



## The Kuss Quartet champions long overlooked artist

With its latest CD, the Kuss Quartet presents a portrait of Ernst Gernot Klusmann (1901–1975), a German artist of the "war generation" whose work was dismissed due to his continuous involvement in the Third Reich. With **world premiere recordings** of two chamber music works from the 1920s, the Berlin ensemble, known for its spirit of discovery, together with pianist Péter Nagy, now proves that a once talented composer enriched the gilded world of the Golden Twenties with a highly original voice.



### Ernst Gernot Klusmann (1901–1975)

#### KLAVIERQUINTETT E-MOLL OP. 1 (1925)

- [1] ALLEGRO IMPETUOSO
- [2] ADAGIO MOLTO E CANTABILE
- [3] SCHERZO
- [4] FINALE

#### STREICHQUARTETT NR. 1 OP. 7 (1928-30)

- [2] ADAGIO
- [3] ALLEGRO
- [4] MARSCH
- [5] SCHERZO
- [6] FINALE

**Kuss Quartett** Jana Kuss *Violine* | Oliver Wille *Violine* | William Coleman *Viola* | Mikayel Hakhnazaryan *Violoncello*  
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For decades, Germany's attempt to process and come to terms with the Third Reich meant that personalities and functionaries of the cultural scene of the time who were not persecuted, exiled, imprisoned, or even killed, but instead kept their teaching, research, and musical practice going in the country, were placed under general suspicion (with a few famous and astonishing exceptions: one need only think of Herbert von Karajan, who joined the Nazi Party twice). For the sake of simplicity, both person and work were often considered ostracized across the board. **Eighty years after the end of the war**, it is now time to re-examine, re-evaluate, or even rehabilitate these **individual artists' biographies and their legacies**. And in doing so, surprising and fascinating sound worlds are opening up in the comprehensive search for a path from late Romanticism to New Music – as in the case of Ernst Gernot Klusmann (1901–1975).

Born in the German Empire, raised in the Weimar Republic, followed by a career of composing and teaching during the Nazi and West German eras, the Hamburg native could not have wished for a better advocate for his chamber music oeuvre than the **Kuss Quartet**. An "outstanding ensemble" in the truest sense of the word, their live performances, educational programs, concerts, and exceptional repertoire expertise—including numerous commissioned works—have regularly made an impact in the chamber music scene since 1991. They have also received acclaim from critics, as their last studio album, which features not only Franz Schubert but also the brand-new compositions "Sei gutes Muts" by Iris ter Schiphorst and "Pieces" by Mark Andres Seven, was recently awarded the German Record Critics' Award 1/2025.

The fact that Ernst Gernot Klusmann has now become the focus of the quartet members Jana Kuss (vl.), Oliver Wille (vl.), William Coleman (v.) and Mikayel Hakhnazaryan (vc.) is due to several reasons: first and foremost is the research work of Dr. Carsten Bock, who published the first sheet music editions with Jaron Verlag, thanks to funding from the Funk Foundation. More recently, **the 75th anniversary of the Hamburg University of Music and Theatre** put a spotlight on the composer, since Klusman was one of its co-founders.

**Ernst Gernot Klusmann**, who died fifty years ago, left no small mark on the German musical landscape: after completing his studies, he was briefly a solo répétiteur at the Bayreuth Festival. From 1925 to 1942, he worked as a teacher of music theory, instrumentation, and score reading at the Cologne University of Music, and from 1942 onwards, he was a teacher and finally director of the School of Music and Theatre of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, a precursor to the school founded there in 1950. Klusmann found himself increasingly subjected to bullying by his colleagues in Cologne, however, and as early as 1928 the press accused him of "having reached the total decomposition of tonal foundations." His disgust with Hans Pfitzner and his hatred of Jews **shows a clear position against the National Socialist ideology and aesthetics** – something which he himself, of course, negated by joining the NSDAP in 1933. Fear for his young family prompted him to do so—who can blame him? In 1945, Klusmann was dismissed as director of the music school by the military government as part of the denazification measures. He appealed twice before being reinstated in his former position in 1948. He then served as deputy director at the newly founded music academy in his hometown from 1950 until his retirement in 1966.

The chamber music by Klusmann, presented here as a **world premiere recording** by the Kuss Quartet, dates from the 1920s—and thus from an early phase of his compositional development. Klusmann himself declared **the Piano Quintet in E minor for two violins, viola, cello, and piano**—for which the quartet is joined by the Hungarian pianist and university professor Péter Nagy—to be his Opus 1 and likely marks the culmination of his composition studies in Munich, where it was also premiered in 1925. Stylistically, the proximity to the great Romantics Brahms and Reger is unmistakable, and yet a new century shines through through the compact composition, which surprises in the finale with contrapuntal as well as atonal passages: *"The independent, witty way in which he combines his quite musical, idiosyncratic ideas and develops them into a well-rounded whole is indeed extremely likeable and awakens wonderful hopes for his future work,"* summarized his then lecturer Sigmund von Hausegger. **The First String Quartet, Op. 7**, composed between 1928 and 1930 and dedicated to his composition teacher Joseph Haas, shows Klusmann at a significantly different stage of development in terms of tonal language. Here, polyphony in the spirit of Gustav Mahler characterizes the musical proceedings, as Klusmann understands it: *"It works with unprepared dissonances, with parallel seconds, fourths, and fifths; it has an unconventional, harsh effect, and its overall presentation can be seen as a consequence and development of the polyphonic attitude of late Beethoven."* Thus, the five-movement work, particularly in the concluding finale, moves close to Schoenberg's dodecaphony due to its consistent contrapuntal voice writing, without becoming a purely academic twelve-tone finger exercise. And here, too, great compositional talent shines through—whether in the extraordinary treatment of timbre or humorous episodes such as the march of the third movement, which "limps" in 7/4 time.

This new CD, with its *"highly complex and at the same time highly emotional music beyond the trends of the 1920s"* (F. Hardens-Withenow), provides **valuable, contemporary pieces for this artistically polyphonic era** – and sketches the picture of a young composer for whom the course of time ultimately denied a great career.

 **Julia Mauritz**

Lindenstraße 14  
50674 Köln

+49 (0)221 - 168 796 24  
julia.mauritz@schimmer-pr.de  
www.schimmer-pr.de