

ALAN HOVHANESS:
Meditation on Orpheus
The Japan Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra
William Strickland, conducting

ALAN HOVHANESS is one of those composers whose music seems to prove the inexhaustibility of the ancient modes and of the seven tones of the diatonic scale. He has made for himself one of the most individual styles to be found in the work of any American composer, recognizable immediately for its exotic flavor, its masterly simplicity, and its constant air of discovering unexpected treasures at each turn of the road.

Meditation on Orpheus, scored for full symphony orchestra, is typical of Hovhaness' work in the delicate construction of its sonorities. A single, *pianissimo* tam-tam note, a tone from a solo horn, an evanescent *pizzicato* murmur from the violins (*senza misura*)—these ethereal elements tinge the sound of the middle and lower strings at the work's beginning and evoke an ambience of mysterious dignity and sensuousness which continues and grows throughout the *Meditation*. At intervals, a strange rushing sound grows to a crescendo and subsides, interrupting the flow of smooth melody for a moment, and then allowing it to resume, generally with a subtle change of scene. The *senza misura* pizzicato which is heard at the opening would seem to be the germ from which this unusual passage has grown, for the "rushing" sound—dynamically intensified at each appearance—is produced by the combination of fast, metrically unmeasured figurations, usually played by the strings. The composer indicates not that these passages are to be played in 2/4, 3/4, etc. but that they are to last "about 20 seconds, ad lib." The notes are to be "rapid but not together." They produce a fascinating effect, and somehow give the impression that other worldly significances are hidden in the juxtaposition of flow and mystical interruption. Hovhaness has produced many compellingly evocative works, and the *Meditation on Orpheus* belongs with the finest of them.

About the Composer:

Alan Hovhaness was born in Somerville, Massachusetts on March 8, 1911, the son of a chemistry professor, Haroutiun Hovhaness Chakmakjian, and Madeline Scott Chakmakjian. It was his mother who first thought his name sounded too foreign for the environs of Boston, and hence the change to Alan Hovhaness. When he was five, his family moved to Arlington, and as soon as he could read music he began to write.

Hovhaness' early piano studies were with Adelaide Procter and Heinrich Gebhard, both of whom encouraged him greatly. His first studies in composition were with Frederick Converse at the New England Conservatory of Music. In 1942, he won a scholarship to study at Tanglewood with Martinu.

From 1948 to 1951 he was on the faculty of the Boston Conservatory of Music. Following this he moved to New York, where he now lives, devoting his time almost exclusively to composition. He has received commissions and honors from almost every institution equipped to accord them, including the Fromm Foundation, the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Louisville Orchestra.

JOSEPH WOOD:
Poem for Orchestra
Asahi Orchestra of Tokyo
Richard Korn, conducting

IF one were to place a stylistic label on the music of Joseph Wood, “*neo-romantic*” would be the one which would come to mind. Certainly, the *Poem for Orchestra*, which was completed in April of 1950, would fit comfortably into that category. It is a mellifluous work, suave in orchestral usage, and full of accessible melody. But this tells only part of the story, for, in addition, the *Poem* is as neatly organized thematically as it is harmonically warm. Not one bar is superfluous, not one idea fails in its duty of thematically integrating with the work as a whole. For all its feeling of simpleness, the work is spare and tight. There is no inflation, no sprawling, no sign of anything less than the highest level of compositional care.

About the Composer:

Joseph Wood is a composer of considerable stature from those twin standpoints of expressivity and craftsmanship. Such a work as his *Symphony No. 3* was considered by the New York Herald Tribune in 1958 as “a thoroughly distinguished and handsome creation” and the paper went on to state further “that it would be no exaggeration to place it in the very top rank of American Symphonies.” Those who know Wood’s music are of a similar opinion and though this group of listeners and musicians is small in number it continues to grow with each new performance. Wood was educated at Bucknell University, the Institute of Musical Art, the Juilliard Graduate School and the Columbia University Graduate School and was a holder of several Fellowships from these schools. He has subsequently been a radio staff composer and arranger, conductor and teacher. Wood is currently on the musical faculty of Oberlin College in Ohio.

HOMER KELLER: Symphony No. 3

The Japan Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra
William Strickland, conducting

FOR the world premiere of his *Symphony No. 3*, by the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra, composer Homer Keller provided the following description of the work:

Movement I. The *Allegro risoluto* tersely states two themes. The first is introduced by the trombones; the second is given out by the solo oboe. After woodwind and solo horn comment, a fugal treatment, mainly of the first theme, leads to the movement’s climax and thence to a recapitulation of both themes.

Movement II. The slow movements (two and four) are contemplative and poetic in spirit. By contrast with the close-knit statements and developments which characterized the other movements, in these, one idea leads freely to the next. In the second (*Andante*), the sequence of events leads from a chordal string idea, through a section consisting of solo bits scattered throughout the orchestra, a short string aria, a hymn-like section, a somewhat livelier section with a folksong and dance flavor, to a returning statement of the first chordal string idea.

Movement III. The *Allegro giusto* is a short, folk-like dance based on material from the *Allegro risoluto* movement.

Movement IV. The *Andante tranquillo* also comments on material from the *Allegro giusto* movement, besides introducing a new, *Moderato* theme which is taken up, later, in the last movement. It is quiet, reflective, and reminiscent of a pastorale.

Movement V. The *Allegro con spirito* summarizes and further comments on material from preceding movements, bringing the work to a lively close.

About the Composer:

Homer Keller received his B. Mus. and M. Mus. degrees from the Eastman School of Music, where he studied composition with Howard Hanson and Bernard Rogers. He also studied with Arthur Honegger in Paris. Mr. Keller's *First Symphony* was premiered in Carnegie Hall by the New York Philharmonic under John Barbirolli, in 1940. His *Second Symphony* was performed by the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington, D.C. in 1950. Howard Hanson and the Eastman-Rochester Symphony have recorded Keller's *Serenade for Clarinet and Strings* for Mercury Records.

Notes by Lester Trimble

LIKE the renowned Leopold Stokowski, his predecessor at St. Bartholomew's Church in New York City, William Strickland's professional beginnings are rooted in the music of the church and especially the organ. His artistic growth has paralleled Stokowski's further in the manner in which he has devoted most of his mature musical life to the commissioning and performance of contemporary music. Strickland's work with the venerable New York Oratorio Society has brought him considerable recognition as a choral conductor, in addition to which he has served as founder-director of the NYA Little Orchestra, conductor of the Nashville Symphony and has "guested" extensively throughout Germany and Austria. At present he is appearing with several of the outstanding orchestras in the Far East.

RICHARD KORN is doubtless one of the most rapidly rising conductors on the American musical scene. His career, which has ranged from the study of composition with Bernard Wagenaar to his receipt of fellowships in conducting at the Juilliard Graduate School, the National Orchestral Association and Serge Koussevitsky's master class at Tanglewood, was capped by his recent formation of *The Orchestra of America* which in its initial year has presented five major concerts in New York City's Carnegie Hall devoted entirely to American music from William Fry, and Louis Gottschalk to Leon Kirchner and Gordon Binkerd. The enthusiastic reception given this enterprise in addition to the increased number of guest stints throughout this country, Europe and the Far East attest to Korn's considerable success as a conductor.

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)