



The Austrian composer Friedrich Cerha died on February 17th 2023. Universal Edition pays tribute to his great life's work.

Born in Vienna in 1926, Friedrich Cerha is considered one of the most formative figures in Austrian musical life since the second half of the 20th century.

At a young age he composed his first works for violin and smaller ensembles. His musical career was interrupted by the Second World War which represented a caesura for him, after which his sound worlds were to change forever. Even before graduating from high school, Cerha was drafted into the Wehrmacht, deserted and finally experienced the end of the war in Tyrol.

From 1946 he studied violin, composition, and music education at the Vienna Academy of Music as well as musicology, German studies and philosophy at the University of Vienna, where he received his doctorate in philosophy in 1950.

Cerha initially worked as a violinist and music teacher. He was in early contact with the avant-garde underground scene of young painters and literary figures around the Art Club and the Schönberg Circle of the International Society for New Music.

1958, he founded the ensemble "die reihe" in with Kurt Schwertsik and his wife Gertraud Cerha. He was engaged as a conductor by renowned ensembles and orchestras such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra or the Staatskapelle Berlin. Between 1960 and 1997 he appeared as a conductor at international festivals (e.g. Salzburg Festival, Vienna Festival Weeks, Venice Biennale, Berlin Festival Weeks, Musik der Zeit Cologne and Nutida Musik Stockholm, etc.) as well as at opera houses such as the Vienna State Opera, the Berlin State Opera or the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires. He has received commissions from institutions such as the Koussevitzky Foundation in New York, the Westdeutscher Rundfunk, the Festival Internacional de Música de Canarias, the Wiener Konzerthaus and the Musikverein Wien, and from orchestras such as the Vienna Philharmonic.

From 1959, Cerha taught at the Vienna University of Music, where he held a professorship for composition, notation, and interpretation of new music from 1976 to 1988. From 1994 he also worked with Klangforum Wien and served as its president until 1999.

Within his oeuvre, the orchestral cycle *Spiegel I-VII*, whose individual parts were written over several years and which were first performed as a complete work in Graz in 1972, occupies a special place. Another milestone in the composer's career was the creation of a playable version of the third act of Alban Berg's opera *Lulu*, which was premiered in Paris in 1979 under Pierre Boulez. His own first opera *Baal* was premiered at the Salzburg Festival in 1981.

Numerous awards, prizes and honours recognised his pioneering role in the field of contemporary music – as a composer as well as a performer, teacher and intermediary. Cerha received, among others, the Austrian Decoration of Honour for Science and Art, the Order "Officier des Arts et des Lettres", the "Golden Lion" for his life's work at the Venice Biennale, the Salzburg Music Prize, the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize and, on the occasion of his 95th birthday, the Alban Berg Ring.

Friedrich Cerha died on February 17th 2023 at the age of 96 in Vienna. With the passing of Friedrich Cerha, Universal Edition has lost one of its most influential contemporary composers. The company enjoyed a close association with his work for over six decades. Our sincere condolences go to his widow Gertraud and his daughters Ruth and Irina.

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