

**ASCHAFFENBERG
LONDON
MILLER
A Hero of Our Time**

New World Records 80511

Based on powerful positive/negative impulses still being directed into receptive musical space in continual blazing hurtle, the nineteenth century, such as it seems to have been when viewed from within, and not without its grand artistic visage, can't be falling into real time desuetude just yet.

How can the future be faced, it has often been asked, if there has not been a coming to terms with the past? Precisely, one muses, by straddling the most impertinent issues in a quasi-literal manner. Are the conjectures true that Beethoven, the prototypical industrial revolutionary, can be rolled over, his share of the illusory proceeds being imparted through an intricate and selfless act of biogenetic creative friction into incredible speculative legacies designed for insiders chosen from generations yet to come (who hold, incidentally, and this is important, the right metaphorical lottery ticket for redemption of a considerable amount of residual goodies)? This question is posited (matter of fact, honest to God) as explicitly to the max as is redeemable for our present millennial state—one can go no further than to suggest the ancillary notion that respect does not necessarily constitute retroactive immortality.

That said, it will become clear that the three composers represented on this disc, for reasons that may be different, are in a metaphysical position, at least herein, of *making music out of music*. The music they replicate and parody in spirit and/or sincerely recycle in actuality is what can, in common parlance, be referred to in this specific case as of, if not in, the nineteenth-century style; this referential and becoming-more-common operative technique is actively useful and dependent on a revolving orbit of perpetual replenishment. There is a rationale for it, but assuredly, no need for apologia!

In addition to that, and by no means merely incidental, the three composers, Aschaffenburg, Miller, and London, have been good friends for a long time. This elevates the project to a higher level of Harmon muted significance. The musical arguments that have raged sotto voce between them through the years have settled into a series of independent artistic statements that have common musical attributes amid a diversity of personal commitment. The opportunity in 1994 to record three orchestral works composed by these living American artists, with the Russian State Symphonic Capella, was a real fortification of a brew of intriguing and resounding effervescence. The orchestral ensemble, earlier known as the Orchestra of the Ministry of Culture, has a distinguished history of artistic accomplishment under its former director, Gennadi Rozhvestskensky. Proud of its reputation, but living in a period of difficult readjustment, the RSSC came to grips with new music from another psychic venue with grace and acumen. Some of the music, composed with less-than-conventional notation, proved at first to be troublesome for the orchestra, combined with the difficulties of functional on-the-spot Russian-English translation. But anyone being present and observing the tumultuous and spontaneous reaction from the instrumentalists to the first complete successful run-through could not fail to be caught up in a touching and meaningful moment.

It is now a hundred years since the death of Brahms. Orchestras of the twentieth century have surely witnessed the oppressive and inhibiting effect of the nineteenth-century repertory on composers of their own generation, and are at times now responding positively, it would seem, to suggestions that signal a rapprochement. That it is turning out this way is a good omen. In effect, these efforts represent the needs of all parties—composers, players, and audience. Instrumentalists are as sensitive (if not always as sympathetic) as the composers are to a condition that for so long a time ruled out a confluence of mutual intentions; foreclosure on brittle artistic institutions will enrich no one, unless hallowed but unused concert halls are demolished willy-nilly by greedy land predators to provide upscale high-rises. In the years since such as Brahms, Strauss, and Mahler flourished as living and contemporary composers, the alienation of those who followed may finally have found natural correctives in the development of a new music that grows out of the old. How to reconnect organically in the orderly evolution of the art of music without abandoning twentieth-century practice (and not be accused of freeloading at the trough of the public domain) is not an impertinent question to ask.

There was a temptation, following the powerful impression made in recent years on an ordinarily skeptical observer (a crumbled wall—["it's only a Paper Moon"] and by the TV photo-op contemporaneity of Yeltsin on a tank and Gorbachev returning to Moscow from house arrest ["hanging over a cardboard sea"], to react with irony ["just as phony as it could be"]). It was an inviting setup to use the musical post-toast of an inevitably fading modernism as successor to the useful pedantricks of manifold serial stipulations: as good as gold for a musico-gestural posture to chime in with heady satirical effect: a ("honky-tonk parade") heh-heh-heh hero, huh?

But there was an even more powerful urge, which is likely to be labeled derisively ("a melody played on a penny arcade") by the pundits of chic ("it's a Barnum and Bailey world") as counterrevolutionary. This was an impulse ("it wouldn't be make believe") attempting a direct reconnection in its own terms with the nineteenth-century tradition of tragic-rhythm heroes such as Beethoven's *Coriolan*, Schumann's *Manfred* and Brahms's nameless *Tragic*, to name just a few. It proved to be a long and frustrating search, a colossal stretch, if you will, of unresolved connections. In what might have been a free market of aesthetic ideas many, if not most, would-be composers had been instructed, as had been their teachers, with the dogma of historical determinism: a sermon preached that one must compose in a sort of progressively developing complexity in order to be in tune with the times.

The three musical essays found on this disc represent activity in pursuit of a reconnected and reconstructed circumstance, one which acknowledges the madness and mayhem of the past, even as it cherishes its romantic beauty; no matter what one wills, each age invents its own complexity with which to grapple.

Walter Aschaffenburg was born in Germany in 1927. He emigrated to the United States in 1938. He served in the American army during World War II with the counter-intelligence corps. He entered Oberlin College in 1947, where he studied composition with Herbert Elwell. His master's degree was earned at the Eastman School, where his principal teacher was Bernard Rogers. Later he studied with Luigi Dallapiccola in Florence. His thesis, *Ozymandias*, was performed by the Eastman-Rochester Symphony Orchestra with Howard Hansen conducting. Stokowski later gave performances of the work with the Cleveland Orchestra. Aschaffenburg joined the faculty at

Oberlin in 1953, where he taught for 35 years. He has been honored with grants, prizes, commissions and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Huntington Hartford Foundation, the Fromm Foundation, and others. He is perhaps best known for his opera based on Melville's *Bartleby*, with a libretto by Jay Leyda. Aschaffenburg writes of this concerto,

The Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra, Opus 25, began as an exercise for a composition class in October 1983. Since I had assigned the students to write a melody for a solo wind instrument, I felt obliged to do so myself. Accordingly, I wrote a "tune" for the oboe, and then put it aside. The idea, however, kept coming back to me, though I did not immediately know what to do with it. As has been the case with some of my compositions, the gestation period was relatively long. Eventually the idea grew and developed to become the present Concerto. The music was finished during the summer of 1985, and the full score was completed in July 1986.

The melody I had written is tonal, and even pentatonic. I resisted its tonal implications at first. Not until I observed that no nineteenth-century composer (to my knowledge) had written an oboe concerto, did I rationalize that I could do it for them. I should make clear, however, that stylistically my Concerto could not have been written in the nineteenth century nor in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, I was acutely aware that the oboe is essentially a lyrical instrument. These thoughts more or less explain the musical language of my Concerto.

The Concerto is in two movements connected by a cadenza. After the oboe has presented the principal melody referred to above, a number of additional ideas are introduced, namely a horn-call, a chorale-like passage, and a subordinate idea for the oboe. These materials are interchanged and freely restated and developed until a climax is reached with the chorale-like idea in the full orchestra, which then is followed by the cadenza.

The second movement is faster and somewhat agitated. In structure it resembles a Rondo. The principal idea of a steady rhythmic pattern (A) alternates with a more lyrical slower theme (B) in the oboe. After the climax, the opening idea of the concerto returns in considerably altered form, gradually winding down to a quiet and calm ending on the Concerto's tonal center, G. To this I have appended a closure consisting of my musical signature, i.e., my last name spelled in musical pitches, namely: AS=A-flat, C, H=B-natural, A, F, E, B=B flat, G; (there is no N, U, or R).

The Concerto was first performed by oboist James Caldwell and the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, conducted by Edwin London on January 25, 1987.

Edward J. Miller was born in 1930. He received his baccalaureate degree from the University of Miami at Coral Gables in 1953, after which he worked at the Hartt School of Music, where his composition studies were with Arnold Franchetti and Isadore Freed. He studied later with Boris Blacher in Berlin and Carlos Chavez at Tanglewood. He has received awards, prizes, fellowships and commissions from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the

Fulbright Commission, the Koussevitsky Foundation, and others. His principal publisher is American Composers Edition. He has had performances by the Minnesota Orchestra, the Cleveland Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, the Buffalo Orchestra, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Indianapolis Symphony, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, and others. Miller has been on the faculty at Oberlin College Conservatory since 1971. About his work recorded on this disc, Miller writes:

Anacrusis was commissioned by the Symphony Society of Greater Hartford and the Connecticut Arts Council for the bicentennial year (1976). The commission was specified to be first on the program. Conductor Arthur Winograd informed me that the rest of the program was to include the Ravel Piano Concerto in G and the first symphony of Gustav Mahler. The title of the piece represents a much-expanded anacrusis, an entire composition, for the Ravel and Mahler that follow. Fragments of the Ravel and Mahler are incorporated in the fabric of the piece. It closes as the first movement of the Mahler begins. It is dedicated to my wife, Judi.

Anacrusis is a composition that consists of drones, partials, and fragments. The term "anacrusis" means the note or notes preceding a "downbeat" that follows. Drone is a monotonous tone, humming, or buzzing sound. Partial is one of the pure tones forming part of a complex tone. Fragment is a part broken off or detached. *Anacrusis* is approximately ten minutes in duration. The four sections (A, B, C, D) are in the proportion of 3, 2, 1, and 4 minutes. Each of the four sections contains three sustained pitches (a set of drones), which represent the tonal centers of that section. The three drones in each set are a perfect fifth apart. The second set is a minor tenth lower than the first, the third set is a minor tenth lower than the second, and the fourth set, a minor tenth lower than the third. Each section contains other pitches (partials) which are harmonically related to the drones. The amount of partials increase in every successive section.

Edwin London is the founder (1980) and music director of the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, and has twice earned the John S. Edwards award for Creative Orchestral Programming, as well as recognition from the American Music Center and the American Composers Alliance. He was born in Philadelphia in 1929 and began his career as a French hornist, playing principal horn in the Orquesta Sinfonica de Venezuela and other ensembles, including the Oscar Pettiford Birdland Band. A graduate of Oberlin College, he received his doctorate from the University of Iowa, where he studied with P. G. Clapp and Philip Bezanson. Later studies were with Darius Milhaud, Luigi Dallapiccola, and Gunther Schuller. He is recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship and other honors. He has taught at Smith College and the University of Illinois, and since 1978 has been Professor of Music at Cleveland State University.

Gorbachev! Yeltsin! Why not give their political/personal actions some deservedly credible thought, some elevated consideration as heroic symbols of our time? Maybe it will not be necessary, as it was for Beethoven, to tear up the inscription, just because we may hear of their human corruptibility. That should not invalidate the quest for true heroic qualities. I was influenced, too, by a reading of the novel, *A Hero of Our Time*, written in 1839 by Mikhail Lermontov (1814-41), in the translation by Vladimir

Nabokov in collaboration with Dmitri Nabokov. There is no attempt to mirror the action of the novel in any literal sense. Lermontov writes in his Author's Introduction: "*A Hero of Our Time*, gentlemen, is indeed a portrait, but not of a single individual; it is a portrait composed of all the vices of our generation in the fullness of their development. You will tell me again that a man cannot be as bad as that; and I shall tell you that, since you believed in the possibility of so many tragic and romantic villains having existed, why can you not believe in the reality of Pechorin?"

The composition of *A Hero of Our Time* was started in May 1991 and completed in April 1992. It was commissioned by the Fromm Foundation at Harvard University for performances by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Jesus Lopez-Cobos. The composer offers the work as "a respectful memorial to Paul Fromm: His vision continues to light the way." The first performances were on September 25 and 26, 1992.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Walter Aschaffenburg:

Conversations. W. Cosand, piano. Summit DCD 154.

Edwin London:

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TWO A'Marvell's FOR WORDS. P. Larson, bass-baritone; Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, conductor. GM 2045.

Edward Miller:

Beyond the Wheel. Kay Stern, violin; Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, conductor. GM 2045.

Fantasy-Concerto. Howie Smith, alto saxophone; Oberlin Wind Ensemble, Robert Ponto, conductor. Opus One CD 154.

Going Home. L. McDonald, clarinet; P. Takacs, piano. Opus One 138.

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A HERO OF OUR TIME 80511-2

Walter Aschaffenburg (b. 1927)

1 Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra (unpubl., Walter Aschaffenburg) (20:51)

Elizaveta Zuyeva, oboe; Russian State Symphonic Capella; Edwin London, conductor

Edward Miller (b. 1930)

2 *Anacrusis* (unpubl., American Composers Alliance) (11:32)

Russian State Symphonic Capella; Edwin London, conductor

Edwin London (b. 1929)

3 *A Hero of Our Time* (publ. C. F. Peters Corp.) (20:07)

Russian State Symphonic Capella; Edwin London, conductor

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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
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