

NED ROREM
String Symphony, Sunday Morning, Eagles

New World Records 80353

Orchestral Music of Ned Rorem

Such reputation as I may have in the musical world has always seemed to revolve around sung settings--songs in particular, but choral works too, and some small operas. So I am especially thrilled by the present recording, which represents my less familiar, strictly symphonic, side, since non-vocal orchestral and chamber works do account for the bulk of my output. However, even when building so-called abstract structures I've always felt most at ease when guided by a concrete program, as the tone poems *Eagles* and *Sunday Morning* indicate. But if the impulse for *String Symphony* was also poetic, it was unconscious and non-verbal; I was aiming (always difficult for me) toward un-literary meaning.

The composition of *String Symphony* was begun on May 26, 1985, in Nantucket, and completed there just eight weeks later. The product of this shortish parturition (shortish, considering that other large projects involved me at the same time) is not bedecked with extramusical teases. I have so often been chided for the literary or visual names of my non-vocal compositions (*Remembering Tommy*, *Green Music*, *Sunday Morning*, and so on) that I decided in this case to fall back on just the lean term "symphony," even as I composed for just a clean choir of bowed instruments rather than for full orchestra.

Like most symphonies of the past half-century, the piece is called that *faute de mieux*; the term has become so all-encompassing as to be meaningless. By textbook standards this piece is probably less faithful to classical definitions than are my previous three symphonies (each for big orchestra). Indeed, it could as easily be named *Suite*, as hinted by the Chopinesque titles of its five sections: *Waltz*, *Berceuse*, *Scherzo*, *Nocturne*, *Rondo*.

I'm seldom interested in what composers say technically about their finished work, and this particular work is so formally clear as to need no verbal exegesis. For you who like to learn such things, however, I'll allow that the various movements share their tunes, and that those tunes seem mostly shaped (I myself realized this *ex post facto*) from minor thirds.

The work was commissioned through the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's American Music Project, funded by Mrs. M.G. Woodward.

While writing *String Symphony*, it was my continuing inspiration to know that Robert Shaw, whose conductorial prowess I've profoundly adored for four decades, would be bringing it to life. This he did at the Robert W. Woodruff Arts Center on October 31, 1985.

Wallace Stevens (1879-1955), among the greatest modern American poets, is also one of the most influential, his art touching not only other authors, but three generations of composers, here and abroad, who have drawn from his verse for their song settings. I myself first made musical versions in 1971 with *Last Poems*, for soprano, cello and piano.

This symphonic suite, however, is a non-literal, dreamlike recollection of Stevens' long poem *Sunday Morning* (1915). Like the poem, the music is divided into eight sections; the words, as I comprehend them, are not expressed through a human voice but through the colors of instruments, alone and together.

The piece was commissioned by the Saratoga Performing Arts Center for performance by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra. It was composed in Nantucket and New York City during the summer and fall of 1977, and premiered by the commissioning forces the following August. The instrumentation is for woodwinds in threes, six horns, three trumpets, three trombones, and one tuba, a large percussion battery (including bongos and a metal plate), mandolin, harp, piano (doubling celesta), and strings. Each movement, as listed below, contains different components of the standard symphony orchestra:

- I. ..."green freedom"--Full orchestra
- II. "Passions of rain" --Six horns and strings
- III. "...indifferent blue" --Clarinet and cello solos, with harp and muted strings
- IV. "...birds, Before they fly" --Three flutes and muted strings
- V. "Death is the mother of beauty" --Full orchestra
- VI. "...our insipid lutes" --Full orchestra with mandolin solo
- VII. "...a ring of men" --Timpani solo with full orchestra
- VIII. "...to darkness, on extended wings" --Two solo violas against the full orchestra

The musical seed for *Eagles* was planted when, in the early 1950s, I came across Walt Whitman's "The Dalliance of the Eagles":

Skirting the river road, (my forenoon walk, my rest)
Skyward in air a sudden muffled sound, the dalliance of the eagles,
The rushing amorous contact high in space together,
The clinching interlocking claws, a living, fierce, gyrating wheel,
Four beating wings, two beaks, a swirling mass tight grappling,
In tumbling turning clustering loops, straight downward falling,
Till o'er the river pois'd, the twain yet one, a moment's lull,
A motionless still balance in the air, then parting, talons loosing,
Upward again on slow-firm pinions slanting, their separate diverse flight,
She hers, he his, pursuing.

In September of 1958, at the MacDowell Colony, I composed a nine-minute instrumental interpretation--a memory, rather--of those verses. It purports to relate, in tone, the calm of a poet's country stroll interrupted by an intense sensual disturbance which ultimately subsides, leaving the dreamer alone again--but not quite. Eugene Ormandy gave the first performance the following year, with the Philadelphia Orchestra, on my birthday. (In 1962 I wrote a complementary work called *Lions*, but have yet to realize the final panel of the triptych, *Whales*.) The scoring is: piccolo and two flutes, two oboes and English horn, four clarinets (one E-flat, two B-flat, one bass), two bassoons and contrabassoon; four horns in F, three trumpets in C, three trombones, and a tuba; timpani, and fifteen other percussion instruments (including piano, ratchet, woodblocks, and whip, among others); harp, and the usual strings.

—Ned Rorem

Ned Rorem (b. 1923) won a Pulitzer Prize in 1976 for his orchestral suite *Air Music*. He is the author of twelve books, the latest of which is *The Nantucket Diary 1973-1985*. His new book of essays on music, *Settling the Score* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich), is due out in May 1988.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Garland. "The Music of Ned Rorem." *Music Journal*, 21. no. 4 (1963), p. 34.
- Dyer, Richard. "Ned Rorem Tells All." *Boston Globe Magazine*, September 30, 1984.
- Gruen, John. *The Party's Over Now: Reminiscences of the Fifties*. New York: Viking, 1972.
- Hinson, Maurice. "The Piano Music of Ned Rorem." *Piano Quarterly*, no. 110 (1980), p. 14.
- Holmes, James. "Ned Rorem." In *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie, eds. London and New York: Macmillan, 1986.
- Johnson, Bret. "Still Sings the Voice: A Portrait of Ned Rorem." *Tempo*, no. 153 (1985), p. 7.
- Raver, Leonard. "The Solo Organ Music of Ned Rorem." *American Organist*, 17 no. 10 (1983), p. 67.
- Thomson, Virgil. *American Music Since 1910*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Several of Ned Rorem's songs are on the New World album *Songs of Samuel Barber and Ned Rorem* (80229).

After Reading Shakespeare, for Solo Cello. Sharon Robinson, cello. Grenadilla 1065.

Book of Hours, for Flute and Harp. Ingrid Dingfelder, flute; Martine Geliot, harp. CRI S 362.

Day Music, for Violin and Piano. Jaime Laredo, violin; Ruth Laredo, piano. Desto 7151.

Eleven Studies for Eleven Players. Members of the Louisville Orchestra, Robert Whitney conducting. Louisville S-644.

Lions. New Orleans Philharmonic Symphony, Werner Torkanowsky conducting. Orion 686.

Lovers, for Harpsichord, Oboe, Cello, and Percussion. Sylvia Marlowe, harpsichord, and ensemble. Serenus 12056.

Night Music, for Violin and Piano. Earle Carlyss, violin; Ann Schein, piano. Desto 7174.

Piano Concerto in Six Movements. Jerome Lowenthal, piano; Louisville Orchestra, Jorge Mester conducting. Louisville 733.

A Quaker Reader, for Organ. Leonard Raver, organ. CRI S-396.

Romeo and Juliet, for Flute and Guitar. Ingrid Dingfelder, flute; Herbert Levine, guitar. CRI 394.

Sonata No. 1, for Piano. Jeffrey Jacob, piano. Opus One 73.

Sonata No. 2, for Piano. Julius Katchen, piano. CRI 6007.

Suite for Guitar. Joseph Breznikar, guitar. Coronet 3115.

Symphony No. 3. Utah Symphony Orchestra, Maurice Abravanel conducting. Turnabout 34447.

Water Music, for Violin and Clarinet Soli with Orchestra. Oakland Youth Orchestra, Robert Hughes conducting. Desto 6462.

Robert Shaw has been music director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra since 1967. He first made his reputation as a choral conductor, organizing the Fred Waring Glee Club, the Collegiate Chorale (for which he commissioned, among other works, Hindemith's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*), and later the Robert Shaw Chorale. He made his symphonic conducting debut in 1946 and for several years was associate conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra under George Szell. Shaw's recordings with the Atlanta Symphony have won several Grammy Awards.

Louis Lane has been associated with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra since 1977, and became principal guest conductor in 1983. He served in the same position with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. For many years Lane was associated with the Cleveland Orchestra, beginning as an apprentice conductor under George Szell in 1947, and as an associate conductor from 1956 to 1973. In 1970 he made his Carnegie Hall debut with the Cleveland Orchestra, with which he recorded several albums.

The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, which began as a youth orchestra in 1945, has, during Robert Shaw's tenure as music director, become a major orchestral ensemble. It performs regularly in Washington, D.C., and New York City, and frequently in other major cities, as well as touring extensively in the Southeast. The orchestra participated in President Jimmy Carter's inaugural concert in 1977, and makes its first European tour in the spring of 1988. Conductor Yoel Levi assumes the post of music director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra beginning with the 1988-89 season. The orchestra's other recordings with Robert Shaw and Louis Lane are on the Telarc, Vox, and Pro Arte labels.

Ned Rorem

String Symphony

1- Waltz (4:33)

2- Berceuse (2:05)

3- Scherzo (1:51)

4- Nocturne (8:13)

5- Rondo (6:11)

Robert Shaw, conductor

Sunday Morning

6- I. ...green freedom (1:58)

7- II. Passions of rain (1:16)

8- III. ...indifferent blue (2:19)

9- IV. ...birds, Before they fly (2:16)

10- V. Death is the mother of beauty (1:36)

11- VI. ...our insipid lutes (3:17)

12- VII. ...a ring of men (2:18)

13-VIII. ...to darkness, on extended wings (4:16)

14- Eagles (8:23)

Louis Lane, conductor

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

This recording was made possible with grants from Francis Goelet, Mrs. M.G. Woodward, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Producer: Robert Woods

Recording engineer: Jack Renner

Recorded at Symphony Hall, Robert W. Woodruff Arts

Center, Atlanta, Georgia. *String Symphony* recorded May 6, 1986;

Eagles and *Sunday Morning* recorded November 7, 1987.

Recorded on Sony PCM 1610

Digital editing: E. Amelia Rogers, Soundmirror, Inc.

All works published by Boosey and Hawkes, Inc.

Cover art: Helen Frankenthaler. Flood (1967). Synthetic polymer on canvas, 124 X 140 in. Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art. Purchase, with funds from the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art. ©1967 Helen Frankenthaler, New York.

Cover design: Bob Defrin

©1988 ©1988 Recorded Anthology of American Music, Inc.
All rights reserved.

FOR NEW WORLD RECORDS:

Herman E. Krawitz, President; Paul Marotta, Managing Director; Paul M. Tai, Director of Artists and Repertory; Lisa Kahlden, Director of Information Technology; Virginia Hayward, Administrative Associate; Mojisola Oké, Bookkeeper; Ben Schmich, Production Associate.

RECORDED ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN MUSIC, INC., BOARD OF TRUSTEES:
David Hamilton, Treasurer; Milton Babbitt; Emanuel Gerard; Adolph Green; Rita Hauser; Herman E. Krawitz; Arthur Moorhead; Elizabeth Ostrow; Don Roberts; Patrick Smith; Frank Stanton.

Francis Goelet (1926-1998), Chairman

**NO PART OF THIS RECORDING MAY BE COPIED OR REPRODUCED WITHOUT
WRITTEN PERMISSION OF R.A.A.M., INC.**

NEW WORLD RECORDS
16 Penn Plaza #835
NEW YORK, NY 10001-1820
TEL 212.290-1680 FAX 212.290-1685
Website: www.newworldrecords.org
email: info@newworldrecords.org

LINER NOTES © Recorded Anthology of American Music, Inc.