

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA

JOHN CAGE THE SEASONS (1947)

The following notes were written by H. Wiley Hitchcock for the Tully Hall program booklet.

THE SEASONS was composed between January and April 1947 on commission from the Ballet Society (to the director of which, Lincoln Kirstein, it is inscribed). It was first heard with the ballet by Merce Cunningham, and scenery and costumes by Isamu Noguchi, played by the Ballet Society Orchestra under Leon Barzin, on 13 May 1947 at the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York.

The eighteen minute score was conceived for an orchestra of 43 members and is continuous, though planned in four seasonal divisions, each preceded by its own "prelude" (with the opening Prelude to Winter reappearing to close the work).

Several elements of Cage's experience in the 1930s and '40s lie behind the composition. One is, of course, his involvement with dance, which began in 1937 with work as dance accompanist at the Cornish School in Seattle (and which continues to the present). Another is his interest, growing in the 1940s, in Indian aesthetic theories: he has written that "THE SEASONS is an attempt to express the traditional Indian view of the seasons as quiescence (winter), creation (spring), preservation (summer), and destruction (fall)" — which is the order in which they are represented in the piece. Yet another is his study with Henry Cowell and Arnold Schoenberg in the 1930s, the one nurturing an interest in rhythmic possibilities, the other in integration of details of a composition with its whole: out of this background Cage developed a principle of "rhythmic structure," according to which a sequence of proportions is determined that fixes time-lengths for both the small units of a piece (phrases, for example) and the large (sections, for example). The sequence of THE SEASONS is 2, 2, 1, 3, 2, 4, 1, 3, 1.

It might be pointed out, in view of Cage's later interests (which have eclipsed, for many, his earlier ones), that elements of chance, randomness, or "silence" (unplanned or unintended sounds) had no role in the composition of THE SEASONS. As for the expressive qualities of the work, here is the reaction of critic Alfred Frankenstein, writing in San Francisco in 1948: "Its score is an extraordinary structure of rippling, prickling, pointed and drawn-out sounds, complex, crashing resonances, and firmly structured melodies."

JOHN CAGE was born in Los Angeles on 15 September 1912 but has lived in New York for many years. After studies with Richard Buhlig, Adolph Weiss, Cowell, and Schoenberg, he came to national attention in the late 1930s with his "prepared piano" and all-percussion pieces, mostly for dance. Since then he has consistently been on the leading edge of the musical vanguard, particularly in his employment of electrically derived and altered sound materials, uses of chance in the compositional process, development of intermedia, music-as-theater, and "music circus" ideas, and reinterpretation of traditional harmony and improvisation. A historic recording of Cage's *SONATAS AND INTERLUDES* for Prepared Piano, played by Maro Ajemian may be heard on CRI 199.

CHARLES WUORINEN
TWO-PART SYMPHONY (1977-78)
(live recording of the first performance)
Dennis Russell Davies, conductor

TWO PART SYMPHONY was composed in 1977-78 for the American Composers Orchestra under a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. It is dedicated to Dennis Russell Davies. The symphony is scored for an orchestra of eighty-five players, including significant roles for piano and a large percussion battery. The composer has said this of his symphony:

“I would have preferred to call this work Symphony in C, which it is; or Short Symphony, which it also is. But these names have been used by Stravinsky and Copland already, and so I am left to call it what it also is: a TWO PART SYMPHONY. The two movements (both predominantly fast, although the second has a slow introduction which is to some extent an independent entity) are actually quadruplex, so that the Symphony may be considered a “variation squared”: the first movement is two variants of the same music; and the second is a variant of these.

“What of substance? I begin with a chord of the twelve tones, unordered, repeated variously in the orchestra. From this 'ylem' (a cosmological term derived from the Greek word meaning that on which form has not yet been imposed) the 12-tone set for the work is extracted, and it in turn produces the rest of the piece. But disorder lurks behind order, and the original chord does not go away, but returns from time to time as a reminder that, in the end all dissolves.

“What of manner? It is of course not for me to say, but I have the impression that this work is more regular, conventional and 'familiar' than some of my others. I had a very good time writing it.”

That may be true, but also true (for this writer, at least) is the Symphony's sharing with others of Wuorinen's works a high-tension, live-wire energy and activism, a tensility and tautness, that embodies New York's high-strung, highly charged atmosphere as practically no other music does.

CHARLES WUORINEN was born on 9 June 1938 in New York, where he has lived ever since. At Columbia University, his principal teachers of composition were Otto Luening and Vladimir Ussachevsky. A triple-threat musician (as composer, conductor, and pianist), he co-founded with Harvey Sollberger the redoubtable Group for Contemporary Music. Prolific as a composer, he has been recognized with many honors and awards, among them two Guggenheim fellowships and a Pulitzer Prize. His textbook *Simple Composition* is published by Longman. A number of his works can be heard on CRI 149, 230, 231, 239 and 306.

At 34 DENNIS RUSSELL DAVIES holds an outstanding place among American conductors. Under his leadership since 1972, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra has gained recognition throughout the U.S. and Europe for its distinctive style and its imaginative programming, and its recordings for CRI and Nonesuch. Davies is also Music Director of the Cabrillo Music Festival in California and serves as Music Advisor to the American Composers Orchestra. In 1980 he will relinquish his St. Paul post to be General Music Director of the Stuttgart Opera. Davies is currently conductor for the Bayreuth Festival's new production of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, which opened in 1978. During the 1978-79 season he made his debut with the Berlin Philharmonic. In the U.S. he has led the New York Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Atlanta Symphony, Louisville Orchestra, and Santa Fe Opera. Davies holds a doctorate from the Juilliard School, where he was a member of the conducting faculty from 1968-71.

Members of the American Composers Orchestra on this recording are: Violin I: Jeanne Ingraham, Eriko Sato, Dominic Vaz, Benjamin Hudson, Ronald Bauch, Martha Caplin, Masako Yanagita, Joyce Flissier, William Henry, Nancy Elan. Violin II: Joseph Schor, Ronald Oakland, Robin Bushman, Ruth Buffington, Austin Reller, Marin Aslop, Carol Zeavin, Elizabeth Kleinman. Violas: Janet Hill, Lawrence Dutton, Judith Geist, Susan Winterbottom, Jennie Hansen, Sarah Ricketts. Violincello: Eugene Moye, Beverly Lauridsen, Gabriel Morales, Roger Low, Bonnie Hartman, Julian Fifer. Bass: Joseph Tamosaitis, Michael Willens, Jaime Austria, Lewis Paer. Harp: Susan Jolles. Piano and Celeste: Ursula Oppens. Flute: Paul Dunkel, Susan Palma. Piccolo: Laura Conwesser. Oboe: Steven Taylor. English Horn: Randall Wolfgang. Bass Oboe: Henry Schuman. Clarinet: Joseph Rabbai. Eb Clarinet; John Moses. Bass Clarinet: Mitchell Weiss. Bassoon: Frank Morelli, Lauren Goldstein. French Horn: Paul Ingraham, William Purvis, Julie Landsman, Michael Martin. Trumpet: Ray Mace, James Stubbs, Edward Carroll. Trombone: Porter Poindexter, Ronald Borrer. Bass Trombone and Baritone Horn: Robert Biddlecome. Tuba: Thompson Hanks. Tympani: Gordon Gottlieb. Percussion; Joseph Passaro, Benjamin Herman, David Frost. Daniel Druckman.

The AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA was founded to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the American Composers Alliance. Francis Thorne, the executive director of the Alliance, and Nicolas Roussakis, its president, in consultation with Dennis Russell Davies, who was chosen to be the Music Advisor, asked Paul Dunkel (the flutist with *Speculum Musicae*) to contract the best free-lance musicians who perform new music in New York City. The first concert, which took place on February 7, 1977 in Alice Tully Hall, attracted a large and distinguished audience and was very well received in the press. "The debut concert of the new orchestra turned out to be an unqualified success. It was one of those occasions when the right conductor, the right musicians and the right repertoire all came together in the right hail, and everything worked" wrote Tom Johnson in *The Village Voice*. After such a brilliant start, it was evident that the American Composers Orchestra should become a permanent fixture on the musical scene. The three concerts of the first full season in 1977-78 were conducted by James Dixon. Mr. Davies, and Gunther Schuller. "With this orchestra, more pliant and better versed in its own century than the Philharmonic, Schuller got an evening of playing lithe, muscular, and enormously vivid. It was enough to send anyone out of the hall with renewed pride in America's music" said Alan Rich in *New York Magazine*. The conductors for the second season were Mr. Davies, Lukas Foss and Jose Serebrier; the latter took the orchestra on its first tour to the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and to Philadelphia in May 1979. The concerts have been broadcast live over radio station WNYC-FM and recorded for later broadcast by the Voice of America and National Public Radio. Gunther Schuller conducted music of Helps and Consoli on the premiere recording of the orchestra, CRI SD 384.

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Produced by Carter Harman

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