

MUSIC BY CHRISTIAN WOLFF

LINES

Nathan Rubin and Thomas Halpin, violins; Nancy Ellis, viola; Judiyaba, cello

LINES, for string quartet or possibly other and larger combinations of string instruments, was commissioned by Hans Otte for North German Radio (Bremen) and written early in 1972. The composition began with the desire to find new string sonorities and with a formal notion related to the actual lines of the (four) individual strings of each instrument and the lines described as a sound passes from one of the (four) instruments to another. Retuning the four instruments' individual strings — so that sixteen different pitches become available on their open strings — underscores the line of each string. The players are spaced far apart in performance to help show the lines of sound between them. The score first specifies exactly the connections of these lines (say, from viola to first violin to cello) but their speed of movement (and certain aspects of articulation, dynamics, etc.) is determined by the players in the course of playing. Thus, for example, viola lets her sound go when she wishes, at which point the violin must pick it up immediately, holds it as desired, lets it go for the cello to pick up, and so forth. Next the players individually draw their material freely from more distinctly characterized bits of music (which are repeatable, as is all the material in the score). Here coordination is free or circumstantial (for example, hold a sound until the next sound you hear, whoever produces it). The material now also includes provision for retuning the strings to their usual pitches. Finally (it should be said that this recording does not use one of the eight pages of material), the score takes the form of prose instructions, requiring continuous sound from the players, to be changed in response to changes, whenever these happen to occur, in the playing of another. The specific character of an individual player's sound, texture, melodic continuity, etc., are now entirely her or his choice. The music as a whole, then, is a collaboration between the composer's score and the players' playing, and the latter becomes increasingly directed by the players' own decisions and feelings — the forming of which may have been assisted by the score to begin with.

ACCOMPANIMENTS

Frederic Rzewski, piano

ACCOMPANIMENTS, for pianist who is also required to sing or chant and play percussion with his feet (drum with pedal and high hat), was written for Frederic Rzewski in the late summer of 1972. This piece marks a break from what preceded, due partly to a growing impatience with what seemed to me the overly introverted feeling in much of my earlier music, with a sense of contradiction between the situation of its players — social, cooperative as well as calling on great individual alertness — and the way the resulting music seemed to affect its audience — as something remote, abstract and "pure." At the same time my interest in social and political questions had intensified and taken a more specific direction, and so I decided to attempt to make a more explicit connection between it and my music.

ACCOMPANIMENTS began that attempt, including a political text and using musical material of a more direct character. The text is from Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle's book *China; The Revolution Continued*. It is part of an account of a veterinarian and a midwife, in their own words, of their experiences in a village in the area of Yenan during and after the Cultural Revolution. It was chosen both for its concreteness and for its illustration of the principle of applying a revolutionary political orientation to immediate and practical problems, indicating that these can only be understood and dealt with within such a political framework.

The music is in four parts. In the first, one chord or single note drawn out of a chord accompanies each syllable of the text. The text is sung freely (no pitches are specified), and the rhythm is free but tends to be shaped by the movement of the words of the text. The text is musically formalized by allowing optional repetitions of segments of it. The chords come in sequences of sixteen which make a kind of harmonic progression (though a full sequence may not often occur). In the second and third parts, single line keyboard figures are intended to have a propulsive feeling and accompany freely combined percussion phrases (the drum and cymbals were practical in combination with keyboard and were partly suggested by their appearance in China during mass assemblies and marches). The addition of singing and percussion playing to the pianist's tasks is to extend one player's sound resources and to combine his professional competence with non-professional capacities which we all have — in using one's voice and making percussive sounds. The fourth part of the piece requires only the use of the piano, and comes as something of a release.

CHRISTIAN WOLFF (b. 1934, Nice, France) has lived in the United States since 1941. He started composing in 1949 and a couple of years later met John Cage, Morton Feldman, David Tudor and Earle Brown and through association with them found the initial direction of his musical activity. He has also been helped immeasurably, at various times, by work with (among others) David Behrman, Frederic Rzewski, Kurt Schwertsik, Gordon Mumma, Alvin Lucier, John Tilbury, Garrett List, Jon Gibson, Cornelius Cardew; the groups AMM and Musica Elettronica Viva; and Merce Cunningham and his dance company.

Wolff acquired a PhD in Comparative Literature from Harvard in 1963 and taught there, in the Classics department, between 1962-1970. Since 1971 he has been teaching at Dartmouth College in the departments of Classics, Comparative Literature and Music. He was composer-lecturer at the Internationale Ferienkurse, Darmstadt, in 1972 and 1974, and Composer-in-residence in Berlin under the visiting artists program of the DAAD, 1974. In 1975 he won the Music Award from the National Institute/American Academy of Arts and Letters that made this recording possible.

Among his recent compositions are: CHANGING THE SYSTEM (chamber music with text 1972-3), EXERCISES (any number of instruments, 1973-4), STRING QUARTET EXERCISES OUT OF SONGS (1974-6), WOBBLY MUSIC (chorus with instruments, 1975-6).

FREDERIC RZEWSKI is a pianist and composer known both in the U.S. and abroad for his work in widely varying areas of experimental music. As a pianist, he has performed and recorded works by Carter, Cage, Braxton, Stockhausen, Boulez and others. He is a co-founder of MEV (Musica Elettronica Viva), a member of the Musicians Action Collective in New York City, and is affiliated with the Creative Music Foundation of Woodstock, N.Y.

This recording of LINES was made while the composer was in residence at Mills College under a grant which also supported a recording project. NATHAN RUBIN, member of the music faculty and distinguished for his performances of contemporary music, organized and coordinated the performance; the other players are known in the Bay area for their work with new music.

Text from CHINA: THE REVOLUTION CONTINUED

My mother is very old now. I asked for leave of absence to go and see her. In such cases we're always granted leave. Obviously. There are some who call looking after sick animals dirty work. But Chairman Mao has taught us not to be afraid of filth and excrement. And that's right. Chairman Mao has pointed out how necessary it is to develop stockbreeding. And that's why we are getting ourselves more and more animals, and why I'm studying all the time.

We've been successful in our work. Now the new-born babies don't die any more. Formerly sixty per cent of all new-born infants died. The old way of giving birth to children was unhygienic. Dangerous, both for mother and child. To begin with it was necessary to spread a great deal of information. But now there are no more problems over childbirth. Now the women understand why hygiene is important. Today I deliver all the women in the village.

Formerly many women were always pregnant. Most now understand that this is bad. But we must go on spreading information. There used to be some men who spoke against contraceptives. It was easier to convince the women. But now even none of the men are against them. Now everyone says they agree. But some families are thoughtless. And of course there are accidents too. Other things are more problematic. There are so many bad old customs which must be combatted. There are those who aren't careful enough about their food. Not everyone looks after their latrines properly. Dry earth must be used for covering them. There must be no flies. We have got quite a long way with our hygienic work, but not the whole way. That is why unremitting propaganda is needed against the bad old habits. Not to look after latrines properly, that's one such bad habit. Hygiene is a political question. The old bad habits are deep-rooted, but we're fighting them all the time, and things are getting better every year that goes by. This work we do during study meetings. To study and apply Mao Tse-Tung Thought is a good method.

Text from CHINA: THE REVOLUTION CONTINUED, by Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle, translated by Paul Britten Austin. © 1970 by Random House, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Every year the National Institute/American Academy of Arts and Letters singles out four composers for awards for distinguished achievement. Christian Wolff was a 1975 winner, and this recording is part of his award.

Lines recorded by Maggi Payne at Mills College, March 1973

Accompaniments recorded by Frank Laico, March 15 1976

THIS IS A COMPOSER-SUPERVISED RECORDING

(original liner notes form CRI LP jacket)