

BEN WEBER

David C F Wright, DMus

The American composer Ben Weber was born in St Louis on 23 July 1916 as William Jennings Bryan 'Ben' Weber.

He was self taught as a composer and was the first American to adopt 12 tone music having encountered it in Chicago in 1938 with the music of Ernest Krenek which he did not really like.

His own music was basically romantic lyricism and was admired and conducted by people such as Bernstein and Stokowski and his chamber music was performed by the Julliard Quartet, Schneider, Horszewski and Joseph Fuchs.

When Weber died, a concert of musical tributes was given with specially composed works by Milton Babbitt, Lou Harrison and Ned Rorem. He was truly admired by musicians and discerning music lovers. He had many friends including the aforementioned ones, John Cage and Virgil Thomson.

Weber was a brilliant musician. He read scores as others would read a newspaper.

He moved to New York in the 1950s and supplemented his income by being a copyist. He rarely went out and often communicated by the telephone late at night. He loved cooking and dinner parties inviting guests to his home and to his cooking. He lived as a recluse in his dingy apartment. At one time he was the secretary for Arthur Schnabel.

He was effeminate since he was gay and it is reported that he often composed in the nude. He had many physical ailments but he was a gentle man. He was strange in many other ways including his unpublished biography, I took 63 years to commit suicide.

His most powerful work is probably his William Blake Symphony for narrator and orchestra and one of his last works was the splendid Piano Concerto Op 53 premiered by Bernstein in 1961, with the pianist Masselos Weber's last work is the Caprices for cello and piano.

He was not a prolific composer.

His music is very fine except to the narrow minded. There is far too much prejudice in the musical world.

Weber died in New York on 16 June 1979. He was 62.

His works include the following which are available on CD

Orchestra

- Symphony on poems by William Blake
- Prelude and passacaglia Op 42
- Dolman, an elegy
- Piano Concerto Op 53

Piano

- Episodes Op 26a
- Fantasy (Variations)
- Lyric piece

© COPYRIGHT David C F Wright DMus 2016 – This article or any part of it, however small, must not be copied, quoted, reproduced, downloaded or altered in any way whatsoever nor stored in any retrieval system. Failure to comply is in breach of International Copyright Law and will render any offender liable to action at law.