

MUSIC OF OTTO LUENING CRI SD 334

SONATA FOR PIANO in memoriam Ferruccio Busoni
Ursula Oppens, piano

FUGUE AND CHORALE FANTASY WITH
ELECTRONIC DOUBLES FOR
ORGAN AND TAPE

Alec Wyton, organ; tape realized at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center

OTTO LUENING, who celebrates his 75th anniversary in 1975, is one of the most distinguished elder composers of American music. He has created an imposing number of works for “live” as well as electronic sound sources. He has also been teacher and mentor to an astonishing number of other composers—which alone has made him a major force in American music. In addition to these creative activities, he is a distinguished conductor, numbering among his premieres Virgil Thomson's *The Mother of Us All* and Menotti's *The Medium*; and he is a pioneering flutist as well as an energetic and able administrator of many organizations devoted to the furtherance of music. Although he retired from the faculty of Columbia University in 1970, he continues to teach and compose actively. More of his music may be heard on CRI numbers 103, 112, 219, 227, 268 and 303.

The SONATA FOR PIANO (In Memoriam Ferruccio Busoni) was planned and completed for Busoni's centenary in 1966. This recording coincides with the 50th anniversary of his death. By a coincidence, the gifted young pianist, Ursula Oppens, who performed for this record, won the Busoni Prize in Bolzano in 1969.

Busoni, in addition to his worldwide reputation as a pianist comparable to Franz Liszt, was a seminal force for the avant-garde movements in the early part of the twentieth century. His influence on the American musical scene was direct and profound although not too highly publicized. He taught at the New England Conservatory in the '90s, toured the United States many times, and in his *A New Aesthetic of Music* (1907) called attention to Cahill's electric instrument, the Dynamophone, and pointed out the possibility of electronic sound production. Edgard Varèse was his friend and protégé at that time, and I studied with him in 1917. Two later Busoni composition students were Stefan Wolpe and Kurt Weill. All four made our main careers in the United States.

Busoni's aesthetic had its roots in the past, but he had a vision of a future and prophesied many artistic events that happened in the early twenties and also the electronic sound production that developed in the 50's, in which both Varèse and I were deeply involved. As a composer Busoni was a master of many styles. His genius was to immerse himself in the great repertory of music and the arts from all periods. He was particularly sensitive to 17th century opera, puppet plays, Cervantes, Mark Twain, Goethe and the fantastic stories of E. T. A. Hoffmann and Edgar Allen Poe; Verdi's *Falstaff*, Mozart's music, and the music of Liszt, Chopin, J. S. Bach and Berlioz and the paintings of DeGoya and Detacroix. In searching for new harmonic materials, he was strongly attracted by the theories of the German-American, Bernhard Ziehn, whom he met in Chicago in 1910. Ziehn's principle of symmetrical inversion as applied to harmonies and in canonical techniques contributed to Busoni's later works. In my SONATA I have attempted to assimilate and follow styles he was interested in but without using direct quotes. I also thought of his theoretical speculations that brought new life to old practices and his insistence on what he called “organic form.”

The tonal plan for the SONATA is derived from relationships in the overtone row of the harmonic series. The *Introduction* with G as tone center moves to B-flat, a distantly related overtone or upper partial, and then back to G. The contrapuntal technique used employs interval repetitions to establish sonority areas that can be heard. Section one uses seconds, thirds, fourths, and their inversions; section two, thirds, sixths, and triadic formations, often reached through scale passages. There is a return to the opening. There are two variations mostly of the rhythm and leading to metric shifts and transference of accents at the end of the movement.

The *Dramatic Scene* centers around A (the eighth overtone of G). It begins with a chord canon in symmetrical inversion that is rhythmic as well as harmonic. Busoni employed this device in his *Berceuse élégiaque* for orchestra. The canon is followed by a homophonic passage that is in effect a melody with accompaniment, but in the right hand is a rhythmic diminution of the bass. An added counter rhythm in the middle voice develops into four part rhythmic counterpoint with further diminution in the fast sextuplet passages. After a section in E with a countermelody in the bass, various scale formations are developed. The opening canon is repeated over a pedal on A.

The *Burlesque* opens with a rhythmically square presentation of the phrase. A contrapuntal technique is contrasted with a free wheeling set of triads that after further transformation of melodic material and complex triadic relationships, arrive at a V-I in C, a kind of apotheosis of the tonic-dominant relationship, followed by further development of the triadic chord progressions and leading to a quasimodal section. There are some rather elaborate variations, sometimes imitative and sometimes in contrast to each other, unified by strong block rhythms that are contrasted with the contrapuntal complexities. The idea of an Alberti bass develops into a pseudo Boogie-Woogie bass, that simulates a string bass in a pop combo. Busoni's suggestion to invent new scale formations has been followed in many ways. Just before the final minuet, the music suggests a sentimental scene, almost like a tear-jerker as sung in a 1920 nightclub. A simulated minuet at the end is slightly reminiscent of Busoni's *Turandot*. The piece centers around F but it develops polytonally with so many combinations that the impression is atonal until the F is reestablished at the end.

In the *Fantasia* the use of the piano is reminiscent of Liszt and the musical materials are developed through transformations and harmonic variation that exploit the virtuoso quality of the piano. There are only occasional contrapuntal developments. Many passages with only two contrasting rhythms give the movement a profile that is somewhat in the spirit of sections in Busoni's piano concerto. The movement centers around A and is atonal in its character as it shifts rapidly through many subcenters with different degrees of relationships in the overtone row. The A is re-established, followed by a truncated atonal development returning again to an exact repetition of the opening section on A with a coda that includes virtuoso passages that lead to the A Major triad in the last four measures.

THE FUGUE AND CHORALE FANTASY WITH ELECTRONIC DOUBLES FOR ORGAN AND TAPE (1973) consists of varied and easily recognizable sections from my *Fugue* (1971) and *Chorale Fantasy* (1922) for organ. The Electronic Doubles are based on tape recorded fragments from these two works, sometimes with slight variations, as played by the brilliant organ virtuoso Dr. Fred Titian on the large Ruffati pipe organ in St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco, and on the poly-synthesis stops of the new Hammond Concorde and the special Hammond X-66 organs.

With the technical assistance of Daria Semegen, approximately fifteen reels of timbre variations of these fragments were produced with the Bode Frequency Shifter at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in New York, and then put on tape. These variations were subsequently developed and worked into Electronic Doubles of the original material, being, in effect, electronic echoes of the various sections played by the organ. Careful timing and the timbre relationships between live and taped sound bring cohesiveness and an overall balance to the work.

The FUGUE (for three voices) has five sections for organ alone, each followed by an electronic double. The exposition is in a chromatic contrapuntal style. Electronic Double I, (duration 56") is a timbre-variation of material presented in the exposition. The second fugue section for organ solo is a symmetrical inversion of the main subject, developed in a more elaborate contrapuntal style. Electronic Double II uses fragments of the symmetrically inverted theme. The duration is twice that of the first double. On this recording, the organ plays the original material with Electronic Double II, but discreet improvisations on this material can be used. The third section for organ is a retrograde development, weighted toward the bass. Electronic Double III (duration 1'30") is again a variation of fragments from the preceding organ section, accompanied by a discreet performance of the two upper voices of the previous organ material. Section four for organ is a brief but strong lyric statement. Electronic Double IV, (duration 1'45") is far removed from the original material in sound and subdued in character, again accompanied by a background for two parts on the organ.

The tape sometimes contrasts and sometimes blends with the organ, but ends the section alone. The fifth organ solo presents the lyric material in two-voiced triplet rhythmic variations that suggest a 12/8 pastorale. Electronic Double V, (duration 2'15") is accompanied by the lyric material on the organ, set for three voices. The double is far remote from its origins. It is sustained throughout in contrast to the organ that does some discreet improvising. The FUGUE ends with an easily recognized cadence in B-flat Major.

The CHORALE FANTASY opens with a diatonic melodic line harmonized with chromatic chords that soon develops into a chromatic statement with C as a tone center. Electronic Double I (duration 1'35") presents timbre variations of the previous material, including some bell-like sounds, and then returns to the opening subject. The organ follows with a development of the previously presented organ material, in effect a truncated trio sonata movement, but ending with a sonorous chordal restatement of fragments from the first section. Electronic Double II (1 minute) consists of a development of the previous bell-like sonorities in contrast to the following Allegro Brillante for organ which moves the material from its original form, returning to the chordal progressions only in the last seven measures. Fast figurations for pedal and finally contrapuntal chords move freely in contrary motion with a full registration. In Electronic Double III (duration 52") there are easily recognizable rhythmic regularities and semi-chromatic passages. These have a warble quality in strong contrast to the density of the previous organ material. This double is followed by an arpeggiated variation for the organ that moves through a chromatically ascending series of major and minor chords, ending with a brilliant chromatic passage that is an inversion of previous material. Electronic Double IV, (duration 35") has a "watery" sound but with a steady beat. The organ restates the chorale material from the opening, at first subdued, then followed by the thematic material in the pedal with decorative counterpoint in the other two voices. This material moves quite naturally into a quote from *Tristan*. The next electronic double (V — duration 1'12") opens with brilliant crashes and glissandi and continues with sharp sonorities and timbre variations of the most complex organ registration. The timbre evolves more and more toward bell sounds, until finally the distant chimes of St. James Church join with the organ and tape. The organ then restates the opening chorale chords with a full organ and chimes that, with the electronic double, simulate the sound of church bells. The organ, together with the last electronic double, quietly restates material from the very opening and comes to a brilliant close only in the last three measures.

-Notes by Otto Luening

URSULA OPPENS graduated from Radcliffe College before going to Juilliard and studying with Rosina Lhevinne. She won New York's Young Concert Artists Auditions and Italy's Busoni International Piano Competition and has concertized on three continents. She is a founding member of Speculum Musicae and is a frequent performer with the Group for Contemporary Music, the New York Philharmonic and the Chamber Music Society.

ALEC WYTON began his musical career as a composer in England (his music for Measure for Measure accompanied an early appearance by Richard Burton at Oxford). In the U.S.A., he was for 20 years organist and Master of the Choristers at New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine where he directed many performances of contemporary music, and Adjunct Professor of Music at Union Theological Seminary. In 1974 he became organist and choirmaster at St. James Church in New York. He directed the large forces used on CBI's recording of Iain Hamilton's EPITAPH FOR THIS WORLD AND TIME (CRI SD 280).

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)