

WILLIAM SYDEMAN

MUSIC FOR FLUTE, VIOLA, GUITAR AND PERCUSSION (1962)

CONCERTO DA CAMERA NO. 2 (1960)

Paul Zukofsky solo violin

RAMIRO CORTÉS

CHAMBER CONCERTO (1957-58)

Charles McCracken solo 'cello

CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Arthur Weisberg, conductor

WILLIAM SYDEMAN is a native of New York City (b. 1928) and his musical training has been chiefly at the Mannes College of Music and at the Hartt College of Music in Hartford, Conn. He has also studied privately with Roger Sessions. During the middle 1950's, Sydeman's name rose to prominence largely by virtue of a substantial body of chamber music much of it scored for "non-standard" combinations that achieved startlingly successful concert performances in and around New York City. His orchestral works have been performed by the Symphony of the Air and by the Orchestra of America, and during the 1963-64 season, the successful Boston Symphony premiere under Erich Leinsdorf's direction of his Study for Orchestra No. 2 resulted in a special commission for that orchestra's 1964-65 season. All told, Mr. Sydeman's catalog of compositions of 1964 adds up to nearly fifty works, two of which have been recorded previously on the CRI label: the Seven Movements for Septet (1958) and the Concerto da camera No. 1 (1958) (CRI 158).

It was in 1962 that Mr. Sydeman was awarded the National Institute of Arts and Letters grant that has made the present recording possible, and it is only one of the more recent of many major awards that have come to him, such as the Pacifica Foundation composition prize and the Wechsler Commission.

Concerning the works recorded here, Mr. Sydeman informs us as follows:

"Music for Flute, Viola, Guitar and Percussion was composed in the summer of 1962, having been written for a 1962-63 tour of Arthur Weisberg's Contemporary Chamber Ensemble. The instrumentation was dictated in part by the fact that Pierre Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître* was a major item of the tour repertoire. Both the Boulez and the "Music" are scored for the same combination, the latter being without voice, however. Resemblances end at this point; for *Music for Flute, Viola, Guitar and Percussion* is in every respect a virtuoso work for each instrument, requiring the maximum of technical ability and musicianship, as well as an extraordinary sense of ensemble. An enormous degree of rhythmic flexibility is achieved through various technical devices, including polyrythms and multi-meters.

"The formal design of the work is marked by alternations between swift flowing allegro sections and dramatic recitatives for viola and flute. Both of these elements are first briefly presented, then developed and expanded. The central portion of the work is an

extended allegro building to a big climax, from which the final viola cadenza evolves then subsides into a simple duet with flute. The ending is a sudden burst of sound that derives precisely from the very opening bar.”

Regarding the *Concerto da camera No. 2*, Mr. Sydeman tells us:

“Composed in the fall of 1960, it is, like the *Concerto da camera No. 1* written for solo violin with mixed instrumental accompaniment — in this instance oboe, clarinet (bass clarinet), viola, and ’cello as against the woodwind quartet with viola and ’cello called for in the earlier score. On the occasion of its premiere on Max Pollikoff’s *Music in our Time* series, Eric Salzman of *The New York Times* described the *Concerto da camera No. 2* as ‘having a certain sense of the grand gesture . . .’

“The conception underlying the work is assuredly on a grand scale, not so much in terms of length (it runs slightly less than fifteen minutes), but rather in the nature of thematic materials employed and in the sweeping phrase lengths. As opposed to the miniscule ‘post-Webern’ cellular sound style, the *Concerto da camera No. 2* demands comprehension over a broad span — a span that makes almost for a twentieth century counterpart to Wagner’s *endlos Melodie*. This aspect of the music is most in evidence during the last forty bars, which amount to a cadenza built on two enormous phrases.

“The work begins with a short introduction that leads directly to a precipitous allegro in two sections: the first angry and aggressive the second delicate and lyrical. The following *Presto* movement is made up of a long, generally quiet line carried in the upper register of the solo violin and accompanied by fleeting commentary from the other instruments. The last movement draws on material from the introduction (two major tenths a whole step apart) and generates a set of four variations, the last of which is the aforementioned dramatic cadenza.”

RAMIRO CORTÉS was born in Dallas, but spent most of his boyhood years in Denver, Colorado, where his musical gifts found responsible recognition and encouragement. Thanks to a solid theoretical grounding and some successful piano compositions achieved during his high school years, Cortés found himself at nineteen the recipient of a Charles Ives Scholarship that enabled him to travel east for study with Henry Cowell, as well as with Richard Donovan at the Yale School of Music. His studies were completed at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles under the tutelage of Halsey Stevens, Ingolf Dahl, Leon Kirchner, and Miklos Rozsa.

It was in 1955 that Mr. CORTÉS gained national notice by garnering four major composition awards, including the George Gershwin Memorial prize, the Steinway Centennial award, and the Broadcast Music, Inc. radio award. At the same time, Dimitri Mitropoulos and the New York Philharmonic premiered the *Sinfonia Sacra* and the Los Angeles Philharmonic introduced the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra prize work, the *Yerma* Symphonic Portrait.

Since then, Mr. CORTÉS has worked with Goffredo Petrassi in Italy under a Fulbright grant and with Roger Sessions in this country. Independent creative work, which has resulted in a catalog of nearly forty compositions in all major musical media, has been pursued by Mr. CORTÉS under a variety of grants from the Huntington Hartford Foundation, the John Hay Whitney Foundation, and the National Institute of Arts and Letters whose grant and recording award he received in 1961.

The Chamber Concerto for Violoncello Solo and Twelve Wind Instruments was written in Rome during 1957-58, a period which also saw production of a String Quartet and a song-cycle to Herman Melville poems. The Concerto was completely revised in 1961, the year when Mr. CORTÉS also completed a Symphony in Three Movements for small orchestra.

Says Mr. CORTÉS of his Chamber Concerto,

“It is in one extended movement with a solo ’cello introduction. The term ‘Concerto’ in the title is used in the sense of a composition in which a solo instrument is contrasted with a combined force. The idea of the individual against the mass will also serve here. This ‘mass’ is represented by the combined efforts of the wind instruments (2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoon, 2 horns, trumpet, and trombone) in a bold statement at the onset of the allegro that follows the ’cello-dominated adagio introduction. This statement is used in *ritornello* fashion — as with anything ‘returned to’ in music — throughout the composition, and also to close the piece. There are several distinct themes which are developed in variation form, some serial technique also being employed. However, the attempt has been made to maintain a tonal structure for the composition as a whole.”

ARTHUR WEISBERG and THE CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER ENSEMBLE have won a notable reputation during the 1960’s for their brilliant performances of advanced contemporary music, ranging in point of time from that of such ‘old masters’ as Ives and Varèse to that of such post-World War II luminaries as Boulez and Stockhausen and the youngest generation of Americans. A virtuoso bassoonist himself, Arthur Weisberg is also on the conducting and teaching faculty of the Juilliard School of Music, where his major course is devoted to “Performing Problems of Contemporary Music.”

The seventeen members of the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble are drawn from such outstanding groups as the New York Woodwind Quintet, the Beaux Arts and Claremont string quartets, the New York Brass Quintet, and the Manhattan Percussion Ensemble. Major concert appearances have included engagements at many major universities, the Library of Congress, and New York City’s Town Hall.

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)