

CRI-141

Yehudi Wyner: *Serenade for Seven Instruments*

Ralph Shapey: *Evocation*

1. Yehudi Wyner: *Serenade for Seven Instruments* (14:30)
Julius Baker, flute; Ralph Froelich, horn; Robert Nagel, trumpet;
Keith Brown, trombone; Harry Zaratian, viola; Charles McCracken, cello;
Yehudi Wyner, piano; Werner Torkanowsky, conductor
2. Ralph Shapey: *Evocation* for violin with Piano and Percussion (17:45)
Matthew Raimondi, violin; Yehudi Wyner, piano;
Paul Price, percussion

Yehudi Wyner: *Serenade for Seven Instruments*

“The *Serenade* was written in 1958 in response to a commission by the Friends of Music at Yale University and was first performed on Alumni Day, February, 1959. The title page bears a dedication to James Hoffman, the young American painter who was mortally ill at the time and soon to die. The dedication was intended as a gesture of devotion to a friend, a noble individual and eloquent artist. The titles *Serenade* and *Nocturne I* and *II* refer to qualities of the night and reflect the darkness of his passing.

“*Serenade* is a lyric, poetic work, remarkable in no way for its structural devices. No preconceived schemes were used, no preliminary formal plans imposed; the piece grew in an almost improvisatory way, formal decisions being reached in the writing, imposing themselves retroactively as it were, then affecting further progress. (This is a common procedure in my music in which the direction and significance of timings reveal themselves slowly and in the process, not before, and order is a consequence, not an antecedent, of the work.) The choice of instruments was likewise not hit upon at once but responded to the demands of the material. At least one movement was sketched before the full complement of players was fixed.

“There are four movements (five, if one wishes to count separately the Aria contained within the Capriccio). The order of the movements and their basic motion follow no conscious model, nor does the weight or duration of the movements have much to do with classical precedent. Within these movements the formal divisions are usually simple:

Nocturne I. A-B-A with Coda

Toccata. Through-composed sectional form

Capriccio-Aria. The Aria and its Coda stand between the roughly symmetrical halves of the Capriccio. A brief Coda completes the Capriccio. Viewed in the large, the form reduces itself to:

A-B (Coda)-A (Coda)

Nocturne II. Through-composed, one section, really an elaboration of the Coda of Nocturne I and some incidental progressions found in the Aria. This movement is more a Coda to the whole work than a self-contained piece.

“Certain shapes inform the whole work, but these tend to be general rather than specific. The following example, found at the beginning, has some importance:

Nocturne I



generating as it does many motivic and thematic derivations in all movements, among them:

Toccata



Capriccio



Aria



Other fragments engender other related motives and lines. The number of such generating shapes is very few. It would serve no purpose here to list them.

“Certain features were carried out with some consistency: exact sequences or imitations avoided; all recurrences varied; motivic, phrase and sectional lengths balanced in an asymmetrical way; no doubling of instruments (the surprising exceptions strengthen the rule); any material may appear in any movement, subject to affective transformation; prevailing instrumental timbre is contrast, not blend, permitting clear separation of lines and independent plateaus of action. The listener is frequently offered a choice as to which material is principal or secondary at any given moment. The resultant web in which most parts may have equal weight banishes the idea of mere accompaniment. These ideas are common in dodecaphonic composition, less common outside that sphere.

“These are some of the notions I had in mind as I wrote the piece. None of them is dogma, however, and may or may not operate in any other of my compositions. For if the aims and problems of each piece are a surprise, perhaps the solutions will be fresh as well.”

The preceding observations were written expressly for this recording by the composer.

Yehudi Wyner was born in Calgary, Canada, in 1929, but his musical education was completed mainly in the United States. Following intensive schooling at the Juilliard School of Music, Yale College, the Yale School of Music, and Harvard University, he spent three years in Rome fulfilling requirements for the Hertz Memorial Fellowship in Composition (from the University of California at Berkeley) and the Rome Prize Fellowship.

He has since been active as a performer (he is the pianist on both sides of this album), teacher, and composer. As the latter, Wyner has come to the attention of a widening audience of musicians and listeners. His list of works includes the *Concert Duo* for violin and piano; the *Passover Offering* for flute, clarinet, trombone, and cello; music for piano and for organ, and works for solo voice and chorus.

Ralph Shapey

Evocation for Violin with Piano and Percussion

Ralph Shapey was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1921. He began his musical studies as a violinist at the age of seven and subsequently became a member of the Philadelphia National Youth Administration Symphony Orchestra. He was later appointed youth conductor and then assistant conductor of this orchestra. At that time he also began serious study in composition with Stefan Wolpe. Still later, Shapey appeared as a guest conductor with the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Robin Hood Dell.

After three years of service with the United States Army, Shapey came to New York City for further study as a composer. Commencing in 1951 with an Honorable Mention from the George Gershwin Award for his *Fantasy for Orchestra*, he has been awarded a long list of prizes and fellowships including the Frank Huntington Beebe Award for work and travel in Europe, MacDowell Fellowships, the Alma Morgenthau Commission for his String Quartet No. 4, the Dimitri Mitropoulos Commission for *Challenge—The Family of Man* for symphony orchestra, and a Fromm Foundation Commission for his *Dimensions* for soprano and twenty-three instruments. He was chosen to represent the United States at the 1958 ISCM Festival in Strasbourg, France, with his Concerto for Clarinet and Chamber Group. His catalogue contains five String Quartets, sonatas for various instruments, piano works, compositions for symphony orchestra, and chamber works for various combinations of different sizes.

Shapey teaches extensively both in New York music schools and at his private studio. He has continued his conducting career placing greatest emphasis on newer and more difficult works. His music has been and continues to be performed throughout this country and Europe.

The present work, *Evocation* for Violin with Piano and Percussion, was written between January and March of 1959 for the violinist Matthew Raimondi. Its three movements are headed: I Recitative—with intense majesty, II with humor, III with tenderness with intense majesty—cadenza. It was premiered in New York City on March 26, 1960; the performers on that occasion are also featured on this recording.

About his work Shapey says: “In my music, the initial space-time image generates through expansions of itself all textures and a structural totality. Through permutations of this image I continue, rather than destroy, its state of being. I work with the concept of ‘it is’ instead of the traditional ‘it becomes.’ The expansion of the image is achieved through diminutions of itself. Thus its structure is never dissolved. Instead, the changed focusing of the image preordains changed proportions, i.e., dissolutions of organic sound-units (which are each a part of the image), reestablishing themselves as modified reflections of the original unit, pulling, twisting, distorting, adding and subtracting from that unit; setting up new hierarchies of sound which carry the potential of new imagery. At all times, the ‘it is’ remains a pre-fixed, concrete image.

“Within a work the initial image will explode into its own various states of being, juxtaposed against itself in ever new focuses. These new states become the new proportions. By extending, contracting, verticalizing, inverting, redeploying, refocusing of the material, the same state of being and its varied phases can move on diverse time and space differentials.

“I often work with two or more opposed concepts a) a rigidly controlled rhythmic and pitch relationship; b) a loosely controlled situation. The latter allows for the possibility of one or more diverse relationships recurring at the same time, thus creating an enriched harmonic fabric within an area of time and space controlled by the elastic flux of the performer. I consider all sound-pitch, non-pitch, noise, density, intensity—as an entity in time, set into motion by one or more similar or diverse sets of circumstances to be organized into meaningful patterns of combinations that are then related in varying degrees by the composer. The expression of these diverse sounds should be contingent, however, upon the organic whole of these relationships as well as the possible use of contrasting arbitrary relationships.

“Considering all sounds as dynamic intensities with each a self-involved unit of individual proportions, I, by the use of diffusions, dissolutions, tensions, releases, and distributions of free and formal relationships set up ever new sound potentials. However, I do not separate sound from its many component parts; to me it is closely related to its time and space relationships as expressed in its organic design.

“In conclusion, because music exists in time as well as space, the ear-mind must be activated into its other dimension, of memory. Thus the very freedom and diffuseness of sound combinations have led me to the use of a focal ‘image’ which I choose to call the ‘graven image,’ it being a state of ‘it is’ as opposed to a state of constant abstruse development. The ‘image’ must create and sustain the unforgettable moment, and it is a series of such moments that result in a dynamic, unforgettable experience.”

(Original notes from CRI LP jacket)