

CONTEMPORARY GROUP

PROGRAM NOTES

October 16, 1974

This program commemorates the work of three composers, each a pioneer in developing new techniques in the twentieth century. 1974 is the centenary year of the births of Charles Ives (October 20) and Arnold Schönberg (September 13); in addition, we pay tribute to Darius Milhaud, who died in Geneva on June 22 of this year.

Charles Ives was a New England musical maverick, whose innovations were little appreciated during his creative period (to about 1923), though in his later years he did see the beginnings of the movements which has by today placed him in the first rank of American composers. It is widely known that he made his living in the insurance business, composing in his spare time works which in all probability he never expected to hear performed. In his creative isolation, he anticipated nearly all of the revolutionary ideas that were to sweep European and American music in the 1920's and 30's.

The *Largo* is a comparatively early work (1902), characterized by an intimate expressiveness which may come as a surprise to those who are familiar only with the boisterous, exuberant Ives of *The Fourth of July* or the song *General William Booth Enters into Heaven*.

Tone Roads No. 1 (1911) was originally part of a set of three similar pieces, though number two has apparently been lost. It exemplifies most of the characteristics usually associated with Ives' mature style: a high degree of chromaticism, rugged dissonances, multi-level, complex rhythms -- and quizzical annotations in the score. The following "program" was noted by Ives in the manuscript: "Over the rough and rocky roads our old forefathers strode on their way to the steepled village church or to the farmers' harvest fair, or to the town meetings where they got up and said what they thought regardless of consequences."

Darius Milhaud was already known as an *enfant terrible* in 1917, when he became associated with the group of composer collectively known as "Les Six," whose objectives were anti-academic in the extreme. Among other devices pioneered by Milhaud in the attempt to re-vitalize music in the 'twenties, the most characteristic and important was the use of polytonality. It would be unfair, however, not to point out Milhaud's intense respect for musical discipline and traditional values. Born in Aix-en-Provence on September 4, 1892, he was fond of referring to himself (in conscious contrast to Debussy's self-apellation of "musicen français") as "Français de Provence, de religion israélite." It is perhaps this consciousness of his own ethnic and regional heritage that attracted him to such folk and popular idioms as American jazz (in *La Creation du Monde*) and Brazilian street music (in *Saudades do Brasil*). It is ironic that his use of these elements was one of the principle features of his style regarded as "revolutionary" in Europe.

The *Concertino de Printemps* was written in the composer's native town in 1934. Nearly twenty years later, Milhaud added three more concertinos (*d'Ete, d'Automne and d'Hiver*) to make a cycle *The Four Seasons*. The reference to Vivaldi is obvious. This "spring concertino" is perhaps intended to evoke the sunny Provençal landscape, and is suffused with a lyrical, joyous spontaneity.

Arnold Schönberg's formulation of the "method of composing with twelve tones which are related only with one another" stands as the single most influential musical idea evolved in the first half of this century. The *String Quartet in D Minor*, Op. 7 (1905) predates Schönberg's earliest use of serial devices by more than fifteen years, and is still well within the tradition of post-Wagnerian Romanticism. but Schönberg's growing dissatisfaction with this style are manifested here, first by his choice of the chamber medium -- in contrast to the gargantuan ensembles required for the *Gurre-Lieder* (1901) and *Pelleas und Melisande* (1903) -- and secondly by the attempt to tightly integrate all of the material in a single, cyclic movement. The thematic concentration is intense: virtually everything in the quartet is derived from a few small motives -- the sort of "ultrathematization" which ultimately led Schönberg to his revolutionary row-principle.

NOTES BY JEROME KOFL