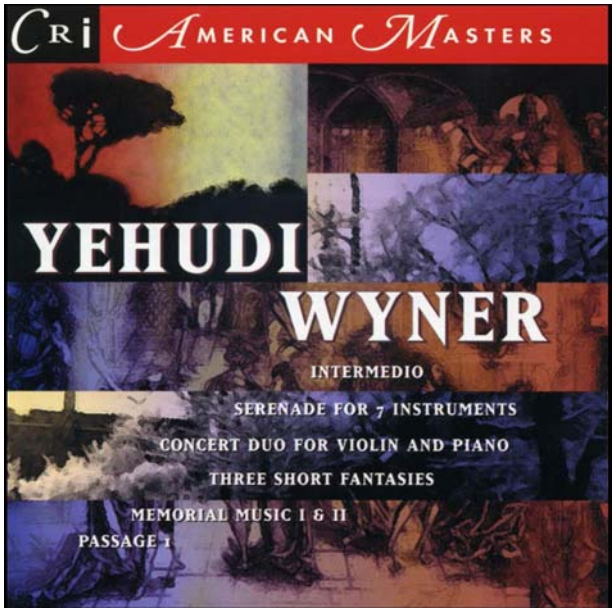
NWCR701

Yehudi Wyner



Intermedio (1974) ..... (17:20)

Lyric Ballet for Soprano and Strings

1. Torch Song ..... (7:11)
2. Up Tempo ..... (4:25)
3. Elegy ..... (5:45)

Susan Davenny Wyner, soprano

String Orchestra conducted by Yehudi Wyner

Serenade for Seven Instruments (1958) ..... (14:17)

4. I. Nocturne ..... (3:35)
5. II. Toccata ..... (3:12)
6. III. Capriccio–Aria ..... (6:05)
7. IV. Nocturne II ..... (1:16)

Boston Symphony Chamber Players;
Yehudi Wyner, conductor

Concert Duo for Violin and Piano (1957) ..... (19:32)

8. I. ..... (9:12)
9. II ..... (10:20)

Matthew Raimondi, violin; Yehudi Wyner, piano

Three Short Fantasies..... (5:38)

10. Piccole Armonie (1963) ..... (1:41)
11. Piccola Fantasia Davenniana (1966) ..... (2:03)
12. For Robert Miller (1971) ..... (2:50)

Robert Miller, piano

13. *Memorial Music I* (1971) ..... (3:21)

"Man Comes from Dust" (Ki K'shimcho)

14. *Memorial Music II* (1973) ..... (3:48)

"Lord, Let Me Know My End" (Psalm 39, Isaiah 40)

Susan Davenny Wyner, soprano; Mary Posses, flute;
Jonathan Drexler, flute; Peter Standaart, flute

15. *Passage I* (1983) ..... (8:47)

Musical Elements; Daniel Asia, conductor

Total playing time: 74:24

Notes

This CD assembles a number of my compositions which, until now, have been only available on individual long-playing records on the CRI label. For the most part these are direct transcriptions from the original masters. Only one composition—*Memorial Music*—will be new to commercial exposure. The performance heard here was privately recorded in 1974 at Dwight Chapel, Yale University, and I include it in this collection because it makes public an eloquent example of the radiant singing of Susan Davenny Wyner. During her singing career, cut short by an accident in 1982, the shining image of her voice was an essential element in my creative activity.

The *Serenade for Seven Instruments* (1958) is represented by a performance different from the one heard on the earlier CRI recording (SD 141). At the time of the original recording the *Serenade* was new and the most colorful way to capture its character had not been fully explored. A performance by the Boston Symphony Chamber Players in 1977 under my direction more truly represents what I had in mind when I conceived the piece. We include that performance here.

As I review the original liner notes for the diverse compositions, I feel they should be allowed to stand unrevised. They said plainly what I wanted to say and in general reveal a consistency of attitude and tone.

—*Yehudi Wyner*, August 1995

As with many of my compositions, *Intermedio* came to life in response to a specific set of conditions. In 1974 we arranged a collaboration of the New Haven Opera Theater and the Connecticut Ballet for the production of two works: *Dido and Aeneas*, the opera by Purcell, and *Divertimenti*, a ballet set to some of Mozart's string music. To complete the enterprise we needed a new work to bring together some of the notable talents of both companies, and with this in mind I began work on a composition for soprano, dancers, and string orchestra. I searched in vain for a suitable text; nor could I devise a clear and evocative scenario. But I did find myself guided by the luminous image of my wife Susan's voice as well as by the droll and lyrical interplay of dancers Robin Welch and Robert Vickrey, prime movers of the Connecticut Ballet.

To this day an exact scenario remains undetermined, though the titles *Torch Song* and *Elegy* give some clue as to the expressive intent of the music. It seems clear that much of *Up Tempo*, the purely instrumental scherzo, represents a teasing and diverting contest. It also seems clear that the emotional shadows of the work deepen as the piece goes on. In the original production, singer and dancers shared the stage in movements I and III, creating a dramatic tension, as if the singer would dance and the dancers sing if they could only step beyond their self-imposed spheres.

From a technical point of view *Intermedio* is invented from a handful of notes and chords which share certain audible characteristics with the vernacular style of the 1930's. Thus it

is no accident that snatches of popular song emerge from the flow of the music in a natural way, evolving from the tonal texture rather than being arbitrarily imposed on it.

The title *Intermedio* is drawn from references to entertainments of the sixteenth century, where *intermedii* (intermezzi, entremeses, entr'actes) consisting of singing, playing, dancing, juggling and the like, were performed between acts of a spoken play or during courtly festivities. *Intermedii*, as they became more and more elaborate, eventually outgrew their intermediary function. They can be seen as one of the fore-runners of opera.

Intermedio is dedicated to the memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky and was completed under a commission from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress. The first performance took place on October 11, 1974 in New Haven.

The *Serenade* was written in 1958 in response to a commission by the Friends of Music at Yale University and was first performed on Alumni Day, February 1959. The title page bears a dedication to James Hoffman, the young American painter who was mortally ill at the time and soon to die. The dedication was intended as a gesture of devotion to a friend, a noble individual and eloquent artist. The titles *Serenade* and *Nocturne I and II* refer to qualities of the night and reflect the darkness of his passing.

Serenade is a lyric, poetic work, remarkable in no way for its structural devices. No preconceived schemes were used, no preliminary formal plans imposed; the piece grew in an almost improvisatory way, formal decisions being reached in the writing, imposing themselves retroactively as it were, then affecting my further progress. (This is a common procedure in my music in which the direction and significance of things reveal themselves slowly and in the process, not before, and order is a consequent, not an antecedent of the work.) The choice of instruments was likewise not hit upon at once but responded to the demands of the material. At least one movement was sketched before the full complement of players was fixed.

There are four movements (five if one wishes to count separately the Aria contained within the Capriccio). The order of the movements and their basic motion follow no conscious model, nor does the weight of duration of the movements have much to do with classical precedent. Within these movements the formal division are usually simple:

Nocturne I. A-B-A with Coda;

Toccata. Through-composed sectional form;

Capriccio-Aria. The Aria and its Coda stand between the roughly symmetrical halves of the Capriccio. A brief Coda completes the Capriccio. Viewed in the large, the form reduces itself to: A–B (Coda) – A (Coda);

Nocturne II. Through-composed, one section, really an elaboration of the coda of Nocturne I and some incidental progressions found in the Aria. This movement is more a Coda to the whole work than a self-contained piece.

Certain shapes inform the whole work. The number of such generating shapes is very few. Certain features were carried out with some consistency: exact sequences or imitations avoided; all recurrences varied; motivic, phrase and sectional lengths balanced in an asymmetrical way; no doubling of instruments (the surprising exceptions strengthen the rule); any material may appear in any movement, subject to affective transformation; prevailing instrumental timbre is contrast, not blend, permitting clear separation of lines and independent plateaus of action. The listener is frequently offered a choice as to which material is principal or secondary at any given moment. The resultant web in which most parts may have equal weight banishes the idea of mere accompaniment. These ideas are common in dodecaphonic composition, less common outside that sphere.

These are some of the notions I had in mind as I wrote the piece. None of them is dogma, however, and may or may not operate in any other of my compositions. For if the aims and problems of each piece are a surprise, perhaps the solutions will be fresh as well.

Concert Duo for Violin and Piano was begun in Rome in 1955. A version was completed and presented at the annual concert at the American Academy in Rome in 1956, but it was not until the end of 1957 that the Duo achieved its present form.

The first movement is prevailingly dramatic, concerned with rhythmic energy and variation; the essential argument is often carried by the piano whose natural tendency to overbalance the violin is deliberately indulged. The two instruments tend to carry forth their discourse on highly independent planes, and integrated exchange of material is practiced only at the end of the movement. The first page of the movement exposes the characteristic intervals, sonorities and linear shapes which will later be reconsidered, elaborated, and recombined.

The second movement is prevailingly lyric. Here the two instruments pursue a less independent course than before and often share the same material; the violin, rather than the piano, tends to dominate. The climaxes, which arise with sudden and virulent intensity, may be seen as intrusions upon a foreground of sustained, introspective songfulness. The *Duo* was commissioned by Dmitri Hadzi, sculptor, whose attractive idea it was to exchange a work of his sculpture for the composing of this work. The *Concert Duo* is therefore dedicated to him.

The composition of *Three Short Fantasies* spans eight years. The first, fluently sketched in 1963, was evoked by the mysterious sonority of Stravinsky's *Symphonies for Wind Instruments*. For a number of years I set aside this Fantasy, unsure of its value (repelled, attracted, indifferent) until at last it persuaded me. I dedicated it to friends, P and B, under the title of Piccole Armonie.

The second, subtitled *Piccola Fantasia Davenniana*, written during the summer of 1966, was a birthday present for the pianist Ward Davenny. The pitch structure derives from a simple system based on his name. Fantasy III was completed expressly for Robert Miller to play in 1971, and is dedicated to him. His interest in the first two pieces and his unruffled confidence that the new piece would be ready in time helped turn long speculation into reality. I feel the three fantasies live well together, despite the years that separate them, despite the absence of a unifying idea or a systematic program. Like the unplanned elements in a city, the pieces comprise a neighborhood. I say these things because I am interested in unity I cannot explain. Demonstrable unities, methodical constructions often bore me with their simple-minded ingenuities, substituting reasons for the mystery of intuitive coherence.

Memorial Music I was written in 1971 in memory of Dr. Seymour Lustman, a friend and colleague at Yale University. The text, drawn from the prayer "Ki K'shimcho," is traditionally recited on Rosh Hoshanah and Yom Kippur in the context of a memorial service. Almost at once I envisaged a companion piece and with the help of the flutist Samuel Baron assembled a number of related biblical fragments, texts from Isaiah and the Psalms which speak of life as a dream, of man as a flower that fades, and of the eternal nature of God's

word.

Memorial Music II was competed in June 1973, and the work as it stands was first performed at a CBC broadcast concert in Montreal with Susan Davenny Wyner as soloist.

Passage, Part I, was composed in 1983 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Boston-based ensemble Collage. The first performance, conducted by Gunther Schuller, took place in Boston in April, a few days after the score was completed.

Passage I deals with vernacular elements, with utterly familiar musical material. A small collection of ordinary harmonies is set in motion in a manner reminiscent of American popular music of years ago. The harmonic web is surmounted and penetrated by strands and patches of melodic stuff, none of it really self-sufficient or substantial, but all of it conventional. It might not be misleading to compare *Passage* with an ostensibly bland street scene by Edward Hopper or an "American Flag" by Jasper Johns.

Passage I was conceived as the opening movement in a series of movements. As it stands, *Passage I* runs just under 10 minutes.

—*Yehudi Wyner*

Production Notes

Serenade for Seven Instruments
Recorded November 6, 1977, Jordan Hall, New England Conservatory of Music, Boston, MA
Memorial Music I
Memorial Music II
Recorded by Mark Levinson at Dwight Chapel, Yale University, 1975
From CRI SD 161:
Concert Duo for Violin and Piano
From CRI SD 306:
Three Short Fantasies
Produced by Carter Harman.
Recorded by Jerry Bruck
From CRI SD 352:
Intermedio
Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by Fred Paut, March 21, 1976
From CRI SD 550:
Passage I
Produced by Daniel Asia. Recorded by Richard Lawson, October 1985 at the State University of New York, Purchase. Edited by Allan Tucker.
All works published by American composers Alliance (BMI)
CRI *American Masters*
Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton
Digitally remastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Ellen Fitton, engineer at Sony Classical Productions, NYC.