

OTTO LUENING - VLADIMIR USSACHEVSKY
CONCERTED PIECE FOR TAPE RECORDER AND ORCHESTRA
Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, José Serebrier, conductor

VLADIMIR USSACHEVSKY
OF WOOD AND BRASS
WIRELESS FANTASY

Tape sounds produced at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, New York

MEL POWELL

EVENTS for tape recorder

Voices: Mildred Dunnock, Martha Scott, Lee Bowman

IMPROVISATION

Ward Davenny, piano; Keith Wilson, clarinet; David Schwartz, viola

SECOND ELECTRONIC SETTING

TWO PRAYER SETTINGS

New York Chamber Soloists; Charles Bressler, tenor; Melvin Kaplan, conductor

Collaboration in musical composition is much rarer than, say, novel writing and even picture painting. But Otto Luening and Vladimir Ussachevsky have been collaborating with eminent success ever since they discovered the possibilities of composition for tape recorders. **CONCERTED PIECE** is the third and one of the most attractive results of this collaboration, as its frequent public performances attest. CRI is proud of the unusually beautiful sound of this recording.

A Luening-Ussachevsky compositional collaboration starts with a conference. Having agreed that they want to write a piece, they then decide how long it is to last, and then what type of effect or quality they wish it to have (it would be fascinating to eavesdrop on this part of the conference). The rest is simply deciding how to divide up the labor. Later conferences help to eliminate unsuccessful efforts and to carpenter the sections together.

CONCERTED PIECE was composed in 1960 on commission by Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic, and premiered by them that year. The music bears some resemblance to a movement from a classical concerto, with the tape recorder in the role of soloist or concertino. The first part, composed by Mr. Luening, ends with the cadenza for taped sounds alone. It is somewhat more homogenous than the second, composed by Mr. Ussachevsky, which makes considerable use of an antiphonal interplay between the orchestra and tape.

OTTO LUENING had a long and distinguished musical career before he undertook composition on electronic tape. Of his more than 200 compositions, 15 make use of the tape medium; his **SYNTHESIS** is on CRI 215. In addition to his teaching activities at Columbia University, he is a director of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center.

JOSE SEREBRIER, was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, and was brought to the U. S. at the age of 17 to study with Aaron Copland. He remained to become Leopold Stokowski's assistant with the American Symphony Orchestra and conducted it himself with a flair and control that justified the maestro's confidence in him. As of 1968, he was serving as associate professor of Music at Eastern Michigan University. He has conducted public performances of **CONCERTED PIECE** in Mexico City, Israel and New York; he recorded its orchestral portions in Oslo.

VLADIMIR USSACHEVSKY is Professor of Music at Columbia University and Chairman of the Electronic Music Center. A public presentation of his first tape experiments in May, 1952, was the first performance of what became known as tape music—an indigenous American development. Besides a number of compositions for tape, he has produced two extensive film scores, one for "No Exit", a screen adaptation of Jean Paul Sartre's famous play, and another for a forty-five minute abstract movie "Line of Apogee", by Lloyd Williams. In 1967 and 1968 he was invited by the Bell Telephone Laboratories at Murray Hill, N. J. to investigate possibilities of sound synthesis on computers.

He writes:

"The title, OF WOOD AND BRASS (1965) is derived from the materials used in composing it. I attempted to remove the final sound materials as far as possible from the quality of the original instrumental sounds."

To achieve this, Mr. Ussachevsky used a number of machine and tape manipulative techniques which he developed from his extensive experimentation in tape medium when the latter was dependent exclusively on skilled handicraft rather than on the now popular keyboard controlled electronic sound generating devices. He adds:

"The first section consists predominantly of material evolved from the trombone and from the electronic source; the second from a single flourish on a trumpet; most of the third section was originally played on the xylophone, mixed with some electronic sounds; the final section is made almost exclusively from a glissando on the trombone and the sound of a Korean gong."

WIRELESS FANTASY was composed in 1960. The composer writes:

"The birth of wireless communication ushered in an exciting period which lasted from 1899 to 1925 when the Amateur Spark Era came to an end. Much romance and nostalgia still remain from these times."

Among the American pioneers of this period perhaps none is better known than Lee De Forrest, whose inventions led to the development of radio as we know it today. To honor him, a group of dedicated old timers formed an organization known as "De Forrest Pioneers".

It is for this organization that Mr. Ussachevsky was asked to produce an electronic work utilizing some wireless code signals as basic sound material. He was introduced to a radio pioneer, Mr. Ed G. Raser, who has an extensive collection of old wireless amateur gear in his W2ZI Historical Wireless Museum in Trenton, N. J. It is there that Mr. Ussachevsky recorded such now seldom-heard sounds as code signals produced on the old spark generators. The insertion of a fragment from "Parsifal," electronically treated to resemble a short-wave transmission, was a result of Mr. Ussachevsky's learning that Lee De Forrest used this work as the first ever to be broadcast anywhere.

Adds Mr. Ussachevsky:

"The first signal is 'QST', a standard call to all stations to stand by for a message of general interest. Then comes the first old open gap spark-generated code, 'DF' (for De Forrest), the identifying call of the famous Manhattan Beach Station which could be heard from Newfoundland to the Caribbean. This is soon followed by 'WA', associated with the Waldorf-Astoria Station, built in 1910, and then 'NY'. Under this is played a montage of wireless signals, until slowly the orchestral composition emerges. Toward the end 'DOC DF', the affectionate nickname by which De Forrest was known to his friends, is tapped by Mr. Raser. The FANTASY ends with the conventional code 'AR'—end of message—and 'GN'—good night".

MEL POWELL (b. 1923) is Chairman of the composition faculty and Director of the Electronic Music Studio at Yale. His music is characterized by a delicate lyricism that never descends to mere preciousness, and by a passion for clarity and immediacy that illumines even his most complex works.

EVENTS (1963) uses three pre-recorded voices and electronically generated sounds. Each of the actors was asked to read Hart Crane's "Legend." The recorded voices were then treated exactly like the electronic sounds, and their overlappings and transformations result in a poem-collage. The simultaneities, and the returns and repeats of isolated phrases and words create a number of subsidiary meanings and associations, thus "interpreting" the poem. Intertwined with the poem-collage, and interacting with it, are the electronic sounds, and the interaction makes EVENTS Powell's most overtly dramatic piece.

IMPROVISATION (1962), a commission of the Yale University Summer School of Music, and TWO PRAYER SETTINGS (1963), written for the New York Chamber Soloists, make use of tightly controlled polyphonic webs which nevertheless allow each performer considerable freedom. The controls tend to create harmonic areas with clearly delimited interval content which often coincide with and unify motivic groups, as well control of the directional thrusts of the groups and their manner of attack. At times the tempo indication requires that each player perform as fast as possible without regard for the vertical correlation of the parts.

In IMPROVISATION the fluctuations of the tempo and the relatively complex writing in the strictly ensemble sections obscure the division between these and the freer sections, creating a continuum from one to the other.

In the TWO PRAYER SETTINGS, the strings are treated as a single polyphonic instrument and set against the oboe and the voice. The work is so rooted in the delivery of the texts that often they can be understood as normal discourse. Thus, the most complex passages occur when the voice is silent as, for example, at the opening of the second setting. The words of the first setting are by Paul Goodman, those of the second are attributed to Gregory the Great.

The SECOND ELECTRONIC SETTING (1962) contrasts sharply with EVENTS. Its divertimento-like surface and straight-forward structure make apparent the amazing technical virtuosity of the work. The individuality of the parts is made explicit by their own registral, timbral and rhythmic characteristics; thus the SETTING carries to the electronic medium some of Powell's attitudes towards instrumental music. However, like every true virtuoso performance, the piece can be enjoyed for its sheer engaging sound by listeners who do not care how it was put together.

—A.E.P.

The American Academy of Arts and Letters and its parent organization, the National Institute of Arts and Letters, are honorary societies with a distinguished membership of creative artists. They are chartered by an act of Congress and are devoted to the furtherance of the arts in the United States.

Through joint committees of selection, these societies every year award fifteen grants to young artists in recognition of distinction and promise. Four of these awards go annually to composers, in addition to the Marjorie Peabody Waite Award given every third year to an established composer of distinction.

In the spring an exhibition of the works of award winners in painting and sculpture is held at the Academy building. In 1956, it was decided to inaugurate a series of recordings with the similar purpose of calling attention to the works of award winners in music. This release, presented in collaboration with Composers Recordings, Inc. offers works by 1963 award winners, Vladimir Ussachevsky and Mel Powell.

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)

