

Lothar Klein

One from the heart

by Colin Eatock

Drawing freely from numerous styles, this musical iconoclast continues to commit his "fascinating felonies".

"Ecclecticism is *not* a dirty word," Lothar Klein states with conviction as he leans forward from a chair in his office at the University of Toronto. "There is no *one* way in music — one style is not necessarily any better than any other."

This philosophy is the basis of Lothar Klein's approach to composition, and has been since the mid-Sixties when such notions amounted to heresy against the orthodoxy of 12-tone compositional technique. But Klein points out that his view is now increasingly accepted by composers of serious music around the world. "It may well be that the era of musical innovation has come to an end," he continues. "The thing that matters today is craft."

Born in Germany in 1932, Klein emigrated with his family to the United States in 1940. He received his higher education in music at the University of Minnesota, and was greatly encouraged by Dimitri Mitropoulos, the conductor of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. He continued his studies in Berlin with Boris Blacher and at Darmstadt under Luigi Nono, before returning to North America. In 1968, he accepted a teaching position at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music.

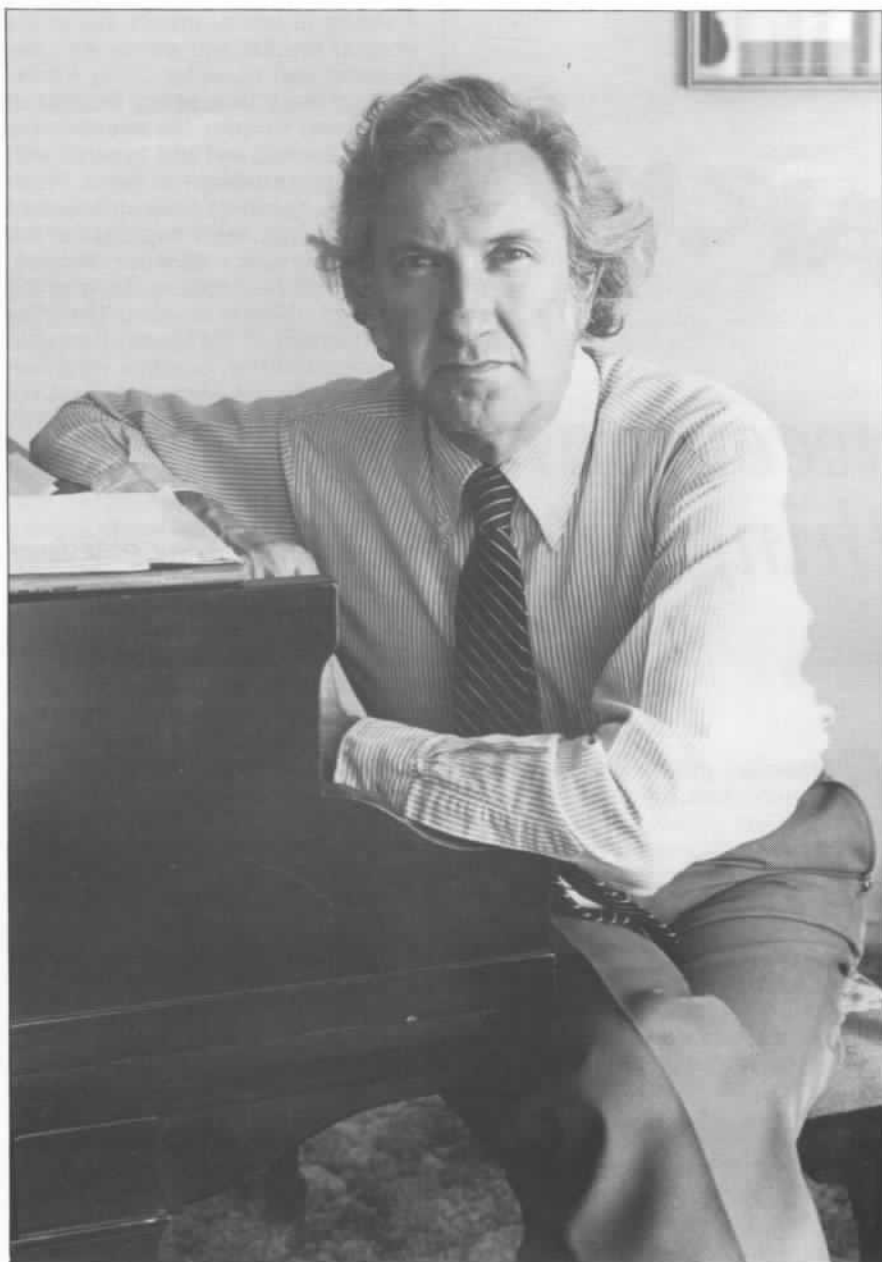
As a student, Klein was trained in, and subsequently composed in, the Schoenbergian 12-tone style. But he soon believed that composing serially just because it was *au courant* was like "laughing at a joke because someone said it was funny." He abandoned serialism in the Sixties and turned to pieces such as his *Chorale and Double Fugue* — a work strongly influenced by jazz and concluding with a quotation from a Bach chorale. Since then he has composed in a wide range of styles, often mixing them within the same composition and including direct quotations to create "collage pieces."

Two such works are his *Musica Antiqua*, a sort of concerto grosso written for the Toronto Symphony and the Toronto Consort, and the *Paganini Collage for Violin and Orchestra*, which uses material from the Paganini *Caprices* and which *The Toronto Star's* William Littler called a "fascinating felony."

Concerning his use of quotation, Klein says he employs this device out of love for the music he works with. "If a composer borrows, he must repay the loan with interest, and that's hard to do. There has to be something new, even in a quotation piece." In November, Klein will present an invited paper on his collage pieces at the annual American Musicology and College Music Society meeting in Vancouver.

The most frequently performed of Klein's orchestral scores is also his most controversial. *Musique à Go-Go*, a seven-and-a-half minute mixture of jazz and pop styles, was composed in 1966. At a performance of the work by the Cleveland Orchestra, it was vigorously booed by some composers in the audience while others in attendance enthusiastically applauded it. The incident led Klein to the conclusion that many composers are actually quite "prudish" and suffer from a "historical vanity that has done music a fair amount of harm." Despite the rather whimsical title, Klein notes that "my intention in *Musique à Go-Go* is as serious as if I had been writing a string quartet."

Jazz is often cited as an influence on Klein's work, and so too is Igor Stravinsky. While this latter inspiration can be heard in his rhythmic and melodic material, it is particularly noticeable in his instrumentation, where wind instruments are favored over the strings in a highly coloristic manner. His striking *Symphony No. 3* is scored



Lothar Klein: Eclectic and proud of it

just for winds and percussion, while the upper strings of the orchestra are not used in his *Janizary Music*. Says Klein: "I just enjoy writing for winds. I hear their color potential more clearly than I do for strings. If someone plays a certain pitch on the piano, I tend to hear it in terms of wind sound."

Lothar Klein's interest in Stravinsky extends beyond musical influence: he has written extensively on the aesthetics of the Russian composer's music and has served as a consultant for a CBS-TV documentary on Stravinsky. In fact, several framed photographs of Klein with Stravinsky hang proudly on the wall of his office as a reminder of the CBS project. Klein readily acknowledges his debt, but adds that

"any influence I may have absorbed from Stravinsky or any other composer has always come from the music, not from any kind of theory — it's always the emotional impact of the music itself."

In addition to composing in almost every single concert-music genre, as well as music for ballet, theatre and film, Klein has been active as a teacher and administrator at the University of Toronto. Not too surprisingly, his open-minded approach to composition expresses itself in the classroom. "I would like to think I'm helping young composers find themselves stylistically," comments Klein. "For me, teaching is a part of composing — if I have to be a tour guide, I have to

have been there. I like to do both simultaneously, but I would be the last to deny that teaching is a very demanding occupation that can eat into one's composing time."

Since 1968, Klein has taught many of Canada's leading young composers. One of his recent students was Richard Romiti, who won the Eastman-Howard Hanson Award for a composition written while studying with Klein. "I've had a lot of good students. I think that U of T produces a well-grounded, well-crafted composer. It is one of my aims to prepare a composition music student for the real world. When they leave university life they're going to have to use whatever musical technique they have developed to earn a living."

Out in this "real world" of composition and performance, Lothar Klein has been busy of late. He has recently written a children's work for piano and orchestra (in which young pianists play very simple repeated patterns) for the Hamilton Philharmonic. Also, he has just completed an orchestral piece for the Toronto Chinese Orchestra, and in 1986 his Viola Concerto will be performed by the Montreal Symphony. He is now working on a series of pedagogical pieces for solo winds and percussion, which are intended to explore wind techniques at a rather advanced level.

Unlike most contemporary composers, Klein's work is most likely to be heard in a mainstream concert, together with Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, than in a contemporary music concert. Klein takes some pride in this fact, but with practised tact hastens to add that, "Of course, anyone who wants to play my music is more than welcome. I have nothing against being performed in contemporary-music concerts."

The man also stands out from the new music pack for his cheerful optimism concerning the possibilities that lie ahead for music, an unusual stance at a time when many composers feel that all artistic directions have been exhausted. "We're living in an eclectic musical age — the day of the really sophisticated concert-goer may well be past. That's not necessarily a bad thing because it gives composers a clean slate. It also means that the composer can get back to seeking out his best friend — the performer." ■

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