

Yehudi Wyner on the music of Stephen Jaffe

Stephen Jaffe's music is dense, complex, weighty, thoughtful, tightly constructed, serious and challenging to perform. It is also transparent, simple, airborne, playful, spontaneously improvisatory, witty and immensely satisfying to perform. How can this be, that such contradictions can characterize the music of one composer, that such oppositions can not only coexist, but actually enhance and enrich all of his compositions? I see the embrace of so many elements as a clear sign of a large world view, of a need to grapple with essential issues in the creative life of a deep-feeling, hard-thinking artist. Jaffe sets in motion complex and contradictory elements with the aim of achieving synthesis and transformation. It is remarkable how convincingly this aim is realized.

The music, while it is highly regulated in a formal sense, is also full of lyric impulses—some simple, some complex—and often conveys a sense of spontaneous, even irrational, invention. While the expressive content may be compact, and even when simultaneous strands of music are combined in independent motion, the textures remain transparent. Every note, every sonority, every detail is telling and necessary.

Jaffe's language is comprehensive and allows him to use basic tonal or modal references, magically integrating them with a highly developed chromatic technique. The instrumental writing is brilliant and sonorous; the orchestrational textures are exquisite and intrinsic to the particular composition—no applied cosmetics here.

When Jaffe chooses to write for the voice, he chooses excellent poetry and sets it with an ideal sense of prosody and vocal allure. The vocal writing is beautiful, satisfying to sing and, as in all of Jaffe's music, wonderfully warm and true.

And the scherzos! These movements are simply the best in the business: witty, energetic, antic, mordant, exploding with meaningful and surprising events. The humor is of an exalted kind, far beyond the merely quick or light or clever. Rhythmically complex, they give the impression of astonishing naturalness and immense variety of information.

My response to Jaffe's music exceeds admiration. I simply love it.

Yehudi Wyner, 17 December, 2003

Stephen Jaffe

(b. 1954)

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1996-99) (34:37)

- 1 I Passage (14:06)
- 2 II Variations (9:56)
- 3 III Allegro vivo (10:35)

Gregory Fulkerson, violin
Odense Symphony Orchestra
Donald Palma, conductor

Chamber Concerto ("Singing Figures") (1994-95) (20:36)

for Oboe and Five Instruments

- 4 I Dance Prelude (6:01)
- 5 II Water Music (6:59)
- 6 III Finale (7:36)

Stephen Taylor, Oboe
Speculum Musicae
Curtis Macomber, violin; Lois Martin, viola; Eric Bartlett, cello
Stephen Beck, harpsichord; Stephen Gosling, piano
William Purvis, conductor

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Notes by the Composer

A creative artist has the challenge of language: one needs to discover one's own way, with a sense of exploration. My path to both of these pieces was unforeseen: the violin concerto emerged only gradually--in fact it started out as another piece until the sketches began to suggest first a shorter work for violin and orchestra, and then a full concerto. Similarly, the *Chamber Concerto* ("*Singing Figures*") morphed into its uncommon instrumental unit only gradually. Of course I respond to external factors, such as recent listening experiences and the needs of ensembles. But primarily, exploration means listening to my musical materials, and what they suggest, and at the same time to an inner impulse, the basis for art-making.

With *Four Images* for Orchestra (1983; rev. 1987), I had composed something like a group concerto, in which bands of instruments combine against each another (this gave me experience in dealing with the orchestra itself as a collection of ensembles). And I have written a good deal for vocalists. But it was a long time before I could find my way to the solo concerto which was my own utterance, in a language not so encumbered with the connotations of earlier concerti: (sometimes) shallow virtuosity on the one hand, or the tragic embodiment of the heroic figure, so fully explored by other composers, on the other. In the process of writing the pieces recorded here, and since, a third concerto, for cello and orchestra (introduced in 2004 by the National Symphony Orchestra, with David Hardy, cello), I have discovered not only many musical and acoustical ways of combining string or wind soloists with larger groups, but also a new found ease with instrumental virtuosity, and my own way of projecting a solo line. This is not to mention the tangible enjoyment of working for months ahead of time in collaboration

with gifted soloists, in a way that can never be never afforded (literally) when rehearsal time--say for an ensemble piece-- is short. To a soloist, the collaboration with a composer offers the freedom to probe music beyond the limits of the repertory. Soloists, as well as composers, want to find out: do I have anything new or different to say?

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1996-99)

As intimated above, I held off naming this piece until I had almost finished composing it (perhaps out of fear the title itself would magically jinx the project). In retrospect, the work, started in 1996 and mostly composed in 1998-99, definitely did earn the title violin concerto, with all the moniker implies in musical and poetic conception: three main sections, a special sound world, and virtuoso violin writing as an integral part of its poetics. The spirit of the music is principally communicated through the notes, of course, but also through composer-to-performer messages, which abound here (*like a boogie-woogie, quasi Doppler effect*, etc.). Words loosely attached to the three individual movements as titles may also be suggestive: "Passage", the first movement, might refer to the little theme with which the violin opens the concerto (as in a musical passage); or to the many cadenza passages; or metaphorically, to the progression from singing to soaring to leaping, a narrow passage as something we might choose to go through, involving risk and dependent on the grace of others, living or ancestors. "Variations", the second movement, may be described in purely musical terms: introduction, theme and ten variations, a sectional composition midway between slow movement and scherzo. But I was also thinking about the beauty of ascent...(and nearly called the movement variations on a song of ascent). The concluding "Allegro vivo" is a joy-

ful, rhythmic and singing enterprise, the most continuous of the three main parts. While related to the previous two movements thematically, the emphasis here is on rhythms which talk and dance, and of course, on the violin.

In addition to the solo part, the concerto calls for an orchestra of nine woodwinds (including piccolo, bass clarinet and english horn), eight brass, harp, keyboard, timpani, and three percussion parts (some thirty instruments including the Chinese lujan and Jamaican Steel drums distributed among three players) and strings. The language ranges from the most simple and direct melodies to very dense clouds of sound in which the violin soloist is temporarily enveloped.

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra was commissioned by the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra, and received its first performances in March, 2000, with Nicholas Kitchen, violin soloist, and Stuart Malina, conductor.

***Chamber Concerto ("Singing Figures")* (1994-95)**

The *Chamber Concerto*, subtitled "*Singing Figures*" is a full concerto with an extended part for the solo oboist and a divertimento in which the discourse is light and airy. The size and small forces of the piece will recall J.S. Bach's *Brandenburg Concerti*, but we have our own dances and manners of poetry: the piece inhabits a world of color, fanciful strangeness and lithe athleticism of its own, as if ruins of tradition--particularly the ancient oboe and harpsichord -- collide with more contemporary notions of song, color, dance, and the ensemble. The "singing figures" are scored for oboe solo and five instrumentalists: two keyboard players sharing three instruments (piano, harpsichord and celesta), violin, viola, and cello. The score calls for members of the ensemble to play with exuberance and precision, and with the poetry of pianissimo, as each member is asked at times to detach

from the tutti and participate as soloist.

Like the violin concerto, but smaller in scale, in "*Singing Figures*" there are three movements of equal length and weight: "Dance Prelude", "Water Music", and "Finale". The "Dance Prelude" takes off from a characteristic rhythm resembling reggae, against which the oboe plays a long tune--in four notes against the accompaniment's three beats; and a leaping scherzando figure which is introduced about one minute into the movement. "Water Music" is very fluid, in contrast to the very clean articulations of the first movement. The title was not suggested by Handel, but by Robert Creeley's poem of the same title ("Water music/loud in the clearing/off the boats, birds, leaves."). In the middle section, the oboe's recurrent arabesque is heard over the darkly undulating color modulations of the ensemble, which I imagined shifting in and out of the background, sometimes a watery scrim, sometimes a participant in the oboe's more plaintive rhetoric. The "Finale" is marked "Decisively rhythmic (Slightly eccentric, jubilant)." It is a moto perpetuo, leaping and light music whose quick tempo allows for many fanciful shifts in rhythm and articulation, including machine-like ostinati, the grotesque, the lyrical, the brash, etc..

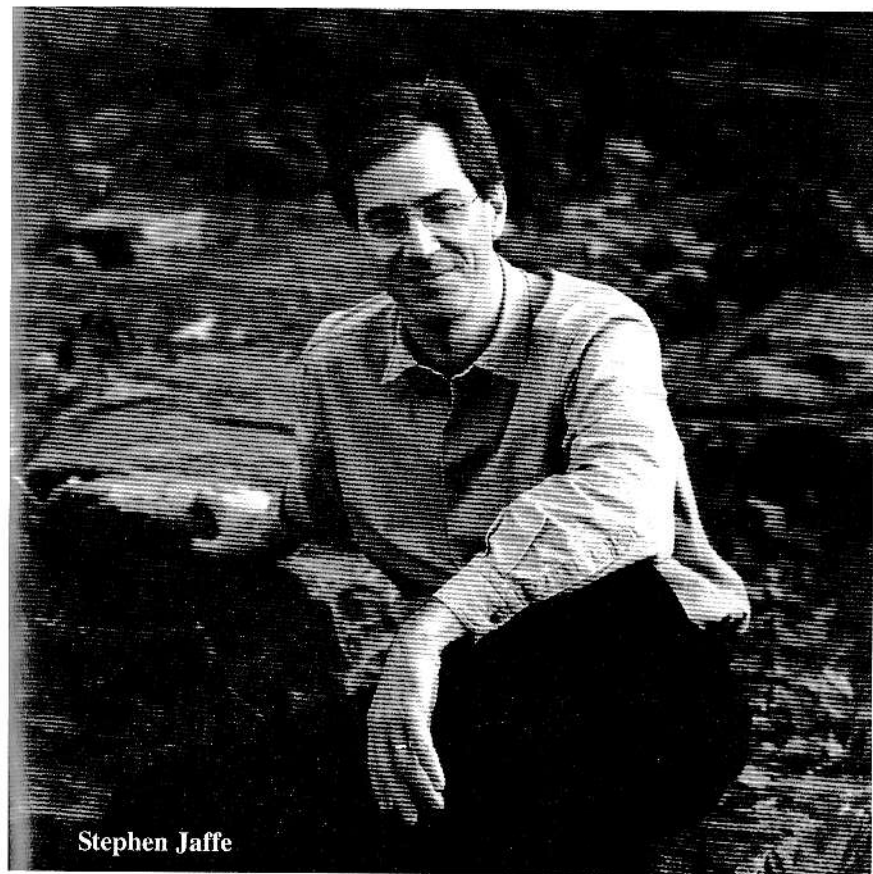
The concerto's three movements are inter-related thematically, and each features a cadenza for the oboe.

The *Chamber Concerto ("Singing Figures")* was commissioned by the Orchestra of St. Luke's for the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, and first performed at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, in April 1996, with Melanie Feld, oboe, and the composer conducting.

A word on style: I try compose physical and expressive music which moves

and delights me, music involving listeners and performers in the ritual of the concert. Over the last twenty years I have sought to make my language one which is capable of nuance and breadth; depth, and freshness deriving from the sonic materials themselves, and from an orientation which embraces pluralism. At the same time, I also want a unified musical language. When I'm listening, I want the sense that the musicians playing can sing their language fluently, and share it eloquently; this is part of the art (and magic) of music.

Thus, those trying to get a stylistic handle on these recordings will find a composer wedged in a space which is not minimalist; neither is it high modernist or neo-traditionalist. As an American composer, I'm particularly aware of pluralist roots -- and as I have been searching out ways to refine my language, surely some of the raw dirt has been left on. As for the present moment of music: when understood deeply and opened up with new vocabulary, there is still plenty of relevance in composing music for the skills and imagination of concert performers. Certainly they provide more than enough challenge for me to explore.



Stephen Jaffe

The music of **Stephen Jaffe** has been performed throughout the U.S., Europe, and Asia by such organizations as the San Francisco and New Jersey Symphonies, the Oregon Bach Festival, Spectrum Concerts Berlin, and many others.

Stephen Jaffe's work has been described as direct and involving without ever being simplistic; emotionally complex but not convoluted. Writing about the composer's *Double Sonata* in the New York Times, Will Crutchfield remarked that the composer's harmonies were "rich with consonant intervals, although I would not call them neo-Romantic, and they certainly did not sound like any particular music of the past."

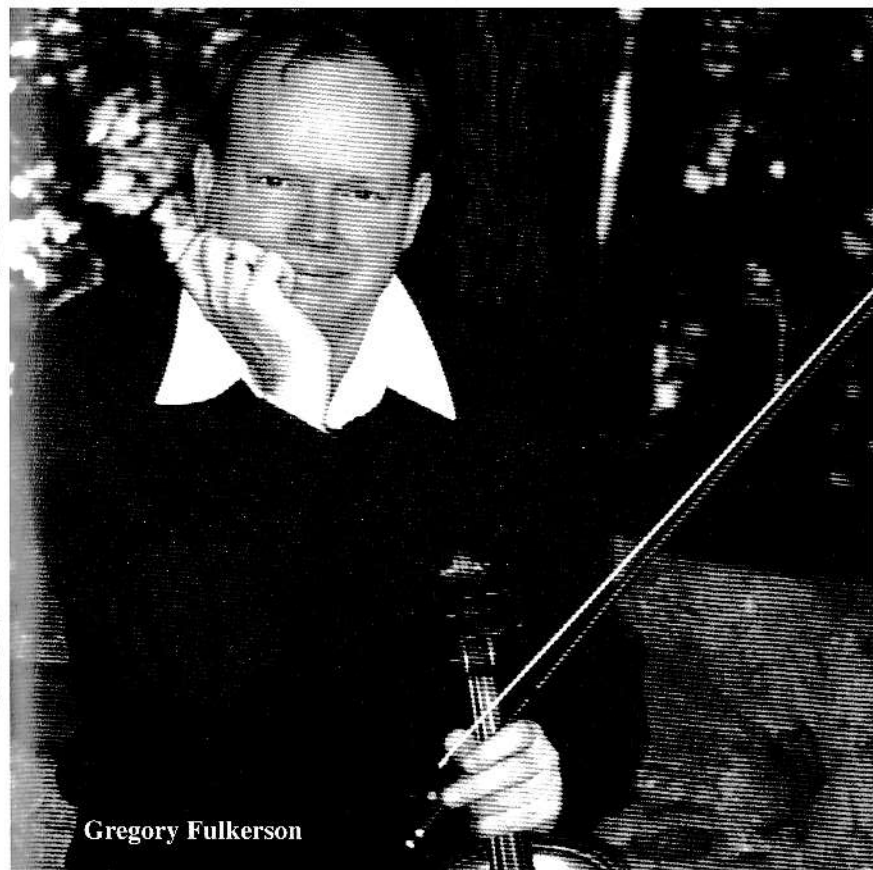
Born in Washington, D.C., Stephen Jaffe studied composition at the University of Pennsylvania, and at the Conservatoire de Musique in Geneva, Switzerland. In addition to a Premiere Medaille from that institution, he has been the recipient of the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome, the American Academy of Arts and Letters Prize, and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Tanglewood, and the Guggenheim Foundation. His works have been commissioned by a variety of groups, including the Fromm and Naumburg Foundations, the Oregon Bach Festival, and the Orchestra of St. Luke's. Citing his "eloquent and original voice", in 1989 Brandeis University awarded him its Creative Arts Citation, and in 1991, Jaffe received a Kennedy Center Friedheim Award for his 32 minute *First Quartet* written for the Ciompi Quartet.

Jaffe's recent projects include a concerto for the American cellist David Hardy, commissioned by the National Symphony Orchestra for their 2003-04 season. Recent premieres have included the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* and *Designs*, for flute, guitar and percussion, premiered at the National Arts Center in Taipei, Taiwan, in June, 2002. Other recent projects have included *Homage to the Breath, Instrumental and Vocal Meditations* for Mezzo-Soprano and Ten instruments, with a text by Thich Nhat Hanh, premiered in 2001 by Milagro Vargas and the 20th Century Consort at the Hirschorn Museum, Washington, D.C., *Offering* for flute, viola and harp, for the Aureole Trio; *Songs of Turning*, for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, for the 1996 Oregon Bach Festival, and three song cycles involving the poetry of Robert Francis: *Four Songs With Ensemble*, *Fort Juniper Songs*, and *Pedal Point* (1989-1994).

Stephen Jaffe lives in Durham, North Carolina, where he teaches at Duke University and co-directs the concert series Encounters: with the Music of Our Time. In 1999 he was appointed Mary D.B.T. and James Semans Professor of Composition.

Gregory Fulkerson has been acclaimed as one of the outstanding violinists of our time. It was as a champion of American contemporary music that Mr. Fulkerson first rose to prominence, taking first prize in the 1980 International Music Competition sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation and Carnegie Hall. As a recitalist, soloist with orchestra, and chamber musician, Mr. Fulkerson has distinguished himself in performances of traditional and unusual repertoire from Bach, Beethoven and Brahms to Sibelius, Glass and Barber. With the Philadelphia Orchestra under Riccardo Muti, Mr. Fulkerson gave the world premiere performances of Richard Wernick's *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, a work composed and dedicated to him (recorded on BRIDGE 9082). Mr. Fulkerson's recording of the complete Charles Ives *Sonatas*, with pianist Robert Shannon (BRIDGE 9024A/B), has won the praise of critics on both sides of the Atlantic, and his other recent recordings for Bridge include music by Gunther Schuller (BRIDGE 9093) and Bach's *Sonatas and Partitas* (BRIDGE 9101A/B).

Gregory Fulkerson was born in Iowa City in 1950. He earned a degree in mathematics from Oberlin College and received his D.M.A. from the Juilliard School in 1987. Included among his teachers are Paul Kling, David Cerone, Robert Mann, Ivan Galamian, and Dorothy DeLay. Gregory Fulkerson is currently Professor of Violin at Oberlin College, Conservatory of Music. He performs on a violin made by J.B. Guadagnini in Turin, 1774.

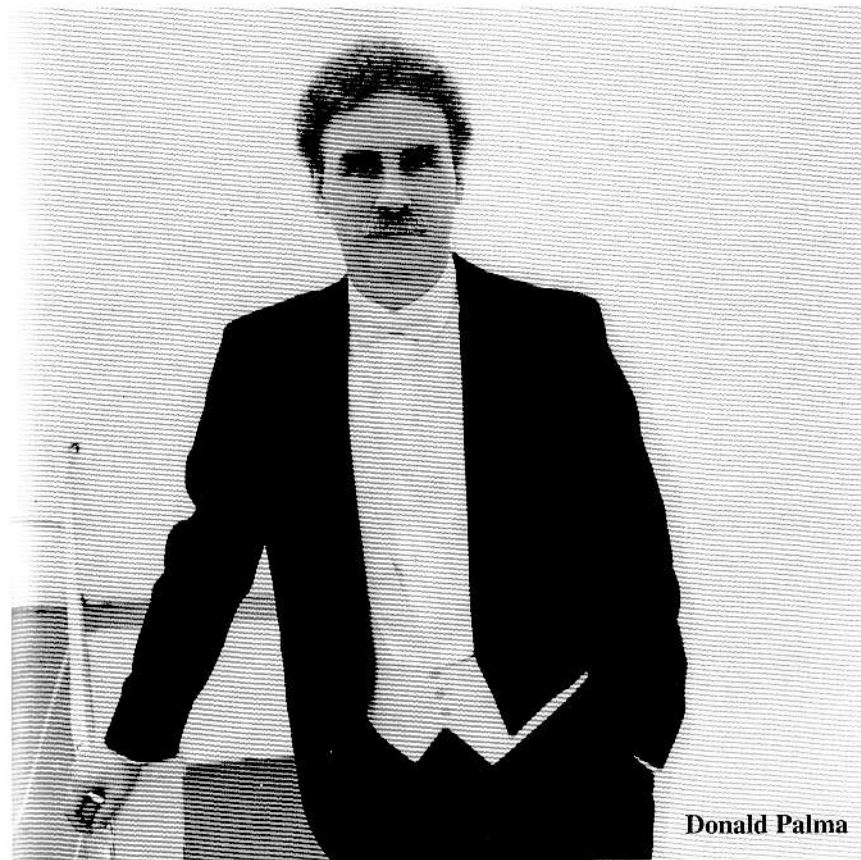


Gregory Fulkerson

Donald Palma has an active career as conductor, performer and educator. Born in New York City, he attended the Juilliard School. In 1973 he won the Naumburg Chamber Music Award as a member of Speculum Musicae, one of New York's pre-eminent contemporary music ensembles. With Speculum, he has conducted at the Miami Festival, the Geneva Festival, the Warsaw Autumn Festival, New York Philharmonic Horizons Festival and has made critically acclaimed recordings of works by Carter, Ruders, Davidovsky, Wuorinen and Crumb.

Mr. Palma was also Music Director of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players and received two Chamber Music America/ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming during his directorship. As the double bassist of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, he was also an Artistic Director for many years and oversaw the programming of hundreds of national and international concerts and recorded over fifty compact discs for Deutsche Grammophon.

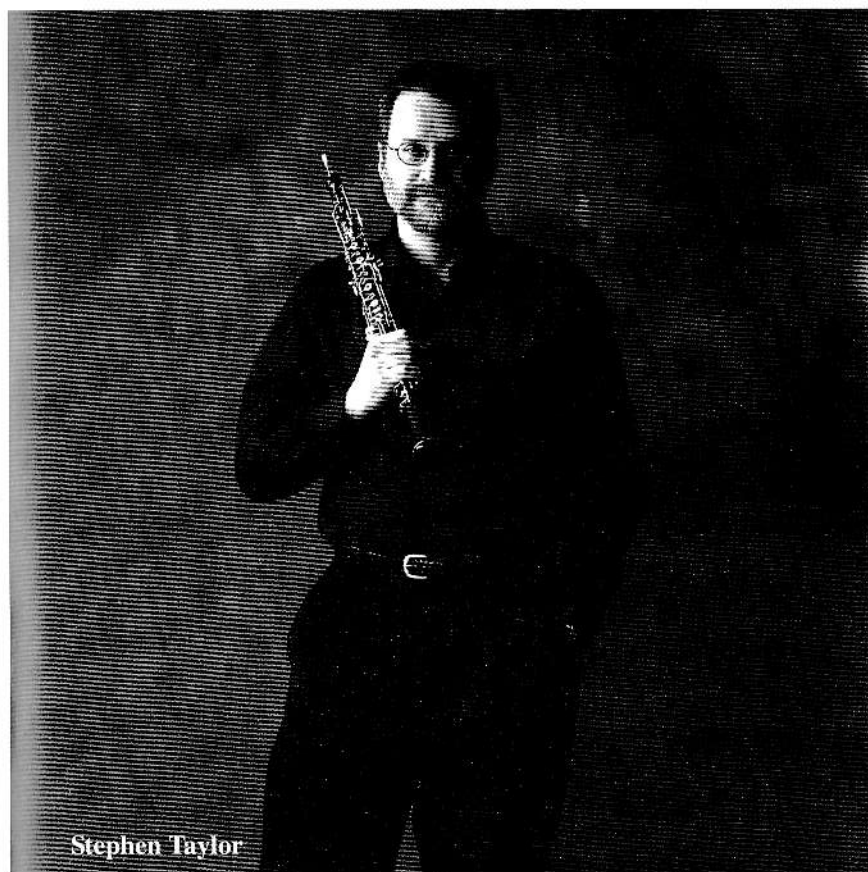
Recent appearances include conducting at the Casals Festival in a broadcast production of Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat* for Puerto Rican Television. He has been on the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music and is presently on the faculties of Yale University and the New England Conservatory where he is Director of Orchestras.



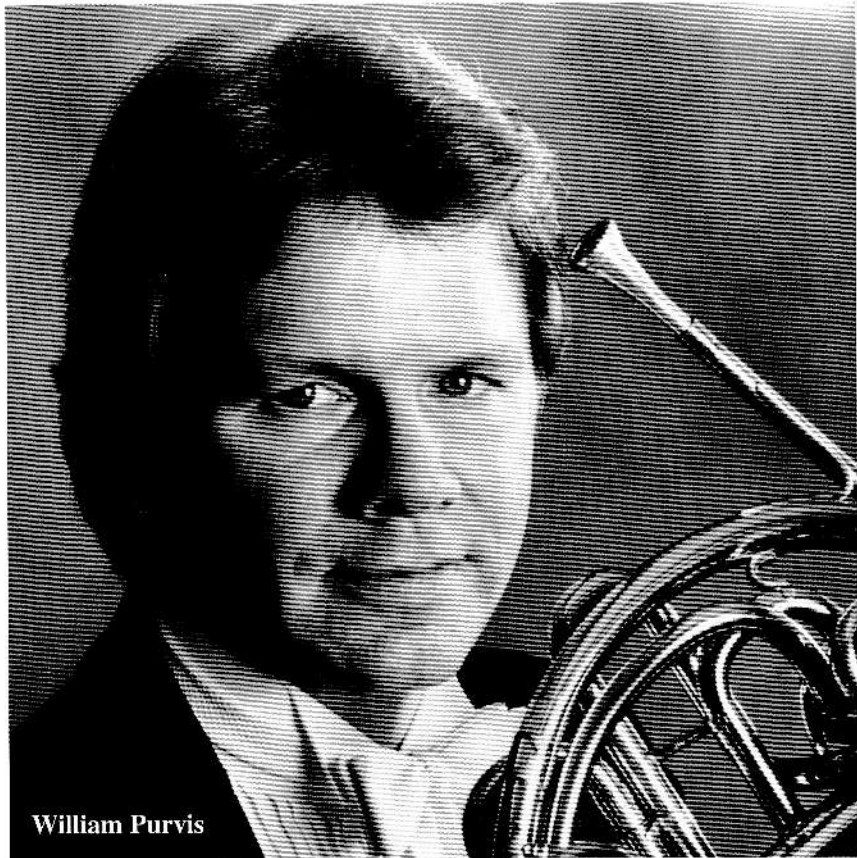
Donald Palma

Stephen Taylor is co-principal oboe of Orpheus, solo oboe at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and principal oboe of the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, the Orchestra of St. Luke's and the New England Bach Festival at Marlboro. He has also held the principal chair with the Casals Festival Orchestra under Zubin Mehta, American Symphony, Spoleto Festival Orchestra and the Aspen Festival Orchestra. During the summers, Mr. Taylor can be found "festival-hopping" around the country, including the Caramoor Festival, Chamber Music Northwest, Bravo! Colorado Music Festival, Bridgehampton Music Festival and Music from Angel Fire. Mr. Taylor is also solo oboist of the contemporary music ensembles Speculum Musicae and the American Composers Orchestra.

A 1974 graduate of the Juilliard School, Mr. Taylor studied with Lois Wann and Robert Bloom. His academic life has included positions on the faculties of the State University of New York at Purchase and Brooklyn College. Mr. Taylor currently serves on the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music and SUNY Stony Brook. Stephen Taylor can be heard on over 200 recordings, with such diverse labels as RCA, Columbia, Nonesuch, Vox, CRI, New World, Musical Heritage and Deutsche Grammophon. Mr. Taylor's recordings on Bridge include music of Stefan Wolpe (BRIDGE 9043), and Elliott Carter (BRIDGE 9128).



Stephen Taylor



William Purvis

William Purvis, horn virtuoso, conductor, and educator is highly regarded for his work both in the United States and abroad. Mr. Purvis's solo performances and recordings range from period instrument performances of early music through the latest compositions of the vanguard composers of our time. Currently on the faculties of Juilliard, Yale, and The State University of New York at Stony Brook, Mr. Purvis has taught master classes throughout the USA, Europe and Asia. William Purvis is a member of the New York Woodwind Quintet, Orpheus, the Orchestra of St. Luke's and Mozzafiato--a period instrument ensemble. He is a frequent guest with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and has collaborated with ensembles including the Tokyo, Juilliard, Orion, Brentano, Mendelssohn, Sibelius, and Fine Arts String Quartets.

William Purvis is also a regular conductor of the ensemble Speculum Musicae, a group for whom he has led many world premiere performances and recordings. Mr. Purvis's recordings include performances on more than a dozen labels, including Bridge, Sony, DG/Polygram and Nonesuch. His upcoming recordings on Bridge include Peter Lieberon's *Horn Concerto* and a CD of music for horn and piano by Robert and Clara Schumann, performed with his wife, pianist Mihae Lee. The peripatetic Purvis's numerous festival appearances include Norfolk, Tanglewood, Chamber Music Northwest, Mostly Mozart, Aston Magna, Salzburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Kuhmo, Båstad, Hong Kong, and Kitakyushu.

Speculum Musicae recently celebrated its thirtieth anniversary. One of the world's leading ensembles devoted to the music of our time, Speculum Musicae is in residence at New York City's Columbia University, where the ensemble performs and teaches a series of master classes devoted to contemporary music practices. This CD marks Speculum Musicae's thirteenth recording for Bridge Records, a catalog which includes works by Elliott Carter, Stefan Wolpe, Charles Wuorinen, Mario Davidovsky, George Crumb, Poul Ruders, Karl Aage Rasmussen, Stephen Jaffe, Hans Abrahamsen and Bent Sørensen.

The **Odense Symphony Orchestra**, located in Odense Denmark, was formally established in 1946, but its roots go back to the year 1800. The orchestra began existence as a theater orchestra that also played symphonic music. Today, the Odense Symphony Orchestra is a continuously developing and expanding modern orchestra with a high level of activity, subsidized by the municipality of Odense and the Danish state. When the Odense Symphony Orchestra was established it had 22 musicians, but over the years has grown steadily to its present size of 74 permanent players. The orchestra gives approximately 100 concerts each season and is based in the Odense Concert Hall, which was inaugurated in 1982. Most of the orchestra's concerts are given in the acoustically superb Carl Nielsen Hall—the hall where the present recording was made.

The Odense Symphony Orchestra frequently tours abroad including recent tours to the USA, China, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Holland, the Baltic countries, Russia, Spain and Sweden. The orchestra has recorded prolifically for labels in Denmark and abroad including Unicorn-Kanchana, Kontrapunkt, DaCapo (Marco Polo) and Classico. The Odense Symphony Orchestra recordings for Bridge include music by Carl Nielsen (BRIDGE 9100); Poul Ruders (BRIDGE 9122); Heitor Villa-Lobos (BRIDGE 9129); and Alberto Ginastera (BRIDGE 9130).

Acknowledgements

Bridge Records gratefully acknowledges the support of the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Inc., the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University, Duke University School of Arts & Sciences, Greensboro Symphony Orchestra, North Carolina Arts Council, Orchestra of St. Luke's, and the Theodore Presser Company.

Time is the most useful gift an artist can receive, and for release time during the initial stage of composition, Stephen Jaffe acknowledges the assistance of the Howard Foundation, Brown University. The composer adds: "Nicholas Kitchen, violinist, and Stuart Malina, conductor offered musical insights, genuine collaboration, and support in the germination and development of the Concerto for Violin, and presented beautiful premiere performances which I will never forget. Gregory Fulkerson plays the concerto with passion and imaginative fire, and projects the piece with heart. Donald Palma, whose many hours of preparation are reflected in this authoritative recording, is a treasure, and the musicians of the Odense Symphony Orchestra, whose playing and hospitality in the beautiful hall in the city of Carl Nielsen, demonstrate great love and care for music. What I think of when I consider the process leading to this recording, are the far flung places I rehearsed—in Odense, Denmark; New York, Oberlin, Washington, D.C., and Boston, and nearer home in Greensboro and Durham, North Carolina. The

music travels "on the grace of others", the title of a dance by Barbara Dickinson, beautifully choreographed to the concerto in 2003.

The oboe is an instrument which I have heard since childhood. I am thankful for the chance to have explored the oboe repertoire in detail, year after year, with my sister Marina Jaffe. These experiences allowed me the chance to internalize the many gradations of sound the oboe can produce. Libby van Cleve, Rudi Vrbsky and Melanie Feld provided valuable advice on the multiple stops, and have played the piece with passion in various performances they've given; Zvi Meniker and Gerald Ranck gave helpful advice about the harpsichord registration. It is such a pleasure to work again with Speculum Musicae, whose musicians demonstrate incredible artistry and dedication to new music.

For superb organization and for the vision to see this project through, I thank David and Becky Starobin of Bridge Records. My family-especially Mindy Oshrain, has experienced many ups and downs in bringing it all to fruition, and I am thankful for their love and support. My children, Anna and Elana, grew up with the violin concerto, hearing it as naturally as any other music. It is to them and to the next generation of violinists- the young violinist James Dargan is exemplary- that this recording is dedicated. May they discover richness and imagination beyond the steps which ascend."

Producer: David Starobin

Executive Producer: Becky Starobin

Recording Engineers: Andrzej Sasin (*Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*)

David Merrill (*Chamber Concerto*)

Associate Engineer: Aleksandra Nagórko (*Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*)

Editor: Silas Brown

Mastering Engineer: Adam Abeshouse

Graphic Design: Alexis Napoliello

Cover photograph and booklet photograph of Stephen Jaffe: Les Todd

Photograph of Gregory Fulkerson: Becky Starobin

Photograph of Stephen Taylor: courtesy of Speculum Musicae

Photograph of William Purvis: Peter Schaaf

The music of Stephen Jaffe is published by Merion Music, Inc., distributed by Theodore Presser Company.

Recorded: May 21-23, 2003, Odense, Denmark (*Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*)

January 28, 2003, KAS Studios, Astoria, NY (*Chamber Concerto*)

For Bridge Records: Ashley Arrington, Kelly Ferriter, Daniel Lippel, Alexis Napoliello and Robert Starobin

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Stephen Jaffe Discography

The Rhythm Of The Running Plough, Double Sonata, and Four Songs With Ensemble Speculum Musicac; D'Anna Fortunato, Anton Nel, Barry Snyder; Prism Orchestra

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