Ian Mullin†  
Helen Brew  
Janet Richardson  
(piccolo)

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(contrabassoon)

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Brian Forshaw  
Michael Bennett†  
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Elspeth Rose  
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Martin Willis†  
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Pippa Tunnell  
Rhona MacKay\*

## **Piano**

Julia Lynch\*  
John Langdon†

## **Celeste**

Gustav Fenyo\*

\* *Set of Four only*

† *Irish Rhapsody only*

# AVAILABLE RECORDINGS

## **VOL. I** *Romantic Music of Edward Collins*

Earl Wild, piano · Manhattan String Quartet

Thirteen piano solo works, including *Variations on an Irish Tune*

*Allegro piacevole* (for string quartet)

CRI CD 644, currently available from Berkshire Record Outlet (BROinc.com)

To be re-released in 2004 on New World Records (NewWorldRecords.org)

## **VOL. II** *Edward Collins*

Concordia Orchestra · Marin Alsop, conductor

*Tragic Overture*

*Mardi Gras*

*Valse Elegante*

*Concert Piece (Concerto No. 2), in A minor* (Leslie Stifelman, piano)

Albany TROY CD 267

## **VOL. III** *Music of Edward Joseph Collins*

Royal Scottish National Orchestra · Marin Alsop, conductor

*Concerto No. 3, in B minor* (William Wolfram, piano)

*Symphony in B minor*

Albany TROY CD 625

## **VOL. IV** *Music of Edward Joseph Collins*

Royal Scottish National Orchestra · Marin Alsop, conductor

*Hibernia (Irish Rhapsody)*

*Concerto No. 1, in E-flat major* (William Wolfram, piano)

*Lil' David Play on Yo' Harp*

*Lament and Jig*

Albany TROY CD 630



**VOL. V** *Music of Edward Joseph Collins*

Patrice Michaels, soprano • Elizabeth Buccheri, piano (songs)

Frank Almond, violin • Parry Karp, violoncello • Jeffrey Sykes, piano (instrumental duos)

*Arabesque* (for violin and piano)

Fifteen songs

*Prayer* (for violoncello and piano)

*Suite for Violoncello and Piano*

Albany TROY CD 641

**VOL. VI** *Music of Edward Joseph Collins*

Royal Scottish National Orchestra • Marin Alsop, conductor

*Hymn to the Earth*

Jeni Bern, soprano • Jane Irwin, mezzo-soprano

Peter Auty, tenor • Henry Waddington, bass • RSNO Chorus

*Variations on an Irish Folksong*

*Cowboy's Breakdown*

Albany TROY CD 650

## FUTURE RELEASES

**VOL. VIII** *Music of Edward Joseph Collins*

*June Night* and other songs

*Piano Trio, Op. 1*

Various piano solo works (Jeffrey Sykes, piano)

**VOL. IX** *Music of Edward Joseph Collins*

*Daughter of the South* (opera, in one act)

*Four Songs* (arranged for chamber or string orchestra)

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The *Newberry Library* (Chicago) is the archive for the original scores, journals, and memorabilia of Collins.

For further information go to: [www.EdwardJCollins.org](http://www.EdwardJCollins.org)

# Edward Joseph Collins

## *Ballet~Suite: The Masque of the Red Death*

25:32

- |   |                                 |       |
|---|---------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I. Invocation Profane           | 00:52 |
| 2 | II. Propos subtil et mysterieux | 07:23 |
| 3 | III. Valse seduisante           | 04:29 |
| 4 | IV. Chez le Sultan              | 05:27 |
| 5 | V. Orgie                        | 07:17 |

II:44

## 6 *Irish Rhapsody*

### *Set of Four*

18:50

- |    |                         |       |
|----|-------------------------|-------|
| 7  | I. Prelude              | 03:20 |
| 8  | II. Moonlight and Dance | 09:24 |
| 9  | III. To Her             | 03:15 |
| 10 | IV. Passacaglia         | 02:49 |

Total 56:06

Royal Scottish National Orchestra  
Marin Alsop, conductor



ALL MUSIC BMI

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TROY650 [DDD]

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# Edward Joseph Collins

## *Ballet~Suite: The Masque of the Red Death*

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		Total 56:06	

Royal Scottish National Orchestra  
Marin Alsop, conductor

All music BMI.

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TROY657 [DDD]

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## An American Composer [1886~1951]



This is the first recording available to the public of these three works, and likely the first performance of the *Ballet~Suite: The Masque of the Red Death*. Born in Joliet, Illinois, Collins studied piano with Ganz in Chicago and composition with Bruch and Humperdink in Europe. A 1912 Berlin debut and subsequent concerts in the USA and Europe earned strong critical praise. Collins was hired as an assistant conductor for the Bayreuth Festival in 1914; that engagement was ended by WWI and service in the US Army. After the war, Collins began a teaching career in Chicago, continuing to conduct, perform, and compose. His music attracted the attention of Chicago Symphony Orchestra Music Director Frederick Stock, who conducted many of Collins's orchestral compositions. Those include a symphony, three piano concerti, three suites, and two overtures. Collins also composed dozens of songs, piano solo pieces, and other chamber music works.

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