

= Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji =

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (born Leon Dudley Sorabji ; 14 August 1892 ? 15 October 1988) was an English composer , music critic , pianist and writer . He was one of the 20th century 's most prolific piano composers .

As a composer and pianist , Sorabji was largely self @-@ taught , and he distanced himself from the main currents of contemporary musical life early in his career . He developed a highly idiosyncratic musical language , with roots in composers as diverse as Busoni , Debussy and Szymanowski , and he dismissed large portions of the established and contemporary repertoire .

A reluctant performer , Sorabji played a few of his works in public between 1920 and 1936 , thereafter " banning " performances of his music until 1976 . Since very few of his compositions were published during those years , he remained in public view mainly by writing essays and music criticism , at the centre of which are his books *Around Music* and *Mi contra fa : The Immoralisings of a Machiavellian Musician* . He had a tendency to seclusion , and in the 1950s he moved from London to the village of Corfe Castle , Dorset , where he spent most of the rest of his life quietly .

Sorabji 's music is characterised by frequent use of polyrhythms , complex juxtaposition of tonal and atonal elements , and copious ornamentation . Many of his works contain sections employing strongly contrasting approaches to musical architecture ; some of them use baroque forms , while others are athematic . His musical output consists of over 100 compositions , ranging from aphoristic pieces to works spanning several hours . Most are for piano solo or feature an important piano part , but he also composed for orchestra , chamber ensembles , organ and other instruments . Partly because of this , Sorabji has been described as a descendant of a tradition of composer @-@ pianists such as Frédéric Chopin , Franz Liszt and Charles @-@ Valentin Alkan .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early years = = =

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji was born Leon Dudley Sorabji in Chingford , Essex (now Greater London) , on 14 August 1892 . His father , Shapurji Sorabji , was a civil engineer of Parsi parentage from Bombay , India , born on 18 August 1863 . His mother , Madeleine Marguerite Mathilde Sorabji (née Madeline Matilda Worthy ; 13 August 1866 ? 5 May 1959) , was English . She is said to have been a singer , pianist and organist , but no evidence has been found to support these claims . They married on 18 February 1892 . Shapurji Sorabji had married in India in 1880 but , as no record of his first wife 's death or his divorce from her has yet been traced , it is possible that he married the composer 's mother bigamously .

Very little is known of Sorabji 's biography , particularly his early life and musical beginnings . He studied music with Charles Arthur Trew from the early 1910s until around 1915 , during a private education that is thought to have ended at about the same time . He reportedly started to learn the piano from his mother at an early age , and he later received help (but no lessons) from his mother 's friend Emily Edroff @-@ Smith .

The first significant insight into Sorabji 's life comes from his correspondence with Peter Warlock , which began in 1913 . At least partly as a result of Warlock 's influence , Sorabji began to focus on composition and music criticism . In those letters he showed great interest in interacting with the world of musicians ? an attitude that changed dramatically in later years . The first significant instance of such interaction took place in November 1919 . Sorabji had sent several of his scores , including that of his *First Piano Sonata* , to Ernest Newman , who paid them no attention . Sorabji then played the piece to Ferruccio Busoni , who expressed some reservations about the work , but gave him a letter of recommendation , which helped Sorabji get it published .

Already as a teenager , Sorabji took great interest in recent developments in art music ? in the work of Schoenberg , Scriabin , Mahler and Debussy , among others ? at a time when they received scant attention in the United Kingdom . This interest , along with his ethnicity , cemented his

reputation as an outsider . He and his music had their detractors , but some musicians received his work positively : Frederick Delius , who heard a 1930 radio broadcast of Sorabji playing his own piece *Le jardin parfumé : Poem for Piano Solo* , sent a letter of admiration to Sorabji ; the French ? Swiss pianist Alfred Cortot expressed interest in performing Sorabji 's piano concertos ; and Alban Berg reportedly took an interest in Sorabji 's music .

Although Sorabji performed some of his works in the UK and abroad in the 1920s , the most important period of his pianistic career was a result of his friendship with the Scottish composer Erik Chisholm . Their first meeting took place when Sorabji went to Glasgow to premiere his *Piano Sonata No. 4* on 1 April 1930 for Chisholm 's Active Society for the Propagation of Contemporary Music . In the Society 's concerts Sorabji played some of the longest works he had written to date : in addition to the *Fourth Piano Sonata* , he premiered *Opus clavicembalisticum* and *Piano Toccata No. 2* and gave a performance of his *Nocturne* , " J?m? " . The two remained friends until Chisholm 's death in 1965 , although their correspondence became less frequent after Chisholm moved to South Africa .

= = = Ban and seclusion = = =

On 10 March 1936 , the pianist John Tobin gave a performance of *Pars prima* from *Opus clavicembalisticum* . This performance was highly inadequate , as it lasted twice as long as it should have . Sorabji left before it finished , and later denied having attended it . He gave his last public performance of his music on 16 December 1936 in Glasgow , when he premiered his *Piano Toccata No. 2* , and afterwards withdrew from the concert platform for the rest of his life . He later banned unauthorised performances of his music , but it remains unclear when he did so ; Paul Rapoport has argued that it was probably in 1938 or 1939 , but Sorabji 's first announcement of it dates from 1944 . Although the ban was not legally enforceable , Sorabji presented it so sharply and decisively that , for the most part , he achieved his aim . The shift in Sorabji 's attitude to public performances of his music has generally been ascribed to Tobin 's performance , but this explanation has also been described as too simplistic . Apart from misleading reviews of his works by music critics , the deaths of people who were important to him (Busoni , Warlock and Bernard van Dieren) , the silence of Sibelius , the changes in Szymanowski 's style and the increasing prominence of Stravinsky and the late Schoenberg have all been put forward as catalysts for his decision to isolate himself from the world of music . The financial implications of his father 's death have also been cited as an important factor .

Sorabji left London in 1951 , and in 1956 he settled in " The Eye " , a house that he had built for himself in the village of Corfe Castle . This has been described as a parallel to his distancing from the world of music .

= = = Fate of his work = = =

From 1936 on , several admirers tried unsuccessfully to persuade Sorabji to record *Opus clavicembalisticum* . Given that Sorabji had not recorded any of his works , and that none of them had been published since 1931 , his friends and admirers began to be concerned about the fate of his output . The most ambitious attempt to ensure the preservation of his music and writings was initiated by Frank Holliday (1912 ? 1997) , who met Sorabji in 1937 and was his closest friend for about four decades . In the early 1950s Holliday organised the presentation of a letter inviting Sorabji to make recordings of his own music . Sorabji received the letter in 1953 , but made no recordings then , in spite of the enclosed cheque for 121 guineas (just over £ 127) . Holliday 's perseverance and closeness to Sorabji did , however , eventually change Sorabji 's attitude , and several recordings were made in Sorabji 's house between 1962 and 1968 . Holliday also helped with the WNCN broadcast of Sorabji 's music in 1970 (which took place without Sorabji 's consent) . Their friendship ended in 1979 as a result of disagreements about some of Sorabji 's decisions .

A similar initiative came from Norman Pierre Gentieu (1914 ? 2009) , an American writer who discovered Sorabji by reading his book *Around Music* just after the Second World War . Because of

the post @-@ war shortages in England , Gentieu sent Sorabji some provisions , and the depth of their friendship appears to have been such that he continued to do so for the next four decades . In the early 1950s Gentieu made an offer to Sorabji to pay for the microfilming of his major piano works and to give some copies to selected libraries . All of his unpublished musical manuscripts were eventually microfilmed . Gentieu also sent Sorabji a tape recorder to record some of his music , but Sorabji did not do so .

Rapoport has argued that Sorabji 's reluctance to make commercial recordings of his music stemmed from a fear of losing control over the making of future recordings of it , because of UK copyright laws of the time .

= = = End of the ban = = =

In November 1969 , the Scottish composer Alistair Hinton , then a student at the Royal College of Music in London , discovered Sorabji 's music in the Westminster Music Library while looking for scores of some guitar works by Fernando Sor . Hinton wrote a letter to Sorabji in March 1972 and met him for the first time in Sorabji 's home on 21 August 1972 . He was Sorabji 's closest friend for the last 16 years of Sorabji 's life .

Not only did Sorabji , who had not written any music since 1968 , return to composition as a result of Hinton 's interest in his work , but on 24 March 1976 he gave the pianist Yonty Solomon permission to play his works in public (although it has been claimed that Michael Habermann received tentative approval at an earlier date) . Several recitals ensued and led to the making of a television documentary on Sorabji , which was broadcast in 1977 . The images in it consisted mostly of still photographs of his house ; there was just one brief shot of Sorabji waving to the departing camera crew .

Sorabji went on to take part in two more broadcasts : one in 1979 for the centenary of the birth of composer Francis George Scott , and one in 1980 on BBC Radio 3 , commemorating Nikolai Medtner 's centenary . The former , although lacking any footage of Sorabji , was significant in that it brought about his first meeting with Ronald Stevenson , whose music and writings he had known for more than 20 years . After they met , Sorabji wrote Villa Tasca , a composition for Stevenson . While working on it , Sorabji received his only commission ; it came from Gentieu , acting on behalf of the Philadelphia branch of the Delius Society . Sorabji fulfilled it with *Il tessuto d'arabeschi* (1979) . He dedicated it " To the memory of Delius " and received £ 1 @, @ 000 for it (equivalent to £ 4 @, @ 563 in present @-@ day terms) .

= = = Last years = = =

Towards the end of his life , Sorabji ceased composing , because of his failing eyesight and difficulties in holding a pen . His health deteriorated severely in 1986 , obliging him to abandon his home and spend several months in a Wareham hospital . In March 1987 , together with his companion Reginald Norman Best (1909 ? 1988) , he moved into a two @-@ room suite in Marley House Nursing Home , a private nursing home in Winfrith Newburgh , where he was permanently chairbound and received daily nursing care . In June 1988 he suffered a mild stroke , which left him slightly mentally impaired . He died of heart failure on 15 October 1988 at a little after 7 pm , at the age of 96 . He was cremated in Bournemouth Crematorium on 24 October of that year , and the funeral services took place in Corfe Castle Parish Church on the same day .

The Sorabji Archive (originally called The Sorabji Music Archive) was founded in 1988 by Hinton (the sole heir to Sorabji 's oeuvre) , to disseminate knowledge of Sorabji 's legacy . His musical manuscripts are located in various places across the world .

= = Private life = =

For a long time , it was difficult to discover many details of Sorabji 's life , as he was extraordinarily private . He almost always refused requests for interviews or information , often with sharp

messages and warnings not to approach him again . This has led to numerous misunderstandings , such as that he lived in a castle , because he lived in the Dorset village of Corfe Castle . Since he had independent financial means , he felt no need to be tactful in his dealings with the public , critics and musicians interested in performing his works . " The Eye " , Sorabji 's home in Corfe Castle , had a sign at the gate stating : " Visitors Unwelcome " .

Sorabji was homosexual , and in the early 1920s he consulted Havelock Ellis , a British psychologist and writer on sexual psychology , about it . Ellis held progressive views on the subject , and Sorabji expressed high admiration for him , dedicating his Piano Concerto No. 7 , Simorg @-@ Anka (1924) , to him as an expression of gratitude . Although Sorabji experienced racial harassment in his youth , his homosexuality caused him greater trouble ; he wrote to Holliday that he had once been blackmailed over it .

Sorabji changed his name to demonstrate his strong identification with his Parsi heritage , explaining :

It is also stated that my name , my real name , that is the one I am known by , is not my real name . Now one is given one 's name ? one 's authentic ones ? at some such ceremony as baptism , Christening , or the like , on the occasion of one 's formal reception into a certain religious Faith . In the ancient Zarathustrian Parsi community to which , on my father 's side , I have the honour to belong , this ceremony is normally performed , as in other Faiths , in childhood , or owing to special circumstances as in my case , later in life , when I assumed my name as it now is or , in the words of the legal document in which this is mentioned " ... received into the Parsi community and in accordance with the custom and tradition thereof , is now and will be henceforth known as ... " and here follows my name as now .

= = = Relationship with his father = = =

Sorabji appears to have had a difficult relationship with his father . Although the father was musically cultured and financed the publication of several of Sorabji 's compositions (enabling 14 of them to be published between 1921 and 1931) , he did not want his son to become a musician . He is also alleged to have brought about the end of his wife 's singing career .

Already in 1896 , Sorabji 's father was back in Bombay , where he played a significant role in the development of India 's engineering and cotton machinery industries , among other things . Although he provided his family with financial support , he spent much of his time abroad and on 17 June 1929 bigamously married Nobubai Visvonata Catcar , causing Sorabji and his mother a substantial loss of fortune . He died in Bad Nauheim , Germany , on 8 July 1932 . In the same year , Sorabji travelled to India to settle matters related to his father 's estate , but obtained nothing but money from a trust fund that his father had established in 1914 . Nevertheless , it saved him from having to earn a living , although his lifestyle was ascetic .

= = = Religious views = = =

In his early years , Sorabji took an active interest in the occult ? according to Rapoport , he was a mystic ? and many of his early works contain occult inscriptions . For a time , he was a member of the London Society of Psychical Research . So interested was he in occultism that he even met Aleister Crowley in 1922 , an event that Sorabji found disappointing and caused him to describe Crowley as " the dullest of dull dogs " . His occult interests also led to his friendship with Bernard Bromage (1899 ? 1957) , an English writer on mysticism and a member of the secret order of the Fraternity of Inner Light . Bromage was one of Sorabji 's closest friends for 20 years , acting as joint trustee of the Shapurji Sorabji Trust between 1933 and 1941 and producing an index to Sorabji 's book Around Music . Their relationship ended abruptly in 1942 .

Sorabji 's early preoccupation with the occult subsided , and he became more interested in other religions , although it is not known whether he practised any . He was enthusiastic about Parsi culture , but became disillusioned with Parsis after visiting India in 1932 . He embraced only a few of aspects of Zoroastrianism , and in later years he was interested in Roman Catholicism , although he

did not take it up . For much of his life he practised yoga , but it is not known what branch of it .

= = Music = =

= = = Early works = = =

Although there has been speculation about earlier works , Sorabji 's earliest known (albeit lost) composition is a transcription dating from 1914 of Delius 's *In a Summer Garden* . His early works are predominantly piano sonatas , songs and piano concertos . Of these , Piano Sonatas Nos. 1 ? 3 (1919 ; 1920 ; 1922) are compositionally the most ambitious and significant . They are characterised mainly by their use of the single @-@ movement format and by their athematism . The main criticism levelled at them is that they lack stylistic consistency and organic form . Sorabji himself developed a largely unfavourable view of his early works , to the extent that late in his life he even considered destroying many of their manuscripts .

= = = Mature works and symphonic thought = = =

Various people have stated that Sorabji achieved compositional maturity with *Three Pastiches for Piano* (1922) and *Le jardin parfumé : Poem for Piano Solo* (1923) , or with only the latter , but Sorabji himself regarded his *First Organ Symphony* (1924) as his first mature work . It is his first piece in which baroque organisational principles play an important role . The union of these and his earlier compositional ideas led to the emergence of what has been described as his " symphonic style " , which provided the basis for most of his piano and organ symphonies . The first piece to apply the architectural blueprint of this style is his *Fourth Piano Sonata* (1928 ? 29) . It consists of three sections :

A " tapestry of motives " ;

An ornamental slow movement (almost always labelled as a nocturne) ;

A closing compound movement , which includes a fugue .

Sorabji 's symphonic first movements have been labelled as " symphonic tapestries " and " a kind of pure music drama " . Their organisation is related to that of his *Second* and *Third Piano Sonatas* and to that of the closing movement of the *First Organ Symphony* . They have been described as being based superficially on either the fugue or the sonata @-@ allegro form , but they differ from the normal application of those forms in that the exposition and development of themes are guided not by conventional tonal principles but by the way the themes , in the words of the musicologist Simon John Abrahams , " battle with each other for domination of the texture " . These movements can last over 90 minutes , and their thematic character varies considerably : while the opening movement of his *Fourth Piano Sonata* (1928 ? 29) introduces seven themes , that of his *Second Piano Symphony* (1954) has sixty @-@ four .

The nocturnes are generally considered to be among Sorabji 's most accessible works , and they are also some of his most prestigious ; they have been described by Habermann as the best of his output , and by the pianist Fredrik Ullén as " perhaps ... his most personal and original contribution as a composer . " Sorabji 's descriptions of his *Symphony No. 2* , *J?m?* , give an insight into their organisation . In a 1942 letter , Sorabji compared this composition to his *Gulist?n ? Nocturne for Piano* , and he later wrote of the symphony 's " self @-@ cohesive texture relying upon its own inner consistency and cohesiveness without relation to thematic or other matters " . Melodic material is treated loosely in these works , reflecting their harmonic freedom ; ornamentation and textural patterns assume a preeminent position . Because of their emphasis on non @-@ thematic processes , the nocturnes have been described as " static " . Some examples of them are *The Garden of Ir?m* , *An?hata Cakra* and *Symphonic Nocturne for Piano Alone* .

Sorabji 's fugues , the most atonal of his works , generally follow traditional methods . After a subject and between one and four countersubjects have been presented in an exposition , there follows a development section in which the subject (and countersubjects , particularly in the earlier

fugues) are usually developed in their original form and in inversion , retrograde and retrograde inversion . The movement continues with a stretto and concludes with a section featuring augmentation and a thickening of lines into chords . His multi @-@ subject fugues repeat this pattern for each subject , and combine thematic material from all expositions in the last section . The fugues are more conservative than most of his output , in that they rarely use polyrhythms . They can contain up to six subjects , and it is these that mark Sorabji 's fugues as different from most others . Some of the subjects are among his most unconventional melodic creations , lacking the frequent changes of direction that characterise most melodies ; other subjects are possibly the longest ever conceived . This has led some people either to treat them with suspicion or to criticise them .

Other important forms in Sorabji 's mature work are the toccata and the variation set . The latter , along with his non @-@ orchestral symphonies , are his most ambitious works and have been praised for the imagination exhibited in them . *Sequentia cyclica super " Dies irae " ex Missa pro defunctis* (1948 ? 49) , a set of 27 variations on the original *Dies Irae* plainchant , is considered by some to be his greatest work . His toccatas are more modest in scope and take the structure of Busoni 's work of the same name as their starting point .

= = = Late works = = =

Already in 1953 , Sorabji manifested a lack of interest in continuing to compose , when he described his *Sequentia cyclica super " Dies irae " ex Missa pro defunctis* (1948 ? 49) as " the climax and crown of his work for the piano and , in all probability , the last he will write " . Around 1968 , Sorabji vowed to cease composing , and eventually stopped doing so after writing *Concertino non grosso* for String Sextet with Piano obbligato quasi continuo (1968) .

Hinton played a crucial role in Sorabji 's resumption of compositional activities . Sorabji 's next two pieces , *Benedizione di San Francesco d 'Assisi* and *Symphonia brevis* for Piano , were written in 1973 , the year after the two first met , and mark the beginning of what several people have identified as Sorabji 's " late style " , one characterised by thinner textures and a denser harmonic idiom .

= = = Style and inspiration = = =

Sorabji 's early influences include Cyril Scott , Ravel , Leo Ornstein and particularly Scriabin . He later became more critical of Scriabin and , after meeting Busoni in 1919 , was influenced primarily by the latter . His mature work was also significantly influenced by Alkan , Debussy , Godowsky , Reger and Szymanowski .

Sorabji was also influenced by Eastern culture . According to Michael Habermann , this manifests itself in the following ways : highly supple and irregular rhythmic patterns , abundant ornamentation , an improvisatory and timeless feel , frequent polyrhythmic writing and the vast dimensions of some of his compositions .

Non @-@ musical subjects , both religious and numerological , influenced Sorabji 's music , too , and he took inspiration from various sources . His *Fifth Piano Sonata* (*Opus archimagicum*) is inspired by the tarot , and his *T?ntrik Symphony* for Piano Alone has seven movements titled after the bodily centres of Tantric and Shaktic yoga . The song *Benedizione di San Francesco d 'Assisi* sets the text of a Catholic benediction . However , Sorabji did not intend the first two of these works to be programmatic , and he heaped scorn on attempts to represent stories or ideologies in music . Nevertheless , some of his works have been described as programmatic .

Sorabji , who claimed to be of Spanish ? Italian ? Sicilian ancestry , composed various pieces that reflect an enthusiasm for those cultures , such as *Fantasia ispanica* , *Rosario d 'arabeschi* and *Passeggiata veneziana sopra la Barcarola di Offenbach* . These are works of a Mediterranean character and are inspired by Busoni 's *Elegy No. 2* , *All 'Italia* , and the Spanish music of Isaac Albéniz , Debussy , Enrique Granados and Liszt . They are considered among his outwardly more virtuosic and musically less ambitious works .

=== Harmony , counterpoint and form ===

Sorabji 's counterpoint stems from Busoni 's and Reger 's . The influence of these composers led Sorabji to employ various baroque contrapuntal forms (chorale prelude , passacaglia , fugue and others) , but he rejected the symmetry and forms that characterise the music of composers such as Mozart and Brahms . Sorabji was dismissive of the Classical style , mainly because he saw it as restricting the musical material to conform to a " ready @-@ made mould " , and his musical thinking is closer to that of the Baroque era than to the Classical .

Ornamentation assumes a preeminent role in much of Sorabji 's music . His harmonic language , which frequently combines tonal and atonal elements , is thus freer than in the music of many other composers and less amenable to analysis . Like many other 20th @-@ century composers , Sorabji displays a fondness for tritone and semitone relationships . The opening gesture of his Fourth Piano Sonata , for example , emphasises these two intervals , and the two long pedal points in its third movement are a tritone apart . However , some people have remarked that his music rarely contains the tension that is commonly associated with very dissonant music .

=== Creative process and notation ===

Because of Sorabji 's sense of privacy , little is known about his compositional process . Other people 's accounts of it state that he composed off the cuff and did not revise his work , and it has been claimed that he used yoga to gather " creative energies " . These claims , however , contradict statements made by Sorabji himself (as well as some of his musical manuscripts) , which reveal that he planned his compositions carefully in advance and used yoga to regulate his thoughts . Nevertheless , he wrote extremely fast , and there is an unusually high number of ambiguities and inconsistencies in his musical autographs . They are among the most distinctive features of his scores , and have prompted comparisons with his other characteristics . Hinton suggested a link between them and Sorabji 's speech , saying , " he invariably spoke at a speed almost too great for intelligibility " , and Stevenson remarked , " One sentence could embrace two or three languages . " A state of frenzy is reflected in several of Sorabji 's letters to Chisholm , which provide a unique insight into the creation of Opus clavicembalisticum and into Sorabji 's feelings while writing music , showing that Sorabji found composition highly enervating .

=== Pianism ===

=== As a performer ===

Sorabji 's pianistic abilities have been the subject of much contention . After his early lessons , he appears to have been self @-@ taught . In the 1920s and 1930s , when his works were being published for the first time and he was performing some of them in public , there were controversies involving their alleged unplayability and his pianistic proficiency . At the same time , some people ? particularly his closest friends ? hailed him as a first @-@ class virtuoso . From this disagreement it has been inferred that he was neither sloppy nor a player of the highest calibre . Sorabji repeatedly denied being a professional pianist and always focused primarily on composition ; from 1939 , he no longer practised the piano very often . He was a reluctant performer and had difficulty handling the pressure of performing in public . The private recordings that he made of some of his works in the 1960s contain substantial deviations from his scores (although largely due to his impatience and disinterest in playing clearly and accurately) . This has been used to argue that the early criticisms of his playing were at least partly justified and that the negative reviews of his music by some of its first listeners were the result of flaws in his performances .

=== As a composer ===

Many of Sorabji 's works are written for the piano or have an important piano part . His writing for the instrument was influenced by that of composers such as Liszt , Alkan and Godowsky , and he has been described as a composer @-@ pianist in their tradition , partly because he was one of the 20th century 's most prolific piano composers . It exhibits particularly the influence of Godowsky , specifically in its polyphony and its use of polyrhythms and polydynamics . This necessitated the regular use of systems of more than two staves in Sorabji 's keyboard parts , reaching its peak on page 124 of the manuscript of his Third Organ Symphony (1949 ? 53) , which uses 11 staves , as well as frequent calls for use of the sostenuto pedal .

Sorabji 's piano writing has been praised by some for its variety and understanding of the piano 's sonorities . His approach to the piano was non @-@ percussive , and he emphasised that his music is conceived vocally . He once described Opus clavicembalisticum as " a colossal song " , and Geoffrey Douglas Madge said that his piano playing had much in common with bel canto singing . Sorabji once said , " If a composer can 't sing , a composer can 't compose . "

His piano music ? not just that which is designated as symphonic ? often strives to emulate the sounds of instruments other than the piano , as is evident from score markings such as " quasi organo pieno " (like a full organ) , " pizzicato " and " quasi tuba con sordino " (like a muted tuba) . In this respect , Alkan was a key source of inspiration ; Sorabji admired his " orchestral " writing for the piano and was influenced by his Concerto for Solo Piano and his Symphony for Solo Piano .

= = Writings = =

As a writer , Sorabji is best known for his music criticism , the bulk of which is contained in the books Around Music (1932) and Mi contra fa : The Immoralisings of a Machiavellian Musician (1947) . He contributed to various well @-@ known publications dealing with music in England , including The New Age , The New English Weekly , The Musical Times and Musical Opinion . He revised some of those articles and included them in his two books . His writings also devote attention to various non @-@ musical issues : he was , among other things , a critic of British rule in India and a proponent of birth control and legalised abortion . Being homosexual at a time when homosexual acts were illegal in England , he wrote of the biological and social realities that homosexuals faced during much of his lifetime .

Sorabji first expressed interest in becoming a music critic in 1914 , and he started contributing criticism to The New Age in 1924 , after it had published some of his letters to the editor . By 1930 , Sorabji had become disillusioned with concert life and developed a growing interest in gramophone recordings , believing that he would eventually lose all reason to attend concerts . In 1945 he stopped providing regular reviews and only occasionally submitted his writings to correspondence columns in various journals . While his earlier writings reflect a contempt for the music world in general ? from its businessmen to its performers ? his later reviews tend to be more detailed and less caustic .

Although in his youth Sorabji was attracted to what were then the newest developments in European art music , his musical tastes were essentially conservative . He had a particular affinity for late Romantic and Impressionist composers , such as Mahler , Debussy , Medtner and Delius , and his main bêtes noires were Stravinsky , the late Schoenberg and Hindemith . He rejected serialism and dodecaphony , considering both to be based on artificial precepts , and he criticised even the later tonal works and transcriptions of Schoenberg . He loathed the rhythmic character of Stravinsky 's music and what he perceived as its brutality and lack of melodic qualities . He viewed Stravinsky 's neoclassicism as a sign of lack of imagination . Shostakovich and Fauré are among the composers whom Sorabji initially condemned but later admired .

Sorabji 's writings also give an idea of his attitude towards performance practice , which was strongly Romantic (that is to say , free) . He dismissed performers like Albert Schweitzer and praised Egon Petri , Wanda Landowska and others for their ability to " re @-@ create " music . (He also encouraged a less @-@ than @-@ literal approach to his compositions .)

= = Legacy = =

= = = Reception = = =

Assessments of Sorabji 's music vary widely . While some , such as the pianist John Ogdon and the organist Kevin Bowyer , speak of him as comparable to such composers as Bach , Beethoven , Chopin and Messiaen , others dismiss him altogether . Reviews of concerts featuring Sorabji 's music tend to be similarly mixed , some reviewers elevating him to the ranks of figures such as Debussy , and others describing his music as vacuous .

The pianist and composer Jonathan Powell writes of Sorabji 's " unusual ability to combine the disparate and create surprising coherence " . Abrahams finds that Sorabji 's musical oeuvre exhibits enormous " variety and imagination " and the ability to " develop a unique personal style and employ it freely at any scale he chose " . Bowyer counts Sorabji 's organ works , together with those of Messiaen , as among the " Twentieth Century Works of Genius " .

Others have expressed more negative sentiments . The English pianist Ian Pace describes Sorabji 's music as that of " a massive ego thoroughly unaware of its crushing banality . " The music critic Andrew Clements calls Sorabji " just another 20th @-@ century English eccentric ... whose talent never matched [his] musical ambition . " The music journalist Max Harrison , in his review of Rapoport 's book Sorabji : A Critical Celebration , heavily criticised Sorabji 's compositions , piano playing , music criticism and personal conduct and implied that " nobody cared except a few close friends " ; this , however , is in curiously stark contrast to his fulsomely enthusiastic reviews of some of Sorabji 's piano works in London performances by pianist Yonty Solomon .

Sorabji 's isolation , and sometimes the resulting lack of interaction with the music world , have been the target of criticism even by his admirers . His writings have also been highly divisive , being described by some as profoundly perceptive and enlightening , and by others as misguided .

= = = Innovation = = =

Sorabji has been described as a conservative composer who developed a highly idiosyncratic style fusing diverse influences . Even so , parallels have been identified between him and more progressive composers . Ullén describes Sorabji 's *Études transcendantes* (100) (1940 ? 44) as pieces that might be seen as " presages of the piano music of , say , Ligeti , Finnissy or Ferneyhough " , although he cautions against overstating this . Some of Sorabji 's pieces have even been described as forerunners of the music of Nancarrow . According to Habermann , " The rhythmic structures within brackets [in Sorabji 's nocturnes] predate the complicated rhythms of Messiaen and Stockhausen . " Habermann also argues that Sorabji 's fusion of tonality and atonality into a different approach to relationships between harmonies is a significant innovation .