

PHCD

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Irving Fine

SYMPHONY 1962*

- 1 *Intrada* 7:10 2 *Capriccio* 5:44 3 *Ode* 10:01
- 4 *Serious Song; Lament for String Orchestra* 9:51
- 5 *Toccata Concertante* 10:27

Erich Leinsdorf and Irving Fine*
conducting *The Boston Symphony*

Total Timing: 43:31

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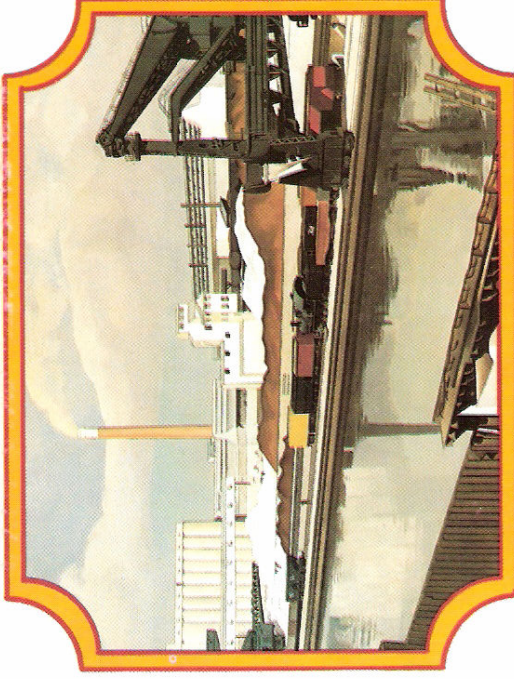


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Irving Fine

Symphony 1962 • *Toccata Concertante*
Serious Song for String Orchestra



Erich Leinsdorf
conducting *The Boston Symphony*

Irving Fine by **Aaron Copland**

The art of music has, for a long time now, suffered from an overdependence on consecrated names. When music lovers speak of composers, they are generally referring, in the whole history of music, to half a hundred famous names of whom perhaps half a dozen belong to our era. This does serious injustice to many valuable composing talents, both of the past and of the present. Irving Fine may be taken as a typical case in point. During his comparatively brief lifetime, his was not a "famous name"; nevertheless, he enjoyed the high regard of his musical peers, and for the very good reason that his music has quality, sincerity and vitality. The fact that his music — especially his vocal and chamber music — has had increasing performances since his passing in 1962 proves its viability. And now, with this recording, we have an opportunity to become familiar with three of his finest orchestral works.

As his friend and colleague, I had plenty of opportunity to observe Irving Fine as musical creator and musical reactor. To my mind his outstanding quality was his musical sensitivity — he had an ear that one could trust. His students and his fellow composers depended on him to tell the truth about their music, and in the sureness and rightness of his judgement we recognized ourselves. The loss of that kind of instinctive musicianship cannot be replaced.

This sureness of musical instinct informed his every activity, as composer and teacher and performer. He worried considerably about each new work in process of composition. And yet, when we came to know them, they had elegance, style, finish and a convincing continuity. His problems as composer concerned matters of aesthetics, of eclecticism, of influence. These limitations he recognized; they made him modest to a fault. But all his compositions, from the lightest to the most serious, "sound"; they have bounce and thrust and finesse; they are always a *musical* pleasure to hear.

Fine grew up musically during the ascendancy of the neoclassic movement. This style, as developed by Stravinsky and his followers during the thirties and forties, had a profound influence on the younger composers. It satisfied a deep need in Fine's creative psyche — the need for an emotive world that includes imaginative freedom along with a sense of order and control. There is intensity and movement in all his music, and sometimes a surprising pathos, yet always one is aware of the craftsmanship that shapes the composition with a sure hand.

In many ways he wrote music that was thoroughly representative of its time. Whether it is elegiac and richly textured as in the *Serious Song*, or rhythmic and athletically vigorous as in the *Toccata*, or dramatically dissonant and daring as in the *Symphony*, his music wins us over through its keenly conceived sonorities and its fully realized expressive content.

Special reference should be made to the *Symphony*, partly because it represents the composer in his final phase and partly because it demonstrates a reaching out toward new and more adventurous experiences, in certain ways experiences outside the frame of reference of most of Fine's music. It is strongly dramatic, almost operatic in gesture, with a restless and somewhat strained atmosphere that is part of its essential quality. It is saddening to think that Fine was not fated to carry through to full fruition the new directions clearly inherent in the best pages of the *Symphony*.

The compositions recorded on this compact disc not only are three of Irving Fine's most representative works, but each is specifically typical of his output in a separate decade of work: the *Toccata Concertante* was composed in 1947, when Fine was thirty-two, the *Serious Song* was written in 1955, and the *Symphony* was completed in 1962, the year of his death.

Each of these works gives emphatic evidence of intense, superlative craftsmanship. Fine worked slowly and was severely self-critical. Each diacritical mark in his scores was subjected to the most minute scrutiny before he was satisfied; revisions were constant (the *Symphony* underwent three major recastings before it was turned over to his publisher). He was not content to "find" a style and then run off carbon copies. He passionately pursued the perfecting of the essence and language of the music he created. One might term this an attempt to evolve a particular aesthetic content; it is more pertinent to describe this special vigilance as true creative growth — growth that marks only the real artist, separates him from the rank experimentalist or from one who finds a solution only by adhering to strict disciplines based on a closed system.

Symphony (1962)

Fine's largest composition (in scope, forces and performance time) was introduced by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Charles Munch conducting, on March 23, 1962. Later it was presented at Tanglewood, with the composer on the podium. During the 1966 - 67 season it received its first New York presentations - under the baton of Leonard Bernstein, with the New York Philharmonic.

Tight form is obviated in this aspect of symphonism; fantasy brings the required balances without resorting to academic formulae, thematic phrases being replaced by pithy ideas. To maintain the unity of this premise, symphonic development is substituted by juxtaposition of these motivic thoughts, and the effect is one of beautifully controlled improvisation. Nevertheless, there is a tension that persists throughout, released only by the peroration of the final measures of the piece.

Despite titles for the three movements the *Symphony* should not be considered in any terms but musical materialization. All the meanings are clear - formal fantasy there is, but descriptive rhapsody is far from the composer's mind. Thus, Fine "suggests" that the first movement (*Altra*), originally titled "Eloque" is "a kind of choreographic action in which characters enter, depart, and reappear altered and in different groupings." Part two (*Capriccio*) is a large scherzo (the meters shift, but are mainly quadruple-pulsed), with a set of connected episodes replacing the customary, contrasting trio. The final *Ode* is the most rhapsodic of the work. Much material from the preceding movements appears, but contrapuntally disguised and costumed with figuration. Of importance is the relationship to the opening of the *Symphony* found in the closing portion of the work. It is not only technically logical but dramatically convincing.

—Arthur Cohn

Serious Song: Lament for String Orchestra

This music of contemporary romantic depth (meaning flexible lyricism plus warm severity) was commissioned by the Louisville Philharmonic Orchestra and first performed by that organization, under Robert Whitney's direction, on November 16, 1955. Its refined mood (the distinct profile in all of Fine's music) is projected by scoring that emphasizes instruments.

Tonality is the yardstick that measures the ternary boundaries of the *Serious Song* — the outer portions are in E (on an extremely fluctuating basis; sometimes major, sometimes minor, sometimes modal), the central section in C minor. Fine's string music represents a symphonic poem without a basic story, but with definite threnodic involvement. It is in turn tender and serene, desolate and impassioned.

Toccata Concertante

Begun in 1946, the *Toccata Concertante* was completed the following year (at MacDowell Colony, where Fine spent several summers) and was first heard when the Boston Symphony Orchestra, with Serge Koussevitzky conducting, presented it on October 22, 1948. (Some soul-searching concerned the titling of the piece. In its working stages it was called a "Sinfonia," and later "Masque," with *Toccata Concertante* as the subtitle; eventually the latter was retained as the sole title.)

The hybrid title confirms Fine's objective. A toccata the work is, from its kinetic obstinacy and fanfarelike persistence. Sixteenth-note patterns set the work in motion, and it is this rhythmic grouping that is basic to the motivic character of the main thematic argument and is further utilized as the accompanimental framework for more lyrical statements. The concertante personality derives from the use of solo instruments (chiefly woodwinds) as a contrasting factor within the design. Furthermore, motoric drive colors this more relaxed section and furnishes a link between the concertante and toccata territories.

A Biographical Note

Irving Fine was born in Boston, December 3, 1914. He received his B.A. (1937) and M.A. (1938) degrees from Harvard University where he majored in music and worked with Walter Piston and Edward Burlingame Hill. He also took a course in choral conducting with A.T. Davison. His advanced studies included composition with Nadia Boulanger in Cambridge, Massachusetts (1936), and in France (1939). Mr. Fine returned to Harvard in 1939 as a member of the teaching staff and from 1947 to 1950 served as Assistant Professor of Music. He then joined the faculty of Brandeis University where he was Walter W. Naumburg Professor of Music and also Chairman of the School of Creative Arts. For nine seasons between 1946 and 1957 he was also a member of the faculty of the Berkshire Music Center and Tanglewood. He died in Boston, August 23, 1962.