

Irving Fine



Irvine Fine (1914-1962)

The Hour Glass (A Cycle of Songs
to Poems by Ben Johnson) (1949) (14:51)

1. I. O know to end to begin (2:48)
2. II. Have you seen the white lily grow (2:40)
3. III. O do not wanton with those eyes (1:15)
4. IV. Against jealousy (2:54)
5. V. Lament (2:09)
6. VI. The Hour-Glass (2:42)

Ann Coons, Deltra Kamsler, Esther Martinez,
Gloria Prosper, Sue Harmon, sopranos;
Lou Ann Stehn, Rose Anderson, Pricilla
Abraham, altos; Dale Jurgenson, tenor;
Edmund Najera, bass; Gregg Smith, conductor

Three Choruses from *Alice in Wonderland*
(First Series) (1942) (9:24)

7. I. The Lobster Quadrille (2:31)
8. II. Lullaby of the Duchess (4:28)

9. III. Father William (2:15)
Gregg Smith Singers – Mixed Chorus (SATB)
with Raymond Beegle, piano
Three Choruses from *Alice in Wonderland*
(Second Series) (1953) (7:32)
10. I. The Knave's Letter (2:29)
11. II. The White Knight's Song (3:14)
12. III. Beautiful Soup (1:40)
Gregg Smith Singers – Women's Chorus (SSA)
with Raymond Beegle, piano; Alice Coons,
soprano soloist; Gregg Smith, conductor

McCord's Menagerie (Four Variations
for Male Voices) (1957) (5:22)

13. 1. Vultur Gryphus (1:25)
14. 2. Jerboa (1:09)
15. 3. Mole (10:56)
16. 4. Clam (1:48)

Gregg Smith Singers – Men's Chorus (TTB),
a cappella; Steve Morrow, William Lyon Lee,
soloists; Gregg Smith, conductor

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1946) (21:02)

17. I. Moderato, Allegro Moderato, giusto (8:01)
18. II. Lento con moto (7:02)
19. III. Vivo (5:59)
Ida Kavafian, violin; Vivian Fine, piano

Mutability A Cycle of Six Songs for
Mezzo-Soprano and Piano (1952) (13:40)

20. 1. I Have Heard The Hoof Beats
of Happiness (1:58)
21. 2. My Father (2:22)
22. 3. The Weed (1:38)
23. 4. Peregrine (1:55)
24. 5. Jubilation (2:04)
25. 6. Now God be Thanked for Mutability (3:43)

Eunice Alberts, mezzo-soprano; Irving Fine, piano

Total playing time: 72:34

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Notes

Irving Fine, born in Boston in 1914 and educated in the public schools of Boston and Winthrop (MA), lived virtually his entire life close to the city of his birth. After receiving his B.A. and M.A. degrees from Harvard University, he undertook further studies in composition with Nadia Boulanger in Cambridge (MA) and France, and in orchestral conducting with Serge Koussevitzky at Tanglewood, from 1939 to 1950. Fine taught in the Harvard Music Department and conducted the Harvard Glee Club. He also served on the Tanglewood composition faculty for nine summers between 1946 and 1957. In the fall of 1950, Fine joined the faculty of Brandeis University as the first Walter W. Naumburg Professor of Music and chairman of the School of Creative Arts, positions he held until his untimely death in 1962 at the age of forty-seven.

Praised as a “musical aristocrat...whose work was distinguished by sensitivity, exquisite taste and ripeness of execution,” Fine has written music, as described by his friend and colleague, Aaron Copland that “wins us over through its keenly conceived sonorities and its fully realized expressive content.” Although Fine spent his life in a university setting, his works are “without the slightest taint of academicism” and, to quote Copland, full of “elegance, style, a finish and a convincing continuity.”

Fine's many honors and awards include two Guggenheim Fellowships, a Fulbright Research Fellowship for France, National Institute of Arts and Letters Award, Society for the Publication of American Music (SPAM) Award and grants from the MacDowell Association and the Wyman Foundation.

Fine received commissions from the Ford, Fromm, and Koussevitzky Music foundations; the Boston Symphony and Louisville Orchestra, the Juilliard School of Music, Library of Congress, League of Composers and others. His String Quartet (1952), *Notturmo* for strings and harp, *Childhood Fables for Grownups* (Sets 1 and 2), and *Fantasia* for string trio may be heard on CRI CD 574. Other major compositions include Symphony (1962), *Diversions* for orchestra, *Blue Towers* for orchestra, *Serious Song: a Lament* for string orchestra, *Toccata Concertante* for orchestra, *The Choral New Yorker*, *Romanza* for Winds, *Partita* for wind quintet plus many short choral and piano pieces.

The first part of this disc contains a major portion of Irving Fine's choral music, *The Hour Glass*, a cycle of songs to poems by Ben Johnson, was composed in 1949. "...in *The Hour Glass*, a cycle of unaccompanied short works...we have the [composer's] final word, really serious, *outwardly* serious music, free of the compulsion to clever satire and yet full of strength and lightness that this very satire brought to Fine's technique...classically short, beautifully written and immensely concentrated, really virtuoso works for chorus." (*American Choral Review*, Edward Tatnall Canby)

McCord's Menagerie, four variations for unaccompanied male voices, uses comic verses by David McCord, noted author of more than twenty books of poetry, and personal friend of the composer. It was composed in 1957 for the 100th anniversary of the Harvard Glee Club.

Three Choruses from *Alice in Wonderland* (first series) were originally written as songs for a stage production; the choral arrangements were completed in 1942. Three Choruses from *Alice in Wonderland* (second series) were written for female voices in 1953 on a commission from Bradford Junior College, a girls' junior college at the time.

"Unlike those musical settings of Lewis Carroll that tended to sentimentalize the author, Fine's songs combined childlike innocence and sophisticated irony in ways that brilliantly matched their texts." (*Harvard Composers: Walter Piston and*

His Students from Elliott Carter to Frederic Rzewski, Robert Pollack, Scarecrow Press, 1992.)

Mutability, six songs for mezzo-soprano and piano, were composed for the most part at the MacDowell Colony during the month of July 1952. Two of them (numbers 2 and 6) were begun there and completed the following September. The texts are by an English poet, Irene Orgel, who was a colony resident at the same time. The composer wrote, "the songs were commissioned by the Creative Concerts Guild, Inc. for the mezzo-soprano Eunice Alberts. They are essentially romantic in conception and employ a variety of harmonic techniques. Numbers 1 and 3 utilize a relatively free modern chromaticism; number 5 a rather stylized diatonic classicism, number 6 (an epilogue to the set) employs the twelve-tone technique, but within the framework of a clearly defined tonality."

Sonata for Violin and Piano, written in 1946, is dedicated to the Cuban violinist Angel Reyes and the composer/pianist Jacques de Menasce. It received its first performance by those artists in February 1947 at a concert sponsored by the league of Composers in New York City. At the time, the composer wrote the sonata "is essentially tonal, diatonic, moderately dissonant, neo-Classic in its formal approach, and neo-Romantic in its expressive attitudes." After the Sonata's premiere, the *New York Times* commented: "To one hearing music by Mr. Fine for the first time, it signaled the arrival of a gifted composer. The sonata has logic and lucidity, tasteful workmanship and abundant vitality." (*The New York Times*, February 10, 1947). And as a more recent 1990 program note commented, the sonata "reveals those characteristics to which Aaron Copland alluded in his eulogy for Fine: "All his compositions, from the lightest to the most serious, *sound*; they have bounce and thrust and finesse, they always are a musical pleasure to hear...For us, as friends and colleagues, they have imbedded in them one of the most cherishable musical natures of our time."

—Verna Fine

Production Notes

From CRI SD 376

The Hour-Glass, McCord's Menagerie, Alice In Wonderland (First & Second Series).
Produced by Hellmuth Kolbe. Engineered by George Engfer.

From CRI SD 508

Sonata for Violin & Piano

Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by David Hancock at the Church of the Holy Trinity, NYC in May 1984.

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