

CRI LP 107

ROBERT McBRIDE: "PUNCH AND THE JUDY"

AVERY CLAFLIN: "FISHHOUSE PUNCH"

F. CHARLES ADLER, conducting The Vienna Orchestra

DOUGLAS MOORE: "COTILLION SUITE"

ALFREDO ANTONINI, conducting The Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra

There is a "Punch" in both of the titles that comprise the opening half of this program, but the coincidence should not be construed as a pretext for these proximate performances. The pieces are dissimilar in both genesis and *genre*. They have in common only that they are as pleasing as their semantic archetype was pleased.

This was of course the Mr. Punch, né Punchinello, of the old Italian puppetry classic, who is forever singing to himself over the success of his mischief. Hence "as pleased as Punch." In view of the entirely disparate uses of this surname as a lower-case noun or adjective, however, it is perhaps relevant to note that the etymology of the word goes back to such slivers prototypes as a certain low comedian otherwise forgotten (Puccio d'Aniello) and a certain procurator of Judea otherwise infamous (Pontius Pilate). You pays your money and takes your choice.

The traditional pantomime beloved of children derives from the following plot, which was allegedly humorous as presented in England shortly before the accession of Queen Anne: Punch, in a fit of jealousy, strangles his infant child, whereupon his wife, Judy, grabs a bludgeon and belabors him with it until he grabs another and beats her to death as well. He flings both bodies into the street. A passing policeman enters and Punch flees, only to be arrested by an officer of the Inquisition and sent to prison, from which he escapes by means of a golden key. The rest of the story is allegorical, purporting to show how Punch triumphs over ennui (represented by a dog), disease (a physician), death (a character who is himself killed), and finally Satan (who is outwitted).

Martha Graham's popular *Punch and The Judy* combines elements of the original with less morbid aspects of standard domestic comedy. Her "group dance with spoken text," in tandem with music by Robert Guyn McBride, was given in première during the 1941 session of the Bennington (Vermont) Summer School of the Arts.

The Arizona-born (1911) McBride is known to the broader public for such unashamedly low-brow pieces as *Mexican Rhapsody* and the notorious *Jingle-Jangle*, not to speak of his equally ubiquitous (but rather more anonymous) music for "March of Time" documentaries and innumerable other films, among them many recurrent cartoons. This notwithstanding, he has evinced a strong leaning toward serious choreographic composition throughout his career. As recently as 1956 he completed a full-length work that had been commissioned by the New York City Ballet. And it was his contribution to *Punch and The Judy*, as much as any other achievement of that early period, which prompted the American Academy of Arts and Letters to honor him in 1942 for "having created a new idiom in native American music."

For the Bennington production, a solo piano sufficed. Later two pianos were used. Still later McBride scored the whole for an ensemble of theater size (ten pieces). It is performed herewith in a setting for full orchestra, somewhat truncated but including, intact, the six principal dances as follows: (1) "The Three Fates," (2) "Overture," (3) "Soliloquy of Judy," (4) "Pony Express," (5) "Pegasus," and (6) "Punch." Of these the final two are virtuoso solos irrevocably identified with Merce Cunningham and Erick Hawkins, respectively.

Avery Claflin, born in Keene, N. H., in 1898, is a Harvard man of gentle mien who has enjoyed the distinction of successive eminence in two aptitudinally polarized ways of life. Vocationally he was for many years a financier; avocationally, he composed. Upon his retirement from the presidency of the important French American Banking Corporation, in 1954, this ambivalence was quickly reversed. Within a year, not as a businessman but as a musician, Claflin had made page one in *The New York Times* and every other major newspaper in the land.

Admittedly, the left hand had helped the right. Who else but a fiscal expert who had once studied with Erik Satie could have contrived the touching *Lament for April 15?* In essence this work (recorded on CRI-102) is but a verbatim five-part setting of excerpts from the official instructions for

filing income tax returns, replete with parentheses. Claflin had conceived it in some annoyance after he had been forced to interrupt work on a suite for strings in order to complete his long form. Within days of its premiere at Tanglewood in August of 1955, *Lament for April 15* had become, and remains, the most sensationally successful madrigal since Monteverdi.

No indignation attaches to *Fishhouse Punch* – anything but, as one might infer from the title. As indicated earlier, “punch” as a noun has several meanings. There is a breed of cart-horse, for example, known as the Suffolk punch. Also, a punch could be any one of many alcoholic delights, among which the so-called Fishhouse punch is, to certain connoisseurs, the supreme delight of all. For the extra-musical delectation of those who may not have encountered this nectar, I quote from “The Fine Art of Mixing Drinks” by David A. Embury:

“This is probably the most famous of all . . . also one of the most potent and one of the best. The formula is supposed to have originated in 1732 . . . I have at least a dozen recipes for this drink, all different and all purporting to be the original and official recipe. If the one below given is not the original recipe, it at least comes very close to it . . .

3/4 pound loaf sugar; 1½ pints lemon juice; 2 fifths rum, 1 Jamaica and 1 gold label Cuban; 1 fifth cognac; 3½ pints plain water; 4 ounces peach brandy.

“Dissolve the sugar in part of the water in the punch bowl. Add the lemon juice and the balance of the water and stir thoroughly. Then add the liquors and allow the mixture to stand for at least 2 to 3 hours to ripen and blend, stirring a bit from time to time. Place a large block of ice in the bowl, stir to cool, and serve.”

As to more usual annotative data, it is of passing interest that the principal melody of Claflin’s piece – a jig tune – occurred to him one day back in the forties when he was pruning a blueberry bush at his summer place, which is in upstate New York at Rensselaerville. He jotted down the theme for future reference and a year or so later turned it into this short scherzo for orchestra. The title actually was an afterthought, “sort of in commemoration of a hilarious Fishhouse punch party we gave for our housewarming up here.”

A certain critic who shall be nameless once heard the music without benefit of this background. When it was over he inquired of the composer: “A drunk?” Claflin, a moderate in these matters, will admit to no further verisimilitude than “that second or third cocktail feeling.”

Douglas Stuart Moore, born in Cutchogue, New York, five years before Claflin, is unquestionably our most distinguished composer-educator. It does him no disservice to say that he has given so freely and so effectively of his energies in behalf of music that there rarely has been any time left to him for creative work. For more than a decade he has been president of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, parent body of the American Academy. For nearly twice that he has been head of the music faculty at Columbia University. In both of those high positions he has dedicated himself to every good cause. More one need not say.

All the same, it is for his own music that Moore will be remembered by the generations to come, and it is fortunate that his catalogue is beginning to find its way to the recorded repertory. The Quintet for Clarinet and Strings is available on a Columbia disc, and his *Farm Journal* was issued previously by the present sponsors (CRI-101). Doubtless his operas will be represented soon enough – in particular *The Devil and Daniel Webster* and *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, the latter of which is being readied for a Broadway production as these lines are written (fall, 1956). The Second Symphony is issued by the American Recording Society, but this performance cannot be had through commercial channels.

Moore's *Cotillion*, a suite of dances for string orchestra, was written in 1952 for the Columbia Broadcasting System. The network's own orchestra gave the work in premiere the next spring under Alfredo Antonini, to whom the score is dedicated. There are six movements, all based on forms that were in vogue during the nineteenth century. The opening “Grand March” suggests the initial event of a cotillion, in which the dancers parade formally around the ballroom. Next is the “Polka,” with its strongly accented rhythm; then a heart-on-sleeve “Waltz” in which the swooning rubato is emphasized by the insertion of occasional extra beats; this is followed by the “Gallop,” a lively bucking dance in two-time. The penultimate “Cake Walk” recalls the back-bending, high-stepping strut that was a feature of the old minstrel shows. The finale is a “Quickstep,” another *fin-de-siècle* favorite of enduring charm even unto this impatiently unsentimental age.

—Notes by JAMES LYONS

*(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*

