

Works by  
**IRVING FINE**  
**GIAN CARLO MENOTTI**  
**CARL RUGGLES**  
**HAROLD SHAPERO**

**New World Records 80402**

**Michael Boriskin, piano**

At the outset of his career, Harold Shapero (born in 1920) was widely recognized as one of his generation's most promising composers. While in his twenties, he undertook to study closely the musical phraseology and rhetoric Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, as a discipline to help him sharpen melodic contours and better manipulate larger musical forms. When the brief piano sonata he set out to compose based on classical principles took only a few days to finish, he decided to write two more. Although their Viennese models hover close to the surface, these three lively, finely wrought works speak with a distinctive voice of their own.

The sonatas, dated 1944, are superficially similar. Short, epigrammatic motives are woven into clearly defined, traditional formal structures, in which crisp, Scarlattian textures are often pared down to just two voices. The first movements are straightforward sonata-allegro forms, the finales are rondos, and the cantilenas blossom within the more extended forms of the delicate slow movements. The deliberately narrow focus of the three sonatas does not, however, preclude expressive variety: The first sonata is airy and brisk, the third more pointed and animated, with an eloquent, jazzy slow movement, and the second more volatile, with agitated outer movements surrounding a florid, Stravinskian Adagio.

Shapero and Irving Fine (1914-1962) shared strikingly parallel backgrounds: Boston, Harvard, Tanglewood, studies with Walter Piston and Nadia Boulanger, among others, and teaching at Brandeis University. Like Shapero, Fine began as an adherent of the so-called American Stravinsky school, writing in an unusually buoyant neoclassical idiom. *Music for Piano* (1947), his only important keyboard work, dates from that period. (Fine later explored twelve-tone composition, and was on the threshold of a personal synthesis of serial and tonal techniques when he died suddenly at forty-seven.) Conceived as a sixtieth birthday tribute to Boulanger, the work reflects her concern with meticulous craftsmanship, textural clarity, and precision of thought.

Upbeat, optimistic, and carefree, *Music for Piano* is a young man's score. While it inhabits the same sound world as the Shapero sonatas, Fine's lyricism is more overt and vocal, his textures richer and more traditionally pianistic, and the rhetoric more flowing. The jaunty Prelude sets the tone for the entire suite, with its lively syncopations and cross rhythms and easy melodiousness. In place of a conventional minuet and trio, Fine offers an elegant Waltz connected to a rhythmically alert Gavotte inserted as the middle section. The slow movement's warm, gently swaying melody is followed by three variations, ranging from playful to pensive. An inconclusive ending leads without pause to the brief Interlude, with its fleeting reminiscences of earlier moments, which builds into a brilliant, nearly nonstop Finale.

The reputation of Carl Ruggles (1876-1971) rests upon only eight relatively brief compositions. The music of this independent-minded Yankee experimentalist combines grandeur, raw power, mystery, and longing; as Wilfrid Mellers has noted, Ruggles "persistently strove for the ecstatic and the sublime."

*Evocations* underwent a typically long gestation period, and continued to be reworked after publication. A group of short piano pieces was drafted by 1935. The present first, second, and fourth pieces were polished between 1937 and 1941, and published together in 1943; number three was completed soon thereafter. All four Chants were revised in 1954, and then republished in their current state. Ruggles was purposely vague about any extra-musical associations in *Evocations*. The first piece rises haltingly from the depths of the keyboard in three ascending phrases, each enveloped by the "haze" created by holding down the pedal or specific notes (this effect is repeated in the final piece): the ensuing music recedes from its peak with another succession of the opening phrases, now altered. The second piece begins with a sinuous treble line which covers all twelve scale tones, and then retreats into the bass to make way for another appearance of the melody; the middle section features a long canon, which builds to the climax. The third piece, in binary form, is the most overtly dramatic of the set. In contrast are the quiet outer sections of the final piece; as in the second piece, the climax in the middle section is reached in a canon, which first descends, then reverses direction.

Gian Carlo Menotti (born in 1911) is thoroughly identified with the theater, having composed nearly two dozen operas, including such popular works as *The Medium*, *The Consul*, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and *The Telephone*. It is often forgotten, however, that he has also written a considerable number of chamber and orchestral works. As the *Ricercare* and *Toccata* is an attractive and well-proportioned composition, it is curious that the piece remains his only concert work for solo piano (though his catalogue includes some keyboard juvenilia). The composition is based on an aria from *The Old Maid and the Thief*, a comic opera which was the first to have been commissioned by a radio network (NBC, 1939). The *Ricercare*'s Pucciniesque lyricism is a mainstay of Menotti's effective, if sometimes melodramatic, operas. The brilliant keyboard writing in the *Toccata*, a fleet, perpetual motion, is ingratiating, natural, and thoroughly accomplished.

—Michael Boriskin

**Michael Boriskin** has performed and recorded a wide-ranging repertoire of both standard and contemporary works. He may be heard on two previous New World releases, 80342 and 80380, and has also extensively recorded for Newport Classic, Music & Arts, and The Musical Heritage Society. A native New Yorker, his international concert schedule has included appearances with the San Francisco, Utah, Denver, and American Symphonies, the Bavarian Symphony of Munich, Polish National Radio Orchestra, Tokyo City Philharmonic, Mexico City UNAM Philharmonic, and the New York Philharmonic (in its Ensembles series), as well as performances at the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, and many other major concert halls on four continents.

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

### Irving Fine

*Alice in Wonderland: The Hour Glass; McCord's Menagerie*. Gregg Smith Singers. CRI S-376.

*Notturmo for Strings and Harp: Partita for Wind Quintet; Serious Song; String Quartet*. Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Gerard Schwarz conducting (Notturmo and Song); New York Woodwind Quintet (Partita); Lydian String Quartet (Quartet). Nonesuch 79175-2.

*Symphony; Toccata Concertante; Serious Song*. Boston Symphony Orchestra, Irving Fine conducting (*Symphony*); Erich Leinsdorf conducting (*Toccata and Song*). Desto 7167 (formerly RCA LSC-2829).

### **Gian Carlo Menotti**

*Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Rosemary Kuhlman and Chet Allen, voices; Thomas Schippers conducting. RCA6485-2-RG.

*The Old Maid and the Thief* ("What a curse for a woman is a timid man," Act 1, Scene 6). Dawn Upshaw, voice; Orchestra of St. Luke's, David Zinman conducting. Nonesuch 79187-2.

*Piano Concerto in F Major*. Earl Wild, pianist; Symphony of the Air, Jorge Mester conducting. Vanguard OVC 4029.

*Sebastian*. London Symphony Orchestra, Jose Serebrier conducting. Desto 6432.

### **Carl Ruggles**

The Complete Music of Carl Ruggles. Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, Michael Tilson Thomas conducting; and others. Columbia M2 34591.

### **Harold Shapero**

*Nine-Minute Overture; Symphony for Classical Orchestra*. Los Angeles Philharmonic, Andre Previn conducting. New World 80373.

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

*Sonata for Piano, Four Hands*. Harold Shapero and Leo Smit, pianists, Columbia ML-4841. See also New World 80373 Discography.

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### **Harold Shapero**

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Bibliography.

**Michael Boriskin, Piano**

**Harold Shapero: *Sonata No. 1***

(© Harold Shapero)

- 1- Allegro preciso (1:39)
- 2- Poco adagio (3:24)
- 3- Minuetto (allegretto) (1:00)
- 4- Presto (2:00)

**Irving Fine: *Music for Piano***

(publ. Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

- 5- Prelude (1:02)
- 6- Waltz-Gavotte (2:52)
- 7- Variations (7:24)
- 8- Interlude-Finale (2:46)

**Harold Shapero: *Sonata No. 2***

(© Harold Shapero)

- 9- Allegro di molto (2:27)
- 10- Adagio (4:37)
- 11- Con brio (2:07)

**Carl Ruggles: *Evocations: Four Chants for Piano***

(publ. Theodore Presser Company)

- 12- I Largo (2:20)
- 13- II Andante con fantasia (2:45)
- 14- III Moderato appassionato (1:22)
- 15- IV Adagio sostenuto (3:38)

**Harold Shapero: *Sonata No. 3***

(© Harold Shapero)

- 16- Allegro marcato (2:33)
- 17- Presto lirico (1:35)
- 18- Andante (5:09)
- 19- Energico (3:03)

**Gian Carlo Menotti: *Ricercare and Toccata on a theme from "The Old Maid and the Thief"***

(publ. CPP/Belwin, Inc.)

- 20- Ricercare (4:03)
- 21- Toccata (3:06)

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Window from the Coonley Playhouse, Riverside, Illinois. 1912.

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