

*Concerto No. 3, for Piano with Orchestra Accompaniment, in B minor* [1942]

Edward Joseph Collins, composer

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

Edward Collins's third piano concerto was the last of his orchestral works to have been given its premiere by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and is the most expansive of his three piano concerti. [Pianist for the first recording of the work] William Wolfram describes it as a "diverse, accessible piece." Cast in four movements and nearly 40 minutes in duration, the work keeps the soloist engaged throughout, with no more than brief, transitional orchestra-only passages. That Collins himself played the first performances in Chicago on 25 & 26 March 1943 suggests that the 56-year-old retained the endurance and prowess consistent with the admiring reviews received early in his performing career.

The opening movement is looser in form than that of the traditional nineteenth century concerto. Its free flowing rise and fall in intensity is carried over from Collins's *Concert Piece* (his second piano concerto, 1931). Yet the movement holds together persuasively, the scale and feeling bearing comparison with the concerti of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff. Collins manages deftly the transitions between concerted passages, solo moments and those in which the soloist is supported by only a small body of instruments.

*Pièce Eccentrique*, the second movement, is marked *allegretto grazioso*; its brevity and lightness bring a gratifying release from the tension of the first movement. The eccentricity derives from a 7/8 metre interspersed with measures in 5/8. Collins's affinity for additive meters was already apparent in his first work for orchestra, the *Tragic Overture*, 1923. Here, the alternating duple and triple pulses create a variety of inviting, balletic syncopations.

Of the four movements, the third, *Nocturne*, is perhaps the most striking. Moving in 4/4 time at an *andante tranquillo*. Collins achieves a breathless effect with high strings moving stealthily above the soloist. When the orchestra swells, the effect occasionally is voluptuous. The movement ends softly, as the solo piano floats upward over a cushion of strings.

The final movement is a driving tarantella that opens with a frenetic iteration of a rising three-note motif by the orchestra, which quickly expands to *tutti*. The soloist enters with an edgy phrase that includes the principal motif and a repeated cadence that terminates with a trio of accented 8th notes. The diamond-point drilling of the 6/8 dance heightens the intensity and, later, when the full orchestra enters the fray and assumes the same rhythmic pattern, the effect approaches the orgiastic. Collins's characteristic sense of balance, though, pulls the ensemble back from the brink several times, as the tempo slackens to an insinuating, tango-like swaying. Returning to tempo primo each time, however, the movement prances relentlessly toward its precipitous ending.