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| Thomson, Virgil (1896-1989) |
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| Virgil Thomson was born 25 November 1896 in Kansas City, Missouri. During his childhood Thomson’s creative and intellectual gifts did not go unnoticed, and with the assistance of a scholarship financed by the Mormon Church, he enrolled in Harvard in 1919. For an artist and intellectual living in the early twentieth century, however, there was nowhere more suited to the development of a modernist style and imagination than Paris, the artistic capital of Europe. It is safe to say that Virgil Thomson’s prestigious career as a composer, conductor, and music critic for the *New York* *Herald Tribune* would have unfolded differently had he refused the trip to Paris as accompanist with the Harvard Glee Club in June 1921. The Glee Club toured Europe, accumulating an assortment of favourable reviews in the process. When the Glee Club arrived in Italy, its conductor, Archibald Davison, fell ill and turned the concert reins at Pesaro over to the young twenty-four year old Thomson for what would prove to be one of the Glee Club’s most exciting performances. “In 1921,” Thomson would later remark, “Europe itself had been the objective. That was where the good teachers lived and all the best composers – Stravinsky, Ravel, Schonberg, Strauss, Satie” (*A Virgil Thomson Reader* 41). Having survived the demands placed on an American orchestra touring the artistic capitals of Europe, Thomson’s Harvard precociousness was transformed virtually overnight into an aesthetic maturity that his subsequent life and career would continuously validate afresh. |
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| Further reading:  (Hoover and Cage)  (Stein and Thomson)  (Thomson, Everbest Ever: Correspondence with Bay Area Friends)  (Thomson, Selected Letters of Virgil Thomson)  (Tommasini) |