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Erich Katz

Teacher-Composer

1900-1973

Martha Bixler, New York City

On July 30, 1973, Erich Katz died in Santa Barbara, California, after a long illness. That he suffered long is well known to those who knew and cherished him. It is really a blessing that he is now at peace.

Volume X, No.4 of Recorder Guild News was devoted to a tribute to Erich in December of 1969, and the main facts of his life were presented to New York recorder players then, particularly for the benefit of those who never knew him. Now, almost four years later, there are vast numbers of recorder players in New York City who not only did not know him but who perhaps have barely heard of him, and so are almost entirely unaware of the debt we all owe him - all of us who have ever laid hands on a recorder.

Erich was, quite simply, the giant, the most important person in the U.S. recorder movement. He was part of the many European intellectuals who took refuge here during and immediately after World War II, sometimes by way of other countries, in Erich's case by way of England. His main teaching posts in New York were at the New York College of Music where he was head of the composition department, City College, and the New School. He was extraordinarily influential in the recorder movement as director of the ARS for many years, as editor of the ARS editions, as arranger, performer, and teacher. The students of his students must now number in the hundreds of thousands. His name appears on the title pages of hundreds of manuscripts, not only of original and arranged music for recorder, but of music for other instruments as well, including some beautiful vocal compositions.

It was at the New York College of Music that I first came to know Erich in the fifties, both because it was then headquarters for the ARS and because he helped me to find teaching work there. He was incredibly generous, allowing me to sit in on his classes so I could learn his teaching methods and talking to me for hours about my teaching (and other) problems. And he got me involved with the ARS, for which I will always be grateful.

Anyone who knew Erich knows that he was a very, very loyal friend. His correspondence was voluminous with people all over the world. I don't think, until his final illness, he ever owed anyone a letter longer than one day. His letters were filled with warmth, interest and affection. He was truly concerned about the Society, the recorder movement, and his many friends until the very end of his life. His final letter to me, possibly the last one he ever wrote, and actually mailed after his death, expresses regret at our long separation and a vital interest in the doings of the recorder world.

But above everything else his interest was in music-making, more than in writing, performing, or perhaps even teaching. His great mission in life, and it really was a mission, was to bring people together to make music. This could be accomplished by means of the recorder, that little instrument that now has such a solid place in the early music revival. If there was no music available (and a few years ago there was very little) he wrote or arranged it, tirelessly, endlessly. If there was nobody to play it, he taught people, singly and in groups, sometimes in classes of fifty or more. If there was no one to organize the players so that they could get together to exchange information, learn, and simply play together, he re-organized the American Recorder Society so that it became a going concern, directly spawning the enormous amount of recorder activity going on in this country today.

Erich will be spoken about and written about and his music played for many years to come. His influence, as the true father of the recorder movement in this country, will last as long as anyone, anywhere, holds a recorder in his hand, puts it to his lips, and finds that he then can discourse most excellent music.