

Harold Shapero was born on April 29, 1920, in Lynn, Massachusetts. Raised there and in Newton, another Boston-area suburb, he was already playing the piano at age seven. By the time he reached college, he had achieved a good bit more musically than most teenagers. This included theory and composition lessons with Nicolas Slonimsky and Ernst Krennek, piano studies with Eleanor Kerr and Manfred Malkin, and a small but promising portfolio of concert music written for string trio and solo piano, even extensive experience as a jazz pianist and arranger.

Shapero's undergraduate years at Harvard University (1937–1941) saw the young man's muse fall strongly under the spell of his teacher, Walter Piston, and the middle-period oeuvre of Igor Stravinsky, who had delivered the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at the school during the 1939–1940 academic year. Further studies with Paul Hindemith at Tanglewood (summers, 1940 and 1941) and Nadia Boulanger at the Longy School of Music (1942–1943) reinforced his stylistic inclinations within the then-dominant Neoclassic camp. Even at this time, Shapero was producing pieces far superior to those of the average music student. The sonatas for trumpet/piano duo and for piano four hands, the wind trio *3 Pieces for 3 Pieces*, the *String Quartet*, and the *Nine Minute Overture for Orchestra* in fact compare favorably to the finest works of the era.

The 1940s saw Shapero and his music gain much favorable attention. During this decade, he won nearly every major award a composer could hope for: the Rome Prize (1941—residency cancelled because of World War II), fellowships from the Naumburg (1942), Guggenheim (1947, 1948), and Fulbright (1948) foundations, the Joseph H. Bearn's (1948) and Gershwin Memorial (1946) Composition Prizes, and numerous residencies at the MacDowell Colony. His colleagues lavishly praised his work. Both Stravinsky and Aaron Copland considered him to be the most special talent among fledgling American composers of that time. Arthur Berger, in his article "Stravinsky and the Younger American Composers," included Shapero among his list of the most important adherents to the mid-century American Neoclassic movement along with himself, Ingolf Dahl, Irving Fine, Lukas Foss, Alexei Haieff, and Louise Talma. The flow of special music from his pen continued unabated, encompassing among other things a violin/piano sonata, a setting of E.E. Cummings' poetry for baritone and piano, a serenade for string orchestra, the *Three Sonatas for Piano*, and perhaps his best-known work, the *Symphony for Classical Orchestra*.

Compositional fashions do not remain stationary, of course, and the late 1940s witnessed radical changes. The ascendancy of non-scalar, non-triadic idioms, especially serialism as practiced by Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern, began to gain favor both in America and Europe. Shapero's Neoclassic colleagues and mentors reacted to this development in varied ways. Stravinsky, Copland, Talma, and Fine openly embraced serial techniques. Berger and Elliott Carter wrote music in uniquely personal styles that admitted high levels of dissonance without using dodecaphonic controls. Leonard Bernstein generally avoided these approaches, composing both concert music in a neo-Romantic manner that demonstrated jazz influences, and commercial fare for Broadway and film. Foss's explorations proved the most wide-ranging, experimenting with everything from extended instrumental techniques to chance operations. Still others, like Hindemith and Piston, stubbornly stayed put stylistically. Like his two former teachers, Shapero found himself highly resistant to this turn of events.

It was also during this time that he encountered notable career turbulence. Copland's 1948 words of praise for Shapero's music simultaneously featured a sharp stab of criticism, finding fault with its composer's supposed over-reliance on older models, a charge later echoed by Berger, Fine, and Wilfred Mellers. This notion was seemingly anticipated and, one might argue, refuted in advance by Shapero in his eloquent article "The Musical Mind." The composer's ambitious *Piano Sonata in F Minor* was greeted with hisses at its late 1940s New York premiere. Most importantly, Shapero's larger, more difficult works of the decade—entries which aficionados consider among his most significant—did not find performances and in some cases disappeared from publisher catalogs. The resulting lack of visibility and commercial success were extremely discouraging to the young composer. Nevertheless, he continued fulfilling modest commissions during the 1950s and early 1960s, producing a tonal-serial *Partita* for piano and small orchestra, the jazz study *On Green Mountain* for 13 players, the Renaissance-inflected *Two Psalms for Chorus*, and *Poems of Halevi*, a Hebrew cantata. Little music would appear during the following decades.

At this juncture, Shapero began a teaching career at Brandeis University that would continue for thirty-seven years. During that time, he reorganized the school's Electronic Music Studio and served as department chair from 1965 to 1969. A few more accolades would also come his way during this time: a second Fulbright Fellowship in 1960 and a stint as composer-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome in 1970–1971.

In 1988, the revival of his *Symphony for Classical Orchestra* by André Previn and the Los Angeles Philharmonic spearheaded a renewed interest in Shapero's long-neglected major works. Buoyed by the attention and eagerly embracing the then-novel computer notation technology, he released a revised, completed version of his *Concerto for Orchestra* and wrote a *Sinfonietta* and a *Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra*.

Fortunately, more frequent performances of Shapero's music have occurred since then. And his pieces have been reissued on compact disc, ready to be experienced by a new generation of listeners. Nevertheless, his vastly underrated portfolio today remains the great undiscovered treasure trove of stateside Neoclassicism.

The *String Trio*, completed in 1937 (not 1938, as is inscribed on some score copies), is a product of Shapero's high school tutelage as a Malkin Conservatory scholarship pupil under Ernst Klenk and is jointly dedicated to him and Nicolas Slonimsky. It was composed in approximately one week's time on his teacher's suggestion that Shapero look at Alban Berg's *Lyric Suite* and produce something like it. Not surprisingly, the influence of this piece and of Klenk, best remembered as an early champion of serial composition, are most keenly felt here. Despite this, the frequently read characterization of the work as a twelve-tone one requires some qualification. One does find dodecaphonic pitch collections throughout this feisty score, though they appear sporadically in the first movement and in a less-than-systematic fashion thereafter. No single generating row determines the content of all subsequently appearing pitch sets; movements two and three, while more strictly serial, are each based on different rows.

To succinctly illustrate this informality, the first dozen notes of the violin, viola, and cello parts in movement one consist of twelve discrete pitches each without constituting collections that have much in common with each other. But they do harbor motivic seeds that Shapero conspicuously explores later in the movement, most notably the prominent G-A-D trichord in the violin and the cello part's falling A-flat to D-flat, which hint at the numerous fourth- and fifth-based figurations heard in subsequent measures. In this movement, one also finds structural foreshadowing of Shapero's later Neoclassic output; here a ternary format is employed, with the opening viola melody making a recapitulatory appearance in the violin part approximately two-thirds of the way through. One also encounters snatches of canonic writing, something Shapero explores more thoroughly during the finale.

The multi-textured slow movement obliquely suggests a set of variations without delineating its divisions in an easily perceivable way. Despite a wide variety of dynamic levels and rhythmic gestures, as well as healthy dollops of silence scattered throughout, Shapero puts forth a convincing feel of expressive repose and an ably defined sense of direction. One also hears mild jazz influences in the chords utilized.

Fast repeated notes permeate the energetic finale, essentially a binary structure with a brief coda that states the two primary melodic ideas in combination. Here, the snatches of canonic writing found in the first movement attain full fruition. Shapero's accomplished handling of this imitative procedure in the extended run-up to the coda belies his tender years and is especially remarkable given his thus far modest compositional achievement.

In fact, the work as a whole transcends any lack of experience on its writer's part to become an effective, compelling listen. In no way is it a piece of forgettable juvenilia.

Written during Shapero's undergraduate years at Harvard and finished in 1941, the *String Quartet* bears a dedication to Walter Piston, his primary teacher during that time. Like the *Trio*, it's by and large an intense, edgy opus, but the sound world encountered is less clangorous, demonstrating kinship to Piston's oeuvre not only in its jagged rhythmic gestures but also in its non-triadic yet scalar harmonies built from stacked fifths. If this work is any indication, Shapero had by this time also acquired a knack for long-range gestural thinking during his lessons. And a budding fascination with reinterpreted classical forms begins to manifest itself in earnest, coloring not only his composing but also his prose writing. As Shapero put it, "I associate this music with work on my college thesis: *Twentieth Century Neo-Classicism*."

The opening movement, however, shows relatively little trace of this kind of structural thinking, instead loosely adhering to a ternary blueprint. It's also the most relaxed and lyric part of the piece. Here, one immediately encounters major thirds, the primary generative interval of the work, which here are linked by one or more minor thirds (the result often being a major-major seventh chord outline).

A crystal-clear sonata form is spelled out in movement two. In the first theme, the aforementioned major thirds expand by half-step to form perfect fourths. There is also a good bit of sophisticated combination of melodic ideas in the development section—and as if to underscore this fact, Shapero quotes a recognizable chunk of the subject from Bach's A-Minor Fugue from Book One of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

The major third idea comes forward most emphatically during the following slow movement, a clear-cut set of variations, one of which serves a recapitulatory function. As the movement unfolds, these major thirds alternate with minor thirds before culminating in a relaxed-sounding variation shot through with minor sixths—the inversion of this basic germ motif.

After such heavy reliance on major thirds so far, what can one do to sum up? Shapero's answer in the finale is strikingly inventive, yet eminently logical: Drop the idea entirely and concentrate on the two previously stated satellite intervals a half step on either side. Melodic ideas that are by turns filled with energetic stacked fourths and combine fourths with minor thirds in rising triplet rhythms—ideas respectively hale and lyric in feel—form the prongs upon which this sonata-form movement is based. The development section, entirely executed in pizzicato, provides a striking contrast to the intensely athletic bowed sections framing it.

Small wonder that this exciting, well-crafted selection helped win its composer the coveted American Prix de Rome. It remains a first-rate piece that deserves wider circulation.

Like Aaron Copland's *Sextet for Clarinet, Piano, and Strings*, the *Serenade in D* is a chamber arrangement of a large ensemble opus that was motivated by practical concerns. Completed in 1945 during one of Shapero's frequent MacDowell sojourns, it's a major entry from this composer's wartime-era output, ambitious in scope and sizable in duration. It's also extremely difficult to perform in its original incarnation as a string orchestra piece, which explains Shapero's wish to prepare this version for quintet in 1999. About this work, Shapero writes the following:

The score is dedicated to Nadia Boulanger, with whom I studied in 1941–42. I still remember the remarkable classes in which she performed the great Viennese string literature at the piano. She managed the most intricate string quartet passage-work in all details at the keyboard, and communicated the spirit of these works perhaps more precisely than string quartet players I have heard since then. The composition of my *Serenade* was greatly stimulated by these memorable experiences.

Here we find the composer at the height of his powers; the astringency of the *Trio* and raw drive of the *Quartet* give way to a manner of expression both urbane and supremely confident. While there's plenty of energy encountered here, it is channeled into delineating finely chiseled, often deliberate gestures that show an inimitable sense of self. Not unexpectedly, the work is unambiguously Neoclassic, more keenly aware of music from earlier eras than that of any other composer writing in this style.

Movement one commences with a rather somber slow introduction containing the initial melody of the following fast tempo section, a main portion that delineates a lucid sonata format. As in the other works heard on this release, Shapero indulges in extensive contrapuntal writing, with the development section featuring fugal episodes in its latter portion. Despite being notated in consistent 4/4 meter throughout, there's enough rhythmic sophistication here to rival Stravinsky.

As if to pointedly underscore the debt this work owes to older models, the second movement is cast as a ternary format minuet—a genre rarely encountered since Mozart's time. But like the third movement of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony, this entity has as much in common with robust scherzi as dignified court dances.

It is the elegantly expressive slow movement, a sonata-structured edifice, which most overtly puts forth the sort of luxuriant figuration typically associated with music of classical Vienna. This stately mood is broken significantly only once, at the development section's outset, where the heretofore mild-mannered gestures suddenly turn intensely forceful.

Subtitled “Intermezzo,” the ternary-constructed fourth movement evokes echoes of Brahms’s essays in this genre. Its mysterious, ghostly mood is reinforced not simply by the utilization of muted strings, but also through employment of restlessly shifting meters and hushed dynamic levels. It proves an ideal preface to the finale, a movement that leavens its angular vigor with a certain studied perkiness. The form used, a rondo with sonata-derived modifications (ABACABcoda), is clearly, yet cleverly expressed.

The *String Trio*, the *String Quartet*, the *Serenade in D*—this special triumvirate encompasses a uniquely broad-based introduction to Shapero’s compositional thought processes. In this welcome release, the record-listening public is afforded an excellent opportunity to experience first-hand these important examples from his infrequently encountered body of work.

—David Cleary

Composer/critic David Cleary has written reviews for the *Boston Herald*, *New Music Connoisseur*, and *All Music Guide to Rock*, CD liner notes for CRI, and articles for *Women and Music in America Since 1900* (Greenwood Press) and *The Performing Arts Career Directory* (Gale Research).

Born in 1920, **Harold Shapero** has lived most of his life in the Boston area, graduating from Harvard University in 1941. Shapero has studied composition with Nicolas Slonimsky (1936), Ernst Klenk (1937), Walter Piston (1938), Paul Hindemith (1940), and Nadia Boulanger (1942). He was composer-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome in 1970. As a composer, he has earned the Rome Prize, the Beams Prize, a Naumburg Fellowship, two Guggenheim Fellowships, and a Fulbright Fellowship. A fine pianist, he has given premieres of most of his keyboard and chamber works. Mr. Shapero has received commissions from the Koussevitsky Foundation, the Houston Symphony Orchestra, the American Jewish Tercentenary, the Louisville Symphony Orchestra, the Ford Foundation, and George Balanchine and the New York City Ballet Company. A recent revival of his *Symphony for Classical Orchestra* by conductor André Previn has led to performances of this work by the Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Jacksonville, and London Symphony Orchestras. For more than thirty years Shapero served on the music faculty at Brandeis University, directing its Electronic Music Studio and teaching theory and composition. Currently retired, he lives in Natick, Massachusetts.

The **Lydian String Quartet** (Daniel Stepner and Judith Eissenberg, violins; Mary Ruth Ray, viola; Rhonda Rider, cello), in residence at Brandeis University, was founded in 1980. The ensemble has won a number of prizes at international competitions in France, Canada, and England, as well as the prestigious Naumburg Award for Chamber Music. The group has appeared in major concert venues in England, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Russia, Armenia, and throughout the United States. The Lydian String Quartet has earned a reputation as an important advocate of new music, and has received a number of ASCAP/Chamber Music America Awards for Adventurous Programming, combining classical repertoire with recently composed music. In the spring of 2000, the Lydians completed a five-year “American Originals” project, during which more than sixty American works were performed or recorded. There followed a one-year survey of quartets celebrating Jewish culture. The Quartet is presently in the midst of a five-year cross-disciplinary project, “Vienna and the String Quartet”—featuring works of Haydn through Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, and serving as a centerpiece for a coordinated series of lectures, films, concerts, and discussions of Central European culture of the past 250 years. The Lydian String Quartet has recorded works of Schubert, Brahms, Fauré, Ives, Allen Anderson, Martin Boykan, Peter Child, Irving Fine, Charles Fussell, John Harbison, Lee Hyla, Thomas Oboe Lee, Leo Ornstein, William Schuman, Yehudi Wyner, and others.

Double bassist **Edwin Barker** is recognized as an accomplished solo and ensemble player, having concertized in Europe, North America, and Asia. At the age of twenty-two, Mr. Barker was appointed principal bassist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, a position he holds today. He is currently a faculty member of the Tanglewood Music Center and of the Music Department at Boston University. He has recorded with Boston Symphony Chamber Players and with Collage, a Boston-based new-music group. Mr. Barker gave the world premiere performance of James Yannatos’s *Concerto for Double Bass and Chamber Orchestra*, written especially for him; and he gave the New England premiere of Gunther Schuller’s *Bass Concerto*. He has been a soloist with the Boston Symphony at home and on tour internationally. In 1995 he was chosen by Sir Georg Solti as principal bassist with the United Nations Orchestra, “Musicians of the World,” a gathering of top international orchestral musicians. He graduated with honors from the New England Conservatory, where he studied with Henry Portnoi. Other teachers were Peter Mercurio, Angelo LaMariana, and Richard Stephan. Mr. Barker has a solo CD available on the Boston Records label.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Four-Hand Sonata for Piano. David Kopp, Rodney Lister, piano. New World Records 80536-2.
Sonata No. 1, Sonata No. 2, Sonata No. 3. Michael Boriskin, piano. New World Records 80402-2.
Sonata for Trumpet. L. Ranger, trumpet. Crystal Records 669.
Symphony for Classical Orchestra. Los Angeles Philharmonic, André Previn, conductor. New World Records 80373-2.

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HAROLD SHAPERO (b. 1920)

LYDIAN STRING QUARTET

80569-2

Serenade in D for String Quintet (1945) **35:18**

1. I. Adagio / Allegro 9:38
2. II. Menuetto (scherzando): Allegretto 3:12
3. III. Larghetto, poco adagio 10:56
4. IV. Intermezzo: Andantino con moto 5:01
5. V. Finale: Allegro, pochetto presto 6:31

Lydian String Quartet: Daniel Stepner, violin; Judith Eissenberg, violin; Mary Ruth Ray, viola; Rhonda Rider, cello; with Edwin Barker, double bass

String Quartet (1941) **20:56**

6. I. Slowly 4:04
7. II. Moderately fast 5:36
8. III. Very slowly 8:08
9. IV. Fast 3:08

Lydian String Quartet

String Trio (1937) **11:01**

10. I. Allegro risoluto 2:21
11. II. Adagio 4:47
12. III. Allegro 3:53

Daniel Stepner, violin; Mary Ruth Ray, viola; Rhonda Rider, cello

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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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