

CRI 118

QUINCY PORTER

String Quartet No. 8

The Stanley Quartet of the University of Michigan

Gilbert Ross, Emil Raab, violins

Robert Courte, viola – Oliver Edel, 'cello

QUINCY PORTER is a real Connecticut Yankee who first saw the light of day in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1897. A direct descendant of the great New England divine Jonathan Edwards, and son and grandson of Yale professors, Porter himself graduated from Yale in 1919, and from the Yale School of Music where he studied with Parker and Smith, in 1921.

He continued work in composition with Vincent D'Indy and later with Bloch at the Cleveland Institute, where he became Bloch's assistant, and later still Director of the Department of Theory.

This composer has been Professor of Music at Vassar College, Dean of the New England Conservatory, and since 1946, a professor at Yale University, where he still is: He has been active as a chamber music performer all his life, his instrument being the viola. He is a Fellow of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, has been commissioned by the Coolidge Foundation (Library of Congress) and has enjoyed many prizes and awards, among them a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Pulitzer Prize.

Porter's works include a Symphony and other large orchestral pieces, the incidental music for several plays, and a big batch of chamber works, in which medium – particularly that of the string quartet – he has achieved a rather special reputation.

Quincy Porter composed his Eighth String Quartet at his 'music hut' on Squam Lake and in his studio in New Haven in the spring of 1950. It was commissioned by the Stanley Quartet of the University of Michigan and was first performed by that group in Ann Arbor on July 25th of that year. The Stanley Quartet also played it on many other occasions, and it has been in the repertory of the Budapest Quartet ever since they first performed it at the Library of Congress in March 1951.

In reviewing the first performance of this work, Ross Lee Finney wrote as follows: "Regardless of its appearance on the program — Lento, Allegro, Adagio, Molto espressivo, this work is in one movement. There are, of course, different tempos and different moods, but the formal design is found in the flow of one idea into the next and the lovely arch of the entire work, ending where it began. The idiom, as one would expect from Porter, is completely free of the affectations that pass for modern. He is primarily the writer of beautiful melodic lines, but they always suffuse into subtle, iridescent harmonic colors. The quality in the music must be accepted as a special gift to the listener from an exceedingly sensitive ear."

Quincy Porter's seventh and eighth Quartets have recently been published by the Valley Music Press, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., from whence miniature scores may be obtained.

ELLIOTT CARTER

Eight Etudes and a Fantasy

For Woodwind Quartet—1950

Members of the New York Woodwind Quintet:

Murray Panitz, flute; David Glazer, clarinet;

Jerome Roth, oboe; Bernard Garfield, bassoon

ELLIOTT CARTER was born in New York in 1908. He received his Master of Arts degree from Harvard in 1930, embarking thereafter on his specialized career as composer. His masters in this subject in the United States were Walter Piston and Gustav Holst; in Paris he worked with Nadia Boulanger from 1932 to 1935.

In 1936 he returned to the United States to become Music Director of the Ballet Caravan, for which organization he wrote his first ballet, 'Pocahontas.' Carter has held two

Guggenheim Fellowships and a Prix de Rome, as well as many other prizes and awards. He has written extensively for *Modern Music*, *The Saturday Review*, and the *New York Herald Tribune*. He is a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

This composer's career has been one of steady growth over the last twenty years, and he enjoys today a reputation firmly based on solid scholarship and a style and outlook without compromise.

The output is already quite large, notable items being the Symphony No. 1, the ballets 'Pocahontas' and 'The Minotaur' (this latter written for the Ballet Society's 1947 season), the Piano Sonata and the Cello Sonata widely played by Webster Aitken and Bernard Greenhouse respectively, and various choral, orchestral and chamber pieces of magnitude, of which a String Quartet won first prize in the Contours Internationale de Quatuors à Cordes in Liège, Belgium;

Much of Carter's music is deeply expressive, gaining immediate reaction from audiences both here and abroad; some few works, the one here recorded being perhaps among them, are thought by some to be somewhat forbidding in their austerity, for the intellectual quotient runs high. All of Carter's works are characterized by an impeccable craftsmanship and a sense of responsibility to esthetic standards that is the more to be appreciated because it is rare.

The present work 'Eight Etudes and a Fantasy' was born out of rather unusual circumstances which the writer Abraham Skulsky relates as follows: "At a class demonstration of the woodwind instruments, the composer was disappointed in the examples his students brought in. So during the class he wrote out some experimental passages on the blackboard for the woodwind players to try. Later these passages were worked up into 'Eight Etudes and a Fantasy' for woodwind quartet, a series of pieces that reveal an unusual command of writing for the instruments, and a knowledge of their special effects, some of which have not yet reached orchestration books. The striking methods of combining the instruments demonstrate Carter's aural imagination at work in the domain of special sounds. One etude which usually provokes comment is built entirely on one note, contrasting the colors of the flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon as they attack, increase or diminish in volume, alone or combined

together. Another is a mosaic made up of a two-note motive and a rest tossed about among the performers, out of which themes, passage work, an entire piece is built on the pattern. The whole concludes with a contrapuntal fantasy which joins many ideas from the etudes into a coherent whole.”

This work was premiered at a concert sponsored by the American Composers Alliance at the Museum of Modern Art on Oct. 28th, 1952, the performers on that occasion being those here recorded.

—Notes by P. GLANVILLE-HICKS

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)