

## AARON COPLAND

**PIANO SONATA (1941)**

**VIOLIN SONATA (1943)**

**TRIO —VITEBSK (1929) (Study on a Jewish Theme)**

**HILDE SOMER (piano)**

**CARROLL GLENN (violin)**

**CHARLES McCracken (?cello)**

In a tribute to Aaron Copland on the occasion of his 60th birthday, fellow-composer William Schuman spoke well and truly in the page of *The New York Herald-Tribune* (October 30, 1960):

“The music of Aaron Copland is already, at its tender age, a part of our heritage. The Copland sound has enriched the art of music. It is a sound that was not in music before and so personal an expression that not one of his many imitators has been able convincingly to make it his own. While the works speak for themselves, there is one fact of which we should take particular note.

“Aaron Copland is an American composer. We should not be afraid in our age of growing internationalism to be accused of chauvinism when we take special satisfaction in the achievements of a fellow-countryman, as such. And Copland is very much the American composer. His works have their roots here — in the sights and sounds of our land and in the writings of American authors. While it is a verity that the composer of major stature writes music for the large arena and that his local origin is of small significance, it is, nonetheless, a joy to know that here is an authentic American voice.”

Among the half-a-hundred or more works comprising the Copland *oeuvre* from 1920 to the present, comparatively few are cast in the heroic mold of the absolute classic forms but those works to which Copland has given the designation quartet, symphony, sonata, variation — these are the scores, which have marked either turning points or summations of his growth as a creative artist.

It is with this in mind that we should listen to the music on this disc: the *Vitebsk* Trio in the light both of the severe Piano Variations that followed immediately thereafter and of the “cowboy” and “Appalachian” dance scores of the mid-thirties and early forties the Piano Sonata and the Violin Sonata in the light of the heroic synthesis represented in the Third Symphony completed in 1946. Copland is no less fluent in speaking of his own music than in setting notes to paper, and thus we are privileged to offer here his own commentary for the works featured on this disc:

OF VITEBSK — “My trio, *Vitebsk*, was completed in 1929 and first performed at a concert of the League of Composers in New York City in February of that year. The performers were Walter Giesecking, pianist, and Messrs. Onnou and Maas of the Pro Arte Quartet. The Jewish folk theme, which is used as an integral part of the work, was heard by me during a performance of Ansky’s play, *The Dybbuk*. The particular version of the folk tune used in the play was first heard by Ansky in his birthplace, Vitebsk. That circumstance supplied me with my title.

“The overall nature of *Vitebsk* is that of a dramatic character study. The form of the work is tri-partite: slow-fast-slow. The opening pages are introductory, consisting of a series of major and minor triads struck simultaneously by the pianist, and immediately reflected in resultant quarter-tone intervals in the two string instruments. A rhapsodic episode follows for the violin and ’cello with interjections by the piano, leading to a return of the opening major-minor chords. This prepares the way for the singing by the

solo 'cello of the Jewish theme on which the piece is mainly based. The 'cello retains its leading role throughout this section and the accompanying material is almost entirely derived from chords and figurations previously heard.

“A brief transition leads to the *allegro vivace* which suggests a Chagall-like grotesquerie. Over a persistent rhythmic pattern, short motifs, reminders of the opening three notes of the noble Jewish theme, are twisted and turned in polytonal juxtaposition, with unexpected rhythmic jolts. The climactic frenzy is interrupted in mid-career. After a pregnant pause, the principal theme returns, sung two octaves apart by violin and 'cello and punctuated by clangorous chords in the piano. A quiet coda brings the work to an atmospheric close.”

OF THE PIANO SONATA — “The Piano Sonata was commissioned by and dedicated to the playwright Clifford Odets and was composed between 1939 and 1941. It was first played by the composer himself in a concert sponsored by *La Nueva Musica* in Buenos Aires in October of 1941.

“The Sonata is a work of absolute music and is divided into three sections—a first movement moderate in speed, a fast, agitated central movement, and an elegaic conclusion.

“The opening *Allegro* is closely allied to the usual “allegro” form of the sonata. This begins in the key of B-flat minor, while the customary slow material is in G minor. The development section is somewhat free in character and is climaxed by the first thematic material in the original key and in a grandiose statement.”

“The second movement makes use of sharply contrasted material, alternating wistful and poetic moods with sudden violent outbursts.

“There is no trio in the usual sense, although some contrasting material is introduced two-thirds of the way through the movement. This movement seems to the composer to be derived from jazz source idioms despite the fact that no jazz motifs are used. “The last movement is in free form. The opening chords start quietly and gradually build to a powerful climax, returning to the bell-like sonorities of the opening and finishing on a note of complete serenity.”

OF THE VIOLIN SONATA — “The Sonata for Violin and Piano was composed at intervals during 1942 and 1943, partly in New York City and partly in Hollywood. The dedication reads: ‘To Lt. Harry H. Dunham (1910-1943), a friend of mine who lost his life while on duty in the South Pacific.’

“There are three movements — moderate tempo, slow, and fast. The last two are played without pause. The first movement alternates in mood between a tender lyricism and a more rapidly paced section. The slow movement is bare in outline and poetic in nature. The finale combines light and bouncy material with sections that are more serious in tone. The Sonata ends with a short coda that makes reference to the theme of the opening movement.”

HILDE SOMER—PIANIST. Vienna-born Hilde Somer had already won acclaim as a pre-teenager as soloist with orchestras in major European capitals before coming to the U.S. to complete her studies at the Curtis Institute of Music. In the years since, she has made more than a dozen coast-to-coast tours both as recitalist and as soloist with major orchestras. She has premiered contemporary works both in the U.S. and in Europe, and she has featured a wide range of American repertoire on her programs, both at the BBC, and in Vienna where she premiered Aaron Copland's Piano Concerto.

CARROLL GLENN—VIOLINIST. A Juilliard School alumna and a Naumburg award winner, Carroll Glenn has appeared as soloist with virtually every major American symphony orchestra, and has concertized throughout the world, including the Far East under ANTA auspices. It was in 1956 that she performed the Copland Violin Sonata in New York's Town Hall with the composer at the piano; and most recently, in 1962, she was at the first violin desk for the world premiere of Mr. Copland's String Nonet, which was video-taped for nationwide educational broadcast and commercially recorded for Columbia.

*(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*