

PROGRAM NOTES

The Contemporary Group

May 4, 1969

I. Synchronisms for flute and electronic sounds - Mario Davidovsky

Mario Davidovsky came to the United States from Argentina at the age of 24, and he has since made his reputation largely on works composed in connection with his association with the Electronic Music Center at Columbia and Princeton Universities.

His Synchronism for flute and electronic sounds is the first piece in a set of three, composed for various instruments plus a prerecorded tape of electronically produced sounds. While the instrumental part is written in the 12 tone technique, the electronic medium does not adhere to the pitch of the tempered scale, but rather use is made of tonal occurrences of very high density, impossible for the ear to perceive as pure pitch values. Throughout, the tape recorder has been used as an integral part of the instrumental fabric.

II. Octet for Wind Instruments - Igor Stravinsky

Stravinsky's Octet falls into his so called "neo-classical" period, which also saw such works as 'Pulcinella' (1919), the Concertino for string quartet (1920), the opera "Fairy's Kiss" (1920).and Oedipus Rex (1927).

In the first movement, the term symphony is to be understood in its pre-classical meaning of overture, in this case the form of slow-fast. The second movement is a theme and variations. The theme is tragic in mood, but is transformed into a march in the Rossini manner, and then into an elegant waltz and back again to the tragic. The last movement is a fugato for two, three or four voices and has rustic joviality reminiscent at times of the festive atmosphere of Petroushka.

This performance is being conducted by Michael Matetsky.

III. Jeux Venetiens - Witold Lutoslawski

Witold Lutoslawski, considered by some people to be the father of the musical renaissance presently taking place in Poland, has written works in many various styles, ranging from rather tame tonality to avant garde. Venetian Games, written in 1961,

marks his first use of aleatory technique. (This is the reason "games" in the title. The games are "Venetian" only because they were performed in Venice.)

The piece is in four movements. The first is made up of an aleatory ritornello, played by the woodwinds and brasses, alternated with "ordinary" sections played by strings. The beginnings and ends of the sections are punctuated by the percussion. The second movement is a murmuring of various orchestral colors, with a free piano part near the end. The third movement might be called "Follow the Flute". A free flute solo is accompanied almost by chance by the other instruments. The final movement, consisting of contrasting color sections, sums up the techniques used in the previous movements. A coda reminiscent of the third movement ends the piece.

IV. Pacific Sirens

Pacific Sirens has been written especially for the Contemporary Group. Robert Erickson now Professor of Composition at the University of California at San Diego, has provided the following information: "Ever since childhood I have wondered about the song the sirens sang to Ulysses and his men. Then, several months ago I read an account of a certain cliff in Southern Italy where passing sailors often hear quasi-musical moans and sighs. I have also been interested for several years in the 'whispered' and voiced sounds which some musical instruments are able to produce.

I set out to make a piece which used 'singing waves' as one of its elements. The tape portion of the music was produced by first, recording the waves at Pescadero Beach, fifty miles south of San Francisco. These natural sounds were then electronically filtered, to make sixteen different pitch bands and then equalized and remixed to produce the performance tape.

The players play into the wave sounds, sometimes matching and sometimes counterpointing the sounds on the tape, to produce a continuous, seamless siren song.