

HENRY BRANT

ANGELS AND DEVILS: Concerto for Flute Solo with Flute Orchestra

Frederick Wilkins, soloist; Henry Brant, conductor

HENRY BRANT (b. Montreal, 1913) began composing in earnest at age eight. In 1929 his family migrated to New York. Their scion promptly won a scholarship at the Juilliard School of Music. Once ensconced, he was to vindicate and happily to supplement this philanthropy by earning every available prize or award for original composition. In the grim spring of 1934 he departed the premises, fully equipped to help supply the Depression's demand for serious music.

Thus it was that Brant entered *popular* music – and not as a composer, either. The business needed arrangers. Brant needed business. So he became an arranger. It was a living, as they say, but also it was to conspire invaluablely with his secret desires, for Brant was then as now an experimentalist – and how nice it was to get paid, albeit modestly, for exploring instrumental parlays never encountered in an orchestration class.

Whenever the hack assignments let up for a while, Brant composed for himself. In 1940 his score for the Ballet Theatre production of *The Great American Goof* provided a tantalizing first taste of “serious” success – along with welcome opportunities to write *Gebrauchsmusik* for radio and films. Soon after that he uncovered a further and finer aptitude. Aaron Copland and Wallingford Riegger had been among his teachers and no doubt the renewing effect of their tandem activity was not lost on him. Whatever the impetus, Brant himself began to teach in 1943 and still does, first at Columbia, then at Bennington College. In the meanwhile he has held two Guggenheim fellowships. And in 1955, this time jointly with his wife, he was the first American in history to receive the million-lire *Prix Radio Italiana*. He wrote the music and she the text of the prize work, which was the now widely performed “stereophonic dramatic oratorio” *December*.

Brant's catalogue is astonishing for its size and diversity. The orthodox forms are well represented, but this composer has ventured far beyond the confines of concerto and symphony. As these remarks are written (fall, 1956) his expeditions into non-synchronous polyrhythm and counterpoint have found their most elaborate expression in an “antiphonal opera”, *The Grand Universal Circus*. Earlier there had been assorted works for chamber ensemble like *Galaxy 2* (1954) and *Signs and Alarms* (1953), both of which were recorded by Columbia in an appropriate coupling with the historic *Ballet mecanique* (1925) of another *enfant terrible* – erstwhile Brant teacher George Antheil. As a fair sample of the burgeoning Brant it will perhaps suffice to note as typical his “three faithful portraits” of 1938 entitled *Chico, Groucho, and Harpo* (Marx) which is scored for tin whistle and small orchestra.

ANGELS AND DEVILS (1931) calls for a virtuosic soloist and a *ritornel* of three piccolos and seven more flutes, two of them altos. The late Georges Barrère played the protagonist's role in the first performance, which was given in New York on February 6th, 1932. The present soloist, Frederick Wilkins, was a member of the premiere ensemble; he and the other participants in this CRI performance are all of them virtuosi in their own rights, especially recruited for the occasion.

Like his fellow composer and Columbia University colleague Otto Luening, Brant is himself an expert flutist. His interest in the instrument is uniquely manifest in a remarkable collection that he has been building since childhood – flutes, fifes, flageolets, whistles, ocarinas, recorders, and pipes of every vintage from every corner of the world, and he can play all of them.

The composer has volunteered the following précis of the “elements ... incorporated into the musical vocabulary of *Angels and Devils*: 1. Harmony. Chords up to eleven notes, including polychords and tone-clusters as well as the normal harmonic vocabulary. 2. Counterpoint. Up to ten independent voices. A double fugue forms the development section of the sonata-structured first movement. The second movement has several sections in eight-part counterpoint climaxed with a dissonant fugato shortly before the end. 3. Style. While predominantly serious, the music has many jazz, circus, and bird-vocabulary aspects, especially in the second and third movements. 4. Sonorities. The specialties of the flute – double-tonguing, triple-tonguing, flutter-tonguing, rhythmated vibrato, multiple trills and runs, and various composites of these elements – are found in a variety of registers. Simple unisons of alto flutes, of low C flutes and of piccolos also are used.”

IRVING FINE

Excerpts from MUSIC FOR PIANO

Irving Fine, piano

MUTABILITY: A Cycle of Six Songs for Contralto and Piano on Poems

by Irene Orgel

Eunice Alberts, contralto; Irving Fine, piano

Heavy with history though it is, Harvard University has shaped several of our most progressive pedagogue-composers. One thinks immediately of Archibald Davison, Edward Burlingame Hill, and notably Walter Piston among those distinguished figures whose careers were built on the banks of the Charles. Properly, any such list should include the name of **IRVING FINE** (b. Boston, 1914, d. Waltham, 1962), who became a full professor at Brandeis University. Fine earned his degrees at Harvard and served on its music faculty for a dozen years.

His subsequent affiliation with forward-looking Brandeis may be taken as proof of his allegiance to the future. The practicality of his scholarship may be inferred in the project that he proposed and fulfilled under a Fulbright grant – an extensive survey of contemporary trends in French music. Over the years he has been variously a Guggenheim fellow, co-director of the Salzburg Seminar for American Studies, and a faculty member of the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood. Also, he has made numerous appearances on the concert stage, including solo engagements with the Boston Symphony and other orchestras.

As composer, Fine has won favor with public and professionals alike for his craftsmanlike, no-nonsense approach to musical problems. He does not eschew the most advanced styles, but always to expressive purpose, *epater le bourgeois* being alien to his way. At one time or another he has addressed himself to virtually all forms, much of his catalogue having grown out of commissions from The Koussevitzky Foundation, The Louisville Orchestra, and such. This recording offers two examples of his intimate writing.

The keyboard suite *Music for Piano* was composed at the MacDowell colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, in mid- 1947. It was intended as a tribute to Nadia Boulanger, who had been one of Fine's distinguished teachers, on her sixtieth birthday. In all there are four movements. Two of them, the *Variations* and the *Waltz-Gavotte*, are excerpted herewith. A later stay at Peterboro, in 1952, resulted in *Mutability* – a cycle of five songs and an epilogue. The lyrics are by Irene Orgel, the young English poet who was a fellow MacDowell colonist that summer. The work had been commissioned by the Creative Concerts Guild. In conception it is essentially Romantic, although Nos. 1 and 3 use a relatively free modern chromaticism, No. 5 a rather stylized diatonic classicism, and No. 6 a twelve-tone technique comfortably within a clearly defined tonality. It is not irrelevant to add that the songs were written with contralto Eunice Alberts expressly in mind.

Notes by JAMES LYONS

(Original notes from CRI LP jacket)