

IT SEEMS TO THIS WRITER THAT THE DAYS of labeling the “woman” composer as such have well-nigh passed. The title has always implied a condescension that was hardly calculated to encourage women composers, and usually served to obscure their caliber of excellence in the mind of the average listener.

An informal survey tends to indicate that more and more genuinely talented women are becoming composers and working seriously at the profession. The reasons for this emergence are clear and those responsible are coming to light. Such organizations as the sponsors of this record (their clear-cut aims are stated elsewhere on the jacket), the more enlightened performers and those determined women who write because it is in them to do so, have all contributed a major share to the recognition of the woman as composer.

The point of this little diatribe is that this record features five contemporary *composers*, each with a strong personal message to convey and each with her own unique way of expressing it. From the brilliant and breathless *Toccata* by Louise Talma to Mary Howe’s quiet and sensuous *Spring Pastoral*, lies a panorama of orchestral sounds and color, designed to demonstrate the worth of the American composer, not necessarily by intention, but certainly by the logical results of talent and training.

### **LOUISE TALMA - Toccata for Orchestra**

The *Toccata* opens with a dazzling trumpet fanfare, continued by strings and woodwinds. A nervous figure in the low strings accompanies a statement of the theme expressed by the violins and violas. This theme, marked *cantabile*, features one of the dominating rhythms of the movement: a Latin-jazz figure in common time consisting of dotted quarter, dotted quarter, quarter (see Gershwin, Copland and *clave* books). We are then energetically led to a new section that, while *pianissimo*, is hardly less spirited. A Presto, tempered by legato triplets, follows. New material appears about halfway through the work, which is first set in a contrasting chorale-like texture, and followed by an exchange of the fragmented melody between the winds and strings. This section resolves directly into the opening atmosphere of brilliance that continues, with only slight respite, to the end.

The *Toccata* is dedicated to and was first performed in 1945 by Reginald Stewart, conducting the Baltimore Symphony; the following year it was awarded the Juilliard Publication Award.

Louise Talma is currently serving as Professor of Music at Hunter College in New York City. She has received two Guggenheim Fellowships—the first woman to be so honored; in addition, she was awarded a Fulbright Research Grant, the Marjorie Peabody Waite Award of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, in 1960, for her “highly controlled, beautifully shaped and personal music.” Her latest work, with libretto by Thornton Wilder, and written at his request, is the opera “Alcestiad.”

### **VIVIAN FINE - Alcestis**

This work was commissioned by Martha Graham, who created the title role. The story is simple and will be familiar to any student of Bulfinch (or Gluck). Alcestis has sacrificed herself to Thanatos (Death) in order that her husband, Admetus, King of Thessaly, might attain immortality. While the house of Admetus mourns her demise, Hercules arrives. As the news of Alcestis’ death has been kept from him (for reasons best known to the perpetuators of mythology), Hercules indulges in a heroic, might we say Herculean, bout of feasting and drinking. When he learns, by the careless words of a servant, of her death, he engages mighty Thanatos in combat. Victorious, he returns Alcestis to her husband and her people.

The four sections of the dance are: I. Alcestis and Thanatos, II. The Revelling Hercules, III. Battle between Hercules and Thanatos and IV. The Dance of Triumphs and The Rescue of Alcestis. Each movement is an attempt to depict the dramatic and emotional qualities of the myth, and avoids descriptive or representational writing. The orchestra consists of double winds, a piano, harp, percussion and strings. It was written in 1960.

Vivian Fine is the subject of a charming biographical essay by the late Wallingford Riegger and a penetrating commentary by Doris Humphrey in the American Composers Alliance BULLETIN. She is a teacher, pianist and, of course, a full-time composer.

### **JULIA PERRY - A Short Piece for Orchestra**

Already represented on discs by her popular *Stabat Mater* for mezzo soprano and orchestra, Julia Perry is a thorough-going musician who has been totally immersed in nearly every aspect of music making and creating. She has studied voice, piano and composition at the Westminster Choir School, was a student of Luigi Dallapiccola at Tanglewood and later in Florence, Italy, further sharpening her compositional technique with Nadia Boulanger, in France, and has organized and conducted a splendidly received series of concerts in Europe.

The *Short Piece for Orchestra* is a volatile work with a brassy opening reminiscent of the Talma *Toccata*, except that with the introduction, the resemblance ceases. Syncopation, *non legatos*, accents and a ricochet of percussion lead to an Andante lento, which features the woodwinds and strings in long solo cantilenas. Having caught a breath, the piece *accelerandos . . . al . . . Tempo prima* and the horns announce the return of the tumultuous opening.

### **MABEL DANIELS - Deep Forest**

Mabel Daniels has been composing quietly and steadily for a good many years. During this time she has acquired a legion of partisans, and has logged a large number of performances by some of the country's leading orchestras. The work featured on this recording, *Deep Forest* (1931), was premiered in 1934 by the New York Orchestra conducted by Nikolai Sokoloff, and has since been performed under the direction of Hans Kindler, founder of the National Symphony (Washington, D.C.), Serge Koussevitsky, John Barbirolli and Arthur Fiedler.

*Deep Forest* was composed at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire. Miss Daniels' comment regarding its genesis also describes the content, form, instrumentation and what-have-you: "It is impossible not to be inspired by the magnificent surroundings at the Colony. I so constantly heard a flute against a background of muted strings, whenever I walked through the woods, that I finally had to put it on paper and, before I knew it, my Prelude had evolved."

### **MARY HOWE - Spring Pastoral**

Quiet, rich string textures, the "spring" qualities of the flute, oboe, bassoon and horn, a hastening, a slight reticence, all combine to evoke the mood of the title, nothing more and surely nothing less. This record opens with the insistence and vivacity of life; it closes with a feeling of satisfaction and confidence in the future. It would not be inappropriate or overly sentimental to equate this confidence with the certainty of spring's renaissance.

Mary Howe is of Scottish-Welsh ancestry and a Virginian by birth. She is an extensively trained musician, having studied in Europe and the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore. As a pianist, she built a considerable reputation, was an enthusiastic proponent of two piano music (partnered by Anne Hull) and, since the 'Twenties, has devoted a major share of her time to composition.

*Notes by DON JENNINGS*

*(Original Liner Notes from CRI LP jacket)*