

## **ROBERT BLACK, pianist**



Photo by Jane Hamborsky

### **ROGER SESSIONS**

#### **FIVE PIECES FOR PIANO (1974-75)**

ROGER SESSIONS (b. 1896, Brooklyn, New York) entered Harvard at the age of 14, and while there managed the football team; he did graduate work with Horatio Parker at Yale. His subsequent studies, probably the most important to his development, were with Ernest Bloch.

In his career as a composer and a teacher, Sessions has continued the 'great line' of European composers in its translation to the American musical community. Much of his early career was spent in Europe; after his return to this country, he profoundly influenced generations of students at Princeton, Berkeley and at Juilliard.

The FIVE PIECES FOR PIANO were written in 1974 and 1975, thus coming between the cantata, *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed*, and the *Ninth Symphony*. In this ordered group, pieces I and V are linked by the slower tempo of their finely-worked counterpoint and their symmetrical forms and procedures; II and IV share a brilliant agitato character and the scherzando, III, stands in the center. It was while writing piece IV, having completed the rest of the group, that Sessions heard of the death of a close friend and colleague. The brief tranquillo section which begins at the thirteenth bar marks this exact moment compositionally, and the entire group is inscribed "to the memory of Luigi Dallapiccola."

- by Alan Fletcher

### **MIRIAM GIDEON**

#### **SONATA FOR PIANO (1977)**

MIRIAM GIDEON, born in Greeley, Colorado, has composed in all media. Her orchestral, chamber, and solo works have been performed and recorded in the U.S.A., Europe, and the Far East. She has had numerous awards, commissions, and honors, and in 1975 was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Her music appears on CRI 128, 170, 286, 288, 343, and 401.

The SONATA FOR PIANO was composed in 1976-77. It was commissioned for the pianist Lillian Freundlich by her husband, Irwin Freundlich, a member of the piano faculty of the Juilliard School for more than forty years. The titles of the three movements are drawn from Swinburne's *Choruses from Atlanta of Calydon*: "Veiled Destinies," "Night, The Shadow of Light," and "Rapid and Footless Herds." A single harmonic cell is at the heart of each movement — those in the first and third movements being derived from one of the *Morike Songs* of Hugo Wolf, and that in the second movement from a song

of Robert Schumann. The sonata recalls associations with some of the deepest experiences of the composer's youth. Robert Black gave the sonata its first performance in the spring of 1982.

## **BEN WEBER**

### **VARIAZIONI QUASI UNA FANTASIA (1974)**

BEN WEBER (b. 1916, St. Louis, d. 1979, New York City) began to compose in Chicago in 1936, moved to New York in 1945 and lived there until his death. He became active in the International Society for Contemporary Music in 1946, and in ensuing years received several fellowships (Guggenheim, Fromm, Phoebe Ketchum Award) as well as numerous commissions for orchestral, chamber and vocal works. Additional honors include an award in 1950 from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and a lifetime membership in that organization in 1970. He was one of the two Americans chosen in 1954 to represent the U.S. at the Convegno Musicale in Rome, and for that occasion wrote his *Violin Concerto*, Op. 41, which was performed there. It was first performed in the United States in 1974. His music appears on CRI 120, 239, 288 and 358. About VARIAZIONI, he wrote:

"I have never sought to develop my creative bent in music solely as a twelve-tone technician. Since 1938 my music has usually been atonal, but sometimes I have written pieces which have strong tonal impetus, or at least implication. However, my use of twelve tone, i.e. serial, music has been consistent over a period of thirty years, and included most of what I and some others consider to be my most important work. I am not an experimenter primarily, though one does this as a matter of living concern, but I feel great respect for the best accomplishments of all times. I hope to have some part in preparing the future for those who will follow me.

VARIAZIONI QUASI UNA FANTASIA is based on a row, freely altered in its presentations. It is basically a lyric-dramatic work, with much use of counterpoint that is frequently florid though the intent is elegant rather than bravura. The work was commissioned by Dr. Joseph Stephens and given its first performance in December, 1978, by Robert Black."

ROBERT BLACK, whose repertoire ranges from Beethoven to Boulez, has performed major works by Albert Reimann, Messiaen, Hindemith, Sessions, Shapey, Stockhausen, Tippett, Rudhyar, Carter, Babbitt, and Ben Weber. Founder and conductor of the New York New Music Ensemble, widely recognized as one of the finest chamber groups in new music, he is a member of Speculum Musicae, and has appeared as guest artist at the Aspen Music Festival and the World Music Days in Boston and Athens. He was a judge in the first Kennedy Center-Rockefeller Foundation International Piano Competition. He also appears on CRI SD 428.

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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.

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All recordings produced by Carolyn Sachs

Recorded by David Hancock, New York, March and June 1982

*(Original liner notes from CRI Lp jacket)*