

Lukas Foss

Psalms (1955-56)

Behold! I Build an House (1950)

Roger Wagner Chorale, conducted by Roger Wagner (courtesy of Capitol Records Inc.)

Pianists: James MacMiles, Lukas Foss

Sound supervision: Richard Dufallo

Vocal solos in *Psalms*, part I: Claire Gordon, Richard Levitt

Vocal solos in *Psalms*, part II: Keith Wyatt

Psalms, the first work recorded here, was composed by Lukas Foss on commission from the Stockbridge Bowl Association of Stockbridge, Massachusetts in 1955-56. The text consists of excerpts from four psalms as given below:

Psalm 121 (1, 2): Psalm 95 (4)

I will lift mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

My help cometh from the Lord who made Heaven and earth.

In His hands are the deep places of the earth; the strength
of the hills is His also.

I will lift mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

Psalm 98 (1, 4, 6)

O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done
marvelous things.

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all the earth; make a loud
noise, and rejoice and sing praise.

With trumpets and sound of cornets make a joyful noise.

Psalm 23 (1, 2, 3)

The Lord is my Shepherd: I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul.

In describing the music, Foss writes:

“Regardless of the division into three parts, *Psalms* is actually a one-movement composition. Psalm 98 forms the main body of the work. The beginning (Psalms 121, 95) is an invocation and prelude; the end (Psalm 23) is a closing prayer and epilogue.”

The world premiere performance of *Psalms* was given on May 12, 1957 by the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Dimitri Mitropoulos. The two-piano version recorded here, however, was actually the original version of the work, and it is as a composition for chorus and two pianos that Carl Fischer published the score.

Behold! I Build an House (Mercury Music Corp.) was composed for the dedication of a Boston University Chapel in 1950. The text as drawn from the *Chronicles*, follows:

Behold, I build an house to the Lord, my God,
And the house which I build to the name of the Lord is great,
For great is our God.

Behold, when they lifted up their voice, and praised the Lord,
With trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music,
Saying; For He is good, For His mercy endureth forever,
Behold, then the house was filled with a cloud,
For the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God.

That thine eyes may be open upon this house.

Lukas Foss was born on August 15, 1922, and is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. He also studied in Berlin, Paris, Tanglewood, and Yale Music School. He received his earliest instruction in composition from Julius Herford, and later studied with Paul Hindemith. He has received many awards and prizes, including a Pulitzer scholarship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Horblit Award, a Fulbright fellowship, the Prix de Rome, S.P.A.M. Award, a New York Music Critics Circle Citation, a Naumhurg recording award and a recent grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

Mr. Foss is an accomplished conductor and pianist and has appeared in both capacities with many major orchestras in the United States and Europe. But it is to composition that he devotes his major effort. He has received commissions from the Koussevitzky Foundation, the Kulas Foundation, the Friends of Albert Schweitzer Foundation, the Louisville Orchestra, and NBC Opera Company. Recordings of his compositions include: the oratorio *Parable of Death*; an opera, *The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, set to a libretto by Jean Karsavina; *Piano Concerto #2*; *String Quartet*, 1947 and *Song of Songs*.

Mr. Foss is a professor of Music at the University of California in Los Angeles, where he succeeded Arnold Schoenberg as teacher of composition in 1953.

Seymour Shifrin

Serenade for Five Instruments

Melvin Kaplan, oboe; Charles Russo, clarinet; Robert Cecil, French horn; Ynez Lynch, viola; Harriet Wingreen, piano

The *Serenade for Five Instruments* was commissioned by the Juilliard School of Music and received its first performance on February 17, 1956, as part of the School's Fiftieth Anniversary Festival. The work is in three movements. "The title is given not in any generic sense," comments the composer. "It derives primarily from the character of the slow middle movement and the relative directness and simplicity of the formal procedures used throughout."

Mr. Shifrin goes on to analyze the movements.

"The first movement, marked *Allegro motto*, is gay and energetic in character. The exposition sets the basic contrast of the movement. It opens with a section in which line and motive pass from one instrument to the other with no one instrument predominating. The contrast is made in the second section by a continuous lyric clarinet line accompanied by the piano. These opposing elements are developed and then recapitulated.

“The slow movement, *Largo assai*, has the character of a night song. The principal melody is first stated in the piano and later returns to form the climactic center of the movement — stated by the clarinet with elaborate accompaniment in the other instruments.

“The last movement, *Presto molto*, follows immediately, and in its opening measures supplies a resolution for the harmony which closes the preceding movement. It is a spirited rondo characterized by rapid repeated notes and irregular alteration of accents of a double and triple nature.”

Seymour Shifrin was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1926. He received his B.A. and M.A. from Columbia University, studied composition with William Schuman, Otto Luening, and Darius Milhaud, and is now Assistant Professor of Music at the University of California at Berkeley. He has been the recipient of the Beams Prize, of Fulbright and Guggenheim Fellowships, and of a grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

— J. B.

The American Academy and its parent organization, the National Institute of Arts and Letters, are honorary societies with a distinguished membership of creative artists. They are chartered by act of Congress, and devoted to the furtherance of the arts in the United States.

Through joint committees of selection, these societies every year award fifteen grants of one thousand dollars each to young artists in recognition of distinction and promise. Three of these grants go annually to composers.

In the spring, an exhibition of the works of award winners in painting and sculpture is held at the Academy building. In 1956, it was decided to inaugurate a series with the similar purpose of calling attention to the works of award winners in music.

This release, presented with the collaboration of Composers Recordings, Inc., introduces to the public works by Lukas Foss and Seymour Shifrin, 1957 award winners.

— DOUGLAS MOORE

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)