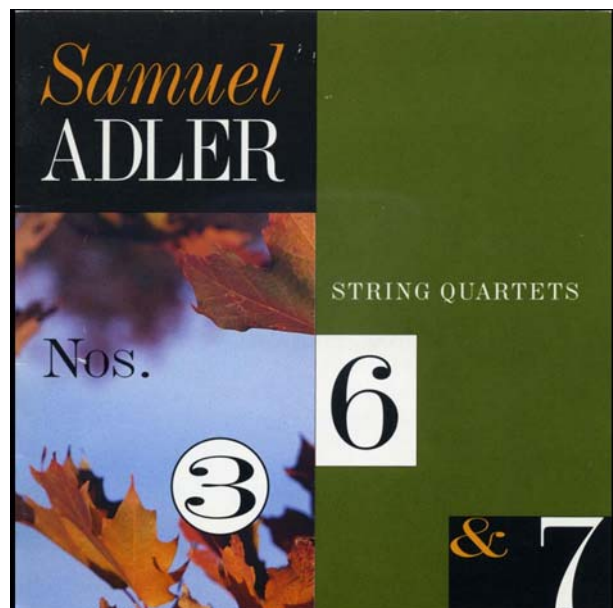


NWCR608

Samuel Adler

String Quartets Nos. 3, 6 & 7



String Quartet No. 3 (1953, revised 1965)..... (18:38)

1. I. Allegro (3:45)
2. II. Adagio (6:37)
3. III. Allegro scherzando..... (3:41)
4. IV. Allegro viva (4:35)

Meliora Quartet; Ian Swenson, Caloin Wiersman, violins; Maria Lambros, viola; Elizabeth Anderson, cello

String Quartet No. 7 (1981)..... (19:04)

5. I. Fast and very intense..... (6:49)
6. II. Slowly and gracefully (7:15)
7. III. Fast and very rhythmic (4:53)

Cleveland Quartet; Donald Weilerstein, Peter Salaff, violins; Atar Arad, viola; Paul Katz, cello

8. String Quartet No. 6 (1975)

A Whitman Serenade (23:57)

Jan DeGaetani, mezzo-soprano; Fine Arts Quartet
Leonard Sorkin, Abram Loft, violins;
Bernard Zaslav, viola; George Sopkin, cello

Total playing time: 61:48

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Notes

The principle of necessity being the mother of invention was all-pervasive in the creation of my String Quartet No. 3. It was originally written in 1953 after I was discharged from the United States Army. Following its premiere in 1954, I put the piece aside to rewrite later on since it was not completely to my liking. However, because many other works occupied my mind, I placed the quartet on “the back burner” for many years.

In 1963, one of my very close friends was tragically killed in an automobile accident; her name was Marjory Fulton-Harrell, a famous violinist (mother of cellist Lynn Harrell) and a colleague of mine at North Texas State University. The Dallas Symphony Orchestra asked me to write a short work in her memory for its next concert, meaning: the piece would have to be composed in one day. Thinking about this task, I remembered the slow movement of my third string quartet and felt it had the kind of mood that a memorial piece should express. I examined it and decided to recompose the basic ideas into a short Elegy for string orchestra.

After the performance of the Elegy and its success as a string orchestra composition, my interest was aroused to reexamine the other movements and possibly rewrite the third quartet after so many years. I have to admit it was a fun project. Though I tried to keep the same style as the earlier version, much was altered and the piece was closer to my liking. Except for the slow movement, Elegy, the work is light and exuberant throughout. It is a summary of the influences of all of my teachers and an homage I

wanted to pay to them after my completed student days and then the “freedom” I felt after being released from the army. There is no doubt that the sounds of works by Piston, Hindemith, and Copland echo throughout this work and the love of the string quartet of Bartók also pervades this youthful piece. The revised version (1965) is the one in which the quartet now exists and was premiered in New York City by the Dallas Symphony Quartet in 1965.

The quartet is in four rather short movements. An opening Allegro in a modified sonata form with two distinct themes is followed by the slow Elegy. The influence of the “rewrite” is perhaps more obvious here than in the other movements since the theme is a twelve-tone row, a technique I used extensively during the sixties and seventies, yet is definitely tonal as of course are the other movements. A bright, though a bit sardonic Scherzo follows and the work comes to a close with a hard-driving fast Finale in a sonata-rondo form.

I have been very fortunate, indeed, to have been asked to write works for some of our leading string quartets and each group naturally suggests a particular type of music to me. Since 1976, I have enjoyed the music-making of the Cleveland Quartet since they are colleagues of mine at the Eastman School. Therefore, when I composed my String Quartet No. 7 for the Quartet, I was greatly influenced by the kind of sounds, the wonderful energy, and the exquisite lyricism which I have come to love in their performances. The work, which was composed in the

summer of 1981 and supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, was premiered in Orchestra Hall, Chicago, Illinois, on March 6, 1983.

The work is in three movements. The first movement, "Fast and very intense," opens with a unison statement of the main theme characterized by some repeated notes and a glissando. This theme recurs often as a punctuation between the different episodes. Right at the beginning we have interruptions of the energetic thematic material by sustained chords or short lyric passages. This technique is employed throughout the movement, constantly pitting driving, almost frenetic, music against much calmer sections. Energy is the overriding concern of the first movement.

The quality of the second movement, "Slowly and gracefully," is mysterious and at other times, reflective and meditative. It opens with the reiteration of the note c-sharp and then develops into a series of melodic episodes interrupted by cadenza-like passages for each of the instruments.

In the finale, "Fast and very rhythmic," we return again to the energetic spirit of the first movement. However, it has changed quite a bit and is more dance-like and much brighter in mood. As in the first movement, the main thematic gesture is introduced by a unison passage right at the beginning and recurs regularly in a rondo-like fashion throughout the movement. The second major theme is a child-like song which gets an extended development but finally is "conquered" once again by the vigorous, energetic, thematic material which brings the music to a close.

While on leave in Vienna in 1975, I read a great deal of poetry before I reread Walt Whitman, whose work I have always loved but never set. Perhaps it was my temporary status of expatriate that made his strong images and hopeful language even more vivid and exciting, and made me finally decide to attempt a setting in my String Quartet No. 6. The quartet was commissioned by the Fine Arts Music Foundation for Jan DeGaetani and the Fine Arts Quartet who premiered the work in Chicago on May 9, 1977. The four poems in this work are from a set called "Whispers of Heavenly Death" which appears in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Throughout, I attempted to keep the vocal line lyrical, trying at all times to picture the strength and meaning of the text.

The work is in one continuous movement consisting of five large sections:

1. The Introduction, for the string quartet alone, is a complex dialogue among the instruments which sounds as if there were no directions left into which mankind may venture. At the moment of greatest tension and disarray, the voice enters with the words: "Darest thou now O soul, Walk out with me into the unknown region."
2. The first Whitman poem in a rather fast deliberate tempo.
3. An interlude, consisting of trills and freer aleatoric passages, guides to the second poem marked "Slower, but without loss of tension."
4. A very relaxed lyric interlude leading to the third poem which begins slowly and then becomes impassioned at the words: "But now the chorus I hear and am elated."
5. The final section begins with a short introduction featuring a violin solo followed by *pianissimo* chords. Then the voice quietly intones "The Last Invocation" over a soft but agitated quartet background, and the work ends tenderly.

All of this said about these three quartets, the third has actually become my first "existing" string quartet for I have discarded my first and second quartets since I did

not consider them worthy of further performances. I feel it is good for a composer to be self-critical and the "retiring," especially of early student efforts, is in the great tradition of the masters of the past, notably Brahms. Now that I have composed eight string quartets, each very unique in both form and content, this medium has become one of my favorite means of expression.

—Samuel Adler

The musical life of **Samuel Adler** is marked by an enormous capacity of output and an involvement in both the composition and teaching of music. By 1991, he had published over 300 compositions, including operas, symphonies, all styles of chamber pieces, and an extensive list of Jewish liturgical works. In addition to his B.M. and M.A. degrees, he has also received four honorary doctorates. He was won numerous awards, from the U.S. Medal of Honor for creating the Seventh Army Symphony Orchestra in 1953, to the ASCAP-Deems Taylor award for his book *A Study of Orchestration* in 1983.

Born in Mannheim, Germany in 1928, Samuel Adler began his music training under the guidance of his parents. His father was a cantor and distinguished composer of Jewish liturgical music; and his mother, an experienced concert performer, had been trained in both voice and piano. In 1939, the young Adler's tutelage continued in Worcester, Massachusetts, where his family had moved to escape the threats against Jews by the growing Nazi regime.

By 1941, at the age of thirteen, he began studying harmony and counterpoint with Herbert Fromm, a pupil of Hindemith. At sixteen, he had composed his first serious orchestral composition, *Epitaph for the Young American Soldier* (1944), which was premiered by the Worcester Philharmonic. The influence of Fromm continued to be evident in Adler's work throughout his undergraduate years at Boston University, where he earned his bachelor of music degree in 1948. He went on to earn his master's degree at Harvard, where his work continued to evolve during his studies with Piston, Thompson, Hindemith, Fine, and others. During summers at Harvard, he traveled to Tanglewood to study with Copland and Koussevitzky. After Harvard, at the age of twenty-two, he was drafted into the U.S. Army to serve in the artillery in Europe. He soon organized the Seventh Army Symphony which he conducted in over seventy-five public concerts throughout Germany.

He returned to the States in 1953 and settled in Dallas, Texas, with an appointment as music director of Temple Emanu-El. The next thirteen years in Dallas would prove to be very fruitful, during which time he began discovering his own unique music voice, combining tonal and non-tonal elements in his work. It was this period which bore his first major compositions, including his Symphony No. 1 (1953) premiered by the Dallas Symphony, his one-act opera *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* (1959), as well as his first teaching post as a professor of composition (North Texas State University, 1957–66). He also continued his association with the Seventh Army Symphony and toured Europe twice, lecturing and conducting in over thirteen countries.

In 1964 he became the first recipient of the Charles Ives Award begun by Mrs. Charles Ives. Two years later, at the age of thirty-six, he was appointed professor of composition at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester. Eastman was at the apex of many new trends in composition during the late sixties and early seventies and Adler's music began to reflect these new influences. He produced serial works, such as in his Symphony No. 4 (1967), and used aleatory techniques in his String Quartet No. 4 (1963). Yet Adler always viewed these changes with caution. "I have been labeled a composer of the

‘radical center’,” he has noted, “and I rather like that classification. I am a happy eclectic who has never been anxious to pursue novelty or the avant-garde, but who tried to be open to all stylistic trends.”

By 1973, he became chairman of the department of composition at Eastman, the post which he continues to hold in 1991. Adler is married to Emily Freeman Brown and he has two daughters, Deborah, a flutist, and Naomi, an attorney. He

continues to teach and writes both articles and new compositions.

“My musical ideal,” he has said, “is predicated on a solid musical language which is playable and singable even though not necessarily easy to perform.” For Adler, his music communicates “a love of life and mankind, a wonderment of the beauty of creation, and the general excitement I feel about simply being alive.”

String Quartet No. 6

Text from *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman

Darest Thou Now O Soul (1868)

Darest Thou Now O Soul,
Walk out with me toward the unknown region,
Where neither ground is for the feet nor any path to follow?

No map there, no guide,
Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand,
Nor face with blooming flesh, nor lips, nor eyes, are in that land.

I know it not O soul,
Nor dost thou, all is a blank before us,
All waits undream'd of in that region, that inaccessible land.

Till when the ties loosen,
All but the ties eternal, Time and Space,
Nor darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds bounding us.

Then we burst forth, we float,
In Time and Space O soul, prepared for them,
Equal, equipt at last, (O joy! O fruit of all!) them to fulfill O soul.

Quicksand Years (1861–62)

Quicksand years that whirl me I know not whither,
Your schemes, politics, fail, lines give way, substances mock and elude me,
Only the theme I sing, the great and strong-possess'd soul, eludes not,
One's-self must never give way — this is the final substance — that out of all is sure,
Out of politics, triumphs, battles, life, what at last finally remains?
When shows break up what One's-Self is sure?

That Music Always Round Me (1860)

That music always round me, unceasing, unbeginning, yet long untaught I did not hear,
But now the chorus I hear and am elated,
A tenor, strong, ascending with power and health, with glad notes of daybreak I hear,
A soprano at intervals sailing buoyantly over the tops of immense waves,
A transparent base shuddering lusciously under and through the universe,
The triumphant tutti, the funeral wailings with sweet flutes and violins, all these I fill myself with
I hear not the volumes of sound merely, I am moved by the exquisite meanings,
I listen to the different voices winding in and out, striving, contending with fiery vehemence
to excel each other in emotion;
I do not think the performers know themselves — but now I think I begin to know them.

The Last Invocation (1868)

At the last, tenderly,
From the walls of the powerful fortress'd house,
From the clasp of the knitted locks, from the keep of the well-closed doors,
Let me be wafted.

Let me glide noiselessly forth;
With the key of softness unlock the locks — with a whisper,
Set open the doors O soul.

Tenderly — be not impatient,
(Strong is your hold O mortal flesh,
Strong is your hold O love.)

Production Notes

String Quartets Nos. 3 & 7

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String Quartet No. 6

Produced by Samuel Adler and John Santuccio. Recorded by H. Ros Ritchie in the Kresge Recording Studios at Eastman School of Music, Rochester, New York, April 1979. Edited by Margaret Wolfers. The original recording was made possible by the generous assistance of the Eastman School of Music. Publisher: Carl Fischer (BMI). Digitally remastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Charles Harbutt, engineer at Sony Classical Productions, NYC using the DCS 900 20-bit a/d converter.

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