

# AMICA International

## Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association

### Honor Roll

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## Leo Ornstein

Leo Ornstein was born in Kramentchug, Russia, December 11, 1895. A son of a syriagopal cantor, he studied music at home and later studied piano with Vladimir Puchlaski at Kiev. At the age of eleven he was enrolled in the St. Petersburg Conservatory and studied with Glazounoff.

In 1907, due to anti-Semitic disturbances in Russia, his family moved to the U.S.A. Here study was with Bertha Tapper and the New England Conservatory in Boston with Percy Goetschuis. Later study was in the Institute of Musical Art in New York.

Mr. Ornstein's debut was in New York, March 5, 1911. Concerts in Boston, Philadelphia and other large cities followed. Compositions, experimenting in percussive sonorities and dissonant harmonies, were done in 1913. A European tour, followed by a tour of the U.S. had him introducing the little-known works of Bartok, Ravel, Milhaud and Albeniz.

When in London, a recital of FUTURISTIC MUSIC was announced featuring the sonata and other compositions. In London at this time, Gustav Mahler was to conduct and Ornstein was to play his "Wild Man's Dance." Plahler had difficulty in quelling a riot.

Returning to the U.S, in about 1915, he gave a series of recitals at the Bandbox Theatre in New York. His performance included works of Ravel, Schoenberg, Scribian and other modern composers. Mr. Ornstein received considerable noteriety and was considered an *Enfant Terrible* in the music world. He was forever fueding with his managers about his programs. The managers insisted he play the works of Chopin, Liszt and others for a better box office but Mr. Ornstein refused and played what he wanted. James Huneker, music critic, termed him "a true-blue, genuine Futuristic composer."

The shock and surprise of his music dwindled and the compositions were performed very little. In 1917 he gave a recital in the Princess Theatre for the Bertha

Flering Tapper Scholarship Fund which was supporting six scholarships. He was Bertha Tapper's most successful student.

Mr. Ornstein settled in Philadelphia to teach at the Philadelphia Musical Academy and the Temple University. He later founded the Ornstein School of Music.

His compositions include "Three Moods: Anger, Peace and Joy" for orchestra; a piano concerto, performed in February 12, 1925 with the Philadelphia Orchestra with the composer as soloist; "Usotrata Siote," a symphony performed in 1934; "Nocturne and Dance of Fates;" "Three Russian Chorus" (a capella); a piano quintet; a string quartet; a violin sonata; cello sonata; "Nocturne" for clarinet and piano; four piano sonatas and piano pieces.

It is interesting to find renewed interest in Mr. Ornstein's compositions, resulting in some recent LP recordings. The "Sonata for Cello and Piano" has been recorded on Orion ORS 76211. The performing musicians are Bonnie Hampton and Nathan Schwarts. Another Stereo disc, Orion ORS 75194, is of his early piano music ("Wild Man's Dance); "Three Moods" and "A La Chionoise," performed by the pianist, Michael Sellers. A third LP release, CRI SD339 is Mr. Ornstein's "Piano Quintet."

The following additional titles were forwarded to AMICA via Anita N. Johnson by Mrs. Ornstein.

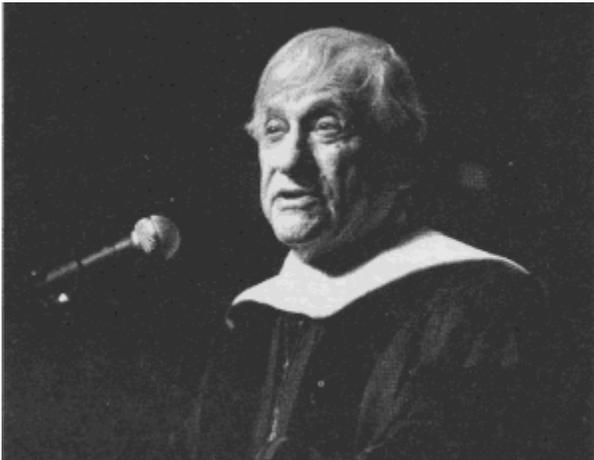
Genesis records 1641, "Sonata No. IV," "A Morning the Woods," "Impressions of Chinatown," "Arabesques," performed by Martha Verbit. Louisville Kentucky Orchestra - "Nocturne and Dance of the Fates" for full orchestra.

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## **HONORARY LEO ORNSTEIN AWARDED DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS DEGREE**

By Doug McGee - from the March/April 1988 AMICA

Pam and I were so fortunate to be able to attend the Leo Ornstein Celebration at St. Norbert College in DePere, Wisconsin on December 4th. This was a day that we will never forget and will enjoy over and over in our memory for years to come.



*Leo Ornstein at 95*

The ceremonies began at 2:00 p.m. with an outstanding brass choir situated on an upper-right balcony of the auditorium. This certainly set a mood of excitement for the many wonderful events of the day to follow. The two photos of Mr. Ornstein at the lectern, and also seated, were taken during the awarding of the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters Degree. This was followed by a superb performance by pianist William Westney of "Three Moods" and "Piano-Sonata No. 4". These are both very outstanding works which produced some incredibly refreshing and very, very beautiful sounds from the Colleges' fine 9' Steinway under the mastery of Mr. Westney. The program then continued with a panel discussion: "American Values and the Music of Leo Ornstein". This proved to be a very fascinating sort of journey into the life and work of Leo Ornstein with intricate contributions from Mr. Ornstein's Son, Severo; Pianist, William Westney; Yale Historian, Dr. Vivian Perlis; and Cellist, Parry Karp. Much was brought to light during this discussion pertaining to Mr. Ornstein's decision in the early 1920's to put aside his concert career in

favor of devoting his time and energy to composing. Also much was said of the quantities of compositions by Mr. Ornstein that have been uncovered in recent years and are now being safely preserved in the Yale Library.

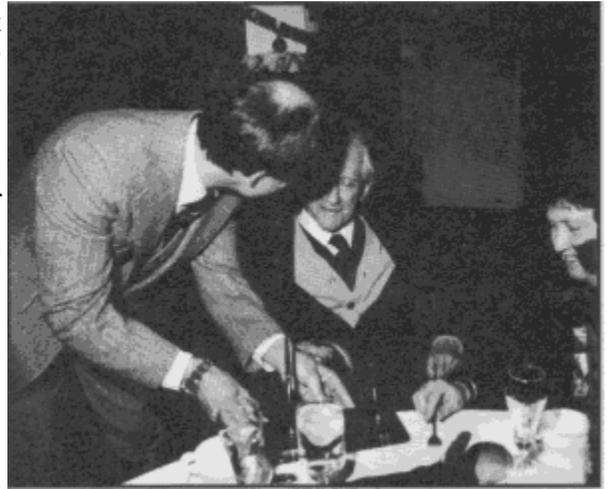
The photo of me shaking hands with Leo Ornstein was taken during the reception for Mr. Ornstein in the lobby of the "Hall of Fine Arts". This was a beautiful time during the ceremonies with several musical groups playing in the lobby at different times,

the most memorable to me being the flute choir of about seven or eight members. I'd never heard a sound quite like this before ... so rich and melodious. Also, a beautiful buffet table was set with fresh flowers and a myriad of delicious food and drink. It was during this time that I had the long awaited opportunity to visit briefly with Leo Ornstein and talk a bit about his experience with the Ampico. His memory is extremely fresh and accurate. He said his experience at Ampico was good and that the people there were nice to work with. I believe he mentioned that he was a friend of Charles Stoddard. I asked him if there had been any restrictions to speak of in recording a roll for the Ampico. He said that there really were no restrictions except for the tact that he had to be careful when playing an extremely fast passage. He explained that he would have to slow down to keep the punches from shredding the paper.

During most of the day and evening, it was possible for anyone curious about the Ornstein Ampico recordings to view a video in a room in the Hall of Fine Arts featuring a Chickering Ampico grand. The Chickering is owned by AMICAn Father John Cherkas of Laona, Wisconsin. He made the video and included several of the Ornstein Ampico recordings in the performance. Many who viewed and listened were quite intrigued with the whole process.

An elegant dinner followed the afternoon's activities with the Ornstein family and their friends being the guests of honor. During this time a number of speeches and tributes were given by various college faculty. I had the honor of presenting the very handsome inscribed desk set contributed by AMICA and its

members commemorating this very special occasion. The photo showing Mr. Ornstein and his Daughter, Mrs. Valentine seated at the dinner table, was taken immediately after I had made the presentation of the gift at the podium and then brought it to him where he was seated. The beautiful long-stemmed red roses placed on the





Ornstein table and seen at the right of the photo were a gift from the Chicago Chapter of AMICA and were indeed a most thoughtful contribution to the very gala evening dinner.

As dinner concluded, an evening of more Ornstein music began, and proved to be yet another thoroughly enjoyable experience of outstanding compositions performed by similarly outstanding talented musicians. The large crowd, nearly filling the auditorium, enjoyed a very rare and exciting musical offering.

Finally, as the curtain came down for the last time and the day came to its inevitable close, we realized the incredibly special time we had spent that day at St. Norbert College, and will always be indebted to the fine people of this outstanding institution for making it all possible.

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From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

Leo Ornstein (December 2, 1892 - February 24, 2002) was an avant-garde composer and pianist.

Born in Kremenchug, Russia, Ornstein was one of the most popular radical composers in the United States, where he immigrated in 1907. A child prodigy, Ornstein mastered the piano at age eight. While he made no audio recordings, his playing was by all accounts world-class, and is preserved on numerous piano rolls he recorded for the Ampico label.

From the period 1910 to 1925, Ornstein was the giant of modern music being performed in the states. Among his most notable pieces *I Allegro Barbero* was one of the first fusion pieces, combining new musical techniques such as tone clusters and polyrhythms before they were widely used.

Ornstein gave countless performances in the 1910s and 20s, but in 1933, he retired from the stage because he disliked performing. Even though he had retired, Ornstein kept composing up until age 98.

In the mid-1970s, a renewed interest in his work began, and the question of his current whereabouts was raised. As it turns out, he was living in a mobile home in Texas, still writing music. He and his wife Pauline Mallet-Provost also founded the Ornstein School of Music in 1935 and operated it until it closed in 1958. In 1990, at the age of 98, Ornstein's final work, the Eighth Piano Sonata was completed and given its world premiere.

In early 2002, the radical composer died in a small nursing home in Green Bay, Wisconsin, at the age of 109.

The music of Leo Ornstein is available by visiting <http://www.poonhill.com/>. This web site is published by Ornstein's son and grandson.