

## **ELIE SIEGMEISTER**

### **Symphony No. 3 (1957)**

**OSLO PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA Elie Siegmeister, conductor**

## **WILLIAM MAYER**

### **Overture for an American (1958)**

**LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA Russell Stanger, conductor**

### **Essay for Brass and Winds (1954)**

**NEW YORK BRASS AND WOODWIND ENSEMBLE Emanuel Balaban, conductor**

### **Country Fair (1957)**

**ROBERT NAGEL BRASS TRIO**

THE name of Elie Siegmeister (b. New York City, 1909) has been associated for more than twenty years with a series of works inspired by American musical folklore, including most notably the highly successful *Sing Out, Sweet Land*, the *Ozark Set* (1943) and the *Western Suite* (premiered by Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Symphony in 1945). The fact remains, however, that Siegmeister's catalog of some half-a-hundred works exhibits a variety of forms together with a depth and scope that might not be suspected by those acquainted with only these popular scores. Siegmeister himself views his output as a whole as having three major facets, the least generally known and perhaps most important of which is that encompassing "absolute" musical works ranging in time from the Violin Sonata No. 1 (1931), Theme and Variations for Piano (1932), *A Strange Funeral in Braddock* (1933), and the String Quartet No. 1 (1935) to the Second and Third Symphonies (1950 and 1957) and the Flute Concerto and Second String Quartet (recorded on CRI 176), both dating from 1960.

The second major sector of Siegmeister's output includes the theater works in which both light and tragic elements are intermingled, from the 1942 "play with music" *Doodle Dandy of the U.S.A.* to the full-scale opera of 1963 on Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*.

The third and best known aspect of Siegmeister's music comprises the purely entertainment pieces already noted, and they have been the only Siegmeister works represented on LP discs until CRI's recordings of the Second String Quartet (CRI 176) and Third Symphony.

In discussing the relationship between his works in absolute forms to those for the theater or in folk idiom, Siegmeister makes the point that,

"They are all part of what interests me. When working with abstract forms, the problem is to explore the inner possibilities and outer limits of your ideas. When writing incidental music for a play or a ballet, there is the problem of illustrating a verbal or visual idea.

“I like to feel that even in our complicated times we can look at music as direct, untrammelled communication. *Ozark Set*, *Sunday in Brooklyn*, and quite a few other pieces were written with that in mind. It is refreshing to write a symphony or a sonata and then, alternately, a theater work or choral composition.

“Then there is the question of style. I have always liked to use certain melodic inflections and rhythmic germs related to our native idiom. From listening to most of my works, it would be easy to sense what part of the world I come from. In certain other works my ideas have taken a different turn. Always there has been a dark, complex, and abstract side to my music. My *Theme and Variations for Piano*, the *First String Quartet*, and *First Symphony* may not be as well known as some of my other pieces, but they are no less a part of me for all that.

“There have been times when the darker and the brighter aspects of my writing have found a common meeting ground, as in the opera on Sean O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars*. Here O’Casey’s characters led me from an earthy musical language to one of a tragic and complex quality. To work out a convincing interplay between them within the framework of a single score was an absorbing problem.”

Of the *Symphony No. 3* recorded here, Siegmeister observes:

“It was composed during 1956 and early 1957, and first performed at a radio concert of the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra under Guy Fraser Harrison’s direction in February, 1959.

In contrast to the broad sonata plan of my two previous symphonies, the *Third Symphony* is based on a free variation concept. It evolves out of three key ideas: the five-note opening; an upward-reaching chromatic figure; and a ‘wedge’ motive in the trumpets. These undergo kaleidoscopic transformation throughout a structure involving three broad sections: 1. A terse, declamatory introduction; then a fast movement in which insistent motivic statements alternate with dance-like elements; 2. a contemplative slow section, in which a long-lined lyricism dominates, despite explosive interruptions; 3. A scherzo-like closing section, over whose contrasting textures clear motivic designs are superimposed, as in a montage. In the hammering climax the three root ideas are telescoped into one, culminating in a climactic return of the declamatory opening.

“The *Symphony* bears the dedication “To Hannah” (my wife), and is scored for woodwinds in pairs, the usual brass and string, piano, and a full complement of percussion.”

---

*From the earliest years of study with Seth Bingham at Columbia University and with Wallingford Riegger, as well as with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, Elie Siegmeister has also been active as conductor and author. He was one of the founding members of the American Composers Alliance, and is presently an officer of the American Music Center, has been choral director for Broadway musical, and in the 1940’s organized the American Ballad Singers to promote interest in the American folk music that has become the rage among the high school and college generation of the 1960’s. Since 1949, Siegmeister has been a member of the music faculty at Hofstra University where he holds the post of full Professor and conducts the Hofstra Symphony Orchestra.*

---

WILLIAM MAYER (b. New York City, 1925) received the greater part of his musical training at Yale University and the Mannes College of Music. He first achieved major public note as a composer with *Hello, World!*, a theater score for children commissioned by UNICEF and subsequently issued on LP by RCA Victor with the participation of no less a personage than Eleanor Roosevelt. Other theater pieces from Mr. Mayer's pen include a ballet, *The Snow Queen* and an opera, *One Christmas Long Ago* which was produced in concert form by the Philadelphia Orchestra for its 1963 Pension Fund. Among his more frequently heard concert hall works have been the Concert Piece from Trumpet and String Orchestra, Two Pastels for Orchestra, and Andante for Strings, as well as the *Essay* and *Country Fair* scores recorded here. Mr. Mayer's Piano Sonata has been recorded by CRI by William Masselos and is scheduled for early 1965 release. *Overture for an American* represents William Mayer's most ambitious work for orchestra at this writing. It was commissioned by the Chautauqua Institution, and premiered at Chautauqua under Walter Hendl's direction in observance of the Theodore Roosevelt Centennial in 1958.

Says Mr. Mayer,

"The work is not meant to depict the many sides of the president, but is intended to evoke his love of life and the out-of-doors.

"The piece falls roughly into three sections. In the first, rapid and asymmetrical figures predominate, whether presented by themselves or in counterpoint to sustained lines. A *misterioso* section follows in which shifting spots of instrumental color are heard over an ostinato figure in 5/4 time, utilizing flatted tones in violas and horns. The music grows more intense, with colors shifting more rapidly and the ostinato figure reaching into higher registers (trumpet and oboe). The ostinato still persists after the ensuing climax, but new harmonies and instrumentation (alto flute, English horn, muted 'cellos) have changed its character; the music is now serene rather than mysterious. The last section celebrates the joyous aspect of nature, and I hope, to a certain degree the buoyant spirit of Theodore Roosevelt. A fugue subject is announced by the bass clarinet, and entries follow from piano, 'cellos, and violins. Culmination of the fugue comes with trombones playing the subject in augmentation. Its fragments continue to be heard however, as four rhythmic motifs heard earlier in the overture now reappear. A climax is reached as the various patterns are played simultaneously. In the coda, the texture thins, leaving at last only the quiet woodwind figure that opened the piece. A burst of brass closes the work. Regarding the texture of the music as a whole, it is worth noting that though a very full orchestra is called for, the patterning of the instrumentation has been worked out to convey the impression of chamber orchestra transparency but with rapid and constant shifts of timbre throughout the whole tonal spectrum available to a large orchestra."

*Essay for Brass and Winds* dates from 1954 and was written at the request of trumpeter Robert Nagel, whose New York Brass Quintet occasionally gives joint concerts with the New York Woodwind Quintet.

Observes Mr. Mayer,

"The concert literature for double quintets is sparse (the *Essay* also uses a percussion player in the second of its two movements). Despite the combining of two quintets in the scoring, the music gives no impression of a choir of woodwinds being pitted against a choir of brass. Instead, the instruments are used individually, in chamber rather, than windband style.

“The first movement could safely be called a passacaglia, save for an interlude and the ending in which the theme is inverted for the first time. The Theme itself is built on an alternation between whole- and semi-tones and between a minor and major seventh. While the first movement exploits the sostenuto-lyrical qualities of the instruments, the second exploits their *secco* and satiric possibilities. Although it can be perilous to interject non-musical thoughts into a musical analysis, I can’t resist calling attention to the raucous trombone sounds near the beginning of the first movement, which I thought of quite specifically as reflecting those of an overly loud and drunken voice as heard over the din of a large cocktail party in its later stages.”

*Country Fair* was composed in 1957 for two trumpets and trombone. “It starts off,” says the composer, “with a rather important sounding flourish that immediately leads into a more gentle episode whose main characteristic is an ‘off-balance’ quality generated by changing meters. There follows a *misterioso* section, which is succeeded once again by the original material.”

The OSLO PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA has been represented on many occasions in the CRI catalog, most recently under its regular conductor, Oivin Fjeldstad, in the Piano Concerto No. 2 by Norwegian composer, Klaus Egge, with the distinguished Norwegian pianist, Robert Riefling, as soloist (CRI 184). American guest conductors appear frequently in Oslo’s University Aula concert hall and on the Norwegian Radio, and it was as a result of just such an invitation that ELIE SIEGMEISTER has the opportunity to conduct the recording of his Third Symphony with the Oslo Philharmonic in June of 1964.

The LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA needs no introduction to record listeners, being one of England’s finest symphonic ensembles. RUSSELL STANGER has for a decade been coming into his own on the national and international scene as one of the most brilliantly gifted younger American conductors. A graduate of the New England Conservatory, Mr. Stanger also studied at the Tanglewood Berkshire Music Center at the invitation of its founder, Serge Koussevitzky. It was in 1960 that Russell Stanger won special laurels for himself, when as one of the assistant conductors of the New York Philharmonic, he did a brilliant pinch-conducting job for the indisposed Leonard Bernstein, and subsequently for five subscription concerts that had been scheduled for Karl Boehm. In recent years, Mr. Stanger has guest-conducted major orchestras throughout Europe, Canada, and the U.S., and in 1963 was named to a panel of three judges for the Princess Astrid Music prize in Norway. The present CRI recording of William Mayer’s *Overture for an American* and one to come of Willard Straight’s *Development for Orchestra* mark Mr. Stanger’s LP recording debut.

The NEW YORK BRASS AND WOODWIND ENSEMBLE participating in this recording of William Mayer’s *Essay for Brass and Winds* is composed of topflight wind players from New York’s finest orchestras. The instrumentalists include Henry Schuman (oboe), Lois Schaefer (flute), Charles Russo (clarinet), Raymond Alonge and Ralph Froelich (French horns), Morris Newman (bassoon), Robert Nagel and Robert Heinrich (trumpets), John Swallow (trombone), Harvey Phillips (tuba), and Charles Birch (percussion). Messers Nagel, Heinrich, and Swallow are the players in *Country Fair*, and they are heard frequently together in New York’s concert halls as mainstays of the well-known New York Brass Quintet. EMANUEL BALABAN, conductor for the William Mayer *Essay* is one of the well-loved veterans of the New York concert and theater scene. He conducted the opera department at the Eastman School of Music from 1927 to 1953 and he lead the New York Ballet Society productions of Gian-Carlo Menotti’s *The Medium* and *The Telephone* that were subsequently recorded by Columbia.

*(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*

