

Robert Russell Bennett
Chamber Music



Seven Postcards to Old Friends
for Flute, Viola, and Piano
(1966)

Janet Schlein Somers and Paul Mack Somers, editors



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Irving Berlin

1. To Irving Berlin (p. 5)

"I ... refer to him as just about songwriter number one, at least in our era, and look back on many a page written for him, but the fact is we never spent a great deal of time together. In the first place, he was his own publisher, and when he needed me he had to come to my publisher and ask for me. That must have been a little distasteful to him, although no evidence of that was ever visible ... If any youngster is ambitious as a songwriter a long look at Irving Berlin should be a required study."

— Robert Russell Bennett, *The Broadway Sound*, George J. Ferencz, ed., p. 240.



Jerome Kern

2. To Jerome Kern (p. 9)

"Working on Kern's music was a joy, compared with working on the usual successful theater music. He was rather better schooled than the majority and was very sensitive to harmony and orchestral color. In a medium where too much originality condemns a writer to posthumous success, his melodies were never likely to be completely obvious. There was a touch of aristocracy in his self-assurance, a feeling of proceeding with dignity no matter how trivial or nonsensical the message was. When you do my work, where twenty seconds of music can take an hour or two (or more) to put on paper, you say, 'Thank God for the Jerome Kerns!' — if indeed there ever can be more than one."

— Robert Russell Bennett, *The Broadway Sound*, George J. Ferencz, ed., p. 254.



Richard Rodgers

3. To Richard Rodgers (p. 15)

"Dick [Rodgers] refused to surrender [to cancer] for almost twenty-five years, and...turned out some of his most successful songs during that time.

"... I once spoke with [Rodgers'] and Oscar Hammerstein's secretary, Lillian Leff, who was with them for many years. She had been with [Rodgers] or near him in every kind of crisis, but she simply didn't know him. She said, 'I've seen him cry, I've seen him happy, worried, angry, thrilled even. But never once did I know what was going on inside. With the other [Hammerstein] I always felt I could help him think if he needed me, but not with Rodgers.

"... it supported my conviction that Richard Rodgers took great satisfaction in hiding all the warmth and tenderness he ever had in order to come out with it in song and surprise us all. By his own estimate that was he."

— Robert Russell Bennett, *The Broadway Sound*, George J. Ferencz, ed., p. 251-252.



Vincent Youmans

4. To Vincent Youmans (p. 19)

"[He] was a champion whistler through his teeth. I don't suppose he ever won any cups at it, but he deserved something. When you think how many beautiful tunes came into the world through Vincent Youmans' teeth you feel your musical education enriched. The whole idea appeals to me somewhat because it was partly for me that he did it. Whistling the tune left the fingers of his right hand free to fish for harmonies and added notes to use in the orchestration. No one would call his harmony experimental but it was personal, and he was very particular about what went on under the melody."

— Robert Russell Bennett, *The Broadway Sound*, George J. Ferencz, ed., p. 243.



Cole Porter

5. To Cole Porter (p. 25)

“When one adds up the hundreds of hours I’ve spent with Cole Porter’s music it’s hard to realize how little I knew him. We had not one quarrel I remember; I was in his house in the Rue Monsieur in Paris as we prepared a show for London, spent time with him in one of his two large suites at the Waldorf in New York, and was with him at countless rehearsals of the many shows he did, but when he died I still had to confess that I didn’t know him very well.

“... His fine musical education, the fact that we both enjoyed France and the French language, and the fact that we both had a stake in the success and quality of his music, should have brought us together socially, but we lived on different planets. No antipathy, but also no common ground.”

— Robert Russell Bennett, *The Broadway Sound*, George J. Ferencz, ed., p. 243.

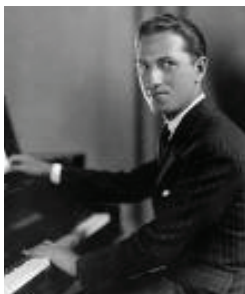


Noel Coward

6. To Noel Coward (p. 27)

“Noel Coward was such a remarkable talent that you found yourself looking at him and trying to see where he kept his many selves. He not only created things, he could interpret and perform them with utter brilliance. He could be old or young, a woman or a man, a child, a youth, a servant, or a master. With all this, as much music and poetry in him as any of the great songwriters start with.”

— Robert Russell Bennett, *The Broadway Sound*, George J. Ferencz, ed., p. 238.



George Gershwin

7. To George Gershwin (p. 31)

“Many of [Gershwin’s] friends referred to him laughingly as naïve. Without being an old stick-in-the-mud reminding them that they have the word in the wrong gender, let’s clean this up a bit. If they mean “naïve” as an antonym of “sophisticated”, it won’t do. He had his own special brand of sophistication, but he was so amazed at the music that came out of his piano that the little social graces seemed unimportant and even an insincerity to him. He was his own great problem and his own great fulfillment.”

— Robert Russell Bennett, *The Broadway Sound*, George J. Ferencz, ed., p. 116.

To get a colorful picture of Bennett and a witty and amusing recounting of the music scene during the first three quarters of the twentieth century, read his *The Broadway Sound* (edited and annotated by George J. Ferencz. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001, ©1999).

Robert Russell Bennett (1894-1981) led — for some seven decades — an active professional life, both as orchestrator of others’ music and as composer of a long list of concert works. He is reputed to have orchestrated all or part of some 300 Broadway and London productions between 1920 and 1976, and turned out hundreds of other published arrangements during his lifetime...

Spending the duration of his professional career almost entirely in New York City, Bennett made his acquaintance with those on both ‘sides’ of the music business: [Jerome] Kern and [George] Gershwin on one hand, and [Sergei] Rachmaninoff, [Leopold] Stokowski, and [Fritz] Reiner on the other. The great majority of his pieces were given New York premieres in the hands of prominent conductors, orchestras, and soloists.

Bennett made it clear to Kern and other songwriters that his personal preferences in music lay with the classics; though he was viewed as something of a ‘snob’ by his Broadway associates for this reason, he saw the popular music industry as merely a money-making venture, with popular songs just another commercial commodity. This did not prevent him, however, from establishing a reputation for tastefulness, creativity, and restraint in his commercial scoring; for several decades he was acknowledged as the leading practitioner in his field.

Greenwood Press, 1990. p. ix.

— George J. Ferencz. *Robert Russell Bennett, a Bio-Bibliography*.

Seven Postcards to Old Friends

for Flute, Viola, and Piano

5

Duration: c. 12'45"

ROBERT RUSSELL BENNETT
(1894-1981)

*Edited by Janet S. Somers
and Paul M. Somers*

1. To Irving Berlin...

Moderato in 2

Flute

Viola

Moderato in 2

Piano *mf*

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

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Fl. *mf* 8

Vla. *mf*

Pno. *p* 8va

12

16

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

8va

Detailed description: This musical score page contains measures 8 through 16. It features three staves: Flute (Fl.), Viola (Vla.), and Piano (Pno.). Measures 8-11 are marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic, while measures 12-16 are marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Flute and Viola parts consist of eighth-note patterns with triplets. The Piano part features a complex texture with triplets in both the right and left hands, and an 8va (octave) marking above the right-hand staff in measures 12-16. A large, faint watermark is visible across the center of the page.

2. To Jerome Kern...

Allegretto

Flute

Viola

Allegretto

Piano *pp*

con Ped.

The musical score is for a piece titled '2. To Jerome Kern...'. It is written for three instruments: Flute, Viola, and Piano. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto'. The Flute and Viola parts are in common time (C) and consist of whole rests for the first four measures. The Piano part is also in common time and begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. It features a melodic line in the right hand with slurs and a bass line in the left hand. A 'con Ped.' (con sordina) instruction is placed below the first measure of the piano part.

5

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

cantabile

p

10

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

f

f sub.

14

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

mp

p

f

f

p

f

The musical score is for measures 5 through 14. It features three staves: Flute (Fl.), Viola (Vla.), and Piano (Pno.). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Measures 5-9 show the Piano playing a cantabile melody with a piano (p) dynamic. Measures 10-13 show the Viola and Piano playing a more active passage with a forte (f) dynamic. Measure 14 shows the Flute and Viola playing a melodic line with a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic, while the Piano continues with a piano (p) dynamic. A large, faint watermark is visible across the page.

3. To Richard Rodgers...

Nocturne, moderato

Flute

p cantabile

Viola

(arco)

p

Nocturne, moderato

Piano

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

ppp

Ped.

11

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

8va-----

loco

12

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

loco

p cantabile

14

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

4. To Vincent Youmans...

Tempo giusto

Flute

Viola

Tempo giusto

Piano *ff*

Fl. ⁶

Vla.

Pno.

ff

Fl. ¹³

Vla.

Pno.

senza Ped.

Fl. ¹⁹

Vla.

Pno.

f (non stacc.)

5. To Cole Porter...

Moderato

Flute *p espr.*

Viola *p espr.*

Moderato

Piano *f* *p* *f*

Fl. *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Pno. *p* *f*

Fl. *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Pno. *mp*

16

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

mf (rhumba)

19

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

21

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

p

8va

f *loco*

6. To Noel Coward...

Valse con grazia

Flute

p

Viola

p

Valse con grazia

Piano

p

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

Fl. ¹²

Vla.

Pno.

Fl. ¹⁷

Vla. *pizz.*
mf

Pno. *f*
tr

Fl. ²² *f*

Vla.

Pno.

7. To George Gershwin...

Vigorouso

Flute

Viola

Piano

Vigorouso

f martellato

Fl.

Vla.

Pno.

This musical score page contains three systems of music for Flute (Fl.), Viola (Vla.), and Piano (Pno.).

System 1 (Measures 7-9): The Flute and Viola parts begin with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Flute part features a melodic line with slurs and ties, while the Viola part provides a harmonic accompaniment. The Piano part consists of block chords in the right hand and single notes in the left hand.

System 2 (Measures 10-12): The Flute and Viola parts continue with their melodic and harmonic lines, featuring long slurs. The Piano part continues with its accompaniment, including some grace notes and accents.

System 3 (Measures 13-15): The Flute and Viola parts conclude the system with their respective melodic and harmonic lines. The Piano part continues with its accompaniment, featuring some grace notes and accents.