

THOMAS STACY
English Horn Concertos

New World Records 80489

The English (or english) horn hasn't had an easy time of it. There is, first, the name, upper or lower case: the contralto of the oboe family definitely isn't a horn and probably isn't English, by provenance at any rate. Further, there's the curiously upmarket tendency among English-speaking musicians to call it *cor anglais*. As to matters French, native and naturalized, we have the Belgian-born César Franck's Symphony in D minor of 1888. An english horn introduces the Alegretto's haunting theme, an impertinence for which Franck was taken to task by a critic who asks the hard, indeed annihilating, question: Where in the symphonies of Haydn or Beethoven do we find an english horn? Answer that, you vandal! One imagines this champion of retrograde continuity glaring out from his portrait in period armor: pince-nez spectacles, goatee, medallioned watch fob, tails. But the vessel has already sprung leaks. Saint-Saëns' third and final symphony (1886) thrusts onstage the rather weightier unorthodoxies of two pianos and a pipe organ. By 1893, and within our subject's narrow scope, the Keepers of the Flame have all but abandoned ship. The Largo of Dvorák's *New World Symphony* entrusts one of the world's loveliest melodies to this double-reed upstart. Or is it simply that luck dealt Franck an unusually touchy critic? In truth, his symphony's pans could have filled a small book.

Tradition has concertos navigating less narrow straits. In the Baroque, we have perfectly respectable examples, ranging from mandolin through musical glasses and on to double-bass. In our own century, there's the very model of Establishment noblesse, Ralph (sometimes Raiph but never ralph) Vaughan Williams, whose Tuba Concerto in F minor and *Romance* in D-flat for harmonica, strings, and piano attest to a broadband abatement. To the postmodern sensibility (for which a term like *jaded* describes a state of relative virginity), even so extreme a genre utterance as Alvin Lucier's *Crossings* for small orchestra with slow-sweep pure-wave oscillator fails to shock, other than electrically should the soloist perform outdoors in the rain. In short (there's a pun there, if you want it), Sydney Hodkinson's electrified english horn notwithstanding, one looks to this New World release for its uncontroversial, musical worth.

Ned Rorem wrote his Concerto for English Horn and Orchestra for its present performer. Thomas Stacy premiered the work in early 1994 with his orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, under Kurt Masur's direction. Rorem's justly celebrated pen addresses his concerto's circumstance and character for its premiere's program note:

"At first I planned to call it *Meditations in an Emergency*, after Frank O'Hara's poem, since half the piece was composed literally in a hospital bed. Indeed, the winter of 1991-92 was one of physical stress; when I worked at all it was through a hazy Protestant need to meet deadlines. Later I opted for a straightforward title...for I do not believe that music, especially non-vocal music, necessarily reflects its maker's mood *in medias res*, or that people can agree--as they can with poetry and pictures--that a specific piece is angry or happy or noble, much less that it represents an ocean or an operating room. When a gloomy composer labors on a lengthy project he checks the gloom at his studio door, along with his aches and pains, and functions in a kind of limbo. (A definition of the Artist: One who exists outside himself, and has something to show for it. He is the least egotistical of citizens.)

"My sole aim in writing the Concerto for English Horn was to exploit that instrument's special luster and pliability. The literature is slim, maybe because the English horn...cannot hold its own against an orchestra as singularly as a piano or trumpet or cello or flute. To make the sound gleam like an opaline reed through a wash of brass and silver, catgut and steel, I used an orchestra which by Philharmonic standards is hardly huge, with a pair of oboes, like nephews, often flanking, sometimes goading, their wistful relative.

"Each of the five movements is to some degree a Passacaglia, a neutral or redundant background, a canvas upon which the soloist will limn his pictures. For what it's worth, this is my first work ever to have been composed entirely away from a keyboard, and directly onto orchestration parchment...."

The impetus for the late Vincent Persichetti's Concerto for English Horn and String Orchestra (1977) parallels that of Rorem. Persichetti directed his Opus 137 to Thomas Stacy's nonpareil talents and the New York Philharmonic's request for new music for its principal players. Persichetti:

"During the serene opening (*Con fantasia*), the higher strings unveil suggestions of a theme [which will later appear in bolder outline], as the lower strings respond in lyric *pizzicato*. The English horn enters, involving the strings in a search for some thematic footing. The violins discover a deceptively affable song which the English horn turns into one of complaint. These two dramatic elements persist until the soloist insists upon holding a cadential tone long enough to discourage the entire string orchestra.

"The thematic core and heart of the work occurs in the opening of the second movement (*Amabile*). The English horn song stems from the alto solo of [my work, *The Creation*, Op. 111]:

He knows the paths of the birds,
the sky-lark, the blackbird;
A butterfly asleep on the mountainside
--on a temple bell.

"A rustling central section combines various strands of tones from the opening of the Concerto and ends with an affirmation of the 'Butterfly Song.' In the agile and swift finale (*Spiritoso*), fragments of the core-subject take flight as sound levels shift quickly. The English horn, recalling the uneasiness of the earlier part of the work, interrupts with an accompanied cadenza of retrospection. A coda emerges, growing in vigor as it sheds all sorrow and sadness in dance."

In view of the music's handsome and idiomatically sturdy lines, composer Hugo Weisgall's characterization strikes this writer as well on the mark. He speaks of Persichetti's "phenomenal natural musicality, closely resembling Hindemith's...[Persichetti] has always written in whatever manner suits his particular conception at the time, from freely tonal through quasi-serial music, all with an equally sure hand....Rhythmically much of the music has the familiar American drive, though when he writes slow music or becomes improvisational he becomes more personal and interesting."

Concerto for English Horn and String Orchestra received First Prize/Kennedy Center-Friedheim Award, in 1978.

Both the title and thrust of Sydney Hodkinson's *The Edge of the Olde One*, Chamber Concerto for Electric English Horn, with Strings and Percussion, derives from the work of the English Romantic poet John Clare (1793-1864): "...I eagerly wandered on and rambled along the furze the whole day til I got out my knowledge...often wondering to myself that I had not found the edge of the olde one the sky still touched the ground in the distance and my childish wisdom was puzzled in perplexities..." Here Clare describes, in Hodkinson's words, an "80-day walk largely without food. [His] extraordinary journey, coupled with poor health and a penniless condition, resulted in his being certified insane; he spent the last 23 years of his life committed to an asylum." One thinks of the German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin who, as his alter ego Scardanelli, spent a large part of his life thus confined. Further, we now understand that the chemistries peculiar to extreme hardship can bring about the hallucinating states Clare's words suggest. In another age and through a different lens, he might well have been a saint of the Church. Be that as it may, Hodkinson's chamber concerto operates perforce in expressive extremes, as in the solo instrument's extra-acoustic stance.

The Edge of the Olde One (1977) is again a commission for Thomas Stacy with, in this instance, the soloist's interest "in the elementary life-electronic modification of woodwind instruments" as lagniappe. Hodkinson:

"The electrification of the solo instrument, in addition to the customary amplification, employs echo, octave duplication, reverberation and modulation: all standard equipment for commercial music ensembles. One unusual aspect of this work is that the soloist manipulates foot pedals to achieve these modifications. The work is [sectioned] into four parts but still roughly adheres to a slow-fast-slow formula in the manner of the traditional concertino form. The segments are performed together without interruption: *slow, fast, slow*.

"Owing to the nature of the commission, the work is rather virtuosic, particularly with respect [to rhythmic interplay]. Furthermore, probably owing to the personal onset of John Clare's writings at the time, the piece evolved into a hybrid 'sinfonia concertante,' thick and often turbid, rather than a true chamber concerto. The general complexity,...especially on a first hearing, is further compounded by the unrelenting single-movement structure.

"If the piece is 'about' anything, I suppose [it's] an elaborate journey of the mind, a trip: often meandering, thorny and dense, that threads itself vaguely across the subconscious; any clear definition is largely obfuscated until one *attempts*, at least, to break out into a 'clearing.' It is not unlike the eyes (of the lunatic?), constantly darting from image to cloudy image, from insanity to a super-saneness. But then, which is which? Is the landscape altered at all?"

Hodkinson wrote his concerto in 1977 for the last of Pierre Boulez's Prospective Encounter concerts with members of the New York Philharmonic in New York's Greenwich Village. It is dedicated to its soloist, "an excellent musician and long-time friend."

—Mike Silverton

Mike Silverton's *poetry has appeared in Harper's, Chelsea, Prairie Schooner, Exquisite Corpse, and other periodicals, as well as anthologies edited by William Cole*. A selection of verse, *The Enchanted Kielbasa*, lies poised in a hope chest. Mr. Silverton reviews recordings of late-century art music for Fanfare and recordings of a somewhat broader scope, along with subjective impressions of audiophilic bric-a-brac, for The Absolute Sound.

The instrumentalist whom Leonard Bernstein called "a poet among craftsmen" is perhaps best portrayed by a typo. When Thomas Stacy performed *The Swan of Tuonela* with the late André Kostelanetz, the advertisement on Broadway read THE SWAN OF THOMAS STACY. The delightful blooper hangs in Stacy's "trophy room" in his Old Greenwich home. A Stacy-inspired concerto precedes these three. As principal conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski wrote an English Horn Concerto for his then player. In response to a performance in Carnegie Hall with this ensemble and conductor, critic Harold Schoenberg of *The New York Times* observed that Stacy "must be the Heifitz or maybe the Kreisler of the English horn." (A recording of the work has been reissued on Phoenix PHCD 120.) The multiple dedicatee has this to say of the present release:

"I've just been listening to these concerti while driving into Manhattan. What warm thoughts they bring back of Ned, Vincent, and Sydney, and our time together! Having them on hand was a thrill and a luxury. Musical notation, suggesting any number of sonic and stylistic possibilities, can be terribly vague. It was therefore great fun to work toward the meanings and sounds their composers had in mind while adding a tablespoon or two of my own thoughts. It is my hope that these positive, friendly, and mutually respectful collaborations please the listener as much as they did the participants."—Tom Stacy, January 1995

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

SYDNEY HODKINSON

Chansons de Jadis; Missa Brevis. R. Fleming, mezzo; Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra and Connecticut Concert Choir, P. C. Phillips conductor. Centaur CRC 2073 (CD).

Dirge Canons. Laurence University Wind Ensemble, R. Levy conductor. Mark Records MCD-1302 (CD).

Epitaphion, for orchestra; *The Steps of Time*, for solo cello, strings and percussion; *Threnody*, for violin and orchestra. M. L. Rylands, cello; University Of Connecticut Symphony Orchestra, P. C. Phillips conductor. University of Connecticut UC91 (CD).

Expiration. Dale Warland Singers, Dale Warland conductor. Minnesota Composers Forum MN-110 (CD).

Sinfonia concertante. Louisville Orchestra, L. L. Smith conductor. Louisville LCD 001 (CD reissue).

VINCENT PERSICHETTI

Psalm; Chorale Prelude: O God Unseen; Pageant; Masquerade; O Cool Is the Valley; Parable. London Symphony Winds, David Amos conductor. Harmonia Mundi 907092 (CD).

Sonatas Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 5 for harpsichord (with Scarlatti sonatas); E. Comparone. Laurel LR 838 (CD).

Symphony No. 5 (*Symphony for Strings*), The Philadelphia Orchestra, Riccardo Muti conductor;

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Robert Taub, piano; The Philadelphia Orchestra, Charles Dutoit conductor. New World 80370-2 (CD).

Winter Cantata (Cantata No. 2); *Mass*, for Mixed Choruses; *Love*, for Women's Chorus. The Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia, Tamara Brooks conductor. New World 80316-2 (CD).

NED ROREM

A Quaker Reader; Views from the Oldest House. Catherine Crozier, organ. Delos DE 3076 (CD).

Piano Concerto for the Left Hand and Orchestra, Gary Graffman, piano; Symphony Orchestra of the Curtis Institute, André Previn conductor; *Eleven Studies for Eleven Players*. New World 80445-2 (CD).

Poems of Love and the Rain; Four Madrigals; From an Unknown Past. B. Wolf, mezzo; Ned Rorem, piano; Modern Madrigal Quartet. Phoenix PHCD 108 (CD reissue).

String Symphony, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Robert Shaw conductor; *Sunday Morning; Eagles*. Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Louis Lane conductor. New World 80353-2 (CD).

War Scenes; Five Songs to Poems; Four Dialogues for Two Voices and Two Pianos. A. Darian, soprano; J. Stewart, tenor; R. Cumming, Ned Rorem, piano. Phoenix PHCD 116 (CD reissue).

Winter Pages; Bright Music. Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival. New World 80416-2 (CD).

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THOMAS STACY has appeared as soloist with many major orchestras, including the National Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony, and the Louisville Orchestra, as well as in over 40 solo performances with the New York Philharmonic, where he has been resident English hornist since 1972. His appearances abroad include performances as soloist with the Bournemouth Sinfonietta and La Sinfonica Municipal in Caracas, a broadcast recital on Swedish Radio, and recitals in England. He often performs on all instruments of the oboe family--oboe, English horn and oboe d'amore. Mr. Stacy has been responsible for the greatly expanding repertoire for English horn, having himself premiered more than 25 new works. Among the composers who have written especially for him are Gunther Schuller, Vincent Persichetti, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, Bernard Hoffer, Calvin Hampton, Peteris Vasks, and Ned Rorem. Mr. Stacy is on the faculty of the Juilliard School and has presented master classes at London's Royal Academy of Music, the Conservatories of Moscow and St. Petersburg, and a week-long class in Stockholm for Scandinavian English hornists. Stacy's has recorded for CBS Masterworks, Spectrum, Deutsche Grammophon, Grenadilla, CRI, and London.

MICHAEL PALMER, conductor, is currently (1995) Music Director and Conductor of the New Haven Symphony Orchestra and The American Sinfonietta. He is also Music Director of the Bellingham Festival of Music in Bellingham, Washington. Mr. Palmer began his professional career as a conductor at age 21 with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Palmer has been a guest conductor with the National Symphony, the Houston Symphony, the Denver Symphony, the Rochester Philharmonic, the Kansas City Philharmonic, the Louisville Orchestra, and the Indianapolis Symphony, among others. Mr. Palmer has also served as Music Director and Conductor of the Wichita Symphony. His major teachers were Wolfgang Vacano, conducting and Alfonso Montecino and Martin Marks, piano. His major score studies were with teacher and conducting coach Julius Herford. Michael Palmer is a graduate of Indiana University.

THE ROCHESTER PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA was founded in 1922 by George Eastman as the Eastman Theatre pit orchestra. The RPO presents a wide variety of musical performances, including a Philharmonics series, a Pops series, the Casual Sunday Matinee Series, the orKIDStra Series, and a summer series at the Finger Lakes Performing Arts Center in Canandaigua, NY. In addition to concerts in Rochester and Canandaigua, the RPO has performed at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and concert halls along the Eastern Seaboard. The Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra reaches 100,000 children annually with its educational programs, which are designed to offer life-long learning. Such programs include free educational concerts for pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school students, and free community concerts throughout the region. The Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra has recorded for Mercury, Columbia, RCA Victor and Pro Arte. In the fall of 1994, the RPO released *Voice*s, a CD percussion concerti, featuring the percussion ensemble NEXUS.

Producer: Elizabeth Ostrow (*Concerto for English Horn and Orchestra*); Richard Gilbert (*Concerto for English Horn and String Orchestra*); Sydney Hodkinson (*The Edge of the Olde One*)

Engineer: Tom Lazarus (*Concerto for English Horn and Orchestra*); Bob Simpson (*Concerto for English Horn and String Orchestra*); Ros Ritchie (*The Edge of the Olde One*)

Assistant engineer: John Chiucholo (*Concerto for English Horn and String Orchestra*)

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**THOMAS STACY, English Horn
THREE CONCERTI 80489-2**

Ned Rorem (b. 1923)

1-5 *Concerto for English Horn and Orchestra* (publ. Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., ASCAP)

1 Preamble and Amble (4:40)

2 Love Letter (3:52)

3 Recurring Dream (4:32)

4 Perpetual Motion (3:00)

5 Medley and Prayer (6:28)

Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra; Michael Palmer, conductor

Vincent Persichetti (1915-1987)

6-8 *Concerto for English Horn and String Orchestra, Op. 137* (publ. Theodore Presser Co., ASCAP)

6 Con fantasia (8:53)

7 Amabile (6:17)

8 Spiritoso (8:25)

String Orchestra of New York; Vincent Persichetti, conductor

Sydney Hodkinson (b. 1934)

9 *The Edge of the Olde One* (publ. Theodore Presser Co., ASCAP) (24:39)

The Eastman Musica Nova; Paul Phillips, conductor

The Vincent Persichetti and Sydney Hodkinson recordings were originally released on Grenadilla Records LP GS-1048.

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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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