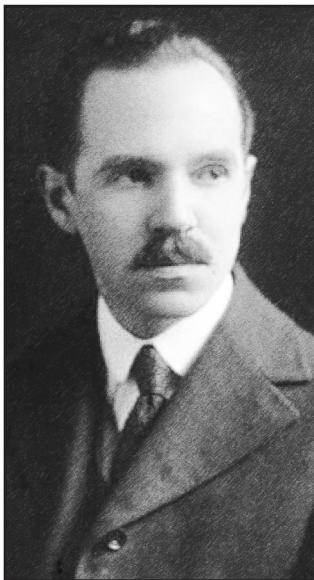


# charles tomlinson griffes



Born in upstate New York in 1884, Charles Tomlinson Griffes was a promising pianist before shifting his focus to composition. His early achievements as a performer brought him to Berlin, where he enrolled at the Stern Conservatory. While in Europe he also studied briefly with Engelbert Humperdinck, renowned composer of the opera *Hansel und Gretel*.

After returning to the US, Griffes taught music at a preparatory school in Tarrytown, NY, for 13 years beginning in 1907. While not entirely to his liking, the position allowed Griffes to pursue composition without being beholden to commissions or wealthy patrons.

Griffes' published compositions include numerous piano works, a concertante work for flute and orchestra (the popular *Poem*), orchestral and chamber arrangements of his own piano pieces, and several dozen songs. He was fascinated by the music and traditional performing arts of Japan, and composed arrangements of Japanese folk melodies and dances as well as a one-act pantomime (a staged dramatic work), *Sho-jo*, based on Japanese themes.

Among Griffes' wholly original works, the influence of the so-called Impressionist composers, namely Debussy, is clear. The use of whole tone collections, evocative titles, and floating, non-functional harmony (in other words, lacking clear dominant-tonic cadences or other conventional chord progressions) imparts a distinct atmosphere to these mature works composed in the final decade or so of his life.

In what direction Griffes' style as a composer may have evolved will forever remain a mystery: a victim of the "Spanish" Flu pandemic, Charles Griffes died in 1920 at the age of 35.

## practice & performance

This "Scherzo" is the third and final of the *Fantasy-Pieces*, Op. 6, preceded in the set by the opening "Barcarolle" and then the "Nocturne". Griffes included epigraphs to all three pieces: the first by William Sharp, the second by Paul Verlaine, and the anonymous text found above the "Scherzo". Griffes skillfully evokes an atmosphere of 'unearthly revelry' throughout the piece, a vivid scene of spirits dancing and cavorting together.

Overall, lightness and a fleeting touch will serve this music well and enable the performer to traverse its difficulties. ***Non-legato*** should be the goal with respect to touch but not sound: maintain gentle, elastic contact with the keybed in all running eighth notes, while still allowing the notes to connect (primarily by using the pedal). All LH ***ostinatos*** should be played with a consistent touch and dynamic. Avoid shaping these figures or adding too much stress on strong beats so that this layer will remain in the background.

Keep dynamics well-paced in order to save the true climaxes for later in the piece. Accents and *sforzandi* should be considered relative rather than absolute, and always within the prevailing dynamic; there will be plenty of opportunities to play *forte* as the music progresses! For example, the *sforzandi* in mm. 9–10 should have a taut, martial quality without being overly loud.

The relentless texture makes it tempting to mentally relax and lose focus anytime there are rests. Be sure both hands practice jumping to their next position and preparing early, for example the LH in mm. 28-29, or the RH in m. 31.

29

*f gioco*

It is also important to be aware when one hand has an especially difficult jump; don't allow the other hand to rush forward and make the jump even more difficult (ex: in m. 33, the RH needs to accommodate the LH at this large leap, and in m. 54 the LH needs to allow the RH an extra millisecond if needed).

# Fantasy Pieces

## III. Scherzo

5

From the Palace of Enchantment there issued into the night sounds of unearthly revelry. Troops of genii and other fantastic spirits danced grotesquely to a music now weird and mysterious, now wild and joyous.

—Anon.

Charles Tomlinson Griffes  
Op. 6, No. 3

Vivace e fantastico ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 138$ )

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**6**

**7**

**8**

**9**

**10**

**11**

**12**

**13**

**14**

**15**

**16**

**17**

**18**

**19**

**20**

**21**