

CRI SD 257

BILLY JIM LAYTON

Five Studies for Violin and Piano, Op. 1 (1952)

Three Studies for Piano, Op. 5 (1957)

YEHUDI WYNER, Piano; MATTHEW RAIMONDI, Violin

CLAUDIO SPIES

Impromptu for Piano (1963)

Viopiacem, Duo for Viola and Keyboard Instruments (1965)

ROBERT MILLER, Piano and Harpsichord; SAMUEL RHODES, Viola

CHARLES WHITTENBERG

String Quartet in One Movement (1965)

COMPOSERS QUARTET

BILLY JIM LAYTON was born in Corsicana, Texas in 1924. He was educated in the New England Conservatory, Yale School of Music and Harvard University, studying composition with Francis Judd Cooke, Quincy Porter and Walter Piston. Among the awards he has received are the Rome Prize, the Brandeis University Creative Arts Award, a grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. After teaching several years at Harvard, he went to Long Island in the fall of 1966 to become the first Chairman of the Department of Music of the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He says:

"The piano studies are formidably difficult to play, especially the kaleidoscopic second one, and I would like to say that I am deeply grateful to my old and close friend Yehudi Wyner for taking the trouble to learn them. Certainly no one understands better than he the character of the music. It was also he who, many years ago, brought the violin studies to the attention of Matthew Raimondi, leading to many performances of the piece by the two of them over the years, and finally to the brilliant and beautiful presentation on this recording."

About FIVE STUDIES FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, Op. 1, he writes:

"I. Emphasizes the contrast between a flexible, changing meter and tempo in one instrument against a fixed-pulse cantus firmus in the other (the two instruments exchanging roles in the middle of the piece). This technique was suggested to me by my studies of fifteenth century proportional notation at the time I was composing the piece.

"Certain constraints are observed in the writing — the cantus firmus does not repeat intervals (not counting the retrograde inversion of the whole in the second half) and both the principal line as well as the total vertical aggregates are constructed of non-serialized twelve-tone groupings — but the structure is essentially derived from a freely chromatic, fluid tonal language.

"II. Mainly a written-out improvisation in the violin around a simple blues-like melody in the piano. The harmonic basis of the study is derived from a nine-tone scale; chords are constructed out of the intervals formed by five steps in the scale. Chord progressions, modulations, non-harmonic tones, and other details of the harmonic process are all treated in a manner analogous to traditional harmonic practice.

"III. Strongly dance-like in a manner somewhat like that of a highly controlled, coolly virtuoso cocktail lounge jazz combo of the nineteen thirties and forties. A study in polytonality and polyrhythm, with much use of syncopation, displaced metrical groupings, and ostinato talea-like patterns.

"IV. In sharp contrast with the preceding study, with its strong reliance upon 'body rhythm', this one uses non-metrical, purely durational rhythms in a sparse, abstract structure of individual tones. There are three lines (one in the violin and two in the piano) capable of being heard in various combinations. The second half is an exact retrograde inversion of the first half, except that each of the three lines has a separate axis of inversion, thereby creating a subtle difference in the groupings of intervals. Further, the total additive durations of the tones in each of the individual lines are exactly balanced around the pivot tone of that line.

"V. The last study builds a musical form of rigid, similar, block-like units of about one measure in length. The units (which fall into three strongly contrasting types) are arranged in different orders in successive re-appearances, but they always remain unchanged internally. Although mostly written in a dense, dissonant chromatic texture, the tonality within each section is quite static — at the opposite pole from the first study. Much of the conception of the piece, such as the multilayered bands of sound in the second and third sections and the imitations of gongs, chimes and small metallophones, was suggested by the Balinese gamelan.

"I think of the **THREE STUDIES FOR PIANO, Op. 5** as my 'neoclassic' pieces, although the twelve-tone language used may lead some listeners to question that label. At the time I wrote them I was fascinated by the grandeur and brilliance Stravinsky had achieved in some of his large piano works. The neoclassic character is most obvious in the third study, where a kind of *sarabande* in 7/8 time frames a quite formal three-part fugue.

"During the course of writing the studies, I gradually worked out a harmonic method based upon the twelve-tone series which was developed from some of the techniques used by Schoenberg in his late works. Briefly, the technique uses groups of adjacent tones in the series as harmonic entities, but no attempt is made to serialize the melodic lines. Tonal regions are identified by transpositions of the series, with a hierarchy of family relationships based upon the number of identical pitch groupings."

CLAUDIO SPIES was born 26 March, 1925 in Santiago, Chile, and has lived in the U. S. almost continuously since 1942. He has received a number of awards, including a grant from The Ingram Merrill Foundation; a Senior Fellowship of the Council of the Humanities, Princeton University; a Brandeis University Creative Arts Award Citation in Music, and an award from The National Institute of Arts and Letters. He has taught at Harvard, Vassar and Swarthmore and is now (1970) Professor of Music at Princeton. He has written the following remarks on the two compositions included on this record:

"IMPROMPTU FOR PIANO:

"Composed in March 1963, in celebration of the birth of their first child to dear friends, this piece is subtitled 'Cradle music for Adam Henry Zivin' and its purpose is thereby explained.

"VIOPIACEM, DUO FOR VIOLA AND KEYBOARD INSTRUMENTS:

"In assembling a 'duo for three instruments' — the keyboard-player being required to perform on the harpsichord and the piano — my intention was to provide each of the composition's eight sections with its particular instrumental identity and textural definition. These sections, of varying length, make use of the participating instruments according to the following plan: 1) viola, 2) viola and piano, 3) piano, 4) viola and piano, 5) viola, 6) harpsichord, 7) viola and harpsichord, 8) viola, harpsichord and piano. In addition, the sections are balanced by an overall tempo scheme, by musical materials held, and derived, in common, as well as by a network of returns.

"VIOPIACEM was composed in 1965. Its title was derived by joining together the opening syllable of each instrument's Italian name. Felicitous aural associations between this compound and words meaning 'life', 'peace', and 'pleasure' were neither unnoticed at the time, nor unintended."

CHARLES WHITTENBERG was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1927, and is now an Associate Professor of Music at the University of Connecticut. His citations and awards include two successive Guggenheim Fellowships (1963-65), the Rome Prize of the American Academy (1965-66), and a teaching grant in new music performance techniques from the American Council of Learned Societies (1962). He has been affiliated with the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center and the Summer Institute of Bennington College, Vermont. His commissions include every performing medium, and his compositions have been performed in every state of the continental United States and with increasing frequency in Europe.

The composer offers the following commentary:

"The STRING QUARTET IN ONE MOVEMENT was begun in New York and completed in Munich, Germany. The World Premiere was 20 May, 1966 by the QUARTETTO DI NUOVA MUSICA, Italian Radio (RIA), Rome. The first American performance was given by the Composers String Quartet in Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, 3 May, 1969."

"Four solo motifs are the composition's initial and primary structural assignments. These motifs are pitch, register and dynamic variants of each other. The composition unfolds in a succession of operations upon these motifs, not in a "cumulative" development but in interjections and superimpositions of the material of one motif into or onto another. As the rate of temporal unfolding is neither constant nor progressive, the listener may here perceive overlapping combinations and orderings with the aid of the medium. To repeat the totality, one re-plays the recording. I believe that this relatively short-term conjunction is a 'perception factor unique to recorded music."

Billy Jim Layton's STRING QUARTET appears on CRI 136.

THE COMPOSERS QUARTET (Matthew Raimondi, Anahid Ajemian, Jean Dupouy, Michael Rudiakov) was formed in 1965 to be quartet in residence at the New England Conservatory of Music. Since then, its performances of new music have dazzled and affected listeners both in metropolitan concert halls and on the nation's campuses.

ROBERT MILLER has already created a legend by his astonishing skill and finesse with the most difficult modern piano music. A resident of New York City, he has played with all the city's contemporary music organizations, giving first performances of works by Babbitt, Berger, Boulez, Stravinsky and Wolpe, among others.

SAMUEL RHODES is one of New York's most impressive young violists. He has appeared as soloist with symphony orchestras and in recital and is a regular member of the Marlboro Music Festival. He has been in the Galimir Quartet since 1961. In 1969 he became a member of the Juilliard Quartet.

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(Original Liner Notes from CRI LP Jacket)