

CRI 231

ROBERT PARRIS - CONCERTO FOR TROMBONE (1964)

(with winds, percussion, piano and strings)

Roman Siwek, trombone; Ldzistan Szostak, conductor; Polish National Radio Orchestra

Recorded by Polskie Nagrania

GEORGE ROCHBERG - CONTRA MORTEM ET TEMPUS (1965)

Aeolian Quartet of Sarah Lawrence College

CHARLES WUORINEN - JANISSARY MUSIC (1966)

Raymond DesRoches, percussionist

The enclosed recording is another in CRI's series of music in advanced idiom, with a strong university-based component: Robert Parris is Associate Professor of Music at George Washington University; George Rochberg is Chairman of the Music Department at the University of Pennsylvania and leads the Group for Contemporary Music there, and Charles Wuorinen is co-director of the Group for Contemporary Music at Columbia University. Raymond DesRoches is first percussionist with the Group. The Aeolian Quartet is in residence at Sarah Lawrence College.

Robert Parris' CONCERTO FOR TROMBONE was regarded with amazement by CRI's composer-directors, who would have thought it unplayable if they had not heard a tape of the premiere played by Robert Gutter. The present recording was made by still another remarkable instrumentalist, Roman Siwek, who was brought into the picture by the Polish Orchestra when it became certain that Mr. Gutter would, through no fault of his own, be unable to make the session. Listening to Siwek's stunning, not to say apocalyptic performance, CRI's officials were still more amazed.

The CONCERTO FOR TROMBONE's vivid atmospheric content is only hinted by the titles of its two movements, NOCTURNE and PERPETUAL MOTION. The first is an eldritch fantasy punctuated by furious thunderclaps, the second a sweeping, almost macabre romp.

Asked to comment on the music, Mr. Parris replied: "I feel that an oversimplified discussion of technical considerations can be less of a guide than a trap. Recreating form and content should be the listener's pleasure; to rely on the composer's view of his own work might lead an intelligent listener to over-estimate elements of the music which might, and perhaps should, be of secondary significance. In any case it was neither the structure nor the material that sparked the intense creative drive which persisted during the six weeks of composition, but rather the medium itself, the sonorous possibilities of which I found endlessly fascinating. To this excitement of the imagination was added the exhilaration of being able to pull out all the stops, to take advantage of the technical prowess of a virtuoso trombonist."

The CONCERTO was written in January and February of 1964 for Mr. Gutter and Ivan Romanenko, conductor of the (now defunct) Washington Chamber Orchestra. These forces combined to give the piece its first performance in September of 1964 at the Arena Stage, in Washington, D. C.

Robert Parris was born in Philadelphia, Pa. in 1924 and attended the University of Pennsylvania, the Juilliard School of Music, Columbia University, the Berkshire Music Center and the Ecole Normale de Musique, in Paris. In addition, he is a pianist and harpsichordist, and has recorded a forthcoming CRI release, Robert Evett's SONATA FOR HARPSICHORD.

George Rochberg writes of his *CONTRA MORTEM ET TEMPUS*:

“After the death of my son Paul in 1964 it became crystal clear to me that I could not continue writing so-called “serial” music . It was finished . . . hollow . . . meaningless. It also became clearer than ever before that the only justification for claiming one was engaged in the artistic act was to open one's art completely to life and its entire gamut of terror and joys (real and imagined); and to find, if one could, new ways to transmute these into whatever magic one was capable of. I rediscovered and reaffirmed with an intensity I had never known before the basic impulse which led me to want to compose music in the first place, a long time ago.

“With the loss of my son I was overwhelmed by the realization that death — and time which, as we humans reckon it, brings an end to all living things — could only be overcome by life itself; and to me this meant through art, by practicing my art as a living thing (in my marrow bone), free of the posturing cant and foolishness abroad these days which want to seal art off from life.

“Life and art. Human experience and the 'iconography of imagination.' Chaos refracted through human sensibilities, through the human spirit. I am only too painfully aware of the paradox inherent in the idea that art cannot die. But if there is such a thing as spirit, then human life is surely its expression here on earth; and art is just as surely one of the great doors or one of the tiny apertures (whichever way it appears to us — and it can be both at different times) through which we can pass or peer into the world of the infinite. Hence the title of my work: **Against Death and Time**.

“To describe the procedures I employed in composing this work, it is much too complex to describe in simple words. Besides it would shed little light, if any, on the musical results. In the most general terms, it is a 'collage' or 'assemblage' of scraps and bits from the music of other composers (as well as an earlier work of my own) composed for one or more of the same instruments, singly or in combination, performed by the players of the Aeolian Chamber Ensemble for whom the work was intended. All of this odd assortment of restructured 'found forms' was put together in two weeks' time.

“The resulting work became the first in a series of compositions of varying intentions and dimensions which include my **Music for the Magic Theater** (1965), Music for 'The Alchemist' (1966), **Nach Bach** (1966) and **Passions (According to the 20th Century)** (1967).

At present I am working on my third symphony, the most ambitious project in this series (for multiple choruses, soloists and large orchestra).”

Charles Wuorinen's *JANISSARY MUSIC* was composed in 1966 for Raymond DesRoches, percussionist extraordinary. The title is the name given to Turkish mercenary troops active between the 14th and 19th centuries; the composer does not, however, admit that he had any programmatic intentions, but rather that the title was applied to the piece as a reference, not an evocation.

The single musician is required to play three sets of instruments, each restricted to a single instrument-class: the mallet instruments (vibraphone and marimba), twelve “metals” (gongs, cymbals, cowbells and triangles) and 12 drums, ranging, like the metals, in order of ascending pitch. The instruments are frequently played either simultaneously or in such close juxtaposition that the player is usually holding four mallets or sticks at once.

It took DesRoches 18 months to learn this music, a labor of love and determination which may be appreciated upon hearing the enclosed record. Although he has played it in public several times with resounding success, he required 13 hours to record it to his own satisfaction.

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. Part of the enclosed recording, presented in collaboration with CRI, is a work by 1967 award winner Charles Wuorinen.

(Original Liner Notes from CRI LP Jacket)