

## **Serenade in C, Op. 10**

*Ernö Dohnányi*

*Born: July 27, 1877, Presburg, Hungary*

*Died: February 8, 1960, New York, New York City*

By the turn of twentieth century, Budapest had become one of Europe's leading music centers. The Budapest Academy of Music was now fulfilling the dreams of its founder, Franz Liszt; for it was producing a cluster of gifted composers, performers, and conductors who would soon become stars of our time. But before Bartó and Kodály there was Dohnányi.

You could have called his birthplace either Pressburg or Poszony, according to whether you were a native of Austria or Hungary, but the city was under the Empire and the German language was the official tongue. For a long time, Dohnányi was known as "Ernst von"; but after the rise of Hungarian nationalism and when Dohnányi, too, had to flee the Nazis, it rather belatedly became "Ernö".

Dohnányi, in his youth, was hailed as the musical heir to Liszt, the grand seigneur of Hungarian music, who dazzled audiences with his wizardry at the piano. Dohnányi, like his predecessor, was a pianist with a formidable technique, and he too had begun a spectacular career as a traveling virtuoso. Despite the pressures of world tours, he somehow found time to compose as well. Most of Dohnányi's works were produced during the composer's early manhood and have survived changing tastes. He did not aspire to change the course of art and Brahms never ceased to be his hero. While others were exploring the new musical languages, Dohnányi preferred the languages of the late Romantics. If the Magyar melody sometimes seems to leave its imprint on his work, it is rarely because he willed it so; it was just slumbering in his subconscious. Although he applauded Bartók and Kodály for their research into Hungarian folk music, he had no compulsion to join them.

Dohnányi composed two piano concertos, two concertos for the violin, and one for the harp. He also wrote three symphonies, three operas,

chamber music, piano pieces and songs. His *Variations on a Nursery Theme* show the composer's witty side, and *Ruralia Hungarica* was one of his few ventures into the folk idiom. The *Serenade in C* for string trio is one of his chamber works that have survived the test of time. Written in 1902, it has remained an audience favorite over the years. Performances of this five-movement work are the stuff that can challenge virtuosos of the highest order. This trio was a favorite of Heifetz, Primrose, and Feuermann who, for awhile, adopted it as their own, programming it frequently.

*By Margery Derdeyn*