

JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA
Conducted by Otto-Werner Mueller,
Sixten Ehrling and Paul Zukofsky

New World Records 80368

WILLIAM SCHUMAN
In Praise of Shahn
AARON COPLAND
Connotations
ROGER SESSIONS
Black Maskers Suite

Is there a New York School in American music?

In painting, the term "New York School" refers to the work of abstract expressionists and action painters, from de Kooning to Pollock. There are musical parallels in the work of New York atonal expressionists, from Wolpe to Wuorinen.

But there is another group of New Yorkers, a generation of composers born in Gotham near the turn of the century, or shortly thereafter. These composers came to prominence in the twenties and thirties. After Charles Ives (who lived and worked in New York), they were the first to establish recognizable American musical identities.

It is extraordinary how many important composers of this generation were from the big city. They were as diverse as George Gershwin and Elliott Carter--and as Roger Sessions, Aaron Copland, and William Schuman.

It is, in fact, an overstatement to try to claim "school" status for such an individualistic group of composers; but there are common threads. Just as American writers of this generation were obsessed with the notion of writing The Great American Novel, so American composers of this time were looking for a genuinely American symphonic style.

The works on this record are "occasional pieces," commissioned and composed for specific purposes, yet all three have a symphonic scope. Roger Sessions' music for a Russian play, *The Black Maskers*, is theater music amplified to the dimensions of a four-movement symphony. Aaron Copland is not usually thought of as a symphonic modernist, but his *Connotations*, one of the latest and most difficult of his works, is a symphonic movement in a dissonant, twelve-tone idiom. William Schuman's *In Praise of Shahn*, a tribute to the late Ben Shahn, is a spacious, highly developed work in the composer's symphonic manner.

William Schuman was born in New York City in 1910, and was graduated from Columbia University. He studied privately with Roy Harris, a major symphonist of the time. Schuman taught at Sarah Lawrence College from 1935 to 1945, then became president of the Juilliard School of Music, where he reorganized the school's general and theoretical educational systems. He was president of Lincoln Center, from its opening in 1962, until 1969; in 1970 he became chairman of the board of Videorecord. No one in the field of music since Ives has so successfully balanced the public life of an administrator

and businessman with creative work. Schuman's impact on musical life through his revitalization of the Juilliard School and the launching of Lincoln Center is incalculable.

As a composer Schuman is, above all, a symphonist. If there is such a thing as a mainstream of American symphonic style, then he is in good part responsible for shaping and updating it. His symphonic style can be described in terms of "block construction," the building blocks long sections, which are made of contrapuntal lines and sustained, dissonant harmonies. This music has a long fetch. It is in the European developmental tradition, but is American in its rhythmic qualities, harmonic direction, and scoring. Schuman has a remarkable ability to assimilate a highly dissonant harmonic vocabulary into a comprehensible, tonal, and even traditional model of musical speech. His music is clear, dynamic, and colorful. It is, in fact, a personal synthesis of popular and high-art modes.

In Praise of Shahn was commissioned by friends of the well-known artist Ben Shahn (1898-1969) as a memorial. It was composed in 1969 and premiered on January 20, 1970 by the New York Philharmonic, under Leonard Bernstein. Ben Shahn was a social-realist painter and printmaker with a striking graphic style. He was known for contemporary urban subjects, often set forth with a clear social, or even political, content. Schuman, however, chose as his inspiration the character of the man, with qualities he has called the artist's "unabashed optimism, and a searching poignancy." These characteristics are clearly reflected in the various sections of the piece: the opening invocation, dominated by brass and percussion, and the contrasting and moving string music that follows.

Roger Sessions and Aaron Copland were, remarkably, born on the same street in Brooklyn, but on opposite sides of the track: Sessions, in 1896, into a well-to-do family of old-American lineage living on the elegant side of Washington Avenue, then often called "the most beautiful street in America;" Copland, in 1900, into a Jewish immigrant family (the original name was Caplan), over the family store.

Sessions, brought up in New England, entered Harvard as a prodigy at age 14, studied at Yale with Ives's teacher, Horatio Parker, and taught at Smith College in Northampton, Mass., the ancestral family seat. Copland took music lessons at home, and later took the subway to the Institute of Musical Art--predecessor of the Juilliard School of Music, but then a rather modest institution. His principal teacher was an immigrant, Rubin Goldmark, the rather obscure nephew of the somewhat better known Karl Goldmark.

Sessions became the protégé of another immigrant composer, Ernest Bloch, the leading Jewish composer of his day, and an exponent of the great Central European symphonic tradition. Later, Sessions lived and worked in Italy and Germany, where he absorbed the influence and lessons of neoclassicism. Copland was in France from 1921 to 1924, and made visits to Europe for almost a decade after that. He was the first of a long line of Americans to study with Nadia Boulanger, and through her he encountered the musical world of Stravinskian neoclassicism.

Copland and Sessions collaborated between 1928 and 1931 on their famous joint concerts which, like the composers' own music, hovered a bit uncertainly between the tenets of modernism and the desire to create and communicate in a recognizably contemporary American language. The issues of "high art" vs. "popular art" were about to crystallize.

After the period of their collaboration, the two composers evolved in different directions for a number of years. In the thirties and forties, Sessions moved toward a highly developed symphonic modernism, eventually adopting twelve-tone methods. Copland, influenced by political and populist ideals, wrote a

series of scores, mostly for dance, of a decidedly popular nature and created a style that has remained the touchstone for an "American" sound in music. Then, with the Piano Quartet of 1950, he returned to the high-art style of some of his early work, but now using twelve-tone methods. This process culminated in some large-scale and difficult late works: the *Piano Fantasy* of 1955-57, *Connotations* for orchestra of 1960-61, and *Inscape* for orchestra of 1967.

It is a curious fact of musical history that Sessions and Copland began using the twelve-tone technique almost at the same time. Sessions' twelve-tone symphonic work seems like the extension of an expressionistic style that was already highly developed. It is harder to hear beneath the very different surface of Copland's twelve-tone music and realize that he uses the same block construction found in his popular works. If neither the music from *The Black Maskers* nor *Connotations* seems typical, it is because they come from opposite ends of the composers' careers. In their atypicality there is something unsettling that tells us things about these men that their familiar styles do not always clearly convey.

Copland's *Connotations* for orchestra was written in 1961-62 on commission from the New York Philharmonic, "in celebration of its opening season in the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and dedicated to the members of the orchestra and its music director, Leonard Bernstein." It was given its first performance by its dedicatees at the opening night of Lincoln Center on September 23, 1962.

Sessions wrote the music for *The Black Maskers* for a 1923 Smith College production of a murky, symbolic drama by the Russian playwright Leonid Andreyev: A wealthy man arranges a fantastic masquerade in his castle, and hordes of mysterious and threatening maskers show up. "The castle is the soul," we are told. "The lord of the castle is man, the master of the soul; the strange Black Maskers are the powers whose field of action is the soul of man and whose mysterious nature he can never fathom." The score, dedicated to Ernest Bloch, shows Sessions' mentor's influence. In 1928, Sessions extracted four of the original eight episodes and rescored them for large orchestra; on December 5, 1930, they received their premiere in this form by the Cincinnati Orchestra under the direction of Fritz Reiner.

—Eric Salzman

Eric Salzman, a composer and writer, is artistic director of the American Music Theater Festival. He is currently working on a new music theater work with the poet Kenneth Koch.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

William Schuman

Clark, John W. "William Schuman on His Symphonies: An Interview," *American Music*, Fall 1986, pp. 328-36.

Aaron Copland

Copland, Aaron. "Piano Fantasy," *Tempo* 46 (winter 1958). One of the few discussions by the composer of his use of twelve-tone technique.

Oja, Carol J., "The Copland-Sessions Concerts and Their Reception in the Contemporary Press," *Musical Quarterly* 65 (April 1979).

Roger Sessions

Sessions, Roger. *Roger Sessions on Music: Collected Essays*. Edward T. Cone, ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979.

See articles for all three composers in *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie, eds. London and New York: Macmillan, 1986.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

William Schuman

Newsreel. Milwaukee Symphony, Lukas Foss conducting. Pro Arte CDD-102.

Voyage. Bennett Lemer, piano. Etcetera ETC-1036.

Aaron Copland

Quartet for Piano and Strings; Piano Variations; Sextet. Boston Symphony Chamber Players. Nonesuch 79168.

Symphony No. 3. New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein conducting. DG 419170.

Roger Sessions

Symphony No. 1. Japan Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, Akeo Watanabe conducting. CRI SD 131.

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra. Paul Zukofsky, violin; French Radio and Television Philharmonic Orchestra, Gunther Schuller conducting. CRI SD 220.

Otto-Werner Mueller has been Juilliard's Director of Orchestral Studies since 1987; prior to that he taught at Yale for fifteen years. He studied music in Frankfurt, and became director of chamber music for Radio Stuttgart at the age of 19. Mueller worked extensively for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He was a guest professor at the Moscow State Conservatory in 1963, and as conductor toured Russia twice, in 1958 and 1970. He has appeared as guest conductor with many orchestras, including the Atlanta, Detroit, and St. Louis Symphonies, and the Scottish National Orchestra.

Sixten Ehrling studied at the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm, Sweden. He worked with Karl Boehm at the Dresden State Opera, then worked as a coach, conductor, and as music director of the Royal Opera in Stockholm. His United States conducting debut was with the Detroit Symphony in 1961; he was music director of that orchestra from 1963-1973 and helped inaugurate the Meadow Brook Music Festival in 1964. Ehrling debuted with the Metropolitan Opera in 1972, and has conducted, among others, the San Francisco Opera, the Vienna State Opera, and the Danish National Orchestra.

Paul Zukofsky is director of the Juilliard 20th Century Ensemble. He is also coordinator of the "American Composer" series at the Kennedy Center. A leading performer of American violin music, Zukofsky has performed world premieres, of concerti by Penderecki, Sessions, Wuorinen, and Glass, and solo works by Babbitt, Cage, Carter, and Crumb. Zukofsky has made many recordings, including the complete sonatas of Beethoven, Brahms, and Ives. In the past, he has served on the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music, the New England Conservatory, and Princeton.

The Juilliard Orchestra is comprised of over 100 students from around the world, and performs a full season of orchestral, opera, and dance programs at Juilliard. The orchestra has performed in Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, and on tour abroad. Its first tour of the Far East was made in June 1987, where the orchestra performed in the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, and Japan.

The Juilliard Orchestra

William Schuman:

1- In Praise of Shahn (18:01)

(publ. Merion Music, Inc.)

Otto-Werner Mueller, conductor

Aaron Copland:
2- *Connotations* (19:59)
(publ. Boosey and Hawkes, Inc.)
Sixten Ehrling, conductor

Roger Sessions:
Suite from *The Black Maskers* (22:01)
(publ. E.B.Marks Music Corp.)
3- I. Dance (4:14)
4- II. Scene (7:51)
5- III. Dirge (3:46)
6- IV. Finale (5:50)
Paul Zukofsky, conductor

Works by all three composers are found on New World:
Schuman-80253,326,348
Copland-80241,243,277,313,317,334
Sessions-80296,302,307,320,345

In Praise of Shahn and *The Black Maskers* produced by Marc Aubort and Joanna Nickrenz, Elite Recordings, Inc. *Connotations* produced by Paul Zukofsky and engineered by Robert Taibbi
In Praise of Shahn recorded May 18, 1988; *Connotations* recorded January 24, 1987; *The Black Maskers* recorded April 4, 1987, all at the Juilliard Theater
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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

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