

WOLFGANG FORTNER

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Wolfgang Fortner was born in Leipzig on 12 October 1907. His parents were both noted singers and, consequently, Fortner was involved with music from a very early age. He learned both the piano and organ at school and attended many concerts at the Leipzig Conservatory.



In 1927, he began his studies at the Leipzig Conservatory, the organ with Karl Straube, composition with Hermann Graubner and, at the University, he studied philosophy with Hans Driesch, musicology with Theodor Kroyer, and German studies with Hermann August Korff. While still a student, two of his early compositions were publicly performed namely *Die vier marianischen Antiphonen* at the Lower Rhineland Festival in Düsseldorf in 1928, and his *String Quartet no 1* in Königsberg in 1930.

In 1931, he completed his studies and graduated with the State Exam for a high teaching office, after which he accepted a lectureship in music theory at the Hochschule für Kirchenmusik Heidelberg where he taught, sometimes, intermittently, until 1954.

His music was initially attacked as Cultural Bolshevism. This definition was used by the Nazis to denounce modernism in the arts and to discredit those who did not follow nihilism which philosophy rejected all religion and morality

In 1935 and 1936, Fortner created the Heidelberg Chamber Orchestra supporting New Music and undertook expanded concert journeys to support the armed forces in many venues such as Scandinavia, Holland and Greece. He also took over the directorship of the string orchestra of the Hitler Youth of Heidelberg formed from juveniles, whose directorship changed in 1939. In 1940, he was drafted into the army as a medical soldier.

After the end of the war, Fortner moved to the Heidelberg Kohlhof and there a group of very young students formed around him, who showed interest in the modern music.

He joined the circle of the Darmstadt Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, and taught within that framework. In 1954, he became a professor for composition at the North-West German Music Academy in Detmold, then, to his retirement in 1973, taught in Freiburg. After the death of Karl Amadeus Hartmann, in 1964 he took up the leadership of the *Musica Viva* concerts, which he directed until 1978.

In 1957, his opera *Blood Wedding*, after Lorca, was highly successful and was acclaimed as the most successful opera after 1945

In 1950, he was elected a member of GEMA's advisory panel and, in 1955, became a member of the Berlin Academy of Arts in Munich. From 1957 to 1971 he was secretary and then president of the German section ISNM.

Together with eleven other composer-friends, Conrad Beck, Luciano Berio, Pierre Boulez, Benjamin Britten, Henri Dutilleux, Alberto Ginastera, Cristóbal Halffter, Hans Werner Henze, Heinz Holliger, Klaus Huber, and Witold Lutosławski, he was asked by Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, on the occasion of the 70th birthday of the Swiss composer and art patron Paul Sacher, to write a composition for cello solo using the notes of his name (eS, A, C, H, E, Re). Wolfgang Fortner created the theme and three variations *Zum spielen für den 70. Geburtstag, Thema und Variationen für Violoncello Solo*. These compositions were presented in Zurich on 2 May 1976.

Wolfgang Fortner died in Heidelberg in 1987, aged 79. He was probably the most respected German musician of his time and yet very little of his music is commercially recorded.

The Violin Concerto is a very attractive three movement work lasting about 22 minutes which would find many friends if it was heard. It is tonal and the outer movements are confident while the central Canzone is appealing.

The Symphony is a very fine work with much to enjoy. It has a coherent form and a short but unusual scherzo which is highly original. Its neglect is grossly unfair and depriving the public of a most acceptable work.

The chamber works are highly commendable and the String Quartet no 4 has enjoyed some deserved success.

The success of Blood Wedding should be revived.

He was awarded many prizes

1948 Schreker-Prize Berlin.

1953 Louis Spohr Prize Brunswick.

1955 Bearer of the "Great Prize of Art-Music" of North-Rhine/Westphalia.

1955 Member of the Academy of the Beautiful Arts of Berlin.

1956 Member of the Bavarian Academy of the Beautiful Arts of Munich.

1957 President of the German section of the ISCM (to1971).

1960 Bach-Prize of the State of Hamburg.

1975 President of the Dramatists' Union.

1977 Reinhold Schneider Prize of Freiburg.

1977 Grand Medal of Service of the Federal Republic of Germany

1977 Honorary Doctorate of the Universities of Heidelberg and Freiburg.

Among his students were composers Günther Becker, Arthur Dangel, Friedhelm Döhl, Hans Ulrich Engelmann, Diego H. Feinstein, Peter Förtig, Volkmar Fritsche, Hans Werner Henze, Milko Kelemen, Rudolf Kelterborn, Karl Michael Komma, Arghyris Kounadis, Ton de Kruyf, Uwe Lohrmann, Wolfgang Ludewig, Bruce MacCrombie, Roland Moser, Diether de la Motte, Nam June Paik, Graciela Paraskevaidis, Robert HP Platz, Rolf Riehm, Wolfgang Rihm, Griffith Rose, Mauricio Rosenmann, Dieter Schönbach, Manfred Stahnke, Henk Stam, Peter Westergaard, Hans Zender, Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Heinz Werner Zimmermann, conductors Thomas Baldner and Arturo Tamayo and translator Hans Wollschläger.

Selected works

Operas

Bluthochzeit. Lyric Tragedy in 2 Acts/7 Pictures, Libretto by the Composer after the Drama Bodas se sangre by Federico García Lorca in Enrique Beck's German translation (1957)

Corinna. Opera buffa in one Act after a Comedy by Gérard de Nerval (1958)

In seinem Garten liebt Don Perlimplin Belisa. Opera after Federico García Lorca (1962)

Elisabeth Tudor. Opera in three Acts after a Libretto by Matthias Braun (1972)

That time. Scenic Cantata after Samuel Beckett (1977)

Ballets

Die weiße Rose. Ballet after Oscar Wilde (1950)

'Die Witwe von Ephesus. Pantomime after a scenario of Petronius

Carmen (Bizet Collagen).
Music for a ballet by John Cranko (1971)

Selected Works

String quartet no. 1 (published 1930)
Concerto for organ and strings (published 1932)
Concertino in G minor for viola and chamber orchestra (1934)
Sonatina for piano (1935)
Concerto for string orchestra (1935?)
Sinfonia concertante (published 1937)
String quartet no. 2 (published 1938)
Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (published 1943)
Sonata for violin and piano (1945)
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1947; written for Gerhard Taschner)
Sonata for flute and piano (1947)
Symphony 1947 (1947)
String quartet no. 3 (1948)
Phantasie über die Tonfolge BACH for Orchestra (1950)
Concerto for Cello and orchestra (1951)
The Creation (Die Schöpfung) for medium voice and orchestra (1954). Recorded by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (with the Sinfonie Orchester des Norddeutschen Rundfunks conducted by Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt.)
Impromptus for large Orchestra (1957)
Die Pfingstgeschichte nach Lukas, Evangelist, for Tenor solo, six-part choir, 11 instruments and organ (1963)
Triplum for 3 Klaviere and Orchestra (1965/6)
Prismen for Flute, Oboe, Harp, Percussion and Orchestra (1967)
Marginalien. Dem Andenken eines guten Hundes for Orchestra (1969)
Zyklus for Cello and Chamber Orchestra without strings (1970)
Machaut-Ballden for Singer and Orchestra (1974)
String Quartet no. 4 (1975)
Triptychon for Orchestra (1977)
Two string trios (1951, 1983)
Piano trio (1978)

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