

Elliott Carter

(b. 1908)

Violin Concerto (1990) (28:18)

- 1 I Impulsivo (10:35)
- 2 II Tranquillo/Angosciato (9:02)
- 3 III Scherzando (8:41)

Rolf Schulte, violin
Odense Symphony Orchestra
Justin Brown, conductor

Four Lauds for solo violin (19:36)

- 4 I Statement - Remembering Aaron (1999) (4:47)
- 5 II Riconoscenza per Goffredo Petrassi (1984) (6:36)
- 6 III Rhapsodic Musings (2000) (3:09)
- 7 IV Fantasy - Remembering Roger (1999) (5:04)

Rolf Schulte, violin

8 Holiday Overture (1944, rev. 1961) (9:17)

Odense Symphony Orchestra
Donald Palma, conductor

Notes by Malcolm MacDonald

Elliott Carter was something of a 'late starter' as a composer, but he has made up for that with an almost unprecedented fecundity of creative activity and accomplishment in advanced old age. The programme on this disc contrasts a comparatively 'early' orchestral work, from his mid-thirties, with the highly mature *Violin Concerto* written in his eighty-second year and a solo violin cycle most of which was composed in his nineties. At the time of writing this note (July 2005) Carter is not far short of his own centenary, and continuing to produce highly complex, sophisticated scores with an energy that would hardly be conceivable even in a much younger man.

Carter wrote his *Holiday Overture* in the summer of 1944 at Fire Island, New York. (Aaron Copland was staying in the same house, composing his ballet *Appalachian Spring*.) Carter had just retired from his job at the Office of War Information in the days preceding D-Day, and the overture's ebullient optimism may be traced to the hopefulness of that summer, when the impending liberation of France by Allied forces seemed at last to put the end of World War 2 in sight. A similar mood is struck by many American scores of the time. Carter entered his overture for the 1945 Independent Concert Music Publishers' Contest, which promised the winner would receive a first performance by the Boston Symphony under Serge Koussevitzky. Carter's work duly won the competition, but many months went by with no sign of the *Holiday Overture* being programmed. In frustration, Carter smuggled the orchestral parts out of the Boston Symphony's library, had them photostatted, and sent them to Frankfurt, where the work received its world premiere under the baton of Sergiu Celibadache during 1946. Carter was to slightly revise the overture in 1961.

The *Holiday Overture* might be considered the last work in Carter's early period of 'American-style neoclassicism', a period that had seen the composition of such works as the ballet *Pocahontas* (1939) and the *First Symphony* (1942). The basic tonal language, with its bright open intervals, Stravinskian rhythmic accents, occasional echoes of jazz and general 'open-air' feeling, proclaims



Elliott Carter, Waccabuc, NY, 1960

affinities to the works of Copland, Piston and Bernstein. But it would be more correct to see the overture as marking a transition to the next phase of Carter's career, which would shortly see the production of his first masterpieces, such as the *Piano Sonata* (1946). In that sense the *Holiday Overture* has a deeper significance, for it celebrates a personal liberation from restrictions and stylistic convention. The density and intricacy of the athletic counterpoint, and the way the busy individual lines tend to spill over the bar-lines or are played off against the underlying four-in-a-bar pulse, are almost reminiscent of Charles Ives, but Carter takes what he learned from the older master in his own directions. In fact over its length the work enacts a

move from neoclassicism into something altogether less capable of being neatly defined.

The superimposition of syncopated themes is the clue to the music's underlying complexity, giving rise to a lavish use of contrapuntal devices such as canon, inversion, augmentation and bursts of fugal writing: all adumbrating elements of Carter's later idiom. The surface of the work, however, remains breezy, bonhomous, bursting with obstreperous energy, from piccolo squeals to off-beat chords that seem to punch you good-naturedly in the chest. But in the closing minutes a huge, craggy, almost Varèsian tutti arises, its wide intervals and much slower tempo still set around with the dancing fugato writing that had preceded it: a momentary vision of an entirely different musical world that is only temporarily set aside by the formally uproarious final bars.

Following the *Holiday Overture*, Carter's orchestral works, like his music generally, became increasingly complex and virtuosic in its deployment of ideas and textures, through the *Variations for Orchestra* (1955), the *Double Concerto* (1961), *Piano Concerto* (1965) and *Concerto for Orchestra* (1969). After the premiere of the *Symphony of Three Orchestras* (1977), however, Carter eschewed orchestral composition for more than a decade, feeling that orchestral musicians were simply unable to play the kind of music he was writing to the pitch of accuracy that it demanded. Nevertheless, since the late 1980s he has returned to orchestral composition with renewed enthusiasm, and it may well be that the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century will be seen as his richest period for orchestral works.

Among the first examples of this new wave of orchestral music was Carter's *Violin Concerto*, completed in 1990 and commissioned jointly by the San Francisco Symphony and the violinist Ole Bøhn, who was already a champion of



Carter's instrumental music. The concerto, dedicated to Bøhn and the conductor Herbert Blomstedt, was premiered by them with the San Francisco Symphony on 2 May 1990. In 1993 it was awarded a Grammy for 'Best Contemporary Classical Composition.'

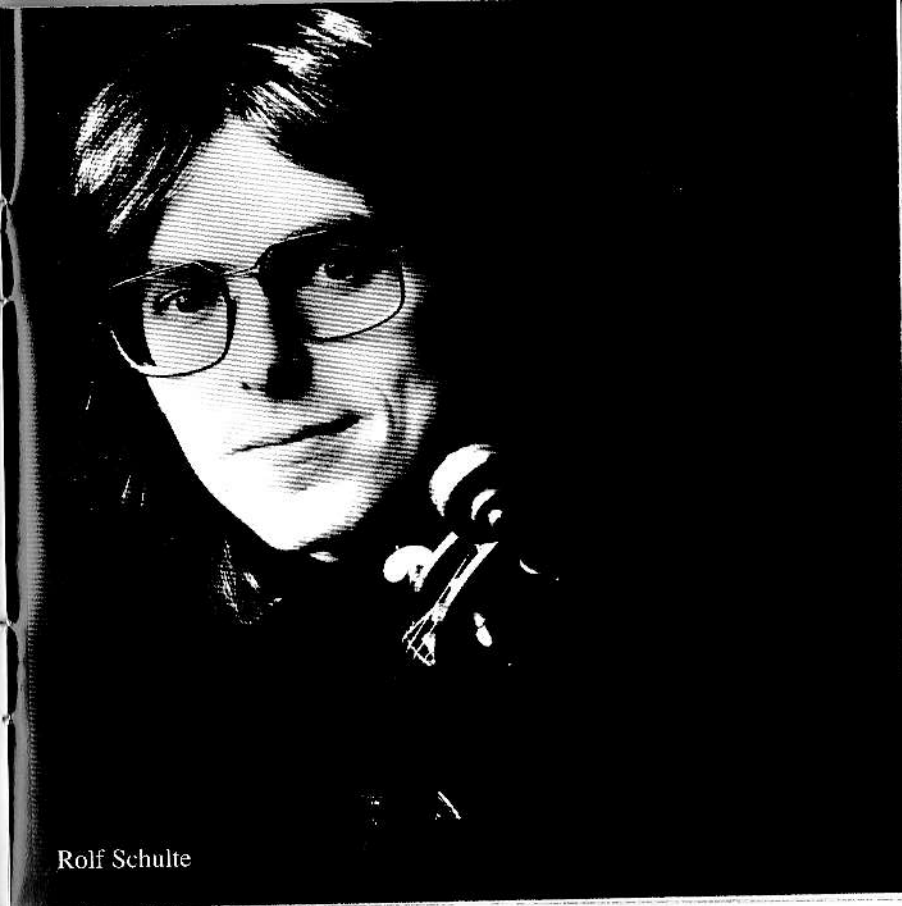
Carter's concerto is scored for a fairly large and fairly standard orchestra with a considerable amount of percussion, and falls into a three-movement pattern that, at least superficially, resembles the time-honoured shape of such concertos since the 19th century. Carter has said that in it he has given the violinist 'an almost continuous, leading role ... meanwhile the orchestra comments in various ways on the solo part'. In this respect his work aligns itself not so much with the dramatically-conceived concertos of Beethoven, Brahms and Tchaikovsky, where soloist and orchestra are often in opposition and the orchestra tends to occupy centre-stage in an opening tutti, as with the lyrical concerto tradition inaugurated perhaps by Mendelssohn, where the soloist takes charge of proceedings from the start and remains the focus of attention through its continual projection of melodic ideas. The three movements flow into one another without any break; their tempo-markings, respectively *Impulsivo*, *Tranquillo/Angosciato* and *Scherzando* (approximately 'impulsive, tranquil/anguished and jokey'), serve also to hint at a broad outline of the concerto's expressive character. While Carter's mature harmonic language, dealing as it does with complexes of 'all-interval' chords, seldom easily allows of any traditional tonal interpretation, there are fleeting indications that his *Violin Concerto* (like those of Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky) is conceived 'in D', or at least glancing at that pitch and its tonally associated satellites at important structural junctures and cadence-points.

The work opens with a very brief, twittering orchestral tutti in which several polyphonic lines are bundled together, and out of which the solo violin emerges.

To begin with it establishes itself as the purveyor of a long-breathed, comparatively serene cantilena that rises above the more rapidly-moving gusts and flurries of the orchestra, but in accordance with the idea of impulsiveness the dialogue takes many different turns and the violin's voice can turn voluble, or at times even tetchy, in response to the orchestra's contributions, with ferocious displays of triple-stopping or rapid alternations of arco and pizzicato bowing. All the same, it is the orchestra – often subdivided into smaller ensembles – whose contributions tend to be fragmentary, even jagged, while the violin creates a continuous line.

In the second (slow) movement, the direction *Tranquillo* applies to the orchestra, *Angosciato* to the violin – a clear indication that Carter aims here at the simultaneous presentation of two different emotional states: a state of calm and something very much its opposite. The violin's high, impassioned, sometimes broken and stammering utterance (a subsidiary marking is *esitando*) is heard at first against dark, shifting harmonic masses in the bass instruments. The orchestral tessitura does not so much rise as gradually open upward, as instruments of tenor register and above are added to the palette. The violin line is sometimes confined to isolated notes, sometimes to a single plangent, 'speaking' interval, but increasingly it becomes fretful, agitated, tying itself in brief knots of flurried semiquavers. A brass-and-percussion dominated climax arises and the violin subsides to a bare fifth on D.

From this point the *Scherzando* finale takes wing in a fluid, scurrying music. The orchestration has a filigree delicacy, and the triplet rhythms which characterize the violin part throughout the Concerto (part of the work's larger 'structural polyrhythm') here take on an almost solid tarantella-like identity; although (as in the rhythmically simpler *Holiday Overture*) Carter continually plays the melodic line off against the expectations this creates. There are indeed



Rolf Schulte

a number of jokes in this movement, often associated with jazzily 'walking' bass lines. A short tutti introduces a kind of surrealistic circus music, and then a passage in which the violin seems to be striving to break away from the pull of a particular low-lying pitch (C-sharp, leading note of D). The 'tarantella' recurs in more or less varied forms, like a rondo subject. Finally it fragments, leading to the biggest and loudest orchestral chord in the entire work, which like the dominant seventh in a classical concerto is followed by a brief, chordal cadenza from the soloist (marked 'very dramatically') before a final quiet spiral into the azure.

Rolf Schulte gives an impassioned performance of the series of solo violin pieces which Carter has collected under the title *Four Lauds* (using 'laud' not in its sense of a religious service but in the sense of a song of praise) belong to the large number of short virtuosic instrumental works, solos or duos or trios, which he has composed since the 1970s as tributes to and presents for friends and colleagues. Though they may at first appear like 'occasional' works or chips from the workbench, these brief and variously capricious utterances are the reverse of ephemeral. Instead, in their combined qualities of taxing but always musicianly virtuosity, formal shapeliness, and continuously evolving yet gimmick-free invention, they must all be ranked among the most important new music for their various instruments of the past few decades: instant classics, in fact.

While three of the *Lauds* were composed in close proximity to one another in 1999-2000, with the idea of a cycle already in mind, *Riconoscenza per Goffredo Petrassi* was written considerably earlier as a stand-alone piece, in 1984, to celebrate the 80th birthday of the senior Italian composer, a great friend of Carter's. It was first performed at a festival concert in the medieval refectory of the

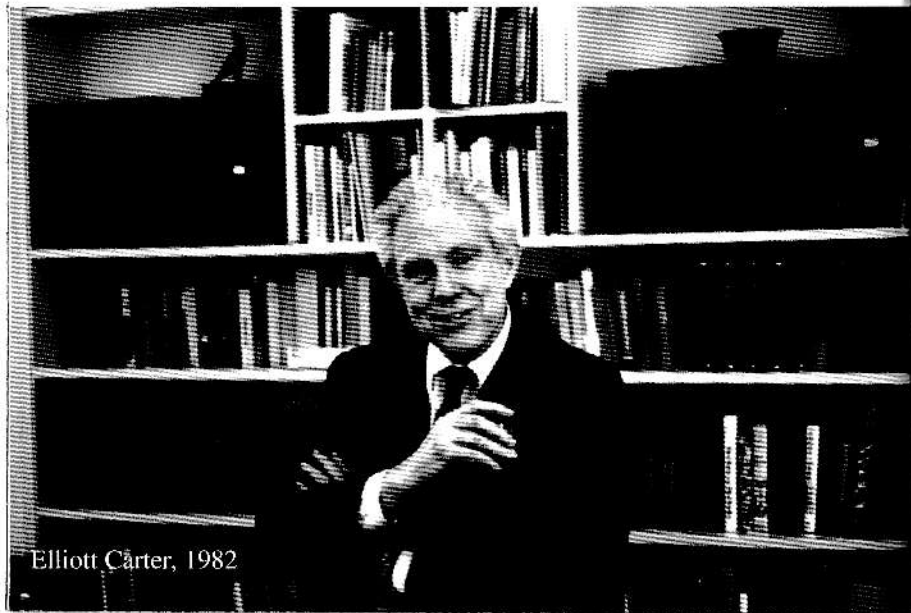
Abbey of Fossanova, Italy, by Georg Mönch on 15 June 1984. In 2001 Carter placed it second in the sequence of the four *Lauds*: a sequence that does not in any way reflect their order of composition. The *Riconoscenza* is like an extended improvisation (Carter directs it should be played *Quasi improvvisando*) a passage in which the violin seems to be striving to break away from the pull of a particular low-lying pitch wide-spanned melody (*dolce, legatissimo*), aggressive but humorous outbursts of rapid figuration (*giocosamente furioso, martellato*), and a *triquillo* element mainly expressed in still, long-held double-stops.

Statement – Remembering Aaron was composed in February 1999 and recalls Aaron Copland, one of whose most original works is, precisely, his cycle of *Statements for Orchestra*. Like Carter's *Violin Concerto*, this solo piece was commissioned by Ole Bøhn, who gave the first performance in Bergen, Norway on 22 May of the same year. Marked *Grave*, it is an intense recitative that contrasts percussive pizzicato writing against soaring melodic lines that develop their own internal two-part counterpoint.

Rhapsodic Musings was composed in June 2000 and is an affectionate gift to Robert Mann, the veteran leader of the Juilliard Quartet, on the occasion of the violinist's 80th birthday. Mann gave the world premiere in New York on 28 March 2001. Carter himself has described the piece as 'very romantic'. Like *Riconoscenza* it carries the direction *quasi improvvisando*, and is an *Adagio appassionato* characterized by sudden florid roulades of notes, with an intense triple-stopped passage towards the end.

Fantasy – Remembering Roger was written in April 1999 for the violinist Rolf Schulte, and recalls the composer Roger Sessions, a dedicated modernist and pioneer of serial composition among American composers, whom Carter had known well. Schulte gave the first performance at Harvard University

(where Sessions was a student from 1911 to 1915, and returned as Charles Eliot Norton Professor in 1968-9) on 18 November 2000. The piece is a scherzo-like *Allegro con brio* with something of the busy semiquaver motion that informs much of Sessions's own *Violin Concerto* of 1935, but with an increasing element of flamboyance and bravura display that may make it the most testing for the performer of all these *Four Lauds*, and also a satisfyingly brilliant finale for this informal cycle.



Elliott Carter, 1982

Rolf Schulte, whom *The New Yorker* called, "one of the most distinguished violinists of our day," was born in Germany and started playing the violin at age five under his father's tutelage. He later studied with Kurt Schäffer at the Robert Schumann Conservatory in Düsseldorf, attended Yehudi Menuhin's summer courses in Gstaad, Switzerland, and studied with Franco Gulli at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena, Italy, before coming to the U.S. to study with Ivan Galamian at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. His orchestral debut came with the Philharmonia Hungarica in Cologne in Mendelssohn's Concerto at age 14, and he has since performed with the Berlin Philharmonic, the Munich Philharmonic, the Frankfurt Museums-Orchester, the Stuttgart State Orchestra, the Bamberg Symphony, the Orchestra del Teatro La Fenice in Venice (Stravinsky's Concerto under Robert Craft) and played Roger Sessions's *Violin Concerto* with the Radio Orchestra of the U.S.S.R.. In the U.S., he has performed with the Seattle Symphony, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and Vermont and New Hampshire Symphonies, recently premiering Donald Martino's *Violin Concerto* with the latter.

Among the works Mr. Schulte has premiered are Tobias Picker's Concerto with the American Composers Orchestra at Lincoln Center (CRI), Milton Babbitt's *The Joy of More Sextets* (New World Records), Mario Davidovsky's *Synchronisms No. 9* at MIT (Wergo); and Elliott Carter's *Fantasy*, Donald Martino's *Romanza* and Babbitt's *Little Goes a Long Way*, all at Harvard University. Major performances include György Kurtag's *Kafka Fragments* at Tanglewood, Poul Ruders's *Violin Concerto No. 1* at Lincoln Center (Bridge Records), and Schoenberg's *Violin Concerto* with the London Philharmonia (Koch International). He has recorded Robert Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*, *Romanzen*, and *Märchenbilder*, (Centaur Records), Fred Lerdahl's



Rolf Schulte and Elliott Carter, 2005

Waltzes, David Lang's *Illumination Rounds* (CRI), and Carter's *Duo* (Bridge Records). Mr. Schulte has also performed the cycle of ten Beethoven Sonatas and the complete violin works of Igor Stravinsky at the Berlin Festwochen and other venues. Mr. Schulte plays on a violin made by the great Cremonese luthier, Lorenzo Storioni, in 1780. About the present recording Elliott Carter writes: "Rolf Schulte, with an extraordinary command of his instrument, gives my *Violin Concerto* a most artistically imaginative performance, very telling and very beautiful."

Established as one of Britain's leading young conductors, **Justin Brown** has worked with most of the country's top orchestras including the BBC Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony and the London Symphony Orchestra. His frequent engagements in Scandinavia include the Malmö, Norrköping and Trondheim orchestras, as well as the Finnish Radio SO, Bergen SO, Lahti SO and Danish Radio Sinfonietta. Since his debut with the St Petersburg Philharmonic in 1996, he has returned several times, most recently to introduce Tavener's *Akhmatova Requiem*. Brown has also conducted extensively in Europe including concerts with the Berlin Symphoniker, RTL Luxembourg, Winterthur Orchestra and the Orchestre du Capitole de Toulouse.

A recent highlight was a performance of the *Missa Solemnis* with the Dresden Philharmonic to mark the 55th anniversary of the allied bombing of Dresden. Further afield he has also conducted in Israel, Singapore, Taipei, Perth, Melbourne and Sydney.

Justin Brown studied at Cambridge University and subsequently at Tanglewood with Seiji Ozawa and Leonard Bernstein. He made his conducting debut with the celebrated British stage première of Bernstein's *Mass*. Following that, he became widely renowned for his work in the world of opera, joining the staff of English National Opera, and later Scottish Opera and conducting a varied repertoire including *Così fan Tutte*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Madame Butterfly*, *La Bohème*, *Macbeth*, *Falstaff* and *The Cunning Little Vixen*, alongside contemporary works such as Berg's *Wozzeck* and Judith Weir's *The Vanishing Bridegroom*. While in Glasgow, Brown also founded the St. Bride's Chamber Orchestra, performing a wide range of repertoire with soloists such as Evelyn Glennie and Jane Eaglen.

Recent engagements include concerts with the Oslo Philharmonic, Bergen Philharmonic, Lahti Orchestra and the his collaboration with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra recording the Elgar and Barber cello concertos with French cellist Anne Gastinel.

Justin Brown



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

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 theatre 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, subsidised 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 Odense Symphony Orchestra has recorded prolifically for labels in Denmark and abroad including Unicorn-Kanchana, Kontrapunkt, DaCapo (Marco Polo) and Classico. The Odense Symphony Orchestra's recordings for Bridge include the Nielsen *Violin Concerto* (BRIDGE 9100); music by Poul Ruders (BRIDGE 9122); music by Heitor Villa Lobos (BRIDGE 9129); music by Alberto Ginastera (BRIDGE 9130), Stephen Jaffe's *Violin Concerto* (BRIDGE 9141) and music by Peter Lieberson (BRIDGE 9178).



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The Music of Elliott Carter on



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Three Poems of Robert Frost (1942, orchestrated 1980); *Speculum Musicae* with Christine
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Au Quai (2002); *Of Challenge and of Love* (1994)

Virgil Blackwell, bass clarinet; Charles Rosen, piano; *Speculum Musicae*; Fred Sherry, cello
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