

**Irwin Fischer**

*Hungarian Set for Strings and Celeste*

Mayne Miller, celeste

When Irwin Fischer was in Budapest in 1936, studying composition with Zoltán Kodály, he had the good fortune to be taken by Kodály to an annual folk festival where peasants from Hungary's various provinces presented their regional folk songs and dances. These festivals aroused great interest among artists and musicians, and Béla Bartók and Léonid Massine were among those attending the gathering which Fischer witnessed.

"My interest in Hungarian folk music was awakened by these programs," Fisher comments, "and I subsequently borrowed the title of the series, 'Perlenstrauß,' or 'The Pearly Bouquet' for my suite. (The suite was later renamed "Hungarian Set.") Fischer chose eight songs from among various popular collections he found in Budapest that summer. We hear the melodies successively introduced, with the celeste taking the lead in playing the fourth song, which the composer regards as the central thematic core of the Set. (The opening lines of this song, as translated by Elizabeth Lockwood, read "Grains of ripened maize like flust'ring pearls shine bright/Pearls I gave my sweetheart dear for her delight.") A development section follows, using material from the different songs in combination, voiced by the various string sections in turn. And the composer writes that "the celeste adds the final signature with No. IV, with its suggestion of pearly dew of early morning. *Hungarian Set* was first performed by Izler Solomon conducting the Columbus Philharmonic Orchestra on February 13, 1948.

Irwin Fischer, a well-known conductor, pianist and organist, as well as composer, was born in Iowa City, Iowa, in 1903. In 1914 he moved to Chicago, and now makes his home in Wilmette, Illinois. He is a graduate of the University of Chicago, received his Master's Degree at the American Conservatory and studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris and, as mentioned above, with Kodály in Budapest. Since 1945, Mr. Fischer has been the conductor of the American Conservatory Orchestra, and since 1955 he has conducted both the West Suburban Symphony in La Grange, Illinois and the Evanston Symphony.

**Robert Nagel**

*Concerto for Trumpet and Strings, Op. 8*

Eugene Blee, trumpet

No more fitting work could represent Robert Nagel here than this *Trumpet Concerto*, for he is known as one of the country's most distinguished trumpet players. He has been soloist in performances of the concerto on two different occasions in New York, once in David Brockman's Music in the Making Series in 1954 and on another occasion with string quintet accompaniment at Carnegie Recital Hall. Reviewing the latter concert, the *New York Herald Tribune* critic wrote: "Robert Nagel, in his own very solid concerto, proved again that, aside from being an imaginative and mature composer, he is one of the very best trumpeters around." The composer himself summarizes his work as follows: "*The Concerto for Trumpet and Strings* consists of three contrasting movements. The first opens with a lyric trumpet theme in moderate time, followed by two rhythmic themes and a recapitulation in modified form. The second movement

begins with a slow string introduction followed by a declamatory trumpet theme which leads into a lyric theme with interlude and return to the lyric theme which closes the movement. A gay trumpet tune starts the last movement, after which there appear several contrasting sections and finally a return to the first material followed by a short coda section which concludes the work.”

Robert Nagel was born on September 29, 1924 in Freeland, Pa. He began to study trumpet at the age of eight and was a child cornet solo virtuoso. He is a graduate of the Juilliard School, from which he also has an M.S. in composition. His teachers there were Bergsma, Copland, Mennin and Persichetti. He has had a wide range of experience as a solo trumpeter, ranging from dance bands to military bands, from concert orchestras to pit orchestras in musical shows, and including radio and television work. In addition to composing (he has a catalog of over twenty compositions, which include works for solo voice, chorus, chamber and full orchestra), he is first trumpet with the Little Orchestra Society, director of the New York Brass Quintet, and Wind Instrument instructor at Yale University.

## **Chou Wen-Chung**

### *Landscapes*

The young Chinese-American composer Chou Wen-Chung is one of the very few who have succeeded in expressing a true unity between the disparate cultures of East and West. For while maintaining a Chinese esthetic, he has managed to translate it into Western musical terms. The composer himself discusses his earlier and more recent work as follows: “My early works are all based on Chinese traditional music and folk songs. The basic principle of these works is to recapture the color, mood and emotion implied in the seemingly simple material, by means of its own transmutation without adding whatever is not already suggested in itself . . . In my more recent works, the Chinese traditional elements have become merely a point of departure. The characteristic successions of transparent intervals used in Chinese music are freely embroidered with opulent dissonance to serve as the palette for the composer to paint in pure orchestral sonority and timbre. Nevertheless, in all my compositions I am influenced by the same philosophy that governs every Chinese artist, a poet or a painter, namely, the affinity to nature in conception, the allusiveness in expression, and the terseness in realization.”

*Landscapes*, composed in 1949, is derived from three traditional Chinese melodies, each of which constitutes the basis for one of the three “landscapes.” They are “Under the Cliff in the Bay,” “The Sorrow of Parting,” and “One Streak of Dying Light.” The melodies date many centuries back, although the poems now associated with them (given below in the composer’s own translations) date from the eighteenth, seventeenth and fourteenth centuries, respectively. The work itself, divided, as indicated, into three parts, is made continuous by the use of transitional material taken from the first section. The bridge from the second section, described by the composer as “a dialogue in monochrome for oboe and English horn soli,” consists of the first phrase of the first section mingled with the first phrase of the third section: At the end there is a brief return to the ending of the first section.

Chou Wen-Chung, born in Chefoo, China, on July 28, 1923, studied civil engineering in China, and received a scholarship in architecture at Yale in 1946. Soon, however, he turned entirely to music, studying composition with Edgar Varese and Nicholas Slonimsky, and then with Otto Luening. He has been doing research in Chinese music and drama at Columbia University under a Rockefeller Grant since 1955, and received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1957. Another work of his, *And the Fallen Petals*, was commissioned by the Louisville Orchestra and recorded in their series.

I.

Old fisherman, with a fishing rod,  
Under the cliff, in the bay,  
Sailing a small boat freely here and there;  
Dots of sea gulls afar over the light waves,  
Expanse of rustling reeds chilly under the bright sky;  
Singing a song aloud with the sun setting low; All of a sudden, the  
waves rock in golden light;  
Looking up – the moon has chilled over the eastern hill.  
– Cheng Hsieh (1693 . 1765)

II.

My carriage has barely paused,  
yet he is already beyond the plains,  
In no time, far away at the edge of the sky.  
Pleasant dreams tonight – where can they be found ?  
Instead, only the sound of the temple bell,  
    the midnight rain, the ravens' cry at the break of dawn.  
Too grieved to face the fallen petals floating in the wind,  
Too frightened to see the evening sunlight reflect in the clouds;  
The sorrow of parting – I tell it to the lute.  
Broken heart left at the river – into whose courtyard has it been blown?  
Dreams are coining, the candle is flickering, pillows awry.  
– Ting P'eng (c. 1661)

III.

Green, green the grass west of the pavilion,  
The clouds low, the cries of the wild geese faint,  
Two lines of sparse willows,  
One streak of dying light,  
Hundreds of homing ravens dotting the sky.  
– Liu Chi (1311 • 1375)

### **John Lessard**

*Concerto for Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon, String Quartet, and String Orchestra*

John Krell, flute; Robert Marcellus, clarinet; Nicholas Kilburn, bassoon.

String quartet: Isidore Cohen and Richard Adams, violins; Erik Kahlson, viola; John Ehrlich, cello.

In the summer of 1952, in connection with a grant he had received from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, John Lessard was asked to write a piece especially for the Little Orchestra Society, to be played by them during the 1952-53 concert season. Lessard described how he decided to write a work for this particular instrumental combination:

“I had already written a Concerto for twelve wind instruments that was played the year before by the Little Orchestra Society, and when I met with the conductor of the Society, Thomas Scherman, to discuss what kind of piece I should write for them he immediately suggested that I write a Concerto for three of his very expert wind players. It was played that year in New York by Mr. Scherman and the Little Orchestra Society. I made one addition to the original suggestion of Mr. Scherman. In the first and last movements I used another solo group – a string quartet. The musical ideas I had and the way I used them sprang from the fascination of using these three groups in answer, together, and against each other.”

John Lessard was born on July 3, 1920, in San Francisco. He is a graduate of the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris, attended the Longy School of Music in Cambridge, Mass., and studied with Nadia Boulanger. He has received many distinguished awards, including Guggenheim Fellowships in 1946 and 1953, the above-mentioned grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1952, the Ella Lyman Cabot Fellowship at Harvard in 1940-41 and 1941-42, and the Alice M. Ditson Fellowship at Columbia in 1945. Mr. Lessard's music, which includes many works for winds, as well as orchestral, piano, harpsichord, vocal and chamber works, has been performed in London, Paris, Rome, and Barcelona, in addition to performances in major cities of the United States.

The Peninsula Music Festival in Fish Creek, Wisconsin was founded in 1953 by Thor Johnson at the request of Door County's Peninsula Arts Association, a group of year-round and summer residents organized in 1937 and headed in its first year by the late Dr. Frederick Stock. The concerts are given in the Gibraltar Auditorium at the entrance to Peninsula State Park in Fish Creek.

Thor Johnson has pioneered with these summer festival concerts by giving a notable place to contemporary works on his programs, and by featuring new young artists as soloists. The 1957 concerts, from among which these four works were recorded for CRI, consisted of nine programs between August 10 and August 25th. They included a special Young Peoples Concert and featured a number of new soloists, both vocal and instrumental. The recordings were made directly following the concerts on which the works themselves were played.

– Notes by *J. Steiner*

*(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*