

HALL OVERTON: Second String Quartet

EZRA LADERMAN: String Quartet

THE BEAUX-ARTS STRING QUARTET:

Gerald Tarack and Alan Martin, violins;

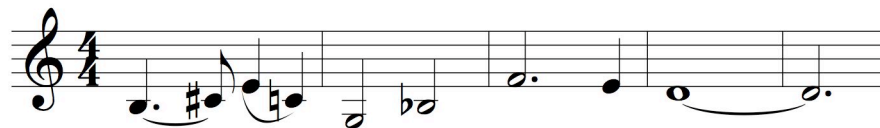
Carl Eberl, viola; Joseph Tekula, cello

HALL OVERTON was born on February 23, 1920 in Bangor, Michigan and died in New York November 24, 1972. At the time of his death he was Visiting Professor of Composition at the Yale School of Music and a faculty member of the Juilliard School. While at the Chicago Musical College he studied counterpoint with Gustave Dunkelberger and later, composition with Vincent Persichetti at the Juilliard School of Music. Subsequent composition teachers were Wallingford Riegger and Darius Milhaud. Overton was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1955 which enabled him to complete his *Symphony for Strings*, thereby fulfilling a Koussevitzky Foundation Commission for the work. In addition to the Symphony, he has written a great deal of chamber music: *Nonage*, a ballet; two string quartets; the Piano Sonata No. 1, several songs and a one act opera, *The Enchanted Pear Tree* based on a story from Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

Overton has always shown a great deal of interest in the field of jazz, both as a performer and an arranger. As a pianist he has recorded with such jazz luminaries as Stan Getz, Teddy Charles, Jimmy Roney and Oscar Pettiford, and recently collaborated with Thelonious Monk in scoring for the latter's orchestra.

Elements of his earlier teachers as well as certain aspects of his jazz interest have found their way into Overton's music. At no time, however, do these influences preclude his own superb imagination and originality. One reviewer, commenting on a performance of his *Second String Quartet* that took place in 1958, noted a "smoldering intensity underlying its surface lyricism," while another was struck by "the composer's facility and affinity for strings." He continued, "Its voice-leading has logic, its musical content lyricism and spirit." All this is valid, but the imagination that Overton uses in introducing and developing the material of the Quartet is also worthy of some discussion.

The work consists of two movements marked *Allegro, cantabile* and *Allegro con spirito* respectively, although he has managed to slip a short slow section, a quasi-third movement in the midst of the second. The piece opens somewhat *fugato* with the following short theme introduced by the second violin:



It is then picked up by the others, one by one, with certain rhythmic changes in each voice. Thus, even at the outset, there is considerable transformation of the thematic material which is subsequently broken up and developed by fragments. The chief formal characteristic of this more or less monothematic movement is its pyramid design which reaches its apex nearly three fourths of the way through and gradually subsides to a *meno mosso* Closing Section.

The second movement is a *quasi-Rondo* with the aforementioned concealed third movement. The movement consists of short motives or theme fragments that are introduced, toyed with and, on occasion, allowed to become full themes. The technique used is subtle and, although not new, is wonderfully handled. A motivic element is suggested that may not gain prominence until further on in the movement, while some melodies that have been stated and dropped are re-introduced. Overton presents sections that are strongly chordal one moment and abruptly follows these with passages that are wholly melodic in nature, nearly always carrying this material on an accompaniment of rhythmic drive and intensity. The nostalgic and sometimes whimsical slow section is followed by a Coda that consists of nothing less than a condensation of the entire movement.

WHEN considering the average age of the “successful” composer today, one rarely thinks of the artist of 35 years as anything but a beginner. Ezra Laderman was born on June 29, 1924 and therefore is in his mid-thirties, however he is anything but a beginner. With two Guggenheim Fellowships, a Columbia Broadcasting System commission for a TV opera, performances of his *Violin and Piano Sonata* by Morini and Firkusny and a continual flow of commissions already to his credit, Laderman is rapidly earning a reputation that covers this country and Europe.

A native New Yorker, all of his musical training was received in that city. He graduated from the famous High School of Music and Art, did his undergraduate work at Brooklyn College and received his Master of Arts from Columbia University. Rather than as mere teachers, Laderman lists Otto Luening, Douglas Moore and Wallingford Riegger as “individuals that have given me considerable encouragement.” He was also a student of Stefan Wolpe at Brooklyn College.

In addition to the *Sonata for Violin and Piano* previously mentioned and the television opera, *Sara* (based on the biblical story of Abraham, his childless wife, Sarah and his concubine, Hagar), Laderman has written considerable music for the dancer, Jean Erdman, a great deal of chamber music including a Piano Trio, a Flute Sonata and the *Theme, Variations and Finale* for wind and string octet, also recorded by Composers Recordings, Inc. (CRI-130) and such larger works as the *Leipzig Symphony*, a Piano Concerto and the *Sinfonia*. He is now at the American Academy in Rome working on his *Second String Quartet*, having completed an as yet untitled orchestral work in Israel during the summer of 1959.

The *String Quartet* is in three movements marked: *Adagio con amore-con moto*, *Adagio* and *Vivace*. The piece opens with a canon at the octave that forms an introduction to the movement. Following this the first theme is stated in what might be considered a sonata form. The major germinal element of this theme, a motive that can be traced throughout the quartet, is as follows:



A second theme is suggested by the augmentation of the principle one except that now it takes on the character of a graceful cantilena accompanied by a counter-theme (found also underlying the first theme) that has its roots in the introduction. Following a brief transitional section utilizing the material of the introduction, the movement returns to the themes of the Allegro closing out with a rhythmically driving and intense final thrust.

Wispy arpeggios form the accompaniment of the second movement against which a strongly intoned viola entrance presents us with the first notes of the quartet introduction. After two false starts the first violin is permitted to state the main melody of the movement. This section is a model of subtle rubato and the veiled quality of the accompaniment is never allowed to obscure the melodic configuration.

The final movement is fast, exciting and direct. The material, though familiar, is still more varied in its presentation, but never obscure.

The Quartet was premiered by the Beaux-Arts Quartet in New York City on January 19, 1959.

Notes by Don Jennings

DURING the summer of 1955, while in attendance at Pierre Monteux' school for conductors in Hancock, Maine, Gerald Tarack and Joseph Tekula began the initial discussions which led to the formation of the Beaux-Arts String Quartet. Not quite two years later, in March of 1957, the Quartet gave its first recital in New York's Carnegie Recital Hall. The initial press and public reaction was strongly favorable with the result that the ensemble subsequently programmed a three-concert series in the fall of that year.

Each concert given by this striking group has been enthusiastically received across the country. In addition to presenting those staples of the standard repertory, the Beaux-Arts Quartet has given numerous premieres and performances of contemporary American and European works including compositions by David Diamond, Lester Trimble, Arthur Foote, Arthur Honegger, Werner Egk, Henry Brant and the quartets featured on this recording.

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)