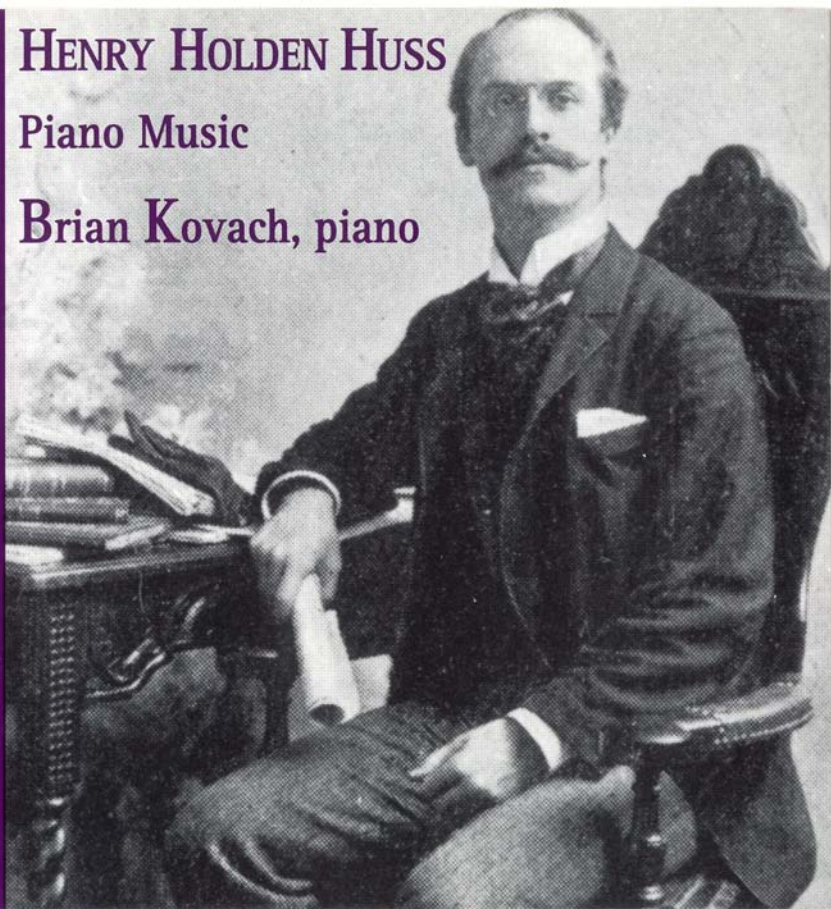


HENRY HOLDEN HUSS

Piano Music

Brian Kovach, piano



ALBANY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

HENRY HOLDEN HUSS (1862-1953)

Henry Holden Huss was born in Newark, New Jersey on 21 June 1862, but when he was two his family moved to New York City, where he became a life-long resident. His maternal ancestry includes Oliver Holden (1765-1844), the prolific colonial composer best known for his hymn tune *Coronation*. His father, George (1828-1904), was a composer, church organist, and music teacher with whom Henry began his studies at age six.

Of his early training, Huss once said, "You see I began to study music almost in the cradle. My father was intent upon my musical education, and I remember...being taken by him to call upon [Anton] Rubinstein. He knew my father well, and he also knew that I had been set apart for a musical career by him." Huss later worked in theory and instrumentation with Otis Bardwell Boise.

From 1882 to 1885 Huss studied at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Munich. His principal teachers were Josef Giehl (piano), a pupil of Liszt, and Josef Rheinberger (organ, composition). While in Munich, Huss made his debut as an orchestral soloist in Beethoven's G Major Concerto, and his orchestral work *Wald-Idylle*, G. 370, was given its premiere.* His graduation thesis, the *Rhapsody* for piano and orchestra, G. 371, was presented to the faculty in the summer of 1885. Besides this performance, the honor graduate also performed the Sonata in C Minor, Op. 111, by Beethoven and had "the rare distinction" of being asked to perform some piano improvisations.

Such improvisations became an important feature of Huss' recital appearances. A review of his 26 October 1952 recital included the following description:

For us, however, the amazing feature was the appearance on the stage of Mr. Huss, who...called for three notes at random from the audience

*The "G" number refers to the catalog of works in the author's *Henry Holden Huss: An American Composer's Life* (Scarecrow, 1995).

der Stucken in 1889. In 1891 Felix Arens gave a series of American music concerts in Germany that included this same work. Three years later, the premiere of his *Cleopatra's Death* for soprano and orchestra, G. 377, was sung by Clémentine Sapio in Sydney, Australia. His Piano Concerto, G. 382, was presented in Europe by a number of soloists, and Huss himself gave a number of performances during his 1910 tour there.

When the American composer is spoken of, and indeed, when any modern writer is thought of, the name of Henry Holden Huss naturally presents itself to mind, as he is among the foremost musicians and composers of the day. [When] his works have been played beside the masterpieces of modern and classical music, they have not suffered by comparison.

[As a] pianist he ranks with the best of the day. [In] recitals he holds a unique position, as he interprets Beethoven in a manner that is both educative and genuinely delightful, and he has few equals in the romantic music of Chopin and Schumann. He is perhaps the most superb exponent of Bach in this country....

[Huss] is a teacher of the most exceptional qualities. Indeed it were absolutely futile to look in Europe or in America for his superior. (*The Musical Leader and Concert Goer*, 1904)

Huss also concertized extensively in the greater New York City area and around the Huss summer home on Lake George in upstate New York. He also performed as soloist at numerous musical conventions and on tours east of the Mississippi River, a highlight of which various recitals was his 1904 White House program for President and Mrs. Roosevelt. His was the last artist recital given in the Old Steinway Hall and the first public concert given in the New Steinway Hall, both in 1925. His Piano Concerto served as his vehicle for performances with orchestras in Boston, Cincinnati, New York, Pittsburgh, St. Paul, and Detroit. In general the reviews for

The "Etude Romantique"...is a tone poem in the truest sense, conceived for the piano by one who knows its possibilities to the minutest detail. [It] has been built with the very essence of that quality which we call "romantic" in the fine arts. It is extremely difficult technically.

With bold and massive strokes Mr. Huss has painted his dance in the "Polonaise Brillante," fully Lisztian in its demands on the player and in its effect. The themes are melodic, stirring in character and fitting to the composition. There is every kind of opportunity offered the player, chords, octaves, passage work, thirds and the many other devices of modern pianistic art, and all is carefully handled with mastery. A thrilling octave passage, five measures long, closes the piece brilliantly.

Let it be recorded here that no American composer has within a considerable time written six pieces for the piano that contain as many solid musical ideas originally set forth, with interesting harmonies, as these of Mr. Huss.

A 1917 review of *Three Pieces for Piano*, Op. 26, G. 232, described them as "unique and distinguished...the expression of a man whose individuality is always distinct..."

Lake Como by Moonlight (Barcarolle), G. 246, is contained in a set of didactic works, but it was often played in recital by Huss. This piece was his most commercially successful work, selling over 3000 copies. Perhaps because of this popularity, in 1932 Margaret Anderton offered a discussion of the work in her column "How to Study/How to Teach" in *The Musician*. Huss is known to have made

was Elsa Stockmann. Kovach was one of the accompanists for Pablo Casals' Master Classes in Pittsburgh during Casals' Guest Lectureship. His Master of Fine Arts Degree in Piano Performance was acquired at Carnegie Mellon University, where he studied with Harry Franklin. Additional studies were pursued with Lowenthal, Seymour Lipkin, and Agi Jambor.

Brian Kovach is a mentor, with private students of his own. He is an expert in course development, particularly for ensemble techniques. As Associate Professor of Music he has established and directed student Fine Arts and Baroque Ensembles as well as a Concert Series at the Community College of Philadelphia. Mr. Kovach was instrumental in establishing the institution's Music Curriculum at its inception.

Mr. Kovach's enthusiasm for turn-of-the-century composers whose work is too often overlooked has led to a prior recording of "Edgar Stillman Kelley, Complete Works for Piano" for Albany Records.

Executive Producer: Matthew H. Phillips • Engineer: Michael E. Harmon • Editing & Mastering: Howard Fievel • Music Actuator: Jacqueline Kovach • Music Advisor: Gary Greene • Piano: Steinway Grand • Piano Technician: Alexander Sargis • Recorded December 22, 1997 at Studio-K, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Cover Photo: Henry Holden Huss at about age forty. From *A Portrait Catalogue of American Compositions* (Boston: Arthur P. Schmidt, n.d.), p. 26. Courtesy of Special Collections in Performing Arts, The University of Maryland, College Park.

Photo of Brian Kovach by Wellington Studio of Photography, Philadelphia, PA



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