

Ensemble plays sensitively

By IFAN PAYNE
Music Critic

Little Erno grew up in his native Hungary, where he had been born in Poszony (Pressburg) on the 27th of July, 1877. In 1885 he began piano lessons with Carl Forsnter and then in 1893 he entered the Royal Hungarian Academy of Music in Budapest where he studied the piano under Stephan Thoman and composition with Hans Koessler.

He was a gifted young musician, and in 1897, at the age of twenty, he was awarded the king's prize for his *Symphony in F*. In that same year young Erno began his career as a concert pianist and in 1900 he made his American debut as soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Perhaps it was also at this time that he Germanized his name to Ernst von Dohnanyi (pronounced Dochnani, with the *ch* sounding as it does in the Scots loch).

It was certainly at this time, 1900, that he composed his *Serenade for String Trio*, a work that seemed to have captured the hearts of much of the audience which attended Ko-Kela's recital in All Faiths Auditorium on Tuesday evening.

The first movement *Marcia* provided Clayton Haslop with an opportunity to display his rhythmically delicate and sensitive playing, but even more striking, the *Romanza* allowed the audience to hear the soaring viola line of Ronald Copes. Although the music of the *Serenade* can hardly be called profound — it sounds to Hungarian music as the lighter-veined Vaghan-Williams does to English music — moments like the skittish, spider-legged music of the *Scherzo* are not with their attractions.

Ko-Kela had started the evening with a fine performance of Mozart's *Piano Quartet in E-flat, K.493*. From the first richly balanced chord it was evident that this was an exceptionally talented ensemble. It is not too long ago since I wrote at some length about the importance of allowing the musical phrases to breathe, and it was this quality of being sensitive to the line and pulse of the music, combined with purity of tone and a fine ear for the balance of the ensemble, that

distinguished Ko-Kela's playing. I particularly admired the violin playing of Clayton Haslop for his fine command of tone, and for being willing to play softly when required.

Also worth noting in the Mozart was the well-scaled and stylistically convincing playing of pianist James Bonn. Actually, Mr. Bonn seems to be an adaptable pianist, he can go either way, baroque or romantic, with equal aplomb, as he demonstrated during the performance of the concluding *Piano Quartet in E-flat, Op.87* by Dvorak. The group's big-toned, broad-gestured acting out of Dvorak's simple-minded and overblown music was just right. Dvorak's melodies have all of the substance of the theme tune to *Chariots of Fire*, but it did provide an opportunity to admire the shapely cello playing of Peter Rejto and the richness of the entire ensemble's full-blooded performance.

The art of programming requires every bit as much consideration as that of the individual performances themselves. Much as I often like to hear more of a good thing, I must say that I find myself admiring those performers who plan out what they have to say through the selection of their music, play that music and then leave the stage and go home, leaving each member of the audience to digest in tranquility what he or she has just heard. I cannot quite see the point of playing an out-of-context chunk of Schumann's *Piano Quartet* as an encore, beautifully played though it was, especially after the theatrical melodrama of the Dvorak.

Ko-Kela is a well blended ensemble, the cohesion and sense of the performers listening to each other is most striking, as is the control and sensitivity of their playing.

As for Ernst von, he made an international reputation for himself as a concert pianist, and presumably a small fortune from his ever-popular *Variations on a Nursery Song* for piano and orchestra, held numerous prestigious appointments in his native land, and then finally emigrated from Hungary, in 1947 or 1948, depending on which authority you consult, first to Argentina, and then to the USA, where he was ap-

pointed composer in residence at Florida State College in Tallahassee, or at Florida State University at Miami, depending upon...etc.

So much for trying to keep track of the former greats and not so greats.

Those who so much enjoyed the *Serenade for String Trio* in the luminescent performance by Ko-Kela will be pleased to know that there are three recordings currently available: one on CBS M-35152, coupled with Beethoven's *Trio, Op.8*; a second one on the interesting Afka label, Afka 290, coupled more adventurously with Dohnanyi's *Quintet for Piano and Strings, Op.26*; and a third performance, by the famed Heifetz, Primrose, Feuermann trio on RCA LVT-1017. Ironically, in light of this, Ernst von Dohnanyi went to New York City to supervise some recordings of his compositions, and he died there on February 7, 1960.