

**Works by ROBERT ERICKSON,
HARVEY SOLLBERGER,
PETER WESTERGAARD,
PHILLIP RHODES, and EDWIN DUGGER**

New World Records 80563

From refined formality to unpredictable unruliness, the character of the pieces in this recording illustrates the wide range of expression in American concert music of the 1960s. An emphasis on timbre and texture, a rigorous sense of form, and a demand for performer virtuosity characterize all five of these works. Otherwise, they explore strikingly diverse terrains.

Phillip Rhodes's *Duo for Violin and Cello* is an exploration of timbral eccentricities and special effects. Currently teaching at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, Rhodes was a student of Iain Hamilton, Donald Martino, and Mel Powell. The Duo emphasizes classical structure, moving from an introduction to a fugue, aria, cadenza, march (with trio), and coda. In contrast to the rapturous neo-Romanticism of Rhodes's larger, later, tonal works such as *Visions of Remembrance*, the Duo is nontonal, compact, and sharply focused—at least in its opening sections. Fierce accretions of energy followed by sudden disintegrations constitute the basic drama in the piece before its drift toward a more lyrical discourse and a serene close.

Harvey Sollberger describes his meticulously patterned *Grand Quartet for Flutes*, from 1962, as “dedicated to the memory of the German-Danish flutist-composer of the last century, Friedrich Kuhlau. The dedication of my quartet is my way of thanking the shade of Kuhlau for the pleasure his works have afforded me over the many years that I have played the flute.” Cofounder of the Group for Contemporary Music, a professor of music at the University of California at San Diego, and an active performer of new music, Sollberger invests his brief but multi-layered *Grand Quartet* with all manner of adventurous as well as traditional flute devices, including piercing trills, long chords, sudden melodic leaps, and rapidly alternating single notes. Like composers in the earlier period whom his Quartet recalls, Sollberger is intimately connected with his own music through his career as a performer. A distinguished flutist and conductor, he is an important initiator of a mid-century trend toward separating contemporary music ensembles—those comfortable with the unusual demands of the music—from the traditional concert world. Not surprisingly, he is one of the virtuoso players in the present performance.

A dramatic contrast to both works is the wildly expressionistic *Ricercar a 5 for Trombones*, written in 1966 by Robert Erickson. Born in Marquette, Michigan, Erickson was a student of Ernest Krenek and, like Sollberger, was a professor of music at the University of California at San Diego, where he taught until his death in 1997. As its title indicates, this work, written for Stuart Dempster (who is part of the trombone quintet in this recording) uses Baroque imitation among its five voices. It is a sonic adventure that revs up like multiple motorcycles—spitting, growling, whining, and finally, whispering. The five trombonists are required to sing, whistle, and bang as they play punishing fanfares, slides, and other devices. Their multiple trombone sonority has a sexy raspiness. Erickson's dark, multilayered polyphony conveys a powerful sense of mystery similar to the soundworld of Ligeti or Xenakis. This piece is avant-garde in the old sense—tough and challenging, but mischievous and fun.

A more delicate aesthetic whispers through Peter Westergaard's 1963 *Variations for Six Players*. Westergaard is the William Schubael Conant Professor of Music at Princeton University. He studied with a formidable group of teachers, including Walter Piston at Harvard, Darius Milhaud at the Paris Conservatoire, Roger Sessions at Princeton, and Wolfgang Fortner in Germany. The lonely cello sigh announcing the lyrical theme at the beginning of the Variations recalls none of these, however, so much as the haunting stillness of Webern. The second movement, full of agitated repeating notes, is a lively contrast. Throughout the first two movements, woodwinds, pizzicato pluckings, timpani blows, and chimes weave subtle transformations of the cello melody, often dispersing the tune, one note per instrument. Westergaard's penchant for "sonority matching" is apparent in a match-up of piano sound dampened by a finger on the string, timpani played with a soft-stick attack, and a low, non-vibrato clarinet. In the finale, the variations float by in a ghostly procession of expanding chords that are actually polyphonic lines sounding together.

Edwin Dugger's 1966 *Music for Synthesizer and Six Instruments* represents another development of the sixties avant-garde, experiments in electronic sound. As computers and synthesizers increasingly dominate pop idioms—often with a mechanical, homogenizing effect—it is useful to recall their poetic, largely unrealized potential. As a colorful example of their unresolved status in the past, Dugger's piece raises tantalizing questions: Is electronic sound the music of the future, or is it all too often, in Pierre Boulez's phrase, the music of science fiction? Do synthesizers constitute, as Edgard Varèse hoped, new materials for a new music, or do they merely enhance traditional ensembles with an illusion of revolutionary novelty?

Dugger's *Music for Synthesizer and Six Instruments* plays with all these possibilities. As with the other works on this recording, instruments imitate and blend into each other, distributing among themselves individual notes in the melodic line—yet the electronic element creates a different sound and sensibility. In the first movement, the instruments and synthesizer act independently, alternating in an antiphonal pattern that emphasizes the independence of each. Only in a single *tutti* shortly before the end do the two forces come together. In the somber second movement, the synthesizer and six instruments play simultaneously, reinforcing their similarities, teasing the ear into deciding just where electronic music ends and acoustic begins. In the finale, an elaborate cadenza for synthesizer alone steals the show. The expressive content is similarly varied: hisses, squawks, and gurgles—the loopy "science fiction" sound associated with electronic music—gradually elongate into a more chordal, lyrical discourse. A final sigh from the strings ends the music on a note of quiet mystery.

Indeed, most of these richly varied pieces move from agitation and aggression toward meditative repose. The listener's challenge, dealing with something new and difficult, is rewarded. Stay with the bumpy ride, these pieces seem to urge: We'll let you down gently at the end.

—Jack Sullivan

Jack Sullivan, *Chair of American Studies at Rider University, is the author of New World Symphonies: How American Culture Changed European Music.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Edwin Dugger:

Abwesenheiten und Wiedersehen. Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players, Jonathan Khuner conducting. CRI 378. (lp)

Intermezzi. San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, Jean-Louis LeRoux conducting. CRI 378. (lp)

Robert Erickson:

Dunbar's Delight. D. Dunbar, timpani. CRI CD 616.

General Speech. Stuart Dempster, trombone. New World 80541-2.

Kryl. Edwin Harkins, trumpet. CRI CD 616.

Postcards. Carol Plantamura, soprano; J. Hübscher, flute. CRI CD 616.

Phillip Rhodes:

Autumn Setting. Phyllis Bryn-Julson, soprano; Speculum Musicae String Quartet. CRI CD 758.

Divertimento. St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Dennis Russell Davies conducting. CRI CD 758.

Museum Pieces. James Livingston, clarinet; Louisville String Quartet. CRI CD 758.

Harvey Sollberger:

Angel & Stone. Harvey Sollberger, flute; Aleck Karis, piano. CRI CD 743.

Chamber Variations. Group for Contemporary Music, Gunther Schuller conducting. CRI CD 743.

Killapata/Chaskapata. New York Flute Club. CRI CD 561.

Life Study. Jubal Trio. CRI CD 738.

Sunflowers. Harvey Sollberger, flute; Claire Heldrich, vibraphone. New World 80541-2.

The Two and the One. New Music Consort. New World 80405-2.

Peter Westergaard:

Ariel Music. Maria Tegzes, soprano; Group for Contemporary Music, Michael Pratt conducting. CRI CD 696.

Mr. & Mrs. Discobolos. Valerie Lamoree, soprano; Jack Litten, tenor; Group for Contemporary Music, Harvey Sollberger conducting. CRI CD 696.

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Robert Erickson:

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Harvey Sollberger:

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Peter Westergaard:

Crumb, George. Peter Westergaard: Variations for Six Players. *Perspectives of New Music*, iii/2 (1965), 152.

Westergaard, Peter. Toward a Twelve-Tone Polyphony. *Perspectives of New Music*, iv/2 (1966), 90.

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Phillip Rhodes (b. 1940)

1 *Duo for Violin and Cello* (publ. C. F. Peters Corp.; BMI) (12:43)

I Introduction and Fugue, Cadenza (violin)

II Aria, Cadenza (cello)

III March (with "Trio"), Coda

Paul Zukofsky, violin; Robert Sylvester, cello

Harvey Sollberger (b. 1938)

2 *Grand Quartet for Flutes* (publ. Josef Marx Music Co.; BMI) (7:56)

David Gilbert, Thomas Nyfenger, Harvey Sollberger, Sophie Sollberger, flutes

Robert Erickson (1917-1997)

3 *Ricercar a 5 for Trombones* (publ. Smith Publ.; ASCAP) (12:39)

Stuart Dempster, Lawrence Dwyer, Frank Harmantas, Lynn Newton, Paul Vander Gheynst, trombones

Peter Westergaard (b. 1931)

4 *Variations for Six Players* (publ. ; BMI) (9:15)

The Group for Contemporary Music at Columbia University: Sophie Sollberger, flute and piccolo; Jack Kreielman, clarinet and bass clarinet; Raymond DesRoches, percussion; Jeanne Benjamin, violin; Fred Sherry, cello; Harvey Sollberger conducting

Edwin Dugger (b. 1940)

5 *Music for Synthesizer and Six Instruments* (ms; BMI) (6:58)

Robert DiDomenica, flute and piccolo; Peter Bowman, oboe; William Wrzesien, clarinet;
Max Winder, violin; Bernard Kadinoff, viola; Stephen Geber, cello; Charles Kiefer, tape; David
Epstein conducting

Originally released as Acoustic Research LPs 0654 084 (tracks 3, 5), 0654 087 (track 1), and 0654 088
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