

Claus Adam (1917-1983)

Claus Adam (1917-1983) the renowned cellist, is primarily known as a chamber music performer, having been a member of the New Music String Quartet for seven years and the Juilliard String Quartet for 19 years. After his withdrawal from the JSQ he devoted more time to one of his first loves, composing. At the end of his life, he was involved in teaching at both The Juilliard School and Mannes College of Music, and was also Music Administrator of the National Orchestral Association. Among his commissions in recent years are one from the Ford Foundation which produced a Cello Concerto, premiered with the Cincinnati Symphony and Stephen Kates; a National Endowment Grant for an orchestral work, the Concerto Variations dedicated to and premiered by the NOA. A grant from the Guggenheim Foundation made it possible for him to accept an invitation to be Composer-in-Residence at the American Academy in Rome in 1976.

String Quartet (1975)

American String Quartet (Mitchell Stern and Laurie Carney, violinists;
Daniel Avshalomov, viola; David Geber, cello)

Adam wrote: "The String Quartet '75 is actually my second quartet, the other one being an early attempt performed by the Juilliard Quartet in 1949 for the ISCM long before I had become the cellist of the Ensemble. This one was commissioned by the Naumburg Foundation for the American String Quartet. The work is clearly divided into two parts. The second part being in *scordatura* (discussed below) needs a few minutes of some complicated tuning. The short *lento tranquillo* introduces numerous harmonic and melodic ideas for the *Prima parte*. The mood suddenly changes and sweeps into the *Allegro inquieto*, a movement in free sonata form which ends quietly to prepare for the *Largo doloroso*, forming a large arc. The *Seconda parte* employs the device called *scordatura*, quite commonly used in the 17th and 18th centuries. Some other examples can be found in the music of Biber, Tartini, Bach, Paganini and Mahler, in Kodaly's solo cello sonata, and in Shapey's Quartet No. 2. By "mistuning" (*scordatura*) two strings on every instrument in the quartet, I had the possibility of all chromatic tones played without pressing down the string, plus new double-stopping and combinations of harmonics. In the *Moderato statico-Presto misterioso*, pizzicatos and natural harmonics are employed but fingered without ever pressing the string down to the fingerboard. Melodic and harmonic materials from the first part are repeated and developed in the second part. In the last section *Veloce e vivace* which is almost a perpetual motion at times, all the devices of the previous sections are employed plus fingering or pressing the strings down to the fingerboard to get various pitches."

Piano Sonata (1948)

Jacob Maxin writes:

"I find the first movement to be a fascinating blend of the following elements:

1) Beethovenian (and Bartokian) rigor, i.e. extremely tight, almost closed-in motivic derivations and developments;

2) romantic and emotional upheavals of the themes which, in their fragmenting or aggrandizing transformations, self-mocking imitations and grotesque projections of themselves, approach expressionism.

"The second movement (Passacaglia) carries within its structured grief an ever-increasing exaltation. The next-to-last variation abandons itself to a climax of near

hysteria which, though always logically structured, is totally unashamed in its intensity. After that, there must be catharsis— the "peace through suffering" of the last phrases...

"The third movement is a satiric, acutely motoric rondo. Its scherzando nature starts twining into a Jekyll and Hyde show. What is at first frisky and harmless evolves later into almost self-destructive viciousness. The motor behaves strangely. The rhythms force the music in turn to devour itself, to be super-controlled and rigid, or to explode.

"The new twist in this piece is that the music, for all its European culture and classical technical behavior is wearing a New York garment — it has jazz-like elements. The arrangements and derangements of rhythms, the beeps and bops, reveal the piece (notwithstanding the fact that Claus was born of German parents, in Sumatra) to be a true child of its time and place.

"I met Claus when I was in my mid-teens. I too was a pupil of Stefan Wolpe (and the piano student of his remarkable and vibrant wife, Irma). As an early and eager modernist, I played the music of Wolpe and of his pupils.

"Claus asked me to work on the sonata with him and I played the first performance in 1948, when I was 18.

"During the next years, I played the Sonata many times. People who heard it said it was a 'tour de force,' but I, young and ignorant, navigated its rapids easily. In my present sober maturity, the tempi are a bit more deliberate, and I know too well the dangers of the rapids. But just recently, in preparation for this recording, I played the Sonata for a few friends, and to my delight they said, 'Tour de force.' It must be the music!"

Jacob Maxin (Jack to his friends) was born in Philadelphia, began performing at 5 and studied with Irma Wolpe, Edward Steuermann and Ilona Kabos (the last two at Juilliard, where he himself later taught). He has toured internationally, played with great orchestras and has appeared on radio, television and records. Since 1968 he has taught at the New England Conservatory.

The American String Quartet, winner of the Coleman and Naumburg awards, is one of the most successful and media-conscious of the younger ensembles. It has been in residence at the Mannes School, Taos School of Music, and (1984) the Peabody Conservatory. It tours internationally, performing with world-class musicians, and has appeared on both Public and commercial television.

This recording was made possible in part by a generous contribution from Mrs. Jane Kitselman. Both recorded by David Hancock, New York, April 1983 and February 1984 respectively.

Produced by Carter Harman and Eve Beglarian.

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, using half inch tape with two channels, each channel almost 1/4-inch wide. In this way the need for conventional (and troublesome) noise reduction devices was eliminated and the resulting reproduction challenges the digital storage method so far as clarity and cleanliness of sound are concerned.

(Original liner notes from CRI Lp jacket)