

1. Russell Smith: Second Piano Concerto (1956-57) (33:00)
Andrzej Stefanski, piano
Polish National Radio Orchestra, Jan Krenz, conductor
2. Lee Hoiby: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (1958) (25:10)
John Atkins, piano
Polish National Radio Orchestra
Jan Krenz, conductor

Recorded by Polskie Nagrania, Poland

Russell Smith (b 1927, Tuscaloosa, Alabama) was raised in northern Virginia by parents whose interests, professional and extracurricular, encompassed economics, drama and poetry, painting and music. His own professional music training began at the Eastman School of Music, and continued under Douglas Moore and Otto Luening at Columbia University, where he received the B.A. and M.A. degrees in music. During the summer of 1947, he worked with Aaron Copland at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood.

In subsequent years Russell Smith has been active as a teacher (Hunter College, Queens College), music editor, and writer on matters musical for such publications as *Harper's* magazine, *High Fidelity*, *HiFi*, *Stereo Review*, and *The New York Times*. In 1966 he was appointed to the Cleveland Orchestra during which time the Second Piano Concerto received its world concert premiere.

Mr. Smith's catalog of compositions includes more than two dozen works: two piano concertos; *Tetrameron* (CRI 131); *Can-Can and Waltz*; music for the film *Speak to Me, Child*; the opera *The Unicorn in the Garden*; a ballet, *Antigone*, and choral, chamber and solo instrumental works.

Recognition of Mr. Smith's creative work has included such major awards as a Guggenheim Fellowship, a special George Gershwin Award, and the 1963 National Institute of Arts and Letters Grant; also performances by such major performers as the Cleveland and Cincinnati symphony orchestras under George Szell and Max Rudolf, respectively; pianist Grant Johannesen; and singers Jennie Tourel and David Lloyd.

Speaking of his Second Piano Concerto, Russell Smith observes that it was written, "simply because I wanted to explore the piano concerto form again." As in *Tetrameron*, composed at about the same time, Mr. Smith employs what might be described as "modern classic" speech, unambiguously tonal in orientation, and powerfully virile in expression. The first movement is in sonata pattern with double exposition. The slow movement is also in sonata form with canonic episodes taking the form of richly ornamented retrogrades, inversions, and retrograde-inversions. The final allegro is in theme-and-variation format—the first three variations building toward a climax, the following two treating the theme in its skeletal aspects. A *musette* variation serves by way of whimsical interlude, and the climactic close of the work is arrived at by way of three final variations.

Andrzej Stefanski, now in his middle thirties, is prominent in his native Poland as a concert pianist and teacher, being currently on the faculty of the State College of Music in Warsaw. Trained at the Secondary School of Music in Poznan and subsequently at the State College of Music in Warsaw, where he graduated with distinction in 1959, Mr. Stefanski has performed widely throughout Poland as a recitalist and featured soloist, and has been heard also in Brussels and as a contestant in the 1962 Moscow Tchaikovsky competition.

Jan Krenz, the gifted conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, won a substantial measure of international renown for the versatility and musicianship he displayed during the Warsaw Autumn Festivals of Contemporary Music in 1963, 1964, and 1965.

Lee Hoiby (b Madison, Wisconsin, 1926) was trained at the University of Wisconsin where he graduated with a bachelor of music degree in 1947. He undertook further study at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia with Egon Petri in piano and Gian-Carlo Menotti in composition, winning the master's degree in 1952. There followed a year in Rome and Salzburg on a Fulbright grant, and in 1957 he was a recipient of the National Institute of Arts and Letters Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

If Russell Smith's musical language displays a sinewy "modern classic" bias, Lee Hoiby's is unabashedly lyrical. Thus it is not surprising that music for the human voice should loom large among the twenty-five opus numbers comprising Hoiby's production through 1966, the principal items being a one-act opera *The Scarf*, premiered at the 1956 Spoleto Festival of Two Worlds; *Beatrice*—a three-act Louisville-commissioned opera, premiered there in 1960, (Louisville First Editions 603-2 discs), and the two-act opera *Natalia Petrovna*, commissioned by the New York City Opera with Ford Foundation assistance, and premiered in October, 1964. A cantata, *Hymn of the Nativity*, and a setting of Thomas Wolfe's *The Tides of Sleep* for bass and orchestra, are among Hoiby's other major vocal works. An operatic setting of Tennessee Williams's *Summer and Smoke* is in progress in 1967. Mr. Hoiby's principal instrumental works include a violin sonata, incidental music for *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, and *She Stoops to Conquer*, and a ballet, *After Eden*.

About his Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Mr. Hoiby writes that it was commissioned by G. Schirmer in 1957 and completed in Rome during the fall of 1958. The first concert performance was with John Atkins and the Festival Orchestra of New York under Thomas Dunn at Philharmonic Hall.

Describing the formal course of the concerto, Mr. Hoiby tells us: "The piano begins with a quiet statement of the principal theme, which is then exchanged with the orchestra and led through several keys, without transition, directly to the second subject, in tempo giusto. There is a closing section, wherein two new motives appear at the same time. Development of all this material follows, leading to a solo piano cadenza, and a brief summarizing recapitulation with coda, the lento second movement is by turns lyrical, contemplative, and rhapsodic, with an embellished cadenza prominent in the early pages.

"The allegro vivo finale offers a dancing 7/8 solo piano figure by way of the main theme, which is counterpointed by a separate rhythm for muted brass. This theme is alternated with two contrasting sections in sonata-rondo fashion. The last pages of the concerto are marked by steadily increasing momentum leading to a *fortissimo* close."

John Atkins, a twenty-seven-year-old native of Mississippi, made his New York debut on January 15, 1965, playing the Shostakovich First Piano Concerto with Thomas Dunn and the New York Festival Orchestra. Then, as in the concert premiere of the Hoiby Concerto a year later, the response from the critical press was singularly warm and cordial.

Mr. Atkins has also been heard frequently as a solo recitalist and chamber music performer in Carnegie, Philharmonic, and Town halls, where he has performed music by Copland, Dallapiccola, Roy Harris, Ives, Krenek, Piston, William Schuman, and others.

Notes Prepared by David Hall

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)