

# NED ROREM

## POEMS OF LOVE AND THE RAIN (1962-63)

REGINA SARFATY / mezzo soprano the Composer at the piano

## SECOND PIANO SONATA (1949)

JULIUS KATCHEN piano

NED ROREM (b. Richmond, Indiana, 1923) was cited by *Time Magazine* as "probably the world's best composer of art songs." Such a statement may appear to be unusually strong. Yet from the beginning of his official composing career in 1948, Rorem achieved prompt and prestigious recognition when his setting of Paul Goodman's *The Lordly Hudson* was acclaimed by the Music Library Association as the "best published song of the year." By this time, the 24-year-old composer had behind him nearly a decade of intensive musical training, highlighted by study at the Curtis Institute, at Tanglewood, and the Juilliard School of Music in New York, as well as private study with Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson.

Other and greater honors followed in short order, including the Gershwin Memorial Award in 1949, the Lili Boulanger Award in 1950, and in 1951 a Fulbright Grant for study with Arthur Honegger. During the greater part of this period, until 1956, Rorem lived in Paris and Morocco. His return to America was marked by commissions from the Louisville Orchestra (*Design for Orchestra*) and from the La Jolla Orchestra (Symphony No. 2); and in 1957 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. During the 1959-61 period, Mr. Rorem was Slee Professor and Composer in Residence at the University of Buffalo. Currently resident in New York City, he has fulfilled one major Ford Foundation-commissioned opera *Miss Julie* (based on Strindberg) for the New York City Center, scheduled for performance in the fall of 1965.

As of the middle 1960's Ned Rorem can look back upon a remarkably extensive and varied catalog of creative work including not only some 300 songs, but three operas, three symphonies, a pair of piano concertos, a dozen or more choral works including *The Poets' Requiem*, chamber works encompassing a pair of string quartets, a Violin Sonata, a Trio for flute, 'cello and piano, *Sinfonia* for 15 wind instruments with optional percussion, *Eleven Studies for Eleven Players*. Chief among Mr. Rorem's piano works are three sonatas, of which the Second is included on this disc as recorded originally for London-Decca in 1952 by the distinguished American-born, European-resident virtuoso, Julius Katchen.

A good cross-section of Ned Rorem's work has been represented on recordings other than this one: Thirty Songs have been released by Columbia; Louisville First Edition Recordings has done the *Design for Orchestra* and *Eleven Studies for Eleven Players*; while *Lovers* for harpsichord, oboe, 'cello and percussion, the *Barcarolles* for piano, and *Two Psalms and a Proverb* for chorus and strings have been recorded by the Decca, Epic, and Cambridge labels respectively.

Looking back over the nearly 15-year span separating the Second Piano Sonata and the *Poems of Love and the Rain* recorded here, Mr. Rorem comments:

"Today, as through a telescope, I see receding the person I once was. With him go these pieces, enough separated in time and space - both from himself and from each other - for objective observation. Objective, that is, as a parent's eye can be. As for his ear, it is never disengaged: resemblances and differences are heard only by outsiders. No composer knows his influences: those he is conscious of, he dissimulates; the others glitter terribly for everyone but himself. All he can say of value about his music is how it came to be written.

"These works are each built of fragments on a spacious format. There, so far as I am concerned, the similarity ends.

"The Second Piano Sonata," notes Mr. Rorem, "emerged from a rainy Autumn week in Morocco, and was the first of some twenty large-scale compositions made in that country between 1949 and 1952. It is a garland of four happy 'songs'. (Everything I write -short or long, with or without a human voice - is Song; I cannot think otherwise.) The first movement *Overture* is my nearest rub with what used to be termed 'strict sonata form'. The second piece is sub-titled *Tarantella*. The *Nocturne* was probably inspired by a love for Billie Holiday. And the Toccata (appended one year later at Julius Katchen's insistence) weaves the intimate themes of the preceding movements into a virtuoso finale. - The French publication by *Pierre Noël et Cie.* appeared two years later, and was recorded at that time by Katchen for London-Decca *ffrr*. The present disc represents a technical re-furbishing on CRI's part of the original 1952 taping."

Turning to the 1962-63 song-cycle, Mr. Rorem comments further:

"If the Sonata is essentially light, *Poems of Love and the Rain* are a good deal darker. The sequence was composed in New York on a Ford Foundation Commission for Regina Sarfaty. Her physique and alto voice were constantly in mind as I worked, She is brooding and beautiful and her singing resembles herself - rich and blue, dramatic and anguished. Hence the choice of poems which deal with unrequited love against a backdrop of ceaseless rain. . . . The cycle tells no story *per se*; it seeks rather to sustain a mood with as much variety as this mood's terms permit -- with an occasional flash of light through the cloud.

"The technical problem I set myself is, so far as I know, unprecedented, going on the principle that if a poem is good, there is more than one way of musicalizing it. Formerly, when different composers set the same poem (for example, Debussy, Hahn, or Fauré with the verse of Verlaine), they approached it in more or less the same way.

"I selected poems by several Americans and set each to music twice, and as contrastingly as possible - i.e. gentle then passionate; slow and violent, then fast and hysterical.

"To these poems were added an Interlude whose words are sung but once, and a Prologue and Epilogue which are nearly identical, except that the Epilogue is a half-tone lower. Therefore, though each poem is repeated, none of the music is - although one motive does recur throughout. The order arranged for these seventeen songs is 'pyramidal': the sequence works toward the Interlude, then backtracks - as in a mirror."

NOTES PREPARED By D. H.

## POEMS OF LOVE AND THE RAIN

1. PROLOGUE: from The Rain
2. Stop All the Clocks
3. The Air Is the Only
4. Love's Stricken "Why"
5. The Apparition
6. Do I Love You - part I
7. in the rain
8. Song for Lying in Bed During a Night Rain
9. Interlude
10. Song for Lying in Bed During a Night Rain (conclusion)
11. in the rain
12. Do I Love You - part 2
13. The Apparition
14. Love's Stricken "Why"
15. The Air Is the Only
16. Stop All the Clocks
17. EPILOGUE: from The Rain