

## **Noel Da Costa**

*Four Preludes for Trombone and Piano* (1973)

Per Brevig, trombone; Wanda Maximilien, piano

*Jes' Grew* (1973)

Max Pollikoff, violin

*Five Verses with Vamps* (1969)

Evelyn Steinbock, cello; David Garvey, piano

## **Howard Boatwright**

*String Quartet No. 2*

Manhattan String Quartet

(Eric Lewis and Roy Lewis, violins; John Dexter, viola; Judith Glyde, cello)

**Noel Da Costa** (b. 1929, Lagos, Nigeria) left Africa with his family at the age of 3 and lived in various Caribbean islands including Jamaica, the original home of his parents. When his family left the West Indies, they moved to New York City and settled in the Harlem Community.

Da Costa's formal musical education began shortly after arriving in America when he began violin studies with Barnabus Istok. "Studying the violin made me sensitive to the lyric quality in music which has influenced my compositional ideas" he says. Another important experience which he feels influenced the development of his talent, was being a student in the class of the distinguished poet, Countee Cullen. It was at Junior High School 139 in Harlem that Countee Cullen encouraged him to incorporate the organization of words in musical statements.

Da Costa received his musical education at Queens College of the City University of New York and Columbia University. During his graduate work at Columbia, he received the Seidl Fellowship in Music Composition. He also received a Fulbright Scholarship which gave him the opportunity to study composition with Luigi Dallapiccola in Florence, Italy.

Da Costa's compositions include works for a wide variety of vocal and instrumental combinations. His *Ceremony of Spirituals* for soprano, saxophone, chorus, and orchestra was performed by the Symphony of the New World in Carnegie Hall in 1971. In 1983, *Primal Rites* for solo drummer and orchestra was performed by the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra in Symphony Hall, featuring Max Roach as solo drummer.

In addition to composing, Da Costa is active as a violinist and conductor. He is Associate Professor of Music at The Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

About his music Da Costa states:

"The compositions on this record represent major influences on my compositional personality: formal compositional practices and spontaneous improvisation.

*Four Preludes for Trombone and Piano* (first performed by Robert Gillespie at a Julliard recital), uses the trombone as a 'voice' - intoning, cajoling, joking, insisting on intervallic relationships (note especially the unaccompanied third movement). The piano responds, picking up passages to elaborate, contrast, underline.

*Jes' Grew* was written for Max Pollikoff and premiered March 4, 1973 at one of Max's Gallery of Music Concerts at the YM-YWHA in New York. The first movement, *Chant*, decidedly free and improvisational in nature, is followed by the heart of the composition - a

theme and variations in which Jelly Roll Morton's *I Thought I Heard Buddy Bolden Say* serves as a point of departure for the nostalgic variations. The work concludes with a rhythmic dance movement of high spirits, interrupted by a plaintive recall of the first movement before a final burst of good humor.

"*Five Verses with Vamps*, for cello and piano, was given its premiere performance by Evelyn Steinbock and David Garvey. The idea of repeated passages (vamps) underpins the structure of all five short movements. The plan of the work can be stated concisely:

1. Play harmonies  
Melodic fragments  
Against piano...  
Vamp it!
  
2. Interact rhythmically  
Use the twelve pitches  
And follow  
The ear.
  
3. Cello melody, plaintive . . .  
Punctuated . . . by short  
Piano exchanges  
Vamp it - (blues-like!)
  
4. Perky rhythm in piano  
brittle ...  
Harmonics ... repetitive  
Bass-line figure in cello
  
5. Play harmonies  
(as in Verse 1)  
Express . . .  
Vamp and out!"

**Howard Boatwright** (b. Newport News, Va. 1918) began his musical career as a violinist with a full length recital at the age of fourteen and a New York debut (Town Hall) in 1942. He has taught at the University of Texas (violin), Yale (where he taught music theory, conducted the University Orchestra and served as concertmaster of the New Haven Symphony), and the School of Music of Syracuse University, where he was dean until 1971. He now teaches theory and composition at Syracuse, and is active as a composer and violinist.

His published writing includes a widely-used textbook on music theory, an edition of the major prose writings of Ives (*Essays Before a Sonata and Other Writings*), and two monographs on Indian music, the fruits of a Fulbright Grant to India in 1959-60. His musical compositions number more than seventy, including songs, choral music, keyboard pieces, chamber music (the *Quartet for Clarinet and Strings* won the award of the Society for the Publication of American Music in 1962), two oratorios, works for chamber orchestra, and one symphony, given its premiere performance by Christopher Keene with the Syracuse Symphony on January 12, 1919. He writes:

"Chamber music has been an important part of my musical life since I became, at the age of nineteen, first violinist of the Feldman Quartet of Norfolk, Virginia, an organization that still exists. Among my many later chamber music associates were Quincy and Lois Porter, Aldo Parisot, Luigi Silva, Frank Brief, Tossy Spivakovsky, and Joseph and Lillian Fuchs. My writing for string quartet, therefore, has developed directly from my experience with the medium.

"My *String Quartet No. 2* was commissioned by the Society for New Music of Syracuse, N.Y. The first performance was by the Manhattan Quartet at the Everson Museum, Syracuse, on April 20, 1975. The European premiere was by the Madison Quartet at St. Legier, Switzerland, on July 1, 1971.

"The style of the work is classical, as far as form is concerned. The technique by which it was composed is a personal one — dodecaphonic, though not serial.

"The approach to sonority — in keeping with the classical forms — does not seek color for its own sake. What strings have always been able to do best — sustain melodic lines — they are required to do abundantly."

**Per Brevig** is widely admired as a master trombonist. He has been solo trombone with the Metropolitan Opera and tours internationally. He may be heard on CRI SD 340.

**Wanda Maximilien** specializes in music of our time. She teaches at Rutgers University and is featured on CRI SD 404, 457, and 496.

**Max Pollikoff**, one of the legendary figures of American music, has organized unique concert series and performed extensively. He has recorded on CRI SD 303, 476, and 488.

**Evalyn Steinhock** is a composer as well as a widely known concert and recording artist. She is founder of Capricorn, a group that performs music of all periods.

**David Garvey** has been piano accompanist for some of the brightest stars in the musical firmament including, exclusively since 1953, Leontyne Price.

**The Manhattan String Quartet** has been in the forefront of American chamber music activity, with a series of residencies (Cornell, Grinnell, San Miguel, Mexico, Music Mountain, and the Manhattan School of Music) and appearances on radio and television.

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*(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*