

Carole Terry, harpsichord
“something else to do”
20th century harpsichord works

Vincent Persichetti: *Sonata for Harpsichord*

William Albright: *Four Fancies for Harpsichord*

Ned Rorem: *Spiders*

Henry Cowell: *Set of Four*

Carole Terry, currently Professor of Organ and Harpsichord at the University of Washington, is a strong advocate of contemporary music for both instruments. She has premiered several important new works for organ and for harpsichord at major conventions and composers' festivals. Her research for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at Stanford University included study of historical organs and performance technique for 17th and 18th century keyboard music. Terry has performed extensively throughout the United States and Western Europe, and is a frequent lecturer and adjudicator in master classes and organ competitions. This recording is her debut on CRI.

"I don't miss the orchestra when I'm writing for the harpsichord. Most of the harpsichord players I know aren't very active. They spend their time playing figured bass, accompanying other instruments, I try to give them something else to do. They can play as loud as an orchestra, be whatever they want to be."

—*Vincent Persichetti*

Notes on the Music

Vincent Persichetti has been a prolific composer for the piano and harpsichord as well as for orchestra and voice. He received his doctoral degree from the Philadelphia Conservatory where he studied composition with Nordoff and Harris. He held important theory positions at various colleges and in 1947 was appointed chairman of the composition department at The Juilliard School of Music. He has received numerous awards, including a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation and from the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, and commissions from renowned orchestras and institutions. Compositionally, Persichetti's music has employed modal, tonal, polytonal and atonal structures.

Persichetti's *Sonata for Harpsichord*, Op. 52, written in 1951, is the first of seven sonatas written by the composer for this instrument. His other works for harpsichord are *Parable for Harpsichord*, Op. 153, the *Little Harpsichord Book*, Op. 155, and *Serenade for Harpsichord*, Op. 161. All but the first sonata are dedicated to harpsichord teachers/performers throughout the United States.

The *Sonata for Harpsichord* is written in three movements. The first movement begins with an introductory *Andante sostenuto* containing a beautiful cantabile melody set with triplets over repeated chords. The following *Allegro* maintains its vitality by constant shifting rhythms on the eighth-note level (e.g. 3/8 followed by 4/8 and 5/8). The opening theme is stated twice and then manipulated in a quasi-development section before its recapitulation. The middle *Adagio* movement presents a haunting melody of wandering sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The second section of this *Adagio* provides a tonal contrast and more stepwise melodic writing before a modified return of the first melody. The final

movement *Vivace* is in three large sections. The first begins with a driving repeated note theme followed by other short theme groups and a lyric theme of harmonized thirds and fourths. The middle section, marked agitate, exploits brilliant toccata-like passage work and development of some of the first section themes, with the repeated note theme returning in the third section.

William Albright has studied composition with Finney, Rochberg and Messiaen and organ with Marilyn Mason; he is currently Professor of Composition at the University of Michigan School of Music. He has received many prestigious composition awards including two Koussevitzky Composition Awards, a Fulbright Fellowship, the Queen Marie-Jose Prize and an award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. His early keyboard works, especially those for the organ, reflect the influence of Messiaen with their colorful registrations and timbres. In later organ compositions such as *Organbook III*, as well as the *Four Fancies*, Albright has turned to Classical forms as a point of departure for his works.

Four Fancies was commissioned by the University of Evansville Music Department and Douglas Reed, Associate Professor of Music, with a grant from the Masker Trust Fund. The piece was premiered by Dr. Reed on March 11, 1980 at the University of Evansville's Wheeler Concert Hall on a 1974 Dowd harpsichord after Taskin. Albright has written:

"The word 'fancy' in 17th and 18th century music was the English equivalent to fantasia, a spontaneous piece or a freely constructed piece. By the middle of the 17th century, the fancy was a dance suite. This was important to me in the piece because I think the harpsichord does dance music superbly because of its clang, clang, chang, chang sound; the rhythms are very clear on the harpsichord. And that's, I suppose, what I wanted to get out: a series of dances. That's why you hear so much metric rhythm, so much pulse, so much excitement of body movement in the music.

"The first movement is a perverse, fun-house mirror glance at the French Overture. But by about the fifth second, the whole thing goes off its track; it gets derailed. It's called *Excentrique*, a title akin to a few 19th century character piano pieces by composers whose names I've forgotten.

"The second movement has one of the worst puns in all music: the *Mirror Bagatelle* ('a mere bagatelle'). But I've wanted to use that title for so long, and I finally got a chance to use it because of the mirror-like effect I explore. And this is a spot where I actually use a new capability of the harpsichord. There are two parallel sounds on each of the keyboards sounding at the same pitch. For this I created a texture based on a very fluid, spontaneous improvisation although it's very carefully notated 預 round the same pitches on two different sounds. The technique in music is called 'heterophony,' a word which means two or more lines sounding around the same pitches but at different times or rhythms. It's familiar enough in folk music, musics of other cultures, and in jazz, but not all that much used in Western classical music.

"The third movement is called *Musette*. 'Musette' is the French word for bagpipes, and was a familiar movement in Baroque harpsichord suites. During a very simple melody you hear all kinds of funny glitches and squeaks and whizzes. It is accompanied by a very severe and plain left hand.

"The last movement, *Danza ostinata*, is a kind of combination of Soler's fandango and boogie-woogie from the '30s."

From a performer's point of view, the notation, manual changes, and musical workings are extremely interesting. Traditional notation is used in the *Musette* and *Danza ostinata* while the *Excentrique* and *Mirror Bagatelle* have conventional notation but few bar lines. A timbral effect that Albright refers to as 'heterophony' occurs in places with quick shifts between the two manuals of the harpsichord creating a unique dynamic effect. Perhaps the most amusing from a performer's standpoint is the composer's use of descriptive markings given at the beginnings of and throughout various movements. These various markings direct affective colors within the context of the piece making it an extremely exciting and challenging piece to play.

Ned Rorem is known not only as a composer but as a diarist and essayist as well. He received early training in piano and also in composition with Leo Sowerby before attending the Curtis Institute of Music. After winning a prize for his song "The Lordly Hudson," Rorem went to Paris on a Fulbright grant to study with Honegger, later traveling to Morocco. After his return to Paris in 1952, Rorem's literary work and song settings were recognized by the Parisian cultural intelligentsia including Poulenc, Auric and Cocteau. Returning to New York in 1958, Rorem concentrated on writing solo songs and combining voice with orchestra in pieces such as *Sun* (1967). In his later instrumental writing he used expanded tonality through altered chords, modality and polymodality. Later, in the 1960s, his compositions explored the use of modified serial techniques.

Rorem's *Spiders* was written during June and July of 1968 for premiere by Igor Kipnis. On June 8th, Rorem went to speak with Kipnis regarding the composition and had finished the work by July 12th. *Spiders* is one of only two works Rorem has written for the harpsichord; he has also composed some well-known pieces for organ, including *A Quaker Reader*.

Compositionally *Spiders* is reminiscent of a fast-paced toccata of chromatic, running sixteenth notes, here in 4/4 time of quintuplet beats with occasional shifts to 5/8. The piece exploits the full range of a French double harpsichord from FF to f3. Since Rorem wrote this piece during the New York heat wave of July 1968, it might be construed as an attempt by a poor spider running to and fro to find a cool place to hide.

This piece was recorded on a French double manual harpsichord with the disposition 2 x 8' and 1 x 4'. Double fortes were realized on the full chorus sound, fortes on 2 x 8', and mezzopiano and piano on the single upper 8'.

Henry Cowell received some early training in the violin, but his formal musical training began in 1914 at the University of California at Berkeley where he studied harmony and counterpoint. He later attended the Institute of Musical Art in New York and Stanford University. After a brief stint in the Army, Cowell made his Carnegie Hall debut in 1924, playing his own works. After concert tours of Europe, Cowell met Charles Ives in 1927 and became a champion of his music. Cowell was responsible for introducing Ives' work to many performers, and through his journal *The New Music Quarterly* and its series of recordings, Cowell brought to Ives deserved recognition as a pioneer of 20th century American musical thought. Cowell taught at the New School of Social Research in New York, at the Peabody Conservatory and at Columbia University.

Cowell's music can be said to fall into three stylistic "periods." The first, from 1911-36, is characterized by the use of tone clusters and the invention of unusual piano sound by plucking strings and using various objects inside the piano to produce new timbres. The second period, ca. 1936-50, was characterized by more conservative, tonally oriented idioms with regular rhythms, such as his series of "Hymn and Fuguing Tunes" for various instrumental combinations.

The third period of his work, from 1950 to his death in 1965, during which the *Set of Four* was written, reflects an amalgamation of previously used styles and techniques such as clusters and ethnic influences. Written for harpsichordist Ralph Kirkpatrick, the piece was premiered at the University of California at Berkeley on January 26, 1961. The opening *Rondo*, marked *maestoso*, is followed by the toccata-like *Ostinato*. The third movement is a slow *Chorale* followed by the final *Fugue and Resume*. The *Rondo* juxtaposes three different writing styles: 1) a chordal section of bitonal chords often spanning the interval of the tenth; 2) fast eighth and sixteenth note diatonic and arpeggiated passage work and 3) a *piu mosso* section of rising and falling chord clusters. The second movement *Ostinato* is based on an arpeggiated rhythmic pattern of four measures plus one beat in 4/4 time. This ostinato is used in both hands and accompanied by leaping intervals or harmonized by itself in transposition. The ostinato sections alternate with running sixteenth note scalar patterns accompanied by large spanned chords with written-in pedal points. The third movement *Chorale*, composed of chord clusters, is reminiscent of a hymn tune played on a wheezy old harmonium. It is not unlikely that Cowell intended this effect, as he composed many hymn and Fuguing Tunes during the last years of his life. The final movement is the most serious, beginning with a short fugue based on a twelve tone row. The *Resume* that makes up the middle part of the last movement is composed of direct quotations from the three preceding movements. A repeat of the fugue with extension concludes the piece.

I wish to acknowledge Andrew Buchman, a Pre-Doctoral Associate, for playing the unreachable notes in Cowell's large, bitonal chords in the first and fourth movements of *Set of Four*. It's always nice to have an "extra hand."

—Carole Terry

Notes on the Instruments

Writing for the harpsichord in this century has in a way paralleled the recovery of historical instrument-making styles. The harpsichords for which most of the modern repertoire was conceived are those from the early years of the harpsichord revival in which piano technology combined with a late romantic taste to produce large and complicated "plucking pianos" with multiple registers of extreme and contrasted tonal color, and pedals for instant timbral changes. Such harpsichords "improve" on the piano as a sort of miniature orchestra, and "orchestration" is the main interest of music written for them.

From the commissions of Landowska for her Pleyel to the well known "Continuum" of Ligeti, this view of the harpsichord has influenced, as well, modern performance of music of the historical period. It is still possible to find Bach and Scarlatti recorded on such "plucking pianos," sounding like a keyboard reduction of a Stokowski transcription for orchestra.

Dr. Terry has here set about turning the tables. Using two harpsichords of "historical" type, she has explored modern literature for what virtues it may possess beneath the obvious exploitation of coloristic extremes. The historical harpsichord is a linear instrument: it makes etchings, not paintings, and achieves its effects through shape and texture - quantitative means - rather than through colors which much of this music anticipates.

Roem's *Spiders* is made on a conventional "French double" made from Zuckerman parts, the last instrument from Robert Horning of Portland, Oregon (d. 1980). The traditional disposition of "unison (8') and octave (4') on the lower manual, unison (8') on the upper, and shove coupler" (which requires the player to stop playing in order to shift it) is at odds with the 20th century's "Bach" arrangement with pedals to shift couplers and stops with the 4' on the upper manual, and perhaps a 16' on the lower. The French compass, from FF, was required for this piece.

The remaining works have been played on a large double from my shop, to a design by David Jacques Way. It has five octaves, GG-g3, and the same disposition as the French, with buff to the upper manual 8'. It is intended to avoid the perfumed and devious excesses, of the late French instruments, with a voice more direct and objective. This effort to make a large contrapuntal harpsichord is an extrapolation to what mid-18th century Flemish builders might have made had they not abandoned their native tradition to the Parisians.

With hand-operated stops and couplers, it has not been possible to perform all the registration instructions from the composers of this music. Dr. Terry has spliced tape in some cases. I'm shocked to find that I'm no more offended by this cheating than by the idea of these performances, or these pieces. This music and these instruments may tell us something new, each about the other.

-David C. Calhoun/Ante Musica Seattle, Washington

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)