

AMERICAN ACADEMY - INSTITUTE OF ARTS AND LETTERS

GEORGE PERLE

STRING QUARTET NO. 7 (1973)

New York String Quartet (William Fitzpatrick, Paul Kantor, violins; Brian Dembow, viola; and Stephen Erdody, cello)

GEORGE PERLE (b. 1915, Bayonne, N.J.) studied composition with Wesley LaViolette and Ernst Krenek. Currently Professor of Music at the City University of New York (Queens College), he has also held teaching posts at the University of Louisville and the University of California (Davis) and visiting positions at Yale University, University of Southern California, the Juilliard School, State University of New York at Buffalo, University of Pennsylvania, and Tanglewood. He was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1966-1967 and in 1974-1975. The fourth edition of his *Serial Composition and Atonality: an Introduction to the Music of Schoenberg, Berg and Webern*, and a new book, *Twelve-Tone Tonality*, were recently published by the University of California Press.

The composer has submitted the following remarks:

“The SEVENTH QUARTET, composed in 1973, was commissioned by the Cleveland Quartet and had its premiere performance, by the Cleveland, in Buffalo, New York, on March 19, 1974. The work is in four movements.”

HAROLD BLUMENFELD

VOYAGES after Hart Crane (1977)

Patrick Mason, baritone; Kim Kashkashian, viola; David Starobin, guitar; Gordon Gottlieb and Louis Oddo, percussion; Arthur Weisberg, conductor

HAROLD BLUMENFELD (b. Seattle, 1923), composer and opera director, is on the faculty of Washington University. He has served as Visiting Professor at Queens College, and is a contributor to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and the Los Angeles Times. About himself and his music he writes:

“I am a composer given completely to language, languages and the human voice. Born in Seattle and educated at Yale, in Paris and Zurich, I am nonetheless a long-term Missourian, reside in St. Louis, and maintain a studio at Osage Beach.

“I spent most of the Sixties in experimental opera production with my Washington University Opera Studio and the St. Louis Opera Theatre. I turned my full attention to composition in the Seventies. A string of vocal works — big and little, a cappella and with orchestra, in English and other assorted tongues — has resulted. These encompass settings of Blake, Hawthorne, Siegfried Sassoon, Isabella Gardner, Pauline Hanson, Tom McKeown and Charles Kondek; and Rilke, Baudelaire and Osip Mandelstam.

“VOYAGES, constituting settings of five of the celebrated Hart Crane cycle of six luxuriant, transcendent poems, was drafted in ten days of intense but curiously effortless work at Osage Beach in March 1977, elaborated at Yaddo and finished in late summer back at my lakeside studio.

“Crane's poems form a many-leveled sea allegory of experience, moving from an initial warning of the ocean's perils to total immersion in its sweep (Part One: poems I and II); the high tide of erotic passion and fulfillment (Part Two: poem III); and the drying up of love, an ensuing drowning in despair, and a vision of deliverance — a transcendence of tragedy and loss through the poet's 'Imaged Word': a 'silken, skilled transmemberment of song' (Part Three: poems V and VI, not included on this disc).

“The vast Crane cycle speaks in some of the most imaginative and eruptive language yet devised. Attempting to set it to music was a venture fraught with risk; but after several years of hesitation and intimidation, I came to feel that music could both clarify and further intensify this wondrous Rimbaudian work.

“When David Starobin requested a piece for Pat Mason and himself, I decided on the Crane idea. It grew into a forty-minute epic calling additionally for the viola (generally the Voice of the Lover), a large assemblage of percussion instruments, some quite exotic (shekere, 6-tongued slit drum, steel drum, etc.) and conductor. The manifold percussion instruments complement the guitar in evocation of turbulent inner and external vistas. They suggest the hiss and pounding of surf, the strangled pealing of bells from a legendary sunken city, the hollow ring of seashells; a twelve-fold chiming, foreboding sterility in the wake of receding passion ... “meticulous, past midnight in clear rime ...” (the first of these are heard in the postlude of Part Two on this disc); and finally a radiant emergence of Venus — the poet's longed-for Answer — on a tidal wave surging up from the depths. The premiere took place on November 18 at Brooklyn College with Arthur Weisberg conducting, and was performed by the eminent young virtuosi who play on the present recording.”

THE NEW YORK STRING QUARTET was formed at the Juilliard School in the spring of 1976 and has already established itself as an important entity on the U.S. chamber music scene performing recent works and standard repertoire. This is their first CRI recording.

PATRICK MASON has concertized and recorded as a soloist with the Gregg Smith Singers and currently performs with the Waverly Consort. He has recorded for CRI, Vox and Nonesuch. KIM KASHKASHIAN is a member of the Washington Theatre Chamber Players and the New York Philomusica, and has performed frequently at the Marlboro Festival and on Music from Marlboro tour. DAVID STAROBIN's special talents performing new music have earned him over 70 works written especially for him. He is on the faculties of Brooklyn College and Bennington College. GORDON GOTTLIEB is a founding member of New York's premier new music ensemble, Speculum Musicae, and has been a participant in numerous recordings of contemporary music. LOUIS ODDO is a member of the New Jersey Percussion Ensemble and a participant in the Biennale de Venezia in Italy. He teaches at Jersey City State College and the William Patterson College. ARTHUR WEISBERG is a distinguished bassoonist as well as one of the foremost conductors of 20th century music.

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)

H. Crane - “Voyages”

I
Above the fresh ruffles of the surf
Bright striped urchins flay each other with sand.
They have contrived a conquest for shell shucks,
And their fingers crumble fragments of baked weed
Gaily digging and scattering.

And in answer to their treble interjections
The sun beats lightning on the waves,
The waves fold thunder on the sand;
And could they hear me I would tell them:

O brilliant kids, frisk with your dog,
Fondle your shells and slicks, bleached
By time and the elements; but there is a line
You must not cross nor ever trust beyond it
Spry cordage of your bodies to caresses
Too lichen-faithful from too wide a breast.
The bottom of the sea is cruel.

II

—And yet this great wink of eternity,
Of rimless floods, unfettered leewardings,
Samite sheeted and processioned where
Her undinal vast belly moonward bends,
Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love;

Take this Sea, whose diapason knells
On scrolls of silver snowy sentences,
The sceptred terror of whose sessions rends
As her demeanors motion well or ill,
All but the pieties of lovers' hands.

And onward, as bells off San Salvador
Salute the crocus lustres of the stars,
In these poinsettia meadows of her tides,—
Adagios of islands, O my Prodigal,
Complete the dark confessions her veins spell.

Mark how her turning shoulders wind the hours,
And hasten while her penniless rich palms
Pass superscription of bent foam and wave,—
Hasten, while they are true, —sleep, death, desire,
Close round one instant in one floating flower.

Bind us in time, O Seasons clear, and awe.
O minstrel galleons of Carib fire,
Bequeath us to no earthly shore until
Is answered in the vortex of our grave
The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.

Nothing so flag less as this piracy.

But now

Draw in your head, alone and too tall here.
Your eyes already in the slant of drifting foam;
Your breath sealed by the ghosts I do not know:
Draw in your head and sleep
the long way home.

V

Where icy and bright dungeons lift
Of swimmers their lost morning eyes,
And ocean rivers; churning, shift
Green borders under stranger skies,

Steadily as a shell secretes
Its beating leagues of monotone,
Or as many waters trough the sun's
Red kelson past the cape's wet stone;

O rivers mingling toward the sky
And harbor of the phoenix' breast—
My eyes pressed black against the prow, —
Thy derelict and blinded guest

Waiting, afire, what name, unspoke,
I cannot claim: let thy waves rear
More savage than the death of kings,
Some splintered garland for the seer.

Beyond siroccos harvesting
The solstice thunders, crept away,
Like a cliff swinging or a sail
Flung into April's inmost day—

Creation's blithe and petalled word
To the lounged goddess when she rose
Conceding dialogue with eyes
That smile unsearcheable repose—

Still fervid covenant, Belle Isle,
—Unfolded floating dais before
Which rainbows twine continual hair—
Belle Isle, white echo of the oar!

The imaged Word, it is that holds
Hushed willows anchored in its glow.
It is the unbetrayable reply

Whose accent no farewell can know.