

Works by Donald Erb
New World 80415-2

Donald Erb's music explodes with energy. It stretches instruments to extremes of pitch and dynamics. It explores new sonorities. It builds to terrific climaxes. Outspoken and forthright, Erb says he dislikes listening to Beethoven's music because he feels he is getting a scolding; but in his own powerful scores, Erb is capable of shaking his musical fist at the heavens with a fury rivaling that of the German titan.

Born in Youngstown, Ohio, on January 17 1927 Erb grew up in Cleveland and started his musical training on the trumpet. After serving in the Navy he toured the country playing jazz and arranging music for big bands. He subsequently earned degrees in composition from Kent State University, the Cleveland Institute of Music and Indiana University, where his principal teachers were Harold Miles, Kenneth Gaburo, Marcel Dick and Bernhard Heiden. He also studied briefly with Nadia Boulanger in Paris.

Erb has taught at Bowling Green State University, Southern Methodist University, Indiana University, and the Cleveland Institute of Music, where currently he heads the composition department. He has been a visiting professor in universities and conservatories across the United States and in Australia. Erb has also served as composer-in-residence for the Bakersfield, California, school system, the Dallas Symphony, and the Saint Louis Symphony. He has received numerous fellowships, grants and prizes, including an award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

The *Concerto for Brass and Orchestra* was commissioned by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra through a gift from the Edward F Schmidt family of Evanston, Illinois. It received its premiere in Chicago on April 16, 1987 under the direction of Leonard Slatkin. The work is dedicated to the memory of John S. Edwards, longtime general manager of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

This is a serious concerto, a dramatic showpiece for a concertino of eleven brass instruments. Cast in three movements played without pause, the piece opens with an apocalyptic three-note motive that bursts into brilliant constellations of sound. Hard-edged sonorities fly, float, and fall through musical space; soloists engage in intense polyphonic conversations. A cloud of sustained high pitch hovers ominously over the middle movement, which ends with the seventeenth-century Lutheran chorale "Alle Menschen müssen sterben" ("All men must die"). Emerging like a funeral cortege, the stately hymn is punctuated by a tolling bell; in the finale, the solo trumpet sings a lyric farewell before nervous rhythms build up inexorably to the final fall.

The *Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra* was commissioned by Lynn Harrell, with a grant from the Concert Artists Program of the Ford Foundation. Harrell performed the premiere on November 4, 1976, with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by David Zinman.

A virtuoso work of extraordinary difficulty, the concerto requires the cellist to vocalize as well as explore an extended range of contemporary string techniques. The dominant sonorities and lyrical qualities of the cello are played off against pointillistic textures from the large orchestra, which includes water tumblers and harmonicas, as well as full wind, brass, and percussion sections.

After an attention-getting fortississimo flourish by the orchestra, the cello makes a stunning entrance with dramatic gestures, expressive trills and sung tones. The first section builds on the overtone series of the cello's open strings; the second expands the instrument's natural harmonics; the finale surges in flurries of notes, rapid-fire repetitions and crisscrossing lines of musical battle. The soloist plays virtuosic cadenzas in all three sections.

Ritual Observances was commissioned by the Saint Louis Symphony during Erb's tenure as composer-in-residence and received its premiere on April 30, 1992, under Leonard Slatkin's direction. The score requires full orchestra, synthesizer, amplified piano, harmonicas, slide whistles, and telephone bells. Along with conventional bows, the string section sometimes plays with wooden chopsticks.

The work is dedicated to Slatkin, Mozart, and the memory of Bruce Duncan Collie, a gifted percussionist and family friend who died of cancer in 1989 at the age of 32. The title is taken from the prologue to the collected works of Welsh poet Dylan Thomas:

"I read somewhere of a shepherd who, when asked why he made, from within fairy rings, ritual observances to the moon to protect his flocks, replied: 'I'd be a damn fool if I didn't.' These poems, with all their crudities, doubts and confusions, are written for the love of Man and in praise of God, and I'd be a damn' fool if they weren't."

Each of the four movements is given a descriptive title. The last three are taken from Thomas's poetry.

I. Lacrymosa

The musical material of the entire piece is derived from the first eight bars of "Lacrymosa" from Mozart's *Requiem*. Although there are no extended direct quotes, the music, written during the bicentenary of Mozart's death, is suffused with the achingly sad character of the notes, believed to have been the composer's last. A falling-third motive, piercing high pitches, tolling bells and hollow rustles contribute to a modern elegy of overwhelming emotion. The solo oboe produces sounds that penetrate close to the nerve. Wind players sing the word "Lacrymosa" through their instruments. Rising pitches collapse into a curling melodic figure that wraps around itself like a snail. Heavy percussion pushes the movement to its huge climax, a heartfelt cry of anger and grief.

II. Genesis Thunder

An intense scherzo, the movement starts low and slowly, then develops into shrieks, rings, and trills at extremely high pitches. The percussiveness of the music suggests explosions, snarls, and primordial rumbles.

III. My father's ghost is climbing in the rain

A feeling of resignation is expressed with sobbing trills, chromatic wails, motivic sighs, and harmonic moans. The static movement is encased in ethereal percussion sonorities.

IV. Light breaks when no sun shines

The finale lets loose in a frenzy of excitement: The pianist attacks the keyboard with fist and forearm; orchestral choirs take rhythmic aim; instrumentalists sing on wordless syllables. The tremendous climax goes over the edge, driving the music to the ultimate cataclysm. —WILMA SALISBURY

Wilma Salisbury is a music critic on the *Plain Dealer* of Cleveland.

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SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- Autumnmusic, Christmasmusic, Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra, and Fanfare*. Louisville Orchestra, Louis Lane conducting; Stuart Dempster, trombone. LS 772.
- Concerto for Contrabassoon and Orchestra. London Philharmonic, Harold Farberman, conductor. Leonarda LE 331.
- The Devil's Quickstep; Quintet* for flute/harmonica, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano/electric piano; *The Last Quintet* for woodwind quartet; *The Rainbow Snake; Sonata* for clarinet and percussion. Voices of Change. *Sonata* for Harpsichord and String Quartet. J. White, Koch String Quartet. CRI CD-593.
- Prismatic Variations*. Saint Louis Symphony, Leonard Slatkin conducting. Nonesuch 79118-1F.
- Sonneries*. Summit Brass, Carl Topilow conducting. Summit Recordings DCD-127.
- Symphony of Overtures, The Seventh Trumpet, and Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra*. Marvin Dahlgren, percussion. Dallas Symphony, Donald Johanos conducting. Turnabout TV-S34433.

THE SAINT LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, the second-oldest major symphony orchestra in America, was organized in 1880. Rudolf Ganz, Vladimir Golschmann, and Walter Susskind are among the orchestra's distinguished past music directors. The Saint Louis Symphony has recorded for RCA Victor, Angel, Columbia, Capitol, Vox, Nonesuch, and Telarc, as well as three releases for New World Records: John Knowles Paine's Mass in D minor (New World 80262-2), an album of works by Michael Colgrass and Jacob Druckman (New World 80318-2), and works by William Bolcom (New World 80356-2).

LEONARD SLATKIN's association with the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra dates from 1968; his appointment as music director and conductor came in 1979. In addition to

the SLSO he has conducted the major orchestras and opera companies throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia, and is Artistic Director of the Blossom Festival of the Cleveland Orchestra. Slatkin has recorded extensively with the Saint Louis Symphony and with other orchestras.

LYNN HARRELL is one of the foremost cellists of our time. A recipient of many prestigious awards and prizes including the first Avery Fisher Award, Mr. Harrell is also highly regarded as a teacher. He holds the Piatigorsky chair at the University of Southern California and is the newly named Principal of the Royal Academy of Music in London. He has made over thirty recordings for London Records and EMI.

The Meet The Composer Orchestra Residency Program, created by John Duffy, Director and President of Meet The Composer, was initiated in 1982 to foster the creation and performance of orchestral music by American composers. Through the program, composers are placed in residence with major symphony orchestras nationwide. Resident composers write a major work to be premiered and recorded by the host orchestra, organize concerts of new music, review scores, and work with the music director in the programming of contemporary music. The Orchestra Residency Program is made possible with major grants from: The Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Hewlett Foundation, the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, the Eleanor Naylor Dana Charitable Trust, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

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Concerto for Brass and Orchestra

1. I. (=72-84) (5:22)
2. II. (=48-56) (6:44)
3. III. (=c.132) (6:08)

Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra

4. I. (=96) (5:10)
5. II. (=48) (7:14)
6. III. (=160) (5:31)

Ritual Observances

7. Lacrymosa (11:54)
8. Genesis Thunder (4:57)
9. My father's ghost is climbing in the rain (7:44)
10. Light breaks where no sun shines (5:14)

Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra
Leonard Slatkin, music director and conductor
Lynn Harrell, cello

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