

THIS ISSUE IN THREE SECTIONS

# READER<sup>®</sup>

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CHICAGO'S FREE WEEKLY

# RALPH SHAPEY “F DOESN'T ME

BY KYLE  
GANN

First of all,  
when I got the offer,  
the University of Chi-  
cago matched it right

W  
HY GO  
TO NEW  
YORK?



cage matched it right down the line. As the chairman at Queens said, 'I would have been worried if they hadn't.' They don't want me to leave. My dean immediately said, 'What can we do to keep you here?' They keep teasing me: 'Are you coming back? You're coming back.' Queens wants me to stay there. I said, 'Look—I've been here 21 years and I've never taken a year off. Ever! OK, so I'm going to take a year off and go to New York, to see if I like it.' It's a test, to see if I want to go back home."

PHOTOGRAPHS  
BY JON  
RANDOLPH

Lake Michigan is dotted with sailboats on this calm, gray August day. I watch them from a handsome, if bachelor-messy, 18th-floor apartment overlooking "the point," which juts into the lake from Hyde Park. Ralph

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

MY BEST  
FRIENDS  
AND  
ENEMIES  
ARE IN  
NEW  
YORK!"



# WILL HE BE HERE ANYMORE

**IF HE DOESN'T COME BACK,  
THE CITY'S SERIOUS-MUSIC SCENE  
WILL BE POORER—AND A WHOLE  
LOT DULLER.**

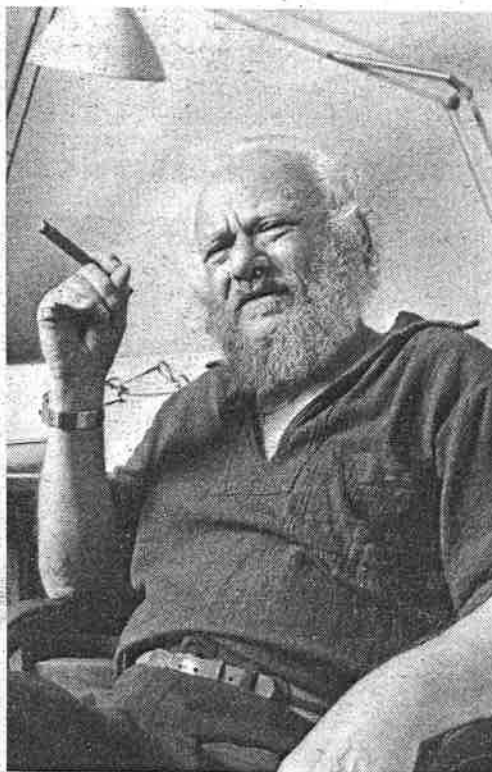


# SHAPEY

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Shapey, in maroon pullover shirt and white shorts, talks to me through innumerable wisps of cigar smoke, periodically tapping his pouch of little cigars and saying, "Please, there are plenty more." A row of large, ornately carved pipes proudly occupies the heavy, masculine coffee table. The living/dining area is graced by four oversize paintings, three of them by Chicago artist Vera Klement—Shapey's second and former wife; the other a Jackson Pollock gift from an old painter friend from the New York days, in return for Shapey's dedication of his Piano Trio. One of the Klement paintings is an urban portrait of a grimacing, crouching old man that could pass for a very unidealized portrait of the future Shapey.

The photographs on the wall, his rogues' gallery, as he says—Shapey joking with composer Luigi Dallapiccola, Shapey looking at music with Roger Sessions, Shapey looking up at conductor Dmitri Mitropoulos, Shapey standing in the audience at a concert, receiving applause with a big smile on his face—all reveal a rather dashing-looking young man, mustachioed, clean-chinned, wavy brown hair running back from a receding hairline, lively, good-humored, and intelligent looking. More recent photographs of Shapey, not exhibited, look very different from one another and, watching him, one realizes why: the remaining strands of thick white hair make him look bald or hirsute depending on the angle, and his expression changes mercurially from a



cherubic grin to a vicious snarl, countenances that seem to emanate from quite different persons. A quilted sampler to the left of the photographs states blankly in blue and brown the motto:

*Competitions are for horses, not artists.*  
—Bartok

"You like that saying?" As with everything else in Shapey's life, there's a story attached.

When I say Shapey "talks" to me, I euphemistically cover a wide range of locutions, from an engaging and disinterested whisper with raised eyebrows to sarcastic imprecations shouted through clenched teeth, sometimes followed by a calmer "There; am I crazy? I must be." The powerful, rugged music I still hear in my mind grants these outbursts the stern authority of prophecy. But the important

question inevitably comes up: after you teach at Queens College for a year, are you *really* coming back to Chicago?

"The truth is—I don't know, I don't even know at this point, it's such a mixed bag. I'm very comfortable here, it's a beautiful apartment. And the lake—you can't get *that* in New York! I told Elsa we're going to siphon the lake into bags and take it with us! New York is a very, very different kind of place. It's *not* what it was when I was there; it's dirty, filthy, noisy, I could use a couple of other

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**W**hat advantages are there for a composer living in Chicago?  
"There are no advantages at all."

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adjectives. But I put it this way: my best friends and enemies are in New York! There are so many factors involved."

The words are hardly reassuring. Does Chicago *dare* let Ralph Shapey out of its sight?

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For all that he continues to call New York "home," no other classical musician is so much a Chicago institution as Ralph Shapey. For 21 years he has been Chicago's most famous composer, a highly respected teacher to scores of young Chicago composers (pardon the pun), and the perfectionist conductor and artistic director of the University of Chicago's prestigious Contemporary Chamber Players. No concert season would be complete without his taut, precise, rhythmically persuasive performances of 20th-century classics and new works, accompanied by a hundred familiar mannerisms: the strict, no-nonsense conductor's beat, the exasperated glare at a wayward soloist, the swift about-face

of the rotund belly at work's end, the proudly gracious smile framed by a Brahmsian white beard, the lunge of the concertmaster to grab a quick handshake as the maestro runs briskly offstage. Many cities have symphony orchestras, lyric operas, but—at least until now—only Chicago has had Ralph Shapey.

An undeniable part of Shapey's visibility is his controversial personality, which has lent so much color to the



otherwise fairly drab Chicago new-music scene. He is a throwback, in a way, to the composer-as-character that flourished in the 19th century. Today, most composers find it advantageous to project as civil and professional an image as any CPA; eccentricities, if any, are best left to the music, and used there only with great discretion. Shapey, suffice it to say, does not fit the mold. One would have to go back

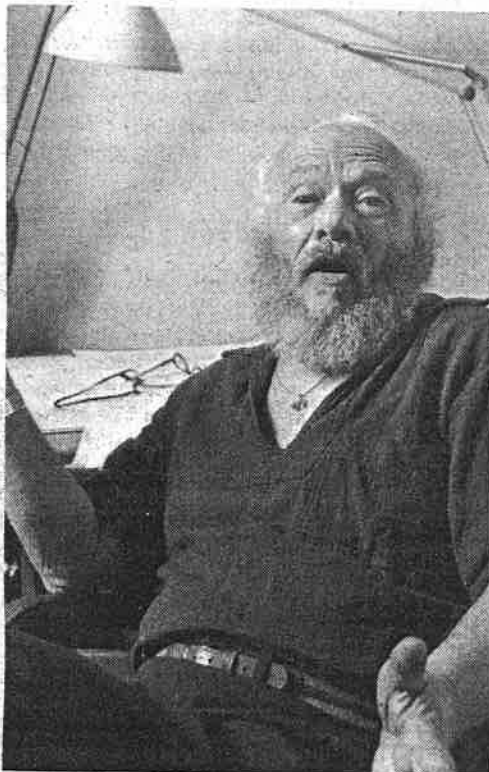
to Carl Ruggles (who was often likened to Popeye the Sailor) to find a composer whose personality plays so great a part in the aura of his music. His Rabelaisian humor, his frequent bitterness, and his feisty yet paternal warmth toward his students are qualities remarked upon (with widely varying degrees of approval) by all who have been associated with him.

As Shapey puts it: "I've been accused of having a Beethoven complex. I said, 'Thanks for the compliment.'"

It's difficult to find a musician in Chicago who does not have at least one Ralph Shapey anecdote. Even rarer are those who will not admit the extreme professionalism and perfectionism of his conducting and his profound creativity as a composer. These qualities have made him something of a guru to Hyde Park musicians, a spiritual leader for younger composers whose music tends toward harsh atonality and cerebral structures—qualities only partially shared by his own music. Students speak of his teaching with uniform respect. Composer Robert Carl calls Shapey "the only teacher who taught me technique." Monroe Couper calls him "a good role model as an artist—uncompromising; he had a vision." Widespread rumors that Shapey is difficult to work with are heatedly denied by those who have long been associated with him. Says pianist Abraham Stokman, who has played under Shapey for years, "I've never known him to lose his temper. He's a very sweet person, he doesn't make any demands. He's said to me many times, 'Music is music: if you're truly musical, the performance can't help but come off right.'" And Paul Fromm, the Chicago wine merchant who became one of America's most important patrons of new music, says of Shapey: "I have always been struck by the

oneness between the composer and the man. Both have the same personality traits: absolute integrity, an almost fierce passion for artistic autonomy, and, as Ralph once said to me, an everlasting search for the deeper truth that lies below the threshold of intellectual perception."

For all this, Shapey's sphere of influence rarely extends as far as the Loop, nor do he or his associates pay much attention to Chicago music north of 51st Street. His relations with Orchestra Hall have always been problematic and, since Georg Solti took over the orchestra from Shapey's friend Jean Martinon, virtually nonexistent—a sad and unaccountable



situation for America's best orchestra and Chicago's greatest composer. Nationally, Shapey is well known in academic circles through his dozen recordings on the CRI label, and is

seen as something of an expatriate: a New York composer who abandoned New York, but left deep roots there. Shapey studied composition with the great German-American composer Stefan Wolpe, from whom he inherited a highly intuitive and expressionistic atonal style associated with the abstract expressionist painters of 1940s New York. By uprooting himself from New York's more congenial musical atmosphere, Shapey has become an unfortunate symbol for what is perceived as the *problem* of being an important composer living in Chicago, a city stranded halfway between the much more active new-music climates of the east and west coasts; and while he clearly enjoys the security of his U. of C. position, his comparison of 1950s New York with 1980s Chicago touches on many reasons that few successful

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"I've been accused of having a Beethoven complex. I said, 'Thanks for the compliment.'"

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composers have called Chicago home for any length of time.

Kyle Gann: What advantages have you found, as a composer, to living in Chicago?

Ralph Shapey: There are no advantages at all. I came to Chicago because the University of Chicago rolled out a royal rug. What do you do when a royal rug is rolled out, you walk on it!

KG: [*New York Times* critic] John Rockwell compared your coming to Chicago to Ruggles going to Vermont or Conlon Nancarrow going to Mexico City, as if it were a retreat from the professional music world.

RS: You see, when I was in New York—and I tried so hard in my first years here to do it here—there was a milieu. It was incredible. Paul Fromm

always said, "Ach, why can't we have that milieu again?" "Paul, you can't do it again." It will take a certain number of years for that milieu that we had to be digested, and then maybe a new one will occur. When I gave a concert



in New York, it was filled with everybody, every musician, conductor, what have you, *and* all the abstract expressionist painters. I was a close friend of de Kooning...

KG: Who else besides de Kooning?

RS: I knew them all. Kline, Motherwell, Tworlov, ohhh, Harold Rosenberg and I were very close friends. But he was a writer [art critic]. And I used to go to that famous club. I was one of the few nonpainters allowed in. Friends and enemies; it didn't make any difference. You might go to a concert with your colleagues knowing each one had a knife in his hand to knife you in the back, you didn't pay



# SHAPEY

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any attention to that. But it was a magnificent milieu.

Now, I came to Chicago, and it's incredible. It's the most segregated city I've ever lived in. I'm not talking about race segregation. I'm saying, if you live in the south you don't go north, if you live in the north you don't go south. It's true, Chicago should be proud of being a city with various sections and various people. Fine. But why don't they mix? And I tried so hard, I had parties, and I invited composers, and I invited painters... no way. We found out, for instance, that a painter who lived one block away from another painter, they didn't know each other.

KG: Every composer knows two other composers who come to his concerts.

RS: That's right. With me, of course, it's different, they're afraid of me: I'm the terrible, horrible Ralph Shapey, and all of that. Well, that's their problem. If you go beyond that into a "Chicago school of composers," there is none. There was a Chicago school of painters, the Monster Roster [and since then the "Hairy Who," the neo-expressionists, etc], there's no question of that. But if you think about it, most of the composers around here, forget whether we like them or don't like them, are from the east coast. Mainly from New York. I can only think of a couple who were born and raised in Chicago. And of course, they studied with people from the east coast.

KG: [Composer] Ray Wilding-

## SHAPEY ON RECORD: A DISCOGRAPHY

*Configurations* (1964) Sollberger, flute; Black, piano. New World NW 254

In keeping with its title, the outer movements of this Wolpesque work are a little dry and academic; sadly, the delicate beauty of the soft middle movement is marred by the record's poor sound quality.

*The Covenant* (1977) Charlston, soprano; Contemporary Chamber Players of the University of Chicago (CCP), Shapey cond. CRI SD 435

Shapey is reluctant to discuss explicit religious influences on his music, but this setting of texts from Jewish writers, the Old Testament, and inscriptions by Jews hiding from the Nazis, written for the 30th anniversary of Israel, is an overwhelming, transcendent expression of a faith that harbors no theodicy. Elsa Charlston's soaring voice is powerfully underscored by massive blocks of sound and taped voices.

*Evocation* (1959) Raimondi, violin; Wyner, piano; Price, percussion. CRI 141

*Evocation* (1959) Zukofsky, violin; Kalish, piano; Desroches, percussion. Desto DC 6435/37 (*Music for a 20th Century Violinist*, a three-record set)

The slow shifting of Shapey's "sculpted forms" is less easily perceptible here than in the later, clearer ensemble works, but this acerbic, thin-textured piece will repay the careful listening it requires. Hardly a dime's worth of difference between the two performances; Zukofsky may have a slight edge in terms of rhythmic clarity.

*Fromm Variations* (1966/1972-3) Black, piano. CRI SD 428

One of the masterpieces of the piano literature (of any era): a theme of 20 chords given a stern, rocky, powerfully expressive treatment.

*Incantations* (1961) Beardslee, soprano; CCP, Shapey cond. CRI 232 USD

Those unused to the style might find Bethany Beardslee's vocal intensity irritating in this chaotic but evocative work for wordless soprano, brass, and percussion.

*Praise* (1961-71) Geiger, bass; CCP and Chorus, Shapey cond. CRI SD 355

Similar in intent to *The Covenant*, but its chamberlike, sustained textures and rhythmic discontinuity achieve a much lower degree of intensity.

*Rhapsodie* (1957) Ostryniec, oboe; Wuorinen, piano. CRI SD 423

A subtle, charming, unusually lyrical, otherwise thoroughly characteristic work in a minor genre.

*Rituals* (1959) London Sinfonietta, Shapey cond. CRI SD 275

Limited improvisation by three saxophones sparked groundless rumors that Shapey was getting into jazz, but the improv does add an uncharacteristically hectic touch to the second movement of this static, brassy, atmospheric work. (With String Quartet no. 6.)

*Seven for Piano Four Hands* (1963) Salkind and Salkind, piano. Friends of Four Hand Music SKD-1027

Privately printed; not commercially available.

*Sonata for Oboe and Piano* (1952) Ostryniec, oboe; Maximilien, piano. CRI SD 501

Quite ambitious for its genre, this sonata will seem dry and lacking in a distinctive personality to nonaficionados, but it's a fine example of Shapey's taut, rough-hewn early style.

*Songs for Soprano and Piano* (1982) Charlston, soprano; Orkis, piano. Opus One #106

Shapey assembled an interesting text from disparate quotations for this massive, Ivesian song cycle: "Dreams," "Hope," and "Death." Its beauty—tough, meditative, and austere—is not likely to have widespread appeal (especially in this oddly

muted recording).

*Songs of Ecstasy* (1967) Pilgrim, Cobb, voices; Shapey cond. Desto 7124

Difficult to find; I was unsuccessful.

*String Quartet no. 6* (1963) Lexington Quartet of the CCP. CRI SD 275

A complex, thickly written, difficult work in one 12-minute movement; best heard live for proper effect, I suspect, but it will repay careful and repeated listenings. (With *Rituals*.)

*String Quartet no. 7* (1971-2) CCP Quartet. CRI SD 391

A majestic, 36-minute work, now gritty and complex, now slow, stately, and transcendently meditative; Shapey calls it "my answer to Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*." The fourth movement, a passacaglia, is transparently beautiful and quite amazing.

*Three for Six* (1979) New York New Music Ensemble, Black cond. CRI SD 509

A massive chamber work with a jaunty sense of humor, brilliant contrapuntal interplay, and a delicate, soulful middle movement that should appeal to anyone.

*21 Variations for Piano* (1978) Maximilien, piano. CRI SD 496

My personal favorite: a charming and enigmatic work, the end of each variation marked by some form of a quirky little seven-note theme, almost tonal sounding.

A list of Shapey's works complete through 1980 will be found in *Soundpieces: Interviews With American Composers* by Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1982—available through C.F. Peters, Inc. All works are published by Theodore Presser, though all they've done is reproduce Shapey's manuscript, and the results are occasionally difficult to read; Shapey's work deserves a better presentation. His String Quartet no. 4 is expected to appear on the Opus One label.

—Kyle Gann

White was asking people to send him statements about what Chicago music is for his WFMT radio show *Making Music Chicago Style*...

RS: Oh, yes. I refused to do it. I

guess he's sore at me. I said, "Look—I'm sick and tired of the same old business: I'll make my statement, which is not going to be very nice of course," and then another hundred

people will be mad at me." Not that I give a damn... When I gave concerts in New York like the ones I give now at Mandel Hall, the hall was loaded, especially with composers! Here, you

would think they would come to my concerts. But they don't. In New York we went to everything, even if we didn't like it. Even if we *hated* it—WE WENT!—to find out what was going on. Here: no way.

Ralph Shapey's slow rise from years of obscurity and poverty to his present fame and honored position as one of the U. of C.'s most prized professors was a difficult and discouraging journey, reminiscent of the trials of some of the 19th-century masters. Born in Philadelphia in 1921, Shapey began there as a violinist and assistant conductor. Though he studied with Wolpe in New York, he never completed an academic degree, and for 20 years he applied in vain for composition teaching jobs. The bitterness that occasionally surfaces in Shapey's conversation stems from what he sees as the unfair and sometimes politically motivated neglect of his work during those years, and from mistreatment of his music then and afterward by conductors and orchestras. Indeed, Shapey's fame is so recent, his present activity so vigorous, and his music and ideas so controversial, that it is difficult to keep in mind that the composers who skyrocketed to fame in the 1950s—Boulez, Stockhausen, Xenakis, Nono, Feldman, Brown—are *younger* than he is.

KG: How did you make your living in New York before you came to Chicago?

RS: Well, I was a free-lance composer, conductor, and teacher.

KG: So you *were* teaching in New York.

RS: Free-lance. Privately. Not at a school. Ninety-eight percent of the time—probably *all* of the time—I conducted for nothing. Composition, the same thing. Even if it was a commission, I ended up with nothing. You don't make money on a com-

Then in 1963, I was part-time at the University of Pennsylvania conducting the chorus and orchestra, and I got the vast sum of \$4,000 a year. Which meant running back and forth from New York to Philadelphia. And I had a son, born in 1960.

You know, the truth is, I look back on those days, and I wonder myself, how the hell did I stay alive? I don't know how we did it. A student comes to me bitching now and then about money because they want to get "new wheels." "Get the hell out of here, don't tell me about being poor. I know more about it than you do."

Then in 1964 I was offered the job here, at the first decent salary of my life.

KG: [Former student] Monroe Couper mentioned that, since you hadn't always been an academic but had come up "from the streets," you had the beneficial effect of keeping him from taking academia too seriously.

RS: Well, after all, I don't even have one goddam degree to my name, not even a bachelor's. I'm "iggorant" [laughs]. Now I'm a "distinguished professor." That's one of the funniest things I've ever heard of.

But I have to say that the University of Chicago has been very good to me. I will always be grateful to them, whether I come back or stay in New York makes no difference. I could show you hundreds of rejections from jobs: "Very interesting bio; however, you have no degrees." They took a gamble, and took me in when no one else would touch me. They've been good to me, but I think it's been a two-way street. I'm very visible, as a composer, but especially as a conductor, traveling all over the world and conducting major orchestras. They invested in me, and I repaid it. Our department of music was last year

# AFFORDABLE PORTABLES

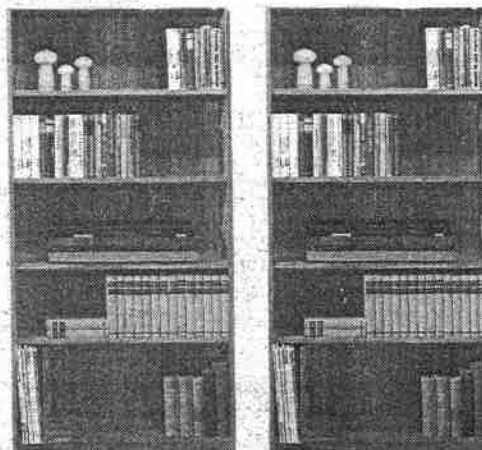


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KG: So how did you make a living from 1945 to 1964?

RS: [Outrageous laughter] Well, for ten years I did teach violin and theory at the Third Street Settlement Music School, where I earned the vast sum of about \$2,500 a year. Even in those days, that was poverty. Supplemented by private teaching here and there.

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One thorn in Shapey's side has been his inability to get a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation, one of the music world's most prestigious awards.

RS: I had a list, arm's length, of great names who had never been able to get a Guggenheim: Schönberg, Mitropoulos, Wolpe, Bartok, Varese... After ten years of trying, I wrote a letter to the Guggenheim, said, "I will never again try to get a Guggenheim. Thank you for putting

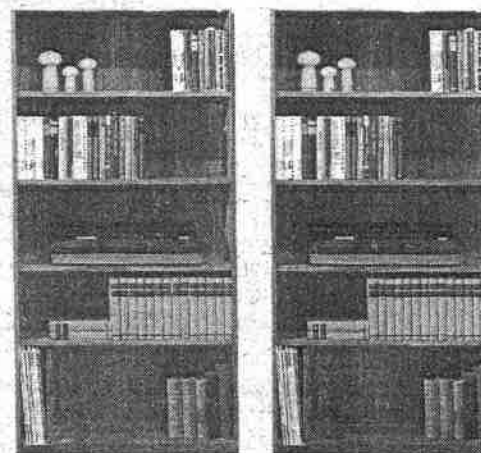
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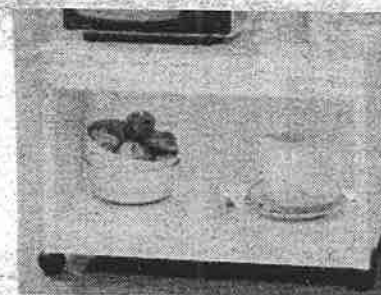
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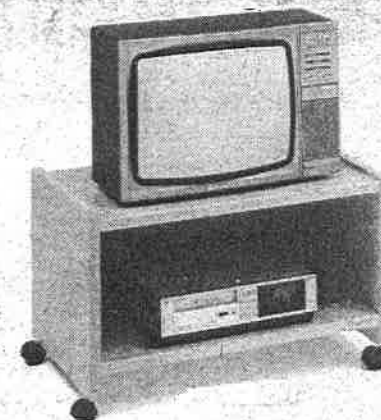
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# SHAPEY

continued from page 23

me on the list of great musicians who never got a Guggenheim," and I named them. So he wrote a letter back, "Thank you for your letter. Your list is inaccurate." It couldn't have been inaccurate because I checked it all out. Some friends keep telling me to apply for one now, and I say, "Like hell; if they want me they're going to

have to hand it to me."

The funny thing is that my students occasionally nominate me for a Guggenheim, and then I get a form letter: "We understand that you are interested in obtaining a Guggenheim..." The first time I wrote "Fuck you" across the letter and sent it back. It happened again. This time I xeroxed that sampler on the wall: "Competitions are for horses, not artists," and

**W**hat do you think of orchestra members? "They're the biggest bunch of babies alive."

sent them that. I haven't heard from them again.

Shapley has also never received the Pulitzer Prize for music, which has been awarded to many manifestly inferior composers.

Along with these professional slights, there have been contretemps with orchestras and conductors. In 1955 Dmitri Mitropoulos canceled a performance of a work he had commissioned from Shapley, *Challenge: The Family of Man*. The official reason was that the parts hadn't been copied in time; Shapley contends that the piece was already in rehearsal, but that the orchestra couldn't play it and wouldn't take the parts home to practice them. Similarly, the premiere of Shapley's Violin Concerto with soloist Esther Glazer was postponed in 1966 for the same reason—parts not copied—and his *Ontogeny* was substituted instead (along with the Chicago pre-

miere of the Schönberg Violin Concerto). When Shapley's concerto was finally played a year later, Shapley walked off the podium and attempted to cancel the performance himself on



the grounds that the players were "fucking around" and refused to play properly. Jean Martinon, who had stepped down to let Shapley conduct the work, talked him into going through with it; the orchestra behaved, and the performance went beautifully, Esther Glazer playing the difficult work from memory. Glazer now claims that Shapley had been a little

defensive, but admits that "when you play a new, difficult work with any orchestra, it's always difficult to calm them down, and there are a certain number of cutups in *any* orchestra. They complain about having to do the Beethoven Fifth and the Brahms Fourth again, but when it comes to rehearsing a new work and learning all the new notes, they don't really want to do the work. This was par for the course." Shapley's conclusion about orchestra members is, naturally, a little stronger: "They're the biggest bunch of babies alive."

Part of Shapley's problem with orchestras is the difficulty of his music. Admittedly, he demands very complex passages and high notes of orchestra players that one would usually ask only from a soloist, but there's nothing strange or new about this. Earlier composers, notably Richard Strauss, did the same thing and thereby increased the level of orchestral performance. Shapley points out that the horn solo that opens Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel*, once considered the most difficult brass solo ever written, is now routinely used by college kids to warm up for auditions. That orchestras refuse to keep advancing past their present level of technique Shapley sees as a sign of laziness and the result of coddling, and he is always delighted to prove his point, especially to other conductors.

RS: I don't know if you've heard my Concerto for Clarinet and Chamber Orchestra. I was writing that in '54, I was in Florence, Italy, at the

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ARE WORTH \$15**

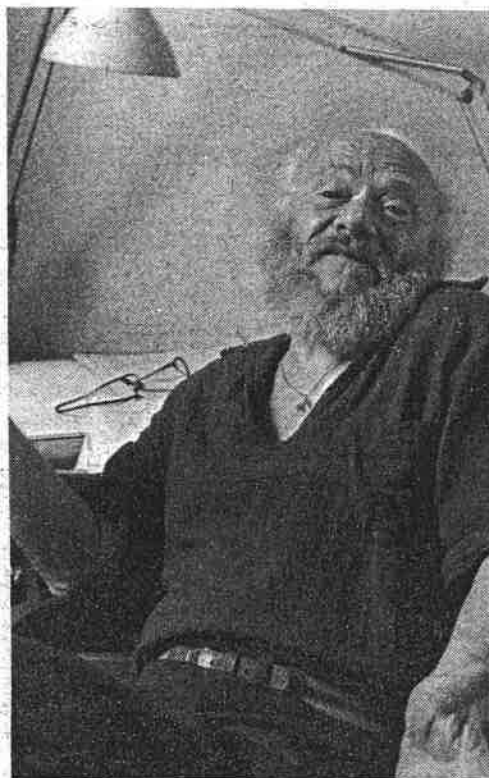
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time. Mitropoulos came in to do the opera *The Girl of the Golden West*. We made contact, he said, "What are you working on?" So I told him. "Ah! I want to see it!" I told him that it was still in sketches, he said, "Next year we'll do it with the Philadelphia Chamber Orchestra." Fine. Meantime he sees a high B for clarinet, concert pitch, B-flat clarinet, that means C-sharp. I come back to New York, I'm walking down 56th Street, Dmitri sees me, he says, "You'll conduct the rehearsals and the concert. But that high B—can't be done!" I say, "Dmitri, it can be done." So I went to rehearsal, the orchestra's onstage, and I said, "Hey Stanley!" Stanley Drucker, first clarinetist for the Philharmonic. He was maybe 21 at the time. Fabulous clarinetist. "Bring your clarinet!" "Which one?" "The B-flat!" So he takes his clarinet out of the case, slaps a reed on, comes over. "What do you want?" "Play that note." BEEEEEE-EEEE!! Just like that. I looked up at Mitropoulos, he says, "You win," and throws up his hands.

By 1969 Shapey's resentment against the official musical establishment peaked and resulted in the most melodramatic and perhaps quintessential gesture of his career: a moratorium on performances of his music.



(Admittedly, certain performers, such as violinist Paul Zukofsky, defied the edict with no ill consequences.) Of his moratorium, Shapey later said: "My children—namely, my music—I think are beautiful. That's my problem. And I didn't want to give them to the human race because I despise the human race.

I don't think it's worth a damn. It's nature's worst mistake..." Publicly, Shapey even claimed to have stopped composing, though privately he continued as busily as ever.

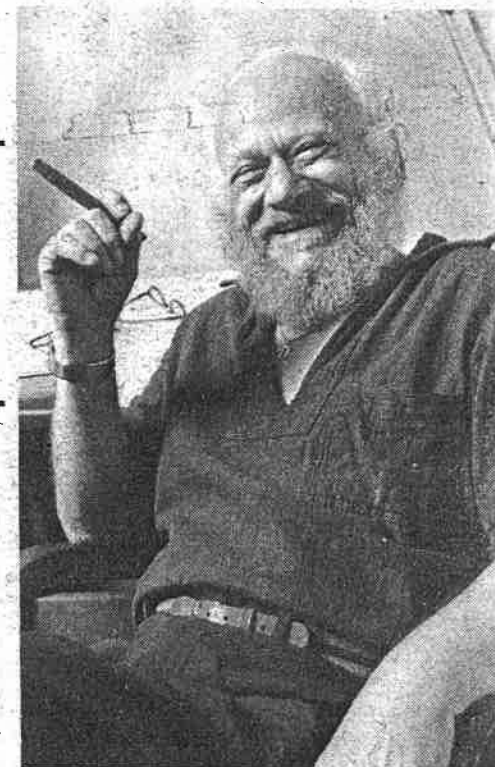
It was Fromm who, in 1976, convinced Shapey to allow his music to be played again. Fromm's attention

"I don't have one goddam degree to my name...now I'm a 'distinguished professor.' That's one of the funniest things I've ever heard of."

had earlier been drawn to Shapey by Mitropoulos. Fromm says: "Mitropoulos asked me, 'Would you be interested in a composer whose style of music is very fierce and violent?' I said jokingly, 'You want me to commission another *Rite of Spring*?' Fromm became one of Shapey's staunchest supporters, and subsequently commissioned three works from him: *Dimensions*, *Songs of Ecstasy*, and his Seventh String Quartet. When Fromm reminded Shapey that the latter often told his students that "a work of music is not alive until it is performed," Shapey agreed and

ended the moratorium with a performance of his oratorio *Praise* in the Bicentennial year.

At last in 1982 a magnificent honor



came to Shapey that boosted his rising reputation and seems to have mollified his *contemptus mundi* somewhat. The

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# SHAPEY

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MacArthur Foundation conferred upon him a five-year fellowship, an award totaling \$288,000. The award is given based on nominations by a secret committee, and while the nominations can come from any field of endeavor, the percentage of awards given to those in the arts is very minor, and those given to musicians much smaller still. It is, in short, one of the most prestigious honors an American composer has ever received.

KG: How has the MacArthur grant affected your composing?

RS: The only effect, basically, is that—it's like getting the Nobel Prize. It's called the "genius award." The effect is on the sidelines, people say "oooowheel!"—that sort of thing. The simple fact is that I entered the university circuit very late; I was 43. My retirement money stinks to high heaven. And I've gotten used to eating, I like it. So I'm saving it toward my

retirement.

As one of my colleagues put it so well, [musicologist] Howard Brown, we were walking along and he said, "You know what tickles me about you, Ralph? When you came here you were the enfant terrible, now you're the grand old man, with nothing in between."

\*\*\*

For 21 years, Shapey's Contemporary Chamber Players have provided Chicago with one of the finest new-music series in the country. In the 60s, while Jean Martinon was conductor, the CSO lent its services for one concert a year. Martinon continued to take an interest in the series even when not personally involved, too: "I'd be walking backstage, and somebody would say, 'Hey Ralph, Jean Martinon is up in the balcony!' I'd say, 'I hope he learns something.'" Music critics Donal Henahan and Bernard Jacobsen were writing for the *Chicago Daily News* (they now write for the *New York Times*); both knew Shapey, and both gave the ensemble copious press. Shapey blames the country's increasingly conservative mood for the waning interest in his concerts, though he estimates that attendance has never dropped below

500. Association with the CSO, though, is over. Shapey considers Solti an enemy. "When he first came here, Bernie Jacobsen talked to him about me and my music and I went to meet him at a rehearsal. I met him in the office afterward, and we talked, and he listened to a couple of pieces of mine, and he said, 'Very, very interesting. I don't understand it, but it's very interesting. I'm going to commission a work from you for soprano and orchestra. You'll hear from me.' Time goes by, time goes by, time goes by. I've never heard from him."

As the ensemble's artistic director, Shapey prides himself on the stylistic diversity of his programming: "I don't pick my concerts according to my likes and dislikes; as a conductor, my attitude is to do everything, the best of everything of *any* school, the best that I can do it." Still, while Shapey points out that he has performed music by Pauline Oliveros, a composer of meditative music (while admitting that he hates everything it stands for), his programs have been heavily skewed toward the atonal, abstruse, highly organized music of east coast academia. Much of what is generally referred to today as "new music" is absent, and minimalist composers such as Terry

Riley and Steve Reich seem out of the question altogether.

But the performances are superb. Shapey secures excellent players by insisting on paying them on a professional scale, and draws fiery, note-perfect performances from them marked by close attention to detail. As an interpreter of early-20th-century works, he can strike some as a little dry (or simply unsentimental), and he seems to take an antiinterpretive stance that characterizes his teaching of conducting as well. Students mention that he uses recordings to teach conducting, allowing the student little interpretive latitude, and that he concentrates on baton technique very much to the exclusion of other aspects of conducting. Still, there is never any lack of excitement in a Shapey performance, and he is legendary for giving extremely accurate renderings of a 20th-century repertoire that is rarely presented in a fair and professional manner.

It may well be, though, that Shapey's most enduring legacy to Chicago will be as a composition teacher. Robert Carl's statement that "he was the only teacher who taught me technique" was echoed by every former student I talked to, and all

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gave me very similar accounts of Shapey's strict and idiosyncratic method of teaching composition. As Chicago composer Frank Abbinanti recalls it, "The first week we were to pick five pitches and use them to write chords in a number of permutations. Shapey would criticize these in terms of how much imagination they displayed. Next we worked on one-line melodic writing in three different steps. The first was circulation around one note: say, if you picked D, then your melody would use just C, C-sharp, D, D-sharp, and E. That was a good exercise, because it forced you to think carefully about rhythm, since your pitch choices were so limited.

"The next step was inversion—to use those same pitches, but to create an opposite contour, and then to create deviations on that pattern. Shapey liked to call those 'perversions.' The third step was to write longer melodies, but limited to the intervals between those original five pitches. It was developmental, in a way. Then we would start using those methods to write counterpoint, using five pitches in each voice. We used two voices, then three, then four—and finally we did one exercise, eight bars of eight independent voices. I felt like I was

writing [Schönberg's] *Moses and Aron*."

If the exercises sound dull, the classes weren't. Monroe Couper, now a part-time teacher and free-lance editor in New York, remembers how emotionally involved Shapey would get in the assignments turned in. "We came in with these stupid little chords on the first day, and Ralph threw them on the floor and started screaming that we were all locked into our own little worlds. He said to one guy, 'These chords are all scored for trombone!' and it turned out the guy was a trombone player and had written them all in that range. Then he shouted, 'I've brought you all down to the beach and taught you how to swim, and you'll only stick your feet in the water!'"

(Shapey can be intimidating, but apparently not so much that he doesn't get practical jokes played on him. Couper also remembers a CCP rehearsal of a piece by Xenakis, whom Shapey hated, in which he and a friend pasted a *Penthouse* foldout into the middle of the score. In the midst of conducting, Shapey turned the fatal page, burst out laughing, held up the score, and shouted, "This is the way Xenakis should have written music!")

Shapey apparently pays little attention to harmony in teaching composition. Robert Carl, presently teaching at the Hartt School of Music in Connecticut, says that "Shapey's harmony was the result of consistent pitch sets, much like 15th- or 16th-century music. But what I found useful was that he taught me to *think through a phrase*—to structure a phrase so that it creates its own momentum and sets up the following phrase. That was very important." Not every student saw the point of the exercises at the time he worked through them, but at least some realized how important they were years afterward. "He said, 'These exercises will revolutionize your thinking,'" Couper recalls. "I didn't believe it, but it was true. I go back to those little exercises from time to time when I get stuck, and they open up my imagination."

Shapey is not unaware of the effects of his teaching. Yet, for all that he teaches technique, he has scoffed in print at the idea of technique, saying, "The only *real* technique is imagination." I asked him if this was a paradox.

RS: Let me clarify. The technique that I teach is *tools*, that's all. Once you've got your tools, then the final

technique is imagination. You should be the master of your technique, not its slave. So many pieces I look at, I say, "Yes, the technique is good, but it doesn't go beyond the technique." In these exercises they're doing, I don't give them anything, they're writing their own music right from the beginning. I just give them a means for understanding. You know what I tell them? "After you've learned it—now flush it down the toilet! Forget it! And let your *unconscious* mind use it and write music!" The kids in my class say, "Gee, all you're teaching us is how to compose, like the old masters did." I say, "That's right!"

I had a student, Jorge Lieberman, came to me at the end of the first year and said, "You know, when I first came here, when someone would ask me who my influences were, I would say Ligeti, Xenakis, this or that composer, a certain way of thinking. After a year with you, do you know what my answer is? Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms!"

KG: Monroe Couper said the same thing.

RS: Well, he never said it to me.

Despite his classroom theatrics, Shapey could develop a warm, pater-

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# SHAPEY

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nal relationship with his students. "Once you got through the first few layers," claims Couper, "you found that he was a very humanistic, nurturing sort of person; he was more like a father, I even talked to him about my love life." The disadvantages of Shapey's teaching? Abbinanti: "You could only use it to write atonal music." Carl: "The types of gestures those exercises allowed led you to write little 'Shapey pieces'; there was little place in the system for stepwise motion, and you felt like you were becoming a Shapey clone." Even so, none of the music of Shapey's students *sounds* like his, and there is no "Shapey school" of composing—a fact Shapey notes with some pride. "I'm trying to break open their minds. So they can fly!"

Many of these descriptions of Shapey's teaching provide more insight into how he writes his own music than do his statements about his music. Though talkative, he is not an

articulate man (or an easy one to interview). His right brain is more active than his left; fluid and prolific when communicating on manuscript paper, he is wary and frugal when forced to resort to words. His oft-reiterated insistence that "the music should speak for itself" has left many a program-note writer in dire straits. His descriptions of his work tend to take the form of opaquely abstract statements, as this for his 1961 *Incantations*: "Music as an object in Time and Space... aggregate sounds structured into concrete sculptured forms..." In these days when the analytical program notes of academic composers threaten to drown the listener in a morass of arch forms and combinatorial sets, his refusal to discuss the gory details of his compositional method is refreshing. But at a few times in his life he has taken great trouble to concoct verbal images for his aims as a composer—the "graven image," the "it is, not it becomes"—and when pressed to explain his music in terms foreign to his way of thinking, he often retreats into these somewhat mystical expressions.

KG: The thing that, it strikes me, distinguishes your music from everything else written since the 1920s until very recently is the amount of repeti-

tion you allow. There was a tacit attitude that Adorno called "musical nominalism," a scientific model that decreed that music, to give a true picture of the world, could not repeat itself. On this question, even Cage and Feldman were on the same side of the fence as Babbitt and Wuorinen. And yet from your early works on, you have never been afraid to use very striking, lengthy, and frequent repetition.

RS: Didn't the old masters repeat themselves?

KG: Is that why you like to say that you belong in the 19th century?

RS: I belong in the 19th century because I'm a romanticist, you're not supposed to be a romantic in this day and age, it's become a dirty word. Let me tell you this story: There was a certain point in my life, in the late 50s, that I got fed up—really fed up—with so-called modern music. And I asked myself, what *secret* did the old masters have? I'm not talking about talent. We all have talent. Fine, Beethoven had talent as a composer. But he had something more; he must have had a *secret*. So I said, it's time to find out. I quit composing for a whole year, I went back and studied the old masters. *Not* in terms of what you learn in school; but trying to discover

what were their *secrets*.

It isn't a question of repetition. My repetitions are not that simpleminded. I take, in the case of an orchestra, each person or group and make them involved with a concrete idea. I try to make my music so concrete you could hold it in your hand. It's like an object. So, this is object one, this is object two, this is object three [picking up a wallet, cigarette lighter, and knickknack from the coffee table] and I put them together in various ways [shuffling them in his hands]. What happens by putting them together in various ways, is—you hear them, and it's a repetition, but—wait a minute—they're different.

And like the old masters, I try to make it unforgettable. That's when I formulated the "graven image" idea. BA-BA-BA-BAAAAAAAMMMM!! [Beethoven's Fifth] If you don't know *that*, get out of here! Let's be honest: da-da-da-dummmm, what the hell is that anyhow? Any idiot could write that! But what he does with it, THAT is genius. So what was the secret? It was *graven in rock*. In *stone*. It cannot be destroyed. I said, well, "Thou shalt not make graven images," I'll make graven images.

Now, can that be done today? I call myself a traditionalist, a romanticist,



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but I *use* the musical language of the 20th century. Can that be done in the language of the 20th century? Why not? Who the hell says no? I'll do it.

Shapey's description is hardly a manual on how to compose, but it does provide many keys as to how to listen to his music. The repeating brass chorales set against the changing voice line in *The Covenant* or the blocks of percussion that form an ostinato for the brass solos in the final part of *Incantations* do indeed sound as though invariant elements are being shifted and shuffled against each other, to give a sometimes chaotic variety with simple and recognizable elements. In some of the starker piano works this process is even more perceptible: the 20 granitic chords, grouped 4-5-3-2-4-1-1, which form the brilliantly simple theme of the *Fromm Variations* (also called 31 Variations for Piano), recur in various quantities at the end of each variation, both to mark off the individual variations and to show the changes in perception of the theme those variations create—a graven image indeed. It is because of this process that Shapey's music can be some of the thorniest, fiercest, and most demanding music of the last several decades, and yet also some of the most accessible and directly

expressive, a combination that distinguishes him from the academic composers with whom he is often associated. As composer Carlos Salzedo told Shapey after hearing the latter's Second String Quartet, "Ralph, I've never seen such a complicated score that sounded so simple."

Accessibility is one thing, but Shapey's self-description as a romanticist is more problematic. When asked why his work wasn't included on Jacob Druckman's "New Romanticism" festival in New York, Shapey thought a moment and replied, "Because I'm *old* romantic, not *new* romantic." Abraham Stokman agrees, and goes so far as to call Shapey "basically a tonal composer." But how far can one stretch these terms before they become meaningless? Music can give an impression of permanence and stability, as Shapey's often does, without therefore being tonal, a term that refers to a specific organization of pitches that Shapey does not follow. "Romantic" is presently in vogue as a hot PR term; John Rockwell even calls Xenakis, no less, a "romantic" on the basis that his music is "exciting." The prevailing logic seems to be that people *like* music that is romantic and tonal, and if composers are writing music that people like, then it must be romantic

and tonal. By this tacit definition, though, Bach and Vivaldi are romantics, a terminological absurdity.

Definitions of classicism and romanticism vary and are often bitterly argued. Goethe baldly stated that "the classic is the healthy and the romantic is the sick." Cultural historian Jacques Barzun is more generous and more analytic: the classic has to do with being, a state of ideality and permanence, while the romantic has to do with becoming, impermanence, and new creation. This criterion places Shapey's music squarely in the "classic" category by his own admitted values. One of his frequent credos has been "I work with the 'it is,' not the 'it becomes,'" and in a recent interview with Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras (printed in *Soundpieces*, Scarecrow Press, 1982), Shapey explained: "I got tired of the 19th century developmental ideas. They became like a dog running after its own tail. The 'becoming' factor for me was nothing more than taking a seed and showing its constant growth. I don't deal with that any longer. To me, the seed has been planted, and we now have the thing, whatever it is." Historically, romanticism in music seems to have to do with climax-orientation, a constant flux in which an interplay of

tension and release creates tragic or triumphant points of arrival alternating with episodes of greater relaxation. Shapey's music exhibits no such orientation. Extreme contrasts exist, but not in a fluid or resolving manner; there are neither moments of cathartic Wagnerian epiphany nor of complete relaxation. Shapey's very use of concrete repetition harks back to the 18th century and runs counter to the trend toward increasing nonrepetition that runs from late Beethoven through Schönberg. If, however, as is popularly done, romanticism is equated merely with passionate and deeply felt emotions, then Monteverdi is very much a romanticist and Mendelssohn often is not, and the term loses its only dependable historical moorings.

Suffice it to say, then, Shapey's well-meaning apologists to the contrary, that Shapey's music is passionate, deeply felt, exciting, accessible, often restful and tending toward stability; yet it is not tonal in any construable sense of the word, nor is it romantic in any sense that could be historically meaningful. On the other hand, there is much about his 21 Variations for Piano and the *Fromm Variations* that reminds one of the great variation forms of the classic era,

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# SHAPEY

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from Bach's *Goldberg* to Beethoven's *Diabelli*: the thoughtful and understated attention with which each variation takes up one idea and follows it through all its implications, and the succession of variational contrasts more subtle and complex than the overriding crescendos and decrescendos of the romantic era. Likewise, as Stokman accurately points out, the strict Baroque form of the passacaglia is ever-present in Shapey's music, often extrinsically, as in the final movement of the Seventh String Quartet. Calling such works romantic may be good PR for Shapey in the short run, but it hopelessly confuses any critical discussion. It would be more to the point to admit at once that Shapey's music is very intuitive and not, like so much recent music, sys-

tematic. Or, as Robert Carl put it, "not romantic, but *heroic*."

It was former U. of C. historian Leonard Meyer, though, who gave Shapey perhaps his most accurate categorization and the one of which he is most proud: a "radical traditionalist."

RS: He's absolutely right. I'm a traditionalist—and I radicalize it. But I don't know...what is radical? To me, late Beethoven is as radical as hell! He broke all the rules, left and right. Bach, in the *Art of Fugue*, broke all the rules left and right. He used parallel octaves [the prohibition of which is the first rule of counterpoint]. And some of my colleagues, here and across the country, are trying to explain why Bach, of all people, started to write hidden octaves, and not-so-hidden fifths and octaves. After all, it's verboten!

Do you know, there are excellent string players, sitting in orchestras that are supposed to be excellent, who still say—today—that had Beethoven not been deaf, he would have never writ-

ten things like the *Grosse Fuge* and the late string quartets! My answer to that: if that's the price I have to pay to write the *Grosse Fuge*—I'm prepared. I'm going deaf anyway, I have a hearing aid in my left ear, and my right ear's day by day getting shot to hell. But to me the *Grosse Fuge* is the greatest work ever written. What he did in there is absolutely incredible! He had to be out of his fucking—write that in—mind.

Freud said that if we were healthy, and living in a healthy society, we wouldn't have art. That art is a neurotic expression. Of course, my answer to Freud, I'm sorry he's not around so I could say it in his face, is "Thank God we're neurotic! Look at all the magnificent ART we have!" Beethoven must have been as neurotic as hell, he had to be!

And don't forget, he was the new music of his day. Mozart was the new music of his day, Brahms... We talk about "new music"—it's just music. Do you know that the first time a work by *Johannes Brahms*—by

BRAHMS!—was played by the New York Philharmonic in Carnegie Hall, the audience walked out? Do you like Beethoven's Third Symphony? Pretty good work? Do you know what the critics said about it after the premiere? "This is a monstrosity which will never be heard in a concert hall again." How wrong can they be?

THANK GOD that Mozart and Beethoven and Brahms aren't here to talk about their music. Who needs it? I just want to hear the music, and the music speaks for itself. Someday we're all going to die. Me, I'm 64 and a half, so what? Ten years? Twenty? When we're dead, what we leave behind us has to speak for itself. That's one of my most important philosophical stands, and of course there are others, one I keep writing is that GREAT ART IS A MIRACLE. And it is. See, I'm still in love with art.

I've been teaching these things for, my god—40 years, and it always surprises me. We're dealing with 88 notes. Now, I've written 75 or 80 works. When I hear composers say that

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they've gone to using electronics because they don't have enough notes—I die laughing. I still have enough notes, plenty of notes.

KG: You used one quarter tone [a note halfway between two pitches] at the end of *Evocation No. 1*, so at least once those 88 weren't enough.

RS: [Looking thoughtful] It was nothing more than that the C itself was not quite right, I needed something a little lower, and the B was not quite right; I needed something in between.

I tell my students, "Look—no system guarantees a goddam thing!" All it is, is a *modus operandi*. It so happened, that along came some magnificent talents that used the tonal system and wrote some great music in it, but that could happen with any system. There's a British composer, I won't mention his name because I can't even pronounce it...

KG: Brian Ferneyhough.

RS: That's the one. I've not heard a note of his. I glanced through one of his scores, very complicated score,

Fine, nothing wrong with that. The appalling thing, is that he looked at the music of a student here, and said, "You don't have enough *system* here. You have to have *system*, that's the important thing." Then he said the most incredible thing I've ever heard—"I don't expect to hear more than 10 percent of my score." I asked the student, "Are you sure you heard him right?" I want to hear 100 percent of everything I put in my score, but since I'm a performer and realist, I'll settle for 99 percent. But I think that's symptomatic of what's wrong with our society today.

KG: Robert Carl made the observation that you're reaching your greatest fame now at a time when your music is more out of fashion than it ever has been. Do you agree?

RS: Well, we've been saying for a long time that the modern composer is alienated from his audience. I don't find that true at all. [!] I usually get ovations. From an audience, that is. I don't get them from fellow composers. Most of them hate my music. What's

happening is—a man called me up from New York, said, "I want to commission an organ piece from you." "Well, that's nice." I can't stand the organ, but that's nice. I said to him, "Do you know my music?" "Oh yes." "Well, you know I write difficult music." "I know, that's why we want it." "Would you explain that?" "We are sick and tired of getting *fluff*. We want something difficult that we can sink our teeth into, that when we've played it, we'll have accomplished something." I said, "On that basis I'll accept the commission."

The Chicago Symphony people say that if they can't sight-read a work it's not worth playing. That's a bunch of crap. Grant you, they can sight-read Beethoven, because that's part of their bloodstream. They have played any Beethoven symphony a thousand times to any one conductor's conducting it! They don't pay any attention to the conductor up there—they ignore him! He's conducting the audience! I've been conducting since I was 16 years old, they can't kid me.

Solti came and gave a lecture at Mandel Hall. I wasn't there, but it was broadcast on WFMT, so I know it was true. Right from the beginning, Solti mostly took questions from the audience. Finally, a young person raised his hand and the question came out: "Mr. Solti, why don't you play more modern music? We love Bach, Beethoven, and the rest, but we live in this century, and we want to hear that too." Out came the famous answer: "I cannot use the Chicago Symphony for an experiment." [Solti's exact answer, transcribed from a tape of the broadcast: "If you look at the general program, we play a great deal of 20th-century music. But if you say, why don't we play more experimental music?—that's different. We play very little of it. Clearly and consciously not. Because I do not believe that this orchestra and this podium is for that. There are other orchestras, there are other podiums... This is a first-class, wonderful, professional orchestra, and it has a duty to play 19th-, 18th-, and

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# SHAPEY

continued from page 33

20th-century music in the best perfection... We cannot escape that duty. We must lead the symphonic world. And you have to lead the symphonic world with the Beethoven Ninth Symphony, not Mr. X's 15th symphony because that's not enough..." Well, luckily, within a short time I had some radio and TV appearances, and I'll do it again: "Mr. Solti, for your information, a Beethoven symphony is an experiment on paper until it is performed by musicians."

I grew up in Philadelphia, so I grew up with [conductor Leopold] Stokowski, and he did all the moderns. Well, I heard the American premiere, with Louis Krasner, of the Schönberg Violin Concerto in Philadelphia at the Academy of Music. First of all, my hair stood up on end. I had hair in

those days, believe it or not, now I have it on the face... Well, it stood on end. At the end, the applause was such that you could hear a pin drop, like they were applauding with their fingernails: tap, tap, tap. You know what Stokie did? He turned around and said, "Since you like it so much, we do it again." Imagine hearing the Schönberg Violin Concerto twice in a row like that! Of course, after that they cheered like crazy because they were afraid he'd do it a third time!! I wish he had.

I had a big argument with the NEA people x number of years ago, they came to Chicago for a meeting. I had no intention of going, and Fromm called me, he said, "Come on, Ralph, we're going to the meeting." Ohhh, hell, I really didn't want to go, because I knew I was going to end up having a fight with them. Which, of course, happened. I listened to all this garbage, and then I raised my hand and said, "Well, I'm a taxpayer, and I pay a hell of a lot of taxes. Now, if you give, let's say in nice round terms,

\$500,000 to the Chicago Symphony, at least *half* of that money should be stipulated that they use it to play works by living American composers." You know what they did? They raised their hands in shock and horror and yelled, "Dictatorship! Dictatorship! Dictatorship! We can't dictate!" I said, "What the hell are you talking about, the government dictates all the time!" In Britain they do that, they give money and stipulate that a certain amount has to be spent on British composers. Other countries do that.

I'm not going to complain about the NEA. The fact is, we do not have a minister of culture. Or a department of culture. Every country in the world — some of the poorest countries in the world — have *that*. We, the richest country in the world, don't have a minister of culture.

What is it that we remember of the past great nations? It's something that goes under the word culture, isn't it? What's American culture going to be, 1,000 years from now? Coca-Cola? Pepsi-Cola? That's terrible. We're the

richest country in the world, but at the same time we're really the poorest country in the world when it comes to culture.

From this point Shapey's angry, arrogant tone calms down and becomes almost pathetically sad:

RS: And the sad thing about the NEA yelling "dictatorship!" is, that it's more proof that we composers — have no part in our society. We don't belong in this society, they don't want us. They really wish we would disappear.

I bumped into somebody in New York who had seen my picture in the paper, and he said, "Now, *what* do you do?" "I'm a composer." "Oh, you write Broadway shows." "No." "You write jazz." "No." He went down the list, and finally he said, "You mean you write that long-haired stuff for the *symphony orchestras*?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Why don't you get a job like a man?" *Why don't you get a job like a man*, he said to me.

Today, Ralph Shapey is working on

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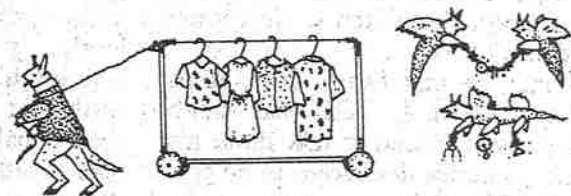


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a commission from the Philadelphia Orchestra, probably to be entitled *Symphony Concertante*. It's going to be a difficult piece; he knows the individual players he's writing for, and knows that what he's writing is playable; he wonders if their refusal to practice it is going to make him "infamous" again at age 64. This fall, in New York, he married for the third time. His wife, Elsa Charlston, is a soprano who has been singing his music for years. He won't deny John Rockwell's report that he's working on an opera, he'll only say cryptically that what he's working on won't be performed until he's dead and buried. From now through at least May, he's teaching at Queens College and conducting an ensemble there much like he had here; he's gratified by the number of calls he received from New York musicians asking to play in his ensemble when they heard he was coming. The U. of C. Contemporary Chamber Players are basing their season largely around works that don't require a conductor, though Shapey will be here April 11 to conduct the annual Fromm Concert; Paul Fromm refused to let it go on without him. For the time being, composer Shulamit Ran has taken over his composition students. Next year? He doesn't know.

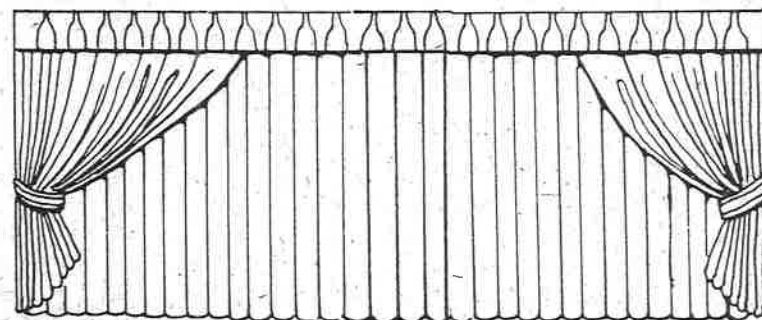
It may be that future generations will say THANK GOD that Ralph Shapey isn't around to talk about his music. America does seem to be embarrassed by its living creative artists. The inherent contradictions between the demands of art and the demands of capitalism are so vast that those committed to the latter seem to feel, in the presence of those who embody the former, a guilt with which they prefer not to deal. Dead artists can be relegated to the business world of box office and art auctions, but living ones remind too many of us that, while our

practical concerns are well taken care of, we put relatively little time, money, and effort into the half of existence that makes life graceful and beautiful. To assuage our consciences, we select a tiny number of artists and ludicrously overcompensate them, paying a Pavarotti \$50,000 for a few hours of work. With those symbols so highly visible, we can afford to abandon the remainder to the harsh and unsubtle criteria of the marketplace, letting them sink or swim in the flimsy belief that we have done our cultural duty.

How would Beethoven's art have fared under such circumstances? And what would a society embarrassed by Shapey have thought of Beethoven? After all, *he* cheated his publishers, borrowed his friends' wives (with their permission), and rarely emptied his chamber pot; Wagner slandered Jews and borrowed money constantly; "Papa" Haydn wrote to his girl friend that he couldn't wait for his wife to kick off. Next to these, Shapey's crimes are pale and unimpressive, yet we're not indignant when a major music publisher tells Shapey, as Boosey and Hawkes did, "When you're dead and buried we'll print you." Like the others, Shapey's value to society will someday be justified—is already—by his beautiful music, and by his "search for the deeper truth that lies below the threshold of intellectual perception." It is to those who already realize that that he shows the sincerely humble and generous side of his nature, as when he called me after I reviewed one of his works (I had never met him before) to say, as if this said it all, "I'm trying—to write music. I don't know what music is! [laughs] but I'm trying to write it! Thank you for recognizing that fact."

Come back home, Ralph Shapey. Or else there'll be dull times in the Chicago music world.

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