

WILLIAM MAYER

BRASS QUINTET

Iowa Brass Quintet

SIX MINIATURES

Deeply Down (Aleinikoff); Land of Dead Dreams (Noyes); Fireworks (Mayer); Prophetic Soul (Dorothy Parker); Isn't There Some Mistake? (Mayer); For No Man (Mayer)

KHARTOUM (Mayer)

TWO NEWS ITEMS

Hastily Formed Contemporary Music

Ensemble Reveals Origins (Mayer)

Distraught Soprano Undergoes Unfortunate

Transformation (Mayer)

Catherine Rowe, soprano

Ensemble conducted by Arthur Weisberg

DOMINICK ARGENTO

LETTERS FROM COMPOSERS

Vern Sutton, tenor and Jeffrey Van, guitar

WILLIAM MAYER, a graduate of Yale University and the Mannes College of Music, studied composition with Roger Sessions, Felix Salzer and Otto Luening. He has received numerous commissions and awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship. His work is becoming more and more widely performed. This past season saw the performance of his *Two Pastels*, under Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, and premieres of his *Snow Queen Ballet*, *Lines on Light* and his *Octagon*, under Leopold Stokowski, with William Masselos as piano soloist (Masselos has also recorded Mayer's Piano Sonata on CRI SD 198).

Mayer's fondness for brass instruments has resulted in such works as *Concert Piece for Trumpet*, *Essay for Brass and Winds* (CRI 185) and the BRASS QUINTET which is dedicated to the Iowa Brass Quintet. What emerges from the shifting timbres and asymmetric rhythms is a quality of Rabelaisian humor co-existing with poignant lyricism. The simplicity of the second movement, an elegy, contrasts with the intricacy of the other movements: the movements are marked Poco presto, Lento, Con moto, and Poco presto. All parts of the work share a quality of disarming simplicity that conceals Mayer's fine craftsmanship.

Mayer has devoted much of his creative energy to dramatic and vocal music, the latest of which is an opera-in-progress, based on James Agee's *A Death in the Family*. The MINIATURES, KHARTOUM and NEWS ITEMS are more

intimately styled evidence of this interest.

After the premiere of *MINIATURES*, Donal Henahan of the New York Times found that some of them “put one in mind of Ives at times, particularly the latter's tersest and best jests such as 'Ann Street.' Mr. Mayer's songs chattered along with an elfin, askew wit that led only back to itself, as good music ideally should.” Most of the *MINIATURES* are dark and lyrical, however, and deal with serious subjects — loneliness, longing, getting old — and all are an attempt to create individual worlds of feeling in a tiny space of time.

The *NEWS ITEMS*, on the other hand, are primarily light and are designed to resemble a soufflé despite the fact that the distraught soprano in the last selection turns into a hen.

KHARTOUM is a simple song of longing.

DOMINICK ARGENTO (b. York, Pa., 1927) has devoted most of his creative life to opera, vocal music and music for the stage. Rather than regarding this as a specialized branch of the musical art, he believes that opera demands the ability to write all kinds of music. "My primary concern," he has said, "is to make contact with an audience and, with luck, to move it."

Argento's training was well suited to his attitude, as he studied with representatives of a number of "schools" of composition. At Peabody Conservatory, he studied with Nicholas Nabokov and Henry Cowell, and privately with Hugo Weisgall; at the Eastman School of Music, he studied with Bernard Rogers, Alan Hovhaness and Howard Hanson; in Italy on a Fulbright Fellowship, he studied with Luigi Dallapiccola. He has taught at the Hampton Institute, Eastman and, since 1958, at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. He has composed seven operas, several major vocal pieces with orchestra, two ballets, four sets of incidental music to plays and works for orchestra which are themselves rather theatrically conceived.

About *LETTERS FROM COMPOSERS*, Argento writes:

“In a letter of 1882, Verdi wrote: 'But what need is there to go dragging letters out of a composer of music? Letters that are always written in haste, carelessly, as something of no importance.'

“I chose letters rather than poems for these songs because the epistolary style seems highly suitable to the intimate sort of chamber music made by voice and guitar; I chose letters by composers because they seem to me to be less self-conscious, less 'public' than those of other creative artists. Wanting to treat the subject of the artist as man, I deliberately avoided letters dealing with 'art' and chose instead those shedding light on some less familiar facet of the composer's personality.

I. Chopin, recovering from an illness at Majorca, describes his unusual lodgings and surroundings in prose as poetic and mysterious as his Nocturnes.

II. Knowing that his father will be angered by the news, Mozart ends the account of his ignominious dismissal from the Archbishop's entourage with a plea for paternal understanding.

III. From the depths of despair, amid forebodings of failure, Schubert recalls the words of a song he composed years before — Gretchen at the Spinning-wheel: 'My peace is gone, my heart is heavy.'

IV. Bach, in the obsequious and baroque form of address demanded by his times, begs the Town Council of Leipzig to redress a grievance: Herr Eitelwein's out- of-town marriage has cheated Bach of his rightful fee as wedding organist.

V. In one of his last letters, written in hospital in 1916 as he was dying of brain cancer, Debussy speaks listlessly of his own sense of futility and the futility of the war raging about him.

VI. Puccini, one of the most urbane and cosmopolitan composers, writes, shortly after the triumph of "La Boheme" in the French capital, of his yearning to return to the Italian woods and lakes, to rid himself of top-hat, waistcoat, cities and palaces.

VII. A love letter from Robert Schumann to his wife-to-be, Clara.

"This song-cycle, composed in 1968, was commissioned by Mr. Sutton and Mr. Van: it is happily dedicated to them."

The IOWA BRASS QUINTET is made up of faculty members of the noted University of Iowa School of Music. They have toured extensively and impressed audiences with their beautiful sound and their sound musicianship. They are John Beer, Robert Levy, Paul Anderson, John Hill and Robert Yeats.

CATHERINE ROWE is popular with composers and conductors because of her excellent musicianship and perfect pitch. She specializes in "vocal chamber music," such as MINIATURES, with the contemporary and Baroque styles as her favorites. She is also a specialist in oratorio. An enthusiastic musician, she enjoys teaching as much as singing, always including ear training along with vocal instruction. She teaches at Sarah Lawrence College, and has taught at Rutgers and her alma mater, the Peabody Conservatory.

ARTHUR WEISBERG is widely known as an outstanding conductor of contemporary music. He was founder of the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, which was in residence at Rutgers for three years, establishing itself as a leader in its field. He is also a distinguished performer on the bassoon.

VERN SUTTON and JEFFREY VAN are on the music faculty at the University of Minnesota. Mr. Sutton is leading tenor in Minneapolis' Center Opera Company; his extraordinary range permits him also to sing baritone roles and his special interests and abilities have made him an expert in Italian baroque music, particularly monody. Mr. Van has participated in new music productions, including two at Minneapolis' Tyrone Guthrie Theater, as well as extensive collaborations with Mr. Sutton on music for voice and guitar.

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