

If the striving for originality is as old as art itself, surely the music of our day reflects unprecedented extremes in the pursuit of that goal. Not so long ago, the term "stylistic diversity" might have brought to mind Gershwin, Prokofiev, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky. Today, however, it is a code that enjoins us to dismiss traditional aesthetic standards in favor of an inclusiveness which replaces critical thinking with a sentiment of accommodation.

Multicultural and populist dogma militate against artistic hierarchy—as if Western art had not long been fascinated with the culture of distant peoples and dependent on our own folkloric roots. Ironically, these once radical-seeming ideologies have spawned an outpouring of blatantly commercial work, legitimized by cause, context, or simply the newly sanctified virtue of wide public acceptance.

Up to the present time, artistic innovation has grown out of a reverence for the past. In this self-preoccupied age, however, our formidable cultural legacy can represent a discomfiting reminder; thus has cultural amnesia abetted both the radical and the reactionary "new."

Happily, there continue to be artists who demand nothing less of themselves than what they admire of the glorious past. They seek, in the words of Arnold Schoenberg, "to find the form in which the laws of earlier art can be applied to the new." As to "innovation," they have no control over whether their work will break new ground. They offer the totality of their experience through their work, a product of countless influences chosen, metabolized, reinvented. They deeply aspire to communicate, but do not, cannot, create simply to please an audience. They are, according to Schoenberg, "creators who must open the valves in order to relieve the interior pressure of a creation ready to be born."

The interior pressure that exerts its force on Stephen Hartke's creative impulses has been formed by a wide range of musical experience. Born July 6, 1952, in Orange, New Jersey, Hartke was raised in Manhattan, where he began his musical career as a professional boy chorister. As a choir member of the Church of the Transfiguration (The Little Church Around the Corner) he sang with the New York Pro Musica, the Metropolitan Opera, and the New York Philharmonic. This early experience engendered in Hartke a deep and abiding love for early vocal and instrumental music. His work can conjure up the mystery and ritual of ancient musical times. He is an expert polyphonist, yet equally confident in the sparest of textures.

These affinities he shares with his spiritual mentor, Stravinsky, from whom—at the risk of indulging in what Ravel termed "the favorite game of amateurs: discovering musical reminiscences"—it would appear Hartke has assimilated a fondness for subtle shifts in block harmonies, a gifted passion for the layering of orchestrational textures often displayed through artfully handled repetition, and finally, a playful, unpretentious rhythmic vitality. These last attributes may also be said to be descriptive of American popular forms, and why not? Indeed, it might one day be said of both Hartke and Stravinsky: Here were two highly absorptive musical personalities who knew a good thing when they heard it!

The first sounds on this CD demonstrate a gift for musical piracy that would have had the Russian

master beaming with pride. Evoking the image of the rock drummer firing up the band, four clicking pairs of drumsticks held high over the percussionists' heads signal the opening of this thematically driven Concerto for Violin and Orchestra. What follows, however, are not the reductionist vulgarities of a post-modern vernacularist, but a tightly argued three-part movement reminiscent of the Italian Baroque concerto. The violinist's opening dance-like solo confirms and develops the insouciant spirit of this movement, intended as a musical portrait of violinist Michelle Makarski, for whom the piece was originally composed.

Of the ensuing music, Hartke writes:

The orchestra gradually joins in, arranged in choral groups: high string harmonics, low brass chords, piccolos, and violins, each playing material unique to that instrument and each with a slightly different idea of where the downbeat is. The violin dances on above this shifting background, sometimes leading the dance, at other times picking up an idea from the orchestra and veering off with it in a new direction. The middle section begins with a slow series of quiet chords, moving from strings to mallet percussion to winds and, finally, to low horn, tuba, and basses. A recurrent four-note rhythmic figure in timpani and contrabassoon might be heard as an echo of the four opening drumstick strokes. The violin sings a long, arching melody in double-stops, and then leads on to a series of progressively faster sections, each of which has something of the character of a variation on the preceding one. This process culminates in a sudden explosion of rattles, clearing the way for the final section. Marked "*quasi una cadenza*," the last part opens with a spirited exchange between the soloist and entire orchestra, as if the violin were challenging the orchestra to a musical duel. The soloist then rushes off in a new direction, the orchestra following with fragments from the first section, finally building to a fast coda.

With the dancing over now, in the second movement the soloist has become a traveler in a musical landscape, journeying home. The thematic basis for this movement is "Auld Swaara," a Shetland Island fiddle tune. A lament for a lost fisherman, it is traditionally played by Shetland fiddlers at day's end before putting the instrument away. In my piece, the tune appears at first in elusive fragments, gradually becoming clearer toward the end, when the violin plays it (or rather, my own free adaptation of it) in its entirety against a background of slowly drifting string chords that part for the soloist like clouds.

Hartke's Second Symphony bears the dedication "To *my* memory of my father," and was composed in the period following his father's death. To paraphrase Hartke, the Symphony is an essay on the tragedy of failure. In fact, the Greek tragedy was an important structural model for the work, conceived, despite its division into three movements, as a dramatic whole. The Symphony provides another important example of Hartke's thematic approach. The opening theme, played by solo violin and cello, is intended to evoke the Greek chorus in setting forth musical and dramatic elements whose conflicts drive the work's unfolding.

The composer continues:

The drama proper begins in a formal manner with a pavane. The episodes that follow

take up issues presented in the opening "narrative" and pass through considerable tumult to a quiet ending.

The second movement begins with a short fanfare-like flourish. At first, this scherzo seems to be concerned with the quasi-fugal unfolding of a theme heard at the outset in the bassoons. But as the music continues, elements from the first movement infiltrate the texture, reasserting their dramatic conflicts. The opening flourish interrupts from time to time, as if to return the music to the subject of the bassoon's initial theme, but in the last measures this insistence yields to silence . . . a failed jump-start.

These two opening movements complete the main dramatic action, thus the third movement offers both final commentary and resolution to the conflicts presented. It is largely elegiac in tone. The principal musical material is a chorale, heard four times in all, though each time with a different melody above. Interspersed is a second chorale, played first by a string trio and later by the harp. A quite brief scherzo-like episode ushers in the concluding section, the centerpiece of which is a duo for horn and piano. And finally, at the close, one member of the first movement's duo, the cello, sings the peroration to the entire symphony.

Following the descriptions of the two major works in this collection, it becomes clear that a significant aspect of Hartke's multifaceted and complex musical personality has yet to be noted. Both the Concerto and the Symphony, by virtue of the grandness of their architecture and the public nature of their dramatic utterance, evidence a decidedly romantic artistic temperament. This is balanced, however, by the more Apollonian traits earlier described. The synthesis results in something quite fresh. To hear a new work of romantic tendencies that is neither coarse, hackneyed, nor lugubrious, but eloquent—now *that* is a rare experience!

Again and again, time has shown that "original" art, no matter how radical it at first appears, comes from somewhere and leads to something. Thus, the mystery and essence of our culture resides in its organic quality. As long as there remain artists who build on the past, our culture will flourish . . . we have no basis on which to think otherwise, after all.

—Anthony Korf

*Anthony Korf, co-founder, artistic director, and composer-in-residence of the Riverside Symphony, is also the founder and artistic director of the contemporary music ensemble Parnassus. He has been commissioned by the American Composers Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, and the Koussevitsky Foundation, and has also been awarded a Goddard Lieberon Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.*

**George Rothman**, the music director and conductor of the Riverside Symphony since its inception in 1981, was trained at the Manhattan School of Music, The Juilliard School, and the Tanglewood Music Center, where he worked with Leonard Bernstein and Seiji Ozawa. He has conducted more than one hundred premieres, local premieres of works by Prokofiev and Ravel, and revivals of important music from all periods. Increasingly in demand as a guest conductor, his recent appearances include the Dayton Symphony, the Sinfonia Orquestra da Campinas of Brazil, and the Shanghai Symphony. He will make his European debut with the South Jutland Symphony Orchestra

in 1998. Since 1988, Mr. Rothman has served as director of music performance at Columbia University and conductor of the university orchestra.

Violinist **Michelle Makarski** is known to audiences in North America and Europe as a concerto soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician. In 1989, she won first prize at the Carnegie Hall International American Music Competition, an event which brought her international attention. She has appeared as soloist with such orchestras as the Royal Philharmonic, the American Symphony Orchestra, the American Symphony Orchestra, the American Composers Orchestra, and the Atlanta Symphony, among others. An ardent interpreter of today's music as well as the standard repertoire, Ms. Makarski is active in the commissioning and of performance of new works. Her recordings include a debut CD on New World Records, a collaborative effort with Keith Jarrett on the ECM New Series label entitled *Bridge of Light*, and, on the same label, *Caoine*, a disc of unaccompanied violin works spanning three centuries.

The **Riverside Symphony** was co-founded in 1981 by George Rothman and Anthony Korf. Acclaimed by New York's most prominent critics for its performances of music from all periods, the Symphony counts among its membership the elite of New York City's most gifted instrumentalists. The Riverside Symphony's central focus is discovery—discovery of young artists, unfamiliar works by the great masters, and important new works by composers around the world. The orchestra provides a unique forum for emerging artists, and has presented countless award-winning young soloists in their New York orchestral debuts.

In addition to its annual series at Alice Tully Hall, the Riverside Symphony is in residence at Columbia University, where it performs an annual reading session for graduate composition students. In 1994, the Symphony launched its International Composer Reading Program, which combines works selected from a national competition for emerging composers with foreign works unknown in America. Two major grants from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation have added an international scope to the Symphony's active commissioning program, three works of which have been recorded for New World Records and Bridge.

### **SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY**

*Caoine*. Michelle Makarski, violin. ECM New Series 1587.

*Night Rubrics*. Angela Schwartz, cello. New World 80461-2.

*Oh Them Rats Is Mean in My Kitchen*. Michelle Makarski, Ronald Copes, violins. New World 80391-2.

Sonata-Variations. Ronald Copes, violin; James Bonn, piano. New World 80461-2.

*The King of the Sun*. The Dunsmuir Piano Quartet. New World 80461-2.

*Wir küssen Ihnen tausendmal die Hände*. Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Donald Crockett conducting.  
CRI CD 669

### **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Crockett, Donald. "Conversations in Los Angeles." *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 10 no. 1 (1994):  
American Composers: The Next Generation.

Schwartz, Elliott and Daniel Godfrey. *Music Since 1945*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1993.

Watkins, Glenn. *Pyramids at the Louvre*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994.

Producer: Adam Abeshouse (Concerto for Violin and Orchestra); Judith Sherman (Symphony No. 2)

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**STEPHEN HARTKE (b. 1952) 80533-2**

**RIVERSIDE SYMPHONY, George Rothman, conductor**

**Michelle Makarski, violin**

**Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, "Auld Swaara"**

1 I Allegro festivo—Lento calmato e misterioso—Subito andantino, scherzando—Con brio, liberamente, quasi una cadenza (15:29)

2 II "Auld Swaara"—Fantasy on a Shetland fiddle tune (Adagio sereno)

Michelle Makarski, violin (12:46)

**Symphony No. 2**

3 I Andante con moto (9:29)

4 II Scherzo: Molto vivace (5:12)

5 III Adagio sostenuto (11:38)

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