

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, Igor Buketoff, conductor

ROGER SESSIONS

SYMPHONY NO. 3 (1957)

ROGER SESSIONS (b. Brooklyn, 1896) is one of the most important American composers. He had his first piano lessons at the age of four, went to Harvard when he was fourteen, graduated at eighteen and subsequently attended Yale. In 1917 he came under the guidance of Ernest Bloch, whom he followed to Cleveland in 1921 to teach music theory at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He spent the years 1925-33 mostly in Europe, where he won a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Prix de Rome. In 1935 he joined the faculty of Princeton University; ten years later he joined the music department at the University of California at Berkeley, returning to Princeton in 1952. He retired in 1965; since then he has been associated with Juilliard, and with Harvard (1968-69). All his life he has been active in many musical organizations serving contemporary music, including the International Society of Contemporary Music, of whose U.S. section he was president from 1936 to 1941. He has written music in many forms, including two operas, a cantata, chamber music, a violin and a piano concerto, nine symphonies, and other orchestral works.

His **THIRD SYMPHONY**, commissioned in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra by the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, was composed between 1955 and 1957, and is dedicated to the memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky. It was first performed on December 6, 1957, by the Boston Symphony under Charles Munch. For that occasion Sessions wrote an article about the **SYMPHONY**, portions of which are reproduced here with the kind permission of the composer.

“My **THIRD SYMPHONY** is larger in conception and scale than the First and does not contain the sharp and even violent contrasts of the Second. In saying this I am simply noting a difference in character, not implying a fundamental change of artistic direction. I regard this symphony as belonging very definitely among a series of works which began with my Second String Quartet (1951). It contains new elements, however, even with respect to these works.

“The first movement (*Allegro grazioso e con fuoco*) is in three large sections, which may be compared to the three sections of a classic 'sonata' form. The first and last of these sections are composed — like the 'sonata' — of two contrasting groups, of which the second begins with a melody for oboe. These two groups are varied, though readily recognizable, in the 'recapitulation.' The middle section introduces new elements, is stormier in character and less concentrated in pace.

“The second movement (*Allegro, un poco ruvido*) is likewise in three sections — corresponding to the three sections of the classic minuet or scherzo. Here again, however, the third section is a variant, not a repetition, of the first. The middle section, or 'trio', is quite simple in conception; it is essentially a dialogue consisting . . . of florid and agitated declamatory passages for violins, over trombones in unison, answered by much quieter phrases in the woodwinds and horns.

“The third movement (*Andante sostenuto e con affetto*) is based on two contrasting themes — (1) clarinet, harp and muted horns; (2) violins, answered in imitation by cellos — connected by a passage, given at first to muted trombones, which assumes each time a different character and greater importance in the two variations which follow. The first of these variations leads to a big climax. The movement ends with a return of the music and the coloring of the opening measures.

“The final movement (Allegro con fuoco) is built of five sections, separated clearly by quiet and relatively static passages, in which various orchestral colors are played off against each other, and the persistent recurrence of short motifs, of sometimes purely rhythmic character, maintains the pulsation. Once again variation is the guiding principle; the third and fourth sections are extended variations of the first and second, respectively. Each of the two main sections contains a number of elements proper to itself. The final section is a kind of 'coda' which brings back in summary form the various elements of the opening section.”

BENJAMIN LEES

CONCERTO FOR STRING QUARTET AND ORCHESTRA (1965)

**John Ronayne and Geoffrey Grey, violinists;
Frederick Riddle, violist; Norman Jones, cellist**

BENJAMIN LEES (b. 1924) was raised in San Francisco, where he received his early musical training. He attended the University of Southern California, and later continued his studies in advanced composition with George Antheil. He left for Europe in 1954 and remained there for eight years while he devoted himself solely to composition. During this period he received a Guggenheim Fellowship, Fulbright Fellowship and Copley Foundation Award. With a growing reputation for his orchestral music, Lees received three commissions for the Bicentennial year: one from the Music Teachers National Association, which resulted in his *Variations for Piano and Orchestra*, premiered by Eugene List and the Dallas Symphony; another by the Detroit Symphony for his *Concerto for Woodwind Quartet and Orchestra*; and the third, from the National Symphony for his *Passacaglia* which has been played by over a dozen orchestras since its premiere in April 1976. His music has also enjoyed performances by such organizations as the Boston and Chicago symphonies, the Cleveland, Louisville and Philadelphia orchestras, and the New York Philharmonic. Lees has taught at the Peabody Conservatory, Queens College, the Manhattan School of Music, and the Juilliard School. He writes:

“The CONCERTO FOR STRING QUARTET AND ORCHESTRA was commissioned by the Kansas City Philharmonic and given its premiere in 1965, with the participation of the Paganini String Quartet. The composer treats the solo quartet almost entirely as one unit, rather than four separate solo instruments.

1. Allegro con brio. The opening movement is in sonata-allegro form. A short dramatic reiteration of the chord G, B, D, E-flat, F sharp, G by the brass and winds leads directly to the first subject by the string quartet. A brief dialogue, a strong reiteration by the orchestra and an episodic section lead to a transition. This begins quietly in the quartet, with a counter-figure for the piccolo, flute and glockenspiel, building in intensity until the entire orchestra brings it to a climax. A sudden interjection by the solo cello leads to the lyrical second subject stated by the quartet. The orchestra restates it more excitedly, as does the quartet. A jolting figure in the timpani signals the beginning of the development section, and then a new reiteration of the brass-and-winds chord announces the recapitulation.

2. Andante cantando. The second movement is in three parts. It opens with a round for three voices in the quartet against a soft, pulsating beat by the timpani. After a second statement, the tempo accelerates and the mood is changed by the arrival of a *giocoso* section in 6/8. The tempo grows faster, tension is generated by the quartet and brought to a peak by the orchestra. Then the pace slackens to the original tempo with its measured timpani figure. A quiet second subject quickly undergoes a transformation, and suddenly there is an explosive encounter between quartet and orchestra. There follows a dramatic solo section for the first violin, punctuated by utterances of the orchestra until once again we hear the measured beat, and the quartet takes up the round for the last time.

3. Allegro energico. The final movement, a rondo, bursts on the scene with a figure by the trombones and an immediate statement of the first subject by the quartet in 7/8. The second subject, *giocoso*, in 4/4, is exchanged between orchestra and quartet, with the orchestra subsequently building to a climax. The quartet again forcefully states the first subject followed by the third subject with phrases from oboe, flute and horn. Soon there is a violent flurry and a sudden entry upon a section marked *molto marcato*. Here a *concerto grosso* treatment is built on the second subject. The orchestra then states the first subject (in a different key) and proceeds to a transition of large proportions. The quartet now plays the first subject in the proper key, the trombones hurl forth their introductory figure, which is elaborated upon in strength by the string section, and the final *codetta* is introduced by the quartet in unison.”

IGOR BUKETOFF won the first Alice M. Ditson Award for outstanding American conductors. He has led many performances of American operas (he was Music Director of the St. Paul Opera Association) and orchestral music (he was Music Director of the Fort Wayne Philharmonic Orchestra and the Iceland Symphony Orchestra simultaneously). As a guest conductor he has appeared with the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, and the orchestras of Minnesota, Houston, Denver, Kansas City, Indianapolis, San Diego and Hartford, and with foreign orchestras. In 1967, Buketoff was honored for the second time by the Ditson Committee, this time as the conductor who did the most for the promotion of American contemporary music.

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)