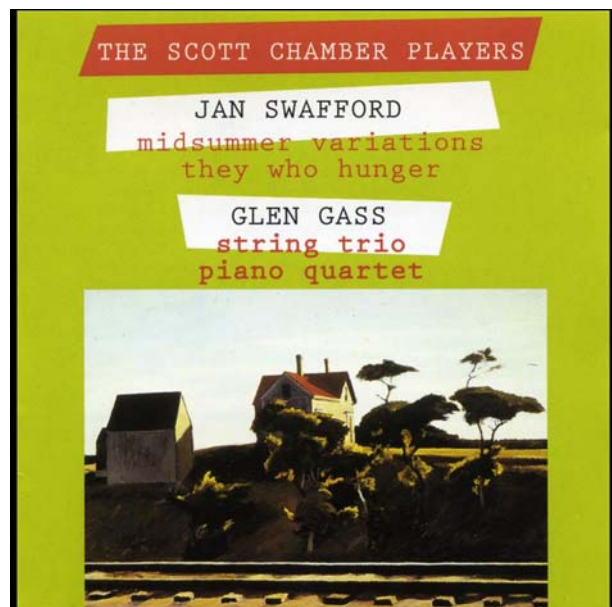


The Scott Chamber Players

Jan Swafford: *Midsummer Variations*; *They Who Hunger*

Glen Gass: String Trio; Piano Quartet



Jan Swafford

1. *Midsummer Variations* for piano quintet (1985) ... (15:40)
2. *They Who Hunger* for piano quartet (1989) (21:13)

Glenn Gass

- Piano Quartet (1987) (15:09)
3. I. anxiously (4:03)
 4. II. distantly – mournfully (3:07)
 5. III. wistfully (5:11)
 6. IV. restlessly (2:45)
- String Trio (1983) (12:48)
7. I. With Motion (5:04)
 8. II. Almost Still (2:29)
 9. III. From a Cloud (4:45)

The Scott Chamber Players: Linda Scott, violin; Perry Scott, cello; Beverly Scott, viola; Gregory Scott Dugan, double bass; Sylvia Patterson-Scott, piano

Total playing time: 64:35

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Notes

Midsummer Variations

The theme that *Midsummer Variations* varies appears not as usual as at the beginning of the piece but at the end: a meditative sequence of chords, more or less a chorale. The preceding variations on this chorale are not separate but instead continuous throughout, appearing in both melodic and harmonic dimensions. As in all variations, the intent is to take the theme in contrasting directions, texturally and expressively.

In much of the piece I experimented with major and minor scales, not for any ideological reasons but simply because they seemed to belong there. It is odd that such material should be called experimental, but so it was with me. Working with these familiar friends was both fascinating and perversely difficult—something on the order of teaching old dogs new tricks.

When one is composing, one is sometimes guided by a half-conscious program. I arrived at the title *Midsummer Variations* after writing the music, but in retrospect saw that summer had perhaps colored the piece from the beginning. It was written at the end of a good, rich summer in the country, when in the company of friends and loved ones I rediscovered a childlike feeling of the season which had long been obscured by the contrapuntal tensions of adulthood. Enjoying the magic of a child's summer, one inescapably feels an adult awareness of summer's melancholy: this exquisite and evanescent time, passing and dying even as it is experienced. Thus the piece in both its emotional and technical worlds looks back on a time past—summer, and those old scales that once warmed us.

Midsummer Variations was commissioned and first performed by the Minnesota Artists Ensemble. It is dedicated to them and to my friend Josh Faigen.

They Who Hunger

Although the expressive world of *They Who Hunger* ranges widely, its title and much of its tone arise from a scene increasingly familiar in urban America: streets filling with beggars and homeless while long dark-windowed limousines sweep past. This grotesque spectacle troubled my days and dreams as I composed. The title is taken from the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness' sake...." My work is dedicated to the victims of the world, particularly the victims of governments, and most especially to those murdered by the Chinese government in the summer of 1989 and those brutalized by public policy on the streets of America every day.

I confess the inspiration with some uneasiness. In the past I have criticized others for muddling art and politics. Good intentions cannot, of course, animate or enable any creative effort: to paraphrase the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky, "The artist's main responsibility to society is to write well." I have tried to observe that principle in *They Who Hunger*, as in all my work. Still, an artist needs to join his art to what he feels and believes and is. Since the images above have something to do with the elegiac and tragic stretches in the piece, that connection bears mentioning. (There are joyful moments as well, in good measure.)

The piece is in one movement, which enfolds three quasi-movements (fast/slow/fast), an extended introduction, and a coda. Each quasi-movement is also subdivided into three

sections, the third developing material from the first (and all developing a few fundamental ideas). Many musical traditions resonate within this piece, because they do in me. Composers write with reference to what they have heard; and today we are, as artists and human beings, part of a world tradition as much as a Western one. Especially in *They Who Hunger* there are echoes of African-American music: In a sense, the work is an extended, heartfelt blues.

They Who Hunger was written for the Scott Chamber Players, to whom it is also dedicated, on a commission from Chamber Music America with funds from the Pew Memorial Trusts.

Jan Swafford has composed music ranging from orchestral and chamber works to occasional pieces to film and theater music. Among these are three works for full orchestra, a symphony for winds, a string quartet, *Midsummer Variations* for piano quintet, *They Who Hunger* for piano quartet, *Requiem in Winter* for string trio, and a chamber sinfonietta. His work has been played widely around the country and abroad by many ensembles, including Boston's Musica Viva, Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, Civic Symphony, Alea III, Collage, and Dinosaur Annex; New York's American Composers Orchestra and Musical Elements; the Society for New Music in Syracuse; the Minneapolis Artists Ensemble and Minnesota Chamber Symphony; the Scott Chamber Players of Indianapolis; and the symphonies of Indianapolis, St. Louis, Harrisburg, Springfield, Chattanooga, and the Dutch Radio. In 1988 he conducted the Vermont Symphony in his *After Spring Rain*; the work had won the Indiana State University Composition Contest in 1983, and the following year his string duo *Labyrinths* won the New England Composers Competition. Among his honors are an NEA Composers Grant, two Massachusetts Artists Council Fellowships, a commission from Chamber Music America, and a number of fellowships to the MacDowell and Yaddo colonies. His piano fantasy *Music Like Steel* and *Like Fire* was a Grand Prize co-winner in the Delius Composition Contest. His music is published by Peer-Southern Concert Music.

Mr. Swafford has degrees in music from Harvard and Yale; teachers have included Jacob Druckman, Earl Kim, and, at Tanglewood, Betsy Jolas. While living in small towns around New England, he has at various times supported his composing by working as a clerk, a country schoolteacher, journalist, jingle composer, military historian, and college professor. In 1988–89 he was a Mellon Faculty Fellow at Harvard. Currently he is composing for chorus and working on biographies of Charles Ives (Norton) and Brahms (Knopf). In 1992 vintage brought out his *Guide to Classical Music*.

Glen Gass: Piano Quartet

The Piano Quartet is in four movements marked "anxiously," "distantly-mournfully," "wistfully," and "restlessly." The overall form of the Piano Quartet is rather traditional in nature, with a weighty opening movement, a sad and slow second movement, a dance-like, melancholy third movement, and an up-tempo, climactic closing movement. Although the individual movements are highly varied, all four feature a tension between opposing musical and emotional pulls and are driven by the search for a clarifying sense of purpose and resolution.

The Piano Quartet was begun in the summer of 1986 at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and completed in the winter of 1987 in Bloomington, Indiana. The work was written for the Scott Chamber Players with funding from the Indiana Arts Commission.

String Trio

The String Trio contrasts the pull toward intensity and the desire for serenity, a tension reflected in the juxtaposition of harshly chromatic material against music of a more lyrical and diatonic nature. Constant textural variation and the recurrence of previously heard material, in new contexts and with new meanings, create the basic motion of the work's three movements.

The opening movement, "With Motion," is the most expansive of the Trio, presenting and exploring the basic ideas of the piece through continually changing contrapuntal textures. The second movement, "Almost Still," is a calm hiatus that signals a fundamental change of attitude and direction. In the final movement, "From a Cloud," the musical materials of the first movement return, through now seen through, and thoroughly transformed by, the memory of the second movement.

The String Trio was written for the Scott Chamber Players during the summer and fall of 1983 and was awarded First Prize in the 1984 American Society of University Composers Composition Contest.

Glenn Gass is an associate professor of music at Indiana University, where, in addition to composing, he teaches music history and a series of courses that he developed on the history of rock and popular music. He received his doctorate in composition from Indiana University, studying principally with John Eaton. He also attended the New England Conservatory of Music and De Pauw University, studying with Malcolm Peyton and Donald White, and has taught at the University of Wisconsin at Baraboo and at the Federal Correctional Institution in Oxford, Wisconsin.

Gass is the recent recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Indiana Arts Commission. His works have been performed by numerous ensembles, including the Group for Contemporary Music, the Detroit Contemporary Ensemble, the Scott Chamber Players, the Cassini Ensemble of Ann Arbor, the Hawthorne Trio of Milwaukee, the Almont Ensemble of Los Angeles, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and the contemporary music ensembles of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio State Universities.

The Scott Chamber Players

Having appeared regularly for more than a decade at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, the Scott Chamber Players now continue their concerts there as the resident piano quartet. In the summers they have participated in the New Hampshire Music Festival, the North East Indiana Chamber Music Festival, and Virginia's Garth Newel Music Festival. The three string players are members of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, with which Sylvia Patterson-Scott frequently appears as the orchestra pianist. The Scott Chamber Players have been the recipients of grants from Chamber Music America and the Indiana Arts Commission.

Production Notes

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