

**Four Works by
ROBERT HALL LEWIS**

New World Records 80444

A perverse notion occurred to me following an involved discussion of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*--to wit: that music is a superior means of inquiry into the nature of time and being than is philosophy, and that Gustav Mahler--to cite one instance--knew more about Time and Being than Heidegger did. Philosophy is not the sole purpose of music, I must hasten to add; there is a whole subspecies of music, from Scarlatti to Duke Ellington, which might be characterized as "cuisine," just as another subspecies--I'll mention no names--could be characterized as "propaganda," religious or otherwise. But there is also a music which seeks the taproots of Being--the opening measures of the slow movement of the opus 127 Beethoven quartet, the beginning measures of the Mahler Ninth--just as there is a music which attempts to tell us of time itself--Edgard Varese's *Deserts* is a prime example. The music on this disk belongs to this tradition.

If the purpose of "cuisine" music is to impart flavor, and the purpose of "propaganda" music to persuade, then the purpose of a "philosophic" music is to create an auditory model of time and space. The factors any twentieth century composer must face in order to do this are many; just as the medieval view of the firmament as a huge dome with the throne of God at its apex is impossible after Einstein, so the harmonic certainties of Bach (or Schubert) are impossible after the second Viennese school. Time, moreover--stretched to the maximum by Wagner, condensed to a minimum by Webern--has also proven a more elastic medium than was thought at the beginning of this century.

For Robert Hall Lewis, who studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris and Hans Erich Apostel in Vienna, but who was born in 1926 in Portland, Oregon, and entered the field of conducting after mastering the trumpet and the piano, another challenge much have been how to reconcile the many compositional tactics of a relentlessly innovative period into a unique personal idiom. But, as Lewis himself writes:

“there is no problem on my part of reconciliation of a French stylistic attitude with Viennese serial methods, since I am not a serial composer, nor have I ever been aside from a few theoretical exercises...To study in Paris and Vienna is a fine experience which raises one's standards in all respects. This does not imply that an adoption of national tendencies will result.”

Invenzione, the first work on this disk, exemplifies this independent stance.

If in *Invenzione* the opening glissando followed by the scattershot motif announced by the percussion (marimba, piano, Mexican rainstick) and the brutalist hornflare contain the whole work *in utero*, Lewis avoids a Webern-like crystallization by generating from each of these sections an extended aria unfolding simultaneously with the others but at radically different speeds. The slow middle section employs the chaconne variation principle. Throughout, the horn parts act not so much as a cantus firmus for the winds, strings and percussion as the pylons of a bridge extending farther and farther into space. Lewis fuses building blocks of very different size, shape, and sonority into a single architectural unit. This kaleidoscopic technique allows him to interrupt a string section with a

voluptuous wind tutti without loss of momentum, and allows also a flute solo of languid self-appraisal to precede the stormy convergence of brass, bass trombone, and timpani parts. Best of all, it allows a daunting premises to metamorphosize in ways not only heroic but witty, as the listener who approaches *Invenzione* a second and third time will find. Commissioned by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, *Invenzione* was premiered on April 21, 1988 at Meyerhoff Hall with Christopher Seaman conducting.

Diptychon for nine players, of the works on this disk, is the closest to the spirit of the divertimento. It was commissioned expressly for a concert in New York's Merkin Hall for the combined resources of the New York Quintet and the Algonquin String Quartet and was written during the last two months of 1984. *Diptychon*, a multi-sectional work, begins with a sinewy toccata, in which the flute and marimba, much like two dancers at opposite ends of a single stage, unfold two different themes at quite different speeds before becoming—as its title implies—a piece in which two different ensembles, string quartet and a quintet of winds, bass, and percussion reflect each other through five sections.

The toccata is followed by a fantasia, which, like that in the Fourth Symphony on this disk, mirrors a fourth section while framing a third, central section, regarded by the composer as the work's "dividing point." Both fantasias are character pieces, swiftly limned, almost sardonic; the first for strings only, the second using the same material rescored for the quintet. The *adagio espressivo* in between is plaintive and sweet, if the term does not seem naïve, sweet. Throughout these three central sections there is a continuous, almost empirical comparison being made between the idiomatic resources of the quartet and quintet—for example: does the use of the lower register of the marimba act coloristically like the rapid *tremolando* in the strings? (the answer: yes and no). The final movement, *allegro moderato*, casts a rapid eye over these investigations to consolidate them in a vigorous and virtuosic finale: here the nine players act like an entire orchestra.

Kantaten is a polyglot work, in German, English, and Italian, based on the texts and initial melodic phrases of three chorales composed in the 16th Century by mostly anonymous composers and used by Bach in the cantatas *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir*, *Vater unser im Himmelreich*, and *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, as well as fragments of texts by Giovanni Cinzio and Battista Guarini, and their translation into English from the original Italian. Composed for the Gregg Smith Singers, it was given its premiere by that group in May, 1980 at Merkin Hall in New York. The three chorales are also quoted in the last two thirds of *Kantaten*, first in unison, later in four-part harmony, but chiefly filtered through an array of vocal techniques a composer of the 18th Century would not likely have imagined: *sprechstimme*, ululation, nasal humming, the rolling of consonants and attenuation of vowels, falsetto, choral whispering, and declamatory speech. A whirling piano obligato accompanies at times these cantilevering fragments, intensifying as, towards the conclusion, a "multi-voice texture of shifting eight-part harmony is heard, leading to a transposed version of *Wachet Auf*," according to Lewis. Here the many disparate elements are united, chorale harmony, *Sprechstimme*, and speech alike, before subsiding into a whisper.

The Fourth Symphony was commissioned by the American Composer's Orchestra in celebration of the orchestra's 15th season. The premiere was October 28, 1990 in New York's Carnegie Hall with Dennis Russel Davies conducting. Here an arch-like construction made of brief segments reappears. Three large movements, the outer two each framed by an introduction and the brief coda, the

second and middle movement framed by two interludes, create the basic topography of the work. This topography is made the more intricate by the fact that the two interludes mirror each other and the middle (the second) movement—a theme of three phrases followed by five variations—reflects the design of the entire symphony in miniature.

The first movement, following an introduction, is divided in two, bridged by a section marked *tempo libero ma poco frenetico*, in which the strings (tapping or playing pizzicato) alternate with the tuned percussion and harp, celesta, and piano. The instrumentation of the percussion section is especially exotic, consisting of glockenspiel, maracas, five bongos, triangles, maracas, claves, antique cymbal, xylophone, sleighbells, five cowbells, slit drum, medium suspended cymbal, medium and large tam-tams, tambourine, five tom-toms, five temple blocks, five woodblocks, guiro, marimba, and tubular bells.

The second movement consists of a three-phase theme and five variations ranging from the oblique to the heroic which encapsulates the argument and general contour of the whole symphony in abbreviated form.

The final movement, which follows the second interlude, begins with a steady ground tone F, around which the percussion and strings are subsumed mid-movement by what Lewis described as a "kaleidoscopic sound picture" played by a quintet consisting of piano, vibraphone, harp, celesta, and tubular bells. In the finale, "short ostinato units over the entire range of the orchestra add rhythmic sparkle" as the ground tone returns to anchor the finale.

—Philip Guerrard

ROBERT HALL LEWIS

Robert Hall Lewis graduated with distinction in composition from the Eastman School of Music, where his principal teacher was Bernard Rogers. He also studied with Nadia Boulanger and Hans Erich Apostel. His works have been performed by orchestras and chamber groups in the United States and abroad, most notably the American Composers Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony, Boston Symphony, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, Parnassus, Nuova Consonanza, and Die Reihe. Mr. Lewis has received many awards, among them a Fulbright scholarship, two Guggenheim fellowships, an American Academy of Arts and Letters award, a Koussevitzky Foundation award, the Walter Hinrichsen award, and two fellowship-grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. He has also been composer-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome, the Rockefeller Foundation Center in Italy, and the Grand Teton and Tidewater music festivals. Eight of his orchestral works have been recorded on CRI, with himself as conductor. He studied conducting with Eugene Bigot, Hans Swarowsky, and Pierre Monteux. Mr. Lewis is Elizabeth Conolly Todd Distinguished Professor of Music at Goucher College, professor of composition at the Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University, and artistic director of the Chamber Music Society of Baltimore.

London Sinfonietta Voices

Formed in 1979, the London Sinfonietta Voices have become highly regarded for their performances of twentieth century music. Their main aims have been to highlight consort composition from earlier centuries, to perform the major twentieth century repertory, and to offer

composers the opportunity to write for virtuoso singers. They have commissioned works by Simon Bainbridge, Simon Holt, Colin Matthews, and others. The group has also performed the works of Berio, Messiaen, Xenakis, and Stockhausen, and sung with the Ensemble Intercontemporain and the Ensemble Modern. They have made two recordings on Virgin Classics.

Philharmonia Orchestra

The Philharmonia Orchestra gave its first concert in October 1945 under Sir Thomas Beecham. The orchestra has worked with the most distinguished conductors of the twentieth century, including Wilhelm Furtwangler, Arturo Toscanini, Guido Cantelli, Richard Strauss, and Herbert von Karajan. Since 1984 the Philharmonia Orchestra's principal conductor and music director has been Giuseppe Sinopoli. The Orchestra has a list of guest conductors that includes, among others, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Charles Dutoit, James Levine, Christoph von Dohnanyi. They have made many recordings for Deutsche Grammophon. The **Philharmonia Chamber Artists** is composed of the orchestra's principal players.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Atto for string orchestra; Concerto for string orchestra, trumpets, keyboard and harp; *Destini* for orchestra; *Moto* for orchestra; *Osservazioni II* for winds, keyboard, harp and percussion. Philharmonia Orchestra, R. H. Lewis and R. Premu, conductors. CRI CD 569.

Combinazioni I for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano; *Combinazioni II* for percussion ensemble and piano; *Combinazioni IV* for cello and piano. Penn Contemporary Players; Eastman School of Music Percussion Ensemble; Stephen Kates, cello; Ellen Mack Senofsky, piano. Orion ORS-79363.

Concerto for chamber orchestra; *Nuances II (Whale Lament)*; Symphony No. 2. London Sinfonietta, Philharmonia Orchestra, R. H. Lewis conductor. CRI CD 596.

Inflections I. Bertram Turetzky, contrabass. New World NW 254.

Monophony VII. Thomas Stevens, trumpet. Crystal S-361.

Violin Sonata. Gabriel Banat, violin. Turnabout TVS-34429.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cummings, David. Ed. *International Who's Who in Music*, 12th Edition. Cambridge, England, 1990-91.

Gonzalez, Luis Jorge. "Analytical Study of the Symphonies of Robert Hall Lewis." D.M.A. dissertation, Peabody Institute of the John Hopkins University, 1977.

Invenzione was recorded June 12, 1989, at Henry Wood Hall, London.

Producer: James Burnett

Engineer: J. W. Bower

Tape editors: Alan Kefauver, John Taylor

Symphony No. 4 was recorded June 18, 1991, at St. Augustine's Church, Kilburn, London.

Producer: Andrew Keener

Engineer: Mike Hatch (Floating Earth Ltd.)

Tape editors: Alan Kefauver, John Taylor

Diptychon was recorded January 11, 1992, at Henry Wood Hall, London.

Producer: Andrew Keener

Engineer: John Whiting

Tape editor: John Taylor

Kantaten was recorded July 5, 1986, at Wigmore Hall, London.

Producer: Terry Edwards

Engineer: John Whiting

Tape editor: Mike Skeet

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ROBERT HALL LEWIS 80444-2

1 *Invenzione* (1988) (18:35)

Philharmonia Orchestra of London; Robert Hall Lewis, conductor.

2 *Diptychon* for Nine Players (1984) (14:20)

Philharmonia Chamber Ensemble; Robert Hall Lewis, conductor.

3 *Kantaten* (1980) (10:25)

London Sinfonietta Voices; John Constable, piano; Robert Hall Lewis, conductor.
4 Symphony No. 4 (1990) (18:13)
Philharmonia Orchestra of London; Robert Hall Lewis, conductor.

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