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Karl Haas, Radio Ambassador of Classical Music, Dies at 91

By ANNE MIDGETTE

Karl Haas, the popular classical music commentator whose program "Adventures in Good Music" was once the most listened to classical music radio show in the world, died on Sunday at a hospital in Royal Oak, Mich. He was 91.

Bridgett Emerson, a syndication associate of WCLV-FM in Cleveland, which began producing his nationally syndicated program in 1970, attributed the death to natural causes.

Trained as a concert pianist, Mr. Haas gave recitals and conducted throughout his life, and from 1967 to 1971 served as president of the institution now known as the Interlochen Center for the Arts. He wrote a book, "Inside Music," that is now in its 10th printing, and he produced three CD's with WCLV.

But his primary legacy is his show, which began in 1959 in Detroit and which he continued to produce until two years ago. (It is still broadcast in reruns on about 100 stations.) For it, Mr. Haas received two Peabody Awards for excellence in broadcasting, among many other awards. In 1997, it became the first classical music program inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame.

Hallmarks of "Adventures in Good Music" included a snippet of Beethoven's "Pathétique" sonata played at the beginning and end of each broadcast (sometimes by Mr. Haas himself), Mr. Haas's slightly accented English, and the punning titles he thought up for his programs, including "Haydn, Go Seek," "From Stern to Bow" (about the violinist Isaac Stern), "Baroque and in Debt" and "The Joy of Sax."

One listener wrote Haas in the 1960's to say that it was a "longhair program with a crew cut," a description he was happy to repeat. Some longhairs looked down their noses a bit at Mr. Haas, but that didn't matter to thousands of regular listeners.

Mr. Haas was born in Speyer-am-Rhein, Germany, on Dec. 6, 1913, and began piano lessons at 6 with his mother; later teachers included the eminent pianist Arthur Schnabel. In 1936, denied a job because he was Jewish, he left Germany and emigrated to the United States, settling in Detroit and working for a year to earn the money to help his family and his future wife, Trudie, follow him a year later.

Mr. Haas's broadcasting career began in Detroit in 1950, when he was host of weekly previews of Detroit Symphony concerts. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation then asked him to play piano and conduct a chamber orchestra for a weekly program, and gradually encouraged him to talk about the music he was playing during the broadcast. By 1959, WJR in Detroit offered him a weekly hourlong show of music and commentary; it became Detroit's No. 1 show in its time slot for two decades.

Mr. Haas, who still lived in Michigan at the time of his death, was awarded the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government and received eight honorary doctorates.

His wife died in 1974. He is survived by a daughter, Alyce, and two sons, Jeffrey and Andrew, all of Michigan; and two granddaughters.