

Fellowship Com

3670 Cimarron Street

Los Angeles, California

March 14, 1942

Mr. William C. Haygood, Director for Fellowships  
JULIUS ROSENWALD FUND  
4901 Ellis Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois

WCH	3/16	WCH	17

Dear Mr. Haygood:

By this time you must have received my letter of the past week, and the package containing the scores by Kay, Middleton and Anderson. Today I am sending back to you by express the scores by Margetson, Kerr and Dorsey.

You ask for a rating of each man in the order of ability and promise. For reasons that I will explain later, it is difficult to decide whether Kay or Kerr should come first. Therefore I've decided to put them both in the top spot and rate the rest in order, in this way:

1. Ulysses Kay and Thomas H. Kerr
2. Edward Margetson
3. James E. Dorsey
4. Emanuel Middleton
5. Walter Anderson.

My reasons for ranking Kay and Kerr as equals are as follows: though Kerr shows a broader horizon in that he is able to use both the modern and the academic mediums intelligently and though he displays more melodic gift, Kay has written in the larger forms as well as the small, and has also written for orchestra, for piano, for voice and for solo instruments, thus displaying a versatility that (judging by the compositions submitted) is not at once apparent in Mr. Kerr's work. My first impression of Mr. Kerr was that he is more clever than inspired, that he is what may be termed an exhibitionist. I know very well that mere cleverness is not lasting. However, on studying his work more carefully, I came to the conclusion that he has a genuine talent, good taste and technic (especially as concerns the piano) and that he may develop into someone musically worthwhile. I hope so. I gave you my impressions of Mr. Kay's work in my last letter: (I might add that I think he is thorough and conscientious and is building on a solid foundation.

Edward Margetson is a very competent composer. I liked the things he wrote a great deal. His melodies were good, and the compositions were tastefully and intelligently written. My only reason for ranking him after the other two is that I feel that he has consciously limited himself to an academic --at times almost ecclesiastical--style. This is only a comment and not a criticism, for I found nothing wrong with his work. He has a great deal of talent.

James E. Dorsey has evidently studied hard and worked well, but in every way he seems to have been influenced by European music and European ideals, despite the fact that I note that he has had as teacher's one of America's foremost and most capable composers--Harl McDonald. It appears to me that Mr. Dorsey hasn't yet risen above the classroom. Perhaps in the future he will, and at that time perhaps he will display a little more originality and questing spirit.

The more I study these things the more I come to the conclusion that being a judge is one of the hardest jobs I'll ever have to face. There is such a great responsibility attached to it, and I suppose one's judgments are necessarily colored by his personal tastes, although I've tried hard to be impartial. At any rate, I hope that these comments will be of some assistance in making a decision.

All good wishes to you, as always.

Sincerely,

William Grant Stiles

Dear Mr. [Name]

By this time you must have received my letter of the past week, and the package containing the scores by Mr. [Name] and [Name]. Today I am sending back to you by express the scores by [Name], [Name] and [Name].

You ask for a rating of each man in the order of ability and promise. For reasons that I will explain later, it is difficult to decide whether [Name] or [Name] should come first. Therefore I've decided to put them both in the top spot and rate the rest in order, in this way:

1. [Name] and [Name]
2. [Name]
3. [Name]
4. [Name]
5. [Name]

The reasons for rating [Name] and [Name] as follows though their papers border on that of a real artist in the modern and the academic method intelligently and though his displays more artistic gifts, [Name] has written in the larger form as well as the small, and has also written for magazine, for voice and for solo instruments, thus displaying a versatility that (judging by the conventional standard) is not at all common in [Name]'s work. My first impression of Mr. [Name] was that he is more clever than [Name], that he is not so far from an exhibitionist. I know very well that many observers do not realize, however, on studying his work more carefully, I came to the conclusion that he has a genuine talent, good taste and technique (especially in structure the hand) and that he may develop into a most interesting and original composer. I hope you will be as kind as to [Name]'s work in my last letter. I might add that I think he is thorough and conscientious and is building on a solid foundation.

[Name] is a very competent composer. I think the things he wrote a great deal. His studies were good, and his compositions were carefully and intelligently written. He only began for writing his after the other two is that I feel that he has consciously limited himself to an academic -- at this point, this is only a comment and not a criticism. For I found nothing wrong with his work. He has a great deal of talent.

[Name] has evidently studied hard and worked well. It is very hard to have been influenced by European music and to have been able to do that. I note that he has had a number of articles printed and that his compositions are of a high order. I hope you will be as kind as to [Name]'s work in my last letter. I might add that I think he is thorough and conscientious and is building on a solid foundation.



3670 Cimarron Street  
Los Angeles, California

March 11, 1942

Mr. William C. Haygood  
JULIUS ROSENWALD FUND  
4901 Ellis Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois

WCH	3/16	WCH	17

Dear Mr. Haygood:

I'm returning to you today by Express collect, according to your instructions, the compositions by Mr. Kay, Mr. Middleton and Mr. Andersen. As seen as the others arrive here, I will study them and return them also. This has been rather a great responsibility for me, as I well remember how much it meant to me to apply for and receive Fellowships, and so I have tried to study each score as carefully as possible. I hope that the conclusions I state here are correct, and not too harsh.

Of the three composers represented, the only one who qualifies (in my opinion) is Ulysses Kay. He seems to have a great deal of talent and to be worthy of being given assistance. I don't think he would mis-use a Fellowship---and as a basis for this opinion I might call your attention to the tremendous amount of work he turned out, neatly and intelligently, to send for examination. That alone says to me that he has one qualification for success: industry and perseverance. He handles his orchestra well, and has a good technical foundation. His talent, however, is definitely in the formative period. He hasn't risen above the influence of his teacher. Personally, I don't care for his melodies---er rather, his lack of melody---but on studying his scores I have come to the conclusion that this is not caused by an absence of melodic gift, but rather that his melodic gift has been suppressed. He has evidently been surrounded by teachers or associates who have ever-emphasized the modern idiom. I hope that his project is such that it will enable him to rise above modernity and to use it as it suits him, not to become the tool of modernity. He should be able to use or discard it as necessary. The study of racial music might be a good antidote for this tendency. I make this suggestion for the simple reason that the period through which he is evidently passing now is one that I also had to undergo when I was acquiring the tools of my trade, and I recognize the symptoms. But there is undoubtedly great talent, sincerity and application to work in Mr. Kay. *all*

I am sorry to have to report that the compositions by Mr. Andersen and Mr. Middleton appeal to me as being mediocre. They are adequate and sincere, perhaps, but seem to me to be lacking in imagination. I am able to say a little more about Mr. Middleton, for he came here to deliver the scores and had a talk with me. I also went to hear his orchestra in a public rehearsal. (I think, incidentally, that a Negro symphony orchestra is much needed---this has been one of my pet desires for a long time.) I will admit that I was surprised to hear this orchestra play. I had expected something quite bad, and was pleasantly surprised to find that it wasn't what I had expected. Mr. Middleton, who is evidently an energetic and good organizer, had discovered instrumentalists here in Los Angeles that I didn't know existed, and had persuaded

1.2. AS GOOD AS I HAD EXPECTED

them to come out and rehearse with him, apparently just for the love of the work. As a conductor, he obviously needs more training--and he modestly says he wishes to work and to get this training. He seems to be sincere, and I take it for granted that he really will work to get this training. Somehow I don't feel that he is top-notch, but perhaps I am mistaken in this view. It very often happens that people who don't seem to have greatness within themselves can be so industrious that they work up to a position of attainment. One other thing that I must mention: I question the validity of his judgment in musical matters. He was talking at length on American music and said some very sensible things about it. Later I discovered that he and I were thinking of American music in different terms: he thinks of it as "swing" and music of the more popular type, like that written by Ferdie Grefe, and of course my view is a little different. I think American culture is rapidly becoming much more serious than that, and feel that his placing it in the "popular" field brings it down to a level lower than it should be. His preferences definitely run toward the "popular", and in some instances he classed compositions well-known to me in that vein, when they actually belong among serious American symphonic works.

All good wishes to you, as always!

Sincerely,

William Grant Still