

Harold Shapero: Symphony for Classical Orchestra, Nine-Minute Overture
New World 80373-2

For nearly 40 years, the name Harold Shapero (born in Lynn, Massachusetts, in 1920) was little more than a footnote in the growing ledger of American composers. In December 1986, however, a dramatic change occurred. Under the auspices of AT&T's American Encore program, which supported performances of neglected American works, André Previn and the Los Angeles Philharmonic introduced Shapero's 1947 Symphony for Classical Orchestra to its audiences, bringing to life an expansive score of immense strength, vitality and deeply felt expressiveness. Shapero rightly became the focus of widespread attention—a composer rediscovered captured the imagination of the musical fraternity, and of the public as well.

On hearing the symphony, the Los Angeles audiences responded with enthusiasm that matched Previn's. In fact, the conductor's extremely high regard for the work—he has called the Adagietto the most beautiful slow movement of any American symphony—resulted in an unusual programming move: He scheduled it again for the following season (April 1988, at which time the present recording was made) and then took it on tour to the East Coast for performances in Carnegie Hall and in New Haven.

A symphony written in 1947 by an American composer might be expected to take any one of a large number of stylistic stances; possibly the least likely would be Beethoven-like, by way of Stravinsky. At the age of 27, Harold Shapero considered it both a valid and a valuable symphonic approach, contrary to the opinion of his senior colleague, Aaron Copland. Writing in 1948, the year the Symphony for Classical Orchestra was premiered by Leonard Bernstein and the Boston Symphony, Copland evaluated Shapero in both glowing and guarded terms: "Harold Shapero, it is safe to say, is at the same time the most gifted and baffling composer of his generation." Copland observed. (That generation includes such composers as Barber, Bernstein, Schuman, Gould, Diamond, Carter, Druckman, Menotti, Rorem and Rochberg.)

Explaining both the "gifted" and the "baffling," Copland said, "This young Bostonian ... has a phenomenal ear and a brilliant mind.... Shapero now possesses an absolutely perfected technical equipment. To examine one of his scores closely is a fascinating experience. Few musicians of our time put their pieces together with greater security in the skeletal harmonic framework, in the modeling of the melodic phrases, or in the careful shaping of the whole. Shapero knows what he is doing, but that is not the least of it: The exciting thing is to note how this technical adroitness is put at the service of a wonderfully spontaneous musical gift.

"Despite this," Copland continued, "there is, as I say, something baffling about what he has produced so far Stylistically, Shapero seems to feel a compulsion to fashion his music after some great model. Thus his five-movement *Serenade* for string orchestra (a remarkable work in many ways), is founded upon neoclassic Stravinskian principles, his *Three Amateur Piano Sonatas* on Haydnesque principles, and his recent long symphony is modeled after Beethoven. For the present he seems to be suffering from a hero-worship complex—or perhaps it is a freakish attack of false modesty...."

Shapero was philosophical about Copland's critical comments, realizing that "Copland was so original that he just couldn't understand anyone who wasn't." Interestingly, as if anticipating Copland's attitude, Shapero had already addressed the

question of hero-worship in an article, "The Musical Mind," which he wrote in 1946 for *Modern Music*. Pointing out that the functioning of the musical mind is intimately connected with subconscious tonal memory, and that acquired experience becomes a part of the individual, he said, "In the metamorphosis which has taken place, the original tonal material has become compounded with remembered emotional experiences, and it is this action of the creative unconscious which renders music more than an acoustical series of tones, which gives to music its humanistic aspect...."

Shapero went on to express the firm conviction that composing in imitation of a model brings about the discovery of personal materials in a musician's own art. Then he closed with the crux of his argument, a discussion of inspiration, which he calls the creative absolute. "It is certain," he insisted, "that inspiration occurs only when the artist is compelled to give something of himself, and when his creative imagination is unhampered by technical procedures unsuited to it. Thus a system of musical materials which fails to lead to inspiration can be considered unnatural, and a system which leads to inspiration can be considered one which insures the natural functioning of the creative mind....The composer to whom inspiration is granted can be assured that he is drawing on the most significant creative forces which are available to him. He is in a position to perceive the musical mind in its permanent aspects.

Harold Shapero's musical mind was shaped by some of the most brilliant musical sculptors of the 1930s and '40s, a veritable Who's Who of composer-teachers: Slonimsky, Krenek, Piston, Hindemith, and Boulanger among them. One additional contact proved to be crucial to Shapero's development: Igor Stravinsky was Norton Professor at Harvard in the 1939-40 term, and the young composer showed the master one of his works, the *Nine-Minute Overture*. At the age of 19 or 20, Shapero was certain to have been intrigued with Stravinsky—who at that time wasn't? And so later, at 27, Shapero was ready and able to shop quite openly at Stravinsky's neoclassic warehouse in order to furnish the classical structures of the symphony. It is worth noting that a relationship of sorts had developed between Shapero and Stravinsky after their sessions at Harvard. In 1947, at a meeting in New York, Shapero played the new Symphony for Classical Orchestra for Stravinsky, who was kind and supportive, and, apparently responding to the technical difficulties of Shapero's orchestral writing, advised him to become a conductor for his own good.

At the Los Angeles Philharmonic's performances of the symphony in 1986, Shapero participated in pre-concert discussions, where he stated that he had originally intended to write a 20-minute divertimento, and that he probably should have made some cuts when he realized the work had grown to more than twice that length. But, he explained, he didn't cut it then, and now he didn't have the heart for it.

The *Nine-Minute Overture*, Shapero's first orchestral piece, was written in 1940, while he was a student of Walter Piston at Harvard. The influence of his teacher is apparent in the overture's neoclassic style, in its formal repetitiveness, and in its Piston-generated animation. Shapero points out that the work owes a special debt to Piston's *Piano Concertino*.

In the summer of 1940, Shapero went off to study with the formidable Paul Hindemith at Tanglewood. With the ink barely dry on his overture, Shapero had high hopes that the work would at least be given a reading. However; his hopes were dashed when Hindemith decreed that no student pieces would be performed that season. To the

rescue came Aaron Copland who, at the end of the term, formed an *ad hoc* orchestra just for the purpose of playing through several of the worthy student compositions. One of these was the *Nine-Minute Overture*, the performance of which by an orchestra that was numerically incomplete in all sections left much to be desired. Later, Shapero received due compensation when the piece was heard on a national broadcast by the CBS Symphony, Howard Barlow conducting.

The overture figured further in Shapero's career: On the basis of that work and his String Quartet of 1941, the composer was awarded the Prix de Rome, but, because of the war; he was unable to take up the award's residency in Italy. Happily, Shapero was not to be deprived of an Italian sojourn, for one came about as a result of a Fullbright Fellowship in 1948, the year after he had written the Symphony for Classical Orchestra.

—ORRIN HOWARD

Orrin Howard has been annotator for the Los Angeles Philharmonic since 1972. He is also the Philharmonic's Director of Publications and Archives.

ANDRÉ PREVIN has been music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic since 1985. He has also served as music director of the Houston, London and Pittsburgh symphony orchestras. Previn studied composition with Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, and conducting with Pierre Monteux. He began his career in Hollywood's film studios as conductor, arranger and composer, and won four Academy Awards for his outstanding achievements in film. Previn's chamber, vocal and orchestral compositions have been performed in the United States and abroad by Vladimir Ashkenazy and Dame Janet Baker, among others.

THE LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, founded in 1919 by William Andrews Clark Jr., has included among its directors Artur Rodzinski, Otto Klemperer, Zubin Mehta and Carlo Maria Giulini. The orchestra has toured extensively in the United States, Europe and the Orient. The Los Angeles Philharmonic can also be heard on New World 80228-2, *Works of John Alden Carpenter; Henry F. Gilbert, Adolph Weiss, and John Powell*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Credo. Louisville Orchestra, Robert Whitney conducting. Louisville Orchestra First Edition Records LOU-56-5.

On Green Mountain (Chaconne after Monteverdi). Ensemble, Gunther Schuller conducting. Columbia C2S-831.

Partita in C for Piano and Small Orchestra. Benjamin Owen, piano; Louisville Orchestra, Robert Whitney conducting. LOU 67-4.

String Quartet. Columbia AMS-6176.

Serenade in D. Arthur Winograd String Orchestra, Arthur Winograd conducting. MGM E-3557.

Sonata for Piano No. 1. Frank Glazer, piano. Concert-Disc M- 1217.

Sylvia Marlowe, harpsichord. Decca DL- 10021. Bernhard Weiser; piano. New Editions 1.

Piano Sonata for Four Hands. Harold Shapero and Leo Smit, piano. Columbia ML-4841.

Sonata for Trumpet. Maurice Stith, trumpet; Stuart W. Raleigh, piano. Redwood RRES-4.

Symphony for Classical Orchestra. Columbia Symphony Orchestra, Leonard Bernstein conducting. CRI SD 424.

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Los Angeles Philharmonic

André Previn, conductor

1. Nine-Minute Overture (9:15)

Symphony for Classical Orchestra

2. I. Adagio; Allegro (12:09)

3. II. Adagietto (15:05)
4. III. Scherzo (5:27)
5. IV. Finale: Allegro con spirito (11:23)

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