

PAUL PISK:

Passacaglia

PAUL AMADEUS PISK was born in 1893 in Vienna and educated in that city. He studied piano with J. Epstein and theory with Schreker and Schoenberg, receiving his Ph.D. in musicology at the University of Vienna. He came to the United States in 1937 where he studied and worked with Guido Adler, one of the real leaders in modern historical research in music. Since then he has been Professor of Theory and Chairman of the Department of Music at the University of Redlands, and has been a visiting professor at various other universities in the country. Presently, he is Professor of Musicology at the University of Texas. Dr. Pisk, today, enjoys an enviable reputation both as a composer and as a musicologist. Besides being the editor of numerous historical publications of music and author of several articles on related subjects, he is a prolific composer, having been published extensively in this country and in Europe. Included in this remarkable catalogue of works are: *Partita*, *Symphonic Overture* and *Divertimento* for orchestra, several vocal works with orchestra, a great deal of piano and string ensemble music as well as much choral and vocal music.

The *Passacaglia*, Op. 50 was written in 1944 and premiered by the Zurich Radio Orchestra with Jacques Monod conducting. Pisk uses the traditional passacaglia form: three beats to a measure, utilizing an eight bar ground bass (theme). The form, however, bends to Pisk's strong imagination and masterly craftsmanship. Elements of the theme that might begin in the bass, for instance, may be found in some other voice for a beat or so. He introduces sections in 4/4 and 2/4, always retaining the feeling of the theme; never does one lose the characteristic quality and impulse of the passacaglia. Sonority and richness of instrumentation are also very exciting and rewarding aspects of this work, with Pisk's gift for brass writing particularly in evidence.

PAUL SCHWARTZ:

Concertino for Chamber Orchestra

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Sarabande with variations**
- 3. Finale (Allegro con brio)**

THE Concertino for Chamber Orchestra by Paul Schwartz was composed in 1937, revised in 1947 and premiered in 1957. The question is asked eternally: why must a work of this quality wait twenty years for a performance, for a single hearing? There is, of course, rarely an answer worth considering,

Paul Schwartz was born in Vienna in 1907. The pursuit of studies at the Vienna State Academy of Music earned for him diplomas in piano and composition and master diplomas in composition and conducting. In 1933 he received a Ph.D. in Musicology from the University of Vienna. Among his teachers in composition at that time were Franz Schmidt and Ernst Krenek.

In 1938 Schwartz came to the United States and was appointed chairman of the Music Department at Bard College, a post which he retained until 1947 when he was offered a similar post at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. Today, he is also Professor of Church Music at Bexley Hall, the divinity school of Kenyon College.

Among his best known and most widely performed compositions are the *String Quartet in Two Movements* (1936), the *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1941), the *Chamber Concerto for Two Pianos* (1944), an *Overture to a Shakespeare Comedy* (1948) and the *Variations on an Ohio Folk Tune* (1952). His chamber opera *The Experiment*, with libretto by Kathryn Schwartz, was premiered in 1956.

The *Concertino for Chamber Orchestra*, which had its American premiere in Tucson, Arizona in 1958 is divided into three movements. The first, called Introduction consists of two contrasting themes, the first stated by the strings, the second by the winds, that alternate twice at which time the movement closes with all instruments united in a modified version of the first theme.

The second movement, entitled Sarabande with Variations has for its theme an extended melody of great warmth and dignity that, while managing to retain all the “established” requisites of a first-rate tune, combines with a richly imaginative harmonic development and instrumental voicing resulting in a highly original and well-wrought basis for the three variations that follow. These variations, named Nocturne, Ostinato and Lament are as their names suggest. Each of the instruments has an opportunity to perform in a solo capacity terminating with a short, straight-forward cadenza that leads without break into the Finale.

The Finale, marked *Allegro con brio*, is precisely that in character. It combines certain elements of the fugue and the rondo, i.e. the fugal exposition and episodes serve as the refrain sections for the rondo, while less contrapuntal interludes serve as contrasting secondary themes.

The work is scored for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, two French horns, strings (except string bass) and piano.

CHARLES MILLS:

Prologue and Dithyramb

CHARLES MILLS, born in 1914, is a member of that generation of mid-1930 musicians who were clearly attempting to create an American musical language. He had begun to study piano and composition at the age of fifteen working with the traditional classical models, learning in the European manner. Four years later, having since moved to New York City, he began formal study with Max Garfield and subsequently with Aaron Copland, Roger Sessions and Roy Harris. It is a tribute to the wisdom of his teachers that he was allowed to develop his own personal style of classicism, to develop his idea that “the sonata form is eternal though subject to change and that the diatonic system has certainly not been fully explored.” Regarding this style, the late Paul Rosenfeld once wrote: “It is plainly a thing of deep moods and an aristocratic reticence, even dry subjective sentiment; finely melodic, with frequently recitative-like textures achieved by continuous melodic outgrowths. It is definitely diatonic, but sharpened by hold transcendences in chord-progressions, and exquisitely idiomatic, exacting—refreshingly so—particularly at a period when composers are suavely avoiding the creation of fresh demands on instrumental technics . . .”

The *Prologue and Dithyramb* was commissioned by the Cleveland Chamber Music Society in 1951 as a string quartet and revised to its present form in 1954. The *Prologue* is a slow, but fluid movement making excellent use of string texture and sonority. The instruments are required to sing in long arching lines or to blend in rich chords burst with resonance. The *Dithyramb* (originally a Greek choral song in honor of Dionysus and one that is full of wild emotion and enthusiasm) is somewhat more controlled than the definition of the word would suggest and yet, it is wonderfully lively and quite intricate. In short the work has “originality and a certain purposefulness in the writing that gives it potency and appeal.”

MIRIAM GIDEON:

Symphonia Brevis

1. **Allegro energico**
2. **Andante (Scherzo)—Chorale**

GEORGE PERLE, a composer and colleague of Miriam Gideon, once wrote: “I recall a conversation between her and a fellow composer who was complaining about the composer’s situation in the world today—a world, he felt, in which it was impossible for a serious composer to find any motivation for composing music. Miss Gideon replied, ‘If you can relate tones to each other in such a way that they belong together, that’s enough of a reason for composing.’ The answer tells us a good deal about her, as a person and as a composer.”

Miriam Gideon is an American composer by birth and training. Born in Colorado, her musical studies took place mainly in the East. In addition to an opera, *Fortunato* based on a play by the Quintero brothers, she has written a string quartet, a sonata for viola and piano, five piano suites, settings for solo voice and chamber group of Sonnets from Shakespeare, the *Hound of Heaven* (Francis Thompson), Sonnets from *Fatal Interview* (Edna St. Vincent Millay) and numerous songs, choruses and shorter chamber works. Her music has been performed by leading orchestras, chamber groups and soloists in the United States, Europe and South America.

The *Symphonia Brevis* was written in 1953 for the Orchestra of the College of the City of New York. The first performance was conducted by Fritz Jahoda in May 1953. The work is divided into two movements marked *Allegro energico* and *Andante (Scherzo)-Chorale* respectively. In spite of its brevity, the *Symphonia* has the proportions and emotional range of a symphony. Each movement is terse and highly charged.

Notes by D. Jennings

RADIO ORCHESTRA OF ZURICH, SWITZERLAND
Jacques Monod, conductor

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)

