

# STEFAN WOLPE

(1902-1972)

## Suite im Hexachord (1936) (16:36)

1. Sostenuto (2:37)
2. Pastorale (3:25)
3. Fuge (1:55)
4. Adagio (5:10)

### *Speculum Musicae*

Stephen Taylor, oboe Allen Blustine, clarinet

5. **Provence**, read by Hilda Morley (2:52)  
(text for Quintet with Voice)

## Quintet with Voice (1956-57) (20:52)

6. Of festive grace (5:18)
7. Here, the sun violet (Hilda Morley) (5:29)
8. Variations (9:19)

### *Speculum Musicae*

Jan Opalach, bass-baritone  
Allen Blustine, clarinet Daniel Grabois, horn  
Eric Bartlett, cello Barbara Allen, harp  
Aleck Karis, piano  
William Purvis, conductor

## Piece in Three Parts (1961) (13:49) (for piano and sixteen instruments)

9. ♩ = 100 (6:25)
10. ♩ = 74 (3:11)
11. ♩ = 132 (4:09)

### *The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center*

Peter Serkin, piano

Ransom Wilson, Bart Feller, flute/piccolo  
Stephen Taylor, oboe Todd Palmer, clarinet  
John Campo, baritone saxophone

Robert Rouch, Robert Carlisle, horn  
Raymond Mase, Christopher Gekker, trumpet  
Thompson Hanks, bass tuba

Ida Kavafian, violin Paul Neubauer, viola  
Fred Sherry, cello Gordon Gottlieb, percussion  
Nancy Allen, harp David Starobin, electric guitar  
Oliver Knussen, conductor

## Notes by Austin Clarkson

After Wolpe was exiled from Germany in 1933 and after a few months of study with Webern in Vienna, he settled in Palestine, where he began to re-examine the possibilities of the twelve-tone idiom. In August of 1936, after completing the *Four Pieces on Basic Rows* for piano, he began a series of what were to be *Seven Little Canons in the Inversion of Two 12-Tone Corresponding Hexachords for Viola and Cello*. For the first three of these Wolpe split the chromatic scale into two sets of five semitones. He assigned one of the hexachords to each instrument and proceeded to compose canons with one voice as the inversion of the other. It was one of those exercises in stringently limited resources that Wolpe liked to set himself from time to time. But his exuberant imagination expanded beyond the initial idea, and the last four pieces jumped off the canonic rails and became the four movements of *Suite im Hexachord* (1936) for oboe and clarinet. The instruments are no longer in canon, but the pitch resources are limited even more drastically. The first three movements—eight-and-one-half minutes of brilliantly variegated music—utilize the six pitch classes of only one of the hexachords (G, Ab, A, Bb, B, C). Because these pitches appear in several registers, it is as though Wolpe is composing with some strangely gapped scale. When the remaining six pitch classes of the chromatic scale enter for the concluding *Adagio*, it is as though a whole spectrum of new colors enters the picture, as though switching from black and white to color film.

The *Suite* marks a major step beyond the big city expressionism which Wolpe inherited from the Berlin years. His discovery of the richly decorative melos of the Mediterranean infuses the work, especially the *Pastorale*. Irma Wolpe, his second wife, recalled how Wolpe loved to listen to shepherds in the fields playing their pipes. The move from strings to woodwinds can be seen as the naturalization of the Yekke (the German emigre to Palestine) ear to the indigenous sounds of the Mediterranean, but it also marked the beginning of Wolpe's life-long friendship with Josef Marx, the American oboist, musicologist, music dealer, and publisher who brought out many of Wolpe's works under the McGinnis and Marx imprint. Marx, who was playing in the Palestine Orchestra at the time, premiered the *Suite* at concerts in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in May of 1937.

With Marx as his guide, Wolpe explored the furthest reaches of oboe technique in this and other contributions to the oboe repertoire. Nora Post, who studied with Marx, noted that *Suite im Hexachord* makes one of the first requests for harmonic fingering in the oboe literature (8 bars from the end of the first movement) and calls for an

extraordinary range. "With total disregard for existing convention the piece sweeps from the oboe's lowest note to the first A3 in the oboe literature (last bars of the third movement). Other composers did not begin tentative explorations of this register for another 20 years."

The play of antinomies between the oboe and clarinet is a hallmark of Wolpe's music. The two instruments relate and divagate in an intensely inventive and intimate discourse of freshly turned phrases. The delight in the dangerous play at the edge between chaos and order lies in the ground of Wolpe's imagination and appears richly elaborated in the *Quintet with Voice* (1957). Wolpe composed the *Quintet* on a commission from the Baron de Rothschild Foundation and completed it in the spring of 1957 while staying at the American Academy of Rome on a Fulbright Fellowship. After the piece was finished he wrote that he had finished a cycle of works including *Enactments for Three Pianos*, the *Oboe Quartet*, and the *Symphony* that were linked by a certain "concept of doing, inventing, realizing," and that "after this, I'll start anew on a different plane."

This cycle of four works was written during the four productive years Wolpe spent at Black Mountain College. They hold in common a freely outflowing energy that assimilates an extraordinary range of gestures, moods, idioms, shapes, and inflections within a single dominant action. Successive moments are saturated cubistically by profusely varied aspects of the action. The space is not stratified by polyphonic voice parts but is freely constellatory, a space in which sinewy, elastic, finely molded shapes freely move, expand and contract, often at great speed. It is music of action in the same sense as the abstract expressionist painters of the early fifties (many of whom Wolpe knew well) were concerned with a painting of action. As Wolpe wrote of *Enactments*, it is "acting out, being in an act of, being the act itself."

The first movement of the *Quintet* begins with a lilting, graceful French horn solo based on a series of linked and varied tetrachords, the genetic material out of which successive passages emerge. The fabric the instruments weave sustains the gay and affirmative feelings of the opening statement.

The second movement is a setting of a poem by his wife Hilda Morley. It is outwardly an appreciation of Cezanne, but inwardly the poem trembles with resonances of their love for each other. Although Wolpe had written much vocal music before, he found it a challenge to incorporate the voice into his new instrumental writing, as he put it, "to blend a human's vibration of throat and chest with music which fits my knowledge of the human species, or the being or the socialness of all that is in him." To find a place

for the voice in his instrumental theater of actions he lengthens and smooths the lines, varies the tempo continuously, and lightens the texture. Atmospheric instrumental touches subtly delineate the warm Provencal light and the praise of Eros evoked by the poem. The instrumental prelude recurs as a postlude.

The last movement is a theme and variations, where the theme is a sequence of linked interval complexes presented as lines and chords by the piano and harp. The tempo slows with each successive variation and the texture becomes more intricately detailed. The movement concludes with a reprise of the theme in its chordal aspect followed by the original theme in a fresh scoring.

After the expansive pieces of the fifties composed while music director at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, Wolpe rethought his aesthetic ends and re-fashioned his compositional means. He became concerned with "the art of molding opposites into adjacent situations" in contrast to the principle of continuous variation, and with the projecting of a constellatory, multi-focal space by means of a system of symmetrical and asymmetrical intervallic proportions. *Piece in Three Parts for Piano and Sixteen Instruments*, commissioned by Paul Fromm to celebrate the composer's 60th birthday, is one of the principal works in Wolpe's late style. Nevertheless the Quintet can be heard as a bridge to this new language.

Dedicated to his daughter, the British pianist Katharina Wolpe, the piece gives the piano a dominant presence but not as in a solo concerto. The piano, which is silent for only a few bars, is constantly engaged with the ensemble as an instigator, collaborator, and commentator, but does not take off on its own for a solo section or cadenza. As in several of the later works Wolpe sometimes enters names and phrases in the score that reveal associations with particular images. In the present work we find "tracing Debussy" beside the trumpets (b. 28), "Tristan and Isolde" by a clarinet gruppette (b. 87), and the enigmatic "white patterns..." above a figure in the woodwinds and horns (b. 352). A clue to the feeling-tone of the work is found at bar 131, where Wolpe wrote beside the flute part: "*A Jewish phrase (like a deep musical scar) commemorating all the slaughtered Jews.*" These words, which must apply to the entire musical image including the fortissimo clusters in the piano, place *Piece in Three Parts* among the works like *Battle Piece* in which Wolpe made a statement about the struggle for spiritual freedom against the forces of oppression.

Wolpe set forth the technical bases of the piece in the program note he wrote for the

premiere (see below). The orchestra functions as a set of ensembles—a woodwind quintet of two flutes, oboe and clarinet (the two flutes often allied with two trumpets), with the baritone saxophone substituting for the customary bassoon; a brass trio of two horns and tuba, which with the saxophone forms a quartet for bars; and a string quartet. The harp and electric guitar complement the piano by intensifying and elaborating its sonorities, while the percussion, principally with timpani, is brusquely independent. As in so many of Wolpe's later compositions the piece breaks from the struggle without offering false hopes for a final resolution or reconciliation.

The composer provided the following note for the premiere on 13 May, 1962 at the New School Concerts in New York. Ralph Shapey was the conductor and Paul Jacobs the pianist.

*The Piece for Piano and Sixteen Instruments* consists of three interfluent parts, the middle of which focuses on the piano as an autonomous and continuous unit, separated from, though coordinated with, a reduced ensemble of for the most part, two flutes, and two trumpets. In the outer parts the piano maintains among the shifts of instrumental combinations (caused by the fluidities and volatile transformations of musical actions) a principle of instrumental constancy, which affirms the sense of the title: *Piece for Piano and Sixteen Instruments*. Only in the last thirty bars is the full ensemble used. The choice of instrumental combinations depends upon the choices made in regard to the serial (fixed) material and is often decided upon by the permutational devices. The functional role of the piano is at times one which initiates action, or ramifies or multiplies it on other levels. At other times, it opposes, deflects, confuses, destroys events proposed by the orchestral ensemble. Then again, it simultaneously filters or catalyzes them, always a focal force, in the same way as the total musical spectacle is a multifocal force.

The organic quality of the material is of a constantly changing nature. It sometimes exists as a reservoir of a limited amount of pitches from which any number can be chosen and used freely, recombined freely in exchange with other pitches drawn from slightly altered, mode-like formations. Or the pitches are joined in an order whose sequence is at times absolutely unalterable, at other times unalterable only in certain sections, yet in other ones free, as, for example part of a

disorderly pitch conduct. The idea is to modify greatly the character and tempo of the unfolding of the chromatic circulation in the same way as the level of the musical language is often very rudimentary, often intricately involved, depending upon the generic role the material is appointed to play, which also (among a host of other things) decides behavior and articulation of content.



Hilda Morley and Stefan Wolpe, 1957.

© CLEMENS KALISCHER

### Provence

Here the sun, violet,  
gives us that light Cezanne was  
thankful for continually,  
while at night  
we are left alone,  
challenged only  
by the frozen moonlight,  
and the stars  
hilarious in their wheeling violence blow  
air from our lungs,  
blood from our bodies,  
rock our bellies sick –  
what the stars  
in their blazing courses say.  
So he  
slept always by nine o'clock  
and rose with dawning.  
And that light  
filled his eyes and hands, and therefore  
one must be exact, he said.  
What so clearly  
time describes on the flesh, in the eyes'  
wrinkles, on throats and the back of hands,  
must be rendered again, with time  
itself wrested away, and  
the appalling drop of the soul  
through space in  
gravitation.  
Over again  
the earth is beautiful, again and again  
and no light dissuades it and everywhere it is

beautiful again and beloved.

But the mouth cannot praise it.  
You must be patient, he said, and humble  
before nature.

And the work, he said,  
gives courage.

Only, the raised tongue clogs.  
Helpless, it says: my love, O my friend.

In the evening the mountain reaches  
for your face.

Those last leaves carry a message,  
scattered

everywhere. They ask for you  
in praise.

In obstinacy they spin  
till the late cold strikes

(and the light  
of the mountains on the brown leaf

swung  
off the branch in trajectory)

where even  
the mountain-pine, bold in drawing,

is violet  
turning brown.

–Hilda Morley  
(first version)

## THE PERFORMERS

Formed in 1974, **Speculum Musicae** is a democratically propelled instrumental ensemble, dedicated to the performance and recording of twentieth century repertoire. Based in New York City, the thirteen musicians of Speculum present an annual series of concerts in New York and Philadelphia, and perform on tour in the USA and in Europe. These **Speculum Musicae** CD's are available on Bridge: *Wuorinen* (BCD 9008); *Carter* (BCD 9014); *Crumb* (BCD 9028); *Ruders* (BCD 9037).

Bass-baritone **Jan Opalach** is highly regarded for his chamber, orchestral, and operatic performances of contemporary repertoire. Mr. Opalach made his Metropolitan Opera debut in Philip Glass's *The Voyage*, and last season was seen as Wesener in the New York premiere of Zimmerman's *Die Soldaten*. **Jan Opalach** has recently recorded works by Igor Stravinsky, Elliott Carter, Aaron Kernis, and Robert Beaser.

**William Purvis** has been acclaimed as virtuoso French horn recitalist, concerto soloist, chamber player, and recording artist. He is a member of the New York Woodwind Quintet, the Orpheus Ensemble, and the Orchestra of St. Luke's, and is on the faculty of the Juilliard School and SUNY/Stony Brook. His recordings for Bridge include (as conductor): *Elliott Carter: Syringa* (BCD 9014); and *Horn Trios by Brahms and Ligeti* (BCD 9012).

### The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

David Shifrin/Artistic Director

Charles Kargacos/Executive Director

**The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center** has been the resident ensemble at Alice Tully Hall since the opening of the hall in 1969. In addition to its Tully Hall series at Lincoln Center, the Chamber Music Society tours in the U.S. and abroad. Since its founding, the Society has commissioned over 80 new works, many of which have already taken their place in the repertoire. The Society is featured frequently on Public Television's "Live from Lincoln Center," and is heard nationwide on Public Radio.

### Peter Serkin

A champion of a wide range of repertoire, pianist **Peter Serkin** has been a unique presence on the world music scene for more than three decades. Mr. Serkin appears frequently with the world's major symphony orchestras, in recital, as a chamber musician, and as an award-winning recording artist. With a longstanding and absorbing interest in contemporary music, Peter Serkin is known for his fresh and challenging programming, interweaving such diverse composers as Wolpe, Beethoven, Takemitsu, Mozart, Messiaen and Bach.

**Oliver Knussen** made his conducting debut at the age of 15, leading the London Symphony Orchestra in his own *First Symphony*. He has guest conducted many of the world's great orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Bayerisches Rundfunk Orchestra, and BBC Symphony. Knussen is, however, best known for his own widely performed compositions. Among the most frequently heard are his operatic collaborations with Maurice Sendak — *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*

### **Suite im Hexachord**

Producers: David Starobin and Michael Calvert

Engineer: Ben Rizzi

Associate Engineer: David Merrill

Edited: Eric Delente and Michael Calvert at GLC Productions

Recorded on January 12, 1993 at Mastersound Studios, Astoria

*Suite im Hexachord* is published by Joseph Marx Music Company, 1964 (ASCAP)

Hilda Morley Wolpe's reading of her poem, *Provence*, was recorded at a Speculum Musicae concert given on November 18, 1992. *Provence* is copyright, Hilda Morley Wolpe, and is re-printed by permission of the author.

### **Quintet with Voice**

Producers: David Starobin and Michael Calvert

Engineer: Paul Zinman

Edited: Eric Delente and David Starobin at GLC Productions

Recorded on December 23, 1992 at RCA/BMG Studio A, New York City

*Quintet with Voice* is published by Southern Music Publishing Co., Inc. 1977 (ASCAP)

### **Piece in Three Parts**

Producer: Lucy Sumner

Executive Producer: Allison Chernow

Mix Engineer: Edward Haber

Engineers: Christine Bronder and Stephen Shultis

Recorded by WNYC, New York Public Radio, in performance, March 15, 1992, at Alice Tully Hall,

Lincoln Center, New York City

*Piece in Three Parts* is published by Southern Music Publishing Co., Inc. 1977 (ASCAP)

This recording was made possible in part by generous grants from the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, the Rex Foundation, the Stefan Wolpe Society, the Virgil Thomson Fund, and the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal Agency.

Special thanks to Fred Sherry, former Artistic Director of The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and Nick Saunders of The Society; Ronald Anderson of the Stefan Wolpe Society; Todd Vunderink of Peer Music; Allison Chernow of WNYC Radio, Amy Roberts Frawley of Speculum Musicae; and Virgil Blackwell.

All photographs, copyright, Clemens Kalischer

