

MAX LIFCHITZ

Rhythmic Soundscape No. 1 (1978)

Gordon Gottlieb, percussion; Max Lifchitz, piano

Winter Counterpoint (1979)

Bronx Arts Ensemble; Walter Trampler, viola; Max Lifchitz, piano/conductor

Consorte (1970)

Walter Trampler, viola d'amore; Lawrence Dutton, viola

Exceptional String Quartet (1977)

The Times Square Basstet

Max Lifchitz was born in Mexico City in 1948 and has lived in the United States since 1966. He holds degrees in composition from the Juilliard School and Harvard University. His teachers have included Luciano Berio, Leon Kirchner, Bruno Maderna and Darius Milhaud. In recent years he has been a member of the faculty of Columbia University.

Lifchitz's music has been widely performed in both Europe and the Americas. His oeuvre comprises approximately seventy pieces, nearly all are instrumental compositions. They range from full orchestral to solo works, with several of the latter being destined for instruments whose solo repertory is traditionally small, for instance, double bass, accordion, basset horn and oboe d'amore. Much of Lifchitz's output is written for chamber orchestra or ensemble; some calls for electronic or taped components. Rare combinations of instruments tend to attract this composer, a fact clearly evidenced by the four compositions on this recording.

The compositional craft of Max Lifchitz is directly conditioned by his wide-ranging musical activity and experience. Both as a pianist and a conductor, he has been performing new music for some twenty years, though he does not neglect the standard repertoire. Performances have taken him to all parts of the United States as well as to Latin America and Europe. He has organized the concert series sponsored by North/South Consonance, Inc., of which he is founder and director. His closeness to performing and to performers infuses all his compositions, which often aim to challenge and expand the players' capabilities. This recording marks the debut of his work on CRI.

Rhythmic Soundscape No. 1 (1978) calls for two performers: a pianist and a percussionist who has at his disposal a gong, bass drums, tom-toms, snare drums, bongos, Chinese cymbal, hi-hat, regular cymbals, water phone, claves, temple blocks, wood chimes and glass chimes. Add to this the variety of sounds caused by the mallets, sticks, and brushes that the composer demands, and one sees what a great array of sonorities is available to the percussionist. The piano is also treated primarily as a percussion instrument, though the composer also controls its pitch aspects, largely through segmenting the chromatic spectrum in various ways. The opening piano sounds a succession of chords that recur again and again. First and foremost, the work is a study in rhythm, by the way a pattern once stated will expand or hasten, retard or decay through all kinds of subtle gradations, with direct repetition being quite the exception.

Winter Counterpoint (1979): The word “counterpoint” in the title proclaims the importance of pitch organization in this piece. Consistent harmonic controls guide the vertical sonorities and the linear interaction in all the movements, with the opening movement providing chordal progressions that the later movements reproduce and enlarge. As a harmonic take-off and resting place, the pitches B-C-F-Gb operate somewhat like a tonic sonority. Counterpoint has other implications in this piece. For example, in the fourth movement, the instruments play in rhythmic agreement as they build to the climax of the entire work and each instrument spins off and starts moving at its own speed. As the five different speeds are thus superimposed, a complicated “counterpoint of tempi” results.

Structurally, the work is in five movements, each distinguished by a different instrumentation. Movement 1 is written for viola and bassoon; Movement 2 for flute, viola and piano; Movement 3 for flute, viola and oboe; Movement 4 includes all five instruments; Movement 5, viola and piano. Thus the instrumental distribution produces a textural progress toward Movement 4 and a retreat thereafter. The fifth and last movement, which functions as a postlude, permits the viola to come to the fore. At the end piano and viola diverge; as the piano chords sink down, the viola line in harmonics floats softly upwards. So *Winter Counterpoint* concludes “calm of mind, all passion spent.”

Consorte (1970), a duo for viola and viola d’amore, creates an intimate partnership between the two instruments. The viola d’amore, with its lower range and sympathetic strings, interacts with the viola and in a sense enlarges on its contributions. Though written at a time when the systematic precomposition methods of total serialism were much in vogue, *Consorte* was devised in a more intuitive way. The composer intended the shape of the piece to arise from the sonorities inherent in the medium. What has resulted is a musical form that mirrors the processes of growth and dwindling away.

Exceptional String Quartet (1977) is as unusual as its title suggests, in that it calls for four double basses. Each of the players must be a virtuoso, since this piece tests the capacities of the double bass both in terms of range and technique. The motivic materials of the quartet are drawn from a vast reservoir of double-bass sounds extending from sustained bowed notes through tremolo and glissando to all manner of more sharply percussive tones. Placed with the careful attention to their registral relationships, these materials often appear in extreme contrapuntal contrast with one another. At times a steadily maintained tremolo, for instance, acts as a pedal or drone to ground the simultaneously sounding events; at other times, heterogeneous but interwoven activities work together to create a fierce climax. The degree of mobility or stasis that such techniques attain determines the speed of the harmonic rhythm of this piece. *Exceptional String Quartet* exhibits structural features that would be at home in chamber music of more conventional makeup. The integrity of design that each movement possesses is balanced by recurring elements that help to pull the whole piece together. These formal principles can be recognized amid the quartet’s novel sounds. The result is like seeing some familiar objects moving through new and strange surroundings.

—Christopher Hatch

Notes on the Performers

Members of the Bronx Arts Ensemble on this recording are: **Louise Scribner**, oboe, **William Scribner**, bassoon, and **John Wion**, flute. **Louise Scribner**, a founding member of the Bronx Arts Ensemble, performs regularly with the American Symphony, the Little Orchestra, the New Jersey Symphony, the Brooklyn Philharmonia and many other ensembles. She is presently on the faculty of the Horace Mann School. **William Scribner** is founder and Artistic Director of the Bronx Arts Ensemble. He is principal bassoonist of the American Symphony, Long Island Philharmonic, New Jersey State Opera and the Chatauqua Symphony Orchestra. He is a frequent participant in chamber music concerts and has recorded for the RCA, Columbia and Musical Heritage labels. **John Wion** is a member of the American Symphony the New York City opera Orchestra and the Bronx Arts Ensemble. He teaches at Mannes College and Hartt College of Music. He has toured throughout the United States and Australia. Wion has collaborated with well-know artists such as Gilbert Kalish and the Tokyo String Quartet. He has recorded for the Turnabout and Musical Heritage labels.

Lawrence Dutton is a founding member of the Emerson String Quartet and an artist/member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. He has appeared as guest artist with the Juilliard String Quartet, the Orpheus Chamber Ensemble and the New York Philomusica, among others.

Gordon Gottlieb has performed with the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, Speculum Musicae, the Group for Contemporary Music, the New York Philharmonic, the Madeira Bach Festival and other organizations. His many credits include recordings for dance, theater, television and appearances with famous jazz artists such as Keith Jarrett and Sarah Vaughn. Gottlieb may be heard on CRI recording SD 255, performing Jacob Druckman's *Animus II* with Jan DeGaetani, mezzo soprano and Richard Fitz, percussion.

Walter Trampler is a founding artist/member of the Chamber Society of Lincoln Center. He has taught at the Juilliard School, Boston University and Yale University. He has appeared as soloist with major orchestras throughout the United States and Europe, and has recorded with the Juilliard and Budapest String Quartets. An advocate of contemporary composition, Trampler has premiered many works written especially for him. He may be heard on CRI recordings: SD 138, Babbit: *Composition for Viola and Piano* (1950); SD 148 Bassett: *Trio for Clarinet, Viola and Piano* (1953) and Perle: *String Quintet, Op. 35* (1958) with the Beaux Arts Quartet.

The **Times Square Basstet** has been active since 1974. Its current members are the very highly regarded New York double bassists **Jaime Austria**, **Dennis James**, **Donald Palma**, and **Michael Willens**. The group has appeared at the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis and at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. It has also participated in concerts sponsored by the Group for Contemporary Music, New Music for Young Ensembles and North/South Consonance. The Basstet has commissioned and premiered works by several composers including William Schimmel, Jacob Druckman and Robert Ceely.

This recording was made possible by the generosity of the Alice M Ditson Fund of Columbia University and private donors.

All selections are published by North/South Editions (BMI)

Rhythmic Soundscape No.1 (9'02")

Recorded by Paul Zinman at Vanguard Studios,
New York City, June 6, 1985
Produced and edited by Eve Beglarian

Exceptional String Quartet (16'27")

Recorded by Paul Zinman at Vanguard Studios,
New York City, April 1, 1985
Produced and edited by Eve Beglarian

Winter Counterpoint (14'29")

Recorded by Tom Lazarus at Vanguard Studios,
New York City, February 8, 1984
Produced by Carter Harman
Edited by Eve Beglarian

Consorte (6'55")

Recorded by Paul Zinman at Vanguard Studios,
New York City, May 23, 1985
Produced and edited by Eve Beglarian

This is a composer-supervised recording.

(Original Notes from CRI LP jacket)