

## HENRY COWELL

Trio for Violin, 'cello, and Piano (1965)

## ALEXANDER SEMMLER

Trio for Violin, 'cello, and Piano, Op. 40 (1964)

## *THE PHILHARMONIA TRIO*

*Charles Libove, violin — Alan Shulman, 'cello — Nina Lugovoy, piano*

*Both of the works recorded here were commissioned by the Hans J. Cohn Foundation of Woodstock, N.Y. and were premiered there in the summer of 1965 by the Philharmonia Trio at one of the Sunday afternoon Maverick Concerts, then celebrating their fiftieth anniversary.*

HENRY COWELL (b. 1897, Menlo Park, Calif. — d. 1965) began work on his Trio in September of 1964 at his summer home in Shady, not far from Woodstock. Completed sketches were worked out at Brooklyn Jewish Hospital, and finishing touches were done during March of 1965, at which time Cowell was completing his final semester of teaching at Columbia University prior to his retirement from the faculty. The Trio stands as Cowell's only composition for the classic trio combination and was his last completed work.

Thus it marks the end of a singularly bold and varied creative life that, over a period of half a century, encompassed a vast exploration of every means of producing and organizing musical sound, ranging from the early piano tone-cluster pieces through nineteen symphonies and more than a dozen "hymn and fuguing tunes" for varied combinations. Add to this Cowell's work as teacher, pioneer ethnomusicologist, writer, tireless promoter of the fresh and new in music, and a truly protean figure emerges. As Richard Franko Goldman noted in a memorial tribute published in the Spring-Summer 1966 issue of *Perspectives of New Music*, "Henry was a mover, and one of the enliveners of music in our time. All of us, whatever our musical tastes and practices, owe him a great deal. He helped two generations to see and think and hear, and he helped to create and build a foundation for 'modern' music in America. This is not a small achievement; it is a gigantic one, and should not be forgotten."

As always with Cowell, his treatment of the medium is anything but classic, both as to the manner of writing for the instruments and as to formal characteristics. Instead of the usual three- or four-movement scheme of classical chamber music, there are nine sections based on common melodic and rhythmic materials. Indeed, the work has been described as a series of "imaginative, sunny views of a single hit of music from nine different vantage points." As with the *Mosaic* and *United* string quartets composed in the middle 1930's (recorded on CRI 173), with which the present Trio shares stylistic affinities, Cowell has sought to create his own special "sound." Thus he avoids the so-called normal procedure of using the piano as the textural and rhythmic foundation of the ensemble. The piano functions by and large as an independent entity of the tonal texture, with strings playing either soloistically or in duet. The musical material of the trio is treated in widely varied fashion — as sheer melody (first movement),

arpeggio etude (second and seventh movements), chromatic study in oblique motion (fourth movement), chorale (fifth movement), or fantastic scherzo (sixth movement). The harmonic *glissandi* for 'cello here recall the similar effect used in the third movement of the *Mosaic* Quartet. The finale — of almost Weberian brevity — seems to break off almost before getting really started, the intent being to create the feeling common to much Indian and Indonesian music of infinite continuity beyond the span of actual sound.

In this recorded performance—made possible with the assistance of the Contemporary Music Society, pauses between movements have been arranged so that the movements relate to each other as units in the following sequence: 1-2, 3, 4-5-6-7, 8-9.

ALEXANDER SEMMLER (b. Dortmund, Germany) was educated and pursued his early professional music career in Germany. While studying in the cities of Marburg, Berlin, and Munich as composer, conductor, and pianist, Semmler also pursued university majors in philosophy and musicology.

Upon coming to the United States in the 1930's, Semmler continued his career as concert pianist, and after a number of years with the CBS Symphony Orchestra, became a CBS staff conductor. Most of his professional work since then has been connected with radio, television, or films as conductor, composer, and consultant. In the latter capacity he has been American Administrator of the Music Department at RIAS in West Berlin -- this in 1951-52, and in 1953-54 at the behest of the Mexican Cultural Ministry, he helped organize in Mexico City the *Centro de Compositores Mexicanos*, as well as lecturing and conducting. In 1958 he conducted members of the Symphony Orchestra of Madrid in recordings of his own work, as well as those of other American composers. In New York, Semmler is Musical Director of TRF Music, Inc., and of Picture Scores, Inc. Since 1955 he has been program director of the Maverick Concerts in Woodstock.

Semmler's extensive catalog of compositions include symphonic scores, choral and solo vocal works, much chamber music for a variety of combinations, and a large sheaf of solo piano works. By his own estimate, he has composed over a thousand scores for dramatic broadcast and film use, much of it for major network programs.

The Trio, Op. 40, is a generously proportioned, intensely dramatic four-movement work composed in what might be called twentieth century mainstream idiom—post Hindemithian, yet very personal. Motic dynamism dominates the opening *Allegro con brio*. The brooding second movement is characterized by extreme contrasts in dynamics and mood, while the lively *pizzicato* Scherzo is a light but complex weave of polyphonic lines in which even the piano plays *quasi-pizzicato* most of the time. The finale is a sophisticated but brilliant *Alla marcia molto vivo*. As might be expected from a composer-pianist, the writing for the keyboard instrument is highly virtuosic, and indeed this last adjective could be applied to the music as a whole. While the Trio is not cyclic in any strict sense of the word, its four movements represent an organically unified structure, allowing only for brief pauses between movements.

While Mr. Semmler insists on the purely musical genesis of the Trio's content and structure, he also notes a kinship in spirit to a huge project in progress by his sculptor-friend, Harvey Fite at Highwoods, N.Y. Observes Semmler, "The latent energies in the dynamic lines, planes, and terraces of the sculpture, the mysticism implicit in its many shadowy crevices, the sense of dark triumph that seems to emerge from the six-ton monolith challenging the very universe, all these seem to find their equivalent in the moving forces of the Trio."

*Notes by* DAVID HALL

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THE PHILHARMONIA TRIO made its New York debut in 1962, and considering the caliber and experience of its members — Charles Libove (violin), Nina Lugovoy (piano), and Alan Shulman (cello), it is hardly surprising that their playing should have been written of in *The New York Times* in terms of “warmth and expressive vitality . . . nuance and big line . . . technical skill and ease,” and ability “to get deep into the profounder aspects of musical communication.”

New York-born *Charles Libove* is currently first violinist of the Naumburg Award winning Beaux-Arts String Quartet. *Nina Lugovoy*, also a native New Yorker, has played solo recitals throughout Europe and the U.S.A., and has given numerous sonata programs with her husband, Charles Libove. *Alan Shulman*, a Baltimorean by birth, was a charter member of Toscanini's NBC Symphony, has played in the Kreiner String Quartet, and was co-founder of the Stuyvesant String Quartet. He is equally, if not better known as a composer, whose works have been played by leading orchestras and soloists throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe.