

For many years, French music—the sonatas of Franck, Debussy, and Fauré, the less formal works of Chausson and Saint-Saëns—has been a staple in the repertory of American violinists. How gratifying, then, to find a gifted French artist willing to return the favor.

This recording contains four works for violin by four disparate American composers with unique conceptions of the instrument, its possibilities, and the company it keeps.

Elliott Carter, born in 1908, has attained the status of "Grand Old Man" without losing any of his uncompromising intensity. The violin figures prominently in a good deal of Carter's music—he won Pulitzer Prizes for his second and third string quartets—but this is his first composition for the instrument unadorned. The difficulties for the violinist here are mainly those of rhythm and continuity. And for the listener? "My music sounds like confusion at first," Carter told an interviewer, "but if you hear it more often it really isn't as confused as you might think.

As a child growing up in New York City, Carter was interested in both music and English literature (he has made eloquent use of the poetry of John Ashbery and Elizabeth Bishop in several fine cycles.) He studied at Harvard with Walter Piston and Gustav Holst, among others, and then worked in France with Nadia Boulanger. His early works were written in a tonal neoclassical idiom, yet were charged with a granitic strength that was always Carter's own. His music grew increasingly complex, chromatic, and dissonant, and since the early 1950s he has been composing in a style of atonal chromaticism that is at least as complex as the work of most serialists.

But complexity in itself is not necessarily a virtue, and discussion of Carter's music should not devolve to a catalogue of his innovations. What seems more important is his work's craggy, rough-hewn grandeur, its arching melody lines, its innate sense of the epic, even when couched in miniature form.

Ralph Shapey, born in 1921, is no less uncompromising in his methods and no less epic in his conceptions. He began his musical studies at the age of seven and eventually became a composition student of the late Stefan Wolpe. Like Carter, Shapey has had a distinguished career as a pedagogue. He taught at the University of Pennsylvania in 1963 and 1964 and then moved West, becoming the guiding force behind the Contemporary Chamber Players at the University of Chicago, where he also taught composition. In 1985 he moved back to New York and taught at Queens College. He received a "genius" grant from the MacArthur Foundation in 1982.

Shapey has always been a determined outsider—opinionated, feisty, and outspoken. Many people have chosen to live in Chicago over the years, but few have ever made their decision not to live in New York as public as Shapey did (when he returned, he said that it was to be closer to his "best enemies"). In 1969 Shapey withdrew his music from all public performance in protest against conditions in the music community and the state of the world in general. Although he continued to compose, he refused to allow his works to be heard until 1976, when, as a personal favor to his long-time friend and patron Paul Fromm, he broke his moratorium to conduct the first performance of *Praise*, a work completed some time earlier. Since then his music has been heard with more frequency throughout the country.

Shapey's work is an unusual combination of astringency and lyricism: It is dense, dissonant, passionate, angry, heroic, frustrating, and deeply rewarding—all at the same time. Here is one "neo-romantic" who owes absolutely nothing to Richard Strauss (the neo-romantic's patron saint) but whose Byronic grasp nonetheless eminently justifies the description. Since the end of his self-imposed silence, Shapey's work has grown progressively ambitious in scope; *Fantasy* (1983) marks a departure of sorts, yet the emotions and conceptions involved are still larger than life. The work is scored for violin and piano, and both parts are immensely difficult.

John Melby's contribution to this album is also a duo, albeit for a decidedly contemporary combination. The Concerto for Violin and Computer-Synthesized Tape is one of a series of compositions by Melby combining traditional instruments and technology.

Melby was born in 1941; he studied at the Curtis Institute of Music and later at Princeton University: Vincent Persichetti, George Crumb, and Milton Babbitt were among his teachers. All but three or four of Melby's mature works involve use of the computer. "I think of the computer as one more instrument, but admittedly one with a fantastic amount of possibilities," he said in an interview. "I'm not interested in just creating a lot of unusual sounds . . . on the contrary, I'm a pitch-oriented composer, and the score for the concerto has some fairly precise notation for the computer. But the computer allows me an unprecedented control over the dimensions and parameters of the music I write. I don't have to worry about poor performances; I can write a work of orchestral scope and complexity without having to worry about how—or even *if*—it will be played."

Tod Machover, born in 1953, represents a still younger generation of American composers who have also spent a good deal of time working with computers. He studied at the Juilliard School, the University of California at Santa Cruz, Columbia University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. From 1978 to 1984 he was Director of Musical Research at Pierre Boulez's IRCAM in Paris. He has since returned to the United States to become a founding member and professor at the M.I.T. Media Laboratory.

Hidden Sparks, completed in 1985, is a work for solo violin fashioned specifically for Maryvonne Le Dizes-Richard and this recording. The composer has provided apt program notes: "*Hidden Sparks* attempts to unite highly diverse musical materials though a unified and expressive form. The language of the piece is one of reconciliation. In many ways, it uses ideas that I developed during my seven-year stay in France (complex timbral development, often derived from computer-music experience) with some of my major preoccupations before going there (melodic lyricism and continuity; nontonal but 'functional' harmonic progression)."

Indeed, although the writing for violin in *Hidden Sparks* is the most exploratory on this (pizzicatos"), the work is not so much experimental—which implies an elevation of syntax over content—as it is highly expressive.

Attempting to sum up American music always calls to mind the old fable about the blind men and the elephant. One cannot understand the beast by holding its tail, or fondling its trunk, or attempting to encompass its leg. It is too large, too grand an aggregate of dissimilar parts. Whether or not this recording can be considered comprehensive, it contains some engrossing sonic visions of both American music and twentieth-century violin playing. —*Tim Page*

MARYVONNE LE DIZES-RICHARD was born in Quimper, France, and studied at the Paris Conservatory, where she was awarded first prizes in violin and in chamber music. In 1962 she became the first woman to win the International Paganini Competition in Genoa.

Pianist **JEAN-CLAUDE HENRIOT** was born in Paris and studied at the Paris Conservatory, where he won first prize in piano and chamber music. He won a gold medal at the Vercelli Competition in Italy.

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SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

ELLIOTT CARTER

Concerto for Orchestra. London Sinfonietta, Oliver Knussen conducting. Virgin Classics CDC 59271.

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra. Ursula Oppens, piano; Cincinnati Symphony, Michael Gielen conducting. New World 80347-2.

Double Concerto. Paul Jacobs, harpsichord; Gilbert Kalish, piano; Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, Arthur Weisberg conducting. Elektra/Nonesuch 79183-2.

Night Fantasies. Aleck Karis, piano. Bridge BCD 9001.

String Quartet No. 1. Juilliard Quartet. Sony Classical 2-S2K 47229.

String Quartet No. 2. Juilliard Quartet. Sony Classical 2-S2K 47229.

String Quartet No. 3. Juilliard Quartet. Sony Classical 2-S2K 47229.

String Quartet No. 4. Juilliard Quartet. Sony Classical 2-S2K 47229.

To Music. University of Michigan Chamber Choir; Thomas Hilbish conducting. New World 80219-2.

Variations for Orchestra. Cincinnati Symphony, Michael Gielen conducting. New World 80347-2.

TOD MACHOVER

Bounce. Robert Shannon, piano. Bridge BCD 9040.

Light. Ensemble InterContemporain, Peter Eotvos conducting. CRI SD 506.

Nature's Breath. PRISM Orchestra, Robert Black conducting. Bridge BCD 9002.

Soft Morning, City! Jane Manning, soprano; Barry Guy, double bass. CRI SD 506.

Valis. Anne Azéma, soprano; Janice Felty, mezzo soprano; Terry Edwards, bass; Patrick Mason, baritone; Tod Machover conducting. Bridge BCD 9007.

JOHN MELBY

Alto Rhapsody. Debra Richtmeyer, sax; Taimur Sullivan, sax; Paul Martin Zonn, clarinet; Wilma Zonn, oboe. Zuma ZMA 105.

Chor de Steine. Computer-synthesized tape. Advance FGR-28S.

Chor der Waisen. John Melby, electronics. Centaur CRC 2045.

Concerto for Clarinet and Computer-Synthesized Tape. Paul Martin Zonn, clarinet. Zuma ZMA 105.

Concerto for Violin, English Horn, and Computer-Synthesized Tape. Gregory Fulkerson, violin; Thomas Stacy, English horn; David Liptak conducting. CRI SD 528.

(Two) Stevens Songs. Phyllis Bryn-Julson, soprano; tape. CRI SD 364.

RALPH SHAPEY

Concertante No. 1 for Trumpet and Ten Players. Ronald Anderson, trumpet; Contemporary Chamber Players of the University of Chicago, Ralph Shapey conducting. New World 80355-2.

Evocation. Matthew Raimondi, violin; Yehudi Wyner, piano; Paul Price, percussion. CRI 141.

Fromm Variations. Robert Black, piano. CRI 428.

Incantations. Bethany Beardslee, soprano; Contemporary Chamber Players of the University of Chicago, Ralph Shapey conducting. CRI CD 690.

Kroslish Sonate. Joel Krosnick, cello; Gilbert Kalish, piano. New World 80355-2.

Movements. New York Woodwind Quintet. New World 80413-2.

Rituals. London Sinfonietta, Ralph Shapey conducting. CRI CD 690.

String Quartet No. 6. Lexington Quartet. CRI 275.

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Preliminary rounds of the 1983 Competition for Violinists were held in Chicago, New York, and Paris. The judges were Rafael Druian, Richard Dufallo, Mark Sokol, Roman Totenberg, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. The semifinal and final rounds, held at Carnegie Hall in New York, were judged by Pina Carmirelli, Felix Galimir, Louis Krasner, Gidon Kremer, Ezra Laderman, Michael Tilson Thomas, and Charles Treger. Sharing the first prize with Maryvonne Le Dizes-Richard was Robert Davidovici. Joel Smirnoff won second prize, and Mischa Lefkowitz, third prize.

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HIDDEN SPARKS 80333-2

Maryvonne Le Dizes-Richard, violin

ELLIOTT CARTER (b. 1908)

1 *Riconoscenza* (publ. Hendon Music Inc.) 4:27

TOD MACHOVER (b. 1953)

2 *Hidden Sparks* (publ. Ricordi) 13:01

RALPH SHAPEY (b. 1921)

3 Fantasy for Violin and Piano (publ. Theodore Presser Co.) 7:52

I. Variations

II. Scherzo

III. Song

Jean-Claude Henriot, piano

JOHN MELBY (b. 1941)

4 Concerto for Violin and Computer-Synthesized Tape (publ. Margun Music, Inc.) 15:00

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