

MUSIC FROM EASTMAN: WILDER & BLANK

Alec Wilder

Oboe Sonata

Richard Killmer, oboe

Barry Snyder, piano

Bassoon Sonata No. 3

K. David Van Hoesen, bassoon

Bill Dobbins, piano

Phyllis McGinley Song Cycle

Jan DeGaetani, mezzo-soprano

K. David Van Hoesen, bassoon

Gretchen Van Hoesen, harp

Allan Blank

Duo for Bassoon and Piano

K. David Van Hoesen, bassoon

Barry Snyder, piano

Born in Rochester, N.Y. **Alec Wilder** (1907-80) studied there at the Eastman School of Music with Edward Royce in composition and Herbert Inch in counterpoint. Wilder is perhaps best known as a writer of popular songs, and as author of the award-winning *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-50*. His own "hits" "While We're Young" and "I'll be Around - were made popular by such great singers as Mabel Mercer and Frank Sinatra, and Wilder worked for many years as writer and arranger for Benny Goodman, Jimmy Dorsey, Judy Garland and others. Although Wilder was active in jazz during the '30s and '40s (the Big Band Era), one of his greatest contributions to the genre may be the woodwind sonorities he introduced in his *Octets* of 1939-40. These transparent chamber works, according to Wilder, synthesized "legitimate and jazz ideas for legit woodwinds, harpsichord, bass and drums." After 1945 Wilder concentrated increasingly on his more "legit" music, and by 1954 chamber music, such as the works recorded here, begins to overshadow pieces written for the popular market.

Allan Blank (b. 1925, New York City) received his earliest musical training on the violin. He studied at the Juilliard School (1945-47), Washington Square College (BA, 1948), the University of Minnesota (MA, 1950) and the University of Iowa. He was a violinist with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (1950) and has taught at a number of schools and universities. Blank is currently Professor of Theory and Composition at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Blank was the first recipient of the George Eastman Prize, established by the Eastman School of Music in 1982. He has received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and commissions from the New York State Council on the Arts and the Virginia Shakespeare Festival at Williamsburg. Blank has had over 50 works published; his work has been recorded on the Orion, Advance, Centaur and Open Loop labels. Select works of Allan Blank may be heard on CRI recordings: SD 250, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* (1964) Valarie Lamoree, soprano, Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, Arthur Weisberg, conductor/ *Two Parables by Franz Kafka* (1964) Valerie Lamoree, soprano; Matthew Raimondi, violin; Eugenie Dengel, viola/ *Poem* (1963) ensemble conducted by Edward Gerber; SD 329, *Rotation: A Study for Piano*; Gilbert Kalish, piano; SD 370, *Two Songs*; Jan DeGaetani, mezzo-soprano; Arthur Weisberg, bassoon.

Notes on the Music

Some writers have drawn a distinction in Wilder's oeuvre between "popular" and "formal" styles of composition. Yet such a distinction obscures the fact that the so-called "serious" works exhibit the characteristics so readily associated with the music written for popular performers: the tonal organization is unfailingly clear, and is often based on a harmonic vocabulary derived from jazz; formal structures are also clearly defined and show a tendency towards miniaturization; and the musical texture is dominated by an unrestrained lyricism.

The *Sonata for Oboe and Piano* (1969) and the *Bassoon Sonata No. 3* (1973) point to another distinguishing feature of Wilder's work; it seems the composer was especially enamored of wind instruments, his additions to the wind repertory outnumbering those of perhaps any composer of our century. This love for winds is also reflected in the *Phyllis McGinley Song Cycle*, where the voice is accompanied by the unusual combination of harp and bassoon.

Moreover, it is in the *Song Cycle* that the fundamental connection between Wilder's "two styles" is most evident, as the writing for voice offers a particularly strong reminder of his popular songs. The *Song Cycle* is in one movement, with short interludes for bassoon and harp serving to connect one song with the next. The poetry of the American writer Phyllis McGinley, whose early reputation was made largely through her contributions to *The New Yorker*, is noted for its lightness of style and intimacy of expression - in short, qualities which make it a perfect counterpart to the music of Alec Wilder.

Allan Blank's *Duo for Bassoon and Piano* (1979) forms a striking contrast to the selections by Wilder. Here, and in many of Blank's other works, it is the dramatic, not the lyrical element that is at the fore. Indeed, one of the most fascinating features of this composition is that the bassoon, traditionally regarded as an instrument with a somewhat limited range of expression, is exploited for its dramatic potential. The emphasis on drama naturally leads to a certain complexity of style: an involved, tightly knit texture and writing for instruments which presents a formidable challenge to the technical and expressive abilities of both players. The overall form of the *Duo* is cyclical as material from the first movement figures prominently in the conclusion of the third.

-Michael Nott

Notes on the Performers

Jan DeGaetani, mezzo-soprano, is a graduate of the Juilliard School and is Professor of Voice at the Eastman School. Highly esteemed for her performance of contemporary repertoire, she has premiered dozens of works, including those of Carter, Crumb and Wernick. In recital, she has demonstrated unusual breadth of skill with repertoire ranging from Haydn to Ives, regularly performing at the Library of Congress, the Museum of Modern Art and Alice Tully Hall, often with accompanist Gilbert Kalish. A favorite of the world's great orchestras, DeGaetani has sung with the Chicago, Boston, San Francisco and Baltimore Symphonies and the Berlin and New York Philharmonics. She has recorded for the Nonesuch, Columbia, Odyssey, Vanguard, Acoustic Research and Louisville labels, as well as on CRI recordings: SD 167, Druckman: *Dark Upon the Harp*; SD 255, Druckman: *Animus II*; SD 286, Gideon: *Rhymes from the Hill*; SD 301, Ronsheim: *Bitter-Sweet* and *Easter-Wings*; SD 343, Gideon: *Questions on Nature*; SD 344, Wernick: *A Prayer for Jerusalem*; SD 370, Blank: *Two Songs*; SD 397, Moryl: *Das Lied*; SD 432, Adler: *Sixth String Quartet - A Whitman Serenade*; SD 469, Carter: *Syringa*.

Bill Dobbins, piano, is Assistant Professor of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media at the Eastman School. He is pianist in the National Jazz Ensemble and the Chuck Israels Quartet. He has performed with Clark Terry, Buddy DeFranco, James Moody and Joe Williams, as well as with the Cleveland Orchestra and the Akron Symphony. For work in composition, Dobbins has received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and commissions from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Ohio Band Directors Association, and the Ohio Arts Council. This recording is his premiere on CRI.

Richard Killmer, oboe, is Professor of Oboe at the Eastman School. Principal oboist of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra for 11 years, he was formerly a member of the Aspen Festival Orchestra, the American Reed Trio, the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra and the Boehme Wind Quintet in New York City. He may be heard on CRI SD 415, William Mayer: *Dream's End*.

Since winning three major prizes in the 1966 Van Cliburn Competition, pianist **Barry Snyder** has appeared as soloist with this country's major orchestras, among them the National Symphony Orchestra, the Rochester Philharmonic, and the Detroit and Atlanta Symphonies. Snyder studied with Cecile Staub Genhart at the Eastman School, where he received his undergraduate and graduate degrees, and with Vladimir Sokolov at the Curtis Institute. After serving on the faculty of Georgia State University from 1968-70, Snyder returned to Eastman as Associate Professor of Piano. He has recorded for the Golden Crest and Vox labels, and may be heard on CRI SD 432, Hodkinson: *Dance Variations on a Chopin Fragment - Divertimento for Piano Trio*.

Gretchen Van Hoesen is currently Principal Harpist of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and a member of the faculty of the Duquesne University School of Music. Van Hoesen earned her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the Juilliard School where she studied with Marcel Grandjany and Susann McDonald. Her orchestral positions have included those with the New York Lyric Opera, the New York City Ballet, the National Orchestra Association, the Greenwich Philharmonia, the Spoleto Festival Orchestra, the Virginia Opera, and the Jeunesses Musicales Orchestra. As a soloist, she has performed with the Rochester Philharmonic and the Lake Placid Festival Orchestra. Van Hoesen has appeared as a recitalist at Carnegie Recital Hall, Alice Tully Hall and the Brooklyn Museum. This is her debut on CRI.

K. David Van Hoesen, bassoon, is Professor of Oboe at the Eastman School and Chairman of Eastman's department of woodwinds, brass and percussion. Previously he taught at Oberlin and at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Van Hoesen is former principal bassoonist of the Rochester Philharmonic and a former member of the Cleveland Orchestra and the Lake Placid Club Sinfonietta. This is his debut on CRI.

I Know a Village

I know a village facing toward
 Water less sullen than the sea's
Where flickers get their bed and board
 And all the streets are named for trees.

The streets are named for trees.
 They edge Past random houses, safely fenced
With paling or with privet hedge
 That bicycles can lean against.

And when the roots of maples heave
 The solid pavements up that bound them
Strollers on sidewalks give them leave
 To thrust, and pick a way around them.

The little boats in harbor wear
 Sails whiter than a summer wedding.
One fountain splashes in a Square.
 In winter there's a hill for sledding;

While through October afternoons
 Horse chestnuts dribble on the grass,
Prized above diamonds or doubloons
 By miser children, shrill from class.

I know a village full of bees
 And gardens lit by canna torches,
Where all the streets are named for trees
 And people visit on their porches.

It looks haphazard to the shore.
 Brown flickers build there. And I'd not
Willing, I think, exchange it for
 Arcadia or Camelot.

Apologia

When I and the world
Were greener and fitter,
Many a bitter
Stone I hurled.
Many a curse
I used to pitch
At the universe,
Being so rich
I had goods to spare;
Could afford to notice

The blight on the lotus,
The worm in the pear.

But needier grown
(If little wiser)
Now, like a miser,
All that I own I celebrate
Shamefacedly—
The pear on my plate,
The fruit on my tree,
Though sour and small;
Give, willy-nilly,
Thanks for the lily,
Spot and all.

Six Nuns in the Snow

Beautifully, now, they walk among these new
petals the snow shook down—
identical figures, going two by two,
each in a black gown.

With what a placid tread, what definite,
calm impulse each proceeds,
two by two, black on bewildering white,
swinging her long beads;

an absolute six, taking their candid way
undazzled by this whiteness,
who have grown used to walking without dismay
amid incredible brightness.

Honest Confession

The things are three
 Which I discern
Less easily
 As the years turn.

Three things seem sliding
 From my sight:
The line dividing
 Wrong from right;

Whereto we hie
 From where we've been to;
The needle's eye
 A thread goes into.

Midcentury Love Letter

Stay near me. Speak my name. Oh, do not wander
By a thought's span, heart's impulse, from the light
We kindle here. You are my sole defender
(As I am yours) in this precipitous night,
Which over earth, till common landmarks alter,
Is falling, without stars, and bitter cold.
We two have but our burning selves for shelter.
Huddle against me. Give me your hand to hold.

So might two climbers lost in mountain weather
On a high slope and taken by the storm,
Desperate in the darkness cling together
Under one cloak and breathe each other warm.
Stay near me, Spirit, perishable as bone,
In no such winter can survive alone.

—Phyllis McGinley
Reprinted by permission

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)