



Believe Your Ears: Life of a Lyric Composer

Kirke Mechem

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Believe Your Ears is the memoir of composer Kirke Mechem, whose unorthodox path to music provides a fascinating narrative. He wrote songs and played music by ear as a newspaper reporter, a touring tennis player, and a Stanford creative-writing major before studying composition and conducting at Harvard. He describes his residencies in San Francisco, Vienna, London, and Russia, and gives detailed attention to his choral music, operas, and symphonies.

He writes that “the twentieth century gave us much brilliant music” but shows how atonality came to dominate the post-war period. His lyric style belongs to no particular “school,” avoiding the trends, –isms, experiments, fads, and lunacies of the period. He encourages younger composers who are trying to bring back beauty, passion, and humor—even entertainment—to classical music. He asks music lovers to believe their own ears, not the lectures of “experts.”

Believe Your Ears is addressed to all who love classical music. Along the way, readers will meet Dimitri Shostakovich, Wallace Stegner, Billie Jean King, the Grateful Dead, Richard Rodgers, Benjamin Britten, Bill Tilden, and Aaron Copland—a who’s who in Mechem’s storied career.

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