

THE DA CAPO CHAMBER PLAYERS' 10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Patricia Spencer, flutist; Laura Flax, clarinetist; Joel Lester, violinist;

André Emelianoff, cellist; Joan Tower, pianist

To build a concert around six commissioned works as the Da Capo Chamber Players did for their 10th Anniversary Concert on March 23, 1980, at Alice Tully Hall, is a risky business. But as this record shows, the six pieces are unusually strong, and, in spite of their diversity, well-matched. As a guideline, the composers were asked to try to work “da capo” into their music. (“Da capo” is a musical term directing the performer to repeat a phrase or to return to the beginning of the piece.)

JOSEPH SCHWANTNER

WIND, WILLOW, WHISPER

The Players

JOSEPH SCHWANTNER (b. 1943, Chicago) is professor of composition at the Eastman School of Music; his orchestral work *Aftertones of Infinity* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1979, and his MODUS CELESTIS is on CRI SD 340. He provides WIND, WILLOW, WHISPER with an original illustrative poem: “Wind, Willow, Whisper / a gentle breeze/ the early morning mist/ dew on languid leaves/ sweet birds sing/ in exultation/ a celebration . . .” A few phrases — sweet birds singing — are exuberant, but most of the music is quiet, marked with such instructions as “like delicate little bells” (a repeated figure high in the piano), or “ethereal” (fragments of lyrical melody for clarinet, violin and cello harmonics), and — a wonderful effect — the violinist and cellist softly whistling. The pianist helps create the haunting mood by keeping the damper pedal down from beginning to end. The figuration for piano and flute is unobtrusively varied throughout.

SHULAMIT RAN

PRIVATE GAME

Laura Flax and André Emelianoff

SHULAMIT RAN (b. Tel Aviv, Israel) is associate professor of composition at the University of Chicago; her works have been premiered by the New York Philharmonic and the Israel Philharmonic. This is her first CRI recording. For her, “da capo” suggested the repetition of musical material. Taken literally, this seemed a touch archaic to her; she therefore modified it by repeating not whole sections but only short ideas, embedded in other non-repeated music. The pattern of repetition is the PRIVATE GAME of her title. The ideas occur in the order 1-2-1-3-2-3. The first is the easiest to recognize when it returns. The second three rising semitones for clarinet, followed by a slow dancelike figure (which the composer hears as Schubertian) is hard to identify as an independent idea at all, because it sounds like the end of one thing and the beginning of something else. The third idea, too, is hard to spot when it is repeated because it fits so naturally into the fast music around it (it is a chugging little figure, first heard a minute into the piece). PRIVATE GAME is the only one of these pieces that consistently shows off the performers' individual virtuosity; it shows off the composer's virtuosity, too, not just because of its game with form, but because such an unexpectedly full texture is created with only two instruments.

JOAN TOWER
PETROUSHKATES
The Players

JOAN TOWER (b. 1938, New York) is Da Capo's founder and pianist. Among her many works are two pieces for orchestra, *Amazon Two*, premiered by the Hudson Valley Philharmonic, and *Sequoia*, commissioned by the American Composers Orchestra, first performed in 1981. Among her recordings are CRI SD 302 and 354.

PETROUSHKATES depicts a carnival on ice, inspired by both Stravinsky's *Petroushka* and Olympic figure skating. The beginning and end sound very obviously like *Petroushka*, but, the tone of PETROUSHKATES is entirely original, with the energetic tumult of Stravinsky's orchestration ingeniously recreated for Da Capo's five players. There are other recollections of Stravinsky, too, especially in the concertante section toward the end, where the solo violin music recalls a famous passage in *L'Histoire du Soldat*, and the irregularly-spaced chords that accompany it suggest the final movement of the *Rite of Spring*. Stravinsky, though, would never have written the descending triplet arpeggios in the flute, the obsessively rising cello figure, or the alternately jazzy and romantic piano solo that brings the section to a close. PETROUSHKATES, dedicated to Stravinsky, is the only one of these works that uses the piano as a virtuoso solo instrument.

CHARLES WUORINEN
JOAN'S
The Players

CHARLES WUORINEN (b. 1938, New York) won the Pulitzer Prize in 1970 for *Time's Encomium*, is co-director of the Group for Contemporary Music, and has appeared as conductor or pianist with numerous orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, and the Cleveland Orchestra; his works are widely performed, and are recorded on CRI SD 149, 230, 231, 239, 306, 410, and 459.

JOAN'S, an affectionate present for Joan Tower, has an air of sublimated passion, passion channelled into repeated retransformation of previously stated musical material. It moves in short phrases and might be heard as the adventures of a simple motif — two ascending or descending scale steps — extended at one point into a quickly interrupted fragment of almost Wagnerian melody. JOAN'S ends with a ghostly cadence on D, a soft A minor triad followed by an emphatic low D.

GEORGE PERLE
SCHERZO
Patricia Spencer, Laura Flax, Joel Lester, André Emelianoff

GEORGE PERLE (b. 1915, Bayonne, New Jersey) is a distinguished scholar and theorist as well as a composer; his books include *Serial Composition and Atonality* (now in its fifth edition), *Twelve-Tone Tonality*, and a definitive study of the operas of Alban Berg. His music is recorded on CRI SD 148, 212, 288, 306, 331, 387, and 403. His SCHERZO requires a special kind of virtuosity. Perle uses flute, clarinet, violin and cello (there is no piano in the piece) as equal voices, which — in spite of the different tone colors involved — have to blend as smoothly as the four instruments of a string quartet. Perle's style

recalls Schoenberg, but Perle's gestures aren't as angular or abrupt as Schoenberg's and his disposition seems sunnier: SCHERZO is tender and witty, with an attractive airiness that comes from the blend of winds and strings. The "da capo" requirement is satisfied by a literal repeat just before the end of fifteen bars heard much earlier, followed by a restatement of the opening four measures transposed a major third up.

PHILIP GLASS (arr. Robert Moran)

MODERN LOVE WALTZ

The Players

PHILIP GLASS (b. 1937, Baltimore, Maryland) has performed his music with his own ensemble throughout the United States, Canada and Europe; he became widely known for his operas, *Einstein on the Beach* (written in collaboration with Robert Wilson) and *Satyagraha*, premiered in Rotterdam by the Netherlands Opera Company. ROBERT MORAN (b. 1937, Denver, Colorado) has been resident composer with Northwestern University and with the City of West Berlin; his works include a large-scale composition for 100,000 residents of San Francisco, and another for the entire population of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

PHILIP GLASS didn't have time to write anything new and suggested that the group consider playing the solo waltz he had written for Robert Helps' and Robert Moran's "waltz project," in Moran's arrangement for Da Capo's instrumentation (with the piano replaced by an electric piano). The members of the group agreed, and as a result, were able both to end their concert with a frothy divertissement (a kind of built-in encore), and to include an important contemporary idiom they had never worked with before. MODERN LOVE WALTZ is minimalist light music, improbable as that may sound: as in Glass' recent ballet score, *Dance*, the repetition of simple elements seems not meditative (the traditional description of minimal music), but exhilarating. The harmony oscillates between two dominant-seventh chords a half-step apart, a flamenco-like effect so rich in unrealized tonal implications that the piece, light-hearted as it is, seems ready to burst with suppressed excitement. (It takes both its inspiration and its title from *Modern Love*, a novel by Constance De Jong, Glass' collaborator on his opera about the life of Gandhi, *Satyagraha*.)

The pieces on this record were commissioned by the New York State Council on the Arts, Meet the Composer, and the Fromm Foundation.

The DA CAPO CHAMBER PLAYERS, well-known for their extensive performances of twentieth-century chamber music, were Naumburg Award winners for chamber music in 1973, and are one of only two groups to be supported in a second concert (their 10th Anniversary Concert) by this prestigious organization. They perform a series each year at Carnegie Recital Hall sponsored by the Carnegie Hall Corporation, and have toured widely, emphasizing workshops and seminars as well as performances. They appear on CRI SD 302, 322, 352, 354 and 401.

Notes by Gregory Sandow

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.

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(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)