

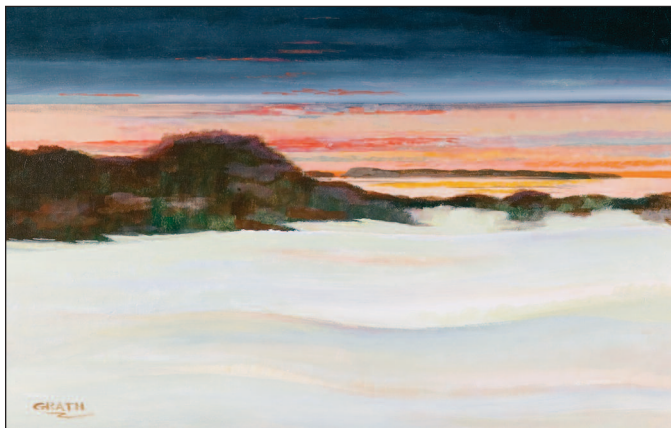
VOLUME II

Music of Edward Joseph Collins

Mardi Gras ■ *Concert Piece*

Tragic Overture ■ *Valse Elegante*

Leslie Stifelman, piano
The Concordia Orchestra
Marin Alsop, conductor



Edward J. Collins ■ *An American Composer*

BY ERIK ERIKSSON

Composer and pianist Edward Joseph Collins was born on 10 November 1886 in Joliet, Illinois, the youngest of nine children. After early studies in Joliet, he began work with Rudolf Ganz in Chicago. In 1906, Collins traveled with Ganz to Berlin, where he enrolled in the *Hochschule für Musik* in performance and composition. Upon graduation, he made a successful concert debut in Berlin, winning positive reviews from several critics.

When Collins returned to the United States in the fall of 1912, he toured several larger eastern cities, again winning strong reviews. After serving as an assistant conductor at the Century Opera Company in New York, he traveled again to Europe, to become an assistant conductor at the Bayreuth Festival, a position cut short by the outbreak of World War I.

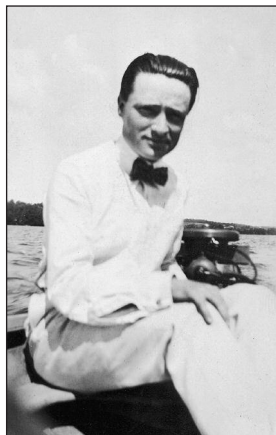
During that war, Collins rose from Private to Lieutenant. He served as an interpreter, received a citation for bravery, and entertained the troops as pianist.

Upon return to Chicago, he began a career in teaching, joining the faculty of the Chicago Musical College. He later married Frieda Mayer, daughter of Oscar Mayer.

Collins had co-authored *Who Can Tell?* in Europe near the end of WW I; the operetta was enjoyed in Paris by President Wilson. Collins continued composing on return to the USA. Two compositions submitted to a Chicago competition in 1923 were among the finalists, one the outright winner. Both works attracted the attention of Frederick Stock, Music Director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Stock conducted the first performance of 1914 (later re-titled *Tragic Overture*) and, eventually, many of Collins's subsequent orchestral compositions as well.

Collins died on ~~7 December 1951~~, leaving an oeuvre comprised of ten major orchestral works (including a symphony, two overtures and three suites), three piano concerti, *Hymn to the Earth* (for orchestra, choir, and four solo voices), several chamber works, eighteen songs for voice and piano (four arranged by Verne Reynolds for chamber/string orchestra), and more than a dozen piano solo and duo scores.

EDITOR: Research of public records by the composer's nephew Joseph Collins, subsequent to the release of this CD, revealed that the composer died on 1 December 1951.



Edward Collins, age 34,
Cedar Lake, Wisconsin (1920).

Composition dates enclosed in brackets are drawn from a catalogue prepared in the 1990s by the composer's daughter, Marianna. Dates in parentheses are drawn from source scores or from the composer's journals.

Mardi Gras [1922] (rev. 1924~1931)

A 13 October 1921 entry in Collins's journal records the beginning of his work on this composition:

Started my "Festival Overture" [Ed.: later re-titled *Mardi Gras*] today—got a pretty good idea for the beginning. At last I have started writing something for orchestra. No more fooling now. Night and day I must work to make up for a ten year delay. My apprentice has been too long—from now on learning must come from writing only.

After completing the overture on 7 January 1922, Collins submitted it to Chicago's North Shore Competition, in which it failed to qualify for the final round. Before the year's end, however, an individual described only as "a prominent musician" gave Collins some advice about the work and the composer immediately started making revisions.

On two successive evenings in late March 1924, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra performed *Mardi Gras* and "the audience liked it," the composer noted in his journal. Nonetheless, he felt it was "very old-fashioned" and was "a bit ashamed of it." Collins felt somewhat more sanguine about the work when he conducted it during 1931 commencement ceremonies at Chicago Musical College, leading an orchestra composed of students along with members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. *Mardi*



Edward and Frieda (Mayer) Collins,
Chicago, ca. 1920.

Gras had, he noted in a journal entry of 25 June 1931, "a fine success." By this occasion he could have also recalled that the work had been one of five final-round compositions in the 1926 North Shore Competition in which Collins was awarded first prize for his *Tragic Overture*.

Although *Mardi Gras* suggests the freer form of subsequent compositions, Collins here maintains a connection to traditional theme and development notions he had learned from his teacher Rudolf Ganz and others with whom he studied in Berlin.

In program notes prepared for the 1924 Chicago Symphony performances, Collins observed that "the piece is boisterous and bizarre by turns, with now and then a romantic or even serious moment—this latter the constant companion of wild frivolity." He further remarks that *Mardi Gras* presents a main theme voiced by cellos and horns accompanied by violins, trumpets and higher woodwinds, then by the full orchestra, and that after the orchestral statement, the theme breaks into "subsidiary fragments."

A return to the principal theme is followed by a transition to the second theme, now played "tenderly" by a solo clarinet. The composer acknowledges the episodic quality of the work in detailing the succession of climaxes that rise and subside, making way for new themes evocative of the festival's great masks and clowns on stilts. Collins concludes:

The Development has to do mainly with a working out of the opening subject and the first subsidiary theme. The Recapitulation begins in the violas and violoncellos (soli) over an organ-point in the kettledrums and horns. The final coda is the whole work 'boiled down.' Fragments of the entire thematic material are tossed back and forth until the wild scene reaches a culmination in a fanfare of trumpets sounding above the full orchestra. At this moment the carnival royalty arrives, thousands of colored streamers are thrown from upper windows, the air becomes thick with confetti, and lurid lights play upon the fantastic floats and the grotesque costumes of the revelers.

Concert Piece (Concerto No.2), for Piano with Orchestra Accompaniment, in A Minor [1931] (1931)

By the time Collins began work on what he sometimes called his "Concertstück" in late summer 1931, he had long since all but disavowed his attachment to German Romanticism, embracing instead Ravel as a composer he could admire unreservedly. Thus, when he approached his second piano concerto, it was with no obligation to theme and variations construction. Indeed, he described the piece as a "large work 'en miniature,' that is—the thematic material undergoes no

working over, consequently, what might have become a broad symphonic work is now condensed and episodic in character.”

Although the *Concert Piece* gestation period was relatively brief, it was not without problems. On 18 August 1931, Collins confided to his journal that, after returning to Cedar Lake from a “restful week” spent in scenic Door County (both scenic Wisconsin locales) he had lots of music paper, but was unable to write. Although Chicago Symphony Orchestra conductor

Frederick Stock had been promised he would have a new piano and orchestra work ready to perform by December, Collins unfortunately still had no compositional idea with which to begin. Four days later, he remained stuck. With a houseful of “little children who howl and quarrel all day” and suffering from rheumatism, he could only swim and go for short walks, making little progress on a work he had to deliver in three months.

Back in Chicago, on September 17th he wrote that the “Concertstück” was moving forward, though he wondered whether it would be good enough or finished on time. A second theme that had occurred to him at Cedar Lake now prompted doubts: “...of late it seems a bit saccharine and weak. I am just finishing the third episode (Scherzo)—still a Cadenza and Finale to do.” By the first of October, the work was finished: “It has turned out very well and I am not ashamed of it—that takes a year or two.”

On 29 October 1931, the orchestration was completed.

At a party in mid-November, Collins played his new work. “Many prominent musicians were there,” Collins wrote, “and some of them liked my *Concert Piece* which I played with Miriam Ulrich.” Collins’s December performance of the new concerto with the Chicago Symphony



Frieda and Edward Collins, with first child Dorothy, Nye, Wisconsin, 1922.

Orchestra was a success. Even the hard-to-please music critic Claudia Cassidy wrote favorably of it. The measured introductory theme is transformed into the principal subject of the Allegro. This is Collins's own description of what ensues:

... a lyric idea follows and is spun out at some length, then giving way to a Scherzo Diabolico—the most ambitious section in that it contains a Trio and Recapitulation. The cadenza follows the Scherzo and summarizes the material up to that point. The orchestra then begins a short transitional section which leads to the entrance of the theme of the last movement, in A minor, $3\frac{1}{2}$ –4 time. This section also contains a subsidiary idea and a return, followed by the climax of the work—Andante trionfale, which is a repetition of the early lyrical theme, now fortissimo in the orchestra and accompanied by violent arpeggios and octaves in the piano.

A scurrying coda concludes the work.

Tragic Overture [1925, originally titled 1914] (revised 1926, 1942)

Collins's *Tragic Overture* was the work with which the composer finally took first prize in Chicago's North Shore Festival competition in 1926. Begun four years earlier (when it was called "1914"), it is first mentioned in Collins's journal entry of 30 November 1922.

On 11 December 1922, Collins was recovering from negative criticism of his recital played the previous day, though the evening papers were kinder in their assessments. After working on the overture, he wrote in his journal that day: "It is a silly old piece but has some interesting moments and I am learning a great deal writing it."

After having lost the competition twice, the work, now titled *Tragic Overture*, won the competition on its third appearance in 1926. He admitted in his journal on 3 June 1926 that his delight in winning was "not as great as my chagrin the other times." Two years earlier, he was rueful about losing because he regarded his work as the best on the program. In August 1926, the *Tragic Overture* was performed in New York under Frederick Stock's direction; a month later, the composer led the overture with the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra. In December 1926, Collins completed a new revision of the work.

In notes Collins contributed for CSO performances in March 1927 (which he conducted), he cautions:

No definite program should be attached to the thematic material; however, in one or two cases, it will be impossible to avoid this as the meaning is perfectly obvious. For instance, the battle scene with the pastoral interruption which constitutes the development section, and the coda, which is a

funeral march with a fragment of 'taps' in the distance, are two places where only one impression can be conveyed.

Those who listen carefully may be startled to hear what seems a near-direct quote of the Nibelungen theme from Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. Was this intentional? Did the composer, briefly an assistant conductor at Bayreuth on the eve of the Great War, consider this a symbol of war's enslaving savagery?

The *Tragic Overture* is scored for large orchestra, calling for three flutes, three oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, bass tuba, piano, and an extensive battery of percussion.

Valse Elegante [1933] (arr. 1933)

Orchestrated in 1933, this charming piece of little more than three minutes duration was drawn from a set of waltzes Collins composed for piano, titled *Six Valses Caractéristiques, Op. 18* when published by Carl Fischer in 1922.

Valse Élégante, the second of the "Characteristic Waltzes," was dedicated to Collins's instructor and mentor, Rudolf Ganz. Its title clearly describes its character, as do the titles of the other five piano pieces in the original set, the vales *Héroïque*, *Romantique*, *Limpide*, *Pensive*, and *Capricieuse*.

The composer left no comments in his journal regarding the genesis of this orchestral elaboration.

ERIK ERIKSSON, ANNOTATOR

Marin Alsop, conductor

Marin Alsop is Principal Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony, Music Director Laureate of the Colorado Symphony and Music Director of the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in California, where she has received the ASCAP award for adventurous programming several years running. In 2003 she was awarded both the Gramophone Artist of the Year Award, and the Royal Philharmonic Society Conductors Award for outstanding achievement in classical music. She guest-conducts major orchestras worldwide, including the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, Royal Concertgebouw, Munich Philharmonic, London Symphony and London Philharmonic.



Marin Alsop studied at Yale University, taking a Master's Degree from the Juilliard School. In 1989 she won the Koussevitzky Conducting Prize at the Tanglewood Music Center, where she was a pupil of Leonard Bernstein, Seiji Ozawa, and Gustav Meier.

Alsop is an important champion of American music. Her first recordings with the Bournemouth Symphony on Naxos of Bernstein, Adams and Glass have received much praise, whilst the first disc of her Barber cycle with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (of which she was Principal Guest Conductor 2000-2003) was nominated for a Gramophone Award and a Classical Brit award. She has also recorded Gershwin's youthful opera *Blue Monday* and works by American composers such as Roy Harris, Christopher Rouse, Michael Torke, Libby Larsen and Joan Tower.

Leslie Stifelman

On Broadway, Leslie Stifelman has been Music Director of *Chicago*, Associate Conductor of *Wonderful Town*, and, as a member of the Green Moon Gang (with Bebe Neuwirth, Roger Rees and Ann Reinking), Music Director and Supervisor of *Here Lies Jenny* at the Zipper Theatre. Stifelman was also Music Director and Conductor for the U.S. tour of *Vamps: An Orchestral Evening with Bebe Neuwirth* and Assistant Conductor/Pianist for *Chicago* (original Broadway company).

Pianist for eight City Center *Encores!*, Stifelman has also collaborated with Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, Dawn Upshaw, Marin Alsop, Dick Hyman, Janis Siegel, Mark O'Connor and worked as vocal coach for Melanie Griffith, Brooke Shields, Patrick Swayze, and Wayne Brady. She has been piano soloist with the London Symphony (Andrew Litton, conductor), the Concordia Orchestra at Lincoln Center, the Colorado Symphony, the Richmond and Eugene Symphonies, the New York City Ballet Orchestra, the Oregon Festival of American Music (all with Marin Alsop, conductor) and the EOS Orchestra at Lincoln Center (Jonathan Sheffer, conductor).

Stifelman has been Producer/Pianist for concerts and theatrical events including premieres of rediscovered works by George Gershwin, Paul Bowles, James P. Johnson, Oscar Levant and the music of the Paul Whiteman Orchestra. Her discography includes recordings for BMG, RCA Victor, Angel, Nonesuch, Decca Broadway, DRG, Koch International Classics, Albany Records and MusicMasters. Stifelman is President of *Symfunny Toons™*, a company dedicated to creating television and interactive products for children to learn about music, currently in development for a documentary television series called *Finding the Groove™*.



The Concordia Orchestra

Concordia was established in 1984 by Marin Alsop to break down the barriers between jazz and classical music. Concordia enlightened a wide audience through innovative concerts combining American symphonic masterpieces, orchestral jazz, and commissioned premiers. The orchestra was committed to the preservation and presentation of the American music tradition and garnered praise for adventurous programming, artistic excellence, and its belief that art is creative, fun, and accessible to everyone. In 47 concerts across 13 seasons, Concordia showcased over 100 American composers, including 27 world premiers. The Village Voice hailed the 1996 performance of Bernstein's *On the Town* as one of its Top Ten Picks for that year.

Concordia's dedication to honoring new talent was highlighted by two programs, the American Composer Awards and "Celebrate America." The American Composer Awards, begun in 1986, premiered new compositions by emerging artists at Lincoln Center. These awards demonstrated Concordia's loyalty to American talent by offering young composers their first entrée into the professional music world. Concordia's "Celebrate America" recording project aimed to compile an extensive discography of our country's symphonic music. Concordia released a recording of music by Christopher Rouse in 1997. This followed Concordia's recording of *Victory Stride*, released by Music Masters, a presentation of rediscovered works by James P. Johnson, and a 1933 Angel Records release, *Blue Monday*, featuring the works of Gerswhin and Levant. Concordia, led by Marin Alsop, also appeared on a 1995 Warner Brothers recording of Mark Connor's *Fiddle Concerto*.

In addition to many performances in Alice Tully Hall, Concordia appeared at Avery Fisher Hall, Town Hall, the World Financial Center, South Street Seaport, Lincoln Center's Damrosch Park, and Symphony Space. Featured guest artists included Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, Marcus Roberts, Carole Shelley, Judy Kaye, David Garrison, William Sharp, Dick Hyman, Mark O'Connor, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Elmar Oliveira, and members of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company under George Faison's direction.

Concordia received international exposure through live broadcasts by Japanese Satellite Broadcasting, WQXR, and National Public Radio. In the fall of 1993, *Concordia Celebrates Bernstein*, a one-hour television special, aired on the BRAVO channel.

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The *Newberry Library* (Chicago) is the archive for the original scores, journals, and memorabilia of Collins.

For further information go to: www.EdwardJCollins.org

Edward Joseph Collins

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| 1 | <i>Mardi Gras</i> | 15:03 |
| 2 | <i>Concert Piece</i> (Concerto No. 2), for Piano with
Orchestra Accompaniment, in A Minor | 20:44 |
| 3 | <i>Tragic Overture</i> | 14:04 |
| 4 | <i>Valse Elegante</i> | 3:15 |
| Total | | 56:06 |

Leslie Stifelman, piano
The Concordia Orchestra
Marin Alsop, conductor



Marin Alsop.

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Edward Joseph Collins

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An American Composer [1886~1951]



This is a 2005 re-issue of a 1997 CD titled *Edward Collins*, with updated liner notes and art design. Born in Joliet, Illinois, Collins studied piano with Ganz in Chicago and composition with Bruch and Humperdinck in Europe. A 1912 Berlin debut and subsequent concerts in the USA and Europe earned strong critical praise. Collins was hired as an assistant conductor for the Bayreuth Festival in 1914, an engagement ended by WWI and service in the US Army. After the war, Collins began a teaching career in Chicago, continuing to conduct, perform, and compose. His music attracted the attention of Chicago Symphony Orchestra Music Director Frederick Stock, who conducted many of Collins's orchestral compositions. Those include a symphony, three piano concerti, three suites, and two overtures. Collins also composed dozens of songs, piano solo pieces, and other chamber music works.

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