

## THE CONTEMPORARY GROUP

November 29, 1967

### CONCERT NOTES

#### I. ARNOLD SCHOENBERG: Violin Phantasy, Op. 47 (1949)

The Violin Phantasy, a work typical of Schoenberg's last years, is ostensibly a virtuoso piece. Its audience appeal is unmistakable; this immediate attractiveness, however, masks the tight-knit craftsmanship displayed in every measure.

Schoenberg lived long enough to see his twelve-tone system accepted and adopted as the musical language of the future. In the Violin Phantasy he refined his doctrine still more: This is an early example of serial hexachords, in which four interrelated sets of six notes form the foundation of the entire work. This style of composition bears a resemblance to Medieval and Renaissance practice. Each six-note group (hexachord) assumes the character of a mode, and the harmonic movement is subtle and continuous.

Schoenberg's formal structure, by contrast, is quite obvious. Phrase-lengths, cadences, and dynamic/textural contrasts are in the classic language of Mozart or Beethoven. The first half of the work is based on the violin motives of the first measure - a repeated note (short, long) and a fast three note ascending figure. The second half is a lively scherzo reminiscent of Viennese dance music. The Phantasy ends dramatically with a restatement of the opening measures.

#### II. JOHN VERRALL: Symphony for Chamber Orchestra (1967)

John Verrall's Symphony for Chamber Orchestra, which tonight receives its première performance, is tailored to the University of Washington Contemporary Group. Every member is employed, and each part is independent.

The brevity of the work should not suggest slightness of substance. Rather, it shows the melodic inevitability and contrapuntal integrity implicit in all of John Verrall's music.

The composer remarks:

"I wrote the Chamber Symphony in the seclusion of Camp Indralaya on Orcas Island this past summer. The basic material, particularly in the third movement, was a series of themes, my own and those of others, which had through much reflection grown to be a part of my very consciousness. The evolution of these themes and the resulting forms demanded a kind of wide-spread texture with an intimate pure-tone style of orchestration - hence the chamber orchestra. The peaceful, detached setting in which the work was composed made it possible for ideas to emerge which had remained hidden and almost below the level of consciousness."

### III. MAURO BARTOLOTTI: Introduction, Night Music, and Toccata (1966)

A movement toward synthesis pervades the music of the 1960's. The exclusive categories of art music, popular music, and jazz are less significant than ever before, and young composers have reacted by expanding the medium of composition in all directions.

Mauro Bartolotti's music may best be viewed in the context of synthesis. His "Introduction, Night Music, and Toccata" was written for one of the leading figures of the Third Stream movement - tonight's soloist, William O. Smith. It uses serialism, silence, quasi-electronic effects, chance techniques, and jazz-like improvisation - all as part of a homogeneous style. The musical notation is experimental, and unusually free.

If the music of Luigi Nono provides Bartolotti a starting point, long association with the soloist gives this piece its unique flavor. The clarinet is exploited to an unprecedented degree, and must play "double stops" (two tones at once), flutter-tongued sounds, slides, and pitchless notes produced by tapping the keys or breathing through the instrument.

The arsenal of twenty-three percussion instruments requires an unusually skilled performer. His task is complicated by the presence of glass wind-chimes, which must be replaced after each rehearsal or performance.

The "Introduction" is to be played "violently, with motion"; the "Night Music" (with no apparent resemblance to Bartok) is "calm"; the aptly named "Toccata" must sound "decisive".

### IV. AARON COPLAND: Sextet (1937)

In 1933 Aaron Copland wrote his second "Short" Symphony, only to find that no American conductor would perform it (his colleague Carlos Chávez did so, but then only in Mexico.) After four years of frustration, Copland recast the work, this time as the sextet performed this evening. The clarity and spare, vigorous style of the original were easily adapted to the new idiom, and the sextet has gained a respected place in the American repertoire.

The nervous motor rhythms of the first and third movements attest to the composer's adulation of Stravinsky, as do the widespread polymeters and sharp, severe instrumentation. Stravinskyan Neo-Classicism is tempered with strong, often unexpected rhythmic emphasis and a strident, acrid harmonic idiom. Despite all European influences, this is clearly an American work: Copland's "Music for the Theatre" and other relics of the Jazz Age are reflected throughout.

The spacious slow movement is a near relative of the hymn-like portions of "Appalachian Spring" and "Rodeo". The curious rhythmic retardations and melismas may point to still another source: Arthur Berger sees this movement as an echo of cantorial singing.

Both versions of the work (Symphony and Sextet) are dedicated to Carlos Chávez. The three movements are played without pause.

--- Harrison Ryker