

CRI SD 543  
Vladimir Ussachevsky

*Dialogues and Contrasts* (1983) (18:24)  
American Brass Quintet

*Colloquy* (1976) (24:00)  
Utah Symphony Orchestra, Maurice Abravanel, conductor

**Vladimir Ussachevsky** (born in Manchuria, China, in 1911) came to the United States in 1930 with a background in Romantic piano literature and Russian Church choral music. His early love for piano, and an extensive adolescent experience of long hours of improvisation for the silent movies and in night clubs were a decisive influence on his choice of a career in music. He majored in music composition at Pomona College and then earned his doctorate at the Eastman School of Music, where he studied with Bernard Rogers and Howard Hanson. After service in World War II, Ussachevsky joined the faculty of Columbia University in 1947. He remained there for thirty-three years, including twenty-one as director of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center. He is now on the faculty of the University of Utah, where he spends several months of each year as composer-in-residence and director of the Electronic Music Studio.

In his long career as a composer, Ussachevsky's writings in the instrumental and choral media have been overshadowed by his creative work in the tape medium, where he has made a distinctly individual contribution. Ussachevsky began his experiments in the early 1950s developing handicraft skills and a modest array of engineering skills needed to convert the tape recorder into a composing tool. His work and that of his colleague Otto Luening attracted nationwide attention in 1952 after being introduced by Leopold Stokowski at a concert at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. During the period between 1953 and 1958 he and Luening collaborated on three orchestral works involving the use of a tape recorder as a solo instrument, and on the background score for Orson Welles's New York City production of *King Lear*. Ussachevsky's solo tape works, including four film, television and theater scores, have been widely performed, broadcast and recorded, both in the United States and abroad. Since the early 1970s, Ussachevsky has written a number of compositions for conventional instruments, with and without electronic tape.

Ussachevsky has appeared several times on CBS and NBC national network television. He has worked, by invitation, in several of the principle European studios. In 1967, at the invitation of Bell Telephone Laboratories in Murray Hill, New Jersey, he began investigating the possibilities of sound synthesis by means of computer. A composition produced there in 1968, with the aid of a GE 635 computer, was later used as the basis for a film by Lloyd Williams, *Two Images of a Computer Piece*, shown at the Whitney Museum in New York City in January 1969.

Ussachevsky has lectured widely in the United States, appearing at more than 175 universities and other institutions, as well as giving informal presentations in Britain, France, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. He has twice toured South America under the auspices of the State Department. He has received two grants from the Guggenheim Foundation (in 1957 and 1960), an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1962), and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (1966). In 1961 he received a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies for travel to the Soviet Union. He has lectured for the New York State Council on the Arts on the subject of electronic music.

Ussachevsky is a past president of the American Composers Alliance and has served as a board member of Composers Recordings Inc., and of the Edward MacDowell Association. He serves on the editorial committee of *Perspectives on New Music*. In 1973 he was elected to the membership of the American Institute of Arts and Letters. He received a Distinguished Alumnus Award from the University of Rochester in 1973, an honorary doctorate from Pomona College in 1973, and an honorary doctor of Humane Letters from the University of Utah in 1986.

Ussachevsky's works may be heard on the Desto, Finnadar, Gramavision, and Folkways labels, and on CRI recordings: SD 112, *Piece for Tape Recorder* (1955); *A Poem in Cycles and Bells for Tape Recorder and Orchestra* (with Luening, 1954) and *Suite from "King Lear"* (with Luening, 1955); SD 227, *Of Wood and Brass, Wireless Fantasy* (1960); and *Concerted Piece for Tape Recorder and Orchestra* (with Luening, 1958); SD 263, *Computer Piece No. 1* (1968) and *Two Sketches for a Computer Piece* (1971); SD 297, *Three Scenes from the Creation* and *Missa Brevis*; SD 356, *Linear Contrasts* (1958) and *Metamorphosis* (1957); ACS 6010, *Electronic Music, The Pioneers*.

## Notes on the Music

The title *Dialogues and Contrasts* describes the nature of the exchange which takes place between the performer and the materials committed to tape. In the first movement the exchange is more in the nature of an argument. Though initially each side appears to favor an independent thematic course, as the movement progresses the performers engage in direct response to the statements on tape. The second movement is more subdued and reflective, with many solo passages, particularly from the French horn. Tape joins from time to time with its own version of the fragmented melodic lines. In the last movement it appears as if the instruments and tape each decided to go their own way.

I chose to use only brass-generated sound materials, subjecting them to modifications by electronic and mechanical means. (Special recordings of various brass combinations were made at the University of Utah and processed primarily at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center.) The materials thus obtained range from slightly-to-completely transformed. The favored texture is predominantly harmonic. A cluster of fifty-six notes made from the vertical juxtaposition of twelve individually recorded brass sonorities opens the work. Some of these sonorities briefly emerge in their original form throughout the composition. There is a suggestion of a chorale in the first movement, a full statement of it at the end of the second movement and additional brief quotations in the last movement.

It may be of interest to mention that the initial idea for weaving modified and "live" brass sounds together in a composition was stimulated by interest expressed in it by the American Brass Quintet some twenty years ago! A brief section was written and, in fact, performed by the Quintet on CBS *Sunday Morning*. Later some of the brass materials were used in a work for tape alone entitled *Of Wood and Brass*. The present composition finally realizes the original idea but utilizes none of the earlier versions.

This work was commissioned for performance by the Consortium Commissioning Program of the National Endowment for the Arts. It was premiered by the American Brass Quintet on February 12, 1984 in New York City and has received numerous performances by three other brass quintets elsewhere.

*Colloquy* is intended as a fun piece—a musical and verbal interplay between the orchestra, conductor, and tape recorder. In 1954, Otto Luening and I juxtaposed pre-processed sounds on tape with live instrumental ensembles for the first time in our joint composition *Rhapsodic Variations for Orchestra and Tape Recorder*. This combination is now practiced frequently, though predominantly in conjunction with the smaller chamber groups or with the individual instruments. But many an eyebrow is still raised at the idea of having a recording-playback device sharing the platform with musicians. So *Colloquy* gives a chance to the tape recorder to plead its case in public debate. The final proof of the legitimacy of this union must, of course, be a musical one.

It has been my own preference since 1951 to experiment with sound materials of all possible sources: musical instruments, sounds from the world at large, and, in recent years, materials produced on synthesizers and computers. When the National Endowment for the Arts agreed to fund my writing a piece for tape and orchestra, and Maestro Maurice Abravanel of the Utah Symphony Orchestra promised to perform it, I formulated and reformulated many possibilities, but finally decided to include the materials of both electronic and non-electronic origin.

The general plan of *Colloquy* calls for featuring either groups or individual instruments of the orchestra in turn. The materials on the tape have been prepared either to produce an effect of a radical contrast to the orchestra, or to give a sense of being related to or growing out of the orchestral texture. The music featuring various sections of the orchestra is of a kind that I imagined the instrumentalists might enjoy playing without too much struggle with the notes.

The plot assumes that the presence of the tape recorder is ignored by the musicians until it enters with the first distinctly non-orchestral electronic passage. The strings, which are the only instruments playing at the time, after a brief musical flurry, proceed as if nothing has happened. However, the second intrusion of the emboldened tape, now attempting to imitate the earlier passage, proves even more disturbing. The strings and, of course, the conductor attempt twice to proceed, but the tape is growing louder and the intrusion can no longer be ignored. The strings make an angry musical comment, and various chairs then verbally demand to know what is going on. The tape recorder diffidently tries to explain its role and provides several examples of mechanical and electronic transformation of instrumental sounds. When the strings decidedly reject the “new instrument,” the conductor asks whether the flutes and oboes would like to have a try. In the second section a reluctance at a wholehearted collaboration is still evident. Flutes and oboes play their kind of music, loyally supported by the orchestra which, at times, is clearly impatient to get along on its own. But the tape passages, completely electronic in origin, are more closely integrated with the orchestral material and tend to relate more closely in timbre to the sound of the winds. Further verbal comments clarify the function of the tape recorder in its role as an important tool in the preparation of the sound materials and as a performing instrument. (Though the tape recorder does not admit it, a lot of additional electronic gear is required to produce the variety of effects which are assembled, often manually, into the final tape.) In the remaining sections of the tape, materials are derived from the highly-modified instrumental sources, namely, the snare drum and bass clarinet. Enrichment or a radical modification of the familiar timbres, and a passing of sounds between several loud speakers illustrates possibilities which are not inherently idiomatic to the live instrumental groups.

My original text has been partially put into verse by the American poet X.J. Kennedy. In the few lines added by me for this recording, I tried to match his humor. The voice of the tape recorder is mine, somewhat disfigured by electronic manipulation. The voice of the conductor is that of Maurice Abravanel. The comments of the orchestral chairs are spoken by Salt Lake City actors Margaret Crowell, Richard Kramer, and Gene Pack, and by New York actors Eve Collier and Owen Rackleff.

—*Vladimir Ussachevsky*

## **Section I.**

Player No. 1: Who’s butting in?

Player No. 2: Hey! What’s that?

The nachtmusik of some stray alley cat?

Conductor: Strings! Will you please be quiet? Order, order. This is no feline, but a tape-recorder.

Player No. 1: A tape-recorder! Comes the revolution! Who let it in to make this noise pollution?

Tape-Recorder: Don’t be alarmed. Excuse me please for taking part uninvited in your music making.

Player No. 2: Good grief. It talks.

Player No. 1: Who are you, anyhow?

Tape-Recorder: Your humble friend. If I could, I’d bow.

Player No. 2: A friend to whom?

Tape-Recorder:

A friend to musicians and many others in skilled composers' hands I invent new sounds.

By speeding up the tape or slowing it I change

An instrument's timbre and increase its range.

*(Example of transformed triangle)*

One drum is stretched beyond its usual norm...

*(Example of transformed snare-drum.)*

Thick unison of strings becomes a howling storm.

*(Example of transformed strings.)*

Player No. 1: Well, strings . . . Maestro . . . is this our kin? This Martian! Would *you* invite it *in*?

Conductor: No!

## Section II.

Conductor:

I am sorry, tape recorder. As you see

The strings don't care to keep you company.

Is it perhaps an oboe or a flute

Your electronic aid can better suit?

Let's ask them. Flutes and oboes are you game?

Player No. 3: If game's the word, we'll try.

Conductor: Begin then, if you're ready.

Tape Recorder: So am I.

## Section III

Player No. 1: That sounds quite different. But isn't it synthetic?

Tape Recorder: Indeed it is. Why so unsympathetic? A synthesizer was my sound source. But I transformed much of it, of course.

Player No. 2: Well, show us more. Transform some sounds of a real bassoon.

Tape Recorder: Bassoon . . . *(Example of bassoon transformation.)*

I love an experiment involving that peculiar instrument.

Player No. 4: What do you mean *peculiar*? I object.

You squawk-box! How would you like your panel wrecked?

Tape Recorder:

Pardon. I meant no slur.

To modify a spectrum as complex as yours is quite like shifting colors around in the rainbow.

Why don't you play and let me join you at times.

Then I can demonstrate—that is, if I am forgiven.

Player No. 4: The things you have to do to make a living!

## Section IV.

Conductor: Keep going tape. You might yet win the day.

Player No. 5:

I say, what have we got to fear from this machine?

Let us be fair; after all it is our guest.

Maybe it has more tricks than we have seen.

Tape Recorder: I do. I love to demonstrate my skill.

Player No. 1: That's obvious. Maestro, if you will,

Isn't there something jazzier we might play?

Conductor: Of course. Enough of this repartee. Now tape recorder, join us would you mind?

Tape Recorder: You . . . you are inviting me? You are very kind.

(The orchestra plays Section IV. Just before the final chord the tape recorder says:)

Tape Recorder: Thank you very kindly.

## Notes on the Performers

When the **American Brass Quintet** (Raymond Mase, trumpet; Chris Gekker, trumpet; David Wakefield, horn; Michael Powell, trombone; Robert Biddlecome, bass trombone) was founded in 1960, brass chamber music seemed a novelty. Concert audiences were skeptical, and modern music for such a group was almost non-existent. Even so, their first Carnegie Hall recital, in 1962, earned rave reviews. During the more than twenty-five years since then, the American Brass Quintet has become what many consider to be the country's most distinguished ensemble of its kind. In addition to performing its annual concert series in New York, the Quintet regularly tours throughout the United States and Europe; it recently completed an extended tour of Japan and the People's Republic of China. It has represented the United States at the Zagreb Biennale Festival in Yugoslavia, and the Festival of Shiraz in Iran, the Spoleto Festival in Italy, the Edinburgh Festival, and the Casals Festival, and it has appeared under the auspices of the State Department in Australia and in Central and South America.

The American Brass Quintet is in residence at The Juilliard School in the winter and at the Aspen Music Festival during the summer. The group has premiered a long list of new works in addition to its own editions of compositions from the Renaissance and Baroque periods. More than one hundred new works have been composed for them, by such composers as Gilbert Amy, Henry Brant, Elliott Carter, Jacob Druckman, Meyer Kupferman, William Schuman, Ralph Shapey, and Virgil Thomson. The Quintet has produced twenty-seven records, and may be heard on CRI recordings: SD 229, Etter: *Concerto for Brass Quintet, Strings and Percussion* and SD 327, Bazon: *Brass Quintet*.

**Maurice Abravanel** was born in Greece and raised in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he first conducted at the age of sixteen. He studied in Berlin with Kurt Weill and received his first professional experience as guest conductor of the Berlin Opera. Following his 1932 symphonic debut in Paris, he became guest conductor of the Paris National Opera and musical director of the Balanchine Ballet Company in both Paris and London. A three-month engagement as guest conductor in Sydney and Melbourne was extended to two years, during which he led many Australian premieres.

When the Metropolitan Opera engaged Abravanel in 1936, he was the youngest conductor ever to step to its podium. After two years he left to conduct works of Kurt Weill both in New York and on tour. He became the conductor and musical director of the Utah Symphony Orchestra in 1947. During his tenure of more than three decades, the Utah Symphony became one of America's most respected orchestras, touring the United States and Europe and amassing an impressive list of recording credits. In 1979, Abravanel

retired and became music director laureate. In 1982 he was appointed acting director of the Berkshire Music Center; each summer since he has returned to Tanglewood as artist-in-residence, a position that he has been asked to accept for life.

The **Utah Symphony** was established as a professional orchestra in 1946, with Werner Janssen as its first conductor. During the tenure of Maurice Abravanel (1947-79) the Symphony grew to national and international prominence. In 1979, Varujan Kojian succeeded Abravanel, followed in 1983 by Joseph Silverstein. The orchestra now has more than 100 recordings to its credit and has received international acclaim on five worldwide tours. The Utah Symphony may be heard on CRI recording SD 373, performing Henri Lazarof's *Spectrum for Solo Trumpet, Orchestra and Tape*, conducted by Henri Lazarof.

The recording of *Colloquy* was made possible by the generosity of the Research Committee of the University of Utah; the recording of *Dialogues* was made possible by the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University.

*Dialogues and Contrasts*: American Composers Alliance (BMI)

Recorded and edited by David Hancock

Produced by Vladimir Ussachevsky

Technical assistance tape machine: Eric Chasalow

Recorded at the Church of the Holy Trinity, New York City, on June 12, 1985

*Colloquy*: American Composers Alliance (BMI)

Recorded by Lynn M. Robinson, Bonneville Media Communications, Salt Lake City, Utah

Produced by Vladimir Ussachevsky

Final mix by Vladimir Ussachevsky and Palmer Pattison, Skaggs Telecommunications Service, Salt Lake City, Utah

Production: Rachel Siegel

© 1987 Composers Recordings Inc.

This is a composer supervised recording.

*(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*