ROBERT MOEVS

MUSICA DA CAMERA (1965)

Contemporary Chamber Ensemble
Arthur Weisberg, *conductor*

VARIAZIONI SOPRA UNA MELODIA (1961)

Jacob Glick, *viola*
Robert Sylvester, *cello*

EZRA SIMS

THIRD QUARTET (1962)

The Lenox Quartet

ROBERT MOEVS was born in La Crosse, Wisconsin, in 1920 and studied at Harvard with Walter Piston, and in Paris. He has been Composer in Residence at the American Academy in Rome and has received among other awards, a Guggenheim Fellowship and the award of the National Institute of Arts and Sciences. He has been a military pilot and officer in the Allied Control Commission in Rumania. He is now Associate Professor of Music at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

Although Moevs has been commissioned and performed with gratifying results both in Europe and the U. S., one of his most startling successes came in Boston in 1960, after a performance by the Boston Symphony of his ATTIS. The Boston papers were moved to report the event on the front pages. The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR compared it to the scandalous premiere of Stravinsky's SACRE in 1913, and described the work as containing "elements of awe-inspiring design . . . a mood of violent paganism," and as being "a tonal illustration in the most vivid terms possible of ancient blood rites . . . This man is following no trails; he is blazing highways."

The following notes were supplied by the composer.

> "MUSICA DA CAMERA was written in 1965 at Blackwell's Mills, N. J., for the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, conducted by Arthur Weisberg. It was first performed at Rutgers where the ensemble is in residence, and then at Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, in 1966.
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> "The character of the music may be suggested by a poetical image of Rilke: . . . *das ungewisse Licht von Nachmittagen, in denen man sich furchtete als kind.* Rilke is evoking a sense of foreboding, a tension of imminent, unknown danger in the gathering afternoon silence of a park or grove, broken by the sudden cries of a bird. MUSICA DA CAMERA was written in surroundings charged with a similar quality.

"There are 12 sections averaging one minute each. The climactic point arrives in Section II when the percussion, which has been growing in importance through the preceding sections, attains the foreground. Sections VIII-XII are pitch inversions, in reverse order, of sections I-V. Sections I and XII arc divided into three parts, mirroring one another in structural detail.

"The music is organized around pitches that are not sounded, to produce a kind of anti-tonality. This negative center migrates systematically through the twelve chromatic pitches of the octave as a result of manipulation of primary motivic material: a minor second expanding in contrary motion to a minor third; a minor third expanding similarly to a fourth; and a fourth expanding to a fifth. The first note heard is A, a harp harmonic; the last note is, as a consequence, B-flat, likewise a harp harmonic. The axis thus defined establishes a pitch orientation in the positive sense. The pattern of tempi is built on multiples of 25, from MM 50 to 150, the lower limit governing outside sections I and XII, the upper limit the central pivot sections VI-VII. The number of measures in each section is a multiple of 3, from 9 to 30.

"VARIAZIONI SOPRA UNA MELODIA was written in the Spring of 1961 at the Villa Aurelia of the American Academy in Rome. In spite of the extraordinarily beautiful environment, it was a time of crisis; this music for viola and cello, an outgrowth of crisis, is for me intensely personal. The melody is presented by the viola, but through the participation of a cello commentary it acquires a double aspect. The various intervallic successions produced by this complementary dialogue then are used independently as bases for a series of variations.

"A climactic zone is reached, during which the music begins to proceed in retrograde until the end, when the melody is heard again, also in retrograde. The first and last notes are the same F, which functions as the axis of pitch. The general procedure is similar to, but simpler than that followed in the later MUSICA DA CAMERA."

Ezra Sims was born in 1928 in Birmingham, Alabama. He was graduated from Birmingham-Southern College (B.A.), Yale University School of Music (B.M. — with Quincy Porter), and Mills College (M.A. — with Darius Milhaud and Leon Kirchner). The earliest piece he now recognizes is his "Chamber Cantata on Chinese Poems" (CRI 186), written during his study with Milhaud.

He has held, in the course of his studies and career, "the usual string of routine jobs" — as a steel-worker, mail clerk, display designer for a department store — and on the staff of Harvard's Music Library. In recent years he has received several awards, two of which — a Guggenheim and a commission from the Endicott Fund — made possible the composition of the THIRD QUARTET "in unusually unharried circumstances."

This composition was begun in Roxbury, Massachusetts, continued in New York and San Francisco and finished in Tokyo. It is dedicated to the Lenox Quartet, which gave it its first performance in Carnegie Recital Hall in 1965. It is one of an increasing number of mid-century compositions that make integral use of micro-intervals (in his case "quarter- or "sixth-tones") to indicate intervals smaller than those of the chromatic or 12-note scale.

Mr. Sims says:

"I came to a use of microtones not by whim, nor because of an intellectual decision, nor from a desire to be *epatant*, but of necessity — rather, indeed, against my 'better judgment': what composer wants to add still another obstacle to performance?

"I had known for a long time, of course, of Haba and Carillo — and later of Vincentino, Yasser, the electronics people and Partch — but their example was tangential to the music I was, and am, interested in and had done nothing to recommend my following them. It was only after I came to use microtones that I discovered that a goodly number of composers around my age were finding themselves compelled to the same thing.

"At one point in the composition of my first quartet, I realized that my "ear" was demanding that an F, sounding against an E, rise a major seventh to a note that was nevertheless not an E. I was delighted but frightened, and I decided to hold off using quarter-tones — until it became obvious I'd have to use them or have nothing to write.

"The THIRD QUARTET is my sixth work using micro-intervals and my last to use quarter-tones. The more I worked with quarter-tones the more I realized that they provided a rather too-inflexible division of the octave. Now I'm calling for quarter- and sixth-tones mixed.

"It was a curiously satisfying piece to write. It's a commonplace to describe sections of a piece as having written themselves when work was going at its best. But the whole of the quartet seemed something granted me rather than something I'd invented or uncovered. My role seemed essentially that of amanuensis: to keep my mind open, follow it where it wanted to go, and record its trip.

"When it was finished, I saw that what had gone onto the page was a pretty conclusive survey, summing up, and dismissal, of what I'd been doing up till then."

—CARTER HARMAN

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(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)