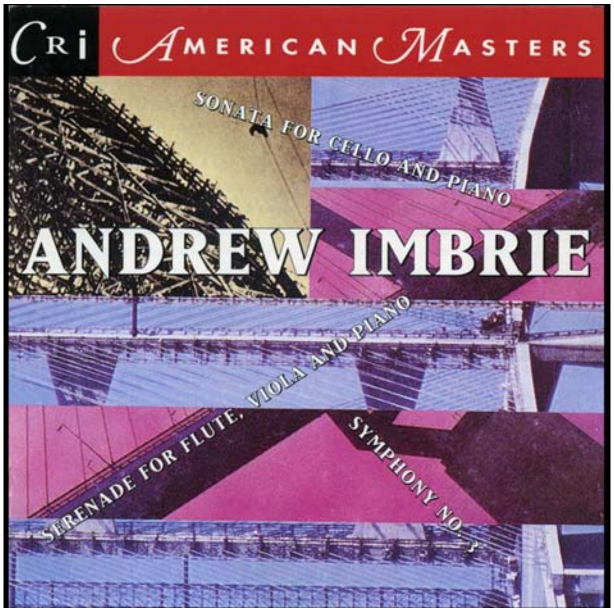
NWCR632

Andrew Imbrie



Symphony No. 3 (1970) .... (20:11)

1. I. Prologue, Maestoso .... (3:04)
2. II. Allegro .... (7:21)
3. III. Andantino .... (4:24)
4. IV. Vivace .... (5:10)

London Symphony Orchestra; Harold Farberman, conductor

Serenade for flute, viola and piano (1952) .... (18:30)

5. I. Allegro vivace .... (5:08)
6. II. Siciliano .... (6:15)
7. III. Adagio .... (7:02)

Louise DiTullio, flute; Walter Trampler, viola; Lois Brandwynne, piano

Sonata for cello and piano (1966) .... (25:06)

8. I. Allegro .... (8:31)
9. II. Andante con assetto .... (5:06)
10. III. Andante, Allegro vivace .... (11:20)

Robert Sayre, cello; Roy Bogas, piano

Total playing time: 64:01

Notes

Describing one's own music is a little like describing one's voice and manner. It is easier to say what it is not than to say what it is. My music does not strive to be American, like my nationality, nor Scottish, like my ancestry. It is neither experimental nor conventional. I always start at the beginning, and let the ideas shape themselves as they must; the direction they will pursue and the changes in character they will undergo become increasingly clear as I go on. I find that an initial musical statement, once made, raises obligations that the composer must have the wit to recognize and to fulfill. As he begins to do this he discovers that he has rendered his statement both more complex and more nearly definitive; in the end the complexities are resolved and the obligations cease; the music becomes an independent artifact and no longer needs the composer. In making the judgments that lead to all this, the composer must constantly resort to innovation—yet he is influenced by the other music that he loves, both old and new. Without such participation he would be powerless. Originality, if indeed present at all, is the style with which the composer characteristically chooses, weighs, shapes, and distorts. It is to be found not in his polemics, but in his voice and manner.

My Symphony No. 3 begins with a prologue which serves as a point of departure. Its central idea consists of a three-note pattern stated and repeated at the outset by the trumpets, but surrounded and extended by an irregular succession of bell-like chords in the orchestra. The three-note melodic pattern soon develops into a full musical phrase; but in one's memory it should always retain its identity—and its association with bell-sounds. The second half of the prologue becomes quieter and more lyrical, as if preparing to move on to other things; but the three-note pattern persists within the fabric of both background and melody, until both dissolve outward into a sustained chord.

The first movement begins resolutely with new rhythmic and propulsive material which soon gives way to a lightly scored transition. Out of this suspenseful atmosphere suddenly emerge the violins. This will prove to be important hereafter; at present it is embodied in the broadly lyrical melody that grows out of it. The gesture itself consists of a quick upward sweep from a low sustained note to a high point, and a brief falling off. Its return is deferred until the last moment.

The second movement is an aria for clarinet solo with orchestral accompaniment. At the climax the flow is interrupted by a sudden reference to the prologue. Brass tone predominates, the colors are darker and somewhat more subdued, and as the motion subsides the clarinet melody returns in a changed form.

In the last movement, as the violins join the melody, it takes on a familiar cast. There is a somewhat chastened form of the old "extravagant gesture," along with that of the three-note prologue motive. These two melodic cells have merged so that the one completes the other. The materials of the movement are developed and combined in various ways, until the final return to the original prologue.

The dramatic effect of the whole work hinges on the prologue, with its motive and its characteristic bell-sounds. These represent a state of affairs to which the music seeks a return. The "extravagant gesture" might be said to represent the effort to bring this about by force of will. But the return cannot be coerced; it is accomplished in its own necessary time. The second movement seems to anticipate the event, but it is premature. Only when the energies of the last movement are reconciled is the desired result achieved. Symphony No. 3 was written for Britain's Hallé Orchestra.

The music was completed in 1970 and the orchestra played the premiere in December of that year.

In my *Serenade* for flute, viola and piano, the three movements describe a progression "from the surface to the interior." The first is a kind of *perpetuum mobile*, whose character is established by the steadiness of its meter and the busy quality of its counterpoint. The energy is maintained until the end, where the motion is finally brought to rest through a gradual simplification of texture over an ostinato. This in turn eventually falters and stops, like a clock, without slowing its basic pulse. The second movement is based on the traditional *Siciliano* rhythm, and is intended to evoke a sense of nostalgia. It incorporates two cadenzas, one for flute and one for viola. The last movement presents, and attempts to reconcile, the extremes of expressive contrast. It begins and ends very quietly, but rises to the most intense climax of the work. The serenade was commissioned by Mr. and Mrs. Edward Hohfeld of San Francisco, and was composed in 1952, during the periods of my Violin Concerto and Second String Quartet.

The Sonata for cello and piano is in three movements. The first assumes a form not unlike that of classical sonata form—if such a thing can exist without classic tonality. The opening gesture of the cello, characterized by a downward motion in the lowest register followed by a wide expressive leap upward recurs at crucial structural points throughout the movement (which closes with a free inversion of it). The contrasting group opens with a gentler, more lyric statement, which leads to different consequences at each of several recurrences. The development opens with a rather stormy piano solo, and progresses to a climax, which incorporates the opening gesture in both instruments and exploits the extremes of the register. The recapitulation is much condensed, particularly as regards the second group. The slow movement exploits a contrast in texture and mood between piano and cello, in which the piano opens with isolated motivic groupings, played with a dry staccato attack. The cello enters with an intense lyric gesture. It is the reconciliation of these two expressive extremes that is the concern of the movement. The last movement, the longest of the three, opens with a slow introduction, and proceeds to a very energetic *vivace*. A contrasting slow theme is projected against a background in which the pianist must sustain a texture consisting concurrently of three separate kinds of mode of attack, without distracting attention from the cello line. The conclusion requires bravura performance by both musicians. The Sonata was commissioned by Robert Sayre. After the first performance in San Francisco, in May 1967, it received the San Francisco Critics' Award for that season.

—*Andrew Imbrie*

Andrew Imbrie was born in New York in 1921 and grew up in Princeton, New Jersey. He began piano lessons at the age of four, studying with Ann Abajian and later with Pauline and Leo Ornstein. He studied composition with Roger Sessions, first at Princeton, and after serving in World War II, at Berkeley, where he received an M.A. in 1947. After a residence at the American Academy in Rome from 1947 to 1949, he returned to Berkeley as a faculty member.

He now holds the Jerry and Evelyn Hemmings Chamber Chair at the University of California, Berkeley Department of Music. He has also taught at the San Francisco Conservatory as chairman of the composition department and at Brandeis University as a visiting professor. His students have included Larry Austin and David Del Tredici. He is an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1991, during his seventieth birthday year, he was composer in residence at Tanglewood.

Production Notes

From CRI SD 308

Symphony Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded at St. Giles Cripplegate, London, England, February 26, 1973. The original recording was made possible by the Hinrichsen Award, and grants from the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University, the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music, Inc., and the University of California at Berkeley.

From Desto DC-7150

Serenade Produced by Horace Grenell. Recorded at Capital Studios, Studio B., Hollywood, California, on August 17, 1971. Sonata Produced by Horace Grenell. Recorded at Hertz Hall, University of California at Berkeley, on December 18, 1971.

All published by Malcolm Music, Ltd. (Shawnee Press/G. Schirmer) (BMI)

CRI American Masters

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton

Digitally remastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Tim Tiedemann, engineer at Sony Classical Productions, Inc., NYC.

This compact disc reissue has been made possible by the Jerry and Evelyn Hemmings Chambers Chair, Department of Music, University of California, Berkeley, and by the Virgil Thomson Foundation.