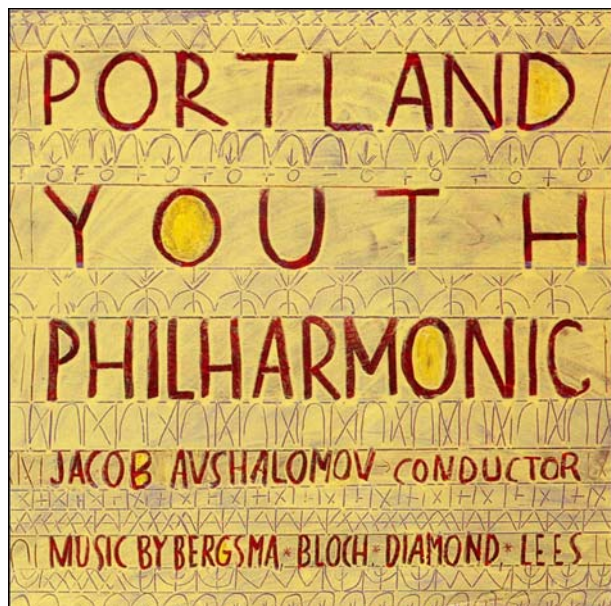


Bergsma, Lees, Diamond, and Bloch



William Bergsma

1. *Chameleon Variations* (1960) (12:41)

Benjamin Lees

2. *Prologue, Capriccio, and Epilogue* (1959) (12:00)

David Diamond

3. *The World of Paul Klee* (1957) (11:49)

Ernest Bloch

4. *Suite Symphonique* (1944) (20:29)
5. *Symphony for Trombone and Orchestra* (1954) .. (15:46)

Howard Prince, trombone; Portland Youth Philharmonic; Jacob Avshalomov, conductor

Total playing time: 73:11

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Notes

Oregon's Portland Youth Philharmonic is America's first youth orchestra, founded in 1924. Its reputation spread across the United States through nationwide radio broadcasts in the 1930s. Later, recordings of its concerts were heard also in Japan, the Philippines, and, during the 1960s, in Europe on the Voice of America.

The Orchestra has made five highly acclaimed tours: to Europe in 1970, 1984, and 1989; to Japan in 1979, and to Korea and Japan in 1992. In all cases young artists from the host countries were invited to participate in the concerts, either as soloists or in choruses. A highlight of the sixtieth Anniversary celebrations was a joint concert given with the New York Philharmonic at Avery Fisher Hall in New York City.

The Portland Youth Philharmonic consists of more than 100 students, ages twelve to twenty-two; another 100 are trained in the Preparatory Orchestra. More than seventy-five different schools and colleges from the Portland metropolitan area are represented. The Portland Youth Philharmonic Association maintains a scholarship program for lessons during the season, and offers several awards each summer for study at Tanglewood, the Aspen School of Music, and other such programs. The Orchestra collaborates with choruses, art students, and other educational and civic groups in the Portland area. Twelve concerts are given each season for adults and children in the city's major halls.

The Association has commissioned a number of works, beginning in 1960, with a series of six funded by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. These and others were recorded by CRI, to critical acclaim. The present CD is a reissue of several works from the initial series. This project is being funded by the heirs of Ruth Saunders Leupold, who played in

the original Orchestra of 1924 and was a longtime patron and member of the Board.

Jacob Avshalomov, now in his thirty-ninth season as conductor and musical director of the Portland Youth Philharmonic, is a noted composer, educator, and recording artist as well. He was born in Tsingtao, China in 1919. His father, Aaron Avshalomov, a Siberian-born composer, provided his early musical training. Avshalomov and his mother, a San Francisco native, moved to the United States in 1937. After a year's study in Los Angeles, young Avshalomov spent two years studying at Reed College in Portland. He performed with the city's youth orchestra, which he would later conduct, and studied with Jacques Gershkovitch, his only predecessor as conductor of the orchestra.

Avshalomov earned a B.M. and an M.A. at the Eastman School of Music. He served on the music faculty of Columbia University from 1946 until 1954 when he became leader of the Portland Youth Philharmonic, at that time called the Portland Junior Symphony. Avshalomov has been a visiting professor at Tanglewood, Aspen Music School, Reed College, the University of Washington, and Northwestern University.

Avshalomov has composed more than forty works for orchestra, chorus, voice, and chamber groups. He has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, the New York Critics Circle Award, and the Naumburg Recording Award. His works have been performed in many parts of the world, and he has conducted several for recordings.

His work with the Portland Youth Philharmonic earned him the Ditson Conductor's Award in 1965. He has served on the National Council for the Humanities and as co-chairman of the National Arts Endowment, Music Planning Section.

William Bergsma (b Oakland, CA 1921; d Seattle, WA 1994) studied at Stanford University and the Eastman School of Music, with Howard Hanson and Bernard Rogers. Works include two ballets, orchestral music, documentary film scores, three string quartets, songs, and an opera, *The Wife of Martin Guerre* (recorded on SD CRI 105). Principal honors include a National Institute for the Arts and Letters Grant and two Guggenheim Fellowships and he has served as the chairman of literature and materials department at the Juilliard School of Music.

The following note for the premiere of *Chameleon Variations* is by the composer:

The chameleon, of course, is an attractive little lizard that changes color to suit its surroundings. As a child I owned one, bought for a dime, with a chain around its neck. It was worn on the shirt front, secured by a safety-pin; we besieged it with brilliant sheets of colored paper, and the poor thing tried its best. It seems to me, in retrospect, a good symbol of variety with integrity, which is the intent of my *Chameleon Variations*.

The piece contains an introduction, which states a quiet version of the principal theme, and presents the formal structure which the variations will follow: seven variations and a finale. These are played without pause. The variations contrast with each other, but are so placed as to present the outline of a condensed symphony. Variations I, II, and III are three kinds of allegro; Variations IV and V, two kinds of slow movement; Variations VI and VII, two kinds of scherzo; the Finale is a finale.

Benjamin Lees (b 1924) came to the United States in 1925. His early studies were in San Francisco and later at the University of Southern California and with George Antheil. Principal works include a string quartet and two symphonies. Honors include a Fromm Foundation Award, a Fulbright Fellowship to Finland, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

The following note is by the composer:

The Prologue, Capriccio, and Epilogue have no program or text and is geared to the sonorities of a large orchestra. The title needs little further elaboration. A short, calm prologue leads, with quickened tempo and dynamic thrust, directly to the capriccio, which forms the core of this composition. It is a turbulent capriccio, filled with rapid and numerous changes of meter, rising to many climactic peaks, and alternating between wit, sardonicism, lyricism, and outright savageness. The conclusion of this section passes without pause into the epilogue, which is quiet and enigmatic in character. The material of the epilogue is drawn from the preceding two sections and the entire work ends with a quiet, sustained oboe phrase.

This piece has many faces, turning one and then another to us in quick succession. It seems to me that our own time is also represented by many faces such as these; a composer can but reflect the time in which he lives. True, every artist sees his own epoch in a different light. I see ours as desperate, but not despairing: hopeful, not hopeless.

David Diamond (b Rochester, NY 1915; d New York, 2005) studied at the Cleveland Institute of Music; later with Bernard Rogers, Paul Boepple, Roger Sessions, and Nadia Boulanger. His works include chamber music, six symphonies, a piano concerto, songs, film scores, and incidental music for the Broadway productions of *The Tempest*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Rose Tattoo*. Principal awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Prix de Rome and the New York City Music Critics Circle Award. Now living in New York, he has taught composition at the Juilliard School for the past twenty years.

For *The World of Paul Klee*, Diamond has taken his inspiration from four paintings by Klee titled: *Dance of the Grieving Child*, *The Black Prince*, *Pastorale* and *Twittering Machine*.

It seems fitting for several reasons that Klee's work should generate musical aftereffects. He was an excellent violinist, he often discussed his formal problems in terms of theme and motive and he insisted that graphic art also involves the element of time no less in the viewing than in the creation of a work.

The first of Diamond's musical pictures, all of which are set off by a "frame" of five or six measures, is a veil of sound that opens to view a dreamlike poignant waltz movement in which one gropes to recognize a familiar strain. At every hesitation, recovery, and twist of dissonance, however, this melody eludes us until, with a few airy steps, it disappears.

The frame for *The Black Prince* is built of the somber color of low woodwinds and horns which is displaced immediately by the sterner brass, whose function is to reveal the nature of this impetuous and apprehensive young majesty.

Following a momentary pause, a "frame" consisting of legato piano, harp, and percussion introduces the *Pastorale*. Diamond in this case has responded to both the title and its technique with a remarkably accurate "reproduction" of the little ostinato-like rhythmic figures and its lines and arches.

Klee was in the habit of collecting beautiful things, such as butterfly wings, shells, colored stones, roots, and mosses. His conviction that a work of art is experienced as a process of formation rather than as a product led him to use these collected treasures and other materials such as gauze and bits of wood and wire in making contraptions which were movable by drafts of air or by a crank. The *Twittering Machine* is just such a thing. The art critic Howard Devree has noted that "it evokes shrill sounds and sudden lapses into silence filled with echoes in memory." This could just as well serve as a description of Diamond's representation just as his entire work shows how far he concurs in Klee's view that "this world, in its present shape, is not the only possible world."

The two works by **Ernest Bloch** (1880-1959) were recorded in 1976 during a season-long series of tributes to the composer in Oregon where he lived during the last twenty years of his life. Bloch was a longtime admirer of the Portland Youth Philharmonic; in 1959 he wrote that the orchestra "brought to Oregon's people masterful interpretations of great musical works, and stimulated a deep appreciation of musical beauty." In an inscription to the orchestra members, the composer signed his name followed by "also called Uncle Ernie."

It was appropriate that Oregon's Bloch tribute took place during America's Bicentennial Year for he produced some of his most substantial works while living among us. Indeed, Bloch was a titan among the creative artists of our time. His sources of inspiration included the Bible, Gregorian Chant, Shakespeare, Beethoven, Brahms, Mussorgsky, Strauss, Debussy—all familiar enough. But from these diverse elements he derived a personal language—strange, vehement, and haunting. It expressed the savage grandeur of the Prophets in the Israel Symphony, and the sensuality and rending despair of Solomon (*Schelomo*) in that masterpiece of his young manhood.

Later the stimulus of teaching brought him to re-study the music of the Renaissance and Baroque masters. His classes were legendary for the virtuosity with which he made Bach fugues appear on the blackboard and the way that solutions of

formal and thematic problems would lead to Bach's own conclusions. All this was reflected in Bloch's *Concerti Grossi* and other works.

Both his neo-Baroque and rhapsodic utterances are present in the *Suite Symphonique* (1944), sometimes on adjacent pages. The second movement is probably the greatest passacaglia since its famous model, the Bach C minor organ work so often transcribed for orchestra. In the Bloch the initial eight-measure phrase is lovingly prepared by the oboe at the Overture's end; it suggests but does not present the full passacaglia theme. After a breath, the basses do just that, and there follows a series of twenty-five variations which grow inexorably, with the same variety, logic, and dovetailing as the Bach, to a climactic Coda, which returns to the Overture's beginning as to native soil. The Finale reveals another current in Bloch the grotesque; just to hear him mutter the word, with a grimace, was to understand a whole movement. In this case the devilry is manifest not only in the rhythms and the intervals, melodic and harmonic, but also in a recurring *cantus firmus* unmistakably related to the *Dies Irae*, and in the hair-raising chord at the end.

Bloch's affection for the strings and his skill in writing for them doubtless came from his training as a violinist; but his power with all parts of the orchestra is formidable. The *Symphony for Trombone and Orchestra* (1954) attests to this with renewed fervor. Drawn from the same well as *Schelomo*, it seems as if he wanted another chance to express some of those feelings, but with a protagonist better able to stand up to

the orchestra. Whatever his motivation, he produced one of the best works for trombone in the literature as it ranges from the most poignant music to the most heroic.

The three movements of this work are highly integrated. Coming out of an impassioned orchestral introduction, the trombone makes a contemplative entrance with a rising skip of a fifth. This interval is used first with a sixteenth-note upbeat and later with the serene quarter-note downbeat. Both versions have prominent consequences in the other movements. The second, *Agitato*, begins with a driving triplet rhythm in the lower strings and fanfare motives in the trumpets. When the trombone enters it is with the first movement's rising fifth inverted to a snapped fourth, and this is used in almost all subsequent entrances. The second theme of this movement reverts to the contemplative mood and material of the very beginning, and appears twice. There are two climaxes, which are almost unbearable in their potency, the second ebbing to a close as serene as that of the first movement. The *Finale*, *Allegro deciso*, begins with bounding winds and brass, echoed by the full strings, and is more athletic and less dramatic than the first two parts. Midway it subsides to a sweeping string version of the first-movement theme. When the energy returns it brings the only moment of the metric asymmetry: 3/8 and 5/8 measures leaping out of the common time. After this outburst the work develops a deepening serenity which draws us to its third quiet ending. It is a masterpiece both eloquent and bold.

—J.A.

Production Notes

Originally released on CRI SD 140 and CRI SD 351.

Bergsma:

Published by Galaxy Music Corporation.

Lees:

Published by Boosey & Hawkes.

Diamond:

Published by Southern Music Publishing Co., Inc.

Bloch:

Produced by Carter Harman.

Recorded by Jack Pierson, February 27 & 28, 1976.

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Suite Symphonique published by Boosey & Hawkes (ASCAP); *Symphony for Trombone* published by Broude Brothers (ASCAP).

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The Portland Youth Philharmonic dedicates this release as the Ruth Saunders Leupold Memorial Recording in beloved memory of its former violinist, concertmaster, board member, and patron.