

PARNASSUS

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1 STEFAN WOLPE: CHAMBER PIECE NO. 2 ... 3:44

(publ. Southern Music Publishing Co., Inc.)

2 MARIO DAVIDOVSKY: PENNPLAY ... 10:30

(unpubl. © Mario Davidovsky)

3 DAVID OLAN: OCTET ... 10:15

(publ. American Composers Alliance)

4 CHARLES WUORINEN: THE WINDS ... 14:53

(publ. C. F. Peters Corp.)

5 ERIK LUNDBORG: SOUNDSOUP ... 10:51

(publ. American Composers Alliance)

Parnassus; Anthony Korf, conducting



New World Records, 20 Jay St. Suite 1001, Brooklyn, NY 11201-8346
212.290.1680 www.newworldrecords.org info@newworldrecords.org
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A NEW YORK SCHOOL: THREE GENERATIONS OF COMPOSERS

By Jeffrey Kresky

In 1972, Charles Wuorinen (NW 209, *New Music for Virtuosos I*) wrote in *Perspectives of New Music* (XI, 1; p. 6):

Stefan Wolpe's insights into composition were profound and original; I am indebted to him on both counts. His "originality" lay in his special notions of musical continuity, which root in tradition but branch unexpectedly and indirectly. His "profundity" lay in his use of traditional means, values, and materials to achieve his special continuity.

And Mario Davidovsky, Wuorinen's contemporary, recalls Wolpe's influence: "He was extremely important to all composers blooming in the early sixties. I think it was his unique harmonic language, his enormous rhythmic vibrancy."

Wolpe, born in 1902, spent his important final years in New York, where he died in 1972. He was significant in the development of Wuorinen and Davidovsky, two of the most influential composers born in the thirties and working in New York. Erik Lundborg and David Olan, both born in the late forties and both currently members of the contemporary-music community in New York, represent a third generation in this musical family tree. Together, the five composers presented on this recording offer a unified picture of musical creation, the product of several decades of development centering in New York.

It is not primarily a pedagogical strand that weaves through these three generations (though, as will be seen, such a strand does exist), nor is it primarily a technical one (though much technique is shared as well). Rather, a general aesthetic and philosophical outlook is projected by these composers under a stunning variety of musical surfaces. They can be seen as part of a particular school of New York music production that has come to distinguish itself plainly from other New York centered musical traditions, as well as from many superficially similar compositional styles found elsewhere in the country and the world.

A musical style is nearly impossible to characterize satisfactorily in words. But a

description of the context in which these composers have worked can do much to unify the picture best drawn by listening to the pieces themselves.

Stefan Wolpe was a pioneer, one of those strikingly independent figures (like Varèse) whose aesthetic development is extremely difficult to trace. Though one can hear in his pieces of the fifties and sixties (his final period, amazingly different from his earlier periods, and the one over which the other four composers have expressed such enthusiasm) certain echoes of his early studies with Webern and Busoni, the pedagogy seems not to be at issue in the style. Nor do we find clues of any useful kind from Wolpe's international and political wanderings, from Berlin to Palestine and finally to America, and in and out of a variety of convictions, periodically projected in groups of compositions, about the politics and sociology of music.

What we do know is that Wolpe came to New York, first in 1938, then permanently in 1956. It is during this period, with pieces such as *Form for Piano* (1959) (New World Records NW 308), the two *Chamber Pieces* (1964, 1965-66), and the *Piece for Trumpet and Seven Instruments* (1971), that a true, and very remarkable, Wolpe voice emerges. It is a tense, densely textured declamatory style, of the sincerity of Varèse, but gesturally much more compact and unique in its virile phraseology. In its unusual brevity and in the complex sum of its thirteen contributing players, the *Chamber Piece No. 2*, heard on this recording, represents the typical Wolpe sound in all its brilliant vitality.

Not long after Wolpe established himself in New York, this music began to receive a very special kind of exposure. In 1962 Wuorinen and Harvey Sollberger (NW 254, *New Music for Virtuosos 2*) formed the Group for Contemporary Music, which, along with Arthur Weisberg's Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, was the first of many specialized (and at first university-based) new-music performing groups. Wolpe's music was presented by the Group with such regularity, and the Group's concerts were attended by New York-area composers of all ages with such consistency, that the influence of his unique sound on the ears and thoughts of those around him underwent an unusually forceful expansion. Wuorinen's personal enthusiasm was greatly instrumental in the influence that Wolpe's work came to bear. As early as 1963, Wuorinen wrote in *Perspectives of New Music* (I,

2; p. 59)-then a Princeton-based professional journal that functioned as the theoretical counterpart of these performing groups, for much the same audience:

One may turn perhaps to . . . Stefan Wolpe, who combines serial pitch organization with gestural and dramatic formal conceptions that in the most generalized sense are related to [Elliott] Carter's ideas. . . . It is possible that Wolpe's influence on young composers may ultimately prove to be very great.

Much of Wolpe's music was published by the New York firm of McGinnis and Marx; Josef Marx, a friend of Wolpe's and a great champion of his music, was for many years general manager of the Group for Contemporary Music.

Wuorinen and Davidovsky, of course, each claim influences other than that of Wolpe. Wuorinen, the only one of these composers actually born in New York (in 1938), studied at Columbia with Otto Luening and claims definitive inspiration, both technical and aesthetic, from Elliott Carter (NW 219) and Milton Babbitt (NW 209), from, at a greater distance, Schoenberg and Webern, and especially from Stravinsky, whose widow, in fact, entrusted to Wuorinen the fragmentary sketches for a never realized last orchestral piece that Wuorinen then incorporated into his own *Reliquary*.

Davidovsky, born in 1934 in Buenos Aires, came to New York especially to work in electronic music. He studied with Aaron Copland (NW 277), who in 1958 invited him to Tanglewood. There he met Babbitt and thus learned of the Columbia-Princeton electronic facilities in New York. In 1960 he settled in New York, where he studied with Luening. Davidovsky prefers to point to no specific influences, describing his development as the result of saturation in the wide range of styles and techniques found in New York's musical life.

Unlike Wolpe, Wuorinen and Davidovsky came to exert a direct pedagogical influence on a very wide range of young composers, including Olan and Lundborg, through teaching at Columbia and Princeton, in the City University system, and at the Manhattan School of Music. (The Group for Contemporary Music itself moved to the Manhattan School from its original home at Columbia.) Both men, too, became involved in the scene at a

time when much important national recognition was available for work like theirs through prizes-ranging up to the Pulitzer, won in 1970 by Wuorinen for *Time's Encomium* and in 1971 by Davidovsky for *Synchronisms* No. 6, for piano and tape-and commissions from foundations and ensembles of world stature (opportunities not all readily available to composers of Wolpe's kind in his day).

Wuorinen's *The Winds*, written expressly for Parnassus, displays a striking feature that has emerged in this New York style. This characteristic perhaps owes much to Varèse, himself a prime motivating force on these works, not just through his music but through his presence in the New York newmusic milieu (Olan recalls, for example, that the first concert of the Group for Contemporary Music he attended on arriving in New York took place just after Varèse died, and therefore opened with an unscheduled performance—from memory—of *Density 21.5*, Varèse's celebrated flute solo, by Harvey Sollberger). This feature of *The Winds*, announced at the very opening, is a stark motive, a series of even-valued single notes. Motive is just the most accessible term to identify the declamatory gesture, the distinctive and sincere quality, whether supple and smooth, sharp and piercing, or whatever, that permeates the extraordinarily varied textures of the pieces of this style. For Wuorinen, this gestural simplicity seems to represent a streamlining, over the course of several years of composing, of what used to be denser and less differentiated—perhaps reminiscent of Babbitt and, for that matter, of Bach.

Davidovsky's *Pennplay* (the title reflects the commission by the music department of the University of Pennsylvania) calls for sixteen players, the largest ensemble of these five works. The surface of the music is obviously less tuneful than that of Wuorinen's piece; but the work is in the same gestural and timbral spirit—which projects a pitch story by means of an exciting and vital surface—that characterizes all these composers. None of them is interested in sound effects for their; own sake. This remark may seem surprising in relation to Davidovsky, whose influence has been so decisive in electronic composition (his series of *Synchronisms* for various live instruments with tape accompaniment have inspired many young composers and have become virtual concert favorites in new-music circles). But even in electronic music, these composers seem far more interested in the traditional concerns of

continuity and expression than in the search for new sounds or theatricality that seems to characterize other well-delineated schools of contemporary American composing.

David Olan, born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1948, grew up in Dallas, where he studied composition with Samuel Adler (NW 304, *Exultation*). He came to New York not specifically for music but for a general education; at Columbia, however, he met Wuorinen and soon became an assistant to directors Wuorinen and Sollberger at the Group for Contemporary Music. After a period of study in Wisconsin with Les Thimmig, Olan returned to New York to involve himself in the active musical life, especially in performing (he is a clarinetist and studied with Jack Kreiselman, for many years the Group's clarinetist) and in electronic music (he was drawn to the Columbia-Princeton facilities, which are particularly well known). He came into contact with Davidovsky and, earning the doctoral degree at Columbia, worked also with Bülent Arel, Otto Luening, Vladimir Ussachevsky, and Chou Wen-chung (NW 237). Olan's Octet, written for Parnassus, reflects the gripping sonorous qualities of Varèse (the constant coloration of the deep, clear tuba music, for example). In addition, the surface proceeds by way of isolated events, whether long-sustained single pitches or short, individual notes or fragments, a characteristic of much electronic music.

Erik Lundborg was born in Helena, Montana, in 1948. In 1968 he went to the New England Conservatory of Music and studied with Wuorinen, who was a visiting teacher. Lundborg came to New York in 1970 especially for the musical vitality and to study further with Wuorinen. He enrolled in the doctoral program at Columbia and, like Olan, credits the concerts of the Group for Contemporary Music with providing him with a sense of an overall, continuous repertory, beginning with the early twentieth-century Viennese classicists. The constant presence of live music-making, supported by the printed discussion of music in journals, was a decisive force in Lundborg's development in New York. Both he and Olan proceeded to win important prizes and commissions as a result of the compositional output that followed their moves to New York. Lundborg's *Soundsoup*, also written for Parnassus, contrasts remarkably with the piece of his contemporary colleague, offering an elegant surface connectedness that is a very recent and beautiful product of the music of New York today.

We see, then, that the unification of one particular New York style of composing was crucially enhanced by the repertory presented by the Group for Contemporary Music, as passed on and contributed to by the generation of composers who directed such ensembles. Just as importantly, however, the Group (together with Arthur Weisberg's Contemporary Chamber Ensemble) inspired the formation of a large number of chamber groups devoted exclusively to the performance of new music. Thus, such distinguished organizations as Speculum Musicae, Tashi, and the Da Capo Chamber Players began to appear, and the dissemination of the style continued. In due time, in fact, responding to the role projected by Sollberger and Wuorinen of the composer as his own performer, a group of young composers formed the Composers Ensemble. Lundborg was its pianist, Olan its clarinetist.

Recent in the proliferation of these groups is Parnassus, heard in the exemplary performances on this recording. It was founded by its conductor, Anthony Korf, in the 1974-75 season directly in response to work Korf did under Sollberger in student performances of new music at the Manhattan School. In its espousal of a repertory that eschews such elements as improvisation, theater, and mixed media, Parnassus continues to promote (through commissions as well as performances) and disseminate-and thus to consolidate and define- the style we are coming to think of as a New York school.

In expressing themselves in a wide variety of surface manners that impress the listener with the sincerity of their musical impulse, embracing viscerally stimulating declamations that range from vividly complicated to starkly plain, from motivically clear to texturally ambiguous, these composers and their colleagues seem to be continuing a direct line from late nineteenth-century European concert music. If the emphasis on pitch, rhythm, and other traditional elements helps identify the style technically, its commitment to phraseological conviction and an expressive surface comes more and more to strike the listener as the hallmark of this sound, with its sparkle, vitality, and continuity. This New York style is a definitive American artistic statement and, as such, a developing national treasure.

JEFFREY KRESKY, *composer and theorist, received his B.A. at Columbia and his Ph.D. at Princeton. He is assistant professor of music at William Paterson College in New Jersey and is the author, most recently, of Tonal Music: Twelve Analytic Studies (Indiana University Press, 1978).*

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Gryc, Stephen M. "Stratification and Synthesis in Mario Davidovsky's *Synchronisms No. 6*," *In Theory Only*, IV, 4 (August-September 1978), 8-39.

Wuorinen, Charles. "Mario Davidovsky: *Contrastes No. 1*," *Perspectives of New Music*, IV, 2 (spring-summer 1966), 144-9.

Erik Lundborg

See liner notes for CRI 350: From *Music Forever* No. 2; Passacaglia for additional information by and about the composer.

David Olan

See liner notes for CRI 419: Composition for Clarinet and Tape; Sonata for Violin and Piano for additional information by and about the composer.

Stefan Wolpe

Babbitt, Milton; Carter, Elliott; Stempel, Larry; and Wuorinen, Charles. "In Memoriam: Stefan Wolpe," *Perspectives of New Music*, XI, 1 (fall-winter 1972), 3-10.

Brody, Martin. "Sensibility Defined: Set Projection in Stefan Wolpe's Form for Piano," *Perspectives of New Music*, XV, 2 (spring-summer 1977), 3-22.

Also see lists of articles by and about the composer and his music (up to 1972) under the entry "Stefan Wolpe" in *Dictionary of Contemporary Music*, edited by John Vinton, New York: Dutton, 1974.

Charles Wuorinen

Information by and about Wuorinen is found on the record jackets of his music (see Selected Discography) and in *Perspectives of New Music*. Wuorinen is also the author of a recently published book, *Simple Composition*. New York: Longmans, Green, 1979.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Mario Davidovsky

Chacona. Jeanne Benjamin (Ingraham), violin; Joel Krosnick, cello; Robert Miller, piano. CRI 305.

Electronic Study No. 2. CRI 356.

---. No. 3. Finnadar 90100.

Inflections, for fourteen players. David Gilbert, cond. CRI 305.

Junctures. Harvey Sollberger, flute; Allen Blustine, clarinet; Jeanne Benjamin (Ingraham), violin. Nonesuch HB 73028.

Synchronisms No. 1, for flute and tape. Harvey Sollberger. CRI 204 SD.

---. Samuel Baron. Nonesuch 71289.

Synchronisms No. 2, for flute, clarinet, violin, and cello, and tape. Sophie Sollberger, Stanley Drucker, Paul Zukofsky, Robert L. Martin. CRI 204 SD.

Synchronisms No. 3, for cello and tape. Robert L. Martin. CRI 204 SD.

---. Jay Humeston. Delos 25405.

---. David Moore. Opus One 6.

Synchronisms No. 5, for percussion and tape. Harvey Sollberger, cond.; Raymond DesRoches, Richard Fitz, Claire Heidrich, Donald Marcone, Howard van Hyning. 2-CRI 268.

Synchronisms No. 6, for piano and electronic sounds. Robert Miller. Turnabout-Vox TV-S34487.

Synchronisms No. 8, for woodwind quintet and tape. Dorian Quintet. 3-Vox SVBX-5307.

Erik Lundborg

From *Music Forever* No. 2; Passacaglia. Daniel Shulman, cond.; Light Fantastic Players. CRI 350.

David Olan

Composition for Clarinet and Tape. Laura Flax. Sonata for Violin and Piano. Rolf Schulte, Robert Miller, CRI 419.

Stefan Wolpe

Chamber Piece No. 1. Arthur Weisberg; Contemporary Chamber Ensemble. Nonesuch 71220.

Form for Piano; Broken Sequences; Form IV. Robert Miller. CRI 306.

Piece for Trumpet and Seven Instruments. Mario Guarneri, William Kraft, cond. Crystal S-352.

Piece for Two Instrumental Units. David Gilbert, cond. Opus One 9.

Piece in Two Parts for Five Players. Frederick Prausnitz, cond. Argo ZRG-757.

Piece in Two Parts for Flute. Samuel Baron. Desto 7104.

Quartet for Tenor Saxophone, Trumpet, Piano, and Percussion. Arthur Weisberg, cond.; Contemporary Chamber Ensemble. Nonesuch 71302.

Solo Pieces for Trumpet. Robert Levy. Golden Crest GC-7045O.

---. Gerard Schwarz. Desto 7133.

String Quartet. Concord Quartet. 3-Vox SVBX-5306.

Trio. Group for Contemporary Music. CRI 233.

Charles Wuorinen

Bassoon Variations. Donald MacCourt, bassoon; Susan Jolles, harp; Gordon Gottlieb, percussion. New World NW 209.

Composition for Oboe and Piano. James P. Ostryniec, Charles Wuorinen. Orion 78288.

Percussion Symphony. Charles Wuorinen, cond.; New Jersey Percussion Ensemble. Nonesuch 71353.

Time's Encomium, for synthesizer. Nonesuch 71225.

Two-Part Symphony. Dennis Russell Davies, cond.; American Composers Orchestra. CRI 410.

Also see Selected Discography New World Records NW 209.

THE ARTISTS

Parnassus was formed in the fall of 1974 by Anthony Korf in order to establish a large chamber ensemble to perform contemporary music. The Ensemble has premiered over a dozen new works, by both established and up-and-coming composers, most of whom are American.

In addition to an annual concert series in New York, Parnassus has appeared on numerous college and concert series in the northeast United States. Parnassus is made up of young virtuosos who occupy first-chair positions in The American Composers Orchestra, Orpheus Chamber Ensemble, The New Jersey Symphony, and the American Ballet Theatre Orchestra, and who are members of such prominent chamber ensembles as the American Brass Quintet.

Anthony Korf, conductor, received his Masters Degree in performance from the Manhattan School of Music. He studied composition privately with Harvey Sollberger, and his works have been performed in both the United States and Canada. In 1979 he was winner of the inaugural ASCAP awards to composers. He has been a guest conductor with The New Amsterdam Symphony Orchestra, The Group for Contemporary Music, and the Lenox Arts Festival.

PARNASSUS

Anthony Korf, conductor

flutes:

Keith Underwood (piccolo)

*Rie Schmidt

oboe:

Gerard Reuter

clarinet:

Stephen Hart

Dennis Smylie

bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet:

Dennis Smylie

bassoon:

Steven Dibner

horn:

David Wakefield

trumpet:

Raymond Mase

trombone:

Ronald Borrer

tuba:

David Braynard

violin:

Cyrus Stevens

*Carol Zeavin

viola:

Judy Geist

violinello:

Chris Finckel

contrabass:

Joseph Tamosaitis

*Donald Palma

piano:

Edmund Niemann

percussion:

Glen Velez

James Preiss

*assisting artists

Producer: Elizabeth Ostrow
Recording and mixing engineer: Paul Goodman
Assisting engineers: Tom Brown, John Cue
Tape editing: Don Van Gordon,
Soundwave Recording Studios
Mastering: Robert Ludwig, Masterdisk
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