

STEREO

PLPS 6

BERG

CHAMBER CONCERTO, PIANO, VIOLIN & 13 WIND INSTRUMENTS
STRAVINSKY / SYMPHONIES FOR WIND INSTRUMENTS
I. STRAUS, VIOLIN / Z. KOZINA, PIANO / CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
OF WIND INSTRUMENTS, PRAGUE / COND.: LIBOR PESEK



DESIGN: THE DRAWING BOARD, INC.

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PARLIAMENT

Alban Berg

Chamber Concerto for Piano, Violin and 13 Wind Instruments

Igor Stravinsky

Symphonies for Wind Instruments

Ivan Straus, *violin* Zdenek Kozina, *piano*

Chamber Ensemble of Wind Instruments, Prague . . . *conducted by Libor Pesek*

PATRIMONIO UC

Perhaps the best introduction to Berg's Chamber Concerto is that by the composer himself, who explained it as follows to his mentor and friend Arnold Schonberg: "Out of many plans the following has crystallized: a concerto for piano and violin with accompaniment of 10* wind instruments (woodwind and brass). The old idea of a piano concerto (incidentally suggested by yourself) and then the idea of a double, triple and even quadruple concerto (forgive my incurable elephantiasis!) has kept me in thrall. When the idea of using wind instruments occurred to me I tried to accommodate the idea of the piano concerto to it by combining the two. However, as you know, that didn't work.

"Finally I hit on the solution mentioned at the beginning of this letter, to which I hope to adhere, and which at once banishes all the seemingly insoluble problems of an accompanying chamber orchestra. These problems are (1) what is the relationship of the piano in the chamber orchestra to the concertante piano? (2) What is the relationship of the concertante violin to the solo strings (first and second violin) of the chamber orchestra? (3) How can the harmonium be used as an instrument of the orchestra in this special case — and can it be used *at all*? I admit that these problems can be solved. However, as you so convincingly said to me, why choose *beforehand* a difficult combination of instruments? In the combination I have now arrived at, with ten wind instruments, apart from the fact that I'm attracted by it, such difficulties are, as it were, blotted out. And if work progresses only slowly just now (I've only got about 50 bars on paper and I am planning to write a big symphonic movement in three sections extending to perhaps 500 bars) that is not the result of the combination of instruments but — as I've told you — of my heavy hand."

Alban Berg was born in Vienna on February 9, 1885

*Later expanded to 13

into a very musical family. By the time he was 15, he had written a large number of songs. The family felt he should receive some sort of musical training. When Arnold Schonberg began advertising himself as a music teacher in the Vienna newspapers a few years later, Alban's brother Charles drew the ads to his attention. Not leaving anything to chance, Charles, unknown to Alban, took several of his brother's compositions to show the maestro. Schonberg was so impressed that he took Berg on as a non-paying private pupil in 1904.

Also studying with Schonberg was Anton von Webern, a lad two years older than Berg. The three became lifelong friends; Schonberg began by teaching them, and lived to see each champion his music. The chamber concerto actually was intended as a 50th birthday present for Schonberg, but the composer ran behind schedule. It actually was completed the following year — and not performed for another two years. Finally, on March 20, 1927, the late Hermann Scherchen led the premiere performance in Berlin.

Berg first came to the attention of the musical public in 1925, with the performance of his *Wozzek*. Five years later, he was nominated a member of the Prussian Academy of Arts — exactly three years before Hitler banned performances of his works and ordered his name taken off the Academy's rolls. Much has been made of the effect of Hitler's coming to power upon Berg's health and creative powers. It is a fact that he died within two years — of a bee sting, not of a broken heart. However, he consumed much of his energy in those last two years fighting to have his own music and that of Webern and Schonberg performed in Germany. Schonberg had fled to America at the first signs of Hitler's gaining power — because he was not only a modern composer, he was Jewish. To Berg, this made no difference whatever.

Stravinsky's Symphonies for Winds were completed in 1920 — just seven years after his Rites of Spring had created a riot in Paris. The year is significant, because it marks the point at which Stravinsky turned his attention from music for the theatre to music for instrumental groups of various sizes. The man who made his reputation as the composer of ballets and chamber operas was now producing string quartets, solo piano music, concertos and pieces for small orchestra such as the Symphonies.

Stravinsky, born in a suburb of Leningrad in 1882, actually got a late start, as composers go. He studied for a law degree, and it was not until he met Rimsky-Korsakov in 1902 that he decided to devote himself to music. From 1902 until the composer of *Scheherazade* died in 1908, Stravinsky was his pupil. In 1909, he joined the Diaghilev Ballet and moved to Paris, where there were new currents in art and music. Diaghilev encouraged him, and Stravinsky produced for him such striking ballet scores as *Firebird* (1910), *Petrouchka* (1911), *The Rite of Spring* (1913), *L'Histoire du Soldat* (1918) and *Pulcinella* (1919).

Stravinsky's departure from a musical idiom influenced by his Russian training and background is strikingly evident in the Symphonies, as is his constant search for new methods. He approaches the subject with the desire to create a particular style which will not only be fitting to the subject but perfectly executed musically. Consequently there is a wide difference between the Symphonies and the works which precede and follow them — innovations which appear in one work are not permanent in the sense that they become a part of Stravinsky's overall style.

— *Liner notes by* ROBERT ANGUS

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