Portraits of Three Ladies (American) New World Records 80562

American Music in the Sixties: Revolutions New and Old

For American concert music, the sixties was a period of striking polarities. The serialism that largely dominated the early part of the decade was the inversion of the movement in literature, film, popular music, and politics toward openness, emotional frankness, and sex appeal. In the musical academy, populism was out, high abstraction, in. Thanks to the powerful American wing of the New Viennese School, represented on this recording by Richard Hoffmann and Charles Whittenberg, the wall between serious and popular music that many claim started with Wagner was higher than ever. The increasing serialization of all elements—rhythm and dynamics as well as melody—was a further intellectualization of a system that was already daunting, except to insiders. In an age of spontaneity, artists like Hoffmann and Whittenberg embraced total systemization; in an age of informality, they opted for formal purity; in an age of anti-elitism (still very much with us), they saw themselves as standard-bearers of intellectual integrity.

The explosive abstractions of Hoffman's *Orchestral Piece* and the Webernesque purity of Whittenberg's *Variations for Nine Players* represent a remarkable line back to the New Viennese School of the early twentieth century. Hoffmann studied with Schoenberg, acted as his secretary, editor, and amanuensis, and co-edited the Schoenberg "Gesang-Ausgabe"; Whittenberg was so enraptured with Schoenberg, Webern, and the music of their progenitors that he burned all his extant pieces in 1949. Paradoxically, these composers regarded their work as daring and forward-looking, in that sense very much part of a progressive age: The newest New Viennese School were avatars not of tradition but a revolution still burning ahead. The possibility that serialism would collapse under the weight of its own tradition, which had been predicted by Virgil Thomson twenty years earlier, was not on their radar. As they saw it, they were still the avant-garde–a peculiarly permanent one.

Richard Hoffmann represents Schoenberg's revolutionary classicism in its purest form; further, he extended serialism beyond pitch to rhythm and dynamics. Born in Vienna on April 20, 1925, he lived in New Zealand from 1935 to 1947. Graduating from Auckland University in 1945, he began his association with Schoenberg in 1947 when he moved to Los Angeles. According to Helen Paxton, a former student of Hoffmann's at Oberlin College and author of *Music's Connecticut Yankee: An Introduction to the Life and Music of Charles Ives,* Hoffmann passionately promoted the twelve-tone method but "forced his students to think lyrically. His music is like Bach's, finely wrought but intensely lyrical."

Hoffmann's *Orchestra Piece* supports this view. Written in 1961 during his seventh year of teaching at Oberlin College, it combines a lyrical line with swirling kinetic energy. The structure is a single tightly wound movement with a double exposition, a slow ostinato section and a reprise; the orchestra is divided into three segments supplemented by soloists as well as four percussionists set in a semicircle. Soaring, colliding, and collapsing between these groups, the melodic material evokes, in the composer's words, "the maximum possible illusion of multi-dimensional movement." This dynamism is intensified with directional microphones dispersed among the ensembles and relayed to three loudspeakers positioned as far as possible from one another, plus a nondirectional microphone in the middle of the soloists relayed to a continuously revolving loudspeaker in the middle of the auditorium. The content is austere, yet the overall effect is resonant and colorful. Timpani glissandos

rumble and thunder under piercing brass and sighing strings, bells, chimes, and piano ring out with a mysterious sense of ritual.

A more delicate if equally mobile sound bounces through the 1964 *Variations for Nine Players* by the prolific Charles Whittenberg, who studied at the Eastman School of Music under Bernard Rogers and taught at Bennington College, the Center of Liberal Studies, and the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center. Here the line is fragmented between flute (and piccolo), oboe, bassoon, trumpet, horn, trombone, violin, and contrabass. The first part of the work emphasizes tiny threads of single notes; the second, aggressive chords, which gradually thin out and die away. As in Webern's mature works, the theme is constantly broken and dispersed among the various instruments, producing a sensation of constant motion.

By the late sixties, something very different from monastic serialism was starting to emerge. Advocates of a more dramatic, overtly emotional style of nontonal music such as Edwin London in his 1967 *Portraits of Three Ladies (American)* began experimenting with a surrealist style of theater music most popularly represented by George Crumb and Peter Maxwell Davies. By no means "easy listening," London's *Portraits* are acerbic and challenging, but their high-Gothicism and the childlike immediacy throw them into a relatively populist context. Their insistence on reaching out to an audience automatically places them in a different realm from the Hoffmann-Whittenberg school, so much so that the original liner notes for this release placed their "larger significance" in the "urgent concern for communication that motivates the composer"—as if such a motivation were unusual.

Scored for narrator, mezzo-soprano, and chamber orchestra, the *Portraits* include multimedia devices such as a slide projector and an optional male dancer. The texts, from a collection of children's poems by Rosemary Carr Benet, have an extraordinary vividness heightened in London's music by *wa-wa* brass, aggressive percussion, long glissandos, and a narrator who shouts and wails as well as reciting.

In a 1999 interview, London said he originally had the "unwieldy idea" of setting to music Vance Packard's *The Waste Makers* before discovering Benet's poems one evening in Weston, Vermont—a "sudden illumination" moving him to compose the *Portraits* in a few weeks. The controlled hysteria of the opening "Pocahontas" portrays "a wild thing tamed." The high-flying, free-spirited saxophone at the end was influenced by John Coltrane's "Ascension," indicating London's increasing embrace of jazz and pop sources. In the second portrait, Ivesian layers of dissonant counterpoint with quotations from "Here Comes the Bride" and the *1812 Overture* mix with spooky vocal echoes to evoke the "enigma" of Dolly Madison. In the final portrait, Nancy Hanks' sad ghost searches for her lost son amid ominous chords alternating with surreal blues and swing.

If the serialism of Whittenberg and Hoffmann mark the codification of a revolution, the *Portraits* begin a new one. Their intense theatricality and immersion in popular culture point the way toward Michael Daugherty and John Zorn. The wilder energies of the sixties, it seems, have not quite been extinguished.
—Jack Sullivan

Jack Sullivan*, Chair of American Studies at Rider University, is the author of* New World Symphonies: How American Culture Changed European Music *(Yale University Press, 1999).*

Pocahontas
(1595?–1617)

Princess Pocahontas,
Powhatan's daughter,
Stared at the white men
Come across the water.

She was like a wild deer
Or a bright, plumed bird.
Ready then to flash away
At one harsh word.

When the faces answered hers,
Paler yet, but smiling,
Pocahontas looked and looked,
Found them quite beguiling.

Liked the whites and trusted them,
Spite of kin and kith,
Fed and protected
Captain John Smith.

Pocahontas was revered
By each and every one.
She married John Rolfe
She had a Rolfe son.

She crossed the sea to London Town
And must have found it queer,
To be Lady Rebecca
And the toast of the year.

"La Belle Sauvage! La Belle Sauvage!
Our nonpareil is she!"
But Princess Pocahontas
Gazed sadly toward the sea.

They gave her silks and furbelows.
She pined, as wild things do
And, when she died at Gravesend
She was only twenty-two.

Poor wild bird—
No one can be blamed.
But gentle Pocahontas

Was a wild thing tamed.

And everywhere the lesson runs,
All through the ages:
Wild things die
In the very finest cages.

Dolly Madison
(1772–1849)

Dolly Madison
(Dorothea Payne),
Married, was widowed
And married again.

Passing by other
More dashing names
To set her cap
For "the great little" James.

She loved fine clothes,
Though she was a Quaker.
She wore linen masks
So the sun wouldn't bake her.

Her eyes were large,
Her manners urban,
And she posed for her portrait
Wearing a turban.

She brushed her satins,
Tended her beauty,
Smoothed her laces,
Minded her duty.

But, though fine and grand
On her at-home day,
She could still take snuff
With Henry Clay.

When the British began
To cut more capers
And burned the White House,
She didn't have vapors.

The roofs fell in
And the cut-glass burst—
But she saved George Washington's

Portrait first.

She didn't talk much.
She eschewed all tears.
She went to a ball
At fourscore years.

But her very last words
Set us staring—for—
"There's nothing in this life
Worth caring for."

Said by a lady
Who loved her life
And, more than most,
Was a perfect wife,

Make us wonder a little,
Though with no stigma,
If Dolly could have been
An enigma.

Nancy Hanks
(1784–1818)

If Nancy Hanks
Came back as a ghost,
Seeking news
Of what she loved most,
She'd ask first
"Where's my son?
What's happened to Abe?
What's he done?

"Poor little Abe,
Left all alone
Except for Tom,
Who's a rolling stone;
He was only nine
The year I died.
I remember still
How hard he cried.

"Scraping along
In a little shack,
With hardly a shirt
To cover his back,
And a prairie wind

To blow him down,
Or pinching times
If he went to town.

"You wouldn't know
About my son?
Did he grow tall?
Did he have fun?
Did he learn to read?
Did he get to town?
Do you know his name?
Did he get on?"

"Pocahontas," "Dolly Madison," "Nancy Hanks" by Rosemary Carr Benet. From *A Book Of Americans* by Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benet. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
Copyright 1933 by Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benet. Copyright renewed 1961 by Rosemary Carr Benet. Reprinted by permission of Brandt & Brandt.

Richard Hoffmann was born in Vienna in 1925. From 1935 through 1947 he lived in New Zealand, and was graduated from Auckland University in 1945. Two years later he moved to Los Angeles, where he studied composition with Arnold Schoenberg and subsequently became his secretary. He has served on the faculty of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio, a tenure interrupted by assignments as Visiting Professor of Music at the University of California, Berkeley campus, and Victon's University in Wellington, New Zealand. Hoffmann has written extensively for the voice, chamber ensembles, and orchestras.
Edwin London was born in Philadelphia in 1929 and holds degrees from Oberlin and the University of Iowa. He studied composition with Philip Greeley Clapp, Philip Bezanson, Luigi Dallapiccola, and Darius Milhaud. London is the founder and music director of the Cleveland Chamber Symphony. He has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and, since 1978, has been Professor of Music at Cleveland State University.

Charles Whittenberg was born in St. Louis in 1927. His early studies were at the Eastman School of Music under Bernard Rogers and Burrill Phillips. In 1949 he burned all his extant compositions and stopped composing while he restudied the masterpieces of the past as well as the works of Schoenberg and Webern. He resumed composing in 1959. Whittenberg died in 1984.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Richard Hoffmann

In memoriam patris. CRI 393. (lp)
Trio. Paul Zukofsky, violin; Jean Dupouy, viola; Robert Sylvester, cello. CRI 240. (LP)

Edwin London

Auricles Apertures Ventricles. Gregg Smith Singers. New World 80477-2.
Before the World Was Made. Christine Schadeberg, soprano; Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London conducting. Albany TROY 208.
A Hero of Our Time. Russian State Symphony, Edwin London conducting. New World 80511-2.

TWO A'Marvell's FOR WORDS. Philip Larson, baritone; Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London conducting. GM 2045.

Charles Whittenberg

Electronic Study II. Bertram Turetzky, contrabass. Advance FGR-1. (LP)
Games of Five. University of Oregon Woodwind Quintet. Advance FGR-11S. (LP)
Polyphony. Gerard Schwarz, trumpet. Phoenix USA PHCD 115.
Set for Two. David Sackson, viola; Dwight Pelzer, piano. Serenus SRS-12064. (LP)

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Richard Hoffmann

Hoffmann, Richard. Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951). *Oesterreichische Musikzeitschrift* 42:576-7 Dec. 1987.
Reminiscences: A Schoenberg Centennial Symposium at Oberlin College (March 2, 1974). R. Hoffmann and L. Stein, eds. *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 8:59–77, 1984.

Edwin London

London, Edwin. "Making Music Out of Music." *Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought,* Volume 1, p. 291–300; Routledge, London 1993.
Malitz, N. Milwaukee: A Festival of Sacred Music. Ovation 5:71 Jan. 1985.
McGahan, C. D. A study of Edwin London's music for women's chorus. *Dissertation Abstracts International* A 44:1621A, Dec. 1983.
Schwartz, Elliott and Daniel Godfrey. *Music Since 1945*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1992, pp. 163, 297–298.

Charles Whittenberg:

Duffy, T. C. *Triptych for Brass Quintet (1962)* by Charles Allen Whittenberg: an analysis. *Dissertation Abstracts International* A 47: 2788A-9A, Feb. 1987.

Recording director: Marc Aubort
Recording engineer: Elite Recordings, Inc., NYC
Tape editor: Joanna Nickrenz
Portraits of Three Ladies (American) was recorded May 18, 1969, in Smith Hall, University of Illinois.
Variations for Nine Players was recorded November 28, 1969, in Rutgers Presbyterian Church, NYC.
Orchestra Piece 1961 was recorded January 27, 1970, in the Oberlin Conservatory, Oberlin, Ohio.
Cover design: Bob Defrin Design, Inc., NYC

This project is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.
This recording was also made possible with grants from The Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University and the late Francis Goelet.

FOR NEW WORLD RECORDS:
Herman E. Krawitz, President; Paul Marotta, Managing Director; Paul M. Tai, Director of Artists and Repertory; Lisa Kahlden, Director of Information Technology; Virginia Hayward, Administrative Associate; Mojisola Oké, Bookkeeper; Ben Schmich, Production Associate.

RECORDED ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN MUSIC, INC., BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

David Hamilton, Treasurer; Milton Babbitt; Emanuel Gerard; Adolph Green; Rita Hauser; Herman E. Krawitz; Arthur Moorhead; Elizabeth Ostrow; Don Roberts; Patrick Smith; Frank Stanton.

Francis Goelet (1926–1998), Chairman

℗ 1999 © 1999 Recorded Anthology of American Music, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in USA.

Charles Whittenberg (1927–1984)
1 *Variations for Nine Players* (publ. C. F. Peters Corp., BMI) 13:35
The Contemporary Chamber Ensemble: Thomas Nyfenger, flute; Georges Luis Haas, oboe; Arthur Bloom, clarinet; Donald MacCourt, bassoon; Paul Ingraham, French horn; Robert Nagel, trumpet; John Swallow, trombone; Jeanne Benjamin, violin; Alvin Brehm, contrabass; Arthur Weisberg conducting

Edwin London (b. 1929)
Portraits of Three Ladies (American) (publ. C. F. Peters Corp., BMI)
2 Pocahontas 5:36
3 Dolly Madison 9:00
4 Nancy Hanks 5:58
Marilyn Coles, soprano; Royal MacDonald, narrator; The University of Illinois Contemporary Chamber Ensemble: Thomas Howell, flute and piccolo; Robert Quade, clarinet; Ronald Dewar, bass clarinet and tenor saxophone; James Keays, French horn; Kenneth Serrantino, trumpet; Jerry Tessin, trumpet; Robert Weiss, trombone; James Plondke, tuba; Charles Braugham, percussion; Michael Udow, percussion; Lee Duckles, cello; Andrea Een, violin; Jon Deak, contrabass; Edwin London conducting

Richard Hoffmann (b. 1925)
5 *Orchestra Piece 1961* (publ. Helicon Music Corp., BMI) 17:29
Oberlin College Conservatory Orchestra, Robert Baustian conducting

Originally released as Acoustic Research LPs 0654 084 (track 5), 0654 085 (tracks 2–4), and 0654 087 (track 1)

Made in U.S.A.

NO PART OF THIS RECORDING MAY BE COPIED OR REPRODUCED WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION OF R.A.A.M., INC.

NEW WORLD RECORDS
16 Penn Plaza #835
NEW YORK, NY 10001-1820
TEL 212.290-1680 FAX 212.290-1685
Website: www.newworldrecords.org
email: info@newworldrecords.org

LINER NOTES © Recorded Anthology of American Music, Inc.