

**Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji's Quintet for Piano
and Four Stringed Instruments and its intended performance by
Norah Drewett and the Hart House String Quartet**

Marc-André Roberge

Abstract

This article attempts to reconstruct the history of what was to be the first performance of Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji's Quintet for Piano and Four Stringed Instruments (1919-20), which was scheduled to be given on 29 November 1925 at Aeolian Hall in New York by the pianist Norah Drewett and the University of Toronto's Hart House String Quartet as part of a concert sponsored by Edgard Varèse's International Composers' Guild. The performance never took place for reasons that are not entirely clear but have to do mostly with the work's difficulties. The article also provides an introduction to the work itself, which Sorabji dedicated to his friend, the composer Philip Heseltine.

Most people who have heard of Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (1892-1988), the Parsi composer and pianist active who lived as a recluse in England for most of his career, know that performances of his often massive and extremely difficult works have been extremely rare as a result of a so-called ban.¹ The thirteen scores that Sorabji published between 1921 and 1931 contain the following warning: "All rights including that of performance, reserved for all countries by the composer." The score of his 248-page Opus clavicembalisticum (1929-30), his longest and most often cited work, contains the additional admonition: "Public performance prohibited unless by express consent of the composer." Various statements in letters make it possible to say that, in the late thirties, Sorabji had decided to turn down all requests for public performance either by himself or by others. As he later indicated in a letter to the pianist Egon Petri: "I have set my face against ANY PUBLIC PERFORMANCE OF MY WORK FOR GOOD AND ALL EVERYWHERE."² It is true that he did not have to turn

down offers very often, since they were very few and far between. The visual aspect of most scores was forbidding enough to scare potential performers away.

Up to December 1936, Sorabji had been heard in public at least ten times in various cities (London, Vienna, Paris, Glasgow), giving the first performances of five works for piano solo and playing the piano part of his *Trois poèmes pour chant et piano*. He had also allowed two friends – the pianist Harold Rutland (1900-1977) and the organist E. Emlyn Davies (1885-1951) – to play a work each. He had not approved, however, of a performance of *pars prima* of his *Opus clavicembalisticum* by John Tobin (1891-1960). The severe inadequacies of this performance, which took place at Cowdray Hall in London on 10 March 1936, were instrumental in bringing the composer to his decision of not allowing hearings of his music. Even though there were a few scattered performances after 1936, it is only in 1976, thanks to the persistence of a number of friends, especially Alistair Hinton, that Sorabji began to give permission for official performances to a few selected pianists, namely Yonty Solomon, Michael Habermann, and Geoffrey Douglas Madge.³ Since that time, other musicians (mostly pianists) have been drawn to the intricacies of Sorabji's music and public hearings of several short- and medium-size works have become more frequent.⁴ A few recordings have also been produced, all offering sound proofs of the great beauty and artistic validity of the music.

Sorabji never made any real efforts to promote performances of his music. It appears that only one performance (except for Tobin's) was organized without his close involvement, namely, the *première* of the *Quintet for Piano and Quartet of Stringed Instruments* (1919-20) by the pianist Norah Drewett and the University of Toronto's Hart House String Quartet. This performance was to be given in New York in 1925 but failed to materialize. Another performance of the same work, scheduled for October 1992 in Cambridge, did not take place either. The work is still unperformed even though it is available in print (or rather has been, since the remaining copies have been sold). It is the purpose of this article to give an account of the work and to document the sequence of events surrounding its cancelled first performance by the Canadian ensemble, a project that had to be filed away due to the vagaries of new music programming and to the difficulties posed by a new compositional idiom.⁵

Sorabji's musical output consists of 111 works totalling more than 11,000 manuscript pages.⁶ This total can be broken down as follows: 61 works for piano (including 7 transcriptions), 3 for organ, 11 for piano and orchestra, 7 for orchestra (with or without voices), 7 for chamber ensemble (including 2 with

voices), 20 for voice and keyboard, one for carillon and one for unidentified forces. The music for chamber ensemble, to which this article is limited, spans almost all the composer's creative career. Below is a chronological list, with some useful data, of the works comprising this category.⁷ Like the works in the other categories, they range in length from the tiniest (2 pp.) to the mightiest (432 pp.). Some are written for traditional ensembles while others have a more peculiar scoring. Only three have received a first (and only) performance. The sole work to have been published in an engraved edition is the Piano Quintet No. 1 (as it will be called from now on, despite its original title), which is the object of this article.

Chronological List of Sorabji's Works for Chamber Ensemble

Music to "The Rider by Night" (1919); for voices and small orchestra; 54 pp.

Quintet [No. 1] for Piano and Quartet of Stringed Instruments (1919-20); 72 pp.; publ. London and Continental Music Publishing, 1923 (62 pp.). The title of the published edition reads Quintet for Piano and Four Stringed Instruments.

Cinque sonetti di Michelagnolo Buonarroti (1923); for baritone and small orchestra; 40 pp. First performance: Toronto, University of Toronto, Walter Hall, New Music Concerts, 2 February 1980.

Quintet II for Piano and String Quartet (1932-33); 432 pp.

Concertino non grosso for String Septet with Piano obbligato quasi continuo (1968); for piano, 4 violins, viola, and 2 cellos; 48 pp. The manuscript contains music for one cello only even though it appears to call for two.

Il tessuto d'arabeschi (1979); for flute and string quartet; 32 pp. First performance: Philadelphia, Old Pine Street Church, Delius Society (Philadelphia branch), 2 May 1982.

Fantasiatina atematica (1981); for flute, oboe, and clarinet; 2 pp.; publ. Sorabji Archive, 1989 (ed. Anthony Burton-Page). First performance: London, City University, 9 March 1995.

Sorabji wrote his Piano Quintet No. 1 in the years following World War I. Several noted composers have written works for the same forces during that period, such as Dohnányi (1919), Fauré (No. 2, Op. 117, 1919), Martin (1919), Pierné (Op. 41, 1919), Bax (1922), Bloch (No. 1, 1923-24), Korngold (Op. 15, 1924), Vierne (Op. 42, 1924), and d'Indy (Op. 81, 1925).⁸ In the field of string quartet composition, which accounts for most works involving the strings, important periods at the beginning of the century were 1905 to 1913 (Schoenberg, Bartók, Webern) and 1926-28 (Berg, Bartók, Schoenberg). Prior to the composition of Sorabji's works, the most notable work is Bartók's String Quartet No. 2 (1917); at about the same time as Sorabji, Stravinsky wrote his Concertino (1920).⁹ When he attacked the composition of his quintet, Sorabji already had some experience of writing for the strings: he had composed the orchestral poem *Chaleur* (ca. 1916-17), four piano concertos (1915-16, 1916-17, 1918, 1918), and the Music to "The Rider by Night" (1919).¹⁰

The one-movement Piano Quintet No. 1 is dedicated "To my very good friend Philip Heseltine." The composer and writer Philip Heseltine (1894-1930) had been a friend of Sorabji since 1913 when they began an interesting correspondence which dates up to 1922; it is one of the rare sources documenting Sorabji's early career.¹¹ Prior to the Quintet, Sorabji had already dedicated to Heseltine his first piano concerto (completed in June 1916).¹² In his obituary notes written shortly after Heseltine's death in 1930, Sorabji described his friend as

one of the finest musical minds of our time, a critic and writer of unparalleled brilliance, insight, and subtlety. What I owe personally to his early encouragement, sympathy, and championship I can never adequately express, except to say that here and now [it] is my bounden moral duty to express that obligation as best as I can.¹³

The Quintet, which is printed on oblong paper (or landscape format, in modern parlance), has a piano part written throughout on three-stave systems.¹⁴ The tempo and expressive markings are written in French throughout; indeed, Sorabji had been using French not only for evocative titles but for generic ones as well, such as concerto, and had been setting several poems in French since his earliest works in 1915. As in most of his works, the top stave of the piano part uses a symbol (here a fraction composed of the Roman numerals I and VIII) to indicate that the contents of this stave have to be played an octave higher than written.¹⁵

Another conspicuous feature is the almost constant change of meter throughout the 281 long measures. The following time signatures are used: 2/1; 2, 3, 4/2; 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10/4; 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 20/8; 15/8 [or] 5/4½ (see meas. 66),¹⁶ 2½/4 (see meas. 265). The initial boldface tempo marking "Modéré" applies until meas. 235 (p. 54), where "Lent suave" appears, followed at meas. 240 (p. 55) by "Très large." Elsewhere, various agogical markings such as "Ralenti" or "En s'animant et augmentant" shape the work.

Given the long measures containing up to fifteen and twenty beats, Sorabji had the good idea of providing an "index of beats," which is a series of numbers aligned underneath the piano part. The index, however, is missing for twenty measures; this is probably an oversight of both the composer and the engraver.¹⁷ A final visual peculiarity of the score is the use of unusual rehearsal numbers. Sorabji uses letters from A (meas. 6) to Z (meas. 131), then from Aa (meas. 136) to Zz (meas. 260). Then, instead of tripling letters, he resorts to symbols for the last four instances: a downward pointing arrow cutting across a circle (meas. 265), a right-pointing arrow cutting across a rectangle (meas. 269), a symbol resembling "OL8" (meas. 274), and an inverted version of the swastika (meas. 279). These symbols are closely related to those used by Schoenberg in *Die glückliche Hand*, op. 18 (1910-13, full score publ. 1916) to indicate exactly where a stage direction takes effect.

The piano has always held a central place in Sorabji's compositional activity. It is not only the instrument to which he has devoted most of his production, but the medium which was most congenial to him. It is true that he was a great amateur of singing, but his songs, many of which are early works, are not truly idiomatic. Several examples in his music confirm the preeminent place held by the piano. A note in the separate piano part of his *Opus clavisymphonicum: Concerto for Piano and Large Orchestra* (1957-59; 333 pp.) reads: "This work revolves around the Piano as the Solar System round the Sun." His *Symphony II for Piano, Large Orchestra, Organ, Final Chorus, and Six Solo Voices* (1930-31; 333 pp. [also]) exists only in a piano part.¹⁸ The *Symphonic Variations* exist in two versions: one for piano only (1936-37; 484 pp.), and one for piano and orchestra (1953-56; 540 pp.), which is an orchestral version of the first of the three volumes of the first incarnation. Rapoport has remarked that Sorabji nearly always wrote the piano part of his concertos first, then proceeding to the orchestral fabric; he also suggests that this was the case with the *Piano Quintet No. 1*.¹⁹ This is quite likely since the piano part is continuous from beginning to end; there are only very short rests in meas. 44, 59, 63, 85, and 148. A performance of

the piano part alone would probably not be unsatisfactory. Sorabji therefore appears as a quite unique example of a modern composer who uses a technique related to the successive counterpoint of the medieval composers.

As in most works written around 1920 (and after, for that matter), Sorabji uses in the *Piano Quintet No. 1 a free chromatic language* based on bitonal combinations of standard chords (often with added notes) and chords built on fourths and featuring numerous chromatic runs using irrational rhythmic values.²⁰ The music often reminds one of the highly sensuous melodic lines and harmonies of works by Skryabin and Szymanowski. Until the work is performed and recorded, one may have a good idea of its sound by listening to the recording of a piece written at exactly the same time, the *Sonata No. 1* (1919).²¹

Three contemporary critics have published brief comments about the work; in all cases they had to rely solely on the score, since there had been no performance. A certain "F.B.," who is most probably the Italian-born English critic and composer Ferruccio Bonavia (1877-1950), paid special attention to the index of beats:

A Quintet for pianoforte and four stringed instruments [...] deserves special mention as the first work in which the thoughtful composer has provided an "index of beats" for the benefit of the performer. That the index is much needed a single glance suffices to prove. When bars follow one another in this order, 20/8, 4/4, 6/4, 4/4, 5/4, &c., it is evident that some little guidance is sure to be welcomed by the harassed reader: harassed not only by time-signatures but by the accidentals which adorn every chord, by the three staves of the pianoforte (the upper staff is to be played an octave higher), by the frequent directions, by the unusual demands the composer makes on his string players. Thus the reader will be grateful for the index. For this relief many thanks—especially as it happens to be the only relief worth mentioning. The actual music, alas, is aptly defined in the directions printed over the last bar, *Enigmatique équivoque*. Whether anyone will care to solve that problem is not our affair.²²

Another reviewer, writing in an as yet unidentified and unfortunately incomplete source found in the composer's papers, also seems to have had difficulty with Sorabji's unusual style:

This is one of those excessively modern works that stagger the reviewer and leave him flat. Personally I must acknowledge that I hesitate to pass judgment upon it. I can only say that it appears to me to be highly interesting. The harmony is very dissonant, but I seem to feel the direction of the passing chords and altered chords, the appoggiaturas, which seem logical, though I am often at a loss to explain them.

By way of elucidation I may say that there is no harm in dissonance provided it has a logical association with basic harmonies. The difficulty I find in this Sorabji quintet is that (for me) the association with the basic harmonies is rather vague. Yet I am dimly conscious of it, and I can readily conceive of more alert ears, more modernly attuned ears, grasping it in its entirety.

Certainly, the construction of it is masterly. Certainly, too, the brief bits of melody, or theme, show real invention. All of the parts are tremendously difficult, and its [source breaks]²³

Philip Heseltine, the dedicatee of the work, wrote some comments about the work in 1923 (i.e., not long after his correspondence with Sorabji stops). They are obviously partial to the composer, who was a friend, but they are nevertheless worth reprinting here, for they give a glimpse into Sorabji's composition method and shed light on the style of the work:

His music is written down, without any preliminary sketches, bar by bar into the fair copy; there is no improvisation or any use of the piano at any stage of the composition, nor is there any rewriting or alteration when a work is completed. This is the more remarkable by reason of the fact that the texture of the music is of the utmost complexity, both of harmony and rhythm. The effect of a first hearing or reading is bewildering in the extreme; but with familiarity there comes the conviction that we are dealing with a composer who is nothing short of a phenomenon in musical history.²⁴

Sorabji's Piano Quintet No. 1, as mentioned earlier, has yet to be performed; indeed, the two performances that were to take place were cancelled. The most recent possibility of hearing the work would have been on 9 October 1992, at a concert presented by Orchid Music in association with the Cambridge New Music Players and the pianist Ben Morrison in the Great Hall, Blackheath Halls, Lee

Road, Blackheath, London. The program was to feature Sorabji's work alongside Cage's *Europera 5* and works by Xenakis, Clapperton, Sharman, Allauca, Redgate, Hughes, and Pyne. Practical problems prevented the ensemble from rehearsing the piece and the performance had to be cancelled.

The cancelled performance that will be dealt with here in some detail was scheduled to be given on 29 November 1925 by the Hart House String Quartet at Aeolian Hall in New York, as part of a concert sponsored by the International Composers' Guild.²⁵ At the time of its formation in 1923, the Hart House String Quartet, which is considered to have been Canada's most famous chamber music ensemble in the first half of the twentieth century, was composed of the violinists Géza de Kresz (1882-1959) and Harry Adaskin (b. 1901), the violist Milton Blackstone (1894-1974), and the cellist Boris Hambourg (1885-1954), all of whom were foreign-born musicians. There were subsequent changes in the members until the ensemble gave its last concert in 1946; only Hambourg remained with the ensemble throughout its life. The Hart House String Quartet, which was associated with the University of Toronto, is reputed to have been "one of the dozen or so best on the international scene."²⁶ The piano part of Sorabji's work was to be played by de Kresz's wife, the English pianist Norah Drewett (1882-1960), who had been a pupil of Victor-Alphonse Duvernoy (1842-1907) in Paris and of Bernhard Stavenhagen (1862-1914) in Munich.²⁷

The history of the cancelled première of Sorabji's Piano Quintet No. 1 can be reconstructed in some detail (though not with as much precision as would be desirable) using the correspondence between the composer and Norah Drewett (which is limited to one letter from each party),²⁸ the memoirs of the ensemble's second violin, Harry Adaskin,²⁹ and clippings from the Toronto newspapers in the months preceding the date set for the intended concert.

The concert at which Sorabji's Piano Quintet No. 1 was to be performed was organized by the International Composers' Guild (ICG), which had been founded by Edgard Varèse. This society had been established in 1921 and was to give eighteen concerts between 1922 and 1927.³⁰ It is not known how the Guild became aware of Sorabji's quintet, which had been published in 1923. However, it could have received a recommendation from two musicians who were on the Advisory Committee of the Guild in 1924: Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924), who had given Sorabji a letter of recommendation in 1919 to help him find a publisher for his *Sonata No. 1*,³¹ and Bernard van Dieren (1887-1936), to whom Sorabji had given for Christmas 1923 an inscribed copy of his *Concerto for Pi-*

ano No. 5, which had recently been published as Concerto II. Van Dieren's name, however, seems to be a safer guess, since Busoni was seriously ill in 1924; furthermore, a recommendation by Busoni would have to have been made before his death in July 1924, whereas one by Van Dieren could have been possible anywhere thereafter.

There are two dates on which a concert could have taken place. It was first announced in the musical press that "[t]he second concert on Feb. 8 [1925] will introduce a Hindu [sic] composer, Kaikhosru Sorabji."³² Sorabji's name was eventually dropped from the programme at an unknown date. According to a flyer published by the ICG announcing its programmes for the fourth season, the concert was to feature works by Auric, Bartók, Casella, Salzedo, Malipiero, Sorabji, Still, Webern, Zanotti-Bianco. The performers listed were Greta Tordapdie (voice), Marie Miller (harp), Hyman Rowinsky (piano), and Carlos Salzedo (piano).³³ Since no quartet is mentioned in the flyer, several works by Sorabji could have been performed. Yet the actual concert featured additional artists: Henry Cowell (thunderstick), the Letz Quartet, and the conductor Vladimir Shavitch. Sorabji had disappeared from the programme, as had Auric, Casella, and Malipiero, who had been replaced with Acario Cotapos and Henry Cowell.³⁴

The presence of a quartet and of two pianists suggests that Sorabji's quintet could have been the work that the ICG had in mind. It is not known if the Hart House String Quartet had been approached to play at that concert, only to be replaced by the Letz Quartet. It is a known fact, however, that they were hired to play the quintet at the latest in the Spring of 1925. On 21 May 1925, the Toronto Globe announced that "[t]he Hart House String Quartet has been engaged by the International Composers' Guild to present a modern work by Khaikhosru [sic], the Hindu composer [sic], who is residing in London, England."³⁵

In his memoirs, Harry Adaskin recalls that the ensemble had received an offer for a free début in New York if they would play Sorabji's quintet. As he puts it, the cost of a New York recital (about \$4,000) was such that, "to get it for nothing we would cheerfully have undertaken to decipher and play a Sumerian Quodlibet."³⁶ Three months later, it was reported that "[t]he Hart House String Quartet are practising five hours a day all this summer in Newcastle, where all the players are living until early September."³⁷ Indeed, the ensemble seems to have had much difficulty with the work. Adaskin recalls that "[t]he daunting intricacy of the freely interweaving lines of his work demanded a total rhythmical control

on the part of the players. This, alas, we couldn't supply, as neither de Kresz nor his wife had any rhythm." He adds: "In conventional works we just had near misses. But in the free-structured highly involved labyrinth of Sorabji, the best we could achieve was pandemonium." Adaskin then recalls how they worked several hours during thirteen weeks and managed to play up to the end of the first page of his part, which corresponds to meas. 49 (p. 9), "without seriously falling out." He concludes by saying "So we never learned to play it, and we didn't get our free New York recital."³⁸

The rehearsal difficulties mentioned by Adaskin are well documented in their copy of the full score and parts which were donated in 1969 to the Edward Johnson Library of the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto by Milton Blackstone, the ensemble's violist. The performing material must have been provided to the ensemble by the International Composers' Guild, since the cover of the score and the initial pages of the parts are marked as being their property. The piano part, especially, contains several markings, mostly written in black pencil, some with a thick greasy orange pencil, some with a similar blue pencil. The most detailed (and interesting) examples read as follows: "Metronome indication is imperiously needed. 'Modéré' means nothing at all, theoretically not actually" (p. 3); "?!?" with reference to fermatas above each member of a series of chords placed underneath a measured tremolo (meas. 87, p. 21); "Help!!" with reference to a difficult left-hand tremolo; "Index of beats, mostly needed here" (meas. 253, p. 54); "Help!" with reference to the indication "Pesant, sestencieux" [recte "sentencieux" (sententious)]; "Index of beats please" (meas. 246-47, p. 57); "how!" and "?! impossible" with reference to chords that cannot be grasped by one hand (meas. 255, p. 59; meas. 273, p. 63). The first page of the score is reproduced as an illustration showing the free, mellifluous writing that is characteristic of the score.

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji, *Quintet for Piano and Four Stringed Instruments*, p. 3, meas. 1-5 (with annotations by the members of the Hart House String Quartet). London and Continental Music Publishing Co. Ltd., 1923. From the collection of the Edward Johnson Library, Faculty of Music, University of Toronto (accession number 32,420).

[see opposite page]

Impetuous - 43
 The repetition of
 Acc. 22-23-43
 N.B. VIII
 Modéré.
 "Moderate" means
 nothing at all, theoretically means
 usually
 Modéré.
 "Moderate" means
 usually
 Modéré.

Kaikhosru Sorabji.
(MONTY)

Violin I. Modéré.
Violin II. Modéré.
Alto. Modéré.
Violoncello. Modéré.
Piano. Modéré.

Index of beats.
20 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

It is obvious that Drewett, the ensemble's pianist, was baffled by Sorabji's unusual writing; actually, anyone at that time was – and many modern traditional practitioners – still gasp when shown a page from one of his scores. In Drewett's defence, it should be added that most of Sorabji's published scores as well as his manuscripts contain (very) numerous mistakes and inconsistencies; indeed, modern editors of his music constantly have to decide which note Sorabji actually intended to write.³⁹ The string parts show that the players did at least attempt to work through the piece: there are various position markings, cues, solutions for metrical problems for the whole quintet.

On 6 June 1925, it was announced that the Hart House String Quartet was to play at Aeolian Hall on 29 November.⁴⁰ The concert was supposed to feature a chamber orchestra of thirty players conducted by Eugene Goossens.⁴¹ The vagaries of the programming of contemporary music modified the announced plans: Goossens conducted on 24 January 1926 and there seems to have been no chamber orchestra of thirty players. The ensemble finally played at Aeolian Hall not on 29 but 28 November. Their recital, which was favourably reviewed by the *New York Times*, seems to have been given independently of the ICG; it featured works by Debussy, Bartók, and Beethoven.⁴²

The Hart House String Quartet thus most probably paid for their New York début since they did not play Sorabji's work. Back in Toronto, on 19 December 1925, Drewett wrote to Sorabji to explain that Salzedo, who was a member of the ICG's Technical Board, "had changed the dates & had also published the enclosed circular with no mention either of your work or our co-operation." The letter, which is reproduced in full below, suggests that the ensemble would have liked to play it elsewhere.

Dear Mr Sorabji,

I have still to thank you for your kind letter with all the detailed explanations. We have undergone a great disappointment for after having studied your interesting work very intensively, we discovered that Mr Salzedo had changed the dates & had also published the enclosed circular with no mention either of your work or our co-operation. We had some correspondence with Mr Salzedo, & also a friendly discussion with him during our stay last month in New York, but nothing definite has happened. It is of little avail to introduce your work at an ordinary recital before the ordinary audience – these societies have been founded to gather together the different elements interested in "modern" music.

But we want to ask you if, in principal [sic], should we find a good opportunity to play the Quintet either in New York or elsewhere, we will have no difficulties from your side. I really consider it rather unfair of the I.C.G. to have acted thus. Since the Hart House String Quartet had an exceptional success at its initial concerts in N.Y. & Boston & is playing there again in January, I believe the opportunity mentioned before will certainly occur, with or without the I.C.G.

I meant to write to you at once but have been so busy with various things.

With kind regards from my husband & myself.

Sincerely yours

[unsigned, but the name "Norah Drewett" is part of the letter-head]

In May 1928, in one of his articles for *The New Age*, Sorabji, who had just finished reading *A Final Burning of Boats Etc.* by the English composer and writer, Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1948),⁴³ referred to the author as a victim of "persistently relentless efforts to down her" and gives two examples of problems he had faced with the reception of his music. The letter also makes clear that he had been contacted by the "head of an organisation for the performance of new music" (Varèse, Goossens, Salzedo?) for a copy of his score.

As I have said before, I know how people without what I have called the correct back-ground, no matter what their gifts and accomplishment, are pushed on one side, passed over, ignored in favour of nonentities who possess the "background." This affects men just as much as women. I, too, can speak from personal experience. I remember some years ago calling, at the instance of a distinguished critic and musician, upon a friend of his, also a leading critic, armed with his recommendation, and being met with an unconditional refusal to either look at or listen to my work. Also after being urgently requested by the head of an organisation for the performance of new music for a copy of a work of mine for performance in New York, and receiving glowing messages from him and from the leader of the quintet engaged to work upon it as to their admiration, I discovered that it had been dropped— not at the instance of the performers — on the score of insufficient time for work,

but entirely unknown to them as to myself, and without a word of explanation from that day to this.⁴⁴

The last item shedding some light on the sequence of events surrounding the cancelled première of the Piano Quintet No. 1 is a letter from Sorabji to Drewett, written on 3 November 1929.

Dear Madame de Kresz

Or should I say Drewett? I suspect you will remember me if not in person yet perhaps through my piano quintet that you were once going to play in New York chez the International Composers' Guild under the auspices of Monsieur Carlos Salzedo.

From him I have never from that day to this, some years ago[,] had any explanation as to why my work was dropped. While I well remember a letter from you which I still possess telling me of the dropping of the work (dated 19.12.25).

I have heard so many strange stories as to the reason why the work was dropped that I am making a collection of them. One, from a well known English composer whom I have no reason to believe [he] loves me, that you all found the work impossible of performance and that it was dropped for that reason, a story so fantastic and absurd that it may be dismissed as the invention of malignant stupidity. Another reason alleged is such that it is an insult to such a body of artists as yourself and the Hart House Quartet to reprint it. Yet a third ascribed this very reason as the motive of the removal of this work from the I.C.G. programmes. It is all profoundly intriguing and ambiguous. I doubt not that you have still more diverting tales of supposed "reasons"?

It would a pleasure to hear from you again.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely.

Kaikhosru Sorabji

It appears from this letter that Sorabji and Drewett met at least once, obviously in London, since Sorabji never visited North America. They could have met in 1929, in which year the letter was written, for the Hart House String Quartet had gone on a European tour in that year (including England and BBC broadcasts).⁴⁵ There is no indication in Sorabji's reviews that he attended one of their London

concerts; therefore, the reference to "such a body of artists as yourself and the Hart House Quartet" may have been made simply out of politeness. Finally, the reasons for which the work was dropped from the ICG programme were not clear, even for the composer.

The history of the (non)performance of Sorabji's Quintet for Piano and Quartet of Stringed Instruments is not entirely clear. The above paragraphs have tried to reconstruct it on the basis of the documents that are known to have survived. There may be other letters which would clarify the intricate course of events related to the work's history. It is sad that, twenty years or so after the "lifting of the ban," no ensemble has managed to bring the work to the public's ears— at least, one intended to. Obviously, an ensemble like the Hart House String Quartet — whose daily bread consisted of standard pieces from the Classical and Romantic periods, with occasional forays into the works of Bartók, Hindemith, Kodály, Prokofiev, and Schoenberg — could have difficulties with Sorabji's counterpoint of free, mellifluous lines. Several quartets can now play highly complex works like those of Brian Ferneyhough, which leave Sorabji as much behind as Sorabji's did leave other works in the 1920s. There are now also several pianists able to play Sorabji's piano part— and the piano part is pretty easy by Sorabjian standards. So far, our recorded aural experience of Sorabji's music is limited to a handful of piano works (including the great *Opus clavicembalisticum*) and a major organ work. Performances and recordings of at least the shorter works from his chamber and orchestral production are badly needed if we are to assess his contribution properly. It remains to be hoped that the next planned première will not fall prey to the unfortunately too frequent problems associated with the performance of modern music.

Notes

1. For a detailed explanation of the so-called ban, see Paul Rapoport, "Sorabji: A Continuation," *Sorabji: A Critical Celebration*, ed. Paul Rapoport, Aldershot, Hampshire: Scolar Press, 1992; 2nd printing, 1994, pp. 58-87; 75-83.
2. Letter, Sorabji to Egon Petri, 23 January 1948 (Sorabji Archive).
3. Alistair Hinton (b. 1950) is a Scottish composer who became Sorabji's closest friend during the last fifteen years of his life. In 1988 he founded the Sorabji Music Archive (since 1993 the Sorabji Archive, located at Easton Dene, Bailbrook Lane, Bath, England, BA1 7AA), which makes available photocopies of all of Sorabji's scores (manuscripts, original publications, modern editions).
4. For an extensive list of performances of Sorabji's music between 1919 and 1991, see Marc-André Roberge, "Un tessuto d'esecuzioni: A Register of Performances of Sorabji's Works," *Sorabji: A Critical Celebration*, pp. 425-51.
5. I would like to thank Robin Elliott (Toronto), Louise Hirbour (Université de Montréal), Gordana Lazevich (University of Victoria), R. Allen Lott (School of Church Music at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas), Kathleen McMorro (Edward Johnson Library, University of Toronto), and Ben Morrison (Geneva) for their help in the preparation of this article. I also extend my warmest thanks to Alistair Hinton, curator of the Sorabji Archive (Bath), who provided copies of essential documents and gave me permission to reproduce the excerpts quoted from Sorabji's writings and music.
6. Sorabji was also a prolific writer. He wrote more than 650 reviews for two English magazines (*The New Age* and *The New English Weekly*) as well as more than 200 letters to the editors of various newspapers and magazines in addition to his books of collected essays, *Around Music*, London: Unicorn Press, 1932; repr. ed., Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1979, and *Mi contra fa: The Immoralisings of a Machiavellian Musician*, London: The Porcupine Press, 1947; repr. ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1986.
7. Further details will be found in Rapoport, "'Could you just send me a list of his works?'" *Sorabji: A Critical Celebration*, pp. 93-192, most of which consists of "A 'Complete Provisional' Chronological Catalog of Sorabji's Compositions."
8. For a more complete list, see Wilhelm Altmann, *Kammermusik-Katalog: ein Verzeichnis von seit 1841 veröffentlichten Kammermusikwerken*, 6th ed., *Hofheim and Taunus: Friedrich Hofmeister Verlag*, 1945, pp. 123-29. Sorabji's work is listed on p. 128.
9. For a useful chronological list of strings quartets, see Paul Griffiths, "Appendix Two: Chronology," *The String Quartet*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1983, pp. 232-37.
10. The second piano concerto (1916-17) is known only through a two-piano reduction. It is not known whether it was actually orchestrated.
11. See Kenneth Derus, "Sorabji's Letters to Heseltine," *Sorabji: A Critical Celebration*, pp. 195-255. The friendship between Sorabji and Heseltine is too briefly covered in Barry Smith, *Peter Warlock: The Life of Philip Heseltine*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
12. The dedication reads "à Monsieur Philip Heseltine: en témoignage d'amitié."
13. Sorabji, "Music," *The New Age* 48, no. 11 (15 January 1931): 128-29; 128.
14. Three-stave systems are standard in Sorabji's music, which often laid out on four- or five-stave systems.
15. In later works, Sorabji uses a capital I with a caret (Î).
16. This time signature is to be understood as a 15/8 time signature which is equivalent to one comprising five dotted quarter notes. Sorabji was to use such unnecessarily complex fractional time signatures again in his setting of Baudelaire's *L'irrémissible* (1927).

17. The index is missing for meas. 26, 30-31, 42, 46-47, 54-55, 154-55, 220-21, 235-36, 246-47, 252-53, 275-76.
18. The composer eventually wrote the following comment on the title page of the Symphony II: "Got Bored with this: and no wonder! A grotesque extravaganza."
19. Rapoport, "'Could you just send me a list of his works?'" Sorabji: A Critical Celebration, p. 192. It is impossible to confirm this on the basis of the handwriting since the composer's manuscript is not extant; only a copyist's copy with annotations by the composer has survived (located at the Central Music Library, Westminster, London).
20. Maurice Hinson, *The Piano in Chamber Ensemble: An Annotated Guide*, Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978, p. 483, describes the work thus: "Changing meters, harmonic fourths in flowing figuration, tremolo. Enormous climax suddenly drops to pp and ppp with the indication 'Enigmatique equivoque.' Complex and D[ifficult]."
21. Sorabji's Sonata No. 1 has been recorded by Marc-André Hamelin on Altarus AIR-CD-9050 (issued in 1990).
22. F.B. [Ferruccio Bonavia?], "New Music: Chamber Music," *The Musical Times* 44, no. 965 (1 July 1923): 480.
23. "London and Continental Publishing Co., Ltd. / Quintet for Piano and Strings by Kaikhosru Sorabji," 1 p. (incomplete).
24. Philip Heseltine, "Music," *The Weekly Westminster Gazette*, 18 August 1923: 14-15.
25. Aeolian Hall was located at 34 West 43rd Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues.
26. Helmut Kallmann, "Hart House String Quartet," *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, 2nd ed., ed. Helmut Kallmann and Gilles Potvin, Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1992, pp. 589-90 (includes a picture of the ensemble). For a history of string quartet performance in Canada, see Robert William Andrew Elliott, "The String Quartet in Canada" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1990).
27. See Ruth Pincoe, "Géza de Kresz," *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, p. 353 (includes a picture of de Kresz and Drewett). For more on the de Kresz couple, see Mária Kresz and Péter Király, *The Violinist and Pianist Géza de Kresz and Norah Drewett: Their Life and Music on Two Continents, Including Parts of Norah Drewett's Memoirs*, n.p.: George Hencz, 1989.
28. Letter, Norah Drewett to Sorabji, Toronto, 19 December 1925 (The Sorabji Archive, Bath); letter, Sorabji to Norah Drewett, London, 3 November 1929 (Edward Johnson Library, University of Toronto).
29. Harry Adaskin, *A Fiddler's World: Memoirs to 1938*, Vancouver: November House, 1977, pp. 84-85, 139-40. A second volume was published in 1982 as *A Fiddler's Choice: Memoirs, 1938 to 1980*.
30. For more on the history of this society, see R. Allen Lott, "'New Music for New Ears': The International Composers' Guild," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 266-86.
31. About the links between Sorabji and Busoni, see my article "Producing Evidence for the Beatification of a Composer: Sorabji's Deification of Busoni," *The Music Review* (forthcoming).
32. "International Composers' Guild Plans Brilliant Season," *Musical Courier* 89, no. 20 (13 November 1924): 35. The same text also appeared as "Composers' Guild Will Present Modern Works: Organization Announces Three Concerts of Advanced Compositions in Aeolian Hall," *Musical America* 41, no. 11 (15 November 1924): 33.
33. Photocopy of a document provided by Louise Hirbour.
34. See the program in Lott, "'New Music for New Ears': The International Composers' Guild," 285.
35. "To Play in New York," *The Globe* (Toronto), 21 May 1925.
36. Adaskin, *A Fiddler's World*, 1: 84.

37. "Quartet in Newcastle," *Toronto Star*, 22 August 1925.
38. Adaskin, *A Fiddler's World*, 1: 85.
39. For example, the critical report of my edition of Sorabji's Pastiche on the Hindu Merchant's Song from "Sadko" by Rimsky-Korsakov (1922), which was published in 1992 by the (then called) Sorabji Music Archive, contains 69 entries for a 72-measure piece in triple time.
40. *Saturday Night* 49, no. 29 (6 June 1925): 10.
41. "Toronto Quartet Abroad," *The Toronto Daily Star*, 6 June 1925.
42. "String Quartet Plays: Hart House Organization Justifies an Excellent Reputation," *New York Times*, 29 November 1925, 29.
43. Ethel Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats Etc.*, London: Longmans, Green, 1928.
44. Sorabji, "Music," *The New Age* 43, no. 4 (24 May 1928): 44. The "distinguished critic and musician" is likely to be Philip Heseltine and the "leading critic" Ernest Newman; see Derus, "Sorabji's Letters to Heseltine," *Sorabji: A Critical Celebration*, pp. 252-55 (in an appendix titled "Newman and Busoni").
45. Kallmann, "Hart House String Quartet," *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, p. 589.