

CRI 237

ROBERT EVETT: Harpsichord Sonata
Robert Parris, harpsichord

GERALD HUMEL: Sonata for Violin and Piano, "Journey to Praha"
Robert Gross, violin; Peter Hewitt, piano

Preludium and Scherzo
Samuel Baron, flute

ROBERT EVETT was born and grew up in Colorado. He received most of his musical training at Colorado College, entering the school in 1941, at the age of 18, as a pupil of Roy Harris, with whom he studied for six years. He also attended the Juilliard School as a pupil of Vincent Persichetti.

Since the early fifties, Evett has been a member of the so-called "Washington Group," together with Robert Parris and Russell Woollen. Evett has always been the most conservative of the three. His music has strong allegiances to the tonal tradition, and is more often than not cast in forms that have their roots in the past.

His catalog includes three symphonies, a concerto for large orchestra, concertos for harpsichord, for cello, and for piano, choral and chamber works of all sizes, and a great many sonatas.

All of his adult life, Evett has been active as a critic and magazine editor. He joined the staff of the New Republic in 1952 as music critic and later became Books and Arts Editor of that journal. In January, 1968, he became Arts and Letters Editor of the Atlantic Monthly.

About his HARPSICHORD SONATA, Mr. Evett writes:

"I wrote this sonata for Robert Parris' recital at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D. C. on January 1, 1962. It was completed about four weeks before the performance. The work requires a two-manual harpsichord and is contrived to be virtually impossible to execute on a smaller instrument. There are no dynamics, no metronomic indications and no suggested registrations in the score, so the performer enjoys considerable latitude in interpretation.

"Formally, the piece has a strong debt to sonatas of the Baroque era—slow and fast movements alternating. I call the last movement "My Papa's Waltz," after the poem by Theodore Roethke; but I'm never sure whether the piece is or is not program music in the ordinary sense of the word. I built it as a rondo on a tune of no distinction at all ("For He's a Jolly Good Fellow") which, nonetheless, is rich in associations for many people. I've tried to capture something of what must have been a very bumpy trip to bed."

MY PAPA'S WALTZ

by Theodore Roethke

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt.

“My Papa's Waltz,” copyright 1942 by Hearst Magazines, Inc., from ROETHKE: COLLECTED POEMS. Published by Doubleday & Company, Inc.

ROBERT PARRIS, who plays Evett's HARPSICHORD SONATA on this record, is already familiar to CRI listeners as composer of a remarkable Trombone Concerto (CRI 231). In addition to composing and playing and teaching harpsichord and piano, he teaches musical subjects at George Washington University.

GERALD HUMEL was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1931. He studied at the University of Michigan with Ross Lee Finney and Roberto Gerhard and was a University of Michigan Fellow in 1958. Among his other awards (including a Guggenheim Fellowship), he won a Fulbright Fellowship in 1960 and used it to spend a year in Berlin. There he studied with Boris Blacher, and there he has remained since, becoming a force in the musical life of the city, gaining an impressive list of commissions and prizes. Since 1966 he has also been conductor of the Ensemble der Gruppe Neue Musik Berlin.

Asked about his VIOLIN SONATA, he answered:

“It is always difficult to talk about a work motivated not so much by abstract musical form as by the sheer desire to express 'something.' In 1961 I visited Czechoslovakia for the first time since the war. The country was still very much under the influence of Stalinism, though the developments which reached fruition in 1968 were being discussed behind closed doors.

“I remained in the country for a month, getting reacquainted with relatives and friends I had known as a child. Upon returning to Berlin I began toying with the idea of composing a work for violin and piano in which I could (for my own personal satisfaction) reflect upon the impressions I had received during my visit. The idea for the form of the piece came about when it occurred to me to use the Czech national anthem as the basis of my row. A fragment of the anthem is then quoted at the end of the third movement. The form of the composition is quite straightforward. The first movement is a fantasy, the second is a dance-like scherzo and the third a development of various motives found in the anthem.

“The PRELUDIUM UND SCHERZO is adequately explained by its title.”

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 1965 award winner, Gerald Humel.

The Evett work was made possible by a grant from the American Composers Alliance.

(Original Liner Notes from CRI LP Jacket)