

Frederick Jacobi

DAVID DIAMOND

FREDERICK JACOBI's place in contemporary music is an important one; for it is based on the extreme lucidity of his musical syntax as manifested in actual creative work. I attribute this clarity to the man's admirable musicianship and his fervent admiration for all works of art which have definite esthetic roots in the traditions and ideals of masters, past and present.

His intense musical ideals have guarded him from that particular school of contemporary composition which, because of a certain urbane particularization of effect, labels a composer a personality. Furthermore, the solidity of his craft rests on a truly cosmopolitan culture, and is the result of wide musical experience. He has set for himself a definite criterion by which his music reaps the fruits of development profitably and securely.

The actual position Jacobi holds as a composer, aside from his importance as an unusually capable musician, is rather comforting. The musical world today is characterized by a Babel-like diffuseness of style and creed, a disintegration of spiritual probity. The platitudes of present-day musical viewpoints are directed from mediocre sources—usually the heralds of the avant-garde. We cannot excuse the majority of composers who are preoccupied at heart with some cause entirely dissociated from anything musical; in reality they are bruiteurs and amateurs, whose only hope of survival rests in the whimsicalities of their satellites.

How encouraging then it is to find in Jacobi's music an architectony that rests on universal and solid musical values, as opposed to a confused and undisciplined application of formulae.

A detailed analysis of Jacobi's work shows, as the most important feature of his creative tendencies, that he possesses a



FREDERICK JACOBI

sketch by

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puissant melodic style. He is a melodist whose structures have a variety of tonal features and a freshness and directness of utterance. These characteristics are enhanced by an inflection of the medieval modes in a freer and more beautifully grouped relationship of whole tones and half tones within the melodic line itself. His superb instinct for a melody of extended and well balanced musical ideas is governed by the principle of "restatement after a contrasting phrase" as well as a subtle use of the "expansion" in broadening or anticipating the high point within a line. The fluency of his melodies may be due to the naturalness with which notes are distributed, and out of which rise fixed tonal centers codifying the essential phraseology.

In an early *Vocalise Etude-Aria*, his skill in writing a sensitive and simple melody of rare proportions is already discernible. The phrasing is a result of the line's harmonic implications; it is based on a clear exposition of tonic and dominant in the first phrase and a completion into well rounded subsidiary sections resting on the subordinate harmonies. The accented appoggiatura occurs frequently in sequences giving breadth to the melodic movement.

VOCALISE ETUDE-ARIA



The clarity of Jacobi's musical vista was for a time obscured by a superficial attraction to Indian folk song. Superficial in the sense that a lucid utilization of indigenous Indian material was never fully achieved, that instead there was a disparity of musical substance which apparently weakened any definitiveness of musical purpose in the actual scheme. The *First String Quartet on Indian Themes* is more of a plan to incorporate exotic material according to academic musical formulae than a successful attempt to frame those themes with a suitable and personalized idiom. The sonority brought about by the four string instruments is not varied enough, the texture is obviously artificial, and the plan to apply Indian melodic fragments to academic principles of thematic development seems false. In the first and

last movements there are pages of unusual beauty; certain genuine idiosyncrasies of primitive Indian instrumental sonority actually "sound." But the musical essence is not a vital one and exotic timbres do not cover up the dull and unimaginative meanderings from theme to theme, unrelieved in harmonic bareness. The *Indian Dances for Orchestra* are based on themes of great beauty, sensitively harmonized and superbly orchestrated, yet the lack of a basic individuality beneath the structure dims the musical content.



As a complete contrast, the intrinsic value of Jacobi's speech is fully revealed in works which stem directly from a warm emotional attachment to his race. A transition is noticed in both the technical and creative aspects of the immediate syntactical scheme. The *Sabbath Evening Service* for cantor and a *capella* chorus has nobility and exaltation, loftiness and warmth of melodic utterance. Here his music has magnificently realized an actual Hebraic quality, that of racial sorrow, an exalted tristesse at once personal and meditative, of a poignancy directly related to the very elegiac feeling of the music of the synagogue. The *Service* is divided into nine sections following the characteristic Friday evening liturgy. Each portion is a perfectly conceived musical form possessing an emotional intensity of restrained yet highly provocative power. The localization of its Hebraism is confined to the existing musical texture—a traditional one. Most of the parts reflect the nobility and majesty inherent in the oldest Semitic chants.

The *Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra* springs directly from the *Service* and is undoubtedly Jacobi's most personal and inspired work. The meditative serenity of its lyricism is closely allied to the old cantillation of the Bible. It is an intimate and peaceful work projecting a mood definitely inspired by the Ninetieth, Ninety-first, and Ninety-second Psalms. Jacobi's chief concern is a melodic one, and he has utilized the important and expressive instrumental scope of the 'cello to create a work that is noble and has romantic warmth.

The three movements are of a sameness in scale and texture; the 'cello is always to the fore, the orchestra is reduced to an octet

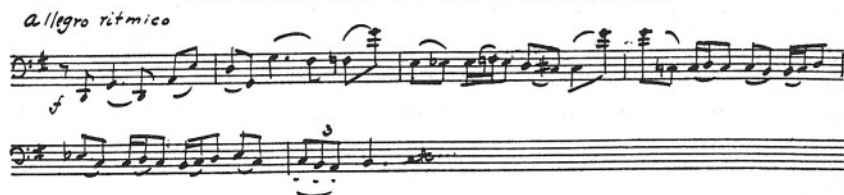
of winds and strings most discreetly employed as an accompanying harmonic background. The subject of the first movement is an excellent example of Jacobi's gift for melody. The theme is very long but perfectly proportioned into phrases punctuated by cadences which clarify the actual structure and simplify as well as unify all the essential details within the line. It is a melody restricted in range but within scope of the mixolydian mode, a mode both radiant and exultant.

FIRST MOVEMENT 'CELLO CONCERTO



In their entities, the three movements are concerned with important melodic details. Notice with what ease and beauty the theme of the third movement descends by semi-tones to its ultimate resolution.

THIRD MOVEMENT 'CELLO CONCERTO



The *Second String Quartet* and the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* have a kinship in their basic structures, but they are unequal in musical content. The *Quartet* is in each movement more unified, more concentrated, and more individually treated. The form is less forced, the ideas are worked out to suit the actual needs and no more. Not so with the *Concerto*, which in its entirety is more diffuse, inconsistent, and less personal in style. The first movement is overlong and the material does not measure up to Jacobi's best efforts. The short introduction which opens the work is not successfully employed as a unifying factor to bind

the form, which is of a rhapsodic nature and distracting in its diversity of styles. In comparison, the first movement of the *Quartet* is a model of structural perfection and one of Jacobi's superior movements.

The slow sections of these works bear marked resemblances in form and treatment of material. In the Andante of the *Piano Concerto* the oboe sings an unusually extended melody in a very free D-minor while the accompaniment of muted strings comprises a dirge-like movement of voices by stepwise motion over a low tonic B- \flat pedal. The fusion of two tonalities creates an extraordinarily beautiful harmonic texture. The Andante of the *Quartet* is less complicated; the tonality is restricted to B- \flat minor and the theme is shorter and less interesting.

The last movement of the *Quartet* is a gem. Its success may be entirely attributed to the humorous subject played by the 'cello, and the facility with which the entire rondo form is handled. The grand pause that heralds each repetition of the main subject is a detail that heightens rather than detracts from the perpetual eighth-note movement and brightens the sparkle and nervous energy of the theme itself. The finale of the *Piano Concerto* is conservatively built on formulae employed in other familiar last movements. It is not an integral part of Jacobi's language and in comparison with the rest seems false and forced.

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In all of Jacobi's work there exists an earnest endeavor to unite tendencies of the romantic and classic schools with present-day musical ideals. It would be absurd for me to concoct a descriptive word meaning "characteristic of past musical thought with contemporary musical ideals." The terms classic and romantic have been with us a long time. Who has defined their relationship better than Stendhal, with his dictum, "All good art was romantic in its day;" to which let me add "and is classic in the future." Within the scope of a composer's own time he is free to be individual or restricted; but his finished product must combine purity of principle with solidity of structure.

The criterion then by which Jacobi shapes his work is the result of a creative impetus based on a purely musical ideal. Very often, alas, there are in his music pages where the creative forces

are not fully realized and an incongruity of speech results. In his latest work, the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, he has succeeded more fully in unifying his material into a logical and coherent structure that possesses clarity of formal design and stimulating, refreshing variety of detail. The complete resolution of his musical syntax into a personal speech demands a revaluation of purely creative concepts. Each new work brings him closer to a more vital means of expression. The solidity of his musical thought and the perfect balance between the emotional and the intellectual elements must still ignite that impulse which generates a more individual mode of expression.

WORKS BY FREDERICK JACOBI

DATE		PUBLISHER
1914	Three Songs	G. Schirmer
1915	The Pied Piper, Symphonic Poem	Manuscript
1916	Three Songs to Poems by Sarojini Naidu	G. Schirmer
1917	A California Suite (orchestra)	Manuscript
1921	Three Preludes for Violin and Piano	The Composers' Music Corporation
1921 (1930)	Vocalises	Alphonse Leduc
1921	Six Pieces for Piano	Manuscript
1922	Symphony	Manuscript
	Three Songs to Poems by Chaucer	G. Schirmer
1923	Two Assyrian Prayers (voice and orchestra)	Manuscript
1923	String Quartet based on American Indian Themes	Society for the Publication of American Music
1925	The Poet in the Desert (after the poem by C. E. S. Wood, for orchestra, chorus and baritone solo)	Manuscript
1928	Indian Dances, Suite for Orchestra	Universal Edition
1930-31	Sabbath Evening Service	Bloch Publishing Co.
1932	Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra	Universal Edition
1933	String Quartet No. 2	Society for the Publication of American Music
1933	Six Pieces for the Organ for use in the Synagogue	Manuscript
1934-35	Concerto for Piano and Orchestra	Manuscript
1935	Piano Pieces for Children	Carl Fischer
1936	Scherzo for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon and Horn	Manuscript
1936-37	Concerto for Violin and Orchestra	Manuscript