

ROBERT DAVIDOVICI, Violin

New World Records 80334

Winner of the 1983 Carnegie Hall

International American Music competition for violinists

STEVEN De GROOTE, Piano

PAUL SCHOENFIELD, Piano

Works by HUGH AITKEN, AARON COPLAND, WALTER PISTON, PAUL SCHOENFIELD, GUNTHER SCHULLER

Perhaps from the habit of our nineteenth-century parlor-music tradition, perhaps from the frustration of trying to get orchestral works performed, American composers seem to have remained more active in the genre of the chamber sonata than their European counterparts. For every American who has written a few sonatas and solo pieces for stringed instruments, one looks long and hard for a major European figure of similar output. In America, the genre has received particular attention from composers of a classical or neoclassical bent, as the works on this recording, varied as they are in style and technique, bear out.

In 1945, when he wrote the *Sonatina*, Walter Piston (1894-1976) was in the middle of his thirty-three-year teaching career at Harvard, and had recently been relieved of his wartime duties as a civilian air-raid warden. The flight of Schoenberg and Stravinsky to America prior to World War II had brought Piston into contact with their music, and the *Sonatina* was among the first fruits of this influence. That the contract was beneficial seems self-evident, for the *Sonatina* is a more compact, more compelling, and more stylistically unified piece than the 1942 Flute Quintet and the other works that preceded it. By this time, Piston was firmly entrenched in the brand of neoclassicism that he made peculiarly his own.

Neoclassic elements in the *Sonatina* extend to the development of a (rather jazzy) one-bar rhythmic motive in the *Allegro leggiero*, the violin's long cantilena line with contrapuntal accompaniment in the *Adagio espressivo*, and the virtuosic *perpetuo moto* of the concluding quasi-rondo. Quite un-neoclassic, though, is Piston's fluid pandiatonicism; although the piece begins and ends in B-flat (with the middle movement a tritone away in E), the violin exhibits a cheerful tendency to wander into distant key areas every few beats. (Such proclivities prompted Piston's biographer Howard Pollack to label him a "surrealist" composer.) It is the quintessential mark of Piston's technique, though, that these meanderings, in retrospect, sound perfectly natural. And since Piston was a very genre-conscious composer, it is interesting to note the technical differences between his violin writing here and in his other works for the instrument. Not for this playful piece the virtuosic, string-crossing *leggiero* of the *Fantasia* for violin and orchestra nor the heavy, Stravinskian quadruple-stops of the *First Violin Concerto*; it requires instead busy finger work, quick reflexes, and a sense of humor.

Gunther Schuller (b. 1925) is a composer of great versatility in terms of musical techniques. Given Schuller's lifelong involvement with jazz, it's surprising that his *Recitative and Rondo* is actually less jazz-related than other pieces on this record. By the time it was written, in 1954 (Schuller made an orchestral arrangement of it the following year), he had already written his *Blues* for brass quintet and *Atonal Jazz Study*; but it was still a few years before he would coin the term "third-stream music" to signify a symbiosis of classical and jazz techniques, and not until 1961 did he feel called to defend and define the term in an article. More typical of Schuller about the *Recitative and Rondo* is the wide

variety of instrumental techniques called for: quadruple-stops, harmonics, *sul ponticello*, and contrapuntal string-crossing, among others. (Imagine these devices multiplied by four, and you'll have an idea of Schuller's awesomely difficult Second String Quartet [80212]. For all the virtuosity required, the piece has a delicate, poetic quality to it, augmented in the Recitative by the dramatic effect of a lengthy violin solo before the piano's sudden entrance. The Rondo is a lightly pulsating tour de force, marked by *ostinati* of alternating major-seventh intervals.

The Nocturne by Aaron Copland (b. 1900) is a neglected gem, written in 1926 (along with a companion piece, *Ukulele Serenade*) for one of Nadia Boulanger's afternoon teas; so prestigious were these events considered among Parisian society that James Joyce made a point of attending its premiere. The next year, the theme of the Nocturne would find itself used as the basis of one of Copland's first orchestral essays, the *Symphonic Ode*. For all its gentleness and uniformity of mood, the Nocturne contains in germinal form all the features of Copland's early style (prior to his turn towards a "vernacular style" in 1936). If it exhibits the same awkwardness of form as his Piano Concerto of the same year, it is "bluesier" than his *Four Piano Blues* (80277) and as harmonically daring as anything he wrote before the quarter-tones of *Vitebsk* (1928). Its motives are as simple as can be imagined--a rising minor third and a falling whole step--but from these Copland elicits a lush, jazzy texture, replete with flatted sevenths, "blue thirds," and flirtations with bitonality. Though initial critical reaction was mixed, the piece already shows that Copland was destined to attain major stature as a composer.

A careful classicism is rarely absent from the music of Hugh Aitken, despite his wide range of emotional expression. Aitken (b. 1924), who has taught for some years at the Juilliard School and William Paterson College, writes in a variety of styles, from the unabashed classical tonality of his *Canata No. 1* to the dissonant classicism of his *Suite for String Orchestra*, to the harsh, discontinuous expressionism of his *Cantata No. 4*. As he once put it, "I thought it was better to follow my intuition than to fret about what kind of music one *should* be writing these days." This *Partita for Solo Violin* from 1968 is characteristic of Aitken in its division into brief movements, its repetition of short motives, and its dramatic contrasts between groups of gestures. It should be noted, however, that despite the division into separate movements, they are arranged with a Bartokian symmetry (the sixth movement takes its material from the first, and the fifth movement from the second) that suggests a single movement with subdivisions. Another trait of Aitken's writing is construction of the piece from small, close-ranged chromatic motives, which are contrasted with occasional large leaps for a feeling of polyphony within a single line.

To the varied program of works on this record, Paul Schoenfield's *Three Country Fiddle Pieces* makes a stunning encore. Schoenfield (b. 1947) is best known as a pianist, from his recordings of Bartok and Scott Joplin, and his performing credentials are certainly evident here in the highly idiomatic writing for both instruments. Originally written with amplification and added percussion (but quite viable without them), this 1980 piece draws on the styles of jazz, blues, and country diddling, blending them and surrounding them with Ivesian dissonances in the piano that seem curiously appropriate (Ives was a ragtime player himself). Schoenfield notates the freedoms of the popular style with scrupulous accuracy--occasional markings include "out of tune" and "1/6-tone flat"--and in "Who Let the Cat Out Last Night?" even throws in a couple of (credited) quotations from Tannhauser. Such rousing music is a sure indication that the accompanied violin genre is not losing its vitality in America.

--Kyle Gann

Kyle Gann, *a composer and critic, is new-music columnist for The Village Voice.*

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Aaron Copland

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Gunther Schuller

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SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Hugh Aitken

- Cantata No. 1; Cantata No. 3, Cantata No. 4; Piano Fantasy. Jean Hakes, soprano; Charles Bressler, tenor; Gary Kirkpatrick, piano; New York Chamber Soloists. CRI SD 365.
- Suite for Solo Bass. Lynn Peters, double bass. Ubres SN-202.

Aaron Copland

- Concerto for Piano and Orchestra. Aaron Copland, piano; New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein conducting. CBS MS-6698.
- A Dance Symphony*. London Symphony Orchestra, Aaron Copland conducting. CBS MS-7223.
- Duo. Gregory Fulkerson, violin; Robert Shannon, piano. New World 80313.
- Piano music. Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Leo Smith, pianos. New World 80277.
- Piano music. Leo Smit, piano. 2-CBS M2-35901.
- Symphonic Ode*. London Symphony Orchestra, Aaron Copland conducting. CBS M-31714.
- Vitebsk: Study on a Jewish Theme*. Aaron Copland, piano; Juilliard Quarter. CBS M-30376.
- Vocal music and opera selections by Copland are available on New World 80241,243, and 317.

Walter Piston

Concerto for String Quartet, Winds and Percussion. Emerson Quartet; Juilliard Orchestra, Sixten Ehrling conducting. CRI SD 248.

Concerto for Orchestra. Polish National Radio Orchestra, William Strickland conducting. CRI SD 254.

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra. Hugo Kolberg, violin; Berlin Symphony Orchestra, Otto Matzerath conducting. Mace MXX-9089 (out of print).

The Incredible Flutist (ballet suite). New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein conducting. 2-CBS MG-31155.

String Quartet No. 2. Budapest Quartet. New World 80302.

String Quartet Nos. 3 and 4. Portland Quartet. Northeastern 214.

Quintet for Flute and Strings. Doriot Anthony Dwyer, flute; Portland Quartet. Northeastern 208.

Symphony No. 2. Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Dean Dixon conducting. Desto 6410E.

Symphony No. 3. Eastman-Rochester Orchestra, Howard Hanson conducting. Mercury 75107E.

Symphony No. 6. Boston Symphony Orchestra, Charles Munch conducting. New World 80286.

Gunther Schuller

Concertino for Jazz Quartet and Orchestra. Modern Jazz Quartet; Stuttgart Orchestra, Gunther Schuller, conducting. Atlantic 1359.

Fantasy for Solo Cello, Op. 19. Roy Christensen, cello. Gasparo 101.

Fantasy-Quartet for Four Cellos. Laszlo Varga, Michael Rudiakov, Jules Eskin, Sterling Hunkins, cellos. CRI SD 144.

Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee. Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, Antal Dorati Conducting. Mercury SRI-75116.

String Quartet No. 2. Emerson Quartet. New World 80212.

Symbiosis (Music for Violin, Piano, and Percussion). Anahid Ajemian, violin; Maro Ajemian, piano; Walter Rosenberger, percussion. GM Recordings 2007.

Transformation. Brandeis Jazz Festival Ensemble, Gunther Schuller conducting. New World 80216.

Robert Davidovici, born in Transylvania, Rumania, studied with Ivan Galamian at the Juilliard School. Since he won first prize at the Naumburg Competition in 1972, he has performed throughout the world. Engagements in this country have included those with the orchestras of Houston, Albany, Dallas, New Jersey, and Fort Worth and the American Symphony Orchestra. In 1983 Davidovici toured China as soloist with the Texas Little Symphony. Currently, he is an artist-in-residence at North Texas State University. Davidovici plays the 1710 "Davis" Stradivarius. This marks his recording debut.

Steven De Groote, Grand Prize-winner in the Fifth Van Cliburn International Quadrennial Competition in 1977, studied with Eduardo del Pueyo, Rudolph Serkin, Mieczyslaw Horszowski, and Seymour Lipkin. He has performed with the major orchestras in this country and Europe, and in 1983-84 toured the United States with the Warsaw Philharmonic. De Groote has also recorded for Finlandia and Deutsche Grammophon.

Paul Schoenfield studied piano with Julius Chajes, Ozan Marsh, and Rudolph Serkin, and composition with Nikolai Lopatnikoff and Robert Kuczynski. He has performed throughout the United States, Europe, and South America. Schoenfield has received commissions to write for the St.

Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Minnesota Symphony Orchestra. As piano soloist he has recorded for Nonesuch and Pro Arte.

The Carnegie Hall International American Music Competitions were created to focus attention on the large repertoire of recital music written by American composers since 1900. By rewarding distinguished performers of this repertoire, the competitions were designed to interest performers, students, and teachers in this music; by presenting the first-prize winners (and the winning programs) in public appearances and concert tours, it is hoped that audiences and managers will come to regard this music as part of the standard repertoire, a literature still dominated by pre-twentieth-century European music.

Since 1981 the Competition has been sponsored by Carnegie Hall, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. It was formerly known as The Kennedy Center/Rockefeller Foundation International Competition for Excellence in the Performance of American Music.

This is the seventh album in the series of recordings by the first-prize winners, presenting selected repertoire from the program that is not otherwise available on disc.

Preliminary rounds of the 1983 Competition for Violinists were held in Chicago, New York, and Paris. The judges were Raphael Druian, Richard Duffalo, 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 Robert Davidovici was Marvonne Le Dizes-Richard, who recorded 80333 for New World Records. Joel Smirnoff won second prize, and Mischa Lefkowitz third prize.

Produced by Arthur Moorhead
Recording engineer: Paul Goodman
Recorded at RCA Studio A, New York,
December 17-19, 1986
Recorded on Sony PCM 1610
Microphones: Schoeps
Console: MCI
Monitors: B & W 801
Digital editing: E. Amelia Rogers,
Soundmirror, Inc.
Compact disc mastering:
Robert C. Ludwig, Masterdisk
Cover design: Bob Defrin

This recording was made possible with a grant from the Carnegie Hall International American Music Competition, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation.

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Robert Davidovici, violin
Steven De Groote, piano
Paul Schoenfield, piano
(on Three Country Fiddle Pieces)

Walter Piston: *Sonatina*

(publ. Boosey and Hawkes, Inc.)

- 1- I. Allegro leggiero (3:29)
- 2- II. Adagio espressivo (4:57)
- 3- III. Allegro vivo (3:13)
- 4- **Gunther Schuller:** *Recitative and Rondo* (15:02)

(publ. AMP, Inc.)

- 5- **Aaron Copland:** *Nocturne* (8:08)

(publ. Boosey and Hawkes, Inc.)

Hugh Aitken: *Partita for Solo Violin*

(publ. Oxford University Press, Inc.)

- 6- I. Allegro vigoroso (:43)
- 7- II. Lento e sostenuto (1:21)
- 8- III. Molto moderato (1:21)
- 9- IV. Grandioso, liberamente (2:06)
- 10- V. Lento e sostenuto (1:28)
- 11- VI. Allegro vigoroso (1:00)

Paul Schoenfield: *Three Country Fiddle Pieces*

(publ. G. Schirmer, Inc.)

- 12- Who Let the Cat Out Last Night? (3:24)
- 13- Pining for Betsy (6:24)
- 14- En Ciudad Juarez (5:39)

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