

LEO SOWERBY

New World Records 80365

Trio in C-Sharp Minor

Trio for violin, violoncello and pianoforte

LA MUSICA GIOIOSA TRIO

Leo Sowerby's music is a study in contrasts, from the whimsy of the *Pop Goes the Weasel* variations for woodwind quintet to the eloquence of the Third Symphony; from the jazz rhythms of Synconata (written for the Paul Whiteman Orchestra) to the intricate, modern counterpoint of a Latin motet; from the architecture of the Symphony for organ to the deceptive simplicity of the English carol settings.

Born on May 1, 1895, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Sowerby spent most of his career in Chicago, where he was on the faculty of the American Conservatory for more than forty years and organist-choirmaster at St. James (Episcopal) Cathedral for almost as long. In 1962 he was invited to found and head a College of Church Musicians at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., where he remained until his death on July 7, 1968.

Sowerby divided his time among composing, teaching, directing choirs, and playing his chosen instrument, the organ. In all four areas, he was largely self-taught. He began composing two weeks after his tenth birthday and continued without interruption until twelve days before his death, producing more than 550 scores. Except for opera, there is virtually no major musical form absent from his catalogue.

One of Sowerby's early works was a violin concerto that he wrote in the astoundingly brief period of thirty-four days. At the age of eighteen, the composer heard the premiere of this work by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Three years later, in January 1917, the same orchestra devoted an entire concert to his compositions. During the twenties and thirties his scores were performed by every important American orchestra as well as in the major European cities.

Sowerby was eclectic in the best sense. He was influenced first by German-oriented theory, which he studied on his own, then by Franck and d'Indy in lessons with his only composition teacher, the French-trained Arthur Olaf Andersen. Subsequently, he was introduced to English folk music, by a touring vocal trio and by Percy Grainger; to the Italian school, by a three-year tenure as the first composer to be awarded the Rome Prize; to jazz, by touring with the Whiteman orchestra; to American folk songs by Carl Sandburg; and he became familiar with the liturgical musical tradition. But whatever he assimilated was inevitably transformed by a fiercely independent sensibility. Here was a craftsman whose works bore the stamp of a distinctive personality.

Sowerby wrote three trios for violin, cello, and piano: two date from 1911 (one of these has been lost), and the third from 1953. The two extant trios, which virtually span the composer's career, stand in remarkable melodic and harmonic contrast, yet they hold in common aspects of their formal structure, rhythmic complexity, and contrapuntal skill. In these two works, the listener is introduced to a single creative intelligence, but at two different stages of development: Leo Sowerby as a young student just beginning his career, and as a mature composer at the height of his powers.

The Trio in C-Sharp Minor was completed October 9, 1911, during the brief period when the composer was under strong French influence. Its first performance is unknown, but was probably

given by Sowerby and a father-and-son team from the Chicago Symphony, Herman Felber, Senior (cellist), and Junior (violinist).

The four movements consist of an energetic allegro in sonata form; a dreamy slow movement, in which melodic interest continually passes from one instrument to another in dynamic counterpoint; a kind of "scherzo diabolique"; and a rondo finale that could well have been subtitled "alla tarantella."

The later trio is dedicated to the composer's long time friend Dr. James Lafayette German of Cornell University's Laboratory of Human Genetics at The New York Hospital. The pencil sketches for the three movements bear the dates May 18, 1952; Feb. 14, 1953; and June 30, 1953.

Beginning and ending slowly, with a melody derived from its main theme, the first movement is in modified sonata form. Among its notable features are the ten-measure principal theme, in which the second phrase is an exact inversion of the first, and the strict fugue on that theme in the development. To this, a lyrical subordinate theme provides the perfect foil. The second movement contrasts a languorous melody, given out by the strings, with a striking bell-motif, first heard in the piano. The final movement makes a strong rhythmic appeal with its angular initial theme and martial second theme. The outer movements are nominally in B major, with the middle movement in D major.

—Ronald M. Huntington

Ronald M. Huntington, *a professor at Chapman College and an organist-choirmaster, has recently completed a biography of Leo Sowerby.*

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hines, Robert Stephens, ed. *The Composer's Point of View*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963. Pp. 64-78.

Howard, John Tasker. *Our Contemporary Composers*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1941.

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Schreiber, Lawrence. "Leo Sowerby," *Music Journal Annual Anthology*, 1967, pp. 42 ff.

Sowerby, Leo. "Composition in Relation to the Church and Allied Fields in America," in Hinrichsen, Max, *Organ and Choral Aspects and Prospects*. London: Hinrichsen, 1958.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

All on a Summer's Day. Louisville Orchestra, Robert Whitney conducting. Louisville LOU-56-6.

Classic Concerto. Rolf Karlsen, organ; Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, William Strickland conducting. CRI SD 165.

Piano Works. Gail Quillman, piano. New World 80376.

Pop Goes the Weasel. Westwood Wind Quintet. Crystal 101.

Symphony in G Major. David Mulbury, organ. Lyrichord 7306.

La Musica Gioiosa Trio was formed in 1984 by Karl Davies, violinist; Margaret Daly, cellist; and Gail Quillman, pianist. Mr. Davies is a native of Cardiff, Wales, and has performed with the Freiburg Philharmonic Orchestra and the Dreisam Trio. Ms. Daly, also a former member of the Dreisam Trio, has taught and performed in Europe. Ms. Quillman appears frequently as a recitalist and as a soloist

with orchestras in the United States and Europe; she has recorded an album of Leo Sowerby's piano music for New World Records (80376).

Leo Sowerby

Trio in C-Sharp Minor

1- Allegro moderato con fuoco (15:48)

2- Larghetto tranquillo (6:51)

3- Scherzo (5:38)

4- Vivace ma non troppo (7:10)

Trio for Violin, Violoncello and Pianoforte

5- Slow and solemn; Fast, with verve (14:14)

6- Quiet and serene (10:53)

7- Fast, with broad sweep (8:34)

La Musica Gioiosa Trio

Karl Davies, violin

Margaret Daly, cello

Gail Quillman, piano

Producer: Joseph Golan

Engineer: Bill Bradley

Assistant engineer: John Armstrong

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