

Edward Collins, Our Greatest Irish-American Composer: Music Now Available On Ten CDs

May 2012, Albany Records (AlbanyRecords.com) released the complete recorded anthology of the music of American composer Edward Joseph Collins, 1886-1951, as a boxed set of ten CDs. The anthology set includes a booklet with a new guest essay placing Collins in the context of his 20th century contemporaries, as well as a chronology, a complete list of works, reviews, and discography.

Much of Collins's music was never performed during his lifetime, much less recorded. All the extant works was only recorded and released during the last 12 years, on 10 single CDs. Now that musicians and reviewers worldwide have been able to perform or listen to the music of Collins, it's clear that he was one of the finest 20th century composers based in the United States.

Collins arguably is also the greatest Irish-American composer ever. The late music writer, Chicago radio host, and Collins biographer Erik Eriksson wrote:

Collins was born in Joliet, Illinois on 10 November 1886 to Irish-American parents. Edward was the youngest of nine children born to Peter and Bridget (McIntyre) Collins, both of whom came from Ireland - he from County Meath in the north, she from Belfast...

Although he ... composed his orchestral works with a pervasive Celtic melancholy, he did not sentimentalize the Irish or even regard them as altogether admi-

rable people. In a diary entry on St. Patrick's Day, 1939, the composer wrote: I have had several very disagreeable encounters with Irishmen. The Irishman is by nature "tough;" he is not warm-hearted as people think...

To this it should be added that the Collins also drew on the Irish traditions of engaging melodies and a puckish humor, both often marked by compelling rhythms.



After studies in Berlin and concert tours here and abroad, Collins married Frieda Mayer, the daughter of Oscar, the food magnate. Edward and Frieda, who eventually had four children, made their home in Chicago, where Collins was based in his work as a pianist, teacher, conductor, and composer.

During the composer's lifetime, world premieres of several major works were performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, with Collins as soloist for his three piano concerti. Collins also conducted the CSO in performances

of other works that he composed.

Much of Collins' music was composed during summers in Wisconsin, at Cedar Lake or in Door County, where the Collins family eventually moved to a rural log home near Fish Creek. Declining health in his final years may have contributed to the undeserved neglect of Collins's music after his death in 1951, following his third heart attack.

The May 1st release of the complete recorded anthology of this neglected composer will be one of several events celebrating the 125th anniversary of the composer's birth year during the 2011-12 season, including:

- In April 2012, Roosevelt University hosted and presented an expert panel and recital of chamber music, in celebration of Collins as well as some of his USA and European composer contemporaries.

- In November 2011, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra gave three performances of Collins's Tragic Overture, conducted by Marin Alsop. The recipient of many international cultural awards, and a MacArthur Foundation "genius" fellow, Maestro Alsop also led all six of the orchestral recording of Collins in the soon to be release 10-CD anthology.

- In October 2011, the composer's only opera, Daughter of the South, was given its first stage performance by the Peoria Symphony Orchestra, in a concert abridgment by conductor George Stelluto.