

GENE GUTCHÉ

FIFTH SYMPHONY FOR STRINGS, Op. 34

1962 OSCAR ESPLA INTERNATIONAL COMPOSITION AWARD

Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra

MAX RUDOLF conductor

JOHN LA MONTAINE

CONCERTO FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA, Op. 9

1959 PULITZER PRIZE FOR MUSIC

KAREN KEYS piano

Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra

GUY FRAZER HARRISON conductor

GENE GUTCHÉ (b. Berlin, 1907; resident in the U.S. Since 1925; now living at White Bear Lake, Minn.) has long been cognizant as the result of actual compositional practice with such basic tools of "advanced modern music" as microtonal, polytonal, and 12-tone technique. He has used them all sometimes exclusively, sometimes in synthesis with traditional means in various compositions since the beginnings of his professional composing career in the middle 1940's. However, he has chosen to integrate varied aspects of these techniques into what he feels to be a highly idiomatic and personal musical language that has been described by one commentator as "unreservedly contemporary yet committed to music as a sensuous art." Mr. Gutché's Fifth Symphony for Strings stands as a thoroughly representative statement of this aesthetic point of view — a point of view which sees today's "academic" composers enslaved by preoccupation with technique as an end in itself, while the "professional" composer may yet be able to preserve some measure of vital substance for the music of our time through the sheer exigency of having to write for a varied lay audience rather than for the eyes and cerebrally-conditioned ears of his academic peers.

That Gene Gutché was in his forties by the time his music first began to be heard in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area may seem odd to those used to the idea of composers achieving their first glow of fame in their early twenties. But the fact remains that his well-to-do Berlin parents merely tolerated the intense fascination that the art of music held for their only child; and not even the encouragement of the renowned Ferruccio Busoni was sufficient to temper their determination to have their son trained as a businessman-economist via the universities of Heidelberg, Lausanne, and Padua.

Unable to pursue either his musical aspirations or a parentally-planned business career with any degree of single-mindedness, young Gutché finally cut loose from his family, arriving in the United States at Galveston in 1925. The subsequent Wanderjahre took him through the heart of the U.S. working at various odd jobs, including migratory grain harvesting, where he settled first in Minneapolis, beginning-serious composition studies with Donald N. Ferguson, then in 1935 moving on to New York, where his early business training and innate linguistic ability apparently stood him in such good stead that he enjoyed a remarkable success in the export and oil business.

After eight years in New York, Mr. Gutché returned to Minneapolis, taking up study in earnest at the University of Minnesota under Dr. Ferguson and James Aliferis. By 1950 he had achieved his Master's degree in music with his First Symphony and Third String Quartet as theses; and three years later gained a doctorate at the University of Iowa under Philip Greeley Clapp with his Third Symphony and Assymmetric Ballet. By the middle 1950's Gutché's compositions were both being performed with increasing frequency in the mid-west area and were gaining added recognition in the form of major awards: the Minnesota State Centennial Prize for the Third String Quartet; the 1959 Luria Award for the Holofernes Overture; the 1961 Albuquerque National

Composition Prize for the Fourth Symphony; and the 1962 Oscar Esphi International Composition Award for the Fifth Symphony recorded here. A Guggenheim fellowship was awarded Gutché in 1963 and again in 1964 for completion of his opera, *Yodí*, for which he had already written the *Holofernes Overture*.

The 1960's have seen Gutché's works being taken up by major performing organizations in Cincinnati, Washington, D. C., and New York, as well as a start toward representation on commercial phonograph discs. Besides the recording of the Bongo Divertimento, Op. 35, on the St. Paul label and the present CRI disc of the Fifth Symphony for Strings, the Fourth String Quartet as recorded by the Fine Arts Quartet is scheduled for release on the Concert-Disc label. The Fifth Symphony for Strings was also broadcast throughout the country over Radio ABC and National Educational Television Network as performed by Max Rudolf and the Cincinnati Symphony.

Concerning the structure and style of the Fifth Symphony for Strings, Gene Gutché has written as follows:

“Compositionally, the work is based on the time-honored principle of motive-exposition and variation. Structurally, the main weight of the symphony falls in the two outer movements.

“The first movement is almost perpetual motion, based essentially on one sinuous melody and the frenetic triplet rhythm that bursts forth for the first time, though tentatively, in the cellos in the third measure. The rhythmic development of this triplet figure, the ways in which it is pitted against other rhythmic outlines, and the constantly shifting phrase lengths create a tour de force of 460 bars.

“The inner movements, despite their intrinsic interest, act almost as foils for the much more complex and expansive first and last movements. The second movement, *Burletta* (musical farce), is a '*pizzicato ostinato*.' It is relaxed and ever sardonic in humor. The compact slow movement is a distillation of carefully conceived lyricism.

“The Finale is a combination of the powerful rhythmic drive of the first movement with a touch of the jocularity of the *Burletta*. The main theme, suggested in the third bar after a series of hammering chords, is soon followed by the germ of another motive, and finally, after only nine bars, a hint of the third motive of the movement. With this “thumbnail” exposition of the germ motives of the Finale, the movement plunges headlong, first into their complete exposition and then into a full-scale development of all materials.”

JOHN LA MONTAINE (b. 1920, Oak Park, Ill.), though known among his professional colleagues for a decade as a highly gifted pianist, came into national prominence as a composer only in 1958, when the Piano Concerto recorded here received its world premiere on November 25 of that year with Jorge Bolet as soloist and the National Symphony conducted by Howard Mitchell. The music had been commissioned by the National Symphony Orchestra under a grant from the Ford Foundation, and in 1959 the score was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Music. This CRI recording was done under the terms of a 1962 award to Mr. La Montaine from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

The reasons for the deep impression made by the Concerto on both lay listeners and on critics and professionals is not hard to discover; for in common with his senior colleague, Samuel Barber, La Montaine has displayed in his music a flair for intensely dramatic lyrical utterance in combination with virtuosic effectiveness in the best sense of the word that makes for surefire listener impact. For a contemporary composer to accomplish such a feat in a large-scale piece, sticking within a relatively traditional frame-work, and avoiding the slightest taint of the meretricious is a feat of no mean order, and one attainable only by a composer whose stylistic persuasions are backed by a solidity of craftsmanship that has become second nature. In this connection, it is sufficient to mention that Mr. La Montaine's training, after studies in Chicago, was received from such august institutions as the Eastman School of Music and the Juilliard School, as well as from Nadia Boulanger.

Since 1959, La Montaine has not lacked for recognition of his creative gifts, having won two Guggenheim Fellowships, being named Composer in Residence at the American Academy in Rome, and Visiting Professor of Composition at the Eastman School. His catalog of compositions is now well past the Opus 30 mark and includes

the *Songs of the Rose of Sharon*, Op. 6 for soprano and orchestra, a Piano Sonata, Op. 3, a Sonata for Piano Four Hands, Op. 25, a String Quartet, Op. 16, Jubilant Overture for orchestra, Op. 20, Canticle for Orchestra, Op. 31, and *Wonder Tidings* for chorus, soloists, harp, and percussion, Op. 23.

Regarding the musical form and content of Mr. La Montaine's Piano Concerto, the publisher has supplied a succinct and valid summation:

“The Concerto affirms both the lyric and virtuoso capabilities of the piano. The first movement is bold and decisive, classic in form, romantic in content. The second movement . is slow and introspective, rising to an overwhelming climax. It is an elegy in memory of the composer's sister, Isabel La Montaine. The Finale, in quadruple meter, is brilliant, rhythmic and march-like, interrupted twice by an extended songful passage of great intensity in triple meter. All the thematic and passage material of the final movement is derived from the opening of the first movement. . . .”

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)