

**HENRY COWELL “ . . . if He please” for Chorus and Orchestra (1955)**

**ROBERT WARD Hush'd Be the Camps Today (1941)**

**LEO SOWERBY Classic Concerto for Organ and String Orchestra (1944)**

**NORWEGIAN CHOIR OF SOLOSINGERS, ROLF KARLSEN (organ)**

**MEMBERS OF THE OSLO PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, WILLIAM STRICKLAND Conductor**

Edward Taylor (1645-1729), the Massachusetts Puritan clergy-man and poet, for whose lines Henry Cowell (b. 1897) wrote the vivid musical setting recorded here, was known through his poetry to only a few scholar-specialists until 1939 when his *Poetical Works* became published for the first time. Today, Taylor stands recognized as “the most richly endowed of the colonial poets” – a not unworthy counterpart, in his colorful imagery and impassioned God-seeking, to the mighty metaphysical poet-predecessor of his mother country, John Donne.

*from THE PREFACE Edward Taylor (1645-1729)*

*Infinity, when all things it beheld*

*In Nothing, and of Nothing all did build.*

*Upon what Base was fixt the Lath, wherein*

*He turn'd the Globe, and riggall'd it so trim?*

*Who blew the Bellows of His Furnace vast,*

*Or held the Mould wherein the world was cast?*

*Who laid its Corner Stone? Or whose Command?*

*Where stand the pillars upon which it stands?*

*Who lac'd and filleted the earth so fine,*

*With Rivers like Green Ribbons smaragdine?*

*Who made the Seas its Selvedge, and its locks*

*Like a Quilt Ball within a Silver Box?*

*Who spread its Canopy? or Curtains spun?*

*Who in this Bowling Alley bowl'd the Sun?*

*Who made it always when it rises, set:*

*To go at once both down, and up to get?*

*Who made the Curtain rods made for this Tapistry?*

*Who hung the twinckling Lanthorns in the Sky?*

*Who did this? or who is He? Why know*

*It's onely Might Almighty this did doe!*

*His hand hath made this noble work which Stands*

*His glorious Handywork not made by hands,*

*Who spake all things from Nothing, and with ease*

*Can speak all things to Nothing if He please;*

*Whose little finger at His pleasure can*

*Outmete ten thousand worlds with halfe a Span!*

*Whose Might Almighty can by half a looks*

*Root up the rocks and rock the hills by th'roots,*

*Can take this Mighty World up in his hande*

*And shake it like a Squitchen or a Wand!*

The idea of setting the Taylor text was suggested by William Strickland when the New York Oratorio Society, of which he was then Director, commissioned a Cowell work in 1954.

The poem itself is a reminder that what the Almighty has done He can undo into Nothing again – a hint of that total annihilation which has become a literal possibility in the twentieth century.

The work was composed at Cowell's country home in Shady, a mountain retreat a hundred miles from New York, during the summer and fall of 1955, and had its first performance at Carnegie Hall on February 29th of the following year with the chorus and orchestra of the New York Oratorio Society, augmented by the boys' choirs of St. John the Divine and St. Thomas' Church, with William Strickland conducting.

The music itself, in common with many of the large-scale works written by Cowell during the 1950's and 1960's, synthesizes many elements from his earlier musical experimentations and exploration – in particular the secundal dissonances characteristic of his early "tone-cluster" piano pieces (see CRI 109) and the American colonial styling of the hymn and fuguing tune works that he composed in such profusion during the 1940's. The end result is a kind of majestic "ecumenical music" (to use Hugo Weisgall's phrase from his comprehensive survey of Cowell's work in the October 1959, *Music Quarterly* that captures with telling power both the picturesque imagery and the sheer grandeur of Taylor's visionary poem. Fanfares of acclamation by orchestra and chorus precede the enunciation of the text proper. Quietly sinister grinding dissonance evokes the chaos of "Nothing" from which God created the world; while the act of creation itself is accompanied by an ostinato of relentless forward motion. As the questions posed by the text reach their culminating answer, "It's onely Might Almighty this did doe!", the full forces of chorus and orchestra unite in a mighty hymn of praise, in which the basic figurations and thematic elements that came before are also joined. The ending is not unalloyed conventional triumph, however; for the lines that tell us that the Lord can "Root up the rocks and rock the hills by th'roots,/ Can take this mighty World up in his hande/ And sake it like a Squitchen or a Wand!"—these lines are alternately shouted wrathfully by the chorus, then hymned—a aural image of Jonathan Edwards' *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*.

Together with his reputation as a fluent writer of virile and warmly lyrical symphonic scores, Robert Ward (b. 1917) has been steadily gaining in stature as a creator in the vocal medium, reaching a universally recognized peak of achievement in the operatic treatment of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* which won for him the 1962 Pulitzer Prize and New York Music Critics' Circle Citation (see CRI 168, mono or stereo).

Many have commented on the expertise of the choral writing in *The Crucible*, and it should be no surprise to find that the roots of this expertise reach far back to his student days at the Eastman School of Music when he composed the setting recorded here of Walt Whitman's *Hush'd Be the Camps Today*. In keeping with the poignance and simplicity of Whitman's tribute to Abraham Lincoln on the day of his interment, Ward's choral-orchestral treatment of the words has steered clear of unnecessary frills, polyphonic or coloristic. The mood is solemn, the melodic line that of a great lament, which is kept in motion through slow and solemn cadence by means of a steady flow and interweaving of inner voices, vocal and orchestral. The orchestral scoring and the harmonic spacing of the vocal lines is such as to lend the music the sense of richness and warmth of utterance called for by Walt Whitman's lines.

HUSH'D BE THE CAMPS TO-DAY (*May 4, 1865*)—Walt Whitman

*Hush'd be the camps to-day,*

*And soldiers let us drape our war-worn weapons,*

*And each with musing soul retire to celebrate,*

*Our dear commander's death.*

*No more for him life's stormy conflicts,*

*Nor victory, nor defeat — no more time's dark events,*

*Charging like ceaseless clouds across the sky.*

*But sing poet in our name,*

*Sing of the love we bore him — because you — dweller in camps, know it truly.*

*As they invault the coffin there,*

*Sing - as they close the doors of earth upon him — one verse,*

*For the heavy hearts of soldiers.*

Leo Sowerby (b. May 1, 1895, Grand Rapids, Mich.) is one of the battle-scarred veterans of American creative music, having been the first to receive an American Prix de Rome for composition back in 1921 (when American modern music as we know it was just a-borning), and still going strong as organist (at St. James' Episcopal Church in Chicago since 1927) and composer as he approaches his years three-score and ten.

The Classic Concerto for Organ and Strings, completed in 1944, is typical of Sowerby's mature musical language at its most accessible. Some of Sowerby's earlier works indicated pre-occupation with folklore elements (perhaps under the influence of his studies with Percy Grainger). Others, such as *Prairie* (1930) and *From the Northland* (1923) are impressionistic essays of a peculiarly individual type. Then in the large-scale works with organ, such as the *Medieval Poem* (1926) or the Organ Symphony in G (1930), we find an almost Regeresque striving for monumentality, complete with elaborate contrapuntal substructure.

In the three movements of the Classic Concerto, we have in the outer movements all of Sowerby's contrapuntal skill and solidity of structure without the near oppressive mass of some of his more ambitious scores. Even so, there is ample density to the music's harmonic texture, due in great part to Sowerby's canny use of the organ as a singularly effective vehicle of dissonance. The movement designations for all three, as given on the label of this disc, say all that need be said about the music unless one desires a close technical analysis; though one must remark on the spirited interplay between organ and strings that characterizes the musical texture as a whole, and above all the bitter-sweet poetry (almost Delius-like) with which Sowerby has infused the slow movement of this work.

#### NOTES BY DAVID HALL

*THE NORWEGIAN CHOIR OF SOLOSINGERS* since its founding in 1950 has become the foremost of Norway's choral groups in the interpretation of contemporary music, though in point of fact its repertoire encompasses sacred and secular music from all periods. Knut Nysted has been conductor of the Norwegian Choir of Solosingers from the first, and prepared the choral works recorded here. He is himself one of Norway's foremost composers, and the highly successful American tour he had with the Choir a few years ago was by no means his first contact with American musical life; for he had enjoyed shortly after the war a substantial period of study with Aaron Copland at the Berkshire Music Center.

*ROLF KARLSEN* is one of Norway's foremost organists, and is also well known as pianist and organist specializing in early keyboard music. He has done considerable composing and much choral conducting, most notably as director of the Chamber Choir of the Norwegian Radio. The instrument on which he plays the Sowerby Classic Concerto is that of the Trinity Church in Oslo, built in 1858 by the Danish organ builder, Claus Jensen. It was overhauled and restored in 1958 by Norwegian organ builder J. H. Jørgensen, a Rückpositif being added, but with the original slider chest and tracker action being preserved.

*WILLIAM STRICKLAND* has enriched the CRI catalog with a wealth of contemporary music recordings from such varied locales as Vienna, Tokyo, and Oslo. It was as organist and choirmaster at St. Bartholomew's Church in New York City that Strickland made his first major foray into professional musical life. In 1946 he founded the Nashville Symphony Orchestra, and in 1955 he was director of the New York Oratorio Society which commissioned the Cowell work on the present disc. Following an extended tenure as conductor in the Far East, Mr. Strickland has turned with great success to the Scandinavian area, where he presently holds the post of conductor of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Reykjavik, Iceland.

*THE OSLO PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA*, Norway's foremost symphonic organization, was established in 1871, with Edward Grieg as one of the founders. Today it gives, with the help of municipal and state subsidy an average of 120 concerts annually, including special tours to other Scandinavian countries and to continental Europe, as well as to the remoter regions of Norway, even those beyond the Arctic Circle

TRINITY CHURCH ORGAN, *Oslo Norway* - Specification  
GREAT

CHOIR (new)

PEDAL

1. Principal 8´

2. Rohrflöte 8´

3. Octave 4´

4. Flute 4´

5. Fugara 4´

6. Quint 2 2/3´

7. Octave 2´

8. Waldflöte 2´

9. Tierce 1 3/5´

10. Quint 1 1/3´

11. Sedicima 1´

12. Trompette 8´

13. Clarion 4´ (new)

14. Gedackt

15. Principal 4´

16. Koppelflöte 4´

17. Octave 2´

18. Quintadena 2´

19. Nazard 1 1/3´

20. Scharf

21. Cromorne 8´

TREMULANT

SWELL

22. Bourdon 16´

23. Salicional 8´

24. Gedackt 8´

25. Spitzgamba 8´

26. Rohrflöte 4´

27. Waldflöte 2´

28. Principal 2´ (new)

29. Cymbel (3 ranks) (new)

30. Oboe 8´ (new)

TREMULANT

31. Principal 16´

32. Subbass 16´

33. Octave 8´

34. Gedackt 8´

35. Quint 5 1/3´

36. Octave 4´ (new)

37. Mixture (5 ranks)

(new)

38. Bassoon 16´

39. Zink 4´

The usual couplers

*(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*