

Ernst KRENEK

PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME TWO

TOCCATA AND CHACONNE, OP. 13

SECHS VERMESSENE, OP. 168

PIANO SONATA NO. 5, OP. 121

KLEINE SUITE, OP. 13A

TWO SUITES, OP. 26

Stanislav Kristenko

ERNST KRENEK Piano Music, Volume Two

Toccata und Chaconne über den Choral 'Ja ich glaub' an Jesum Christum',

Op. 13 (1922)

1	Toccata	12:54
2	Chaconne	12:00

Eine kleine Suite von Stücken über denselbigen Choral, verschiedenen Charakters, Op. 13a (1922)

3	I Allemande	0:48
4	II Sarabande	0:36
5	III Gavotte	0:23
6	IV Waltz	0:54
7	V Fugue	1:14
8	VI Foxtrott	1:19

Zwei Suiten, Op. 26 (1924)*

No. 1 **8:03**

9	I <i>Andante</i>	1:57
10	II <i>Andante sostenuto</i>	1:35
11	III <i>Allegretto</i>	1:05
12	IV <i>Andante sostenuto</i>	2:16
13	V <i>Allegretto</i>	1:10

No. 2 **10:14**

14	I <i>Allegro moderato</i>	1:39
15	II <i>Andantino</i>	1:19
16	III <i>Allegro agitato</i>	0:54
17	IV <i>Adagio</i>	4:20
18	V <i>Allegretto</i>	2:02

Piano Sonata No. 5, Op. 121 (1950)

19 I *Allegretto con grazia*

20 II *Andante appassionato*

21 III Introduction and Rondo

19:50

5:24

6:59

7:27

Sechs Vermessene, Op. 168 (1958)

22 No. 1

23 No. 2

24 No. 3

25 No. 4

26 No. 5

27 No. 6

13:13

1:45

1:45

1:34

3:47

2:34

1:48

Stanislav Khristenko, piano

TT 81:31

*FIRST RECORDINGS

ERNST KRENEK AT THE PIANO, VOLUME TWO: THE COMPOSER AND HIS PIANISTS

by Peter Tregear

This second set of recordings from Toccata Classics of the piano music of Ernst Krenek (1900–91) offers a further survey of this composer’s extraordinarily varied contribution to the twentieth-century piano literature. Although Krenek is best remembered today as a composer for the stage, the piano was nevertheless the instrument on which he first encountered many of the masterworks of his Viennese forebears (an inheritance which would both inspire and haunt him for the rest of his life), and it was also the instrument on which he continued to perform himself. He later declared the piano to be nothing less than ‘the key to music’, because it also enabled him to reproduce, by and for himself, anything from a ‘sonata for contrabass solo to the most complicated opera score’.¹

The origins of the *Toccata und Chaconne über den Choral ‘Ja ich glaub’ an Jesum Christum’*, Op. 13 (1922) [1]–[2] lie in the burgeoning, and creatively important, friendship that Krenek developed in the early 1920s with the pianist and composer Eduard Erdmann and his pianist wife Irene in Berlin. Up to this point in his life, Krenek’s compositional education had been almost entirely in the care of Franz Schreker in Vienna, but when Schreker was invited to become the director of the Staatliche Akademische Hochschule für Musik in Berlin in 1920, Krenek followed him there and quickly made the acquaintance of many of the leading musicians of the city, the Erdmanns chief among them. He later recalled that it was through Eduard Erdmann that he

¹ Transcript of a conversation between the composer and David Burge, University of Colorado, 24 April 1963, reproduced in *Newsletter of the Ernst Krenek Archive*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1997), p. 3.

learned for the first time to look at music from purely musical vantage points and to discuss and analyze it in a truly professional matter-of-fact manner instead of watching it from the outside and evaluating it in the vague terms of pleasantness of sound, as was Schreker's habit. I dare say that practically the whole of my musical philosophy is due to my intercourse with Erdmann; at least the groundwork for it was laid in those three winters in Berlin, when I used to see him about once or twice every week.²

In 1922 Erdmann asked Krenek to compose for him a 'very difficult' work in the 'modern idiom,' a challenge Krenek – who was himself quickly becoming widely known as one of the leading members of an emerging post-WWI generation of musical modernists – was only too happy to accept. Krenek recalls that he starting to compose the work while travelling with Erdmann on a train from Berlin to Lübeck and handing the pages to him as he finished them so that Erdmann could start learning them straightaway. Erdmann's habit of providing made-up texts to difficult passages that he might have to repeat over and over again led to the opening series of chords of this work becoming associated with the phrase 'Ja, ich glaub' an Jesum Christum, Gottes eingebornen Sohn' ('Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God'). Krenek recalled:

As [Erdmann] kept on yelling those words any time that theme appeared, he finally suggested the somewhat fiendish joke of attaching these words permanently to the piece and pretending that this was a Toccata and Chaconne over the chorale 'Yes, I believe' and so forth. I caught on at once, thinking it a remarkable piece of witticism designed as a trap for future critics of the composition. We anticipated that they of course would not bother to investigate whether any such chorale existed nor become suspicious on account of the utterly unchorale-like melody which consisted of wide skips and chromatic progressions, and would indulge in remarks on my treatment, or mistreatment, as the case may be, of the 'well-known' chorale. It was not hard to predict that in this calculation we were absolutely right.³

² Krenek, memoirs, published in German as *Im Atem der Zeit: Erinnerungen an die Moderne*, transl. Friedrich Saathen and Sabine Schulte, Braumüller Literaturverlag, Vienna, 1998, p. 299. This and subsequent quotations are taken from the English original, in preparation from Toccata Press.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

Thus a musical ‘fake’ came into being. As if to draw attention to the absurdity of the presumed association between the work and an obviously un-chorale-like melody, Krenek followed it up with *Eine kleine Suite von Stücken über denselbigen Choral, verschiedenen Charakters* (‘A Small Suite of Pieces on the same Chorale in Contrasting Styles’), Op. 13a, which consists of six epigrammatic movements, effectively a set of variations on this theme, with the descriptive titles drawn from Baroque and contemporary dance styles: Allemande [3], Sarabande [4], Gavotte [5], Waltz [6], Fugue [7] and Foxtrott [8]. The suite became quite popular in its own right, although Krenek also recalled that

Those hostile towards new music were unanimous in condemning me for the blasphemous idea of dragging the sacred theme through the gutter of dissolute, obscene jazz rhythms, after having been defiled by the ‘cacophonous’ orgies of atonality. Of course, that was just what we had expected and planned, but at that time I had not calculated that years later I would not find it always funny to see the reproach of irreverence for the religion of the forebears repeated over and over in the reactionary and later the Nazi press.⁴

An unexpected postscript to this curious set of ‘invented’ works is the possibility that they may have served, at least in part, as the inspiration for another invention, the monumental last composition by Adrian Leverkühn in Thomas Mann’s novel *Doktor Faustus*. Entitled *Dr Fausti Weheklag* (‘The Lamentation of Dr Faustus’), it is itself based on a twelve-syllable text: ‘Denn ich sterbe als ein böser und guter Christ’ (‘For I die as a bad and good Christian’), which, in the novel, is the basis for the organisation of the music around a twelve-tone row.

Although it was again Erdmann who gave their first performance, the two Suites, Op. 26, which were composed two years later, are dedicated to another pianist-composer who became a formative influence on Krenek in the years following his departure from Schreker’s compositional class: Artur Schnabel (1882–1951). Perhaps the dedication reflected Krenek’s belief that Schnabel ultimately presented a more intellectually serious model upon which to base his own artistic endeavours; the movements of this Suite are

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

also more 'serious' works. The individual movements lack descriptive titles, although each pays homage to the historic origin of the suite as a collection of stylised dances, insofar as each draws on a specific rhythmic motif as the foundational musical material. The dance-styles suggested, however, are not the traditional sarabande, gavotte, gigue and so forth, but more evocative of foxtrots, charlestons and tangos. The third movement of the First Suite [1] is, for instance, a grotesque waltz. It also employs a musical palindrome, a device to which Krenek may have been drawn because it was starting to be used by some of his contemporaries who had adopted Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique. Schoenberg himself was also invoking the Baroque musical 'frame' at this time to help provide structure to his post-tonal compositions; his twelve-tone *Suite for Piano*, Op. 25, was composed between 1921 and 1923.

By contrast, the three-movement Sonata No. 5, Op. 121, composed in 1950, reflects Krenek's reaching perhaps the zenith of his own turn towards musical order. The intervening years had seen him witness the seemingly inexorable rise to power of the Nazi Party, first in Germany and then Austria – the latter leading to his flight from his homeland to America. The times demanded nothing less than the utmost seriousness, it seemed. Krenek was to remain in the United States, taking a series of academic posts and eventually settling in Palm Springs, California. The end of the War nevertheless allowed him to reconnect with musical developments in western Europe, and above all with the experiments in the total organisation of musical material that were being undertaken by a new generation of composers, such as Pierre Boulez at the Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music. But he found his own music less welcome there, and this perpetual sense of homelessness is reflected in Krenek's ultimate eschewal of the obsessive concern of the Darmstadt School with obliterating all tonal conventions. Thus, notwithstanding its tautness of musical organisation, the Sonata avoids the total pre-organisation of musical material that characterises the music of Boulez of this time. There are, indeed, allusions both to the thematic dualism of nineteenth-century sonata form, and to traditional tonality itself (especially through the emphasis of the interval of a third, and through the use of scalar passages on the 'white' keys of the piano across all three movements).

The first movement, *Allegretto con grazia* [19], presents a succession of short musical paragraphs, preceded by the statement of a tone-row in the first six bars. The second movement, *Andante appassionato* [20], consists of a theme (a tone-row) and three variations, and concludes with a free return of the theme. The third movement [21] consists of a free, scherzo-like Introduction (*Vivace*) and Rondo (*Allegretto con grazia*), the effect of which, when taken with the first two movements, is to give an allusion to a traditional four-movement sonata outline.

The *Sechs Vermessene* ('Six Measurements'), Op. 168 (1958) [22]–[27], were composed at a time when Krenek was cementing a friendship with his fellow Californian exile, Igor Stravinsky, who, on the urging of Robert Craft, had been studying Krenek's approach to serial composition. Each untitled piece explores in epigrammatic fashion a rarefied aspect of musical structure: not only pitch but also rhythm and even pitch-density are subject to serial organisation. But Krenek was also intensely aware that the pursuit of total serial determinacy in music led to a paradoxical outcome: the result can sound essentially improvisatory. 'Vermessene' in this sense has a double meaning in the original German – not only 'measured' (as in 'thought out') but also 'self-willed'. Here the resulting complexity of the rhythmic permutations alone necessitated the use of a novel system of notation that in the end is impossible for a performer to realise precisely. The resultant 'in-built' element of chance in performance is, in fact, an inevitable consequence of the serial procedure, and it is hard to resist the speculation that it was precisely the inescapable presence of chaos in musical order that appealed to Krenek as both a mathematical-philosophical observation, and a reflection also of the century in which he lived. The work was first performed in Kassel in 1960 by the German pianist and harpsichordist Franzpeter Goebels (1920–88).

Peter Tregear is a Principal Research Fellow of the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. He has conducted several UK premieres of Weimar-era works, including Max Brand's opera Maschinist Hopkins at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 2001, Krenek's Schwergewicht in Cambridge in 2004 and the Australian premiere of Jonny spielt auf in Melbourne in 2019. He is a former member of the Advisory Board of the Ernst Krenek Institut in Krems and Convenor of the International Centre

for *Suppressed Music*, London. He is the author of *Ernst Krenek and the Politics of Musical Style* (Scarecrow Press, Lanham (Maryland), 2013) and more recently acted as artistic advisor to Barry Humphries and the Australian Chamber Orchestra 'Weimar Cabaret' concerts.

Stanislav Khristenko's performances have captivated audiences on four continents since his first solo recital at the age of eleven at the Kharkiv Philharmonic Hall in Ukraine. A 'poet of piano' (*Le Soir*, Belgium), he has been praised for his emotional intensity, charismatic expression, 'palette of touches' and 'solid' and 'precise' technique by publications which include *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Miami Herald* in the USA, *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine* in the UK and *El Pais* in Spain.

As a concert pianist, Stanislav Khristenko has won prizes in over 30 competitions, including the Cleveland, Maria Canals and Queen Elisabeth International Music Competitions. His recordings have been released on Steinway & Sons, Naxos, Oehms and Toccata Classics (Volume One of this series of Krenek recordings, on TOCC 0298). He has appeared as a soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra, Phoenix, Puerto Rico and Richmond Symphonies, National Orchestra of Belgium, the Bilbao, Madrid and Tenerife Symphony Orchestras, Liège Royal Philharmonic in Belgium and Suwon Philharmonic Orchestra in South Korea, among others. His performance highlights include solo recitals at Carnegie Hall, Vienna Konzerthaus, Palais de Beaux-Arts in Brussels, as well as performances with orchestras in the Berliner Philharmonie, Seoul Arts Center, Moscow Conservatoire Great Hall and Hong Kong City Hall. Stanislav Khristenko is a Steinway Artist.

He has recently launched a second career as a conductor, already appearing with orchestras in Ukraine, including Kyiv Soloists National Chamber Orchestra and Kharkiv Opera Orchestra, as well as the Fargo-Moorhead and Concordia Symphonies in the USA, the Moravian Philharmonic in the Czech Republic and the Kammerphilharmonie Graz in Austria. He has taken part in a number of conducting workshops in the United States, Austria and the Czech



Republic, and received the Postgraduate Artistic Training Diploma in conducting from The Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw. In summer 2016 he won second prize in the Kammerphilharmonie Graz Conducting Competition. He is the founder and Music Director of the KharkivMusicFest and Nova Sinfonietta Chamber Orchestra in Kharkiv.

khristenko.com

Also available on Toccata Classics



TOCC 0298

“The cover photo of Krenek on this disc of solo piano music shows the graying composer, horn-rimmed glasses perched on his nose, staring intently, presumably at a score, with the hint of a smile beginning to appear on his lips. It is an apt visual metaphor for his music; much of it is concisely, smartly constructed, but there is also often an undercurrent of humor in his writing. [...] Ukrainian-born pianist Stanislav Khristenko delivers Krenek’s music with energy and precision, [...] this is a fascinating release on the whole, a nicely varied retrospective of a tumultuous career. Toccata Classics does it again.”

—Peter Burwasser, *Fanfare*

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—Jonathan Woolf, *MusicWeb International*

ernst krenek institut



In 1997 a group of musicians and musicologists founded an organisation intended to increase awareness of Ernst Krenek's artistic work. From these roots grew the Ernst Krenek Institut, set up seven years later by the composer's widow, Gladys Nordenstrom Krenek, together with Land Niederösterreich and the Austrian Ministry for Arts and Culture, as a private foundation in Krems an der Donau in Lower Austria.

The principle mission of the EKI is to preserve and to promote Krenek's oeuvre, and its core activities are geared to making Krenek's musical and literary estate accessible to scholars and artists from all over the world. The Institute organises workshops and symposia, supports publications of Krenek's works and research into them, and creates exhibitions to promulgate his cultural legacy.

As an information centre the EKI provides repertoire lists to enquiring musicians and offers dramaturgical advice to promoters and musicians to re-establish Krenek's music as part of musical life today.

The Ernst Krenek Forum, also located in Krems, welcomes a broader public, housing a little museum which documents Krenek's life and provides a venue for chamber concerts, where Krenek's Schweighofer grand piano still can be played.

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