

CRI 233

STEFAN WOLPE: Trio

Trio of the Group for Contemporary Music at Columbia University
Harvey Sollberger, Flute; Charles Wuorinen, Piano; Joel Krosnik, Cello

GEORGE CRUMB: Eleven Echoes of Autumn, 1965

Aeolian Chamber Players
Lewis Kaplan, Violin; David Gilbert, Flute; Lloyd Greenberg, Clarinet; Jacob Maxin, Piano

STEFAN WOLPE'S music integrates certain traditional practices with a uniquely contemporary language and strikingly original procedures. Wolpe, born in Berlin in 1902, first learned the tradition there but soon indicated—by his compositions, by being active in many Dada performances, and by his choice of mentors: Scherchen, Busoni, Webern—that a merely accepted heritage was insufficient. Forced to flee Germany in 1933, Wolpe went to Palestine where he continued to compose works which are relatively simple, direct, and motivically tight in a chromatically modified, dissonant diatonicism.

Wolpe's "middle period" began when he came to the United States in 1938. The works from this time, e.g., **The Man from Midian**, the **Violin Sonata**, are texturally dense, logically developmental, and are primarily concerned with ways through which musical ideas can fulfill themselves. The music is organized contextually rather than systematically, for both the lines and the simultaneities are derived from and controlled by the motivic impulses, and the formal procedures allow the motives their own way. His persistent, concentrated work on variation techniques has given Wolpe an intuitive sensitivity to the inherent possibilities of any musical impulse and a sure hand for developing these impulses into finite, tangible, elegant shapes.

Wolpe's works since the **Enactments for Three Pianos** (1952) have all the traits of a master composer's "late period" and are earning him the recognition he deserves. In these works, the textures become progressively simpler and the interaction of ideas more complex; the organization of pitches becomes more careful and the realizations of pitch combinations wilder; the shapes become more classical and the style more individual; the developments become even more logical and the juxtapositions more playful; the forms become more unique and the continuities more startlingly right; the music sounds more spontaneous, yet it rewards the most searching analysis.

This TRIO, composed in 1963, is an excellent example of Wolpe's late period. In it may be found more or less traditional constructs merged with contemporary attitudes and orderly harmonic processes and thorough development of material combined with logically discontinuous methods of articulating them. One of Wolpe's techniques is his use of unordered pitch groups which, like a scale in tonal music, function as the source for melodic and harmonic events. In the first movement of this Trio, two groups of four pitches are set off against each other, and are projected in constantly changing rhythms, as lines or chords in large or small compasses. The pitches within each unit are continually being reordered to expose every facet of the group; then, the pitches are interchanged gradually and the groups grow larger in order to arrive at new possibilities. Thus, the classical technique of continuous variation is adapted to contemporary means. But the continuity is not progressive; rather, extreme variants are used with quoted, even cliché material juxtaposed against the unique. This use of what Wolpe calls various "levels of language" permits the realization of the many potentialities inherent in any musical idea. The music, then, is simultaneously economical and extravagant.

The opening of the second movement reflects in detail the totality of the work. The first three phrases are an exposition. Each phrase is constructed traditionally: a referent situation is stated, then varied to become more intense, and then a cadential resolution is defined. For example, the cello states a motive using a core of only three pitches, then varies it and extends it by the addition of new pitches to the field. The variations are so extreme, however, because of their new rhythms and the addition of new intervals, that they create both contrast and continuity simultaneously.

The next variant opens up the so-far restricted compass, leading to the phrase's high point. And this extension is immediately countered by a rhythmic and registral contraction, where the cello plays a rapid descending figure which asymmetrically balances the, until now, rising line. This compensating descent and rhythmic contraction define the cadence.

Then, in a Beethovenian technique of developing the tail of a phrase, the cadential figure is extracted and exploded into a new polyphonic texture in maximal contrast to the solo line used until now. Also, this bar completes the process begun in bar 1 of introducing all twelve tones through gradual but irregularly spaced accretion. Thus, the sequence of events is simultaneously connected and contrasting; it is logically discontinuous.

The third phrase adapts another prior harmonic practice: modulation. At first, five pitches form the pitch field which is then enlarged by adding adjacent chromatic pitches until all twelve have been motivically engaged within a relatively undefined harmonic area. Finally, at the cadence, five new pitches become the pitch field focused upon. In this case, the focal pitches are those of the opening measures, so that the original area has been returned to. But this modulatory process has been accomplished through constant use of highly varied shapes, so that the orderly harmonic procedure is realized through volatile motivic activity. The return to the starting harmonic area is marked by a return to the opening situation, beginning what Wolpe calls a "second exposition."

Here, slower development of the material occurs, but with continued setting off of the expanding against the static, the symmetrical against the contrasting.

The situation here is a microcosm of the whole movement, for it, like most of Wolpe's music, is in constant flux, with opposed textures and dynamics, with variants sparking new directions, with long lines heard as flashes of sound, and with all this generating cumulative, rather than sectional, forms.

Wolpe, then, belongs to no "school." The immediacy and directness of his musical utterances combined with the complexity, even virtuosity, of his composing are uniquely his own,

—Notes by Edward Levy

The **ELEVEN ECHOES OF AUTUMN**, 1965 were composed during the spring of 1966 for the Aeolian Chamber Players (on commission from Bowdoin College). The eleven pieces constituting the work are performed without interruption:

- Eco 1. Fantastico
- Eco 2. Languidamente, quasi lontano ("hauntingly")
- Eco 3. Prestissimo
- Eco 4. Con bravura
- Eco 5. Cadenza I (for Alto Flute)
- Eco 6. Cadenza II (for Violin)
- Eco 7. Cadenza III (for Clarinet)
- Eco 8. Feroce, violento
- Eco 9. Serenamente, quasi lontano ("hauntingly")
- Eco 10. Senza misura ("gently undulating")
- Eco 11. Adagio ("like a prayer")

Each of the echi exploits certain timbral possibilities of the instruments. For example, **eco 1** (for piano alone) is based entirely on the 5th partial harmonic, **eco 2** on violin harmonics in combination with 7th partial harmonics produced on the piano (by drawing a piece of hard rubber along the strings). A delicate aura of sympathetic vibrations emerges in echi 3 and 4, produced in the latter case by alto flute and clarinet playing into the piano strings. At the conclusion of the work the violinist achieves a mournful, fragile timbre by playing with the bow hair completely slack.

The most important generative element of *Eleven Echoes* is the “bell motif”—a quintuplet figure based on the whole-tone interval—which is heard at the beginning of the work. This diatonic figure appears in a variety of rhythmic guises, and frequently in a highly chromatic context.

Each of the eleven pieces has its own expressive character, at times overlaid by quasi-obbligato music of contrasting character, e.g., the “wind music” of the alto flute and clarinet in **eco 2** or the “distant mandolin music” of the violin in **eco 3**. The larger expressive curve of the work is arch-like: a gradual growth of intensity to a climactic point (**eco 8**) followed by a gradual collapse.

Although **Eleven Echoes** has certain programmatic implications for the composer, it is enough for the listener to infer the significance of the motto-quote from Federico Garcia Lorca: “. . . y los arcos rotos donde sufre el tiempo” (“. . . and the broken arches where time suffers”). These words are softly intoned as a preface to each of the three cadenzas (echi 5.7) and the image “broken arches” is represented visually in the notation of the music which underlies the cadenzas.

GEORGE CRUMB was born in Charleston, West Virginia in 1929. He has been the recipient of several awards including grants from the Fulbright Commission (1955) Rockefeller Foundation (1964), Koussevitzky Foundation (1965), Guggenheim Foundation (1967), and the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1967). His **Echoes of Time and the River: Four Processionals for Orchestra (Echoes 11)**, premiered by the Chicago Symphony, was awarded the 1968 Pulitzer Prize in Music. George Crumb's *NIGHT MUSIC 1* for Soprano, Keyboard, and Percussion (1963) has also been recorded by CR1 (CRI 218 USD).

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 1967 award winner, George Crumb.

(Original Liner Notes from CRI LP Jacket)