

Obituaries

LOTHAR KLEIN 1932-2004

A music-maker possessed

Composer of hundreds of songs for the orchestra had an eye for detail

BY ALLISON LAWLOR

Late into the night, Lothar Klein sat at his piano striking dissonant chords while composing new works he would later add to his diverse repertoire of orchestral music, pieces for small ensembles, even ballets.

Over his prolific career, Dr. Klein's compositions, numbering in the hundreds, were performed by some of the foremost conductors and orchestras in Canada, the United States and Europe. Among those conductors who programmed Dr. Klein's music were Sir Andrew Davis, conductor laureate of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Sir John Barbirolli, formerly of the New York Philharmonic, and George Szell, a long-time conductor with the Cleveland Orchestra.

"He had a special interest in writing for the orchestra," said his friend and fellow composer John Weinzweig.

Dr. Klein, a contemporary composer and professor emeritus at the University of Toronto, died at a Toronto hospital on Jan. 3. He was 71.

"The poetics of different musical traditions seem to interest Lothar Klein more than the novelties of contemporary techniques, although his style is certainly thoroughly contemporary," Hanns-Bertold Dietz, professor emeritus at the University of Texas at Austin, wrote in a biographical sketch for the Canadian Music Centre.

"All of Klein's works . . . attempt to find parallel points of reference between old and new music, and thereby comment on music's historical continuity. He maintains an aesthetic distinction between a sacred and a secular manner in his music and his collage compositions . . . bridge differences of time and culture, and offer a rich source for stylistic analysis.

"These works, in which labels like 'conservative' and 'avant-garde' lose their meaning, present an aural and intellectual fusion of styles," Prof. Dietz said.

On his most recent CD (2003) called *The Philosopher in the Kitchen*, Dr. Klein based his first piece on

French epicure and gastronome Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's celebrated work *Physiologie du Gout, ou Meditations de Gastronomie Transcendante (The Physiology of Taste or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy)*, published in the 1820s. The piece was commissioned by the CBC in 1975 and written for the Canadian contralto Maureen Forrester.

Almost half of Dr. Klein's compositions were vocal music. In the jacket of the CD, he outlines his approach to writing such music: "I love the human voice, yet cannot take interest in the art-song unless the co-ordinates of text, historical tone, and an equivalent musical language exist authentically together. Co-existence, of course, is not enough, for each must reflect the other, flourish and thrive.

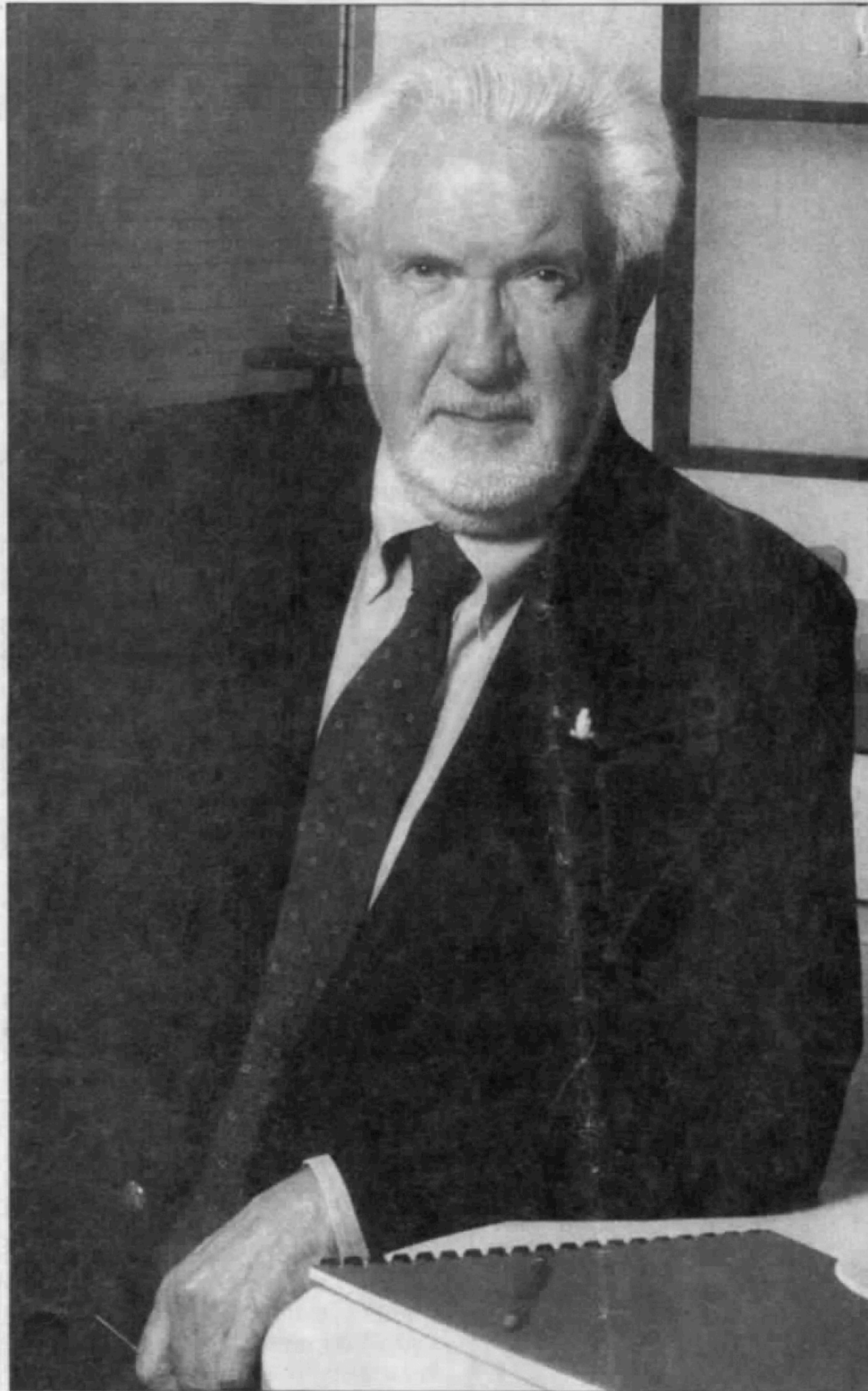
"Song is vital to my musical makeup. Intensity must be a glowing delight. Emotional experience and song must become lyrically entwined."

Lothar Karl Klein was born on Jan. 27, 1932, in Hanover, Germany. By age 12, he was already an excellent pianist. From the time he was a young boy, for reasons unknown, he was attracted to symphonic music. His parents, Victor and Mary, encouraged him to pursue his talents although they were not very musical themselves.

In 1939, on the day Germany invaded Poland, the Klein family left their native country and moved to England. In 1940, they travelled across the Atlantic to the United States and settled in Minneapolis, Minn., where Victor Klein found work as an electrician.

Dr. Klein continued his music studies and in 1961 he earned his PhD in Musicology and Composition from the University of Minnesota. His doctoral thesis was on Igor Stravinsky, whom he greatly admired. Through their correspondences, the two composers later became friends. He also studied in Germany with composer Boris Blacher.

As an undergraduate, Dr. Klein wrote music for theatre and film productions. Before joining the University of Toronto's Music De-



ANDRE LEDUC

Lothar Klein: 'He was an extremely dedicated composer.'

partment in the late 1960s, he held different teaching positions including at the University of Texas and the University of Minnesota. It was there that he met his first wife Marjorie, who later worked with disabled children as a public-school teacher. The couple married in 1958 and had two sons. In 1990, Ms. Klein died of cancer. Driven to create new pieces, Dr. Klein was back composing the day after her death.

"He was an extremely dedicated

composer, at times quite possessed," said his friend and fellow composer Gustav Ciamaga. "He was full out."

Dr. Klein was a professor of composition at the University of Toronto, and several talented composers passed through his studio, including Lesley Barber, who wrote the music for such movies as *Mansfield Park* and *You Can Count on Me*.

Dr. Klein also served as chairman of the university's graduate studies in music, during which time he is

said to have completed five orchestral pieces. As an academic, he published extensively on topics ranging from interpretations of historic music to rock 'n' roll.

"He was a scholar and a composer," Mr. Weinzweig said.

Throughout his career, Dr. Klein received several commissions from performing groups and theatre companies, and awards, including Rockefeller new-music prizes in 1965 and 1967.

For years, Dr. Klein made an annual trip to the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire, where for about a month he would nestle himself away in a tiny cabin to compose. It was the same place where Leonard Bernstein went to compose.

"He wrote a staggering amount of music," said his eldest son Eric Klein. "He wrote constantly."

"He was very concerned with using his time to write and compose. He would be very obsessive about it," Eric Klein added. "He was very cognizant about living a very full life."

Never at a loss for inspiration, Dr. Klein enjoyed his annual trips to Europe where he would visit awe-inspiring old cathedrals and galleries.

Until the end of his life, he regularly met for lunch with former colleagues to talk shop and discuss the latest books they were reading, which for Dr. Klein was anything from conservative American political thinkers to *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*. Often he would meet Mr. Ciamaga at a Polish restaurant, where a week before his death he surprised his friend by ordering in Polish.

"Composing is a lonely life," Mr. Ciamaga said. "It's always nice when someone shares your interest."

In 1995, Dr. Klein remarried after meeting his second wife Frima Karon a few years earlier at his 40th high-school reunion.

Dr. Klein died after a lengthy illness. He had been suffering from pulmonary fibrosis. He leaves his wife Frima Karon, sons Eric and David and one granddaughter.

Donations in Lothar Klein's memory can be made to a scholarship fund soon to be established at the University of Toronto.

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