

CRI-142

**Harrison Kerr**

*Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*

Wolfgang Stavonhagen, violin

The Imperial Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra of Tokyo

William Strickland, conductor

**Henry Cowell**

*Symphony No. 7*

The Vienna Symphony Orchestra

William Strickland, conductor

Composed from 1950 to 1951, the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* was somewhat revised in the early part of 1956. It was the later version that has been used for this recording. The *Concerto* is cast in three movements: I. *Andante quasi largo, Allegretto, Allegro*; II. *Lento*; III. *Allegro moderato*. The three movements are closely related thematically, i.e., the principal and secondary themes of the third movement are derived from those of the first. There is also a reference to the so-called *B* section of the second movement. Of course, only a measure by measure analysis would clearly indicate these thematic relationships. Following is a brief outline of the salient aspects of the over-all form.

A slow introduction to the first movement (it relates to the opening of the second movement) is followed by a short episode leading to the two-part principal theme. Here the bassoon introduces a figure in sixteenth notes, with the minor third established as the characteristic interval. This pattern is taken up by the solo violin and extended (it later becomes the predominant figuration of this movement, the *B* section and much of the third). Note, however, that the only literal repetition of this figure occurs at the beginning of the recapitulation of the first movement (as in the classical sonata-allegro form) and here the tonal center has been raised a minor third. The development and the recapitulation, together with a solo cadenza, more or less follow the traditional pattern. The final coda ends quietly after a reference to the introduction.

The second movement consists of three parts. The first part is lyrical and introspective with a subdued climax immediately preceding the *B* section. The second part is quite agitated and builds to the true climax of the movement. *A* returns, now somewhat varied.

The final movement is the *Concerto's* most rhythmic and forceful. It opens with a motive in the trumpet that is subsequently used to announce the beginning of each section. This movement can best be considered as a continuous development of material derived from the earlier movements.

The *Concerto* is predominantly polyphonic in texture and, although it frequently gives the impression of being twelve-tone in conception, it is not strictly so at any time.

Harrison Kerr was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1897. His music studies began with the traditional piano lessons, while later he took up the clarinet and then composition, although the chronology of these events was not quite so clearly outlined. In 1921 he joined Aaron Copland and fellow Clevelander Herbert Elwell as a member of the first group of pilgrims to the school of Nadia Boulanger. At the same time Kerr studied piano with Isidor Philipp.

Kerr has served as Director of Music at Greenbrier College in Lewisburg, West Virginia and at the now-defunct Chase School in Brooklyn, New York; spent several years as orchestrator for NBC's *General Motors Show*; was editor of *Trends*, a bi-monthly arts magazine; was managing editor of Arrow Music Press (a rather daring venture in the publication of contemporary music that has since been dispersed among several of the larger publishing houses); was a member of the editorial board of the New Music Quarterly Recordings, and has further helped the cause of American music through his active participation in the American Composers Alliance, the American Music Center and similar organizations.

Since 1949, Kerr has been Dean of the College of Fine Arts of the University of Oklahoma. His compositional output is relatively small, less due to the demands of teaching than to his merciless self-criticism. Three symphonies, the superb Sonata for Violin and Piano, two piano sonatas, several songs and, more recently, the opera *The Tower of Kel*, stand out in his catalogue.

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Henry Cowell's reputation was first established in Europe and the United States by his earlier techniques of dissonance, harmony and polyphony. Well-known examples are the piano pieces of 1912 through 1929 or the orchestral compositions, *Synchrony* (1932) and the *Sinfonietta* (1928). The *Seventh Symphony* of Cowell marks the absorption of these techniques into his modal style. In this work diatonic melodies meet and cross, and the resulting dissonance forms the natural basis for his harmonic language.

The symphony opens with a *maestoso* movement. A bright, rising melodic line is the first theme. A subsidiary subject has contrasting lyricism, but a see-saw fiddler's tune is the real secondary theme. An expansion of the subsidiary theme produces a melody for English horn, and it is worked out as it passes from instrument to instrument. The development is agitated, and the recapitulation follows with the themes in reverse order.

The reflective and broadly romantic second movement, *Andante*, has none of the activity of the other movements. An opening pentatonic figure - gentle and persistent - is set against one of Cowell's best Celtic- American tunes.

Marked *Presto*, the third movement sophisticates a jig tune. It may turn unexpectedly whimsical or unwind mysteriously and disappear. A sentimental episode interrupts the jig, and the close is signified by a chromatic run in diminuendo, simultaneously ascending and descending.

The Finale - also marked *maestoso* - using material of the preceding movements, has a generating theme that is reduced to motivic fragments and re-combined, or it assumes the rhythm of accompaniment figures, or again turns up as a fuguing tune before appearing in inversion. Busy episodes interrupt the continuity until all unite and restate the initial theme in augmented rhythm. This forms the climax and the conclusion of the symphony.

Henry Cowell was born in 1897 in California, and early came in contact with many types of music - including Chinese. Early, too, he came in contact with that seeker, miner and polisher of rare musical metals, Charles Seeger. Since Cowell was gifted with the speed and directness of a free mind, it is little wonder, by the age of fifteen, that his virtually new ideas were sufficiently developed for public performance. Further studies were intermingled with world-wide concert tours - tours that permitted him to hear and absorb every musical culture. His early fame, remaining to this day, has spread to every continent. Add to this, a championing of American music, a diversity of teaching positions, an almost incredible productivity, and above all, a mellowing maturity, and from this emerges the legend of Henry Cowell.

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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 further parallels Stokowski's 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 won considerable recognition. In addition, he founded and directed the NYA Little Orchestra, conducted the Nashville Symphony, and has made guest appearances throughout Germany and Austria. At present he is appearing with several of the outstanding orchestras in the Far East.

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Wolfgang Stavonhagen, who is presently concertmaster of the Imperial Philharmonic, began his professional career as a first violinist for Otto Klemperer when he was still fourteen. Between 1932 and 1952, he served as concertmaster for the opera and symphony orchestras of Dessau, Leipzig, Cologne, and Frankfurt, as well as leader of his own quartet. He has lived in Japan since 1952, as teacher, recitalist, concertmaster and conductor introducing various new works to Japan, American works in particular.

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The Imperial Philharmonic Symphony was formed in the autumn of 1959 as a unique experiment of democracy in music. The orchestra had existed as a unit for five years, but was in serious danger of disintegrating due to management difficulties. Breaking away from the original organization, the players formed the Imperial Philharmonic, and performed their first concert on January 25, 1960, under the direction of William Strickland. Since then, the orchestra has taken its place as the best of Japan's six full-time symphonic groups. They have been active in the promotion of new music, and were the first to offer major works to Japanese audiences by such composers as Ives and Riegger.

*(Original Liner Notes from CRI LP Jacket)*