

CRI 208

HALSEY STEVENS

Sonata for Solo 'cello (1958)

ROBERT GROSS

Epode for Solo 'cello (1955)

GABOR REJTO 'cello

JOHN LESSARD

Sonata for 'cello and Piano (1955)

BERNARD GREENHOUSE 'cello

MENAHEM PRESSLER 'cello

HALSEY STEVENS (b. Scott, N. Y., 1908) comments as follows regarding the Sonata for Solo 'cello recorded here:

“The Sonata, written for and dedicated to Gabor Rejto, was completed in Los Angeles on September 25, 1958. It is a companion piece to the composer's Suite for Solo Violin, written for Robert Gerle in 1954, and makes equal or even greater demands on the performer.

“The plan of the Sonata took shape over a considerable period of time. The two last movements were written earlier, in April and June 1956 respectively; the others were added in August and September 1958. The style of the sonata is tonally oriented but freely chromatic, its first and fifth movements (Introduzione and Finale) centering on A, the second and fourth (Ciaccona and Notturmo) on Fsharp, the third (Scherzo) more or less on D.

“The first performance took place on January 5, 1959, at one of the Monday Evening Concerts in Los Angeles. In June of the same year, Mr. Rejto played the sonata at the University of California in Berkeley, on which occasion Alfred Frankenstein spoke of the Sonata as “. . . grand in scale, beautifully balanced in the sequence of its five movements, very taxing in its virtuoso demands, yet reserved and poised in total effect. Above all, it is apparent that the composer was totally absorbed and delightful in imagining these sounds and pursuing the logic of his rhythmic, melodic, and tonal design, and this sense of absorption and delight is fully communicated to his hearers'.”

Notes Mr. Stevens of the music itself,

“The *Introduzione* presents three thematic ideas, elements of which recur in later movements — though the work is not cyclical. The spirit of the movement is somewhat improvisatory, even though the form is closed. The *Ciaccona* is a set of ten variations on an eight-measure theme, arranged in a ternary plan, the central section of which is the more active.

“The *Scherzo* is in modified arch-form, its 'keystone' being a scurrying *ponticello* passage derived from the first movement. The *Notturmo* is subdued and reflective. The *Finale*, marked *Allegro sbalzando*, is the only movement of the work based on the sonata principle. Its two distinctive thematic complexes — the first vigorously rhythmic, the second flowing, are clearly exposed, developed, and recapitulated. Developmental procedures — fragmentation, variation, and recombination of melodic elements — are however characteristic of the entire sonata, this in common with most of the composer's body of work.”

Halsey Stevens is perhaps best known to the music public at large for his *Life and Music of Béla Bartók* (1957), which in its new 1966 edition still remains the standard English language study of the great Hungarian master. However, it was when fresh out of naval service following World War II that Mr. Stevens' First Symphony (recorded on CRI 129) won high praise from San Francisco critic, Alfred Frankenstein. By 1953, Stevens was recipient of a Louisville Orchestra commission, and the resulting work, *Triskelion* was recorded as part of the Louisville First Edition series. The *Sinfonia breve* (1957) was subsequently recorded as part of the same series. Besides the First Symphony, CRI has recorded prior to the present Solo 'cello Sonata the Halsey Stevens Symphonic Dances (CRI 166) and two short choral pieces, *Like as the Culver on the baréd Bow* (CRI 102) and Psalm 98 (CRI 191).

Though trained in his native New York State, Halsey Stevens' professional career has been pursued chiefly on the West Coast, where he has been Head of the Composition Department at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

ROBERT GROSS (b. 1914, Colorado Springs) came to New York at the age of 12, being the youngest student ever admitted under fellowship to the Juilliard Graduate School. Most of his composition study was under Bernard Wagenaar.

Though Mr. Gross is best known as a concert violinist with an extraordinarily wide range of contemporary repertoire at his command (he gave the world premieres of the Roger Sessions and Andrew Imbrie concertos), he has produced a substantial catalog of compositions, including an opera on Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*, a choral cycle titled *Brief Explanation of the Problems of Philosophy*, a Suite for Orchestra, five string quartets, sonatas for violin, viola, and piano, as well as shorter works. A resident of the Los Angeles area since 1949, Mr. Gross in addition to worldwide concertizing activity is on the music faculty of Occidental College.

Speaking of the *Epode* for solo 'cello recorded here, Mr. Gross notes,

“I wrote the music during the early summer of 1955, and it was premiered by Gabor Rejto in Los Angeles the following year.

“The music's character is suggested by its title, signifying a very free lyric poem in the nature of an incantation. An opening two-note motive generates a succession of short sections, with tonal organization dependent on a series of repeating cell-patterns. Though there are episodes demanding great virtuosity, the prevailing purpose is to exploit the basic lyricism of the 'cello and the close relationship of its timbre to that of the human voice. Both as composer and performer, I have been intrigued by the unique qualities of solo string music — having written works for solo viola and solo violin, and at the same time being the fortunate recipient of solo violin music written for me by such composers as Roger Sessions, Ernst Krenek, Ellis Kohs, and Bruno Bartolozzi.”

JOHN LESSARD (b. San Francisco, 1920) tells us of his Sonata for 'cello and Piano,

“Most of the piece was composed in Rome in 1953-54. It was composed for Bernard Greenhouse, who gave the first performance in Town Hall, New York City in November of 1962.

“The first movement follows the sonata-allegro pattern, with second theme preceding the first at the recapitulation. The second movement is more polyphonic in texture, with the basic elements being heard singly, then in varied combinations: piano and 'cello imitate one another and trade parts. A rhythmic element is first heard, the others are essentially melodic. The last movement follows without pause, opening as a 5/8 *presto* with changing meter. There is a counter-theme in 3/4, and when the first theme returns it is in considerably extended form.”

Currently on the music faculty of New York State University at Stony Brook, Long Island, John Lessard has composed most of his small but choice catalog of works in contemporary classic style — the 'cello Sonata

recorded here being a highly representative example. A pupil of Nadia Boulanger in Paris, Lessard received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1946 shortly after wartime military service. He was also recipient of a National Institute of Arts and Letters grant in 1952. His major works include a Violin Concerto (1941), a Quintet for flute, clarinet and string trio (1943), a pair of piano sonatas (1944-45), *Box Hill Overture* (1946), Concerto for Winds and Strings (1952 — recorded on CRI 122), a Mother Goose song-cycle (1953), Wind Octet (1954) and Partita for Wind Quintet (1952) (both recorded on Serenus 10008/12008), a Harpsichord Toccata in four movements (1955 — recorded on Decca 10021/710021), and the 'cello Sonata recorded here.

NOTES PREPARED BY D. H.

GABOR REJTO, Budapest-born and resident in the U.S. since 1939, is among the most gifted of the many brilliant performing musicians who make their home on the West Coast. As chamber musician he has been associated with the Letter and Gordon string quartets, and is 'cellist of the Alma Trio which currently records for the Decca label. He has headed the 'cello and chamber music departments at the Eastman School of Music, has been chairman of the string department of the School of Music at the University of Southern California, and gives master classes at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara.

BERNARD GREENHOUSE and MENAHEM PRESSLER have been associated in recent years both in duo sonata and trio concerts. As soloist, Mr. Greenhouse has won fame equally for his performances of Bach and of the contemporaries. Besides his recording with Menahem Pressler of the Ernst Bacon 'cello Sonata on CRI 201, Mr. Greenhouse's justly celebrated performance of the Elliott Carter 'cello Sonata is available on the Desto label (419/6419), and he has done the Arthur Berger 'cello-piano Duo for Columbia (ML 4846). For Desto he has also recorded the Victor Herbert Second 'cello Concerto.

Mr. Pressler as one of the gifted up-and-coming pianists of the 1950's recorded some two-dozen LP's for the MGM label, encompassing repertoire ranging from Bartok, Ben-Hann, Villa-Lobos, Shostakovich, and Lord Bowers to Haydn, Mendelssohn, Grieg, and Debussy. It is expected that many of these performances will be re-issued on the Heliodor label. Mr. Pressler for the past several years has been on the music faculty of the University of Indiana.

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)