



THE MUSIC OF
JOSE SEREBRIER

SAXOPHONE QUARTET (1955)

- 1. Meditation 4:59
- 2. Dance 1:11
- 3. Song 2:50
- 4. Rondo 1:45

The Australian Saxophone Quartet
Colin Smith • Paul Andrews • Ron Gillett
John Mitchell

SEIS POR TELEVISION (1973)

- (Six on TV)
- 5. Mini Overture 1:24
- 6. Sunabiroc 4:24
- 7. Juliet 4:37
- 8. Taming of the Bull 1:57

9. **EROTICA (1968)** 8:49
Carole Farley — soprano
José Serebrier — conductor

SUITE CANINA (1957)

(Canine Suite)

- 10. Elegy for My Dead Dog 3:34
- 11. Dance of Fleas 1:51
- 12. Transformation and Toccata 4:39

PEQUEÑA MUSICA (1955)

(A Little Music)

- 13. Elegy 4:45
- 14. Dance 0:54
- 15. Song of Love 3:59

The Australian Wind Virtuosi

16. **GEORGE AND MURIEL (1986)** 6:56

Lucas Drew — Doublebass,
Festival Miami Doublebass Ensemble
Festival Miami Chorus, Donald Oglesby — director

17. **DOROTHY AND CARMINEI (1991)** 6:27

(World Premiere Recording)
The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
José Serebrier — Conductor



THE MUSIC OF
JOSE SEREBRIER

Saxophone
Quartet

Six on TV

Canine Suite

Erotica



The Saxophone Quartet

As a young composer, Serebrier was greatly enamoured of the flexibility and sound of the saxophone and wrote what is generally considered to be one of the best works written for the instrument. The "Quartet" starts with a pensive elegy, and is in four movements ending in a waltz. The waltz movement has all the charm of a popular French chanson. Serebrier's sense of humour shows in the Finale, which turns out to be a set of variations on "Chopsticks," wrong notes included.

Seis Por Television

(Six on TV)

During a successful assignment as Music Director for the American Shakespeare Festival, the composer accepted a commission to compose the music for three of William Shakespeare's plays which were presented as television specials. These three pieces, together with one more, were incorporated into a complete suite.

Erotica

"Erotica" was Serebrier's first twelve-tone work and was also experimental in other areas, being aleatoric long before this concept was generally accepted. The work makes interesting use of the human voice with its wordless, disembodied effect coming from afar, more sensuous than erotic. The composer requests in the score that the wind players be seated at some distance from each other; this special separation being crucial to both the atmosphere and the tonal quality of the work. The title was suggested by musician friends of the composer after hearing the work performed.

Suite Canina

(Canine Suite)

This Suite is dedicated to Serebrier's faithful friend, his dog, which died while the composer was still a young boy. The work opens with an elegy which is followed by a fun movement, "Dance of the Fleas," and ends with a remarkable movement which follows the dance without interruption. The work has irresistible humour, but more remarkable is its feeling of premonition. It spells Charles Ives almost literally, but at the age of 17 not only was Serebrier unaware of any music by Ives but the American composer's name was unknown to him. The obviously American-influenced tunes that mockingly appear at the conclusion of the Trio act as an unexpected "punch line" and tell of Serebrier's hopes to visit the country where he would eventually make his career. This was the last composition to come out of Serebrier's Montevideo years before he began his American studies. The movements are largely intuitive, being pieces full of freshness and spontaneity.

Pequeña Musica

(A Little Music)

This was one of Serebrier's earliest compositions, having been composed in 1955. It is also one of his most successful, having been played by wind groups around the world, including the New York Woodwind Quintet. Utilising a quite simple form, the young composer was already showing clear stylistic patterns. It has a sombre lyrical line and a boyish humour where melodies abound. After "Erotica," José Serebrier composed one more work for winds, "12 x 12" (1969). Composed for the American Wind Symphony Orchestra, it was an amusing experiment in audience participa-

tion. The work really belongs in the orchestral repertoire as it is written for 12 winds, 12 brass and six percussionists.

Ron Willis

GEORGE & MURIEL

As the last decade grew busier with conducting tours and the direction of international festivals, I saw my composing time brought to a halt. What broke the ice was a combination of circumstances. For my festival in Miami I had commissioned Elliott Carter to write his Fourth String Quartet—which we premiered together with many other composers. In 1987 I had ten prominent composers write new works especially for Lucas Drew, one of the foremost double-bassists in America. He insisted, however, that I add my own contribution to the list: one of my last works—some 15 years before—had been “Nueve,” a “ritual” concerto for double-bass and orchestra, written for Gary Karr. At that time, my close friends George and Muriel Marek were about to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary and I could not think of a more personal gift for them than a new composition. The two ideas combined, and hence “George and Muriel!”

George Marek was a very special personality. After he rose to the presidency of RCA Victor Records, he reigned over the most exciting times in recording history, signing up Toscanini, Stokowski, Reiner, Heifetz, Rubinstein, etc.; writing book after book about music and musicians, and literally helping to shape the musical life and taste of the 40's and 50's. By the time I met him, he had long retired from the record industry and was writing books full time. His marriage to Muriel was a very special one, and a most inspiring one to observe and admire.

This work does not intend to be in any way a portrait. It is a work I may have written anyway. The music reflects what was on my mind at that moment. Therefore, it is more about myself than about them, but it represents my most intimate thoughts, and as such it is my humble but deeply felt homage to George and Muriel Marek.

DOROTHY & CARMINE!

When I first met this wonderful, colorful couple, Dorothy & Carmine, I was in the midst of organizing Festival Miami. My composing time had been reduced to wishful thinking of ideas, with no time left for writing them down. Every moment was taken up by organizational work for the new festival and guest-conducting all over the world. My first attempt at a musical portrait actually broke the ice after many years of neglecting composition in favor of conducting. It was GEORGE AND MURIEL for the unusual ensemble of solo doublebass, doublebass choir, and wordless off-stage chorus. I found that writing this short piece after so many years, was as if I had never

stopped composing, and it encouraged me to continue.

This essay, written to celebrate the marriage of long-time Miami friends Dorothy Traficante and Carmine Vlachos, is a wedding gift rather than a musical picture. Again I experimented with sonorities by paring strings with two wandering flutes, one of which appears from nowhere in the audience, almost as a dancer who is sometimes invited to join the stage proceedings. The 1st flutist is sitting in the audience unbeknown to the public, and sometime towards the end of this puzzling (to me as well) piece, he/she seems to get excited or inspired by the happenings onstage and starts playing. By the time the public becomes aware that an "intruder" is daring to interrupt the concert, the flutist stands and starts to walk toward the stage, all the while playing faster and faster until reaching the usual soloist spot on the stage next to the conductor. After a brief climax, the flutist exits slowly to the back-stage area, and can still be heard repeating a haunting drone as the orchestra comments with background sounds. Finally, the sound of the flute can still be heard, but magically, this time from the back of the auditorium (or the balcony), a 2nd flutist echoes the dying notes of the first flute. Do not try to read a meaning behind the notes here (nor in the other essay of this series). Each listener is welcome to make up his own story line, if it helps in enjoyment of the music.

José Serebrier

JOSÉ SEREBRIER

Born in Montevideo, Uruguay on December 3, 1938 of Russian and Polish parents, Serebrier, at the age of nine began to study the violin, and at age eleven made his conducting debut. While in high school he organized and conducted the first youth orchestra in Uruguay, which toured the country and gave more than one hundred concerts over four years. Upon graduating from the Municipal School of Music in Montevideo in violin, solfège, theory, and Latin American folklore at age fifteen, opportunities for conducting Uruguay's only major orchestra were not forthcoming. That year, the annual composition contest by the National Orchestra, known as SODRE, was announced, only two weeks before the submission deadline. The young musician, thinking that if he won he might be permitted to conduct his work, entered the contest with a hastily written *Legend of Faust* overture. The 18-minute work was orchestrated in the last four days and nights, and the last page composed in a taxi while rushing to meet the deadline. Serebrier won the contest. But the composer being fifteen, his work was assigned to another guest conductor, Eleazar de Carvalho. Today, Serebrier conducts most major orchestras around the world, and has become one of the most recorded conductors of his generation, with well over one hundred releases. His published compositions, many of them written at an early age, also number over one hundred.

Early in his career, Serebrier was the recipient of many of music's most coveted honors. In 1956/57 he received a United States State Department Fellowship to study composition at the Curtis Institute of Music with

Vittorio Giannini and with Aaron Copland at Tanglewood. In 1956 he was awarded a Koussevitzky Foundation Award at Tanglewood and in the same year a BMI Young Composers Award with his *First Symphony* and *Quartet for Saxophones*. The State Department Fellowship was followed by two consecutive Guggenheim Fellowships in 1957 and 1958. At nineteen, he was the youngest ever to obtain these awards in any field. Serebrier has also been honored with two Dorati Fellowships at the University of Minnesota where he received his M.A. in 1960 (he graduated from the Curtis Institute in 1958), a Pan-American Union Publication Award (for his *Elegy for Strings*), and the Ford Foundation American Conductors Project Award. Many other awards followed: a Rockefeller Foundation award to be Composer-in-Residence of the Cleveland Orchestra, at the invitation of George Szell during the seasons 1968/69 and again 1969/70; a Harvard Musical Association Commission Award (for *Fantasia* for string quartet); a National Endowment for the Arts Commission (for a ballet, "*Orpheus + Light*" for the Joffrey Ballet); a Ditson award from Columbia University, a Grammy nomination for his recording of the Fourth Symphony by Charles Ives, with the London Philharmonic Orchestra; the U.K. Music Retailers Association award for best orchestral recording (for the Mendelssohn symphonies, with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra); the Deutsche Schallplatten Award for best orchestral recording (for the first of three CD's of Shostakovich's Film Suites, with the Belgian Radio Orchestra), and many others.

Serebrier was 22 years old when Leopold Stokowski named him Associate Conductor of the newly formed American Symphony Orchestra in New York, a post he held for four years. Previously, Serebrier was the

Minnesota Orchestra's Apprentice Conductor, with Antal Dorati, for two seasons. Serebrier made his New York conducting debut to the American Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall in 1965 to wide critical acclaim. Running like a theme through the reviews was an awareness of his intense, dynamic approach to music and his superb control of the orchestra. The World Telegram and Sun exclaimed that "Serebrier's conducting technique, both musical and physical, is fluid and poetic. There was no theatricalism, only a desire and the power to communicate." Also, according to the New York Times, "Serebrier let the music storm the heavens and sing plaintively with much emotional vitality, but no loss of control." The accolades for his mastery of the orchestra were perhaps best summed up in the High Fidelity-Musical America review: "Serebrier decidedly left a great impression in his thrilling performance of Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* Symphony. Serebrier controlled every note, every phrase. He obviously had the score not only in his head, but in his whole romantic being. He had the orchestra and the audience in his hands."

Serebrier's association with Stokowski goes back to 1957, when the two came together through a dramatic turn of events. It was in that year while conducting the Houston Symphony, that the maestro planned to premiere the difficult *Symphony No. 4* by Ives. But the music proved too difficult and complex for the orchestra, and Stokowski began to search for a new and interesting work that he could premiere instead. He found and chose Serebrier's *Symphony No. 1*, written by the then 17-year-old student who had just arrived in the United States and was studying at the Curtis Institute of Music. The occasion of the concert was their first meeting.

Eight years later the “unplayable” Ives *Fourth Symphony* finally had its premiere with Stokowski conducting the American Symphony at Carnegie Hall. Standing on the podium next to Stokowski, one of the three conductors necessary for the rhythmic complexities of the work, was José Serebrier. A few years later Serebrier would perform and record the symphony with the London Philharmonic Orchestra on his own, without the assistance of other conductors. His recording is considered a landmark. High Fidelity called it “one of the best recordings ever made.” It won a Grammy nomination, and it received numerous awards around the world.

Leopold Stokowski conducted the first New York performance of Serebrier’s *Elegy for Strings* in 1962 at Carnegie Hall, and in 1963 he opened the American Symphony Orchestra season at Carnegie Hall with the premiere of his *Poema Elegiaco*.

The Louisville Orchestra recorded Serebrier’s *Partita*. In his review, Alfred Frankenstein writing for High Fidelity Magazine, hailed Serebrier as “the logical successor to the crown of Villa-Lobos and the South American to watch.”

For the 1968-69 and 69-70 seasons, George Szell named José Serebrier Composer-in-Residence of the Cleveland Orchestra under a special grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

When Serebrier conducted his Symphony No.1 in Minneapolis, John S. Harvey wrote in the St. Paul Pioneer Press: “He has the creative gift, a genuine musical temperament and a surprising technical skill for a 20-year-old composer. Sometimes precocity can mean genius, as witness Mozart, Schubert,

Chopin and Richard Strauss. I have a hunch he’ll be a man to watch.”

While Serebrier was Composer-in-Residence of the Cleveland Orchestra he wrote a harp concerto entitled “*Colores Mágicos*” for the Inter-American Music Festival in Washington. It combined light and sound and it tempted Irving Lowens to write: “Despite the use of such fashionable devices as tone-rows (the composer says that the work is based on a row of 10 notes, and if he wants it that way, so be it, even though I couldn’t perceive the serial organization with my ears), tone-clusters, tone-clouds... Serebrier, a first-rate conductor, uses orchestral colors in much the same way as a child uses finger-paints. He lays about him with a fine fury, and achieves something of the stagey horror of a tale by Edgar Allan Poe. Of the 15 new works I heard during the course of the festival, I’d rank *Colores Mágicos* among the best... its advanced techniques don’t get in its way. Doubtless it will be heard-and seen-again; it deserves to be.”

Shortly after Serebrier wrote another multi-media work, “*Nizete*”, a concerto for double-bass and orchestra, commissioned by the Plainfield Symphony for their 50th anniversary. It was written for the double-bass virtuoso Gary Karr, who was a Plainfield, N.J. resident at the time. Serebrier and Karr have performed this concerto all over the world. Serebrier has also written concertos for accordion and orchestra (commissioned by the American Accordionists Association), trombone, violin and others. He has composed several works for percussion ensembles. The Symphony for Percussion was recorded by John Elliott Gardiner with the Tristan Fry Percussion Ensemble.