

## **ROBERT WARD**

Dr David C. F. Wright

Robert Ward was born in Cleveland, Ohio on 13 September 1917, one of five children of the owner of a removal, haulage and storage company. He sang in a church choir as a boy and attended John Adams High School from where he graduated in 1935

There were many influences in the young life of Robert Ward namely the Presbyterian Church, a musical home and Cleveland's fine public schools. He spent four years at the Eastman School of Music studying under Bernard Rogers and Howard Hanson and at the Juilliard School from 1939 to 1942 with Frederick Jacobi, Albert Stoessel and Edgar Schenkman. He also studied with Aaron Copland at the Berkshire Music School in the summer of 1941. And this education was in the days of the Depression and the days leading up to World War II and during the war before America entered it..

In February 1942 Ward was drafted into the US Army and sent to Fort Riley in Kansas thinking his musical career was over. There he met up with six other soldiers who were writers or composers. Together they wrote produced and toured with a revue *The Life of Riley*. Then Ward attended the Army School of Music. A month later he became the leader of the Seventh Division Band which included a hot swing band.

The Symphony no. 1 was written in 1942 when Ward was a graduate student in composition at the Juilliard School. It is a short work in three movements but received warm praise for its melodic expression and contrapuntal design with rich and colourful orchestral sonorities.

He married Mary Raymond Benedict, a Red Cross worker on 19 June 1944 and they have five children Melinda, Jonathan, Mark, Johanna and Tim. For meritorious military service in the Aleutian Islands Robert Ward earned a Bronze Star.

Before and after the war, Ward served on the staff of Queen's College, Columbia University and later at the Juilliard School (1946 -1956) becoming music director of the Third Street Music School and conductor of the Doctor's Orchestral Society of New York.

The Jubilation Overture was composed during Ward's time with the Seventh Division's participation in the Philippines and Okinawa campaigns and reflects his then interest in jazz and light music. It was premiered at Carnegie Hall in 1946. It has been said that his music lies between Hindemith and Gershwin.

For his wife, he composed his Symphony no. 2 in 1947 while they were living in Nyack, New York. It was premiered by the National Symphony Orchestra and was then taken up by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Between 1949 to 1955 many works flowed from his pen including the Symphony no. 3, the first Violin Sonata, the Sacred Songs of Pantheists of 1951 and Euphony for orchestra in 1954.

The Symphony no. 3 dates from 1950 and was commissioned by William Strickland and the Friends of Dunbarton Oaks where the composer premiered it on 31 March 1950

The Arioso and Tarantelle for cello, or viola, and piano dates from 1955 and was written in memory of Hans Kindler, the conductor. It is very well written for the instruments and is a delightful piece.

In 1956 Ward became the Executive Vice President and Managing Editor of Galaxy Music Corporation and Highgate Press. In 1967 he was named President of the North Carolina School of the Arts and in 1979 became Mary Biddle Professor of Music at Duke University.

Titles can be irritating. His first opera to a libretto by Bernard Stambler is *He who gets slapped*, originally entitled *Pantaloon*. Other operas followed namely *The Lady from Colorado* (1964), later re entitled *Lady Kate*, *Claudia Leqare* (1977), *Abelard and Heloise* (1981), *Minutes to Midnight* (1982) and *Roman Fever* (1993)

The Symphony no. 4 dates from 1958 and is in three movements. It has rich melodies and has a lively fugal

passage before the broad tune returns to end the work.

In 1963 he conducted his opera *The Crucible*, based on the Arthur Miller play, in a German opera house. A year earlier, he won the Pulitzer Prize for this opera. He has received many other honours and awards, a honorary degree of fine arts from Duke University and an honorary degree of doctor of music from the Peabody Institute. He has had three Guggenheim Fellowships, the Northern Carolina Award in Fine Arts, The Eastman School Achievement Award, The Cleveland Arts Prize and the Morrison Award from the Roanoke Island Historical Society.

Another curious and cumbersome title heads the score of *Sonic Structure* written to open the Nashville Symphony Orchestra's first season in the Andrew Jackson Hall in September 1980. The theme uses all twelve notes of the chromatic scale but it is not a serial piece and is rooted in the key of G. It was written to commemorate the composer's brother David who was an architect.

The Saxophone Concerto of 1983 is in two movements a *lento* and a longer *allegro*. It also shows some influence of his days with the swing band and a hot combo.

Duke University approached Ward in 1984 and he wrote the piano trio version of *Dialogue* originally for violin cello and orchestra to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Chattanooga Symphony Orchestra in 1982. In 1987 he composed his *Dialogue on the Tides of Time* for a memorial concert for peace organised by the North Carolina Symphony. The husband and wife team of Jamie Laredo and Sharon Robinson were the soloists. Ward added two movements to make a *Triple Concerto* for violin cello piano and orchestra. The second movement is a brief interlude and the finale is another dialogue, *Dialogue on the joy of living*. The work contains some very beautiful music.

In 1987 the Raleigh Chamber Music Guild commissioned the *Raleigh Divertiment* for the Aspen Quintet. It was then arranged for nonet for the Czech Nonet to play on their 2004 American tour. It is in two movements and the scoring is for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and string quartet.

The commission for the fiftieth anniversary of the Brevard Music Centre was for the *Symphony no 6* scored for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, piano and string quintet and is set in three movements. It is contemplative, pensive and ends with a dance in rondo form. It was premiered in 1988

In 1991 Bath County in Virginia asked Ward for a piano quintet based on the county's 200 year history. The work falls into seven sections played without a break:

- The mist-covered mountains and warm springs
- Indian discovery of healing waters
- Coming of the white settlers with their hymns and hopes
- Agony of the civil war and lament for the slain
- War's ending and thanksgiving
- Partyin', fiddlin' and dancin'
- Peace again on the mist covered mountains

The Quintet for oboe and string quartet dates from 2005 and is cast in four movements alternating fast and slow. It is beautifully written for the oboe and has a tremendous and satisfying atmosphere. It is a lovely work. It was written for George Chandler in memory of his wife Marjorie Olsen Chandler.

His music is tonal and attractive but it may lack drama and tension. However, it deserves to be more widely known.

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