

Richard Wilson
String Quartet No. 3
The Muir String Quartet

Steven Mackey
String Quartet
The Lydian String Quartet

Richard Wilson was born in 1941 in Cleveland, where he studied piano with Leonard Shure and cello with Ernst Silberstein. He graduated from Harvard College in 1963, receiving the Frank Huntington Beebe Award for study abroad. He studied piano in Munich with Friedrich Wührer before moving to Rome to resume composition studies with Robert Moevs at the American Academy. He studied further at Rutgers University, receiving a Master's degree in Music Theory and Composition in 1966. Since 1966, Wilson has been a member of the faculty of Vassar College, where he is at present Professor Music and Chairman of the Music Department.

Richard Wilson has been active as a composer for some twenty-five years and has produced nearly fifty works, ranging in medium from solo flute to full orchestra. His works have been performed in major halls in New York, London, Tokyo, San Francisco, Washington, Baltimore, Omaha, Bogota, Stockholm, Graz, various cities in Australia, as well as at the Aspen Music Festival, the Monday Evening Concerts (Los Angeles) and at many American colleges and universities. They have been broadcast by the BBC in London and by many FM radio stations in the United States. They have achieved recognition in competitions under the auspices of the city of Liege, Brown University, the International Society for Contemporary Music and the Eastman School of Music.

Wilson's works have been recorded on the Opus One label, and may be heard on CRI recordings: SD 271: *Music for Violin and Cello* performed by Yoko Matsuda, violin and Fred Sherry, cello; SD 315: *Concert Piece for Violin and Piano* with Roll Schulte, violin and Ursula Oppens, piano and *Music for Solo Flute* performed by Harvey Sollberger, flute; SD 437: *Eclogue* performed by Bianca Uribe, piano and *The Ballad of Longwood Glen* with Paul Sperry, tenor, and Nancy Allen, harp.

Notes on the Music

"Each of the three movements of my *String Quartet No. 3* bears a title and exhibits a perceptible formal design. The first is called Prelude, not only for the obvious reason, but because its prominent, early-on pedal point - the cello's C-string - gives rise to a particularly anticipatory feeling. (It may also be that, in the act of titling, I thought of preludes of Bach and their often lavish pedal points.) This opening movement is an arch whose constituent parts are smoothly joined. A central area building to a dynamic high point is enclosed by passages in which the second violin and viola review the harmonic vocabulary of the work as a whole beneath expressive, often high-ranging commentary from the first violin and over the cello's pedal point mentioned above. These are in turn enclosed by a duet between second violin and viola with plucked punctuation from the cello. A trio at the work's opening, this passage expands to four parts as it returns to serve as coda to the first movement.

The second movement takes the name *Episode* because it serves as a dramatic interlude at a certain remove from the main line of the work. Its character is a blend of scherzo and march. Like those forms, and unlike the first movement, it comprises sharply articulated sections. These may be understood as ABA'B', where A' and B' show interruptions, intercalations, and elaborations of the original statements.

With the concluding *Elegy*, the slow harmonic motion of the *Prelude* resumes, but instead of cold, open-string pedals there appears as underpinning the vibrant stopped note, C-sharp, creating a relationship in which the first movement acts as leading tone to the third. (That the resolution of this leading tone is delayed by the entirety of the second movement provides a structural basis for its being entitled *Episode*.) The *Elegy* is a refrain-dominated piece, deeply serious in tone and manner.

I tried to design this work so that the overall shape would be prefigured in general by the form of the first movement. The second movement thus plays a role similar to that of the central section of the first movement. The outer movements are related to each other in expressive intensity if not in thematic detail. *String Quartet No. 3* was commissioned for the Muir String Quartet by the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation. It is dedicated to the members of the Muir and to Leon Botstein. The Muir gave the first performances at Yale and Vassar in April, 1983. In July, 1984, the Delmé Quartet gave the London premiere in Wigmore Hall and subsequently recorded the work for broadcast on Radio 3 of the BBC."

—Richard Wilson

As winners of the 1981 Naumburg Chamber Music Award and the 1980 First Prize in the Evian International String Quartet Competition, the **Muir Quartet** (Bayla Keyes and Lucy Chapman Soltzman, violins; Steven Ansell, viola and Michael Reynolds, cello) were quick to establish their reputation in the chamber music world. Members of the Quartet met at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, where they studied with Felix Galimir, Mischa Schneider, Arnold Steinhart, David Soyer and Michael Tree. In 1979 they were awarded the Edward R. Wardwell Fellowship for a two-year residency at Yale University, enabling them to study with Raphael Hillyer and Oscar Shumsky. Currently in residence at Boston University, the Muir Quartet regularly tours the United States and Canada, as well as Europe; they have appeared at the White House as part of the nationally televised PBS series "In Performance at the White House." The Muir Quartet has recorded on the EMI and Musicmasters labels. This recording marks their debut on CRI.

Steven Mackey (born Frankfurt, Germany, 1956) was trained in music composition as a scholarship student at three universities; receiving his B.A. from the University of California, his M.A. from the State University of New York at Stony Brook and his Ph.D. from Brandeis University. Mackey has taught at the University of California at Davis, Northeastern University in Boston, the College of William and Mary and is presently a member of the faculty of Princeton.

Mackey has been a fellow at numerous music festivals including Tanglewood and the Johnson State Composers Conference. Among his awards are a Fromm Foundation Commission, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Charles E. Ives Fellowship in composition from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the BMI Award from Broadcast Music Inc., the Joseph H. Bearns Prize in chamber music from Columbia University; he is winner of the 1984 League-ISCAM National Composers Competition and the 1985 National Association of Composers, USA, Competition (NACUSA). Mackey's second string quartet has been commissioned by the Concord Quartet.

Mackey's music has been performed throughout the United States and Europe and has been nationally broadcast over National Public Radio. His works are published by American Composers Edition and Margun Music, Inc. This recording marks the debut of Mackey's work on CRI.

Notes on the Music

"String Quartet was written for the Lydian String Quartet in 1983. I had heard the Lydians play a variety of music in many venues and was very familiar with their playing style even before our collaboration began. I was excited about composing a work for them which would exploit their ability to sustain and project an intrinsically expressive, large shape as well as their knack for making intricate details sparkle. The major formal divisions indicated in the score are as follows: I. *An Allegro* II. *Two Miniatures*: a) Hypnogogic sequence and b) Scherzo III. *Finale*: a) Quasi recitative, b) Caricature and metamorphosis, c) An adagio and d) Epilogue.

One member of the Lydian Quartet described the first movement as a lightning storm - no thunder just lightning. I like this description because it conjures up an image of a music that crackles with electricity and rests only to recharge with greater intensity. The energy from the bustling contrapuntal discourse is transformed into propelling a simple linear music which whirls faster and faster toward an end that vaporizes rather than explodes.

The second movement is made up of two miniatures suspended in the curious, illusory stillness which follows *An Allegro*. The first is a dream-like fantasy and the second a comic dialogue between a beserk, gymnastic character (first violin and viola) and its droning antithesis. The somewhat mechanical scherzo sputters, spits and softly fizzles out at its end, making the dramatic contrast between the ephemeral, miniature intermezzi and the heart of *String Quartet*, the *Finale*, quite palpable.

Introduced by *Quasi recitative* (a third miniature, perhaps), *Caricature and Metamorphosis* is simpler and less flexible than that of *An Allegro* and the musical links are more obvious. But in its progress from impish to cataclysmic *Caricature and Metamorphosis* achieves an intensity, power and gravity suitable for a response to *An Allegro*. In fact, *Caricature and Metamorphosis* achieves the first forceful exhalation of the work, a true climax from which the music recedes. (The volatile, unbridled thrusts of *An Allegro* were unable to accomplish this.) The balanced trajectory arching from *An Allegro* through *Caricature and Metamorphosis* is undermined by *An Adagio*, providing an expressive bulge to the form. *An Adagio* is a long-lined sighing, even sobbing, response to everything that has preceded, enveloping and overwhelming the restless, impatient rhetoric of *An Allegro* and, of course, the whimsical miniatures. Even *Caricature and Metamorphosis* seems distant and inconsequential after the obsessive *Adagio*. In a final memory before the music is completely expired, the paraphrastic epilogue ushers out the last sigh with a flicker of electricity."

—Steven Mackey

Since its formation in 1980, the **Lydian String Quartet** (Wilma Smith, violin; Judith Eissenberg, violin; Mary Ruth Ray, viola and Rhonda Rider, cello) has emerged as a colorful and innovative voice in concert halls throughout the United States and abroad. With a repertoire that reaches back to the eighteenth century and explodes into the present, the Lydians have garnered an international reputation; at competitions at Evian and Banff the Lydians captured a total of five prizes, including two special prizes for contemporary music. In 1984 they received the prestigious Naumburg Award. The Lydian String Quartet is currently in residence at Brandeis University. They may be heard on CRI recording SD 511, in Seymour Shifrin's Cantata to the Text of Sophoclean Choruses, with The Cantata Singers and the Harvard University Choir, conducted by David Hoose.

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)