

Gideon Klein (1919-1945): Streichtrio

Gideon Klein was born in 1919 in Czechoslovakia into a Moravian Jewish family. Displaying great musical talent from an early age, the young Klein enjoyed a thriving career as both pianist and composer. In 1940, during his time at music university, he was forced to discontinue his studies, as the Nazis closed all institutions of higher learning in Czechoslovakia following the Czech Invasion of 1939. The Nazis also banned Jews from appearing in concert and the performance of all compositions by Jews, so Klein was no longer able to concertize nor was he even able to have his works performed. At the end of 1941, Gideon Klein was deported to the Terezin concentration camp, where, along with a handful of other well-known Jewish composers, he was able to continue to write music. Terezin was one of the few camps in which artistic activity was able to occur on any scale: In fact, Klein was even able to perform quite a number of piano recitals, and he also took part in some chamber music performances. Tragically, Gideon Klein was deported to Auschwitz and then finally to Fursengrube, where he perished just weeks into the start 1945, at the young age of 25. The String Trio was his very last completed composition.

Klein wrote his String Trio in Terezin, and it was completed only nine days before his transfer to Auschwitz. It is a conventional three-movement work, with brisk and lively outer movements and a slower and more serious second movement. The short first movement shows great influence of Leos Janacek, a fellow Czech composer, and someone whose music Klein was exposed to in his youth. The constant rhythmic drive, as at the very beginning of the piece, is reminiscent of Janacek, for example. In general, despite the circumstances of its composition, this movement is very upbeat and optimistic, with lots of scampering notes in the accompaniment and offbeat and folksy melodies. The second movement consists of a set of theme and variations which is based on a traditional Moravian folk song, as described in the title of the movement, written in Czech. The last movement is very similar in character to the first movement, but this music displays more of an influence of Bartok than of Janacek, with almost Hungarian-like folk rhythms. The Gideon Klein String Trio is a shining example of the work of a first-rate composer, and of one who certainly would be amongst the most famous composers of the 20th century had his life not been tragically terminated so prematurely.

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