

## **Stefan Wolpe**

*Battle Piece* (1943-44; finished 1947)

*Displaced Spaces* (1946-48)

## **Raoul Pleskow**

*Epitaph, in memoriam Stefan Wolpe, and Caprice* (1983-84)

## **Matthew Greenbaum**

*Mischsprache* (1985)

## **David Holzman, piano**

Critically recognized for his performance of contemporary composition, **David Holzman** has espoused the music of Stefan Wolpe, having performed virtually the complete canon of works for the piano from *Gesang* (1920) to *Form IV* (1967). Holzman began his musical studies at the Chatham Square Music School in New York City, studying theory with Wolpe, and piano with Augusta Scheiber and Louis Martin. After studying piano with Paul Jacobs at the Mannes School of Music, Holzman received his B.M. degree in 1971. In 1975, he received his M.A. from Queens College where he studied with Nadia Reisenberg and Arthur Balsam. He is currently on the faculty of Long Island University, the C.W. Post Campus.

Holzman has presented more than forty world premieres as soloist and ensemble pianist. He has appeared at Carnegie Recital Hall, the Saratoga Arts Festival, the Lenox Art Center and at major universities. He has performed with the Y Chamber Symphony, the Group for Contemporary Music, the New Music Consort and the League-ISCM. He has been a member of the Light Fantastic Players (1971-76), the Contemporary Trio (1977-81), and the Pierrot Consort (1977 to the present). In 1981, Holzman was a semi-finalist in the International American Music Competition and in 1983 he was a finalist in the International Competition at St.-Germaine-en-Laye. He performed in the films *A Good Dissonance Like A Man* and *The Competition*. Holzman may be heard on CRI recordings: SD 350, performing Lundborg's *From Music Forever* No. 2; SD 503, Wolpe's *Symphony* with the Orchestra of the 20th Century, conducted by Arthur Weisberg; SD 513, with the Contemporary Trio performing Greenbaum's *Chamber Music*.

### *Notes on the Music*

**Stefan Wolpe** (b. Berlin, 1902; d. New York City, 1972) grew up in the cultural and political turbulence of the Weimar Republic. He attended the Berlin Hochschule für Musik (1919-24). A major influence was his study of Neo-classicism with Ferruccio Busoni in 1920; he also studied with Hermann Scherchen at various times between 1920 and 1933. Deeply involved in radical politics, Wolpe was also influenced by his associations with the artists Tworckov, De Kooning, Klee, Schlemmer and artists of the Bauhaus. Later in the 1920's, the influences of jazz and Dadaism make their first appearance in his work. In 1933 Wolpe fled Germany for Vienna, where he studied with Anton Webern for several months. From there, Wolpe emigrated to Palestine in 1934. While in Palestine, until 1938, he absorbed traits of Semitic music into his work. Wolpe arrived in the United States in 1938, living primarily in New York City until his death. He was head of the music department at C.W. Post College of Long

Island University from 1957-68, and also taught privately. Wolpe's works have been recorded on the Nonesuch, New World, Desto, Crystal and Opus One labels. Selected works may be heard on CRI recordings: SD 233, *Trio* (1963) performed by the Group for Contemporary Music; SD 306, *Form* and *Form IV* performed by Robert Miller, piano; SD 503, *Symphony*, performed by the Orchestra of the 20th Century conducted by Arthur Weisberg.

Wolpe's reputation is based largely upon the compositions of the 1950's and '60's "late period" works of daunting complexity and laconic expression. His earlier works are just now becoming known (many are still unpublished) and in contrast to the later works, they are marked by an extreme diversity of style. During the decade following Wolpe's arrival in this country in 1938, the multifarious influences mentioned above began slowly to coalesce and one may speak of a "middle period" in which extremes of expression and stylistic innovation are major factors in his work.

*Battle Piece* and *Displaced Spaces*, though virtually contemporaneous, belong at opposite ends of Wolpe's compositional style. *Battle Piece* is thick, violent, uncompromising and eclectic in its stylistic influences. *Displaced Spaces* is strict in its two-part writing, abstract, and of one (advanced) style. *Battle Piece* marks the climax of fifteen years of development, while *Displaced Spaces* is the first, albeit tiny, step towards the "late" style of the 1950's and '60's.

*Battle Piece* was composed largely during the war years and completed in 1947. Amidst the copious sketches for the piece one finds a motto affixed to a page: "destroyed cities, destroyed fields, destroyed men . . .". While the full title of the work is "Encouragements for Piano: first piece Battle Piece" the above motto seems much closer to the essence of the work. Apart from the folk-like fifth movement, the seven movement work affords the listener virtually no relief from disjunct chromatic tension and percussive writing. Rhythmic leitmotifs of a primal nature permeate the score and a disjunct polyphony typical of "late" Wolpe adds to the intensity of expression.

Wolpe's strong interest in jazz is felt throughout the work, notably in the second movement (a Prelude and Chaconne based on a particularly lush chordal sequence). Yet another of his early influences is found in the march music of the inner movements. As mentioned earlier, the fifth movement is a quintessentially Jewish gesture of mock despair.

The pitch content hovers between highly chromatic tonality (used predominantly at climactic points) and serialism. The co-existence of triads and non-tonal simultaneities (largely perfect and imperfect fourths) is one of the most jarring aspects of the work on first hearing.

The Expressionist nature of the work is also felt in its structure as Wolpe eschews an ultimate symmetry in favor of a gradual metamorphosis each movement commenting upon and transforming the previous one. The last two movements are a summary of all the motivic, harmonic and syntactical procedures of the work, presented here in polyrhythmic and tonal-atonal combinations.

Wolpe's complete title for *Displaced Spaces* (1946-48) is "Displaced spaces, shocks, negations, a new sort of relationship in space, pattern, tempo, diversity of actions, interreactions and intensities."

The eclecticism of *Battle Piece* is gone. All seven bagatelles are of a piece, with intervallic diversity, ghosts of cadences and an utter absence of rhetoric. The "purity" of the voice-leading is obscured as rhythmically disjunct lines cross each other creating grotesque shapes (an extension of *Battle Piece* techniques). Wolpe considered these and other piano studies of this period very important for his future development. The acerbic wit and drama of contradictory impulses are found here for perhaps the first time. Even more important is the elegance of expression? quality central to all Wolpe's later work.

—David Holzman

**Raoul Pleskow** (b. Vienna, 1931) studied in New York City at the Juilliard School, Queens College (B.A.), Columbia University (M.A.), and privately with Stefan Wolpe. Pleskow's works have been recognized by numerous awards and grants, including those from the Ford Foundation; the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship; the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund; the New York State Council on the Arts; the National Endowment for the Arts (1974, '75 and '77); the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters; and the Composers Forum. Pleskow is chairman of the Music Department of Long Island University, the C.W. Post Campus. His works have been performed by such organizations as the Cleveland Philharmonic; Tanglewood Festival Orchestra; Orchestra da Camera; the Group for Contemporary Music; Contemporary Chamber Ensemble; Aeolian Chamber Players; and all the major contemporary ensembles in the New York area. Pleskow's works have been recorded on the Crest, Serenus and Ars Nova labels. Selected works may be heard on CRI recordings: SD 253, *Movement for Oboe, Violin and Piano* (1966) with Josef Marx, oboe; Thomas Moore, violin and Howard Rovics, piano; SD 293, *Bagatelles No. 3* (1968) with Lewis Kaplan, violin/ *Movement for Nine Players* (1967) with the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble conducted by Arthur Weisberg/ *Per Vege Viene* (1970) with Lewis Kaplan, violin; Walter Ponce, piano; SD 302, *Three Movements for Quintet*, with Charles Wuorinen, conductor; SD 383, *Three Pieces* (1968) with Genevieve Chinn and Allen Brings, piano.

"*Caprice* was written in 1983.

"A three-note motive and the interval of a third that it spans serve to unite numerous and seemingly capricious changes of texture, register and syntax to which the title refers.

"*Epitaph* was written a year or so later. Because of the 'somber' chord with which it starts and because my teacher and friend was on my mind when I wrote it, *Epitaph* bears the inscription 'Stefan Wolpe in memoriam.'

"The long lines of the *Epitaph* seemed to me to complement the more brittle content of the *Caprice* and made me decide to make a two-movement entity of the pieces."

—Raoul Pleskow

**Matthew Greenbaum** (b. New York City, 1950) holds a doctorate in composition from the City University of New York Graduate Center. He has studied with Stefan Wolpe, Mario Davidovsky and Charles Dodge. He has been a Guggenheim Fellow, a fellow of the New York Foundation on the Arts, and has received three fellowships to the Composers Conference, as well as a recording grant from the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund. *Chamber Music* may be heard on CRI SD 513, performed by the Contemporary Trio.

"*Mischsprache* (Ger.: mixture-speech; e.g., conversational switching between Yiddish and English) was written for David Holzman in 1985. Electronic sounds were assembled in a home studio which includes digital and analog synthesizers, a computer (software by Dr. T), and other MIDI units.

"The title refers in part to the interplay of electronic and acoustic elements. But it also points to the construction of both of these elements, each comprised of a series of gestures contrasting in contour, mood and density. The mingling of these two series is the structure of the work."

—Matthew Greenbaum

*(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*