



ARTHUR SHEPHERD
Portrait By
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AMERICAN COMPOSERS XV

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DENOE LEEDY

WE have seen how audiences, because of the ministrations of certain over-imaginative commentators, are inclined to envisage a cold, wan light and to hear the sea-gulls scream whenever a beloved Finnish composer's music is brought into the concert hall. Considering the mental processes of concert-goers, and how quickly they succumb to such stimuli, it is quite possible that a comparable danger lies in store for Arthur Shepherd. If he should be so unfortunate as to attract a similar group of apostles, burning incense before his altar and conditioning the minds of men, then cowboys will gallop through the auditorium, coyotes will howl, and life will become just one long Chisholm Trail.

But Shepherd is not quite such easy copy for the musical journalist. He was born, to be sure, in Paris, Idaho. That delectable juggling of the gazetteer, with its nice suggestion of *Coppelia* performed in the corral, is a brand that never can be effaced. Add also the fact that his parents were converts to the Mormon religion, having emigrated from England to America in 1877, and the picture takes on a tinge of Zane Grey.

Not in the West, however, (and Paris was undoubtedly a true version of it), but in the psychological fermentation and conflict of ideologies set up by the combination of his birthplace and Boston lies the answer to Arthur Shepherd — composer, conductor, teacher, critic, and preëminently "musician of distinction."

Shepherd's father, displaying an admirable intelligence and sympathy, packed him off at the age of twelve to the New England Conservatory. It was either that or the Leipzig Conservatorium, and the fact that in the family councils it was difficult to choose between the two, throws a revealing light on music

education in this country in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Boston won.

At a very impressionable age Benjamin Cutter, Percy Goetschius, and George W. Chadwick introduced Shepherd to the materials of music. It was an awesome and powerful trio of influences and, now that it is fashionable to say so, just as difficult to escape as a Nadia Boulanger or an Arnold Schönberg. But for all the changing theoretical scene, the swing from Leipzig to Paris and Vienna, the inevitable substitution of a Schenker for a Rheinberger, it cannot be denied that such training had its merits. The gulf between theory and practice daily becomes wider, and we may cheerfully assume that the situation was not quite so bad in the eighteen-nineties as it is now. Certainly Percy Goetschius was a veritable Gibraltar of theoretical stability. The Herr Doctor dispensed what we are happy to call "sound instruction" and, what is more, inspired the eager Idaho musician to write.

Shepherd came out of Boston with a definite artistic physiognomy, and none of the self-imposed facial operations have altered it. This is not to imply that he is an exact replica of a Chadwick, a Foote, or even a Henry F. Gilbert, although one suspects that if it came to a choice he would prefer the latter. Shepherd is Shepherd, and whatever appraisal one may make of his music, there is no denying his individuality. From the *Piano Sonata*, opus 4, one of his earliest attempts at a larger form, up to various late examples from his pen one sees the same melodic idiosyncrasies, the same harmonic texture, the same attitude toward solving constructive problems, if not always the same solutions. The only exception may be found in the orchestral work, *Horizons*, where the incorporation of folk material conditions some of the writing. In other words, he very early and with no conscious mannerisms developed a style. This, I admit, is a dangerous term to use, but in connection with Shepherd it implies an artistic integrity so profound that even he himself has been unable to defile it.



The gentleman who now serves as Professor of Music in the Graduate School of Western Reserve University is nothing if

not ultra-distinguished in bearing. His accomplishments in many fields fully warrant the place he holds in American music. To the public at large he is the polished, friendly, scholarly musician. But underneath that exterior there are darksome wells. It is from these depths that the music arises, and when it is finally put down on paper it carries traces of torment.

If only he wouldn't exhaust himself so much in giving form to his life he would retain more energy to guide his tonal materials into logical patterns. He writes too many notes. His magnificent critical acumen, so powerful when applied to the other person's music, frequently forsakes him. His scores get cluttered up. He falls into the morass of one particular tonality, and for all the melodic waving and struggles of his musical torso, is unable to free his feet. Frequently he indulges in just plain tonal suicide, mulling over his materials to the point where there is nothing left of the original artistic impulse.

This is the dark chapter, but it is not, by any means, the whole book. At certain times, and I suspect due to influences outside himself (even though the idea is sentimental), something happens to the man. The stars being right in the heavens, the artist Shepherd breaks through whole geological layers of Shepherd the man, and a strange beauty makes itself felt. One may see the results of these unpredictable and happy moments in the *Sonata for Violin and Piano*; in the gigantic canvas of the orchestral piece, *Horizons*; in the *Exotic Dance* for piano; in some of the songs.

Horizons is, without doubt, the work which has made Shepherd known to the contemporary musical world. It has received excellent performances by major orchestras in this country, and has been heard in Paris, Warsaw, and Prague. No other work from his pen is so personal in character. On the title page of the score one reads *Horizons*, Four Western Pieces for Symphony Orchestra. Shepherd regrets this, feeling that in spite of the programmatic scheme the work should have been entitled a symphony. But, it is too late for regrets, *Horizons* can never be divorced from the images it has evoked.

"Westward," "The Lone Prairies," "The Old Chisholm Trail," and "Canyons" are the four sections of the work. In the

second and third movements actual cowboy tunes are employed, and in the fourth the composer makes use of a choral theme derived from a hymn of the pioneers, a hymn he often heard as a child. It was a dangerous undertaking to use such thematic material as building blocks, especially for a composer to whom obvious phrase symmetry is like a red rag to a bull. But this time Shepherd was in the mood.

The flavor of the folksongs permeates the entire score. The music sings gallantly of the westward trek. It conveys the loneliness of plains reaching out to mysterious horizons. It cracks racy jokes, and pictures the splendor of yawning canyons. I offer no apologies for these "imaginative" statements, for the simple reason that *Horizons* gives me great pleasure. It would be a simple matter to find faults with the score, and perhaps smile at one's poetic flights when experiencing the music. But the reaction is vivid, and not to be dismissed. One must always remember that in Shepherd's boyhood the West was still in existence. It was hard reality, and if in *Horizons* it has been transmuted into romance, there is nothing spurious about it. Its very essence is imprisoned in the Four Western Pieces.



With the *Sonata for Violin and Piano* we come back to Shepherd the artisan in pure tone, for it must be made quite clear that the pictorial West is not to be found in any other of his compositions. The *Sonata*, published by Sénart in 1927, although composed some years earlier, proves conclusively that Shepherd's ideas are not necessarily linked up with orchestral timbre. This has been a critical fallacy on the part of certain commentators due, no doubt, to the fact that the composer has functioned so much in the capacity of conductor. This long conducting experience has been useful to him, but it has not conditioned him aurally.

He is quite capable of thinking in reduced instrumental terms. In the sonata we find him fully alive to the possibilities of the medium, writing admirably for the violin and utilizing pianistic sonorities of peculiar richness and plangency. It is also pleasant to note that this work is singularly free from the excessive cerebration that often mars his writing.

The line is long, even to the point of suggesting the later Fauré. The highly personal harmonic idiom, the fondness for chromatic alterations, the tendency to string together secondary seventh chords, the slight flirtations with modal effects immediately counteracted by a stretching of the intervals and a leaping hither and yon which suggests that, given other influences, the composer might have fallen under the spell of the twelve-tone technic—all these are evident in the sonata. But they are utilized for expressive purposes, and far from being blemishes, lend individual color to the work.

Of the various piano pieces the little *Exotic Dance* calls for some comment, not only because of its charm, but because it gives further proof of the unpredictable Shepherd. In what subterranean depths of his subconsciousness did this fragile blossom find its roots? Technically it is Shepherd—every one of its five printed pages. But it wafts a fragrance of death, of too many gardenias in a warm room, of Baudelaire and the more neurasthenic aspects of French symbolism. Evidently the piece fascinated its creator, for he incorporated it later in the so-called *Choreographic Suite* for orchestra. Here it sings its gentle song all over again, but in the larger frame, with its ballet suggestions, loses something of ghostly pallor.

In recent years Shepherd has turned his efforts toward string quartet writing. This may be indicative of the usual weariness with large tonal canvases that all contemporary composers experience, or it may show him once again applying the rod of self-discipline. Taking a horizontal view of music has never been easy for Shepherd. Evidences of "contrapuntal" struggles are sprinkled throughout his work. Nevertheless the *E-minor Quartet* frequently achieves linear strength and a logical flow of melodic patterns. Strings are no problem, and when the writing goes well one can count on it "sounding" successfully. A tendency toward ecstasy in the last movement threatens to spoil the continuity of the musical thought, the listener must learn to expect, and accept, such rhapsodic fallings from grace in all the larger Shepherd works. Confronted with a large form, or feeling the necessity of expanding his material so that a large form is imperative, he cannot resist striking a rhetorical attitude.

These rhetorical passages are soon over. The composer seems to blush in confusion over his temporary indulgence in bad taste, and rushes back to wipe out the spot with nicely complex and unemotional writing. This desire never to foresake the canons of good taste has both contributed to and detracted from his stature as a creative artist. It has caused him to bring forth some finely chiseled and deeply expressive works, and at the same time it has stifled a great deal that might have been powerful in utterance. In *Horizons*, when the gods were with him, the result was epic.

THE MUSIC OF ARTHUR SHEPHERD

DATE	ORCHESTRAL WORKS		PUBLISHER
1901	Overture Joyeuse		Manuscript
1915	Overture	The Festival of Youth	Manuscript
1919	Overture to a Drama		C. C. Birchard & Co.
1916	Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra		Manuscript
1927	Horizons, Symphony, No. 1.		C. C. Birchard & Co.
1931	Choreographic Suite		Manuscript
1938	Symphony, No. 2, in D.		Manuscript
<hr/> CHORAL WORKS <hr/>			
1908	The Lord hath brought again Zion	Motet for mixed voices, baritone solo.	Oliver Ditson Co.
1913	The City in the Sea	Cantata, with orchestra.	Boston Music Co.
1915	Song of the Sea Wind	Women's voices.	A. P. Schmidt Co.
1915	He came all so still	Women's voices.	A. P. Schmidt Co.
1918	O Jesu Who art gone before	Anthem.	Boston Music Co.
1918	Deck thyself my soul	Response. Mixed voices and organ.	Boston Music Co.
1935	Ballad of Trees and the Master	Mixed chorus, a cappella.	C. C. Birchard & Co.
1937	Song of the Pilgrims	Cantata, mixed chorus, tenor solo, orchestra.	C. C. Birchard & Co.
1937	Invitation to the Dance	(Text by Sidonius Appolinaris)	Manuscript
1938	Build thee more stately mansions	Women's voices.	Manuscript
1938	Grace for Gardens		Manuscript
<hr/> CHAMBER MUSIC <hr/>			
1927	Sonata for Violin and Piano		Editions Maurice Sénart
1928	Quartet for Strings, No. 1, G minor.		Manuscript
1935	Quartet for Strings, No. 2, E minor.		Society for the Publication of American Music. Published for the Society by J. Fischer & Brother
1936	Quartet for Strings, No. 3, G minor		Manuscript
1926	Triptych	High voice and string quartet.	S.P.A.M. Published for the Society by G. Schirmer, Inc.
<hr/> PIANO WORKS <hr/>			
1903	Theme and Variation		The Wa-Wan Press
1905	Mazurka } Prelude }		The Wa-Wan Press
1907	Sonata, No. 1, F minor		Boston Music Co.
1912	Prelude and Fugue in E minor		Manuscript
	Fugue in C sharp minor		Manuscript
1929	From a Mountain Lake		Manuscript
1930	Exotic Dance		Oxford University Press
1930	Sonata, No. 2, F minor		Oxford University Press
1931	Gigue Fantasque		Manuscript
1931	Eclogue		Manuscript
1932	Two Preludes		Manuscript
1936	Autumn Fields		Carl Fischer, Inc.
1936	Gay Promenade		Carl Fischer, Inc.
1938	Lento Amabile		Manuscript
1938	Capriccio		Manuscript
1938	Song		Manuscript
<hr/> SONGS <hr/>			
1909	Five Songs, on Poems of James Russell Lowell		The Wa-Wan Press.
1916	The Gentle Lady		
1929	Oh like a Queen		Manuscript
1931	Where loveliness keeps house		
1931	Softly along the road of evening		
1931	The Fiddlers		
1932	Bacchus		
1932	Reverie		
1936	Golden Stockings		