

FREDERIC BALAZS

Two Dances for Flute and Orchestra

Philharmonia Hungarica

the composer conducting

Paul Pázmándy, flute

“The value of art is in strict relation to how much the doer has to explain about it!” These words of Frederic Balazs may indicate a common occupational reticence of many composers to communicate in other than musical terms, but they also do a fair share to tell us, if only in epigrammatic form, something about the nature of his works. There is a directness about the *Two Dances After David*, and it is clearly the intent of their composer to convince the ear and charm the senses, leaving any question-and-answer game to those who relish playing it. This is as it should be in dance music of any sort, from Schubert *ländler* through the Stravinsky *Circus Polka*.

The exoticism and almost eastern cast of the solo flute writing reflect Mr. Balazs’ Hungarian origin, but the wide and open vertical sonorities produced by the string-choir could only occur in a vocabulary conversant with the American musical syntax of the nineteen-forties. Strength of orchestral technique produces an over-all effect of unity-in-diversity. Several references to Gregorian Chant weave in and out of the music and, strangely enough, only add to the initial effect of sensuous evocation. The first dance is an extended three-part song form with introduction and coda. A lively and completely beguiling second dance, in triple metre, *prestissimo*, rounds out the work with fire and spirit.

An excerpt from a letter of Mr. Balazs’ written during a European conducting tour, when the present work was recorded, may prove enlightening regarding the performance: “The virtuosity of the Philharmonia Hungarica became ever so evident during the recording preparations. The solo flutist, Mr. Pázmándy, mastered the very demanding part within four days—as an additional challenge—during his honeymoon. The reading, rehearsing and recording were done in a minimum of sessions to the complete satisfaction of the composer-conductor.”

about the composer . . .

Frederic Balazs was born in Budapest in 1920 and was graduated *cum laude* from the Royal Academy of Music. He came to the United States during World War II and, after serving four years in the armed forces, settled temporarily in Philadelphia. He has appeared as guest conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in Lewisohn Stadium, New York City; Grant Park Symphony Orchestra, Chicago; Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra and numerous groups in Canada and Europe. Mr. Balazs has also contributed to educational procedures, the assisting of young talent and sociological aspects of music. In recognition of his services on behalf of music for young people, he was recently named chairman of the Youth Orchestras Project of the National Federation of Music Clubs. Mr. Balazs’ many-sided interests are also reflected in his appointment as regional chairman for the Metropolitan Opera Auditions-of-the-Air. The importance of folk music in the heritage of many American composers prompted him to organize the American Contemporary Music Center in Tucson, Arizona, where he now resides with his wife and four small children. He was recently director of the summer festival at Woodstock, where he conducted the orchestra and also served as first violin of the resident string quartet, in the European tradition. He is now permanent Conductor and Music Director of the Tucson Symphony Orchestra.

WALTER MOURANT

Valley of the Moon Air and Scherzo Sleepy Hollow

Camarata and his Orchestra

It is highly probable that the purchaser of this record is quite familiar with the music of Walter Mourant. Remember the *March of Time* theme, the theme for the *Westinghouse Hour*, or a “pop tune” called *Swing Low, Sweet Clarinet*? Walter Mourant wrote them all. Although the aesthetic intent of the compositions mentioned above varies greatly from the music heard on this recording, a common denominator is found in all his works—undoubted sincerity of purpose expressed in a skilled manipulation of materials. Mr. Mourant believes that good composers are not handicapped by a pre-occupation, of either choice or necessity, with commercial music. The media of television and radio may eventually bring the composer of serious music to the masses. In the meantime, he can only perfect his craft by “writing on assignment.” He says: “I believe the general public has been underestimated. The flood of *odorous* (annotator’s italics) commercialism in music is not the result of popular taste but rather a device to overwhelm a captive audience, which radio and television audiences certainly are. The resulting recalcitrant attitude of the present-day composer toward the general public is an empty battle with a ‘so’s your old man’ on either side.”

As might be expected, the music sounds very well, indeed. Mr. Mourant approaches no problems that he cannot solve and solves all the problems that he approaches. A thorough schooling is apparent in the fluid string writing, and his oboe textures are alive with the personality of that instrument. His *Air* has been used extensively on radio and television as theme music, and the brief and poignant *Valley of the Moon* has received many performances by Andre Kostelanetz.

about the composer . .

Walter Mourant was born in Chicago in 1910; his musical career began in a high school dance band after a brief and arid spate of piano lessons with an “almost deaf piano teacher.” Later, he entered the “show business” field of broadcasting in New York. Here, largely under the watchful eye of the late Mark Warnow, he pursued such assignments as the setting of the Preamble to the Constitution for chorus and orchestra and several “concert jazz” pieces for the Mildred Bailey show. His academic training began in 1931 at the Eastman School of Music, where he studied composition with Bernard Rogers and Howard Hanson and received the Master of Music degree. A few years at the Juilliard School on a graduate fellowship, working with Bernard Wagenaar, marked the completion of his formal training. His early affinity for the dance-band field led him to concentrate on arrangements during his first years in New York. He has made no effort to eliminate the dichotomy between his dance-band style (frankly influenced by Duke Ellington) and his more “serious” style. A few exceptions are the *Three Dances for Orchestra* and the *Three Acts of Punch and Judy Suites*. The Concertino, for clarinet, makes use of bongo drums accompanying a clarinet cadenza with a faint “touch of blue” in the slow movement. Mr. Mourant states that, having been more successful in the smaller forms, he will stay entirely within their limits in the future.

Notes by Charles Whittenberg

The Soviet coup in Hungary (1956) accounts for at least one Western cultural victory, the founding of the **PHILHARMONIA HUNGARICA**. Formed of key players from Hungary's venerable orchestras, the Philharmonia achieved a suaveness and polish characteristic of the best Old World ensembles—with an added dash of New World precision.

Acclaim has been as notable for these musical attributes as for the orchestra's moral position. After a sensational series of concerts in Vienna—and tours throughout Europe and America—the Philharmonia has been “adopted” by the town of Marl, Germany; a result of Municipal as well as Federal efforts. This disc marks the ensemble's first recording of American music.

PAUL PAZMANDY is solo flutist of the orchestra

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)