

ANTONIO LORA:
Concerto for Piano and Orchestra

Eva Wollmann, pianist • F. Charles Adler, conducting The Vienna Orchestra

THE COMPOSER-PIANIST, ANTONIO LORA, was born in Italy, but since his early youth, has lived in the United States. His studies in theory and composition were pursued with Rubin Goldmark and Eduardo Trucco; his piano training with Alberto Jonas. In 1924, he made his pianistic debut at Aeolian Hall in New York City.

The following year he began studies at New York University, where his teachers were Philip James and Albert Stoessel. In 1927, having been awarded a Fellowship in Composition at the Juilliard Graduate School of Music, he embarked on a four-year period of advanced study from which he was graduated with honors.

Then, exchanging the role of pupil for that of teacher, he joined the Juilliard faculty and remained there until 1936, when he relinquished his post in order to concertize in Europe. His recital appearances took him to Holland, Switzerland, and Germany, and in addition to his many performances, he found time to supervise presentations of his own music. He was invited by Alexander Spring, then General Manager of the State Opera in Cologne, to write an opera. The outcome was a three-act music drama, "Launcelot and Elaine," with a text by Josephine Fetter Royle, based on Tennyson's "Idylls of the King."

In addition to the opera and the Concerto for Piano and Orchestra here recorded, Lora has composed two Symphonies, a ballet, a light opera based on "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," an operetta for children, numerous chamber works and instrumental pieces, and about fifty songs.

Concerning the latter, the late Marion Bauer wrote:

"The style of Antonio Lora's songs is dominantly impressionistic—not the impressionism of Debussy or Ravel, but of the modern Italians. This impressionism shows more in his accompaniments than in the melodic line. His harmony is definitely coloristic and chromatic; the deft hand of an excellent pianist is evident in his treatment of the accompaniments, which are

always effective musically, and occasionally on the difficult side. They are more influenced by harmonic principles than by contrapuntal ones, and he knows the secret of unification by the use of reiterated pattern. The composer understands the possibilities of the voice, and his music is well written for this medium.”

The CONCERTO FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA was composed in 1948, while Lora was a member of the faculty at Ohio State University. It is cast in three movements, of which the composer has given the following descriptive analysis:

Maestoso-Allegro

“The piano, opens with a series of powerful introductory chords and octaves, followed by the announcement of the first theme in the orchestra. This pattern is reiterated before an episode leads us into the second theme, which is again announced by the strings and repeated by the piano. The development is animated and vigorous. There is interesting interplay between solo instruments and orchestra, culminating in an orchestral climax and the cadenza. The recapitulation, with foreshortening of both themes, leads to a brilliant coda.”

Andantino, quasi Andante

“The theme proper is preceded by contrasting solo utterances from piano and front orchestra. An obbligato-like thread in the piano’s upper register decorates an elegiac theme which the strings sing out, growing in intensity until the solo instrument breaks forth with a surging and impassioned presentation of the subject matter. There is a brief respite before a restatement of the opening measures.”

Allegro molto-Burlesco

“Like the first movement, the third is cast in the traditional Sonata Allegro form. After a few octave passages in the piano, the orchestra launches into the theme proper, which typifies the articulate and rhythmic nature of the entire movement. The jaunty mood is sustained with no letup, save for the contrasting second theme and the short cadenza. If the orchestral texture is restrained and rather subdued, this was intentional, for I wished the sonorities and crystalline tones of the piano to be heard at all times above the orchestra.”

ADOLPH WEISS:
Theme and Variations for Orchestra

F. Charles Adler, conducting The Vienna Orchestra

WHEN ADOLPH WEISS' THEME AND VARIATIONS FOR ORCHESTRA were premiered in April, 1936, by the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra under Pierre Monteux, Alfred Frankenstein, critic of the San Francisco Chronicle, described them in these terms:

“Weiss succeeded in combining the utmost scholastic craft with powerful and poignant expressive values. On the purely musical side, the impression of the first hearing is one of tremendous concentration of energy. The theme is put through a series of brilliantly designed transformations, but there is no meaningless elaboration of unessentials. Astonishing twists of texture are unfolded; new and interesting orchestral devices are revealed.”

An interesting bit of information not mentioned in this quotation is that the variations are based on the sequence of stanzas in Whitman's “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed.” The music does not describe the stanzas, nor could it be called programmatic. But, in the composer's own words, “The spiritual content of the poem fixed the sequence of musical ideas as well as the form of the composition.”

The variations are twelve in number, growing out of the original theme, a broad, highly-arched melody which progresses mainly in sevenths. The first phrases of the theme are stated by a solo bassoon, supported by a richly swelling texture of strings. The high woodwinds are introduced momentarily, still supported by strings. Finally, in the theme's closing portion, the bassoon reaffirms its opening phrase; a triplet motif which has played an important part in the melody is again brought forward, and the section ends. At the conclusion of the entire work, this same theme is recapitulated literally, giving a sense of completion to the form and acting as a re-orienting point for the ear.

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Adolph Weiss was born in Baltimore, Md. He studied with Cornelius Rybner, C. C. Mueller, and A. Liliental in New York; with Adolph Weidig and Theodore Otterstroem in Chicago; and with Arnold Schoenberg in the master class of the Berlin Akademie der Kuenste (1924-1927). He now teaches composition at the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music and Arts and is a bassoonist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. Among honors accorded him have been a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1931 and an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1955.

That the Theme and Variations for Orchestra are based on serial techniques may perhaps be attributed to the composer's studies with Arnold Schoenberg. But Weiss is a 12-tonist in only a very free sense. His familiarity with the "numerology" of serial writing is such that his compositions are created first in a purely numerical form, written in columns of digits and time-symbols on the pages of a simple, loose-leaf notebook. Then, when the work has been completed in every detail, it is transcribed upon score paper in conventional notation.

This does not mean, however, that the composer is bound by any logic of numbers. In his original tone row, he finds endless stimulation for new musical ideas. His attitude toward composition is fun-loving and spontaneous, and he is visibly enamored of pure musical fantasy. Somehow, in his career as a composer, he has acquired such an uncanny facility with numbers that he can handle them as easily as the usual composer handles notes. They remain, however, symbols for sounds, and not an end in themselves. For Weiss, they constitute a kind of shorthand — a labor saver, and a device for cleaning the slate of anything which might, because of its traditional associations, influence his composer's eye.

Among other of Weiss' works are "The Libation Bearers", a choreographic cantata or opera, scored for large orchestra, chorus, and four solo voices; a Suite for Large Orchestra; a Scherzo for Orchestra called "American Life"; a Chamber Symphony; three String Quartets; a Quintet for Winds; and Music for Brass and Percussion. His latest work is "Five Pieces for Violin and Piano", based on Japanese court music. These were commissioned in the Spring of 1956 when Weiss toured the Orient with the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

—Notes by Lester Trimble

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)