

Concerto No. 1, for Piano with Orchestra Accompaniment in E-flat Major [1925]

Edward Joseph Collins, composer

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

Considering Collins's training in composition and success as a concert pianist, his urge early on to tackle a piano concerto was not surprising. Ultimately, Collins wrote three concerti, manifesting growing assurance as a composer with numbers two and three. The first, which William Wolfram describes as a 'pastoral' work, came before stylistic influences had jelled into something more personal.

Collins's journals indicate that he completed the final movement of the *Concerto No. 1* in January 1922 before feeling abandoned by his muse. He was unable to begin work on the first movement until August 1923; by the time he was ready to play the entire concerto for Chicago Symphony Orchestra conductor Frederick Stock, it was December 1924.

To the journal, Collins confided little about what inspired his first concerto or what stylistic considerations shaped it. Not surprisingly, the composition bears residual traces of its composer's German training, even though the final movement was subtitled '*All' Americana*' in the program for the premiere performance. When Collins began his studies in 1906 Germany, Mahler and Strauss were ascendant figures, Bruckner and Brahms each dead just six years. Clear enough, however, is a pulling away from the formal theme, development and recapitulation Collins learned in Berlin. The form is freer; ideas emerge, blossom and disappear, only to reappear later.

The first movement opens with the soloist introducing one of the principal cadences over low strings. Eighth notes predominate in the solo part; a gradual increase in tempo brings the soloist up to an *allegro non troppo*, joined quickly by high winds. Angular chording and a recurrence of descending figures are other imprints of the composer's evolving style. Orchestration is assured in its blending and contrasting of colors, while occasional tripping accents provide contrast to the prevailing forward flow.

The second movement opens with strings and clarinets steadily modulating through twenty measures before the soloist enters. The soloist arrives boldly; grace notes leaven the effect of the piano's constant rustle of 16th notes. The mood is autumnal, imprinted by several haunting figures floating in and out. A solo horn is heard several times before a final appearance at the movement's conclusion in which it rises to a soft, sustained high G.

'*All' Americana*' describes the eccentric, syncopated pace of the finale. Despite the movement's energetic character, more ebb and flow is heard before a final head of steam prompts the concerto through its concluding pages. The ending is both abrupt and decisive.

Two days after the 27-28 March 1925 premiere performances, led by Frederick Stock, Collins was remarkably clear-eyed about the event, and already looking to the future, writing in his journal: "The great spree is over. Last Friday and Saturday I played my concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and (at least on Saturday) had a big success. Broke about even with the critics. It was a fine experience and has inspired me to work and create new and better things. Upon Stock's advice I will forget the concerto for a year or so and then revise it."