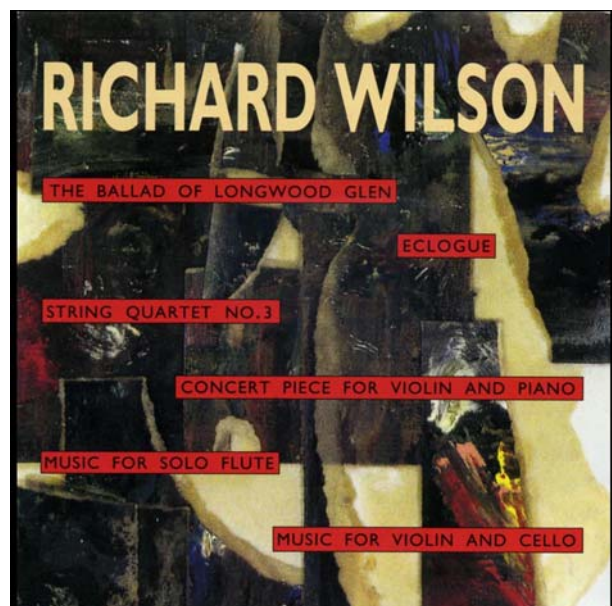


## Richard Wilson



- String Quartet No. 3 (1983)..... (21:48)
1. I. – Prelude ..... (6:08)
  2. II. – Episode ..... (6:24)
  3. III. – Elegy ..... (9:04)
- The Muir String Quartet: Bayla Keyes, violin;  
Lucy Chapman Stoltzman, violin; Steven  
Ansell, viola; Michael Reynolds, cello
4. *Eclogue* (1974) ..... (12:03)  
Blanca Uribe, piano
  5. *The Ballad of Longwood Glen* (Vladimir  
Nabokov) (1975) ..... (14:17)  
Paul Sperry, tenor; Nancy Allen, harp
  6. Concert Piece for Violin and Piano (1967) ..... (8:43)  
Rolf Schulte, violin; Ursula Oppens, piano
  7. Music for Solo Flute (1972) ..... (10:06)  
Harvey Sollberger, flute
  8. Music for Violin and Cello (1969) ..... (9:01)  
Yoko Matsuda, violin; Fred Sherry, cello

Total playing time: 76:11

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## Notes

“In art, as in science,” Vladimir Nabokov wrote, “there is no delight without the detail.” One of the largest pieces in this recorded retrospective of **Richard Wilson’s** music, *The Ballad of Longwood Glen*, is a setting of a Nabokov text. But the great novelist/poet/scholar’s dictum comes to mind as one listens to all six of the works collected here, for Wilson uses a musical language meticulous in its care for detail and informed by a fastidiousness of imagination that is rare in these loud-spoken times but that are utterly characteristic of the man.

A graduate of Harvard College, Wilson studied there between 1959 and 1963 with Randall Thompson, G. W. Woodworth, and Robert Moevs. Awarded the Frank Huntington Beebe Award for study abroad, Wilson spent periods in Munich and in Rome, where he studied once again with Moevs and where he also gave piano recitals. (A cello and piano student from an early age, Wilson is still an active pianist, and his occasional performances of Mozart concertos evince the same blend of delicacy and understated intellectual strength that characterizes his own music.) Wilson holds the Mary Conover Mellon Chair in Music at Vassar College, where he has been a faculty member and two-time chairman of the music department since taking his master’s degree at Rutgers in 1966.

In the last few years Wilson’s music, already known to a group of enthusiastic admirers, has begun to make a wider mark with the help of commissions from the San Francisco Symphony and other organizations, and because of performances in London, Amsterdam, Leningrad, New York, and Washington. The six works in this recorded retrospective range in date from 1967 to 1983.

Not only in the Nabokov setting (where the bizarre story would lead us to expect it), but in all of his music, and perhaps most strikingly and ambitiously in his String Quartet No. 3, the listener encounters the work of a composer who searches for the elusive moment of certainty that can constitute at once a rewarding artistic statement and a reassurance about the solidity of the world.

The moment often passes as rapidly as it comes. Take, for example, the evanescent unisons that offer firm ground among the mercurial chromatic explorations of the quartet’s central Episode. These moments are affirmations all the more valuable for being so hard won. Wilson’s art, whatever this brief account may suggest, and despite his unmistakable relish for the goings-on in Longwood Glen, is not surrealist. It encompasses strangeness, which is set for our contemplation beside the everyday and the prosaic, but there is no attempt to equate the two. Wilson is never under any illusion about the unearthliness of his imaginative flights. As a result, the listener too has a sense of the range of musical experience in this consummate blend of technical craft with transcendent sound-poetry.

—Bernard Jacobson, 1991

Each of the three movements of my String Quartet No. 3 bears a title and exhibits a perceptible formal design. The first is called Prelude, not only for the obvious reasons, but because its prominent pedal point—the cello’s C string—gives rise to a particularly anticipatory feeling. It may also be that in giving this movement a title, I thought of preludes of Bach and their often lavish pedal points. This movement resembles an arch. At its center is a section that builds up in stages to a dynamic high point. Before and after are passages

making use of the cello's pedal point. Surrounding these passages are related outer sections: at the opening, a duet between the second violin and viola with plucked punctuation from the cello; and at the closing, an expansion of this music involving all four players to form a gentle coda.

The second movement takes the name Episode because it acts as a dramatic interlude at a certain remove from the main line of the work. Its character is a blend of scherzo and march. Like those forms, and unlike the first movement, Episode has sharply articulated sections. These may be understood as ABA'B', where A' and B' show interruptions, intercalations, and elaborations of the original statements.

With the concluding movement, *Elegy*, the slow harmonic motion of *Prelude* returns but instead of cold, open-string pedals there appears as underpinning the vibrant stopped note, C-sharp, which creates a relationship wherein the first movement acts as leading tone to the third. The *Elegy* is a refrain-dominated piece that is deeply serious in tone and manner.

String Quartet No. 3 was commissioned for the Muir Quartet by the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation. It is dedicated to the members of the Muir and to Leon Botstein. The Muir gave the first performances at Yale and Vassar in April 1983.

*Eclogue* is a celebration of the traditional resources of the piano—both the kinds of sound it is capable of producing and the variety of styles of playing that its vast literature reveals.

Written for Blanca Uribe, *Eclogue* is one movement that is composed of three parts. There is an introductory section, contrapuntal and motivic, that proceeds on a high level of energy and intensity. This is followed by a much more drawn-out, atmospheric kind of music, in which thematic material—chords and a brief melodic figure—is projected against different sorts of trills. This thematic material becomes the basis for a succession of connected, textural variations that build in dynamics to a high-point, after which quiet, muted sounds become the basis of a variation. The final section is a reflection on what has come before.

First performed December 5, 1974, at Vassar College by Blanca Uribe, the work was selected as one of the winners of the International Piano Competition sponsored by the League of Composers-International Society for Contemporary Music, U.S. Section, in February 1976. In October 1978, *Eclogue* was named the winner of the Burge-Eastman Prize.

*The Ballad of Longwood Glen* is a setting of Vladimir Nabokov's narrative of the same title. Consisting of thirty-two rhymed couplets, the poem was written in 1957 in English and in America. Composed at Yaddo in the summer of 1975, the musical setting begins and ends with the tenor and harp closely coordinated in the manner characteristic of art songs. The music of the opening and closing sections is similar, mirroring the return to (apparent) normalcy found at the close of the poem. In the intervening portion of this piece, as the events of the poem become increasingly strange, the performers stray from exact coordination. This independence allows the singer a good deal of freedom in delivering the text.

The first performance was given by Paul Sperry and Nancy Allen (the dedicatees) at Vassar College on February 1, 1978. Sonority and form were foremost in my mind as I composed *Concert Piece for Violin and Piano*. I had always loved to play and hear the violin and piano sonatas of Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms. But in even the best of these works I was aware of a certain oil-in-water immiscibility of the two instruments. Achieving a blend of sound became a goal in this

piece, which perhaps explains why little use is made of either instrument alone or in dialogues featuring polite alternation.

Form was a particular concern because at the time of composition I had limited experience in organizing a single movement of eight or nine minutes. I pursued a plan suggested by several late fourteenth century isorhythmic motets I had been studying, a plan that I have since found exhibited elsewhere. I wrote paired sections, A and variant A1, B and B1, C and C1, but ordered them so that the pairs were not adjacent; namely, A-B-C-A1-C1-B1. The variants A1, B1, C1 are related to A, B, C, respectively, through texture, motivic use, and rhythmic style, but in different degrees of closeness and perceptibility. One additional section, D, appears before B1. This section functions to offset the dynamic high point of the piece that occurs toward the end of C1; it emerges as a consequent of earlier phrases or subsections that serve similarly to balance climactic points in sections B and C. Tempo as well reinforces the shape of the piece. A and B have the pulse at about 60; C begins at 100 and then slows to 80; A1 returns to 60; C1 moves at 100, 80, 120, and then broadens slightly for the climax; D, marked at 60, lacks the sense of pulse; B1 reasserts the pulse at 60 and quickens to 80 for the closing.

The first performance of *Concert Piece* was given at Chautauqua, New York, on July 30, 1967 by Isidor Desser on violin, and myself on piano.

*Music for Solo Flute* was written at the request of Harvey Sollberger and completed in the summer of 1972. Mr. Sollberger gave the first performance of this work at the Manhattan School of Music on November 20 of the same year.

The first of its three movements begins in a declamatory manner, changing after a flourish to more strident music involving sharply articulated short notes with high graces. The contrast between these two styles gives the movement its shape. The second movement, weightiest of the three, begins tentatively and develops in two distinct manners, one slow and lyrical, and the other quick and dryly staccato. The closing movement has a scherzando character. It concludes with a coda that is sustained and reflective.

*Music for Violin and Cello* consists of four short movements. The first and fourth share motivic material and a formal plan; the second has the character of a scherzo; and the third, the expressive high point of the piece, bears some resemblance to a Classical slow movement. The relationship between the outer movements involves certain deliberate contrasts. The reprise in the first movement ebbs a tranquil recollection of its opening while the reprise in the last movement intensifies and extends its material to a climatic point. The third movement is the most systematic: the two parts are in canon at the fifth although the violin gets so far ahead that the cello must resort to a solo cadenza in order to catch up.

This piece was written for Robert Rudié and Luis Garcia-Renart, who gave its first performances at Bard and Vassar Colleges in April 1969.

—Richard Wilson

**Nancy Allen**, harp, won first prize in the American Harp Society National Competition at the age of fourteen. She has since gone onto performing in solo recitals and with such orchestras as English Chamber Orchestra and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and in collaboration with Jaime Laredo, Richard Stoltzman, Pinchas Zukerman, and Ransom Wilson. She has an extensive discography for Angel and RCA Records.

**Yoko Matsuda**, violin, was founder and first violin of the Sequoia String Quartet and is currently founder and co-director of IMA Concerts near Los Angeles. She has appeared as soloist with the Baltimore Symphony, the Japan Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and the Symphony on the Air.

**The Muir String Quartet** won First Prize in the 1980 Evian International String Quartet Competition and the 1981 Naumburg Chamber Music Award. With the Juilliard String Quartet, they appeared as part of the nationally televised PBS series, "In Performance at the White House." They are currently in residence at Boston University.

**Ursula Oppens**, piano, has forged a distinctive career in both contemporary and standard repertoires. She has premiered works by Carter, Rzewski, Wuorinen, Nancarrow, Harbison, and many others. She has performed as soloist with the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the San Francisco Symphony.

**Rolf Schulte**, violin, born in Germany, won top prize in the 1968 Munich International Radio Competition. He has since performed as soloist with the Berlin Philharmonic and the radio orchestras of Berlin, Cologne, and Stuttgart. He has collaborated with such conductors as Christoph von Dohnányi, Dennis Russell Davies, Max Rudolf, and Robert Craft. He has given premieres of many new works including those of Babbitt, Carter, Kurtág, and Davidovsky.

**Fred Sherry**, cello, is artistic director of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, an organization with which he has been associated since the early 1970s. Although he is equally at home with the music of Monteverdi, Bach, and Mozart, he has had a close working association with such living

composers as Berio, Foss, Takemitsu, Davidovsky, and Wuorinen.

**Harvey Sollberger**, flute, is a distinguished composer as well as flutist. From 1960 until recently, his professional activity largely centered around New York City, where he is co-founder with Charles Wuorinen of the Group for Contemporary Music. Among his many honors is a special performer's grant from the Fromm Foundation at Harvard in recognition of "distinguished service in the cause of contemporary music."

**Paul Sperry**, tenor, is a leading champion of contemporary vocal music. His large repertoire also includes works from Monteverdi through Bach's Passions to hundreds of songs in more than a dozen languages. He premiered Bernard Rands's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Canti del sole* with the New York Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta, has performed it across the United States, Paris, and Moscow, and has recorded it for CRI CD 591. He also premiered and recorded Leonard Bernstein's *Dybbuk* suite, with the composer conducting. He is currently president of the American Music Center.

**Blanca Uribe**, piano, was a prizewinner at the Beethoven Competition in Vienna, the Chopin International Competition in Warsaw, and the Van Cliburn International Competition in Fort Worth, where she also won the Special Award for Romantic Music. Her repertoire includes the thirty-two Beethoven sonatas, which she performs in cycle, and *Iberia* of Albéniz, which she has recorded and performed many times in its entirety. Ms. Uribe was made a member of the Order of St. Charles as the result of her outstanding contribution to her native Colombian culture.

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## Production Notes

### String Quartet No. 3

Produced by Richard Wilson. Recorded by Peter Storkerson. Recorded at First and Second Church in Boston, Massachusetts on September 8, 1985. Published by Southern Music Publishers Co., Inc. (ASCAP)

### *Concert Piece for Violin and Piano; Music for Solo Flute*

Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by David Hancock. Publishers: *Concert Piece*, Southern Music, Publishers Co. Inc. (ASCAP); *Solo Flute*, Boosey and Hawkes, Inc. (ASCAP)

### *Eclogue; The Ballad of Longwood Glen*

Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by David Hancock. Published by Boosey and Hawkes, Inc. (ASCAP)

### *Music for Violin and Cello*

Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by David Hancock. Published by Southern Music Publishers Co., Inc. (ASCAP)

Digital remastering by Joseph R. Dalton and Charles S. Harbutt, engineer at Sony Classical Productions, Inc., NYC, using the DCS 900 20-bit a/d converter.