

ELLIOTT CARTER

(b. 1908)

Eight Compositions (1948-1993)

performed by The Group for Contemporary Music

- | | | | | | |
|----------|---|---------|---------------|--|---------|
| 1 | Gra (1993)
Charles Neidich, clarinet | (4:35) | 6 | Con Leggerezza Pensosa (1990)
<i>Omaggio a Italo Calvino</i>
Charles Neidich, clarinet Rolf Schulte, violin
Fred Sherry, cello | (5:17) |
| 2 | Enchanted Preludes (1988)
Harvey Sollberger, flute Fred Sherry, cello | (6:30) | 7 | Riconoscenza per Goffredo Petrassi (1984)
Rolf Schulte, violin | (6:30) |
| 3 | Duo (1974)
Rolf Schulte, violin Martin Goldray, piano | (21:27) | 8 - 11 | Sonata for Violoncello and Piano (1948)
Moderato (4:46)
Vivace, molto leggero (4:30)
Adagio (4:59)
Allegro (5:37)
Fred Sherry, cello Charles Wuorinen, piano | (19:55) |
| 4 | Scrivo in Vento (1991)
Harvey Sollberger, flute | (5:55) | | | |
| 5 | Changes (1983)
David Starobin, guitar | (7:46) | | | |

Total Time: 78:39

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For Elliott Carter, a musical instrument is always an extension of a performer. His writing grows from a detailed understanding of the mechanical and acoustical properties of each instrument, but also out of the way a player breathes and moves. The remarkable performances heard on this recording respond to Carter's imaginative challenges. They make us acutely aware of the sounds of each instrument, the stress of bow against string, breath against reed, and they take these physical facts into the realm of human gesture and emotion. Each work combines these physical and psychological elements in an ever-changing polyphony which often suggests an argument, sometimes between many parties, at other times an internal dialogue. As in real human arguments, the outcome is hard to predict and is rarely conclusive. Many people argue, even with themselves, more through assertion than reason, more through blind opposition than through open dialogue. (As the writer Fran Liebowitz once put it "the opposite of listening is waiting.") It is precisely the cantankerous, messy and explosive aspects of argument that Carter has evoked in his musical polyphony. The pieces on this album illustrate the fertility of this theme for Carter's imagination over the last forty-five years.

The Sonata for Violoncello and Piano, written in 1948, was a breakthrough in Carter's stylistic development. On the surface, parts of it sound like other American music of the period. We hear breezy bits of jazz and bright pandiatonic harmonies. But at times the music also breaks sharply with vernacular materials and often becomes acridly dissonant and chromatic. New musical techniques produce these more disturbing and dramatic musical events. There are complex relations of tempo which link different parts of movements and also connect the four movements. There are also subtle transformations of thematic ideas and non-tonal harmonic combinations. But most strikingly there is a tendency to oppose the two instruments contrapuntally so that they seem at times to be playing at different speeds and in sharply different characters—an opposition which blazes up as an intense argument. All these new techniques would become the basis of Carter's later development.

Carter composed the second movement first. It begins as a jazzy scherzo, pitting the tonalities of B major and b flat minor against each other (as Carter had done earlier in his *Piano Sonata*). A contrasting section, however, jumps into new territory: a nervous polyrhythm of five against three and an ominous sounding of the *Dies Irae*, swerves the music into a darker terrain. It's as if Carter was pushing aside his earlier Americana style: we're no longer in Kansas. The slow third movement begins with a restatement of the nervous quintuplet figure from the previous movement. A notational transformation from quintuplet eighths to sixty-fourth notes determines the tempo of the new movement. The sections of this slow movement in turn are related by tempo ratios 6:7:8:5, a new procedure which allows the thematic ideas to take on changing characters. A similar transformation produces the tempo of the last movement which begins as the piano turns part of the closing cantilena of the slow movement into a rapid rhythmic motto. Indeed much of the last movement is a recasting of ideas from the slow movement but in a state of increasing frenzy which reaches a climax as the two instruments collide in a five-against-two polyrhythm near the end. Having journeyed so far from the small-scaled humor of the scherzo to the volcanic energy of the finale, Carter added a new opening movement which takes the idea of opposition to a further and definitive stage. The sonata now opens with the contrasted relentless ticking of the piano and out-of-time lyricism of the cello. Both ideas are pursued as if blindly with only a few passing moments of mutual contact (and these seem accidental). The movement is constructed out of three large phrases of polar, tragic, incomprehension. The end of the first movement, then, is the end of the entire sonata. By placing his last-composed movement first, Carter gave the work the shape of a chambered nautilus, spiraling out of its ideas. Time itself had found a new shape.

Twenty-five years after the *Cello Sonata*, Carter returned to the medium of string instrument and piano in the **Duo**. Like the *Cello Sonata* the *Duo* is an argument—Carter has compared the opening, where the violin pursues a series of passionately expressive phrases while the piano remains implacably indifferent, to the experience

of a man climbing a glacier. The contrast of the mechanical and rapidly fading sound of the piano with the sustained and sensitive tones of the strings, however, here becomes an emblem of tragic incomprehension. The struggle between the two instruments has lost any traces of sonata form. There are no longer themes or movements. Each instrument is given a repertory of harmonies, rhythms and expressive characters out of which it builds its own discourse. The piece unfolds as an unbroken series of episodes of various lengths and characters in which the instruments are sometimes completely removed from each other's worlds, or seem to approach each other, although warily. Form, or form-making strategy, itself becomes a part of the argument. The piano constructs its music out of a wide range of pulses, but in large blocks of textures—in a series of distinct movements, as it were. The violin, by contrast, seems to free-associate its way through the piece, sometimes intersecting with the clearer moods of the piano, but mainly going its own unpredictable way, until, toward the end, it seems to take off, in a virtuosic passage that is only approximately co-ordinated with the piano. At its premiere, violinist Paul Zukofsky and pianist Gilbert Kalish were placed about fifteen feet apart. This choreography may have made performance of the *Duo* even harder than it had to be - and made the important harmonic connections between the instruments hard to hear - but it created a striking visual equivalent of the chasm that divides the two players.

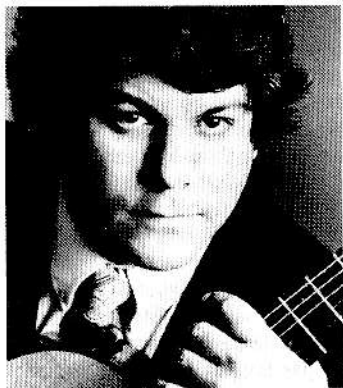
Until the nineteen eighties Carter had written very few short pieces. *Changes* for guitar initiated a whole series of short works for four instruments (*Canon for 4*), or three (*Con Leggerezza Pensosa*), or two (*Esprit Rude/Esprit Doux*, *Enchanted Preludes*, and *Trilogy*), or one (*Riconoscenza*, *Scrivo in Vento* and *Gra*). All of these works are constructed on very similar premises. While Carter used to develop virtually a new language for every piece, since the early 80s his technique has stabilized around a few constructional principles. There is usually a large polyrhythm that supports the rhythmic relations between the instruments or, in the case of solo works, musical ideas. There is also a systematic dividing up of harmonic materials, so that all intervals and other possible harmonic combinations are present in each work, but

each plays a distinctive role in the polyphony. By codifying his rhythmic and harmonic procedures, Carter has given his music at once a greater unity and a greater playfulness - think of these pieces as tennis matches for the imagination. All of these short works sound like spontaneous improvisations, because the apparently rigid framework in which they exist actually allows for a tremendous amount of compositional freedom. These golden fruit of Carter's late harvest should be compared in music history with the late piano pieces of Brahms and with Beethoven's final *Bagatelles*.

Changes was written for David Starobin in 1983. The title stems, officially, from the way the basic harmony is sounded throughout the work "somewhat like the patterns used by bell-ringers in ringing changes." Less officially the title reflects the collaborative nature of the work, for Carter revised and extended the work after consulting with Starobin. Although most guitar music has been written by guitarists, Carter's contribution to the literature is remarkably idiomatic and combines a wide range of guitaristic colors: harmonics, ponticello, expressive vibrato, flamenco-style strumming. The alternation of short, sharply-etched episodes creates a temporal polyphony. All the elements of the piece seem to achieve their goal in the beautiful closing section, *Lento tranquillo*, which reduces them all to chiming chords.

Riconoscenza per Goffredo Petrassi was written in 1984 to honor the Italian composer, a long time friend of Carter's. It contrasts three distinct moods: sweetly flowing lyricism, a mock-furious aggression, and tranquility. Each mood brings out a different aspect of the violin: singing, scratching and sustaining, and each has its own harmonic makeup and rhythmic character. Each character evolves through the piece, and the form of the piece itself grows out of the developing relation of its three moods.

Enchanted Preludes, for flute and cello, was composed in 1988 to honor the 50th birthday of Ann Santen, musical director of Cincinnati's public radio station, and a



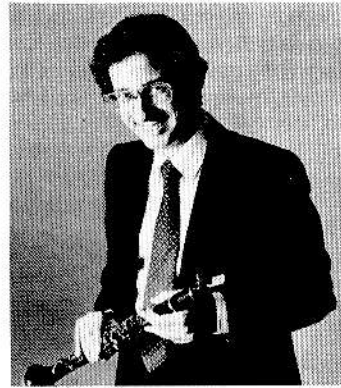
David Starobin



Fred Sherry



Rolf Schulte



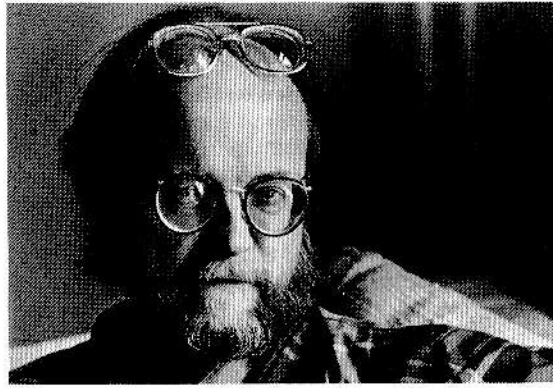
Charles Neidich



Martin Goldray



Harvey Sollberger



Charles Wuorinen

champion of new music. Carter has compared this piece to a Mendelssohn scherzo: it is fairy-dust music full of trills and tremolos. Although both instruments play different intervals and at different speeds they pursue the same elfin mood. The title comes from a poem by Wallace Stevens, *The Pure Good of Theory*, "All the Preludes to Felicity," stanza No. 7:

Felicity, ah! Time is the hooded enemy,
The inimical music, the enchanter's space
In which the enchanted preludes have their place.

Con Leggerezza Pensosa: Omaggio a Italo Calvino, for clarinet, violin and cello, was written in 1990 for the Istituto di Studi Musicali in Latina, Italy to honor the Italian author. Its title, "thoughtful lightness," recalls Calvino's playful literary style. The piece contrasts episodes in an unpredictable sequence, suddenly changing moods in a series of explosions and interruptions. The three instruments seem particularly responsive to each other here, picking up and amplifying each others suggestions.

Scrivo in Vento was written in 1991 for the flautist Robert Aitken and takes its title from a sonnet of Petrarch (Rime Sparse 212) in which he describes a dream state where he pursues the summer breeze, swims through the sea and writes on the wind - more than enough imagery for a flute solo. The piece begins in a tranquil mood which is suddenly interrupted with the sharp sound of a high C sharp. The extravagant alternation of tranquility and violence, which emphasizes the polar extremes of the flute's expressive palette, gives the piece its distinctively unsettled character.

Gra, for clarinet, was written in 1993 for the 80th birthday of Witold Lutoslawski. Gra means "play" in Polish, and the piece is a playful "jeu d'esprit." Carter gives the unusual character indication "Ghiribizzoso" or "whimsical" at the head of the score, and the writing brings out the comic potential of the clarinet in several different ways. In particular the piece draws attention to the wide range of colors that the

clarinet can produce throughout its registers and even on one note. Right at the center of the piece the clarinet sustains one note for six bars, but is instructed to increase and decrease a change in tone-color or vibrato or both. Here the instrument, the player, and the composer come together, in mutual collaboration—a fitting image for all of Carter's music.

—David Schiff

Rolf Schulte, born in Germany, came to the United States after winning top prize in the 1968 Munich International Radio Competition. Mr. Schulte has been soloist with the Berlin Philharmonic, the Munich Philharmonic, the Philharmonia Hungarica, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Seattle Symphony, and the radio orchestras of Berlin, Cologne and Stuttgart. Recent recordings include Milton Babbitt's *The Joy of More Sextets* (New World Records), Mario Davidovsky's *Synchronisms #9* (Wergo), György Ligeti's *Horn Trio* (Bridge), and Robert Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* and *Romanzen* (Centaur).

Fred Sherry has had close working associations with such eminent composers as Luciano Berio, Charles Wuorinen, Elliott Carter, Aaron Copland, Lukas Foss and Toru Takemitsu. A founding member of TASHI, he has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, The New Japan Philharmonic, and L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. Sherry has also appeared at major festivals including Tanglewood, Angel Fire, Casals, and Spoleto. Mr. Sherry was the Artistic Director of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, between 1989 and 1992.

Harvey Sollberger, composer, conductor, flutist and teacher was a founder and (for 27 years) co-director of the Group for Contemporary Music. Sollberger's compositions have won numerous awards and have been performed here and abroad by such ensembles as the New York Philharmonic and Pierre Boulez's *Domaine Musicale* concerts. As flutist and conductor Sollberger has premiered works by Babbitt, Carter, Davidovsky, Martino, Reynolds and Wuorinen. He is currently Professor of Music at the University of California at San Diego.

In addition to the creation of a large and highly regarded compositional output, **Charles Wuorinen** is a distinguished performer, both pianist and conductor. As co-founder of the Group for Contemporary Music, Wuorinen has often performed the works of other contemporaries, championing the work of Carter, Babbitt and Stefan Wolpe in particular. In recent years most of Wuorinen's piano performances have

focused on his own compositions. This performance of the Carter *Sonata* (a work he and Sherry have performed dozens of times together) is a special tribute to the work of Elliott Carter.

David Starobin has had a close relationship with Elliott Carter's music for more than two decades. Starobin can be heard on recordings of Carter's *Tell me Where is Fancy Bred* (1938) (Vox/Turnabout), *Syringa* (1978) (CRI and Bridge), *Changes* (first recording—Bridge BCD 9009), and conducting *Three Poems of Robert Frost* (1981 orchestration) (Bridge). Starobin currently heads guitar departments at the Manhattan School of Music and SUNY/Purchase in addition to performing an international schedule of guitar recitals. He is the founder and president of Bridge Records.

Charles Neidich was the winner of several major competitions including the 1982 Munich International and the 1985 Naumburg Competition. He now performs in excess of 80 concerts annually, and has performed with orchestras and in recital in major halls throughout Europe, the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong. Neidich also maintains an active teaching schedule and is on the faculty of the Juilliard School, the Manhattan School of Music, and the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Martin Goldray is a distinguished advocate of new music as a pianist, conductor and lecturer. He has premiered many new piano works and has conducted the premieres of Philip Glass's operas *Orpheus* and *Hydrogen Jukebox*. He has been a visiting artist at Cornell University and is on the staff of the Wellesley Composers Conference. Goldray received a Doctorate in Piano at Yale, a B.A. at Cornell, and studied in Paris under a Fulbright Scholarship.

In 1985 **The Group for Contemporary Music** was awarded a citation from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters as follows: "The Group for Contemporary Music, founded in 1962 by Harvey Sollberger and Charles Wuorinen as graduate students at Columbia University, changed the musical climate by redefining the standards of performance of knowing, demanding contemporary composition. It was the first collection of musicians joined in ensemble to present new music exclusively and appropriately, with the necessary preparation, in time and understanding. Today its ideals and its personnel have spawned a population of such groups across the city and country,...wherever the music of our time has its rightful place."

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