

The Music of Louise Talma

The Ambient Air (1983)

Jayn Rosenfeld, flute/Ronald Oakland, violin Alvin McCall, cello/Şahan Arzuni, piano

Full Circle (1985)

The Prism Orchestra; Robert Black, conductor

Lament (1980)

Andre Emelianoff, cello/ Şahan Arzruni, piano

Three Bagatelles (1955) and

Kaleidoscopic Variations (1984)

Şahan Arzruni, piano

Four-Handed Fun (1939)

Şahan Arzruni and Louise Talma, piano

Born on October 31, 1906, **Louise Talma** was educated in New York City, receiving her undergraduate degree from New York University and Master of Arts degree from Columbia University. At the same time, she attended the Institute of Musical Arts (now The Juilliard School) where her creative talent was recognized with the awarding of the Isaac Newton Seligman Prize for composition. Perhaps her more significant training was at the Fontainebleau School of Music in France where Talma studied piano with Isidore Philipp—for a time contemplating a concert career for herself—and composition and related subjects with Nadia Boulanger. Following her decision to concentrate on composition, her life became influenced even more decisively and extensively by Boulanger and the two remained faithful colleagues and close friends for many years.

Louise Talma's career as a composer gained momentum in the early 1940's when she became the first woman to receive two Guggenheim Fellowships in composition. While her earlier music is neoclassical in stylistic orientation, there was a turning point in her idiom in 1952, after she heard Irving Fine's twelve-tone quartet. She adopted the serial technique, but her employment of it always remained personal.

Talma's most successful work in this style is the opera, *The Alcestiad*, with a text by Thornton Wilder based on the Greek legend of Alcestris. Its world premiere took place in Frankfurt, Germany, the first full-length, three-act opera by an American woman composer to be mounted by a major European company. On opening night, there were more than fifty curtain calls and a twenty-minute ovation.

The Alcestiad brought Louise Talma, among other recognitions, the Marjorie Peabody Waite Award from the National Institute (now known as the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters). In 1974, Talma herself was elected a member of this august body—the first woman composer to receive this honor—with a citation reading: "many of her admirers who had grown accustomed to seeing or hearing her referred to as one of our foremost women composers, have noticed with pleasure in recent years that she is being referred to more and more often as one of our foremost composers."

A Professor Emeritus, Louise Talma's academic tenure spans over fifty distinguished years during which time she taught at Hunter College and on occasional summers at the Fontainebleau School. Her compositions have been performed by the Baltimore Symphony, the Buffalo Philharmonic, the NBC Symphony, the Milwaukee Symphony, among others, and her works appear on the New World Records, Vox, Desto, Musical Heritage Society, and Avant labels. Selected works may be heard on CRI

recordings: SD 145, *Toccata* (1944) Imperial Philharmonic Orchestra, Tokyo; William Strickland, conductor/SD 187, *La Corona—Holy Sonnets of John Donne* 1954.55) Dorian Chorale; Harold Aks, conductor/SD 281, *Piano Sonata No. 2* (1944-55) Herbert Rogers, piano/SD 374, *Three Duologues*; Michael Webster, clarinet; Beveridge Webster, piano.

The Ambient Air was composed between 1980 and 1983 for Samuel Sanders and the players of his chamber ensemble but never performed by them. The first performance was given by the Da Capo Chamber Players in Symphony Space, October 16, 1984. The opening flourish of the flute is the literal notation of the song of a nightingale I heard in the gardens of the American Academy in Rome in the spring of 1956. The four movements are titled Echo Chamber, Driving Rain, Creeping Fog and Shifting Winds.

Full Circle was written for Robert Black and Sahar Arzruni in 1985 and is dedicated to them. The first performance was given by the Prism Orchestra, Robert Black conducting, in Merkin Hall, New York City, on October 7th, 1986. The title derives from the fact that the last section is the first section modified and in reverse. In between there are five sections related in various ways alternating fast and slow tempi.

Lament for cello and piano was composed in 1980 at the request of Joan Tower for a concert of the Da Capo Chamber Players. It was first performed by her and Andre Emelianoff in Carnegie Recital Hall, March 7, 1983. It is based on a melancholy little tune I heard an old Bedouin playing on a one-string fiddle in the Wadi Rum in Jordan.

Three Bagatelles. These pieces were composed for no particular occasion in 1955, just for the fun of it. They are dedicated to Thornton Wilder.

Kaleidoscopic Variations for Piano was commissioned by Jeff Blocker in 1984. The opening section which serves as theme consists of a number of motives. In the seven variations that follow these are rearranged and transformed making new patterns as in a kaleidoscope, hence the title. The first performance was given by Şahan Arzruni in Merkin Hall, New York City, on October 7th, 1986.

Four-Handed Fun. This piece was composed in 1939 while I was still a student of Nadia Boulanger. The title is self-explanatory. It is dedicated to Lukas Foss.
—Louise Talma

Notes on the Performers

Pianist **Şahan Arzruni** is regarded highly as a composer, lecturer and ethnomusicologist. A longtime associate of Victor Borge, he has collaborated in the master's hilarious stage productions throughout the world. Currently, he is the creative force behind *Positively Armenian*, a recording series intended to promote Armenian art and artists. Arzruni appears on Musical Heritage, Varèse Sarabande, and Philips labels, among others; this is his debut on CRI.

Conductor **Robert Black** has been praised by the New Yorker's Andrew Porter for "the warming combination of advocacy, emotional commitment, and accuracy which distinguishes all that he does." He conducted in the New York Philharmonic's Horizons '83 Festival and, as guest conductor throughout the United States, has recently led performances of major works by, among others, Mahler, Beethoven and Wagner. As a pianist, he has recorded solo works of Beethoven (late sonatas), Liszt, and numerous 20th century masters. He has published poetry, as well as essays on 20th century performance practice.

As a pianist, Black performs on CRI recordings: SD 428, Shapely: *Fromm Variations*; SD 481, Sessions: *Five Pieces for Piano*; Gideon: *Sonata for Piano*; and Weber: *Variazioni Quasi Una Fantasia*; and SD 489, Kahn: *Short Piano Piece, Inventions Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 from Eight Inventions, Op. 7, and Ciaccona*. As a conductor, Black has recorded on CRI SD 493, Gideon: *The Resounding Lyre* with Speculum Musicae, Constantine Cassolas, tenor; and Chaitkin: *Serenade with the New York New Music Ensemble*; on SD 509, Shapely: *Three for Six* with the New York New Music Ensemble, and on SD 527, Gideon: *Sonnets from Shakespeare* and *Wing'd Hour* and Dembski: *Spectra* and *Stacked Deck*, with the Prism Orchestra.

The **Prism Orchestra**, under its Music Director Robert Black, was founded in 1983 and has quickly distinguished itself both for its virtuoso performances and its innovative programming. Prism's repertory ranges from Mozart through Liszt, Strauss and Britten, and it has presented several American premieres of important 20th century works, including Jean Barraqu e's *Chant apr es chant* and *Clarinet Concerto*.

The Prism Orchestra

Violin

Ronald Oakland, principal

Mineko Yajima

Laura McGinnis

Maryellen Shea

Alice Poulson

Jule Supplee

Roger Zahab

Nancy Reed

Holly Ovenden

Carol Sadowski

Cello

Alvin McCall, principal

Dorothy Lawson

Styra Avins

Flute

Jayn Rosenfeld

Patricia Spencer

Clarinet

Robert Yamins

Viola

Olivia Koppell, principal

Daniel Seidenberg

Shelly Holland-Moritz

Randy Fisher

Bass

Gail Kruvand

Melody Goldstein

Percussion

Daniel Druckman

James Baker

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)