

THOMSON, STEIN AND *THE MOTHER OF US ALL*

by Robert Marx

I will have nothing to do with opera,
except as poetic theatre.
—Virgil Thomson

The Mother of Us All was the last collaborative work by Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson. The world premiere in New York during the spring of 1947, only ten months after Stein's death, was a successful but poignant event; it marked the end of a creative partnership that had not only revitalized experimentation in lyric theater and its stagecraft but also produced the first truly innovative and wholly remarkable American operas that reflected the experience and heritage of American culture.

In the past, many of the most stimulating European operas had come about through long-term collaborations between composers and dramatic poets (for instance Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte, Verdi and Arrigo Boito, Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal). Stein and Thomson were part of this tradition. Their creative friendship lasted off and on for twenty years and resulted in numerous songs, a motion picture (never filmed, unfortunately), and two operas (the first was *Four Saints in Three Acts*). In the best sense the operas are works of poetic theater: the texts are musical in language and harmony, and each opera discards traditional conventions to generate its own panoramic world within the theater. Although sumptuously melodic they are not easy to sing, and mere vocal beauty in performance is not enough for success. Both operas demand the complete resources of the theater in an artful and delicate blend of choreography, design, and sound. But even when divorced from the stage (as on a recording) they retain their impact through the listener's imagination, for these are operas of contemporary sensibility and direct communication: simultaneously perceptive, charming, haunting—and great fun.

Until 1928, when Thomson composed *Four Saints in Three Acts*, American opera had failed to generate music of quality or earn the respect of audiences, critics, and musicians. The main reason was that American composers imitated (poorly, as it turned out) the successful musico-dramatic patterns and formulas of their European colleagues. The first opera by an American-born composer—William Henry Fry's *Leonora*, first given in Philadelphia in 1845—heavily relied on the style and technique of Donizetti and Meyerbeer. Subsequent nineteenth-century native works continued

to follow the models of Italian, French, or German composers, depending upon which style was in vogue. The inferiority complex of American culture was at its height, and the desire of so many American opera composers to imitate European models was not only considered proper but was also necessary in order to elicit financial support for a production.

The star system of nineteenth-century opera production (which still exists) also worked against the growth of opera in the United States. Audiences usually went to hear stars, not specific works, and the great singers were entrenched in the operas of fashion (Rossini, Meyerbeer, Verdi, Massenet, Wagner, or Puccini) and considered it a waste to learn a new role in a language without a proper operatic tradition. Artistic and social attitudes were against the American composer.

At the same time, as the population grew and reached westward, theaters (often optimistically called opera houses) were built all over the United States. Performances of popular European operas spread across the land, and sometimes there were even competitions or commissions for American works. (During the early twentieth century, for example, the Metropolitan Opera offered \$10,000 in a contest for a new work by an American composer—a substantial sum at the time.) But the results were always the same: derived from European traditions and without a real stylistic connection to American speech, manners, or drama, these operas soon faded from the scene. Not until the third decade of this century did American opera produce results of originality, quality, and distinction with the first productions of Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934) and Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1935).

Neither was staged in an opera house. After an initial showing in Hartford, Connecticut, Broadway was the scene of the spectacularly successful first production of *Four Saints*, and Gershwin's only opera was also performed on his native Broadway, even though the Metropolitan Opera had offered to produce *Porgy and Bess*. (Gershwin rejected the Metropolitan primarily because he felt a production there would be dramatically inadequate. However, a Victor recording of excerpts on four 78 rpm discs featuring two Metropolitan stars—Lawrence Tibbett and Helen Jepson—was made under Gershwin's supervision, and it gives some idea of what a Metropolitan *Porgy* might have been like: selections from this album were rereleased on an RCA lp *Porgy* anthology in 1976.)

After Thomson's first bold step Gershwin, Blitzstein, Menotti, and many others followed in the search for new and vital surroundings for serious musical theater. Thomson also validated the American theater as a working environment for the serious musician. Only after his initial efforts did classically trained American

composers write incidental music for plays, background music for films, or operas that challenged dramatic concepts and musical traditions.

Virgil Thomson grew up in Kansas City, Missouri, where he was born in 1896. His ancestors, Scottish and Welsh, were early settlers in Virginia. They headed west in the nineteenth-century pioneer movement, settling down with family and slaves to farm the Missouri land in a region known as Little Dixie. During the Civil War the Thomson men fought—and some died—for the Confederacy, and the entire family, true to its heritage and adopted land, was staunch Southern Baptist. The moral and cultural patterns of the American Midwest—its Christian teachings and southern traditions—made up the environment of Thomson's youth. He was a precocious child, and although few in his family had artistic inclinations he was drawn to music at an early age, improvising on the piano before he was five. (“Always with the pedal down,” Thomson remembers in his autobiography, “and always loud, naming my creations after the Chicago Fire and similar events.”) At that age he began lessons, and when he was twelve he performed professionally as substitute organist for the Calvary Baptist Church in Kansas City. Thomson has written that “The music of religious faith, from Gregorian Chants to Sunday School ditties, was my background, my nostalgia,” and this pervades much of Thomson's music, particularly the operas. His music is never far from this framework of midwestern tradition, and no matter how original Thomson's stylistic concept or how strong the French influence, the core remains a vibrant reflection of his youth's homeland—his “nostalgia.”

Thomson continued his education in Kansas City, balancing musical studies with work on student literary magazines (his concise and brilliantly crafted prose would eventually make him one of the most perceptive and influential music critics of his day). On the American entry into World War I he enlisted in the Army (subsequently becoming a second lieutenant in the U.S. Military Aviation Corps), but the Armistice was signed just as Thomson was to be sent overseas. He resigned his commission and enrolled at Harvard University, where he continued musical studies in earnest while singing in the Harvard Glee Club and working as a church organist. Through his acquaintance at Harvard with S. Foster Damon, the Blake scholar, Thomson encountered two things that according to his autobiography changed his life: Erik Satie's piano music and Gertrude Stein's early prose work *Tender Buttons*. Satie, the mordantly witty scourge of French music, and Stein, the American writer who lived in Paris, were then scarcely known in the United States outside an intellectual circle that followed the growing avant-garde

in France. But at Harvard, Thomson learned to revere all things French and to view France as his artistic destiny. “I came in my Harvard years,” he wrote, “to identify with France virtually all of music's recent glorious past, most of its acceptable present, and a large part of its future.”

In 1921 he went with the Harvard Glee Club on a European tour. With scholarship aid he stayed on for a year in Paris, where he began work with Nadia Boulanger, the now legendary teacher of a generation of American composers (including Aaron Copland, Walter Piston, and Roy Harris), met Satie, and discovered the music of Les Six. This group of French composers (all disciples of Satie, they included Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, and Francis Poulenc; at the periphery was the poet Jean Cocteau) sought to break the prevalent grip of Romanticism on music by turning for source material to music halls, cabarets, and jazz. The music of Les Six combined popular taste with the rigors of classical training and often took theatrical form—especially ballets, like Milhaud's *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*. These avant-garde productions, which blended the best of experimental choreography, music, and decor, remained a strong influence on Thomson. In the future he would insist that his operas be treated as “choreographic spectacles” and would continue the French line of musical experimentation by mixing hymns and popular ditties with the techniques of advanced musical expression.

In 1922, his scholarship expired, Thomson returned to Harvard. He spent the next three years in Cambridge and New York but yearned for Paris. He began to develop a reputation as an astute critic of contemporary music, having published essays in such influential journals as *The New Republic* and Nathan and Mencken's *American Mercury*. Thomson's criticism was controversial, and he developed important contacts in the American musical world. But the desire for an artist's life in Europe was strong. Announcing that he “preferred to starve where the food is good,” Thomson left again for Paris in the fall of 1925. This time he would not study the music of others but create his own.

Satie had died, but Stein was alive and well, presiding over the most famous and stimulating *salon* in France. Anxious to meet Stein but wanting the acquaintance to come about informally, Thomson made no direct effort to see her. His friend George Antheil, whose music had begun to be known among Parisian intellectuals, was invited to a Stein at-home that winter and took Thomson with him. Stein was not pleased with Antheil, but she and Thomson got on, according to the composer, “like a pair of Harvard men.” They corresponded briefly during the summer of 1926 and saw each other again at Christmas. Then, as a New Year's gift, Thomson sent her the manuscript of his setting of her early poem “Susie Asado.”

Stein, although musically illiterate, was pleased and wrote back:

I like its looks immensely and want to frame it and Miss Toklas [Alice B. Toklas, Stein's companion for forty years] who knows more than looks says the things in it please her a lot and when can I know a little other than its looks, but I am completely satisfied with its looks.

This began a friendship that lasted, despite tensions and disagreements, until Stein's death.

Gertrude Stein was the youngest of five children born to German-Jewish immigrants. Her father, Daniel Stein, had as a child arrived with his parents and brothers in Baltimore in September, 1841. In 1862, in partnership with his younger brother Solomon, he opened a textile store in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, then a suburb of Pittsburgh (it is now incorporated into the city). Here Gertrude Stein was born on February 3, 1874. Although Daniel and Solomon prospered, they dissolved their business, and when Gertrude was less than a year old the family moved to Austria. The Sterns remained abroad until 1879, living first in Vienna and then in Paris. Returning to the United States, they stopped briefly in Baltimore and in 1880 moved to Oakland, California, where Gertrude grew up in a prosperous household.

Devoted to her brother Leo, who went to Harvard, Gertrude enrolled at Radcliffe. She studied with the philosopher William James (elder brother of novelist Henry James), and was deeply influenced by his theory of pragmatism, which teaches that ideas are comprehensible only in relation to the immediate experiential consequences that precede and follow them. (This mode of analysis is strongly related to Stein's later experiments with abstract prose.)

Following James's advice Gertrude embarked on a career in psychology, leaving Radcliffe for Johns Hopkins university. But graduate work was both rigorous and boring, so she joined Leo, who was already wandering in Europe. They arrived in Paris in the fall of 1903 and settled in what was to become one of Europe's most famous addresses, 27 rue de Fleurus, where they began to assemble a spectacular collection of modern art. (The Stein heirs sold Gertrude Stein's collection for six million dollars in 1969.) Leo began a career as a painter and critic, while Gertrude commenced her formidable output of novels, poems, plays, and essays that would, after decades of public ridicule, have a significant impact on the development of modern English writing.

The Stein home became a center for art and artists, and

by 1925 the apartment had become the focus of progressive movements in literature and art and Gertrude Stein had become the sun around which an entire body of American writers and artists (the "lost generation," she called them) revolved.

Music played less of a role than fiction or painting in the Stein circle, primarily because Gertrude's interests did not go in that direction. In her lecture on American drama she stated:

I came not to care at all for music, and so having concluded that music was made for adolescents and not for adults and having just left adolescence behind me and besides I knew all the operas anyway by that time I did not care anymore for opera.

Thomson was able to change that attitude as Stein came to trust him. She was pleased with his settings, before the composition of *Four Saints*, of three of her poems: "Susie Asado," "Preciosilla," and "Capital, Capitals" (the last a conversation among four Provençal cities—Aix, Arles, Avignon, and Les Baux—set for male quartet and piano).

In choosing for his operatic collaborator an experimental writer like Gertrude Stein, Thomson broke with tradition. American opera composers had generally worked with versifiers who adapted the plots of well-known novels or plays. Dramatic originality was neither sought nor encouraged, and there was no experimental American opera that could use the work of a progressive writer. In rare instances American composers did work with poets of reputation—Horatio Parker's *Mona* (Metropolitan Opera, 1912) was set to a text by Brian Hooker, and Reginald de Koven's *Canterbury Pilgrims* (Metropolitan, 1917) had a libretto by Percy Mackaye; but perhaps the most distinguished was Edna St. Vincent Millay's libretto for Deems Taylor's *The King's Henchman* (Metropolitan, 1927)—but there was no real precedent in the United States for the initial Stein/Thomson effort.

In Europe the situation was different. France alone had already seen the premieres of the narrated, acted, and danced theater piece *L'Histoire du Soldat* (1918; Stravinsky, Ramuz), the ballet *Parade* (1917; Satie, Cocteau, Picasso), and the opera *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* (1925; Ravel, Colette, Balanchine). Thomson was following his own musical inclination toward lyric expression and his desire to make an impact with an American work in the theatrical sphere already developed in France. Progressive in her art and free of stale tradition, Gertrude Stein would prove to be the perfect collaborator. In his autobiography, Thomson has given the reason for his immediate attraction to her texts:

My hope in putting Gertrude Stein to music had been to break, crack open, and solve for all time anything still waiting to be solved, which was almost everything, about English musical declamation. My theory was that if a text is set correctly for the sound of it, the meaning will take care of itself. And the Stein texts, for prosodizing in this way, were manna. With meanings already abstracted, or absent, or so multiplied that choice among them was impossible, there was no temptation toward tonal illustration, say, of birdie babbling by the brook or heavy heavy hangs my heart. You could make a setting for sound and syntax only, then add, if needed, an accompaniment equally functional. I had no sooner put to music after this recipe one short Stein text than I knew I had opened a door. I had never had any doubts about Stein's poetry; from then on I had none about my ability to handle it in music.

Their first conversation about writing an opera together took place in January, 1927. Thomson suggested the subject matter: the life of the working artist, with possible references to Gertrude Stein and James Joyce in Paris, each holding forth before a group of disciples. As a gesture to operatic history, the contemporary references would be veiled as mythology. They agreed that Greek and Scandinavian legends were not to be considered because they dominate so many earlier operas. Stein suggested the mythology of American history, perhaps with George Washington as central figure. Thomson vetoed the idea because he disliked eighteenth-century costumes, but twenty years later they did write their mythic opera about America—*The Mother of Us All*.

Discarding American history, they decided on the lives of the saints, particularly Theresa of Avila and Ignatius Loyola. Both these Spanish mystics were close to Stein: as a child she had been impressed with the San Francisco church dedicated to Ignatius, and with Alice B. Toklas she made an emotional pilgrimage to Avila, Theresa's birthplace. Stein worked for three months on the libretto, titled *Four Saints in Three Acts—An Opera To Be Sung*, and sent the manuscript to Thomson in mid-June.

The libretto in four acts, not three, and with dozens of named and unnamed saints—bears no relation to anything else in opera. It is an abstract assemblage of words and images patterned after the techniques of Cubist painting.

The Cubist formula (as developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque between 1907 and 1910) is essentially a revelation of structure. All planes lie on the surface of the canvas without naturalistic depth or per-

spective: the aim in part is to present all sides of the subject simultaneously. In Stein's prose the abstracted subject matter is traditional sentence structure. Words are placed together and separately as a sequence of sound patterns. Occasionally these make conventional sense as part of a narrative, but often the patterns are total abstractions, designed with great skill to convey Stein's desired sounds and rhythms through repetition and extreme textual compression. In Thomson's words, "She wrote poetry, in fact, very much as a composer works. She chose a theme and developed it; or rather, she let the words of it develop themselves through free expansion of sound and sense." Her innovative work recreated many of the new devices of the visual arts. There is a particularly strong parallel to the collage technique, for amid the varied images of her writing one might suddenly encounter snippets of a children's song or (in *The Mother of Us All*) quotations from the speeches of nineteenth-century politicians.

The dramatic structure of the *Four Saints* libretto has no logical pattern. In Act I, for example, scenes 3 and 4 play simultaneously, there are eight scene 5s, and scene 10 comes before and after scene 9. The presentation, seemingly random and disjointed, has its purpose and is dramatically potent. Stein's distinct and entirely artful collage of meaning and sound forces the reader to enter her world of dramaturgy. The images are often serious—the vision of the Holy Ghost (with its famous line "Pigeons on the grass alas"), a combined wedding and funeral procession—and the libretto, despite its wit, is not a stylistic joke. No matter how random, the images are always presented in relation to each other and endowed with poetry.

Four Saints presents a picture of religious benediction that Thomson calls "the community of peace." But at heart the work is about language: the relation of words to meaning and sound. With the text free of the common burdens of rhetoric, argument, and plot, the simple sounds of the words themselves are released, so we hear what James Mellon, the Stein biographer, calls "words at play, language in a state of beatitude."

The concept of a theatrical "landscape" in which all elements of sight and sound are perceived at once is crucial to an understanding of Stein's work. Instead of presenting a linear series of dramatic events that are progressive in their development of character and plot, Stein unveils a tapestry of images; as with the words themselves, all elements of the "landscape" are perceived simultaneously. What she called the "complete actual present," devoid of dramatic irony or hindsight, is her aim: an entire complex geography in which the theatrical image and the audience are in total emotional unity. Her dramas are about relationships, not situations. Relationships among characters images, thoughts, and

words are developed as she tries to “tell what happened without telling stories.”

Four Saints in Three Acts is poetry composed for music, and Thomson, understanding the world of his collaborator, created a musical setting of great warmth and originality. He began work in November, 1927:

With the text on my piano's music rack, I would sing and play, improvising melody to fit the words and harmony for underpinning them with shape. I did this every day, wrote down nothing. When the first act would improvise itself every day in the same way, I knew it was set. That took all of November. Then I wrote it out from memory, which took ten days. By mid-December I had a score consisting of the vocal lines and a figured bass, a score from which I could perform.

Act II was finished by February, 1928, the rest completed in midsummer. Stein allowed Thomson an opera composer's traditional rights. “Do anything with this you like,” she told him. “Cut, repeat, as composers have always done; make it work on a stage.” But Thomson cut nothing. He set every word—even the stage directions, because he considered them part of the poetic continuity. Later, cuts were made, and Thomson devised two important new elements: he divided the role of St. Theresa (one part for soprano, the other for mezzo-soprano) and introduced two narrators, the Commère and Compère, a notion taken from French variety shows. In 1929 a vocal score was prepared, and Maurice Grosser, an American painter who was a close friend of Thomson's, wrote—with Stein's approval—a working scenario that would ease the opera's transition to the stage.

Many discussions were held about producing the opera. There were plans to have it done in Paris with Picasso sets; in Darmstadt, Germany, whose opera house specialized in unusual contemporary works; or in some other city. But none of these plans materialized, even though Thomson spent much of the next few years playing the piano score and singing all the parts for potential patrons. In time an American production was scheduled as a festival performance to coincide with the first Picasso retrospective held in the United States. It would take place in Hartford at the

Wadsworth Atheneum, where a new wing was about to open that would display both the Picasso exhibition and the opera.

The production, which opened on February 7, 1934, became a legend in modern theatrical history. Not only was the sound of the opera (with its hymns and ballads) startling, but the stage picture was unlike anything seen before. Florine Stettheimer, an American painter who had rarely—if ever—exhibited her work, had designed beautiful costumes and brightly colored sets of cellophane and lace. As photographs of the production clearly show, her scenery, glittering in bright white light, perfectly supported Stein and Thomson's “landscape.” The entire theatrical vision, with its choreographed movement by Frederick Ashton (later Sir Frederick Ashton, artistic director of Britain's Royal Ballet), evoked the spirit of Baroque religious art while parodying familiar opera poses. Most powerful of all was the all-black cast, recruited from church choirs in Harlem and Brooklyn. Few of the singers had previous theatrical experience, but as coached by Thomson and conducted by Alexander Smallens (then assistant conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra) they were by all accounts superb in both voice and movement. Never before had a black cast been used in a work that had nothing to do with Negro life. Both *Four Saints in Three Acts* and *Porgy and Bess* owed much of their success to black performers, who had been excluded for so long from the mainstream of American theater. Thomson had chosen his company (over the objections of his librettist and designer) after seeing *Run Little Chillun*, a black musical on Broadway. The clarity of voice, freedom of movement, and potent theatrical energy of those performers were precisely what Thomson wanted for his opera.

In Hartford the opera was a major social event. Extra trains were run up from New York, bringing a distinguished audience drawn not only from music but from art, architecture, and publishing as well. The reception was so enthusiastic that it was decided to move the opera to Broadway immediately after its six performances in Connecticut.

For its Broadway run the chorus was enlarged and extra strings were added to the orchestra, but the production itself was not altered. Although the stage in New York was twice as large as



that in Hartford, *Four Saints* retained its impact. The New York opening (during a blizzard) brought out another fashionable audience, including George Gershwin and Arturo Toscanini, and the response was even more exciting than in Hartford.

Most papers, sensing something unusual, had their music, dance, drama, and art critics cover the opening together. The reviewers generally agreed on the quality of the music, but the libretto puzzled many. The *Daily News* headline announced: "Virgil Thomson takes the glory, Gertrude Stein supplies the confusion; Music: 3 stars, Libretto: 0." Harshest of all was Olin Downes's review in the *Times*: "It is a text of palpable affectation and insincerity... a specimen of an affected and decadent phase of the literature of the whites." But in the weekly magazines and intellectual journals there was only high praise. Stark Young, the distinguished drama critic of *The New Republic*, called *Four Saints*

the most important event of the season—important because it is theatre and flies off the ground, most important because it is delightful and joyous, and delight is the fundamental of all art, great and small.

Whatever the response, *Four Saints in Three Acts* was a show not to be missed. It ran for six weeks in New York and two in Hartford and Chicago for a total of sixty performances in its first year—a record at the time for a contemporary opera. Thomson became famous overnight. When Stein saw the production in Chicago, she declared herself satisfied:

Anyway I did write *Four Saints in Three Acts* an Opera to be Sung and I think it did almost what I wanted, it made a landscape and the movement in it was like a movement in and out with which anybody looking on can keep time.... Anyway I am pleased. People write me that they are having a good time while the opera is going on a thing which they say does not very often happen to them at the theatre.

To help coordinate this production and engage the technical staff, Thomson had hired John Houseman, at

that time quite inexperienced in the theater. They worked well together, and Houseman became Thomson's other major artistic collaborator. He went on to become an influential director and producer in New York (Orson Welles's Mercury Theatre productions on Broadway in the 1930s; Hollywood—*Citizen Kane* was probably his most famous film —and Broadway in the 1940s; directing the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre in Stratford, Connecticut in the 1950s; and finally becoming the head of the drama division of the Juilliard School). Thomson has composed incidental music for a great many of Houseman's productions, and in a return gesture, Houseman staged the first production of Thomson's third opera, *Lord Byron* (to a text by the playwright Jack Larson), at Juilliard in 1972.

Thomson remained in New York after *Four Saints*, working primarily on Houseman films and plays. Relations had been tense with Gertrude Stein, for they had disagreed about royalties, and she had begun to purge many of the younger artists around her. By 1936 matters were cordial again, but there was no talk of further collaboration. Thomson, always more comfortable in Paris, returned there in 1938 and remained until the Nazi occupation. His *The State of Music*, a cogent analysis of the economics of modern concert life, had been published in 1939. On the basis of this widely recognized book and his experience as a composer, Thomson was named chief music critic of the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1940 almost immediately on his return to the United States.

He stayed on as the *Tribune's* music critic until 1954. A fervent partisan of contemporary music, Thomson never hesitated to wage war on the established musical institutions, particularly the New York Philharmonic. Thomson loved the music he wrote about; his articles were always elegant, sharp, and influential, and he, Edwin Denby (the dance critic) and Stark Young were the best journalistic critics of their generation. Thomson's reviews, collected in four volumes, remain a model for younger writers.

During his critic's career, Thomson continued to work as an active musician. He began to accept assignments



conducting his own music and that of his colleagues with some of the best American and European orchestras. By 1940, in addition to *Four Saints in Three Acts* and incidental music for the theater, Thomson had written two symphonies, dozens of vocal pieces, chamber music, film scores (*The Plow That Broke the Plains* and *The River*, both directed by Pare Lorentz), and a ballet on an American theme (*Filling Station*). While at the *Herald Tribune*, Thomson wrote more stage and film music, flute and cello concertos, two books of piano etudes, numerous songs and chamber scores, and *The Mother of Us All*.

Among Thomson's varied musical works, perhaps the most unusual are his "portraits" (generally for piano, although some are for chamber groups or full orchestra). The subject would pose for Thomson as if before a painter while the composer, without piano, would create a portrait in music. Most of the subjects were close to Thomson, and the diverse list includes Pablo Picasso, Aaron Copland, and New York's Mayor Fiorello La Guardia.

In 1938 Orson Welles had asked Thomson to write incidental music for a staging of John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, one of the most poetic and theatrical Jacobean tragedies. Eventually the production was called off, but Thomson, excited by the play, asked Edwin Denby to prepare a shorter version of the drama as a libretto. Denby did this with the help of Maurice Grosser, and that summer, in France, Thomson set to work. He had outlined an entire act before renouncing the project, finding that the blank-verse text, even reduced, left no room for expansive musical treatment. In the 1950s Thomson would consider setting Gertrude Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* (which she wrote in 1938 for British composer Lord Berners, but which he never used). This project, one of Thomson's most promising, never grew beyond the planning stage.

World War II cut Thomson off from France and Gertrude Stein. In 1945, the year the war ended, the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University offered him a commission for another opera. He wired Stein to ask if she would be interested in working together again, and her reply was positive and eager.

They met in Paris in October, 1945. Fascinated by the language of senatorial oration, Thomson suggested a work about political life in nineteenth-century America. Stein, possibly thinking about the opera on American history that she had wanted to write twenty years earlier, immediately accepted the suggestion and chose

Susan B. Anthony, the women's-rights activist, as her central character. The opera would be called *The Mother of Us All*.

Stein began work that same month and finished the domestic scene that opens the opera before Thomson left for New York in November. Immersing herself in the subject, Stein did a great deal of research on nineteenth-century American life at the American Library in Paris, and then wrote to the New York Public Library for additional material. She sent the finished libretto (which differs in the order of its scenes from the text set in the opera) to Thomson in March, 1946. In April he wrote to her:

The libretto is sensationally handsome and Susan B. is a fine role. . . . The whole thing will be much easier to dramatize than *Four Saints* was, much easier, though the number of characters who talk to the audience about themselves, instead of addressing the other characters, is a little terrifying. Mostly it is very dramatic and very beautiful



and very clear and constantly quotable and I think we shall have very little scenery but very fine clothes and they do all the time strike 19th century attitudes.

In May, his critic's responsibilities over for the season, Thomson was back in France and met with Stein about revisions in the text. The libretto was to be her last completed work, for on July 7, 1946, she died of cancer. Thomson began work on the vocal score that October in New York. By mid-December he had completed all but the final scene. He spent a month playing the opera for others, as he had with *Four Saints*, and in January, 1947, Thomson (now secure about what had already been composed) wrote Susan B.'s final monologue. He prepared the orchestral score in the spring, and the

opera opened at Brander Matthews Hall at Columbia University on May 7, 1947.

The opera was conducted by the composer Otto Luening and was staged by the choreographer John Taras. The cast included two young singers: Dorothy Dow in the role of Susan B. and Teresa Stich as Henrietta M. In the 1950s and 1960s Miss Dow made a distinguished career in Italy, where she specialized in Wagnerian repertory as well as twentieth-century opera, creating several roles in the latter category, including Renata in the stage premiere of Prokofiev's *The Flaming Angel* in Venice in 1955. Miss Stich became famous as Teresa Stich-Randall and attained success especially in Austria, where she was eventually accorded the coveted title of *Kammersängerin* at the Vienna State Opera.

The production was successful, though not one for history books like the first *Four Saints*. Using Columbia students for many singers and for the technical staff prevented the opera's full realization, but the essential quality of the work came through. Reviews were favorable, and the opera was given a special citation by the New York Music Critics Circle. In *The New York Times*, Olin Downes ended a generally positive review by stating:

The question that remains is whether this very literary style of opera... gives the composer enough opportunity for his score to stand as a unit in itself and keep its place in the repertory.



Scenes from the original production of *Four Saints in Three Acts* showing Florine Stettheimer's cellophane sets. (Courtesy New York Public Library.)

It remains to be seen.

The question has been answered by history, for in the thirty years since its premiere *The Mother of Us All* has been given over a thousand times in nearly two hundred different productions.

The "landscape" of *The Mother of Us All* is somewhat different from that of *Four Saints*. Less abstract and more narrative, with recognizable characters and even the semblance of a plot, the libretto reflects the tendency of Stein's writing in her later years toward a more accessible and entertaining idiom.

Although Stein was not an ardent feminist, it is not surprising that she would choose Susan B. Anthony as her central figure. Not only was Anthony a woman of independence and strength who had a major impact on political events in the United States, but her very long life (1820-1906) would serve perfectly as the fictional central point around which an array of characters from America's past could circulate. It is also possible that Alice B. Toklas had something to do with the choice, for as a young girl in San Francisco she had met the feminist and was greatly taken with her. In a letter dated April 5, 1957, she wrote that Anthony was:

... the first great woman I met and she made a lasting impression on me. She was beautiful and frail and quite naturally dominated the group of women she had been asked to meet.

Susan B. Anthony's career was one of strife and dedication. She was a pioneer crusader for women's rights in the U.S., whose work, along with that of her colleagues Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Anna Howard Shaw, led to laws that granted women full suffrage. Although by 1850 Anthony was organizing women's political conventions, in the early part of her life she was principally concerned with the abolition of slavery. But in 1866 the Fourteenth Amendment to the constitution was passed, granting (as part of the Reconstruction) voting rights to all "male inhabitants... twenty-one years of age and citizens of the United States." Shocked and disappointed that the word "male" had been written into the Constitution, Anthony put all her energy into obtaining the vote for women.

Much of her work was done through writing, including her four-volume *History of Women's Suffrage*, but she also used political action. In 1872 she led a women's march on the polls in Rochester, New York, to test the voting laws. The women were refused. Anthony was arrested and convicted on minor charges but refused to pay the fine and continued her struggle. At the time of her death there was still no Constitutional amendment granting nationwide women's suffrage, but some states (beginning with Wyoming in 1890) had begun to grant

women the vote. Not until 1920 was the “Anthony Amendment” (first introduced in Congress in 1878) made a part of the United States Constitution as the Nineteenth Amendment.

The opera deals with much of this history, particularly the Fourteenth Amendment, which elicits Susan B. 's ironic outburst (Act II, scene) “Yes it is wonderful” that because of her work for civil rights the word “male” was written into the Constitution. But in addition to Susan B. Anthony there is an entire gallery of American characters, used with total abandon and anachronism to create a diversified and purposely disjointed portrait of long-ago American life.

Most of these figures had nothing whatsoever to do with Susan B. Anthony and lived during different times. But Stein threw them together as part of her “landscape”: Daniel Webster, the New England elder statesman and senator from Massachusetts (1827-41, 1845-50), delivers excerpts from his speeches and court cases; Andrew Johnson, the seventeenth president, argues with the abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens; Anthony Comstock, father of American censorship laws, wanders into view, as do John Quincy Adams (the sixth president) and stage star Lillian Russell (the last two, unlike the preceding personalities, could never have met, since Adams died in 1848 and Russell was born in 1861). Most humorous is the appearance of Ulysses S. Grant, who will not tolerate loud noises and who talks about his military successor of a century later, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Such anachronisms have more than charm; they have precise dramatic purposes. Act I, scene 2, for example, is a debate between Susan B. and Daniel Webster. As far as one knows, they never met, and Webster died before Anthony reached her fame. But the scene is built entirely of snippets from each character's actual public addresses, and the crosscutting of these fragments, which become a series of non sequiturs, emphasizes the frustration of Susan B.'s cause and the incomprehension of its opponents.

A number of the opera's characters are taken from Stein's life: the American playwright Constance Fletcher, the French painter Jean Atlan (renamed Herman in the opera), and Donald Gallup, the Yale librarian who would edit Stein's posthumous works. There are two mysterious narrators (replacing the Commère and Compère of *Four Saints*), Gertrude S. and Virgil T. The stage marriage of Jo the Loiterer to Indiana Elliot is a reference to the marriage of Joseph Barry, a journalist who knew Stein after World War II. Barry, who was once arrested for loitering, was about to marry a practicing Catholic, and there was much talk about whether the wedding should be civil or religious—the same situation that occurs in the opera.

With the display of so much of her personal life in the libretto, there is little doubt that Stein meant her portrait of Susan B. and her companion Anne to reflect her own life with Alice B. Toklas. The incorporation of her private world into a work of fiction had been an aspect of Stein's writing for many years. (In *Four Saints* there is a passage that describes her own difficulties beginning the opera, and her lengthy novel *The Making of Americans* is about her own family.) Toklas disputed this autobiographical analysis, saying that the portrait of Susan B. and Anne was no more than a heroic evocation of Susan B. Anthony and Anna Howard Shaw. But Stein had always wanted to be historical—she identified with these mythic figures (including St. Theresa) and drew such thinly veiled self-portraits on the assumption that she too, in time, would become a mythic personality.

As with *Four Saints*, Maurice Grosser prepared a scenario (reprinted here with the libretto) that described possible tableaux for the work and facilitated its staging. For *The Mother of Us All* the changes—devised by the composer himself—were more substantial. Two scenes are deleted (the first a dialogue between Susan B. and Anne about who will join the fight for women's suffrage, the second another debate between Susan B. and Daniel Webster), and one scene is presented out of sequence (the domestic dialogue that opens the opera was originally after what is now Act I, scene 2—the political meeting). The place of the intermission—which was before the current Act I, scene 3—was also changed. These major textual revisions are defensible, for Stein's structure would have created an extremely brief first act and a very long second act.

The score of *The Mother of Us All* exemplifies Thomson's musical language: melodious and warm, it evokes an old, imagined world of nostalgia and security. It seems to stimulate memories of experiences we have never had, of small-town American life in times long gone. All the tunes (except “London Bridge Is Falling Down”) are original, even though we seem to remember them from a distant Sunday band concert or school-room chant. Thomson's skill is such that he can make us believe in his own nostalgia, what he called

A memory-book of Victorian play-games and passions... with its gospel hymns and cocky marches, its sentimental ballads, waltzes, darned-fool ditties and intoned sermons. . . a souvenir of all those sounds and kinds of tunes that were once the music of rural America.

This is a singer's opera, for the emphasis is on the expression of the words. The phrasing and rhythms are designed to communicate the text. There is almost no ornamentation in either vocal or orchestral lines,

and the musical flow always matches the spoken cadences of the words. So long as the singers have a true sense of verbal expression, there is never any problem understanding a text set by Virgil Thomson, for his music supports perfectly what he calls the verbal “trajectory.” As with *Four Saints*, the French influence is clear, particularly in the harmonies of some orchestral passages. But the vocal lines are resounding Americana, and the whole work comes off as a Kansas City Fourth of July parade resonantly marching down the Champs-Élysées.

Thomson's music sustains this “political fantasy” with a sure grasp of theatrical technique and contrast. He was right to question Stein about the great number of characters who address the audience instead of each other, but the characterizations are clear and secure. The text (like so many opera librettos) portrays most roles in only two dimensions, allowing the music to give them emotional depth and range. The various couples of the opera, for example, are all clearly defined through music in a way not matched by the words. Daniel Webster and his love Angel More (a ghost who wanders across the stage with tiny wings spread from her shoulders) sing in pompous tones that perfectly match the ornately oratorical statesman and his aristocratic lady. Jo the Loiterer and Indiana Elliot sing with a direct simplicity that recalls Masetto and Zerlina in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. John Adams and Constance Fletcher (always flirting, but never able to marry) are a third contrasting pair of lovers, whose lilting music sustains the comic mode.

Susan B. Anthony's long final monologue, with its melody as solid as an inscription in granite, is an emotional summation of all the flowing warmth of the score. But smaller moments of delicacy and wit stand out. Thomson concludes Act I, scene 3 (a loud and hectic mixture of characterizations), by allowing Jo the Loiterer's guilty question “Has everybody forgotten Isabel Wentworth?” to become a gentle whispering coda to the whole boisterous pageant. Lillian Russell's tipsy catch phrase “It is so beautiful to meet you all here” is musically scattered about the stage like leaves in the wind. And the giddy trumpetlike Chorus of “V.I.P.’s (Webster, Johnson, and Stevens) always makes a comic impact.

Carl Van Vechten, the American music critic, photographer, and novelist who became Stein's literary executor, summarized Thomson's music in an essay on *Four Saints*: “The music is as transparent to color as the finest old stained glass, and has no muddy passages.” So much *is* transmitted like light in this score, for the elements are blended with all the skills of a vibrant colorist (nowhere more than in the impres-

sionistic harmonies describing a snowy winter scene or in the snare-drum beat of an old-time political rally). The opera fulfills what earlier composers called *dramma per musica* (drama *through* music, not just alongside it), and as the text is filtered through song it gains color and emotional resonance without losing its magical sense of nostalgia or its melancholy pathos of an era lost to time.

The orchestration is full and effective, but throughout the opera the orchestra serves in a secondary role—setting the mood, adding tonal color, and primarily supporting the voices. In 1949 Thomson prepared an orchestral suite from *The Mother of Us All*, and three of its four movements are heard on this recording: “A Political Meeting” (in place of the overture), “Cold Weather” (before Act I, scene 3), and “Last Intermezzo” (Act II, between scene 1 and scene 2).

The opera's few musical motives are not used “dramatically” to extend the plot or reveal character. Rather, Thomson uses his lovely, flowing melodies to recall an earlier mood or unify the “landscape.” The wedding hymn, for example, which is first heard in the orchestral prelude to the Act I finale, winds through the scene, musically coalescing a sequence of arias and ensembles. When it is restated alongside Daniel Webster's love song during Susan B. 's final monologue, the two melodies together evoke layers of complexity and emotion as she sings of her sacrifice to a cause:



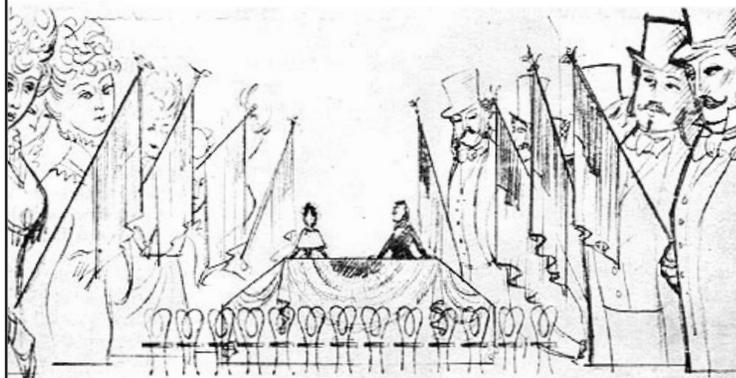
Carl Van Vechten's photograph of Dorothy Dow in the original production of *The Mother of Us All* in 1947. (Courtesy Virgil Thomson and Estate of Carl Van Vechten.)

But do we want what we have got, has it not gone, what made it live, has it not gone because now it is had, in my long life in my long life Life is strife, I was a martyr all my life not to what I won but to what was done. Do you know because I tell you so, or do you know. My long life, my long life.

Is political action worth the emotional sacrifice? Does that sacrifice lead to true intellectual comprehension and social change, or simply to mere agreement? The opera poses serious questions, and the “memory-book”—both text and music—has more than pictures of simple gaiety.

Because of its humane complexity and the unity of its artistic vision, *The Mother of Us All* remains an astonishing work of American musical theater—probably the finest of its kind. It never fails to make an impact, no matter what is done to it. It has been performed in opera houses and church basements; with full orchestra, a single piano, or any number of combinations in between; with a cast of thirty professionals or with eight amateurs doubling on all the parts. It is indestructible.

ROBERT MARX is a critic and journalist whose essays on the performing arts have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The New Republic*, and *The American Scholar*. For four years he edited *yale/theatre*, a leading American journal on drama, and he has taught lyric drama at Yale and at New York University. In June, 1976, he was appointed Director of the Theatre Program of the New York State Council on the Arts.



Drawings by David Hilberman for his sets for the 1965 production of *The Mother of Us All* at UCLA. (Courtesy Virgil Thomson and Estate of Carl Van Vechten.)

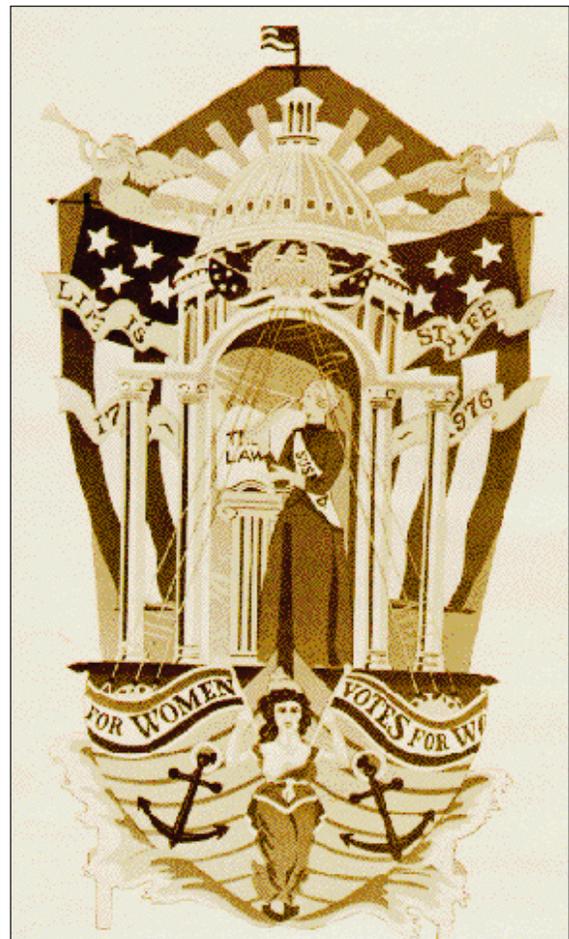
THE MOTHER OF US ALL

An Opera

Music by Virgil Thomson
Text by Gertrude Stein
scenario by Maurice Grosser

The Santa Fe Opera
Conducted by Raymond Leppard

Susan B. Anthony - Mignon Dunn
Anne - Batyah Godfrey
Gertrude S. - Aviva Orvath
Virgil T. - Gene Ives
Daniel Webster - Philip Booth
Jo the Loiterer - James Atherton
Chris the Citizen - Joseph McKee
Indiana Elliot - Linn Maxwell
Angel More - Ashley Putnam
Henrietta M. - Billie Nash
Henry B. - Ronald Raines
Anthony Comstock - David W. Fuller
John Adams - William Lewis
Thaddeus Stevens - Douglas Perry
Constance Fletcher - Helen Vanni
Gloster Heming - James McKeel
Isabel Wentworth - Billie Nash
Anna Hope - Sondra Stowe
Lillian Russell - Karen Beck
Jenny Reefer - Jimmie Lu Null
Ulysses S. Grant - Steven Loewengart
Herman Atlan - Ronald Raines
Donald Gallup - Paul Mabrey
T.T. and A.A., postillions - Men's Chorus
Andrew J. - Thomas Parker
Negro Woman - Marla McDaniels
Negro Man - D'Artagnan Petty
Indiana Elliot's Brother - Stephen Bryant

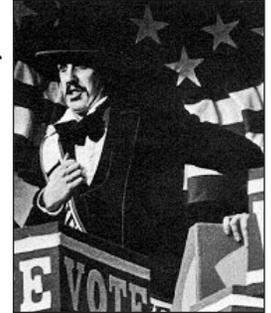


This recording was made possible through a grant from The Rockefeller Foundation,
and in part through a grant from Betty Freeman.



MIGNON DUNN (*Susan B. Anthony*) has sung major roles in opera houses throughout the world. Her extensive repertory includes Waltraute in *Götterdämmerung*, Brangäne in *Tristan und Isolde*, Azucena in *Il Trovatore*, and the title role in *Carmen*. She performs regularly at the Metropolitan Opera and appears often at Covent Garden, the Paris Opera, the Hamburg Opera, the Vienna Staatsoper, and the major opera houses of Canada and South America. She has also sung leading roles with the Chicago Lyric Opera, the Boston Opera, and the New York City Opera.

PHILIP BOOTH (*Daniel Webster*), a member of the Metropolitan Opera Company, has sung with the Houston, Cincinnati, Baltimore, and Central City operas. At the opening of the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., he sang in the American premiere of Handel's *Ariodante* with Julius Rudel conducting. He made his European debut in 1973 at the Festival d'Angers in France as Daland in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, and he has recorded the title role in Ezra Pound's *Le Testament de Villon*.



JAMES ATHERTON (*Jo the Loiterer*) made his Santa Fe Opera debut in 1973 as Sir Philip Wingrave in the American premiere of Britten's opera *Owen Wingrave*. He has performed over seventy roles with opera companies throughout the United States, including the San Francisco Opera, the Dallas Civic Opera, the Houston Opera, and the Washington Opera.

RAYMOND LEPPARD, principal conductor of the BBC Northern Symphony, is equally well known for his work with symphony and chamber orchestras as in the opera house. An authority on seventeenth-century Italian music, Mr. Leppard has made realizations of Cavalli's *L'Ormindo* and *La Calisto*, and Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* and *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*, all of which he has conducted at Glyndebourne. He has been guest conductor of many orchestras, among them, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the English Chamber Orchestra, The London Philharmonia, and the Royal Philharmonic. In the United States he has conducted performances with the San Francisco and Santa Fe Opera companies. He has made numerous recordings for the Philips and Decca/London group labels.



GENE IVES (*Virgil T.*) has lived in New Mexico for twenty years. With the Albuquerque Opera Theatre he has sung a variety of roles, from the title role in *Falstaff* to Guglielmo in *Così fan Tutte*. He is a member of The Company, a professional touring group performing throughout the Southwest, and also often sings in concerts and oratorios.

BATYAH GODFREY (*Anne*) has appeared regularly with the Metropolitan Opera since 1969. While performing with the Santa Fe Opera she was heard by Erich Leinsdorf, and awarded a fellowship at the Berkshire Music Center, Tanglewood. She has also performed with such conductors as Leonard Bernstein, Eugene Ormandy, Fausto Cleva, and Karl Boehm. Recent engagements include performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra and in the Miami Opera's production of *Thais*.





DOUGLAS PERRY (*Thaddeus Stevens*) has performed with the New York City Opera, the Houston Grand Opera, the Fort Worth Opera, and the Eastern Opera Theatre. He is also active in concert and oratorio work. During the 1975-76 season he made his debut with the Baltimore Opera and the Opera Theatre of St. Louis and sang in the American premiere of Roger Sessions' *Montezuma* with the Opera Company of Boston. His recordings include Charles Ives's cantata *The Celestial Country*.



ASHLEY PUTNAM (*Angel More*)

a former Santa Fe Opera Apprentice Artist, won first place in the Metropolitan Opera National Auditions and received a National Opera Institute Grant, both in 1976. She made her professional debut the same year singing the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor* with the Virginia Opera Association. She has also sung with the St. Louis, San Diego, and Fort Worth opera companies.



JOSEPH McKEE (*Chris the Citizen*) appeared with the Tucson Opera Company in the title role of *The Marriage of Figaro* and in 1975 joined the American Opera Center at the Juilliard School, where he appeared as Enobarbus in the revised version of Samuel Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra*. He has also sung with the Augusta Opera Company, the Kansas City Lyric Opera Theatre, and the Kentucky Opera Company.



WILLIAM LEWIS (*John Adams*)

made his debut at the Metropolitan Opera as Narraboth in Strauss's *Salome* and has sung there regularly in such roles as Don José in *Carmen*, Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, and Aeneas in *Les Troyens*. He has also sung with the Santa Fe Opera, the San Francisco Opera, the New York City Opera, and the American Opera Society, among others. He performed in the American premieres of Stravinsky's *Threni* and Orff's *Antigonae* and *Prometheus* and in the New York premiere of Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. Mr. Lewis has been heard in opera, operetta, concerts, and solo recitals in North America, Europe, and New Zealand.



ROBERT INDIANA (*designer*) was born Robert Clark in New Castle, Indiana. He was a member of the Pop Art movement. Most of his paintings are based on familiar images of the American scene and executed in bold, contrasting, and frequently clashing colors. Among his most famous sign paintings are *LOVE*, *EAT*, and, most recently, *ART*. His work is represented in collections and major museums all over the world.

LINN MAXWELL (*Indiana Elliot*) made her professional debut in the premiere of William Schuman's *Amaryllis* at the Library of Congress Coolidge Festival. In Germany she sang for two seasons with the Essen Opera. In 1976 she sang in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, and Rossini's *Barber of Seville* with the Netherlands Opera. She has performed with the American Symphony, with the New York Choral Society, and at Washington's Kennedy Center in the American premiere of Kabalevsky's *Requiem*.

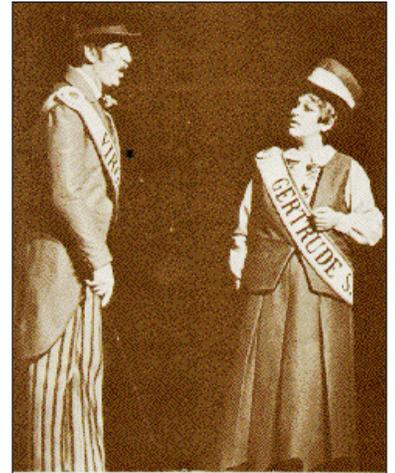


HELEN VANNI's (*Constance Fletcher*) roles at the Metropolitan Opera include Dorabella in *Così fan Tutte*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, and the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*. With the San Francisco Opera she has sung the roles of the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, the title role in *Mignon* and Isabella in *L'Italiana in Algeri*. She appeared for two seasons at Glyndebourne in the title role of *Ariadne*. She is a frequent guest of major symphony orchestras and has made a number of recordings of contemporary works. Miss Vanni is chairman of the voice department of the Cleveland Institute of Music.





Raymond Leppard



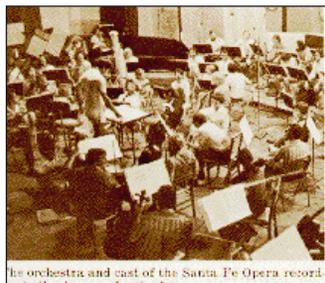
Virgil Thomson as Virgil T. and Gertrude Stein as Gertrude S. in the Santa Fe production.



Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein



The view from the piano and celeste keyboards of the recording studio.



The orchestra and cast of the Santa Fe Opera recording in the Armory for the Arca.



Raymond Leppard talking by telephone to the contractor.

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Five 2-Part Inventions. Jacquelyn Helin, piano. New World 80429-2.

Five Tenor Solos from the opera *Lord Byron*. Martyn Hill, Tenor, James bolle conducting the Monadnock Festival Orchestra and the Budapest Symphony Orchestra. Albany Records TROY017-2.

Four Saints in Three Acts (abridged by the composer). Virgil Thomson conducting. *The Plow That Broke the Plains*. Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra, Leopold Stokowski conducting. BMG/RCA Red Seal 68163.

Four Saints in Three Acts. Orchestra of Our Time, Joel Thome conducting. Elektra/Nonesuch 79035-2.

Four Songs to Poems of Thomas Campion. The New York Concert Singers; St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble; Judith Clurman, conductor. New World 80547-2.

Lord Byron. Monadnock Music, James Bolle, conductor. Koch International Classics 3-7124-2Y6x2.

Hymns from the Old South. The New York Concert Singers; St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble; Judith Clurman, conductor. New World 80547-2.

Nine Portraits. Jacquelyn Helin, piano, New World 80429-2.

Parson Weems and the Cherry Tree. Jacquelyn Helin, piano, New World 80429-2.

Portraits for Orchestra and other orchestral music. Virgil Thomson and Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra. Bay Cities BCD-1006.

Portraits and Self-Portraits. Anthony Tommasini, piano. Sharan Leventhal, violin. Northeastern NR240-CD.

Seventeen Portraits. Jacquelyn Helin, piano, New World 80429-2. Songs. Dora Ohrenstein, soprano; Glenn Siebert, tenor; William Sharp, baritone; Phillip Bush, piano; Cassatt Quartet. Albany 272.

Songs (by Thomson and others). William Sharp, baritone; Steven Blier, piano. New World 80369-2.

Symphony on a Hymn Tune. Symphony No. 2. Don Juan (selections). Martyn Hill, tenor; Monadnock Festival Orchestra or Budapest Symphony Orchestra, James Bolle conducting. Albany 17.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE EVENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

- 1691-1780** Women who own property have voting rights in Massachusetts.
- 1790** New Jersey grants the vote to women by using “he or she” in its electoral law. This is repealed in 1807 when the legislature limits the vote to male white citizens.
- February 15, 1820** Susan B. Anthony born in Adams, Massachusetts.
- 1848** Elizabeth Cady Stanton calls for a Convention on the Rights of Women to be held in Seneca Falls, New York. The Convention creates a Declaration of Principle based on the Declaration of Independence. It includes the line “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal.”
- 1850** First national convention of women held in Worcester, Massachusetts.
- 1852** Second national convention is Stanton and Anthony's first joint effort. Anthony forms Women's State Temperance Society of New York after being rebuffed by male temperance workers.
- 1856** Anthony serves as a field agent for the American Anti-Slavery Society.
- June 16, 1866** Congress approves the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution.
- August 30, 1868** Fourteenth Amendment ratified by the states.
- 1868-1870** Anthony and Stanton publish a liberal weekly in New York called *The Revolution*.
- 1869** American women's-rights movement splits into two factions: the National Women's Suffrage Association, headed by Anthony and Stanton, supports action through a constitutional amendment; the American Women Suffrage Association advocates action through state laws.
- 1872** Anthony tests voting-rights laws in Rochester, New York. She leads a group of women to the polls but is refused the vote. Arrested, tried, convicted, she refuses to pay the fine.
- 1878** “Anthony Amendment” granting women's suffrage is introduced in Congress by Senator Aaron A. Sargena of California. Reintroduced annually, it is either kept off the floor or defeated until 1919.
- 1881-1900** Anthony compiles her four-volume *History of Women's Suffrage*.
- 1888** Anthony organizes the International Council of Women.
- 1890** The two women's-rights groups merge into the National American Women's Rights Association. Stanton is first president (1890-92), followed by Anthony (1892-1900). Wyoming is the first state to grant women full and complete voting rights in its constitution.
- 1893** New Zealand becomes the first country to grant women equal suffrage.
- 1900** Beginnings of the Pankhurst Suffrage movement, spearheaded by Emmaline Pankhurst in England.
- March 9, 1906** Susan B. Anthony dies.
- January, 1918** House of Representatives passes Nineteenth Amendment, 274 for, 136 against.
- June, 1919** Senate passes Nineteenth Amendment, 66 for, 36 against.
- August 18, 1920** Nineteenth Amendment ratified by the states.
- June, 1945** UN Charter accelerates worldwide women's movement.

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Recording facilities: Viking Studios, Denver, Colorado
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Assistant engineers: George Counnas, Ron Oren, Darla Reddick
Recorded at The Armory for the Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico
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The 1976 production of *The Mother of Us All* was directed by Peter Wood.
Scenery and costumes were designed by Robert Indiana.

Cover design: Robert Indiana
Photographs of the Santa Fe production: Jody J. Dole 1976 and Ken Howard
Photographs of the Robert Indiana maquettes: Bruce C. Jones
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Library of Congress Card No.76-750907
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