

George Perle

STRING QUINTET, OP. 35

Beaux-Arts String Quartet,

with Walter Trampler, viola

GEORGE PERLE'S *String Quintet, Opus 35* is scored for two violins, two violas, and cello. Completed in February 1958, the music bears the inscription: In memory of Laura Slobe. The tempi of the four movements are indicated by metronome markings.

The *Quintet* is a tonal composition, large in scale and rhapsodic in nature. Its seeming complexity need trouble no listener for long, for here is tunefulness, motivic development, effective repetitions, and phrase lengths similar to those of the romantic period. A sophisticated listener will also find a challenge in this music: one motive may generate or bear a family likeness to another, while still others are mentioned in passing only, and later assume an important role.

The opening bars of the first movement (theme I) present stylistic details of the entire work: the slow "trill," the falling melodic lines, harmonic and melodic thirds, and sustained and ostinato pedals. The melodic second subject, development, and recapitulation suggest the sonata form.

In the second movement dancing melodic thirds add to the scherzo mood, and form a principal theme which, separated by melodic episodes, appears three times. Thereafter, the material is carefully worked out and a large climax is achieved.

Dr. Perle characteristically saves his most personal moments for the slow movement, the third. A declamatory cry opens and dominates the movement—a cry so stark that it must be repeated; there is no answer but itself. The cry is elaborated, with extensions for solo viola and for solo cello, and its painfulness is assuaged. As a result, the third appearance is truncated; repetition is no longer required. A solo violin leads to the esthetic turning point, where the cry appears in ascending rather than descending form. Now the quiet last half of the theme suffices until the final resolution (the last note of the movement).

THE FOURTH MOVEMENT is fast, free, and melodic. The opening rhythmic idea slyly contrasts twice with a full lyricism, but both succumb to thoughtful, sustained passages. A crescendo builds rapidly to the highest dynamic level of the *Quintet*, a fortissimo. A coda, dealing with the reflective elements, closes this movement and at the same time forms a resolution to the entire work, ending again on a single note.

Perle's special concern with the structural use of rhythm is found in abundance in the *Quintet*. He cites as an example of its simplest form, Berlioz' *Romeo and Juliet*, where "Romeo's Reverie" several times introduces the rhythm of the following section, the "Fete at the Capulets." The usage in Perle's hands is profoundly more subtle; creating a nuance at its least; at its most, a technique for the amalgamation of disparate rhythmic elements.

Producing a long series of theoretical studies while engaged in a full-time academic career, it is surprising that George Perle has found any time for composition. Yet he has found time, and some fifty compositions attest to this fact. His most recent is a large set of pieces—nearly an hour in length—for chorus, soloists and orchestra, for the play by Aristophanes, *The Birds*. It is also anomalous that Perle's writings have so frequently dealt with twelve-tone music, of which the most recent is his book *Serial Composition and Atonality*; while among his compositions (and here we quote the composer) "there are not more than five of my works in which one can discover anything resembling the Schoenbergian 'tone-row'." Among professional positions, he has enjoyed a five year tenure as Associate Professor of Music at the University of California (Davis), and now fills a similar post at Queens College (New York City). He was born in Bayonne, N. J. in 1915. The Louisville Commissioning Series has recorded his *Rhapsody for Orchestra*.

Leslie Bassett

TRIO FOR CLARINET, VIOLA AND PIANO

Charles Russo, clarinet • Walter Trampler, viola • Douglas Nordli, piano

LESLIE BASSETT'S *Trio for Clarinet, Viola and Piano* was composed in 1953. The four movements are: I Adagio; II Allegretto, ma bene marcato; III Adagio, ma non troppo; IV Allegro Moderato.

The *Trio* is a tonal work with chromatic texture and clearly defined key centers. While rhythms and syncopations predominate, its basic elegance and polish are never obscured. Contrapuntal techniques largely account for the smoothness of line, deceptive in its simplicity. Though in his total output, the *Trio* actually marked a shift in emphasis from contrapuntal writing to chordal structures.

The composer suggests that the proximity of a colleague's viola studio increased his interest in this instrument; and that further attraction to the possibilities of the combination (clarinet, viola and piano) came from hearing Mozart's masterpiece, the *Trio in E-flat*, K. 496, and Brahms' *Sonatas for Viola (or clarinet) and Piano*.

Leslie Bassett's *Trio* has a short introduction. The very first sounds, the piano's major seventh (g to f-sharp), are of extreme importance. By the type and number of appearances, it might well be called a "motto"; certainly the scale formations are related, and the melodic leap of the seventh leaves its stamp on nearly every theme. The vivacious and buoyant qualities of the *Trio* are one result of these melodic leaps—the seventh as well as other intervals. However, the mood of the introduction itself is quiet. Its reappearance in the faster movements, together with the motto seventh, serve as a foil to the over-all good-naturedness of the work.

THE second movement opens with a piano trill, and the happy and assertive main theme (in 6/8) is announced by the clarinet and viola in unison. Much slower in tempo, the second theme is given out by the clarinet. Resumption of the original tempo brings all the instruments together on a trill, marking the end of the exposition section. In the development the themes are rhythmically and melodically transformed, interwoven with the motto and the introductory material. Increasing activity and excitement bring a return to the home key of F, and to the recapitulation, where a new verve invests both themes. The altered second theme is now heard in the tempo of the first, yet maintaining its identity. An allusion to the introduction closes the movement.

Part-writing and imitation produce a gentle flow in the slow movement, joined by single lines of the piano rather than by thicker textures. The motto chord closes this movement, as it does all the others.

Sonorities increase in the fourth movement, although the melodies of this rondo, almost orchestral in sweep, remain lively and clear. The main theme has a perky rhythm which several times is cut short by a new melody—in seeming attempt to outdo the previous melody. New vigor is tapped at each repetition of the main theme; the repetitions are altered and new directions are opened for exploration. The last return of the main theme fairly reels with good spirits, unexpectedly ended by the serenity of the introduction and the motto chord.

Leslie Bassett, born in California in 1923, rose from the ranks of Army trombonist to become Assistant Professor of Composition at the University of Michigan. He holds an A.Mus.D. in Composition from that University. Arthur Honegger, Nadia Boulanger and Ross Lee Finney were his teaching masters. He has won publication awards and honors, among them a Fulbright, and is now filling the requirements of the Prix de Rome. His list of works is large: works for band, orchestra, chamber groups, voice and chorus, in addition to incidental music and film scores. Dr. Bassett's university association has afforded him the rare privilege of hearing nearly everything that he has written. His *Five Pieces for String Quartet* may be heard on the Custom Recording Series of the University of Illinois.

—Notes by CARL SIGMON

MAKING its debut as recently as 1957, the Beaux-Arts String Quartet has already achieved rank. "This young and vigorous quartet continues to supply some of the most substantial and most sensitive playing around," says the *New York Times*. "They are a striking proof of how much can be done without tradition; with good honest musicianship, mastery of craft and poetic sensibility instead." The Beaux-Arts has endeavored to include some of the best new American music on its programs and recordings.

WALTER TRAMPLER'S extraordinary viola playing has assumed the three-fold role of soloist, recitalist and chamber music performer. He was a member of the famed Strub Quartet, a member and founder of the New Music Quartet, and is now a leading fifth member of the Budapest Quartet; recital appearances have also been frequent; and solo performances have brought collaboration with the Boston Symphony, the Casals Festivals, among many others. All aspects of his career have permitted the pursuit of contemporary music with penetration, measure and virility.

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