

VIRGIL THOMSON

SYMPHONY NO. 3

New Hampshire Symphony Orchestra; James Bolle, conductor

1. Allegro moderato

2. Tempo di valzer

3. Adagio sostenuto

4. Allegretto

Personal Statement

“I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, grew up there, and went to war from there. That was the other war. Then I was educated some more in Boston and Paris. In composition, I was a pupil of Nadia Boulanger. While I was still young, I taught music at Harvard and played the organ in Boston at King's Chapel. Then I returned to Paris and lived there for many years; till the Germans came, in fact. After that I was for fourteen years music critic of the New York Herald-Tribune. I still live in New York.

“All my life I have written music. There is a great deal of this music. My most famous works are the operas *Four Saints in Three Acts* and *The Mother of Us All* (both to texts by Gertrude Stein), *The Plough that Broke the Plains* and *The River* (films by Pare Lorentz), and *Louisiana Story* (film by Robert Flaherty), though there are also symphonies, concertos, Masses, string quartets, and many other works in many forms.

“I have appeared as guest-conductor with the New York Philharmonic, The Boston Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra and many other orchestras in the U.S., in Europe and in South America.

“I am the author of seven books; the most recent is *American Music Since 1910* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, N.Y., 1971).” – Virgil Thomson

Virgil Thomson's **THIRD SYMPHONY** is an orchestral version of his String Quartet No. 2, composed in 1932, orchestrated in 1972. It is scored for 2 flutes (1 piccolo), 2 oboes (1 English horn), 2 clarinets (1 bass), 2 bassoons; 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba; timpani (5), percussion (gong, tamtam, cymbals, bass drum, snare drum, field drum, tambourine, glockenspiel), harp, and strings.

That Virgil Thomson's **THIRD SYMPHONY** presents no difficulty to the casual listener is perhaps its greatest difficulty. For beneath its bland textures and fluent rhythm, expressed through them, indeed, lies a radical modernism of thought. This is betrayed through a main theme built wholly of stacked-up thirds ascending and descending through a two-octave range and incorporating both a rhythmic displacement and a major-minor contradiction. It is clearly a twentieth-century theme. Also characteristic of our time is the practice of building sizeable structures out of abstract material, in this case out of scales and broken arpeggios.

The expressive progress of the work, which begins in exuberance and ends in tranquillity, comes out of the energy inherent in its material. This is a product of contrasts rather than of conflicts. The music depicts no inner struggle, no unrelieved psychic tensions. Its emotion runs deep, but it is serene and self-contained. And it is housed in a shapely structure. The first movement and the last are very nearly of the same length, about six and a half minutes each, while the two middle ones, a waltz and a tango, each three and a half minutes long, make together a balancing central section of seven. After the original statement of broken arpeggios and scales, moreover, no new material appears, only developments and transformations. Nothing in the work is out of context. All is consistent, tightly joined. And the proportions are as spacious as the interior is airy. Not for nothing is the work dedicated to the architect Philip Johnson, at whose own house it was first performed.

As for its classic harmonies, these are the symphony's most troubling characteristic for conventional modernists. There is no employment of dissonance save for expressive reasons, nor any search for surprise. Even the rhythmic patterns, though foreigners have recognized their lilt as American, are closer to Mozart and Schubert than to twentieth-century masters. As an essay in classical design, the work as a whole is probably less shocking today than in 1932, when it was written.

ROBERT HELPS

SYMPHONY NO. 1

Columbia Symphony Orchestra; Zoltan Rozsnyai, conductor

1. Energico e marcato

2. Adagio

3. Allegro con moto

ROBERT HELPS was born in Passaic, New Jersey, on September 23, 1928. He studied piano with Abby Whiteside and composition with Roger Sessions. He has appeared as piano soloist with Pierre Monteux and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra; in Camera Concerts in New York's Town Hall; in recital with many well-known singers and instrumentalists; and has recorded music of Schoenberg, Milton Babbitt and Mel Powell. His own music has been performed by leading musicians; his *GOSSAMER NOONS* is on CRI SD 384. His *Adagio for Orchestra* (the middle movement of the *Symphony No. 1*) received the Fromm Foundation Award and was performed by Leopold Stokowski and the Symphony of the Air. Helps also received a Fromm Foundation commission for a chamber work, *Serenade*, and a commission from the New Haven Symphony Orchestra for a major orchestral work.

His SYMPHONY NO. 1 received the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation Award responsible for the original Columbia recording. He writes:

“The first movement is a rather explosive short sonata-form movement which, after its highest climax, calms down quickly and leads without pause into the slow second movement. This pervasively somber movement is perhaps the most complex of the Symphony. It also is the most tonally oriented, rather unabashedly making its entrance and exit in what certainly sounds to me like B-flat minor. It is a mirror-like movement, with four connected sections leading to a climax and three leading from it. Sections 5, 6 and 7 are abridged versions of sections 1, 2 and 4, but in reverse order — i.e., 1=7, 2=6, 4=5. (Section 3, not reappearing in the declining half of the movement, is a short restatement of the quiet opening theme, but this time with considerably enlarged forces and in forte.) An ostinato-like figure appears for the first time in the horns just before the climax of the movement; at the climax it appears in the trumpets. This figure accompanies much of the rest of the movement, although at no point does it become the principal theme.

“The last movement is generally fast and energetic, vacillating between 6/8 and 3/4, with the often bizarrely dance-like 3/4 winning out in the end. It is a fairly strict sonata-form movement, with two modifications: one, the development section is replaced with a theme-and-variation section — this section, quite different in mood, being perhaps the most "serious" part of the movement and containing the major climax of the Symphony; and two, in the recapitulation the group of second themes appears before the group of first themes, although this modification is atoned for by ending the movement with a coda built on one of the second themes.”

JAMES BOLLE is founder of the innovative Monadnock (N.H.) summer concert series. A composition student of Milhaud, with works widely performed, he has also conducted many orchestras and choruses. In 1974, with encouragement from a group of New Hampshire music lovers, and calling on players from southern New Hampshire and neighboring parts of Massachusetts, he assembled a group of experienced professionals to form the NEW HAMPSHIRE SYMPHONY. The nucleus of the Symphony is augmented by others musicians, mostly young, who are studying or working in the area.

This recording employed hand-made ribbon microphones in pairs, spaced six feet apart, in the best available acoustical environment. Their output was fed to a 30 IPS Studer A-80 tape recorder, slightly modified for constant velocity record-playback characteristics. In this way the need for conventional (and troublesome) noise reduction devices was eliminated. Lacquer masters were cut from the original tapes, employing an Ortofon transducer system with motional feedback. To minimize groove echo, the lacquer masters were processed within twelve hours using the latest European equipment and techniques. Strict quality control pressings were made of the purest available vinyl.

The Helps recording was made possible by the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation, Inc., which brought about the original recording on Columbia Records; CBS Records, which licensed the recording to CRI as part of CRI's continuing program of reissuing valuable withdrawn recordings; and the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University, which funded the production. The Thomson recording was made possible by the New Hampshire Symphony, the generosity of the following trusts and individuals: The John H. Pearson Trust, Mr. George A. Whipple III, The Granite Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Edson Outwin, The Putnam Foundation, Mrs. Ann Moody, Dr. and Mrs. John McNally, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Solms, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Backus, Mr. and Mrs. John Blackford, and Dr. and Mrs. David Stahl.

Produced by Carter Harman

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)