

# RICHARD WERNICK

(b. 1934)

## PIANO CONCERTO (1989-90) 27:51

- |     |   |       |
|-----|---|-------|
| I   | FANTASIA: "TINTINNABULA ACADEMIAE MUSICAE"              | 13:51 |
| II  | "... THE DREAM THEY SMILE AND THE KISS THEY WHISPER..." | 8:16  |
| III | RÉJOUISSANCE  | 5:43  |

LAMBERT ORKIS, PIANO

SYMPHONY II

RICHARD WERNICK, CONDUCTOR

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## VIOLIN CONCERTO (1984) 24:15

- |     |                       |       |
|-----|-----------------------|-------|
| I   | MOLTO VIVACE          | 3:50  |
| II  | SLOW; TIMELESS        | 12:24 |
| III | WITH ENERGY AND DRIVE | 8:01  |

GREGORY FULKERSON, VIOLIN

SYMPHONY II

LARRY RACHLEFF, CONDUCTOR

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Richard Wernick's *Visions of Terror and Wonder* won the 1977 Pulitzer Prize for music. Since then, it has been a delight to watch as wider public recognition gradually supplemented the reputation he had long been building among connoisseurs as a creator of passionate integrity, vivid imagination, and consummate technique. A graduate of Brandeis and Mills, and a former pupil of Irving Fine, Harold Shapero, Arthur Berger, Ernst Toch, Leon Kirchner, Boris Blacher, and Aaron Copland, Wernick has himself taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo, at the University of Chicago, and, from 1968 until he retired in 1996, at the University of Pennsylvania, where he served successively as Irving Fine Professor of Music and Magnin Professor of Humanities and was conductor of the Penn Contemporary Players. For ten years beginning in 1983, Wernick also worked with Riccardo Muti and the Philadelphia Orchestra, first as consultant for contemporary music and later as special consultant to the Music Director.

Amid the conditions of musical life during the third quarter of the 20th century, integrity, imagination, and technique have not in themselves generally sufficed to assure composers of frequent orchestral performance. Nor has the particular nature of Wernick's inspiration necessarily helped in that direction. No follower of trends, but rather a cat that walks by himself, he has written music that, at the heyday of the avant-garde in the 1960s and early 1970s, was too uncompromisingly individual—too independent of systems or schools—to qualify for a cult. And now that times have changed

that tonality has made a startling comeback, and that something rather vaguely called the "New Simplicity" vies with the Old Obscurity for public and critical attention, Wernick's instinctive distaste for easy answers conspires with his formidable technical equipment to deter him from jumping on that bandwagon either.

The special quality that marks his music is, indeed, the way it combines fearless exploitation of 20th-century harmonic resources with a powerful and always perceptible undertow of tonal implications. In a Wernick piece, neither tonal nor atonal structures would make sense without the enriching effect of their mutual interplay. The directly expressive yet magically allusive language that results was at first, not surprisingly, deployed most often through the intimacy of relatively small performing media. In recent years, however, a series of major commissions has prompted the expansion of his orchestral output. Composed in 1984, the Violin Concerto was only the third of his works, along with *Visions of Terror and Wonder* and the 1966 *Aevia* (and leaving the 1962 small-orchestra piece *Hexagrams* out of account), to call for full orchestral forces. But since then it has been joined by seven relatively large-scale orchestral pieces, including two symphonies, concertos for viola, for cello, and for saxophone quartet, and the Piano Concerto coupled with it on this disc.

Richard Wernick's Violin Concerto had its premiere in Philadelphia on January 17, 1986, with Gregory Fulkerson, for whom it was written, as soloist and Riccardo Muti conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra. The work had originally been conceived for smaller

forces, but grew first to chamber-orchestral proportions and then, at Maestro Muti's request, to full symphony-orchestra scale.

What evidently remained intact through this twofold expansion was the character of a concerto in the fullest sense of the term. Without making any historicist nod to the ritornello form of 18th- and 19th-century concertos, the composer has succeeded in creating a form that fully realizes the metaphysical potential of the concerto idea—essentially a dramatic concept, representing in microcosm the relations of the individual with society.

Wernick's overall three-movement structure is of the utmost clarity. The "*primus inter pares*" status of the soloist is established outright in the second measure, when the violin enters with a motif that scurries upward at once hectically and strongly. Its purposeful eloquence stands at first in stark contrast to the relatively restricted interjections of the orchestra. But Wernick characteristically spurns the facile option. The pioneering Charles Ives, and a number of American composers after him, evolved a formal principle based on the allocation of specific motifs to particular instruments. It would have been a simple task to work out a concerto on this fashionable basis, reserving the scurrying figure and its derivatives for the soloist and limiting the orchestra to more static matter. Preferring poetic truth to systematic consistency, Wernick instead allows the soloist's theme to percolate into the orchestra—it is, after all, one of the characteristics of a successful orator that he carries his audience with him.

Some composers, most notably Beethoven, have used the violin concerto as the medium of a supremely lyrical brand of poetry. The nature of Wernick's material dictates instead the character of an intense, almost febrile quest. The relatively short opening movement serves inevitably as just a first word: any conclusion, at this stage, would be premature. The long slow movement that follows constitutes an utterly different approach to the Concerto's central question, which might well be akin to Whitman's "Ah who shall soothe these feverish children? Who justify these restless explorations? Who speak the secret of the impassive earth?" Carrying the initial direction "Slow; timeless," the movement, at once impassioned and withdrawn, passes through many delicately interrelated changes of tempo and texture. This time the soloist is content for a while to listen to the orchestra. His assertiveness in the first movement has sufficed to confirm his leadership, but it has not brought him near an answer to those nagging questions. Now he is willing to collaborate.

The change of policy opens the way for the finale. Following without a break, it begins to reconcile the vastly opposed dramatic attitudes of the previous two movements, and also to bring their differences of pace into association, interspersing its rapid progress with two quasi-cadenza passages and one full-scale written-out cadenza. The solo theme whose possibilities were not exhausted in the first movement returns—but, significantly, it is left to the orchestra: the soloist, now, is seeking elsewhere for his answers. It is only in the cadenza, near the very end, that he returns to his original thematic topic.

Here once again Wernick rejects the easy solution. He realizes that the issues raised by the Concerto are too complex to allow of a one-sided conclusion. Neither the compulsive activity of the first movement nor the timeless suspense of the second can be left out of final account. Neither a simple slow conclusion nor a facile climax of virtuosity will suffice. And so the soloist reverts to an idea previously thrown forth as an aside earlier in the course of the finale. Based on a rhythmic reiteration of the note D on both open and stopped strings, alternating arco and pizzicato, it brings the Concerto's feverish searching to rest in a hypnotic synthesis of movement and immobility. In retrospect, as the soloist, now calmed, blows the Concerto away with one brief flourish, this contemplative "om" imposes itself as the only possible way the work's sharp oppositions could have been reconciled.

Richard Wernick inscribed the Violin Concerto "for my son, Peter, with much love." Peter Wernick died of cancer on February 2, 1986, seventeen days after attending the premiere.

The Piano Concerto was commissioned by the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington, DC, and its then Music Director, Mstislav Rostropovich, and it was these forces that gave the work its premiere at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on February 7, 1991. The soloist was the orchestra's keyboard player, Lambert Orkis, who also gave the European premiere, with the composer conducting the Residentie Orkest (Hague Philharmonic) in the Netherlands, on December 4, 1993.

In the five years between the completion of the Violin Concerto and the start of work on the Piano Concerto, Wernick's style underwent a marked evolution. It would be risky to describe the process as "relaxation," since there was no diminution in the emotional intensity fundamental to his music. But the Viola Concerto, composed in 1986 for a relatively small orchestra, allowed gentler impulses the space to express themselves with a new sense of leisure, and the Piano Concerto, though returning emphatically to the large-orchestra format of the violin work, takes the shift of expressive emphasis further. This time, indeed, the solo instrument does not even make its appearance until the 28th measure, by which point several striking thematic ideas have already been put forward in an expansive orchestral exordium of some majesty.

Wernick explained the work's rather complex personal associations in his program note for the premiere. The following edited version is used with his kind permission. "The composition of my Piano Concerto," he wrote,

grew quite naturally out of my long association with Lambert Orkis. We have been professional colleagues and close friends for many years now. In 1981 Mr. Orkis commissioned my Piano Sonata, which I completed in 1982 and which he subsequently recorded for Bridge Records. The performances he gave were truly brilliant, not only technically, but musically and emotionally. He understood precisely how this musical

witch's brew of anger, savagery, lyricism, and unabashed sentiment was put together, what its musical antecedents were, and how to make it all appear more coherent than it probably is. Somehow the notion of collaboration on a full-size concerto was inevitable.

I wrote the first movement [of the Piano Concerto] in Jerusalem between the end of May and the beginning of July of 1989. I was living in a small apartment near the Islamic Museum, and at that time of year the smell of honeysuckle and rosemary is particularly overwhelming. I can evoke those aromas at will, as well as the intensity of the light in a locale high above the hills of the Judean desert. For me Jerusalem, despite all the tensions that exist there, is the most beautiful city in the world, as well as the physical and spiritual center of the universe. It is the one city in which I feel completely at home.

I composed the major part of the second movement in a setting that could hardly be more diametrically opposed: Wolcott, Vermont, in my friend Mario Davidovsky's converted barn that sits amidst ninety acres of undisturbed meadow and woodland in one of the most beautiful and peaceful areas of far northern New England. I began in the last week of July and finished at home, in Media, Pennsylvania, in the first week of September. One glance at the score evokes for me the

muted light of late summer, the sound of the small creek emptying into the pond outside the studio, and the antics of two silly geese that made that pond their summer home.

The third movement took the most time. It was written at home in Media, amidst the distractions usually associated with home, hearth, and the necessity of earning a living by honest work. The final pages were completed on January 20, 1990.

The first movement, FANTASIA: TINTINNABULA ACADEMIAE MUSICAE (Bells of the Academy of Music), is based on the bell signal I wrote for the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, home of the Philadelphia Orchestra. This is the signal that exhorts people to take their seats before concerts and after intermission. It marks my debut and farewell performance as a carillonneur. This movement is dedicated to Stephen Sell, then executive director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, who was in good part responsible for my composing the new bell signal.

The title of the second movement “. . . THE DREAM THEY SMILE AND THE KISS THEY WHISPER . . .” is a line from the poem “Ball of Sun” by Bernard Jacobson, [then] program annotator and musicologist of the Philadelphia Orchestra. I did a setting of this poem for Jan DeGaetani, that most remarkable of singers, my dear friend for many, many years, who at the

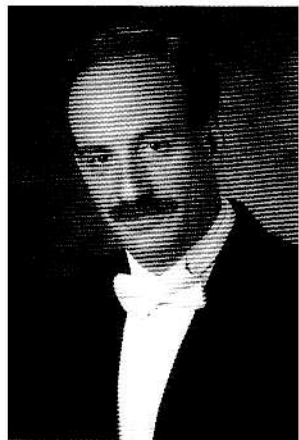
time of her death was planning to record a second collection of American songs. The movement is based on fragments of that song, and is dedicated to her.

The third movement, RÉJOUISSANCE, bears no dedication in the score; but neither is it totally abstract. It is a showpiece for Lambert Orkis and the National Symphony, but more importantly it is a tribute to all those dear people whose personas are intertwined in this piece: Lambert and Bernard and Steve and Jan.

The composer has told me that he feels a knowledge of the music's associations is a more important key to understanding than an account of its structures. Having unavoidably made two personal appearances in the above account of the work's origins, the writer of these notes will therefore refrain from obtruding himself further under pretext of formal analysis, preferring to leave the listener in the capable hands of Richard Wernick as composer, conductor, and explicator of his own creative purposes.

7 Bernard Jacobson

**Symphony II**, which *Chicago Tribune* music critic John von Rhein says is “second to none,” was formed in 1990 by musicians of the Lyric Opera of Chicago orchestra. Performing at a number of venues in the Chicago area, Symphony II offers a spring series in addition to special concerts throughout the year. Guest Maestro Zubin Mehta says of Symphony II, “these musicians who form the core of one of the best opera orchestras are among the finest. They perform with artistry and emotion. It is a pleasure to work with musicians of this caliber.”



**Larry Rachleff** is Professor of Conducting and Music Director of Rice University's Shepherd School Orchestras. He is also the Music Director of Chicago's Symphony II, an orchestra comprised of members of the Chicago Lyric Opera Orchestra and the Grant Park Symphony. Mr. Rachleff has appeared as guest conductor with orchestras including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Houston Symphony, the New World Symphony, the Louisiana Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and at the Tanglewood and Aspen Music Festivals.

**Gregory Fulkerson's** career includes recital debuts in New York, London, Paris, Rome, and Brussels, as well as over 30 concerti with orchestra under such conductors as Riccardo Muti, Zdenek Macal, Lawrence Leighton Smith, Gerhardt Zimmermann, Robert Spano, and Marin Alsop. In 1992, Mr. Fulkerson performed the title role in the revival of Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*, for a total of 48 performances on four continents. Gregory Fulkerson's debut recording was chosen one of the year's best by *The New York Times*, and his CD of the complete Violin Sonatas of Charles Ives (Bridge Records) has set a standard for that repertoire. Mr. Fulkerson's "Bach: Sonatas and Partitas" for solo violin will soon be released on Bridge Records.

**Lambert Orkis's** musical interests encompass traditional and contemporary music performed on modern and period instruments. Composers such as Richard Wernick, George Crumb, James Primosch, and Maurice Wright have written solo works for him. Having recorded extensively, he has been nominated twice for a Grammy award in the field of Best Chamber Music Performance. He is known internationally on the world's foremost concert platforms for his duo performances with cellist Mstislav Rostropovich and violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter. When not touring, he can be found in Philadelphia where he is Professor of Piano at Temple University's Esther Boyer College of Music, or in Washington DC, where he occupies the position of Principal Keyboard of the Kennedy Center's National Symphony Orchestra.

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The Group for Contemporary Music; Charles Wuorinen, piano; Charles Neidich, clarinet; Fred Sherry, cello; David Starobin, guitar; Rolf Schulte, violin; Martin Goldray, piano  
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**Benedict Mason:** String Quartet; Double Concerto; Self-Referential Songs; Arditti Quartet; London Sinfonietta; Ensemble Modern; C. Whittlesey, soprano  
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**Stefan Wolpe:** Quintet with Voice; Piece in 3 Parts; Suite im Hexachord; Peter Serkin, piano; Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center; Oliver Knussen, conductor; Speculum Musicae, Jan Opalach, bass; William Purvis, conductor  
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**Tod Machover:** VALIS; opera on the novel by Philip K. Dick  
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**Stephen Jaffe:** Vocal, chamber and orchestral music  
D'anna Fortunato, soprano  
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**George Crumb:** A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979  
Lambert Orkis, piano BRIDGE 9003
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