

Lil' David Play On Yo' Harp (Negro Spiritual) [1940]

Edward Joseph Collins, composer

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

On 18 November 1940 Collins reminisced in his journal somewhat enviously about his friend Alfred Wallenstein. Once a section cellist in the Chicago Symphony, "Wally" was invited by Toscanini to audition for the solo cellist position with the New York Philharmonic. Collins wistfully remarks that his friend "took the job and shook the dust of Chicago from his shoes."

Collins went on to note that Wallenstein later became music director of NYC's WOR and then conductor of several concerts immediately following the Toscanini series. In the same journal entry, Collins wrote: "Wally asked me to make some arrangements for him and I intend to begin with 'Li'l David.'"

Collins thoroughly enjoyed American spirituals and arranged several of them for piano, including *Lil' David Play on Yo' Harp*, published in 1940 by Summy.

In its orchestral version, *Lil' David* exhibits all the rhythmic vitality of the piano composition, albeit with a more rhapsodic flourish. After a broad and unhurried opening by the harp, the piece gathers force, building steadily to full orchestra. Counter themes are imaginatively drawn, each conspiring to keep the piece in churning motion. When the pace broadens, Collins's gift for conjuring the right atmosphere is manifest. The work ends quietly as the solo harp returns to restate the original theme.