

Works by Martin Bresnick, Mel Powell, Ronald Roseman, Ralph Shapey

New World 80413-2

The woodwind quintet is to the wind instruments as the string quartet is to the strings. Composers have treated the heterogenous ensemble of flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and horn as a unity for so long now that it has become a musical commonplace. The challenge in composing for the woodwind quintet is to weave a consistent musical fabric while respecting the disparate characters of the five instruments. The four composers represented on this recording meet this challenge with imagination and mastery.

Ronald Roseman (born 1933 in Brooklyn, New York) is well known as an oboist, with over fifty-five solo and chamber recordings to his credit. He is also a composer whose teachers were Henry Cowell, Ben Weber, Karol Rathaus, and Elliott Carter. He is currently a professor at Yale, Queens College, and The Juilliard School. Roseman's *Double Quintet* for woodwind and brass was written in 1987 on commission from Yale's Norfolk Chamber Music Festival and is dedicated to Joan Panetti, the director of the festival.

The *Double Quintet* opens with a moody slow introduction followed by an Allegro energico, reminiscent of Stravinsky's *Octet* and *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. Here neoclassical gestures are supplemented by several quasi-improvisatory and extended instrumental techniques. All ten players are given a chance to shine in solos, and there is plenty of virtuoso passagework.

The Adagio mesto creates a mournful *misterioso* atmosphere with low muted brass supporting exotic wind melodies. As in the first movement, there is judicious use of techniques culled from the notational and orchestrational experiments of the Sixties and Seventies.

The final Chorale Fantasy (Variations) relies on a technique of variation in reverse. The theme is presented at the end of the set of variations rather than at the beginning. Apart from its surprise value, which it can have only at the first hearing, this technique has the dramatic value of setting up a powerful emotional payoff. The chorale "Jesu Meine Freude" is a theme fraught with meaning in almost any context. As the culmination of a set of variations that runs through a gamut of twentieth-century styles, it becomes a sort of apotheosis. Roseman chooses to undercut the resolution of the chorale's final cadence with a return in the coda to the material of the slow introduction of the first movement.

Mel Powell (born 1923 in New York City) is the 1990 Pulitzer Prize laureate in music. He teaches composition at the California Institute for the Arts, where he founded the music department. Over a long composing career he has worked in many musical styles, from jazz to electronic music.

The eight-minute *Woodwind Quintet* (1985), commissioned by the Sierra Wind Quintet, is in an intricate, almost mannerist style characterized by flickerings and flutterings, flurries and frills, all meticulously notated and copiously annotated. In order to achieve his desired effects. Powell uses both conventional and spatial notation with such explanatory comments as, "non-metrical," "very quickly and delicately," "accel.

molto,” “wait,” all of which apply, in this case, to a run of nine notes in the flute. The ensemble is often notated in relays, so that each instrument takes its cue from another. This calls for enormous concentration; as an ensemble piece, it is murderously difficult to perform and, due to its built-in-freedoms, any two performances will necessarily be quite different.

There is a transparent, crystalline quality to the sound of the *Woodwind Quintet* that recalls Boulez, and a concision that may be found in Webern, but Powell's concentrated style is very much his own.

Martin Bresnick (born 1946 in New York City) is a professor of music at Yale School of Music. His *Just Time* for woodwind quintet (1985) is scored for doubling alto flute, English horn, and bass clarinet.

*Just Time*, like Bresnick's *Conspiracies* for five flutes (1979) has a punning title. The pun here is on the complex sense of just, meaning “barely,” and just, referring to the system of “just” intonation based on the overtone series. An examination of the score shows that many of the accidentals, particularly in the featured horn part, are written with arrows attached, denoting slight “detunings” of the pitches to which they apply. These detunings are indigenous to the horn when it plays on its built-in overtones—and they are “justly” tuned intervals. The harmonic language of *Just Time* also seems to evolve out of the overtones of the piece's initial B-flat.

Formally, *Just Time* is based on 24 cycles of 121 sixteenth notes, usually divided into nine measures of 3/4 time plus one of 13/16. Each cycle contains its own characteristic figuration, often involving hoquet-like exchanges among the instruments. The technique of composition with overtones is termed “spectral” composition because of its basis in the musical spectrum. The work's title also puns on the sense of “just” as in “justice,” and imagines the serene “just time” of utopian prophesies. Whatever the mathematical or philosophical justifications for its rigorous formal procedures, the result is a sonorously appealing work.

Ralph Shapey (born 1921 in Philadelphia) is currently professor of music and music director of the Contemporary Chamber Players of the University of Chicago. He was awarded first place in the 1990 Friedheim Awards at the Kennedy Center and is a recipient of the MacArthur Foundation “genius” award, as well as many other honors.

Shapey's *Movements* for woodwind quintet (1959-60) is a ten-minute work in three short movements. An examination of the music reveals that the title refers more to the kinetic character of the piece than to the unremarkable fact of its being cast in three movements.

If music is conceived as motion through time and space, then register is the obvious analog of space. Given this analogy, *Movements* exploits thoroughly the woodwind quintet's available space. In the first few seconds of the piece we hear the loud sustained altissimo C-sharp of the flute followed by a widely arching figure in the clarinet; the oboe jumps a ninth, the horn falls a ninth and the flute is answered by the bassoon sounding its lowest pitch, B-flat. Subsequent developments play with these few gestures and show a maximal exploitation of each instrument's range of movement.

In the dimension of time, *Movements* also demonstrates freedom and wide range. Written without bar lines and often in irrational rhythms, the individual lines move in what often sounds like improvisatory, unmeasured time and then suddenly coincide in regular, clearly defined rhythms. Likewise, the harmony moves freely from the austere

contrapuntal to the richly homophonic. *Movements* recalls the music of Varèse, with its insistence on certain “chiseled” sonorities. For all of its complexity this is music that was heard before it was seen. —Ben Yarmolinsky

*Ben Yarmolinsky is a composer living in New York City.*

**THE NEW YORK WOODWIND QUINTET**, founded in 1948, has maintained its position of preeminence in the chamber music field through concert tours, an ongoing concert series in New York City, educational work, and collaborations with other artists and ensembles, including Gilbert Kalish, the Orion String Quartet, The American Brass Quintet, and the Dorian Wind Quintet. The ensemble has performed in Central and South America, the Soviet Union, and the Orient, and in 1989 traveled to Finland for the Kuhmo Festival. Over twenty compositions have been written for and premiered by the quintet, including Samuel Barber's *Summer Music*, and quintets by Gunther Schuller, Ezra Laderman, William Bergsma, and Wallingford Riegger. In 1989, the quintet was named ensemble-in-residence at The Juilliard School. They have recorded for Nonesuch Records and the Musical Heritage Society.

**THE AMERICAN BRASS QUINTET** recently celebrated its 30th anniversary. This highly acclaimed international ensemble regularly tours the United States and Europe and has performed throughout the world, including recent tours to Japan and the People's Republic of China. As champions of new music, the ABQ has commissioned works from William Bolcom, Elliott Carter, Jacob Druckman, William Schuman, Ralph Shapey, Robert Starer, Maurice Wright, and others. The ABQ is ensemble-in-residence at The Juilliard School and at the Aspen Music Festival and School. Their more than thirty recordings include two other New World releases, *The Yankee Brass Band* (80312-2) and *The American Brass Quintet* (80377-2). The American Brass Quintet is funded in part by a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

## **SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY**

### **MARTIN BRESNICK**

*B.'s Garlands*, for eight celli. CRI SD 336.

*Conspiracies*, for flute; *Three Intermezzi*, for cello. Robert Dick, flute; Richard Bock, cello. CRI SD 468.

*Lady Neil's Dumpe*, for tape. Centaur CRC 2039.

*String Quartet #2, "Bucephalus"; Wir Weben, Wir Weben*. Alexander String Quartet; Musical Elements, Daniel Asia conducting. CRI SD 536.

### **MEL POWELL**

*Filigree Setting*, for string quartet and other works. Sequoia String Quartet. Nonesuch N-78006.

*Divertimento*, for five winds and other works. Fairfield Wind Ensemble. CRI SD 121.

*Events*, for tape. CRI SD 227.

*Little Companion Pieces*, for soprano and string quartet. Bethany Beardslee, soprano; Sequoia String Quartet. Nonesuch D-79005.

### **RONALD ROSEMAN**

*Wind Quintet*. Soni Ventorum Wind Quintet. Musical Heritage 512759.

### **RALPH SHAPEY**

*Praise* (oratorio). Helmuth Geiger, bass-baritone; University of Chicago Contemporary Chamber Players and Chorus, Ralph Shapey conducting. CRI SD 355.

*Brass Quintet*. American Brass Quintet. New World 80377-2.

*Three For Six*. New York New Music Ensemble, Robert Black conducting. CRI SD 509.

*Kroslish Sonata* for cello and piano. Joel Krosnick, cello; Gilbert Kalish, piano.

*Concertante No. 1 for Trumpet & 10 Players*. Ronald Anderson, trumpet; University of Chicago Contemporary Chamber Players, Ralph Shapey conducting. New World 80355-2.

### **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

For articles on each of the four composers represented on this recording, and on woodwind quintets, see *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie, eds. London and New York: Macmillan, 1986.

### **MARTIN BRESNICK**

Gann, Kyle. "Music: Machine aged." *The Village Voice*, January 12, 1988, p. 80.

### **MEL POWELL**

Thimmig, Leslie. "The Music of Mel Powell." *Musical Quarterly*, 1969, p. 31.

### **RONALD ROSEMAN**

Horowitz, J. "Ronald Roseman, Oboist." *The New York Times*, November 27, 1980.

### **RALPH SHAPEY**

Ran, Shulamit. "An Angry Composer Forbids his Music to be Performed." *The New York Times*, May 8, 1977.

Rockwell, John. "Ralph Shapey at 60—He Defies Neglect." *The New York Times*, May 10, 1981.

### **Ronald Roseman**

Double Quintet for Woodwinds and Brass

(publ. Phantom Press)

(with *The American Brass Quintet*)

1. I. Adagio; Allegro Energico (6:34)

2. II. Adagio mesto (5:37)

3. III. Chorale Fantasy (Variations) (8:42)

### **Mel Powell**

4. Woodwind Quintet (8:19)

(publ.G. Schirmer, Inc.)

**Martin Bresnick**

5. Just Time (13:18)

(publ. Common Muse Music Publishers)

**Ralph Shapey**

Movements

(publ.Theodore Presser Co.)

6. I. Adagio (3:20)

7. II. Moderato (2:42)

8. III. Allegro (3:31)

**THE NEW YORK WOODWIND QUINTET**

Samuel Baron: flute, alto flute (on *Just Time*)

Ronald Roseman: oboe, English horn (on *Just Time*)

Charles Niedich: clarinet, bass clarinet (on *Just Time*)

Donald MacCourt: bassoon

William Purvis: horn.

**THE AMERICAN BRASS QUINTET**

Raymond Mase and Chris Gekker, trumpets

David Wakefield, horn

Michael Powell, tenor trombone

Robert Biddlecome, bass trombone

Producer and recording engineer: Gregory K. Squires.

Editing: Gregory K. Squires, Mary Van Houten.

Recorded May 18-20, 1990 in Rye, New York.

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