

# 75 Years of Life, 71 Years of Music



**ERNO BALOGH**

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A musical career spanning 71 years is what Erno Balogh can reflect on with pride and satisfaction in his Northwest Washington home as he observes his 75th birthday this Tuesday. Balogh's professional musical activities began before the age of 4, when he appeared as a pianist in a charity benefit recital in Budapest, the city of his birth.

Precocious also as a composer, one of Balogh's first compositions — a work for mixed chorus — was published when he was only 8 years old, having been submitted to a Hungarian publishing firm by the boy's father. However, playing the piano and composing are only the two best known aspects of his multifaceted career.

Balogh's versatility extended to conducting the Budapest Chamber Theater Orchestra, coaching under a specially created conducting scholarship at the Budapest Royal Opera House, accompanying such immortals as violinist Fritz Kreisler and singer Lotte Lehmann, teaching at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, and writing for leading magazines and newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic.

BUT HE ALSO recalls that he has been a playwright, too.

"My '\$25 an Hour' was produced on Broadway with Jean Arthur as the star and Thomas Mitchell in charge of the staging. It was sold to Paramount and many years later I found myself watching Grace Moore, whom I knew very well, in the screen adaptation which was called 'One Night of Love.' Because of the title, of course, I had no idea that it was my play until I had listened in amazement as my own dialogue — word for word — came from the screen!"

Balogh's comments on the events of his life start with "I was always very lucky — I

just happened to be in the right place at the right time."

To begin with, the credit must go to my parents who gave me a wonderful home and education. My father, a history professor, was my first piano teacher. The piano was my favorite toy and my punishment for being naughty was to have it locked so I couldn't play it that day.

"When I was 12, the head of the Budapest Conservatory's piano department accepted me as his pupil without my even taking the entrance examination. Bartok, then 28 and in his second year as a faculty member, also happened to hear me

play and chose me as his student."

BECAUSE NEITHER the department head nor the Baloghs wanted to hurt the feelings of the sensitive young Bartok, it was agreed between them that Erno would study with Bartok for one year and then continue with Prof. Szentdy (a Liszt pupil) as originally planned.

Not surprisingly, after a short period of study with Bartok, the entire Balogh family was so enamored of him that it was unthinkable to change teachers.

After six years of study with Bartok — the longest of any



Bartok student — Balogh received his diploma from the conservatory at the age of 18, winning the Franz Liszt Prize in piano and composition given each year to the outstanding graduate.

His composition teacher was Zoltan Kodaly.

Balogh's relationship with Bartok and Kodaly, two giants of 20th-century music, extended into intimate friendships with both until their deaths. In his years of active concertizing, Balogh was Bartok's first and most ardent proselytizer, and he was instrumental in bringing Bartok to this country for his first concert tour in 1927.

Returning to Budapest after his services with the Hungarian army at the end of World War I, Balogh became the conductor of the Chamber Theater Orchestra and engaged Emil Hauser (later the first violinist of the Budapest Quartet) as concertmaster and Martin Ormandy (the conductor's brother) as principal cellist.

But the post-war political upheaval in Hungary was hardly conducive to the rapid growth of a musical career and so, after a dramatic and illicit escape from his homeland, young Balogh arrived in Berlin in 1919.

"This city was then the musical center of the world, where all at the same time, such great conductors as Nikisch, Walter, Furtwaengler, Kleiber and Klemperer were conducting and such great artists as Kreisler, Schnabel and many others were living," Balogh remarked.

"Although I wanted to be a composer, I knew that no composer, from Bach to Bartok, could make a living from his compositions. I knew that I must find some other way to earn my living. Although conducting posts were available in many German cities, to accept one would mean to leave the exciting artistic mecca that was Berlin. Instead of

conducting, I decided to concentrate on my piano and to do some accompanying to supplement my income.

"Once again Lady Luck smiled on me and in 1923 I met Fritz Kreisler. The great violinist was without an accompanist at that time, and was looking for a pianist to read through a newly published concerto with him. My manager suggested me.

"After we finished playing the first movement, he put down his violin and asked me to join him as his pianist for his forthcoming Scandinavian tour. I hesitated, because I had been in Berlin for four years and had actually been making preparations to go to the United States. But Kreisler pointed out that he was rather well known there, and that having my name listed on his programs would not hurt me with American managers."

THIS TURNED out to be the understatement of the year. Kreisler, after the tour, wrote his New York manager and publisher that on Balogh's arrival in the United States he was to be offered contracts for concerts and publications.

After he had been performing here for several years, Lotte Lehmann received word from her equally famous friend Elizabeth Schumann, "On your American tour, accept no one but Erno Balogh as your accompanist."

From 1937 until he moved to Washington some 12 years ago, Balogh was an established figure in the front rank of concert pianists, appearing in recital and with orchestra in almost every state as well as in Canada and Cuba. He played to capacity audiences and an excellent press.

Ultimately, he met a beautiful New York University professor of biochemistry, Malvina Schweizer, whom he married in 1936. The Baloghs' move from New York to Washington came in 1960, when Dr.

Schweizer was appointed position at the National Institutes of Health, where she is now special assistant to the associate director for lung programs of the National Heart and Lung Institute.

Balogh's busy schedule gives him scant opportunity to reminisce about the 71 years of his career. Most of his time is spent in composing and in generously sharing, with his friends and colleagues, the inexhaustible wealth of his knowledge and experience.

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Balogh Ernő, a Washingtonban élő zongoraművész és zeneszerző 75-ik születésnapját ünnepelték. Balogh rekorder: 75 évből 71-et töltött a zongora mellett. 4 éves korában lépett fel először Budapesten egy jótékonycélu előadáson. 12 éves korában felvették a zeneakadémiára. A fiatal Bartók Béla és Kodály Zoltán növendéke volt. Halálukig barátságot tartottak vele. Fiatalon a budapesti kamarazenekar karnagya lett, majd Berlinbe, azután Amerikába került. Világhírű zenészeket és énekeseket kísért, komponált, önálló estéket adott, a baltimorei Peabody konzervatóriumban tanított, \$25.00 An Hour címmel szindarabot is írt, ezt a Broadwayn játszották és One Night of Love címmel filmre vették. A sokoldalú művész most csak komponál és tanít.

