

## Two Sides of Bill Smith

William Smith

*Concerto for Jazz Soloist and Orchestra*

William O. Smith, clarinet

Orchestra U.S.A.

Gunther Schuller, conductor

*Variants* for solo clarinet

*Mosaic*

William O. Smith, clarinet; Robert Suderburg, piano

**William O. Smith** (b Sacramento, 1926) has always divided his life between the worlds of jazz and non-jazz, and between composition and playing the clarinet. The evocative *Variants* and *Mosaic* represent the former and the Concerto the latter. He was also an early pioneer in the exploration of new sonorities on the clarinet, including multiple tones, glissandos, etc., and many of his more than seventy-five compositions put them to effective use.

Smith began to study clarinet when he was ten. While still in grade school he started a dance band, at age fifteen he began playing professionally and wrote his first composition, a woodwind quintet. In 1945 he began studying at Juilliard while playing jazz on 52nd Street and performing with Dean Dixon's Youth Symphony. He later studied at Mills College, the University of California, and the Paris Conservatory. He received his M.A. from the University of California in 1952. His chief composition teachers were Darius Milhaud and Roger Sessions. While at Mills he played and recorded with the original Dave Brubeck Octet; since then he has written and performed six albums with Brubeck.

Smith lived in Paris from 1951 to 1953 as a recipient of the Prix de Paris. Upon his return to the West Coast in 1953, he taught, and performed his *Concerto for Clarinet and Combo* with Shelly Manne's group, his *Divertimento* with Red Norvo's ensemble and two albums of his "non-jazz" compositions. In 1957 he was awarded the Prix de Rome and in 1960 two Guggenheim Fellowships, which allowed him to devote his time to composition in Rome. There he formed the American Jazz Ensemble with John Eaton, which made two record albums and toured extensively.

In 1966 Smith began teaching at the University of Washington and became director of its Contemporary Group which subsequently received a large grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. He presently (1974) combines his activities as a teacher at the University of Washington with performances as clarinet soloist and with his jazz trio.

Smith began his coloristic explorations in 1960, after hearing a performance by the Italian flutist Severinini Gazzelioni of Luciano Berio's *Sequenza*, in which the flute produces two notes simultaneously. After a year of extensive experimentation, he composed *Variants* to see if the new sonorous materials could be used in a musically convincing manner.

Each of the brief movements explores a different combination of colors. Two years later, in *Mosaic*, the composer paired these new clarinet sonorities with compatible piano sounds. In this recording, the pianist is Robert Suderburg, a composer and Smith's colleague at the University of Washington.

*Concerto for Jazz Soloist and Orchestra* displays Smith's abilities as an extraordinary jazz musician. A twelve-tone row is the basis for both the orchestral material and the improvised clarinet part. Although the listener is not expected to follow the various permutations of the row, it is hoped that he will feel a psychological cohesion. The row itself utilizes only two basic intervals, the major 2nd and the minor 3rd, and is simply the transposition of a four-note figure which happens to be the first four notes of "I Got Rhythm." The simplicity of the row lends itself to spontaneous improvisation. The four movements correspond roughly to traditional concerto form. In style, the jazz idiom is consistently employed.

**Orchestra U.S.A.** was organized and directed by John Lewis, the pianist and musical director of the Modern Jazz Quartet. It was made up of many fine musicians, including the late Eric Dolphy, Richard Davis, and Mel Lewis: The Concerto was recorded at the time of the Orchestra's existence and was not released until now.

Smith may also be heard playing John Eaton's music on CRI SD 296.

This recording was made possible by a grant from the National Institute-American Academy of Arts and Letters. Each year this organization awards prizes to outstanding composers. Mr. Smith was a 1972 winner, and this recording is part of his prize.

Produced by Carter Harman

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*(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*