

Composers Commissioning

The Twenty-second Commissioned Work of the American Accordionists' Association Composers Commissioning Committee:

Normand Lockwood: Sonata-Fantasia

No. 13 of an Ongoing Series on the Commissioned Works of the A.A.A.

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This writer can talk from experience in claiming that twentieth- and twenty-first-century classical composers and/or concert performers are at a considerable professional advantage over their peers if they are faculty members of a college music department. For composers, their instrumental and vocal colleagues are not only willing, but eager, to perform their music, often without expecting remuneration. Likewise, college performers are happy to add to their credentials the prestige of having given world premieres of works by frequently significant composers with whom they work every day. In addition, there is the honor to either party of having possibly “commissioned” the other. A secondary reason for this positive relationship between collegiate composer and performer is the fact that college departments require and sometimes financially back its faculty to compose and perform both on and off campus. This puts the institution in a good light in its efforts to recruit students. For this reason, such creative and performance endeavors are usually requirements for faculty tenure and promotion to higher ranks (associate professor, full professor, etc.) and resultant higher pay. Therefore, in a profession where having one’s music performed can be extremely expensive, time consuming, energy draining, and distracting from the task at hand (paying performers, renting a decent hall, seeking publicity, etc.), the college situation is a very happy one. This is largely why in our times academia has replaced the palatial courts and religious institutions of the past as the main patron of both classical composers and concert musicians.

Such was the situation with several important North American accordionists from the 1950s to the recent past. The most well known of these were the late Willard A. Palmer and his former student, the late Bill Hughes, who maintained a burgeoning and pioneering accordion program at the University of Houston through the 1970s (one of their graduates was the celebrated composer/accordionist Pauline Oliveros); the late Robert Davine, who taught at the Lamont School of Music of the University of Denver (students include Bill Popp and the late AAA Board member Patricia Tragellas); Joan Cochran Sommers (now retired), who established a large and highly successful accordion program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music in 1961 (one graduate who ranks among the most highly visible and successful concert artists in this country today, Lydia Kaminska, was the first accordionist to receive a PhD in accordion in the US); Joseph Macerollo, who taught at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto from 1969 through 1985 (frequently heard artist/composer at AAA events and elsewhere, Joseph Natoli, is among the graduates of that program), and the late Lana Gore and her distinguished former student Peter Soave, both of whom maintained a successful accordion program more recently at Wayne State University, in Detroit. In many of these instances, and similar to the employment situation of this writer, the accordion professor was also on the Music Theory and/or Music Literature faculties of these institutions as well. In nearly all cases, they were responsible for performing and/or commissioning many

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new contemporary works for or including the accordion. Past installments of this series have cited examples of AAA commissioned works that were the result of these professors' efforts. To cite only a few examples, Paul Pisk was commissioned by Palmer, Sommers premiered one of the Robert Russell Bennett commissioned pieces, and this writer commissioned Samuel Adler and premiered recent works by Gary Friedman and Lukas Foss as well as the free bass version of the Adler work.

This article will concentrate on the efforts of one of these accordion educators listed above and his role in persuading a faculty peer to accept a commission from the AAA: Robert Davine and his colleague at the Lamont School, American composer Normand Lockwood.

Lockwood is one of a considerable number of twentieth-century composers who, owing to the fortune of longevity, witnessed and participated in the musical evolution of practically an entire century. He was born to musician parents in New York City in 1906 and died in Denver just short of his ninety-sixth birthday in 2002. Interestingly, two other prominent American composers who accepted AAA commissions share this distinction: Virgil Thompson (1896-1989) and Otto Luening (1900-96; see previous articles on them in this series). The Methuselahian record among our most noted musical countrymen, however, is presently held by the great Elliott Carter, now in his 102nd year. Regrettably, he never accepted a commission from the AAA Composers Commissioning Committee. Perhaps there is still hope!

Though born in New York, Lockwood grew up Ann Arbor, Michigan, where his father, Samuel Pierson Lockwood, was conductor of the orchestra at the University of Michigan's School of Music. The young Normand took advantage of this situation by taking music classes in the University while still in high school. This was to be the extent of his formal academic education, though an honorary doctorate followed many years later, owing to a distinguished career at that point. Encouraged to pursue composition by his pianist uncle, Albert Lockwood, Normand ultimately studied composition with Otto Respighi and, perhaps more importantly, the legendary teacher Nadia Boulanger in Paris. Soon thereafter he received the prestigious Prix de Rome fellowship in composition in 1929 at the American Academy in Rome. Upon his return to America, he was appointed Assistant Professor in Music Theory and Composition at Oberlin College. A string of similarly important faculty positions followed over the years at Columbia University, Union Theological Seminary (during which time he also worked as a

Dr. McMahan will perform one of the more recent AAA commissioned works, Sonata for Accordion, by Robert Baksa, during the 2010 AAA Festival Cabaret Concert this Thursday evening.

The AAA is, under the direction of Beverly Roberts Curnow, in the process of creating a CD series of the commissioned works, performed by various artists.

composer and arranger for CBS), Westminster Choir College, Queens College, Yale University, University of Oregon, University of Hawaii, and finally, in 1961, the Lamont School, where he met Davine. The last was the result of a joint faculty appointment in the departments of Music and Drama at the University of Denver where he produced many operatic/theatrical works. He eventually retired and became Professor Emeritus at the University in 1974.

Lockwood was a very prolific composer who produced approximately 530 works in all genres. His two concertos for organ and brass (1951 and 1977) and his piano concerto (1977) are among his most noteworthy works. He was also particularly noted for his excellent text settings and stage works. Given his long life, it is not surprising that at one point or another he wrote in practically every style and technique of his very diverse century—traditional tonal, modal, quartal, octatonic, and 12-tone. A combination of some of these compositional procedures is evident in his AAA commissioned work to be discussed below.

It is uncertain whether Composers Commissioning Committee Chair Elsie Bennett contacted Lockwood to offer a commission, or if Davine, through his acquaintance with Lockwood, suggested that Bennett make the offer. One source claims that Lockwood had composed eleven works for his accordionist colleague over the years, many of which were likely chamber works including accordion ("In Memory of Robert Davine, Professor of Accordion and Theory", author not cited; published at <http://www.accordions.com/memorials/mem/davine/index.shtml>). Only three, appear, however, in the catalogue of the Lockwood Archive (housed in the University of Colorado at Boulder library): *Suite* for Accordion, Clarinet, and Bassoon (1981-82); *Mosaic*, for Accordion and Flute (n.d.); and, of course, the AAA solo commission to be discussed here, the *Sonata-*

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Accordion with Other Instruments, which he compiled not long before his death in 2001. Whether or not Lockwood did write more than three works for or including accordion, then, is uncertain. One hint that he might have, however, appears in the only article written about the *Sonata-Fantasia*, “Normand Lockwood: A Composer Who Listens,” by Elsie Bennett, that appeared in the *Accordion Times* (April/May 1969) and the *Music Journal* (vol. 27, n. 4, April 1969). In it she states that after Lockwood finished the solo, he wrote to her declaring “new plans for including the accordion in a chamber piece for woodwinds and perhaps low strings.” But perhaps the result was merely the Suite mentioned above.



The topic of this writing is indeed the twenty-second AAA commissioned work, Lockwood’s *Sonata-Fantasia*, for solo accordion. The contract between Bennett and the composer is dated January 3, 1964, making it the first of three commissions for that year, the other two being for Nicholas Flagello (*Introduction and Scherzo*) and Paul Creston (*Fantasy for Accordion and Orchestra, or Accordion Solo, Op. 85*), contracted March 20 and July 17 respectively. The *Sonata-Fantasia* was published by O. Pagani in 1965. It is accompanied that year by two operas by the composer, *The Hanging Judge* (after Katherine Anne Porter’s suspense novel) and *Requiem for a Rich Young Man* (Donald Sutherland, librettist). Unfortunately, no record of a formal world premiere of the accordion work has emerged, but it is very likely that Davine gave the first performance at the Lamont School. What is known is that Davine and Lockwood conferred on the composition of the piece, which would be expected. Also, Davine included it in his now classic and ground breaking LP recording of contemporary original accordion works on the Crystal label during that period (*The Concert Accordion Artistry of Robert Davine*, reissued on CD in 1995). Regarding consequent performances, it is also known, particularly by many

American Baby-boomer accordionists, the writer included, that it was the test piece for the AAA Eastern Cup Contest at the AAA Eastern Accordion Championship Competition in 1967. It was therefore played by a throng of talented young players at that time and no doubt enjoyed further performances in the Senior and Virtuoso Original category for many years thereafter. It was this accordionist’s pleasure to resurrect it several years ago in one of the AAA Master Class and Concert Series at the Tenri Institute in New York City. One has to wonder if someone somewhere played it at a conjectural 100th birthday commemorative concert for the composer in 2006.

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In her article cited above Elsie Bennett quotes choir director and former colleague of Lockwood at the Westminster Choir College, George Lynn, who wrote about Lockwood in the *American Composers' Alliance Bulletin* in 1957: "Normand Lockwood is not a performing musician. His instrument is the one for which he is writing at the moment. He chooses to exploit the expressive capacities of the given instrument and not its technical limitations. More often than not this approach gives the instrument a fresh excursion rather than just one more virtuosic aridity to contend with." Bennett then declared that Lockwood was true to this nature in writing for the accordion, and quoted parts of a letter she received from him as evidence. She states that he commented to her on "possibilities....which I might say I have not heard exploited previously. The accordion seems to lend itself admirably to such harmonic devices as bichordal, polychordal, bitonal and polytonal situations, and to serial or twelve-tone-row lines, which are not only admissible, but also inviting! There seems to be more of an evenness of quality throughout the instrument's range than is present either in winds or strings." While Lockwood did not describe all three movements of the piece, he did comment about some the procedures used in the second movement: "Another facet I have tapped is that of rhythm. In the second movement I have introduced cross-rhythms (between the right and left hands) which are not easy, but which, at least in Mr. Davine's hands, come off exactly as intended." A closer look of the score now follows.

The general tempo scheme of the entire piece is movement I, slow; movement II, fast; movement III, slow/fast/slow. For those who are interested, a more detailed description of the piece follows:

Movement I:

Contemplativo (quarter note= 58), 5/4 time, seven measures, with upbeat note; (quarter note = c. 50), no barlines or time signature, two staff systems; Tempo I, 6/4 time, one measure of 6/4, followed by five measures, 5/4 time; Tempo II, no barlines or time signature.

This movement divides into an A /B / A1 / B1 format, and is freely expressive. The A section puts a repeating 12-tone set into an unbroken solo right-hand melodic line that is tranquil and flowing in nature. The notes of the set are D E G F-sharp A C-sharp B D-sharp A-flat (misprinted in the published score as an A-natural) F B-flat C. There are six successive occurrences of the set that are displaced rhythmically with each recurrence. The set never returns in this section nor elsewhere in this or the remaining movements; but a similar set is similar-

ly treated in the A1 section: F G B B-flat C F D F-sharp B A C-sharp C.

The B and B1 sections, though contrasting with the A and A1 ones, are similar to each other in that the right and left hand parts contrast each alternately with simple major and minor triads in one part and expressive chromatic melodic fragments in the other. Again, the mood is generally tranquil, despite the rather atonal effect of the free use of chromatic notes and occasional contrapuntal dissonances. There is no evidence of the 12-tone sets that were found in sections A and A1.

Movement II.

Allegro giocoso (quarter note =112)

The Allegro giocoso begins with a rather coquettish bass solo played on the chordal buttons for the most part until the right hand enters in the eighth bar with a similarly whimsical, but also strutting, melody that spins itself out for approximately half of the rather lengthy movement. A brief four measures of rather offbeat chords battling each other between the right and left hand, often inadvertently creating polychords of mild dissonance, act as a brief and considerably unconnected divider between the first and second major portions of the movement. A somewhat truncated variant of the first section then ensues, this time with right-hand dyads sounding against the introductory left-hand playful chords. The motives of the second thematic melody of the first section carries the main melody to a bombastic end, culminating in a sweeping F major-to-A augmented triad arpeggio to a concluding C-sharp major chord forming a polychord with a D-flat major 7th chord in the left hand part.

Movement III:

Adagio serioso (quarter note = 50), measures 1-12, with frequently changing time signatures, mostly between 6/4 and 5/4.

Allegro assai (quarter note = 76), measures 13 - 37

Largamente (half note = 76), measures 38 - 49 (three systems after measure 46 with no bar lines or time signature); frequently changing time signatures of 3/2, 4/2, and 5/2.

This movement is rather resigned in nature due to the persistent use of a descending scale-like figure, often treated in sequence, throughout the Adagio serioso and Allegro assai sections. The Allegro assai quickens the pace of this motive, thus giving it a greater sense of urgency and drama. A climatic point is reached in the final seven measures before a rapidly descending line leads into the strongly contrasted Largamente section.

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The first seven measures of the *Largamente* is a highly polychordal chorale with constant shifts of time signatures. This leads to an unmeasured section (marked “quasi cadenza in tempo”) of eighth-note figures similar to the descending scale ones described in the opening section, but this time in the form of broken chords that dramatically and forcefully lead to a climatic chordal ending.

To summarize, the *Sonata-Fantasia* reflects the composer’s wide stylistic palette, perhaps suggesting his long and varied life and career. Elements of atonality, 12-tone serial technique, neoclassical, traditional rhythms (despite occasional time signature shifts and bar-less segments), polytonal harmony, and momentary suggestions of traditional tonality are all present in this rather eclectically styled work (similar to his other works of this period). It deserves more frequent performances in both the advanced student and professional realms. It would be heartening to see it serve as a test piece once again in the AAA competitions. The two chamber works referred to above also merit emancipation from their long confinement in the Lockwood papers and should enjoy revivals both inside and outside of the accordion community. May all this happen before long.



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