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Karl Geiringer, 1899-1989

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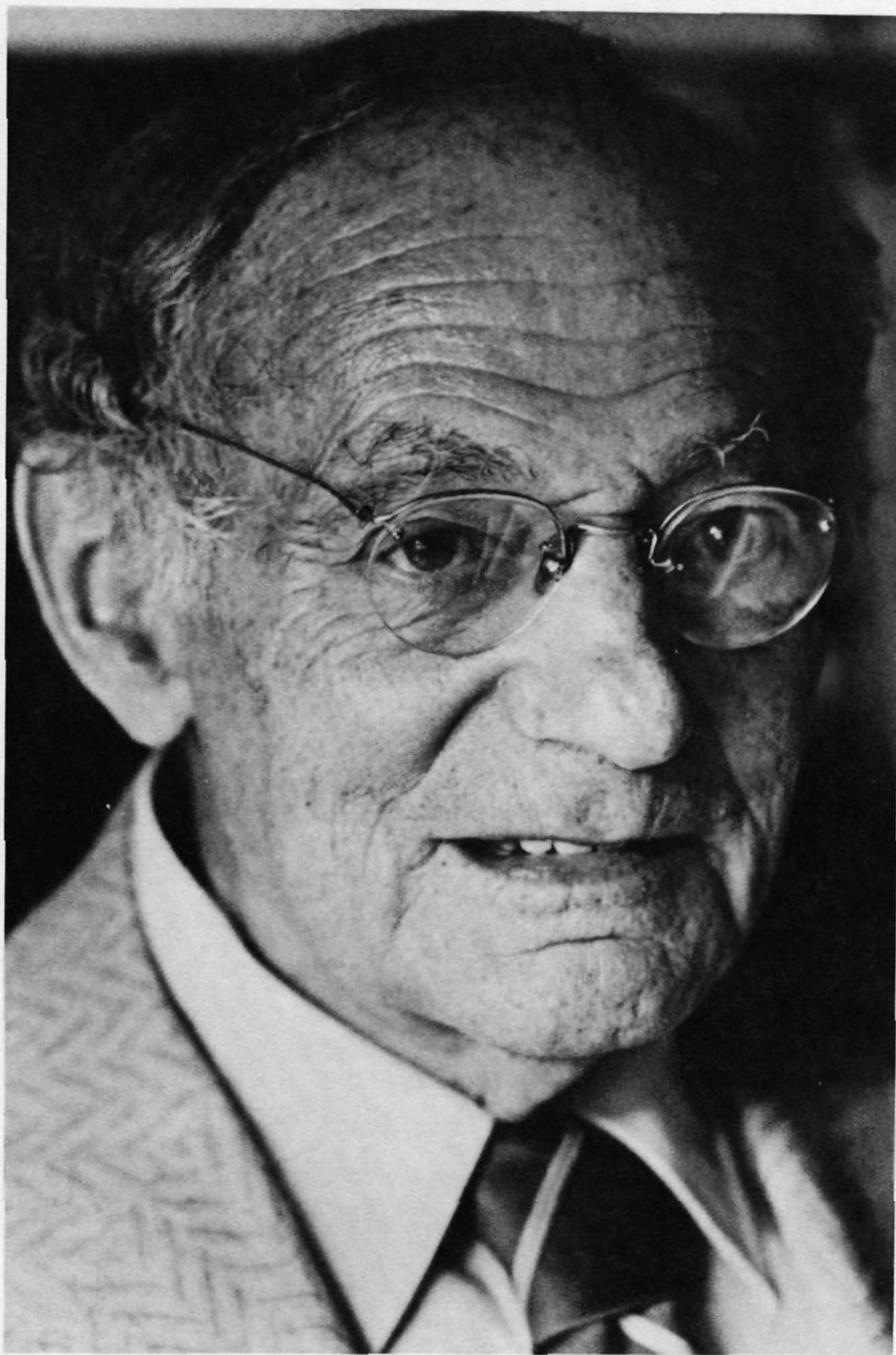


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Photograph kindly provided by Bernice Shapiro Geiringer

A Pioneering Organologist

Karl Geiringer, 1899-1989

Roland Jackson

Karl Geiringer's richly productive career, spanning nearly seven decades, came unforeseenedly to an end on 10 January 1989, the more surprising since a little over a month before he had lectured in Claremont, displaying the lively and engaging manner we had come to associate with him. Although performance practice was only a part of his many-sided interests, his long involvement with musical instruments made a lasting impression on the discipline. This interest in instruments had initially been awakened by Curt Sachs in Berlin, who (as Geiringer later indicated) "opened my eyes to the wonders of this fascinating field of research." The first fruits of this research appeared in his dissertation, *Die Flankenwirbelinstrumente in der bildenden Kunst zwischen 1300 und 1550*, completed in Vienna in 1923 under Guido Adler (and republished in 1979 in *Wiener Veröffentlichungen*, directed by Othmar Wessely). It represents an early instance in which pictorial evidence was systematically applied to a single group of instruments, in this case the plucked strings, lute, mandora, fiddle, colascione, and guitar. Here he traced, largely on the basis of iconographical sources, the gradual changes in these instruments over two and a half centuries, revealing already the propensity for keen observation and sense of detail that was to mark his subsequent musicological work.

This early fascination with organology led eventually to the more comprehensive *Instruments in the History of Western Music*, which went through three editions (1943, 1945, 1978). Geiringer was convinced that instruments constituted an important reflection of history in that they vividly called to mind the sounds of a given time and locale. His history revealed in particular his ability to draw out the implications of a given material and to arrive at its deeper significances. Of the 18th century, for instance, he observed that in the majority of works less than a dozen instruments were drawn upon "in accordance with the sense of economy and striving for lucidity and precision which characterized the classical period."

Geiringer's ongoing concern with instruments resulted in a number of other, specialized studies, such as his catalogue of the Leipzig Augusteum museum (*Alte Musikinstrumente im Museum Carolino Augusteum*, 1932), his paper concerning Schubert and the cello at the Vienna *Schubert-Kongress* of 1978 (published 1979, Graz), and his perceptive study of Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata (*Musical Quarterly* 65, 1979, 513), in which he verified that Schubert conceived it for a special form of bowed guitar current in Vienna in the 1820s, and advanced reasons as to why Schubert called it the "Super Arpeggio."

Geiringer was a keen critic of the musicological scene, exposing many an error or blemished concept. At the same time he gave unwavering support to enterprises he considered worthwhile or promising. He enthusiastically encouraged new projects, including the present periodical, which he welcomed from its inception; and among his last endeavors was a brief review of it for *Notes* (45, 1989, 757). Geiringer had a profound effect on his many students and on those who knew him, and will continue to have an influence in the future through his remarkable and varied writings.

"Selig sind die toten . . . dass sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit, denn ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach" (Brahms, *Ein deutsches Requiem*, vi)