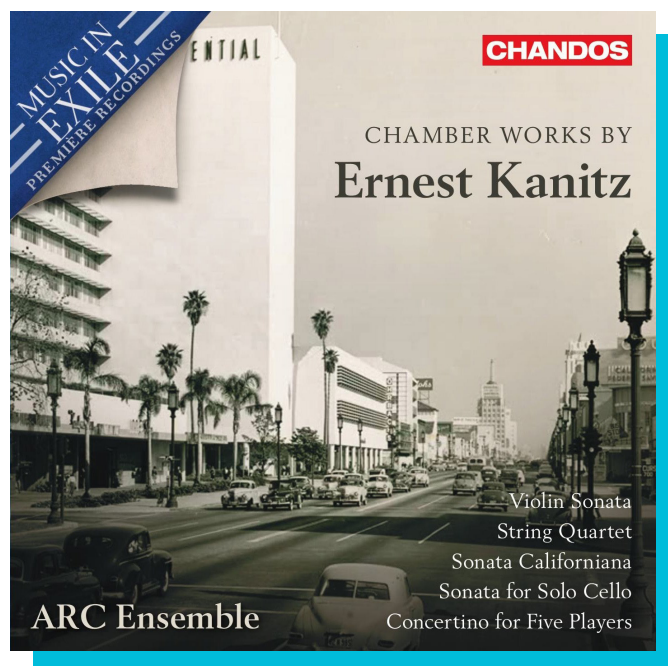


Music in Exile, Vol. 9 Chamber Works by Ernest Kanitz

The ARC Ensemble's Music in Exile series continues with this exploration of chamber works by Ernest Kanitz. Born into a wealthy Viennese family in 1894, he was encouraged in music by his mother, started piano lessons aged seven, and was composing within a year. Persuaded by his parents to study for a degree in Law, Kanitz also studied piano, music theory, and composition (with Franz Schreker, who also served as a mentor). His reputation grew steadily, his works promoted by conductors such as George Szell and Clemens Krauss. In 1922 he gained a position as a teacher at the New Vienna Conservatory, and in 1930 established the Vienna Women's Chamber Choir, which quickly gained a reputation across

Europe for its performances of Kodály, Honegger, and Stravinsky (as well as Kanitz!). Although he had converted to Christianity in 1914, his Jewish ancestry necessitated emigration from Austria in 1938, following the annexation of Austria by National Socialist Germany. After a short spell in New York, Kanitz and his wife, Gertrude, moved to Rock Hill, South Carolina, where he had secured a teaching position. Following Gertrude's early death from cancer, Kanitz moved to California, where he established a successful teaching career at the University of Southern California. Retirement from USC in 1960 gave him much more time for composition (although he was still teaching and lecturing), with successful premières given by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and San Francisco Symphony, among many others. Following his death in 1978, his music, like that of so many émigré composers, has been forgotten.



Reviews

If you needed any further proof of the cultural devastation unleashed on Central Europe in the 1930s, well, here we are in 2025, still rediscovering significant, highly individual composers whose lives and music were consigned to oblivion. The story of Ernest Kanitz is well told in the excellent notes

“that accompany this new recording. He was born in Vienna in 1894, studied with Franz Schreker, and made a new life in the US after fleeing the Anschluss - only to be forgotten after his death in 1978 in Menlo Park, California. With the exception of the Violin Sonata, Op 10, everything recorded here is a world premiere. The five works span the period 1921-57, with everything but the bitter-sweet (and occasionally mordant) Violin Sonata Californiana Sonata dating from Kanitz's American period. In the case of the expansive, ebullient Sonata Californiana for saxophone, he's actively celebrating his new life. Defiance seems to have been Kanitz's watchword in exile; there's a bracing, Hindemith-like neoclassical clarity and wit to the inventive Concertino and the energetic Sonata for solo cello (played with impressive commitment by Thomas Wiebe). But moments such as the central Lament of the Sonata Californiana hint at the sense of loss that underlies Kanitz's inspiration, and the haunted String Quartet of 1945 is frankly nostalgic; an elegy for a vanished Vienna, concise in form but as potent in emotional content as anything by Korngold or the work's dedicatee, Kanitz's fellow exile Ernest Toch. Here again, the players of ARC Ensemble really find the music's sardonic, tender and deeply melancholy soul: an affecting centrepiece to this rewarding and important release. Let's hope there's more Kanitz to come.

Richard Bratby, Gramophone

“Perhaps the most impressive work is the String Quartet: the melodic line in its Elegy is persuasive, and sensitively delivered, betraying perhaps a Viennese nostalgia which also infuses the third movement. As before, stellar performances from the ARC Ensemble offer the best possible case for reappraising this neglected composer.

The Strad, Joanne Talbot

“The String Quartet (1945), with its “Old Viennese” tune, opens with a lovely elegy. There is a fine Sonata for solo cello (1955), a light-touch Concertino for five instruments (1956-57), and a Sonata Californiana (1948) for alto saxophone and piano that delights in Kanitz's arrival in the New World. All get convincing performances from the ARC Ensemble.

Financial Times, Richard Fairman

“This is another attractive entrant in the series not least for the fact that, as so often in the series, these are all premiere recordings. All the performers prove adept, sensitive and stylish exponents. If I named one, I'd have to name-check them all. With a fine recording and equally good booklet notes, this is another welcome reclamation.

MUSICWEB-INTERNATIONAL, Jonathan Woolf

The ARC Ensemble champions another unjustly forgotten émigré composer [...] The programme offers a fascinating window into Kanitz's compositional evolution, beginning with the 1921 Violin Sonata. Its opening movement immediately establishes a melancholic temperament, the piano's beautiful lead drawing the violin into music of considerable tension. The taut Adagio proves particularly affecting, violinist Anna Štuba and pianist Kevin Ahfat bringing exquisite expressiveness to its more introspective moments before a fugal epilogue lifts the spirits. The brief solo Cello Sonata follows, its angular, haunting themes handled with sensitivity by cellist Thomas Wiebe, the second movement's resonant poco adagio particularly well judged. [...] Throughout, the ARC Ensemble perform with their customary polish and rhythmic perspicacity, making a persuasive case for this unjustly neglected figure.

Yorkshire Times, Andrew Palmer

These are bold, adventurous compositions which carry the listener through many worlds. Kanitz has a thoroughly 20th-century compositional toolbox—impressionistic textures, angular melodies, and innovative harmonies. Yet his music has a deeply personal imprint, one that transcends the limits of time and space.

La Scena, Heather Weinreb

ARC Ensemble

The Royal Conservatory's ARC Ensemble is among Canada's most distinguished cultural ambassadors. Performing a wide range of music, its focus remains the research and recovery of music suppressed and marginalized under the 20th century's repressive regimes. A growing number of hitherto unknown masterworks are rejoining the repertoire as a result of the Ensemble's work.



From left to right: Steven Dann (viola), Erika Raum (violin), Joaquin Valdepeñas (clarinet), Thomas Wiebe (cello), Kevin Ahfat (piano), Marie Bérard (violin).