

The manifold beauties of the music of David Carlson are rooted in a lyrical-dramatic ethos and in the composer's assimilation of a vast arsenal of compositional techniques and musics which he crafts into an identifiably personal style. Carlson's receptivity to a wide range of influences informs much of his oeuvre, though with an assimilationist's sleight-of-hand, these devices are rarely overt and often yield themselves only upon analytical scrutiny. The range of possibilities in his stylistic universe may include a lifelong affinity for the music of Richard Strauss, Prokofiev, Berg, and Gershwin; his deployment of serialism and modernist processes such as microtones, extended instrumental techniques, electronic sampling, and minimalist techniques; his embracing of musics of the Far East and the American West; and his appropriation of medieval plainsong or Renaissance polyphony. Yet the overriding sensibility in his music is a richly poetic one, stylistically cohesive and unflinchingly communicative, with lucid musical arguments and a profusion of arresting ideas.

Born in Ventura, California in 1952, Carlson attended the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music during high school, and in 1971 enrolled at the California Institute of the Arts, becoming a member of the institution's inaugural class at the new Valencia campus. Carlson studied piano and composition, and immersed himself in an interdisciplinary curriculum of art, theatre, dance, and film. The institution stressed the experimental and the avant-garde in all the arts--the music faculty at that time included Morton Subotnick, Mel Powell, Earle Brown, and Leonard Stein--as well as the study of world musics and art forms. Carlson's attraction to the operatic medium stems from these formative studies and also informs his present mission: to apply elements from his palette as necessary to achieve his artistic vision in creating music that is expressive and immediate. In 1978, Carlson won the Omaha Symphony's new music competition with his *Quixotic Variations*, an orchestral work based on twenty measures of Strauss' *Don Quixote*, the atonal section depicting the bleating of sheep. Since that premiere, Carlson has written in a variety of genres including, notably, opera in addition to chamber and orchestral music. In 1978, Carlson moved to San Francisco where he worked for the San Francisco Symphony as an administrator from 1981 to 1991, serving as coordinator of the San Francisco Symphony's acclaimed "New and Unusual Music" concert series from 1988 to 1991.

This disc presents a selection of Carlson's orchestral music: four pieces ranging from 1979 to 1996. The most recent, *Symphonic Sequences from Dreamkeepers*, has its genesis in the Utah Opera's commission for a work to celebrate the 1996 centenary of the statehood of Utah. Carlson's opera, to a libretto by Aden Ross, explores the cultural dissonance between American Indian and Anglo cultures and is set on a Ute Indian reservation, the Ute nation being one of Utah's indigenous peoples. The protagonist is a young Ute woman, Ela Colorow, who has repudiated much of her native heritage. Her grandmother, the tribe's shamanistic healer, dies and subsequently appears as a benevolent entity in the Spirit World--the world of the unconscious. When Ela's Anglo lover, Adam, is rendered unconscious in a car accident, Ela sets forth on a self-actualizing odyssey through the Spirit World to find and save him. The opera also introduces the antagonistic Sloane, in Act I a United States government agent for the Ute reservation. He reappears in several guises in Act II--as Gatekeeper of the Spirit World; as personifications of the Ute tribe's historical enemies--forces such as European religion and the Anglo educational system that have attempted to eradicate Ute ways of life and culture--and as Self-Betrayal, the formidable enemy within.

The opera's creation entailed an extensive collaboration with members of the Ute tribe, who worked to ensure Ute culture was represented accurately within the framework of the operatic tradition. Apropos the musical setting, Carlson borrowed rhythmic elements from Ute songs and included in the orchestration authentic Ute instruments--several Ute drums, a Ute rasp, and a Ute river-cane flute to simulate the sacred eagle-bone whistle--subtly integrated into the opera's sound world.

Symphonic Sequences from Dreamkeepers is a distillation of the opera's opening and of scenes in Act II, paralleling portions of the opera's plot, and organized as an orchestral tone poem with an underlying narrative. The initial tableau depicts a sunrise, the rays of light hitting petroglyphs on sandstone. The crest of the crescendo brings six measures from the opening of Act II, the Spirit World, where Adam's wrecked car is revealed, floating upside down. The Spirit World motif is an inversion of music associated with one of the opera's most potent symbols, the eagle feather; the upside-down version of the eagle-feather music symbolizes the distorted reality of the subconscious. This is but one example of serialized material Carlson employs in the opera (and in much of his music), which he uses structurally and ornamentally, sometimes rigidly organized, or, as here, treated with greater freedom. The measured tread of the following episode is taken from the schoolroom scene, where Sloane, as the Examiner, forces Ela to pull a sledge full of rocks as punishment for her refusal to speak English. The interjections of contrasting material in the woodwinds and celesta represent Gwi-yah-gyat (Bear, the teacher of strength and wisdom in Ute culture) and Yo-gor-vich (the trickster Coyote, teacher of laughter in the face of adversity and death), who encourage Ela in her distress and affect her deliverance from the Examiner.

The music dissolves cinematically to a moment of silence and the next scene ensues, that of an operating room. Bold chords in the woodwinds, brass, and metal percussion--this is Adam's theme--introduce a heart monitor (dampened glockenspiel struck with metal beaters) and Adam's faltering heartbeat (vibraphone and harps). The brusque crescendos of a cardiac defibrillator fail to revive the patient who, symbolically, dies. The EKG's flat response dovetails with the appearance of Grandmother's spirit, clothed in music of impressionistic delicacy. A fortissimo chord signals Ela's emergence from a series of trials as she now confronts her greatest obstacle, Sloane as Self-Betrayal. Sloane's music is ominous and funereal.

Two extended lyric sections follow--music from Ela's "Jurisdiction" aria, the emotional centerpiece of the opera and final stage of her quest; and Grandmother's goodbye to Ela and Adam as they return to the overworld. Between the two arias comes Ela's ultimate triumph over her personal inner struggles (the tempo accelerates to Allegro after a truncated crescendo), and the serene call of a Ute eagle-bone whistle, signifying Ela's attainment of selfhood. The final tableau is a celebratory Ute Bear Dance, with which the opera concludes.

Written in 1979, the Cello Concerto No. 1 is the earliest work included here. (A second cello concerto was commissioned and premiered in 1997, nearly two decades after the first.) Cello Concerto No. 1 is scored for an orchestra that includes woodwinds and horns (but no other brass), strings, timpani, a battery of mostly "ringing" metallic percussion, harp, celesta, and prepared piano. The solo cello and prepared piano are amplified. The piece conjures up an atmosphere of incantatory mystery and ritual, and throughout its twenty-minute discourse transmutes in temperament from disquietude to tranquillity. The piece is born out of silence: Strings and clarinets, barely audible, create a febrile layer of sound, the violins and violas undulating between quarter-tone pitches. Fragmented gestures gradually become more and more palpable, with, at first, lambent flickerings in the oboe; from the other woodwinds and celesta come whispers, skitterings, snatches

of melody, and other aural phenomena. This environment of “forest murmurs” begets the solo cello, whose presence is manifested through a single long-sustained note. The cello plunges into agitato figurations which soon broaden into a ruminative melody. What evolves next is a stylized gamelan effect assembled from the metallic percussion, harp and prepared piano. The solo cello assumes the role of a Javanese *rebab*, a two-stringed spike fiddle. In Javanese gamelan ensembles, the *rebab*'s function is to provide melodic improvisation, and the cello here does likewise; the material it plays, however, is precisely notated. The principal ideas of the concerto have now been set in motion, and the piece concerns itself with working out these ideas in inventive and engaging ways. After a cadenza, the gamelan returns and ushers in a long lyrical section marked *Adagio espressivo*, the music now becalmed and confident. More mysterious flickerings, a touch of *agitato* material, and a last fleeting glimpse of the gamelan prepare the final cadence.

Rhapsodies and *Twilight Night* date from the late 1980s, both pieces written at the request of the San Francisco Symphony. The orchestra premiered *Rhapsodies* in 1987; *Twilight Night* was commissioned in 1988, and the following year received its premiere by the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra. During the latter half of the 1980s, Carlson's primary compositional preoccupation was expanding the limits of expressivity and lyricism in his music. Correspondingly, a lyric element is prominent in both pieces.

Rhapsodies is a set of four aria-like sections linked by material derived from the opening motive in the timpani--a motive perhaps best described as a musical heartbeat. The connected lyrical segments allude more to the songs of ancient Greek rhapsodists than to the effusive nineteenth-century genre. In keeping with the bardic character of the work, a vocal quality pervades much of the music and the harp is given a prominent role throughout. The piece presents the sound world of Carlson's first opera, *Sebastian* (Saint Sebastian), and is in fact based on sketches from the opera. (The orchestral score of *Sebastian* was destroyed in San Francisco's 1989 earthquake.) An important unifying element of *Rhapsodies* is the use of a twelve-tone row on which *Sebastian* is based, here used in various permutations in combination with traditional harmonic materials. *Rhapsodies* is further characterized by vibrant textures, evocative scoring, and richly hued harmonies, the overall effect being that of a virtually seamless flow of iridescent colors gradually mounting in intensity. Following the fourth and final “aria,” the piece reaches its culmination in a shower of kaleidoscopic brilliance.

Twilight Night is a study in orchestral color and texture. Carlson's intent was to write a piece exploring the lustrous hues of the blue-purple end of the spectrum and to capture the various intensities of these colors. He also wished to suggest the ambience of a twilit sky, and by imbuing the work with tinges of portent, to connote twilight in its metaphorical sense--that of a period of decline or the waning of a civilization. *Twilight Night*'s crepuscular imagery is rendered through timbral shadings, muted passages, and plangent solos. Twice the piece rises to peaks of great power. The work's Romantic spirit belies the rigidity of its serialized underpinnings. Expressive nuances are meticulously and liberally indicated in the score, this being a primary *raison d'être* of the piece. The ebb and flow of melody--luminous, evanescent, luxuriant--render this work an exquisitely refined and heartfelt utterance of musical poetry.

—Ronald Gallman

Ronald Gallman, *the San Francisco Symphony's Director of Education*, has written articles for the *San Francisco Symphony*, *San Francisco Opera*, *New York Philharmonic*, and *Opera Theatre of Saint Louis*, among others. He is a noted lecturer for the *San Francisco Symphony*, and has given talks for the *New World Symphony*, *San Francisco Opera*, the *University of California at Berkeley*, and the *American Symphony Orchestra League*.

Founded in 1940, the **Utah Symphony** has forged a vital presence in the American music scene through its distinctive performances worldwide and its well-known recorded legacy. The orchestra became recognized as a leading ensemble largely through the efforts of Maurice Abravanel, its music director from 1947 to 1979. Under his direction the orchestra made first recordings of works by Varèse, Milhaud, Gottschalk, Honegger, and Satie, as well as the first complete cycle of Mahler symphonies. Under Joseph Silverstein, music director since 1983, the orchestra has continued its commitment to the music of our time, having premiered and recorded a number of American works. The Utah Symphony Orchestra performs in Maurice Abravanel Hall, which has won several awards for its extraordinary acoustics. The orchestra accompanies the Utah Opera in four productions per year; with its many subscription concerts, in addition to educational concerts and tours, it is one of the busiest orchestras of its size in the nation.

Stewart Robertson, a native of Scotland, attended the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Bristol University. He studied conducting under Otmar Suitner at the Salzburg Mozarteum and Hans Swarowsky at the Vienna Academy, where he graduated with highest distinction. Early in his career he was music director of the Zurich Ballet and the Scottish Opera Touring Company. Since 1988, he has been Music Director and Principal Conductor of New York's Glimmerglass Opera and, since 1989, California's San Bernardino Symphony. During his ten-year tenure as Music Director of the Santa Fe Symphony, he premiered many new works, including David Carlson's Cello Concerto No. 1. Mr. Robertson has earned praise as an interpreter of contemporary music, and has conducted and recorded the world premieres of many symphonic and stage works. An accomplished pianist and a writer and lecturer on music, Stewart Robertson is equally facile as conductor of both operatic and symphonic music. His recent theater engagements have included the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Florida Grand Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, among many others; his symphonic engagements include the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and BBC Scottish Symphony, and the orchestras of Mexico City, Ukraine, and Buenos Aires, as well as many American orchestras. In 1998, he will conduct the New York City Opera in a production of Britten's *Paul Bunyan*, to be broadcast on PBS's *Live from Lincoln Center*.

Emil Miland made his solo debut with the San Francisco Symphony at the age of 16. That same year he was selected to perform in Rostropovich's master classes at the University of California, and was awarded a year of private study with William Pleeth in London. His other teachers have included Sally Kell, Milly Rosner, Margaret Rowell, Bonnie Hampton, and Colin Hampton. He graduated with honors from the New England Conservatory, where he was a student of Laurence Lesser. As a member of the Conservatory's Scholarship String Quartet he received the Henri Dutilleux Medaille d'Honneur. He has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and Chamber Music America. In addition to his positions with the San Francisco Opera and as principal cellist of the New Century Chamber Orchestra, Emil Miland is a noted soloist and chamber musician. He has recorded for the Decca/Argo and New Albion labels. A champion of new music, he has premiered four of David Carlson's works: Cello Concerto No. 1, *Nocturno* for cello and eight-part male chorus, Sonata for Cello and Piano, and most recently, the Cello Concerto No. 2.

In *Symphonic Sequences from Dreamkeepers*, the Ute eagle-bone whistle (played on a river-cane flute) is performed by Aldean Ketchum

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DAVID CARLSON (b. 1952) 80496-2
UTAH SYMPHONY STEWART ROBERTSON, Conductor
Joseph Silverstein, Music Director

- 1 *Symphonic Sequences from Dreamkeepers* (21:04)
- 2 Cello Concerto No. 1 (20:28)
Emil Miland, cello
- 3 *Rhapsodies* (13:20)
- 4 *Twilight Night* (8:03)

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