

ALEA III
October 24, 1981

PROGRAM NOTES

Darius Milhaud: SYMPHONIES POUR PETIT ORCHESTRE

Darius Milhaud was born in Aix-en-Provence in 1892 and subsequently studied at the Paris Conservatory with André Gedalge and Charles Widor. He spent nearly two years in Brazil with Paul Claudel, the writer, and returned to Paris to teach during the 1920s and 1930s. He also traveled widely to lecture and to conduct and play his own works. In 1940 he emigrated to the U.S., where he taught at Mills College in California, alternating with teaching at the Paris Conservatory.

In 1917, Milhaud began writing a series of symphonies which he called SYMPHONIES POUR PETIT ORCHESTRE. These symphonies, which when completed in 1923 were six in number, were written by Milhaud in search of greater contrapuntal independence of voices and the elimination of musical development in the traditional sense. They were unusual in their scoring (few soloists) and their concision (although the "classical" three movements are maintained in each, the longest symphony, the Sixth, is only seven minutes in length). These works are comparable to the epigrammatic music of this period by Stravinsky and Webern. In this performance, four of the six symphonies will be played.

Steve Reich: OCTET

Steve Reich was born in 1936 in New York. He studied piano briefly as a child and began studying Western rudimental drumming at the age of 14 with Roland Kohloff. He subsequently studied at Cornell University, Juilliard School of Music, and at Mills College in California, where he worked with Darius Milhaud and Luciano Berio. He has also studied African drumming and Balinese music. In 1966 he began his ensemble "Steve Reich and Musicians", with which he performs his own music.

Steve Reich says about his work: "OCTET grows out of musical material for two pianos, four hands, that was suggested by the two piano writing in Music for a Large Ensemble (1978). This two piano writing is the most difficult I have written for individual performers, and basically transfers the interlocking rhythmic complexities I had previously discovered with multiples of marimbas and xylophones to two pianos. OCTET also reflects my ongoing interest in traditional Western acoustical instruments."

"The piece is structured in five sections, of which the first and third resemble each other in the fast moving piano, cello and bass clarinet figures in the bass, while the second and fourth sections resemble each other in the longer held tones in the cello. The fifth and final section combines these materials. However, perhaps more interesting is that the division between sections is as smooth as possible with some overlapping in the parts, so that it is sometimes hard to tell exactly when one section ends and the next begins."

Frederic Rzewski: FOUR PIECES FOR PIANO

Composer/pianist Frederic Rzewski was born in Massachusetts in 1938 and studied music at Harvard and Princeton with Randall Thompson, Walter Piston, Roger Sessions and Milton Babbitt. Rzewski's first compositions were serial, while later he embraced electronic, theatrical and chance composition. Together with Alvin Curran and Richard Teitelbaum he founded Musica Elettronica Viva, an ensemble dedicated to the performance of electronic music. As a pianist, Rzewski has performed in the major music festivals and concert halls of Europe and the U.S. He now resides in Rome, making frequent return visits to America.

Frederic Rzewski's FOUR PIECES FOR PIANO, written in June and July of 1977, is written in a tradition which Rzewski identifies as "humanist realism" - the fusion of elements of European art music with North and South American folk music.

"The pieces are parts of a whole or continuum. They nearly make up a sonata: the first is dramatic and expansive, the second scherzo-like, the third has qualities of a slow movement and the last is a kind of finale. But the designation of "sonata" is not quite applicable because the music extends beyond the traditions implied by that form and does not quite have a sonata's closed structural characteristics. Although the pieces are structured with care, they also include passages suggesting improvisation or calling for the free treatment of shorter musical units, and there are experimental passages which explore piano sonorities and suggest a new kind of form."

-Christian Wolff

György Ligeti: CHAMBER CONCERTO FOR 13 INSTRUMENTALISTS

The Hungarian avant-garde composer György Ligeti was born in Dicsőszentmárton, Transylvania, studied composition at the Budapest Music Academy from 1945-49 with Sándor Veress and Ferenc Farkas, and was instructor there from 1950-56. He left Budapest in 1956, working in the Studio for Electronic Music in Cologne and then living mostly in Vienna and Berlin. A summer lecturer at the International Courses for New Music in Darmstadt and,

from 1961, guest professor of composition at the Musical High School in Stockholm, Ligeti also lectured in Spain, Holland, Germany, Finland, and at Tanglewood. He was composer-in-residence at Stanford University in 1972 and was appointed professor of composition at Hamburg's Hochschule für Musik in 1973.

In writing of Ligeti's music, Louis Christensen notes that his three chamber works - the String Quartet No. 2, Ten Pieces for Wind Quintet, and the Opus 13 CHAMBER CONCERTO - have certain things in common, including the fact that they were written for virtuoso players. He describes the music of these works as "of the 'devilishly' eventful type that we know from Aventures and the second movement of the Cello Concerto, but now with an emphasis on extremely difficult repetitions which increase rapidly."