

WALTER PISTON Concertino for Piano and Chamber Orchestra (1937)

CHARLES IVES The Fourth of July (1912-13)

JOHN ALDEN CARPENTER Concertino for Piano and Orchestra (1915)

MARJORIE MITCHELL piano soloist, with the Göteborg Symphony Orchestra
WILLIAM STRICKLAND, conductor

BORN IN ROCKLAND, ME. IN 1894 and trained in Boston and Cambridge during the years of World War I—first as painter and then as musician, Walter Piston became, after a stimulating two years of advanced study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, a prime representative of combined craftsmanship and vitality in American creative music.

Elliott Carter, in his July 1946 article for *The Musical Quarterly*, made a summation which still remains valid nearly twenty years later: “. . . He has summed up the tendencies of the past twenty years both here and in Europe and given them broad and masterful expression. . . . His unique contribution is to have done this particular work with outstanding excellence in a country where few have ever made a name for themselves as thoroughly craftsman like artists. . . . To have helped to establish a deep understanding of the value of craftsmanship and taste here and to have given such persuasive exemplification of these in his works is highly important for our future. For, not having as ingrained a respect and love for high artistic ideals as Europeans have had, we have often slipped into the trivial, chaotic, and transitory. Piston’s work helps us to keep our mind on the durable and the most satisfying aspects of the art of music and by making them live gives us hope that the qualities of integrity and reason are still with us.”

Piston’s Concertino for Piano and Chamber Orchestra was completed in June of 1937 and marked the start of that period of unbroken creative fertility which over the following two decades was to enrich the American repertoire with a half-dozen symphonies, a variety of concerted works with orchestra, and a remarkable body of chamber music climaxed in 1949 by the Quintet for piano and strings.

The Piano Concertino reveals Piston in a stage of transition from a rather taut French-oriented neo-classicism toward the more expansive musical speech represented by the symphonies from No. 2 on, and by the Piano Quintet.

The work was commissioned by the Columbia Broadcasting System and was first performed over the CBS Network on June 20, 1937 with Jesus Maria Sanromá as soloist with the CBS Symphony Orchestra, the composer conducting.

Though cast in a single movement about thirteen-and-a-half minutes in length, this “adventure of a musical idea” as Piston once called his Concertino, falls into five discernible sections. The first finds piano and orchestra (scored with wood winds in twos, a pair of horns, plus strings) presenting the basic thematic material in a lively 3/4 *allegro*, and out of this is derived most of what follows. Section two is highlighted by a woodwind fugato in 6/8; while the third part (*adagio* 3/4) serves as slow movement, wherein the solo ’cello plays a leading role. The following section is in the nature of a recapitulation with fresh development; while the final pages offer variants of the section two materials in 2/4 that lead to a brief and spirited coda.

Of the four movements comprising what Charles Ives (1874- 1954) called “A Symphony: Holidays—Recollections of a boy’s holidays in a Connecticut country town,” *The Fourth of July* is surely the most extraordinary, whether viewed in score, attempted in performance, or heard in actual sonic realization. *Washington’s Birthday* (1909—recorded on CRI 163), *Decoration Day* (1912), and *Thanksgiving* (1904—recorded on CRI 177) are the other three movements. Thus the *Fourth of July* was last in order of composition and certainly the most advanced in style. In company with *Thanksgiving*, *The Fourth of July* bears one of Ives’s few personal dedications—this one of his partner in the insurance business since the turn of the century, Julian Myrick. In a letter to Henry Cowell, Myrick tells how the dedication came to be: “When we moved from 37 Liberty Street to 38 Nassau Street (in 1914), in clearing out our joint safe after Ives had cleared his part and I was clearing mine, I came across a bundle of music in script which I thought he wanted thrown away. He came over and looked at it and said: ‘My God, that’s the best thing I’ve done yet.’ It turned out to be the Fourth of July Symphony, which by the way, he says he is going to dedicate to me. I pointed out to him that his name would go down through the ages and as we had been partners and worked together for so long, I thought my name should be associated with his in some way.”

As a listening experience, *The Fourth of July* can best be likened to an aural equivalent in New England milieu of one of the livelier scenes in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (begun in 1914, by which time Ives had composed all of his most brilliant musical essays evocative of stream-of-consciousness simultaneity of experience). The music is, in short, a startling pre-Joycean montage, (complete with G.A.R. tunes in every conceivable key and metric variant) the first realization of which in performance came about on February 21, 1932 with Nicolas Slonimsky conducting L’Orchestre Symphonique de Paris.

Ives himself supplied a program note as preface to the printed score: “It’s a boy’s ‘4th,’ —no historical orations—no patriotic grandiloquence by ‘grown-ups’—no program in his yard) But he knows what he’s celebrating—better than some of the county politicians. And he goes at it in his own way, with a patriotism, nearer kin to nature than jingoism. His festivities start in the quiet of the midnight before and grow raucous with the sun. Everybody knows what it’s like. The day ends with the rocket over the Church-steeple, just after the annual explosion sets the Town-Hall on fire.”

CHARLES IVES’ NEAR-CONTEMPORARY, John Alden Carpenter (1876-1951) was also a businessman-composer, though hardly aspiring to comparable intensity of expression. He too came of old New England forebears, as his middle name attests, but he was born and raised in the musical milieu of turn-of-the-century Chicago. Upon graduating from Harvard where he took both academic and musical courses of study, Carpenter prepared to go into his family’s prosperous ship chandlery business; but within a few years he had also begun scoring successes as a composer, notably with his songs—and in particular with the *Gitanjali* cycle to text by Tagore.

By the time of World War One, having had the benefit of advanced study with Sir Edward Elgar in England and with Bernard Ziehn in Chicago, Carpenter began turning to the larger musical forms, achieving a distinct success with his entertaining and atmospheric *Adventures in a Perambulator*. Though in later years, Carpenter essayed some ambitious and wholly serious musical projects, such as the *Song of Faith*, a pair of symphonies, *The Seven Ages*, and a Piano Quintet, his most characteristic and successful pieces have remained those with a light touch, tinged with a hit of jazz and Spanish flavor here and there. *Krazy Kat* (1922—inspired by the legendary Herriman cartoon series), the ballet *Skyscrapers* (1926), and *Adventures in a Perambulator* (1915) are typical instances in point, as is the Concertino for Piano and Orchestra, composed in 1915 and revised in 1947.

The first performance took place on March 10, 1916 with Percy Grainger as soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Frederick Stock. Considering the modesty of the music's title, the accompanying orchestra is surprisingly full, even to an expanded percussion department. Lee Fairley in his notes for a performance of the Concertino given during the 1946-47 season by the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington, D. C. quotes these remarks by Mr. Carpenter on the subject of the work in question: "Not to impose upon it a definite 'program,' but merely to establish the mood of the piece, it may be suggested that the Concertino is, in effect, a lighthearted conversation between piano and orchestra—as between two friends who have travelled different paths and become a little garrulous over their separate experiences. The conversation is mostly of rhythms, American, oriental, and otherwise. The rules of polite talk, as always between friends, are not strictly observed—often, in animated moments, they both talk at once, each hearing only what he says himself. Presently the moment comes, as always between friends, when no conversation is necessary—a relaxed moment, when *Friendship* itself takes them in hand and they have nothing to say. But the reaction is quick and strong—there is still so much that presses to be said—on a pleasant night with youth in the air—between friends.

In form the Concertino is in three short movements: *Allegro con moto*, *Lento grazioso*, and *Allegro risoluto*—the last two separated by an almost imperceptible pause. Each movement is in the simplest song form—first subject, second subject, and repetition—except in the last movement, which has a short coda based on the first subject of the first movement."

NOTES BY D.H.

MARJORIE MITCHELL, one of the most prominent of the younger generation of American woman pianists has concertized widely not only in this country, but throughout Europe, particularly in Scandinavia. She has devoted special attention to contemporary repertoire in general and to American repertoire in particular. Among her currently available recording made prior to the present CRI disc are the Ernest Bloch *Concerto Symphonique* and the MacDowell D-Minor Piano Concerto, both for the Vanguard label.

WILLIAM STRICKLAND has done three major series of contemporary American repertoire for the CRI catalog, the first from Vienna, the second from the vantage point of an extended conductorial tenure in and near Tokyo, and the most recent from Scandinavia, where during 1962-63 he was conductor of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, as well as guest conductor of the Göteborg Symphony Orchestra in Sweden. In addition to the works featured on the present disc from Göteborg, other high points of Mr. Strickland's Scandinavian recording activity include performances with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra of Charles Ives' *Thanksgiving* (CRI 177) and of Henry Cowell's Symphony No. 16 ("Icelandic") coupled with two Icelandic scores—Jón Leifs' *Iceland Overture* and Páll Isólfsson's *Passacaglia* (CRI 179).

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)