

JOHN ALDEN CARPENTER Collected Piano Works

New World Records 80328

John Alden Carpenter was born in Park Ridge, Illinois, one hundred years after the United States became a nation. His namesake ancestor had arrived in America in 1620.

Carpenter's mother, an accomplished singer, had studied in Europe. She took part in church musical activities, founded the Amateur Musicians Club of Chicago, and began teaching piano to John when he was five. Later he credited her with developing his love of music. At eleven he began four years of lessons with Amy Fay, a student of Tausig's and Liszt's. Then for two years he studied piano and theory with William Seeboeck, who had studied with Nottebohm, Brahms, and Rubenstein.

In 1897 Carpenter graduated with honors from Harvard College, having taken the full music course as well as the liberal-arts program. While there he had accompanied and sung with the glee club, which performed several of his early compositions. The music courses were taught by John Knowles Paine (New World Records NW 206, 262, 280), the "first American symphonist." At their last meeting, Paine admonished Carpenter, "Better change your mind about going into *that business!*" "That business" was the family business of selling shipping supplies and groceries (in 1909 Carpenter became vice-president). For three months in 1906 Carpenter studied with Sir Edward Elgar, an experience unsuccessful for both. In 1909 he began three years of composition lessons with Bernhard Ziehn, the much respected and feared theorist and aesthetician. Carpenter acknowledged him as the greatest influence on his life as a composer.

Carpenter's first works were piano pieces. He was an accomplished pianist and later often performed his own music. At seventeen, probably while under Seeboeck's tutelage, he wrote "Minuet" and "Twilight Reverie," both of which were published in 1894. (Of all the works on this recording, only the sonata went unpublished.) Carpenter found early that ternary form offered sufficient scope for most of his musical ideas; he adopted it almost as a standard for short instrumental works. There is sufficient leeway for variety of expression through the addition of introductions, codas and codettas, and through varying phrase lengths by abbreviation, extension, or other means. Except for the sonata and the fifth of the Diversions, ternary dominates the formal structure of the piano pieces.

"Minuet," composed in February 1893, follows the standard minuet-trio-minuet form, though a *brillante* section comes between the first minuet and the trio. Noticeable is a fondness for the low piano range, with a certain thickness arising out of the four-, five-, and six-note chords. The almost constant movement in the inner voices is often chromatic. The trio, opening with a repeated bass pedal tone and changing harmonies above it, provides a lush sound.

The leisurely "Twilight Reverie" employs a somewhat novel idea. Both the main section and trio are in the same key, but an added lilt occurs in the latter, where the meter changes to 6/8 from the earlier 3/4. The A section exploits a pulsating part that adds motion to the top voice's slower melody. The textural density is similar to that of the "Minuet." Again a brief insertion is found before the return to the beginning section, this time called *mysterioso*.

Carpenter certainly was guided by Paine in the composition of the Piano Sonata in G minor, since it was written during his senior year at Harvard. He inscribed the cover "Graduation Exercise, Music

Department College, 1897."

The work has three movements: *Allegro ma non troppo*, a sonata-allegro in G minor; *Adagio con moto*, a ternary form in B major; and *Allegro con brio, feroce*, a rondo. The piece was probably intended as a sort of final examination in Carpenter's elective area, and it was performed at his graduation ceremonies.

The first movement's somber introduction establishes the tonality. The first subject is a moving theme of quarter and eighth notes in a regular phrase structure. A textural thickening along with tempo changes denotes the transition to the second subject, which begins with a long note and four equal quarters and has a wide-ranging eighth-note arpeggiated accompaniment. The harmony is less chromatic than in the two earlier pieces, possibly because of the clarity demanded by the classical form. Or perhaps the young man's youthful zest for a highly colorful style was tempered by the academic setting in which the work was composed. The exposition is repeated. The development dwells almost entirely on the first subject. The recapitulation, with an abbreviation of both subjects and a coda, rounds off the movement. The second movement is dark and melancholic, with sonorous ascending chords that gradually evolve into expansive arpeggios. The middle section, marked *Piu animato*, offers more pliable and lyrical phrases, often with countermelodies. In the final movement, the middle section is marked *Meno mosso, cantado*. Possibly of most interest is a section in 5/4, a meter Carpenter later employed so effectively in the Concertino for Piano and Orchestra (1914) and the ballet *Skyscrapers* (923-24). This movement is as agitated and exciting as the second is sentimental and beautiful.

The "Nocturne" of 1898 is more like the 1894 pieces. In it Carpenter begins to exploit delayed resolution. The first sound of a measure may be disturbing in complexity, dissonance, or functional ambiguity. By way of diatonic or chromatic lines the pitches wend their way to clearly heard chord tones. The harmony is characterized by secondary dominants and chromatic nonharmonic tones, and a modal flavor appears in the middle section.

Composed in December 1912, "Polonaise Américaine" is Carpenter's earliest piano piece to use Hispanic rhythms, melodies, and harmonies. He could never account for this exotic leaning, which also colors many later works. French augmented sixths, augmented triads, and other colorful chords, certainly appropriate to the piece, are used in an adroit manner. The keyboard range is wider, but the fondness for low, solemn sonorities remains.

Lester Donahue, a Chicago pianist and friend, performed the "Polonaise Américaine" and the "Impromptu" when Carpenter was honored by the New York MacDowell Club. The latter piece was composed in July 1913. It shows a continued increase in the use of chromaticism. These harmonies always resolve logically, though perhaps not in the "correct" manner. Cross-relations abound, as do tritones, which became a feature of Carpenter's style. Whole-tone, Lydian, and Phrygian scales introduce new harmonies or sometimes new keys. Jazz rhythmic traits creep in.

"Little Indian" and "Little Dancer" were composed respectively in April 1916 and March 1917. "Little Indian" employs an open-fifth drumlike figure to set the American Indian mood of this tranquil piece. Melodies are pentatonic in rather narrow ranges. "Little Dancer" is technically more advanced. The rollicking melody gives the proper atmosphere. Clusterlike harmonies punctuate the afterbeats. Parallel chord motion, a late Romantic device, is employed.

"Tango Américain," composed in August 1920, is in D major, although the sixth is added to the tonic so often that there is a strong B-minor flavor. Carpenter again gives vent to his love of the Hispanic element.

Diversions, published in 1923, contains five short movements. The first is an impressionistic mood picture in *lento tempo*. An almost hypnotic motif throughout lends a subtle swing rhythm. A brief *Piu animato* constitutes the middle section. The second movement, the shortest of the five, shows unusual melodic pliability. The main motif is a long tone followed by four chromatically descending short tones. In the short third movement, with its Spanish flavor, solid dominant tonic harmonies allow dissonances only to add spiciness. The fourth movement, in the same vein, exploits melodically the long tone followed by a series of rapid ones. An oom-pah accompaniment prevails in most of the opening section. Melodies in minor are interpolated in the major tonality of the piece; neighboring chords account for most of the dissonance; a touch of jazz syncopation is heard. The final movement, an *Adagio*, is an amalgamation of American and Spanish characteristics. There are Spanish rhythmic and melodic twists, and harmonically deceptive progressions woven together with insistent dissonant chords. The basic ideas are more motivic than melodic, and the texture is full of wisps of high-range ornamentation.

"Danza," composed in August 1935, distills and sums up the technical means Carpenter developed after the 1893 "Minuet." The Iberian factor has evolved into a fascinatingly stylized component. The melodies sing and are of utmost beauty. The rhythm is vigorous, energetic, and driving. The meter is primarily 3/4, though 5/4 is also prominent and there is some 4/4. (There is even one 3 1/2/4 bar.) Yet even with thirty-five meter changes in 190 measures, Carpenter's expression is natural and spontaneous. Tonality is strong, since dissonance and free chromaticism are superbly controlled. Parallel chord motion, long pedal tones and pedal figures, cluster-related sonorities, seventh and ninth chords, and chords with added seconds and sixths are heard. The B section, primarily in 3/4, is more placid to afford contrast.

Several years later, Carpenter orchestrated "Danza," "Polonaise Americaine," and "Tango Americain" to form the *Dance Suite*, which received its premiere by the Washington National Symphony with Hans Kindler conducting on November 3, 1943.

On April 26, 1951, Carpenter died at his home in Chicago.

---Thomas C. Pierson

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- Concertino for Piano and Orchestra. Marjorie Mitchell, piano; Goteborg Symphony; William Strickland conducting. CRI 180.
- **Diversions*. Jeanne Behrend, piano. Victor 17911 (78rpm).
- Gitanjali*. Alexandra Hunt, soprano; Regis Benoit, piano. Orion ORS-77272.
- "Impromptu." Grant Johannesen, piano. Golden Crest CRS-4065.
- "Jazz-Boys." Donald Gramm, baritone; Richard Cumming, piano. Desto 6411-12.
- Krazy Kat*. Los Angeles Philharmonic, Calvin Simmons conducting. New World Records 80228.
- "Light, My Light," from *Gitanjali*. Rose Bampton, contralto; Wilfred Pettetier, piano. New World Records NW 247.
- "Looking-Glass River." Donald Gramm, baritone; Richard Cumming, piano. Desto 6411-12.
- "The Player Queen." Elizabeth Suderberg, mezzo-soprano; Robert Suderberg, piano. Olympic OLY-104.
- *Quartet in A Minor. Gordon String Quartet. Schirmer Album 4 (78 rpm).
- Sea Drift*. Albany Symphony, Julius Hegyi conducting. New World Records NW 321.
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- Skyscrapers*. Vienna Symphony, Meinhard von Zallinger conducting. American Recording Society ARS-37; reissued on Desto DST-6407E.
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- **Song of Faith*. John Alden Carpenter, narrator; Chicago Chorus and Orchestra; Noble Cain conducting. Victor 26529-30 (78 rpm).
- **Water Colors*. Mina Hager, mezzo-soprano; John Alden Carpenter, piano. Chicago Gramophone Society CGS-50019P (78 rpm).

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Denver Oldham, Piano

Denver Oldham has performed extensively in Europe, South America, and the United States. He has given several recitals in New York, including three in Carnegie Hall. Oldham was a scholarship student at the Juilliard School, where he studied with Joseph Bloch and Leland Thompson. He has also studied with Dame Myra Hess and Ilona Kabos in London, and with Alexander Uninsky at the Aspen

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Sonata in G Minor

1- I. Allegro ma non troppo (8:51)

2- II. Adagio con moto (8:20)

3- III. Rondo: Allegro con brio (:49)

(unpubl. c Genevieve Carpenter Hill)

Diversions

4- I. Lento (3:03)

5- II. Allegretto con moto (1:32)

6- III. Animato (2:27)

7- IV. Moderato (2:52)

8- V. Adagio (4:01)

(publ. G. Schirmer, Inc.)

9- Nocturne (4:21)

(public domain)

10- Polonaise Americaine (2:25)

(publ. G. Schirmer, Inc.)

11- Impromptu (4:37)

(publ. G. Schirmer, Inc.)

12- Tango Americain (4:36)

(publ. G. Schirmer, Inc.)

13- Minuet (2:29)

(public domain)

14- Little Dancer (2:42)

(publ. G. Schirmer, Inc.)

15- Little Indian (3:05)

(publ. G. Schirmer, Inc.)

16- Twilight Reverie (5:56)

(public domain)

17- Danza (4:37)

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