

NWCR638

New Calliope Singers

New Cantatas and Madrigals By Druckman,
Babbitt, Gerber, Gideon, Monod, Wright



Jacob Druckman (1928-1996)

1. *Shake off your heavy trance* (1958) (0:49)
2. *The faery beam upon you* (1958) *(1:47)
3. *Death, be not proud* (1958) (2:22)
4. *Corinna's going a-maying* (1958) (1:45)
* Karen Krueger, mezzo-soprano

Milton Babbitt (1916)

- Three Cultivated Choruses* (1987) (4:31)
5. Madrigal No. 1 – *Amarilli* (1:33)

6. Madrigal No. 2 – *Dorvo dungue morire* ... (1:12)
7. Madrigal No. 3 – *Dorvo dungue morire* ... (1:03)

Miriam Gideon (1906-1996)

The Habitable Earth (1966) (10:35)

8. Part I (3:08)
9. Part II (5:26)
10. Part III (1:58)

Suzanne Peck, soprano; Karen Krueger, mezzo-soprano; Mukund Marathe, tenor; Paul Rowe, bass; Diane Lesser, oboe; Michael Skelly, piano

Jacques-Louis Monod (*b* 1927)

11. *Cantus Contra Cantum IV* (Tränen des Vaterlandes [Anno 1636]) (1978) (3:56)
Wilbur Pauley, bass; New York Cornet & Sackbut Ensemble

Maurice Wright (*b* 1940)

- Madrigals (1977) (8:17)
12. I. *When as in silks* (1:56)
13. II. *Alas, this life* (1:37)
14. III. *The Expiration* (2:41)
15. IV. *My love in her attire* (1:45)

Steven R. Gerber (*b* 1948)

16. *Une Saison en Enfer* (1985) (19:41)
William Parker, baritone; Steven R. Gerber, piano;
New Calliope Singers; Peter Schubert, conductor

Total playing time: 54:41

© & © 1992 Composers Recordings, Inc.

© 2007 Anthology of Recorded Music, Inc.

Notes

Members of the New Calliope Singers:

Sopranos

Deborah P. Chodoff
Deborah French
Abigail Goldman
Robin Levine
Heather McGregor
Barbara E. Morgan
Dawn Norfleet

Suzanne Peck

Arlene Travis

Altos

Lori Henig
Linnéa Johnson

Tenors

Neil Farrell

Ronald H. Lee

John Liepold

Mukund Marathe

David Matrarasso

Kurt Phinney

Elliot Schnapp

Basses

Steven Benjamin

Hayes Biggs

David Chodoff

John Mack Ousley

David Pickel

Paul Rowe

In its twenty-two-year career (1969-1991) **New Calliope Singers** presented more than fifth premieres alongside more traditional concert repertoire. The group's members were mostly amateur singers with a high degree of musical sophistication, and a few professional singers. During most of its career, the group was accompanied in rehearsal and performance by Michel Skelly, who is a member of the piano

faculty at Columbia University. Founding music director and conductor Peter Schubert left Columbia University and New York to teach music theory at McGill University in Montreal. There he now conducts a small chamber choir, Les Chanteurs d'Orphée, with whom he recently recorded choral works by Friedrich Nietzsche.

The pieces brought together on this recording fall easily into the categories of madrigals and cantatas. The madrigals are short *a cappella* pieces on sixteenth and seventeenth century texts in groups of three or four, the cantatas (although only the Gideon is explicitly named as such) are larger—scale pieces involving instruments and soloists. However, the pieces can also be grouped along other lines. For instance, three of the works (Gerber, Druckman, and Wright) are predominantly diatonic, while of the other three, the Gideon is atonal and the Monod and Babbitt, serial. Some are composed in the traditional four-part arrangement (SATB) while others divide in a variety of ways, creating more unusual textures and spacings. The Monod and Babbitt are delicately non-metrical while the others are rhythmically forthright, driven largely by text declamation. The contrast is perhaps due to consideration of language: Three of the works are in English, while the others are in Italian, German, and French. Similarly, the composers' biographies show common traits.

Jacob Druckman (1928-1996) studied with Persichetti and Copland, and, like Peter Schubert some years later, attended the École Normale de Musique in Paris. He has taught at the Juilliard School, Bard College, Brooklyn College, and Yale University. This set of madrigals, published in 1958, is quite different from Druckman's more recent work. But the composer has maintained a steady interest in vocal music, and the madrigals show a mastery that makes them rewarding to sing.

One of their principal features is the use of declamatory rhythm, especially remarkable in syncopations that remind the listener of popular music sung in English. Particularly striking are the almost silly repetitions of the word "Apollo" in the first madrigal, and the tenor fugue subject, "the blooming morn upon her wings," which bounces along energetically in the fourth madrigal. Druckman uses *divisi* extensively in the third madrigal, achieving rich harmonies that are declaimed in rhythmic unison, in order to express the intensity of the text, and to contrast with the other madrigals.

Milton Babbitt (b 1916) wrote this program note for the first performance of his pieces by New Calliope Singers in Merkin Concert Hall (May, 1990): "*Three Cultivated Choruses* were composed in 1987 in celebration of Wiley Hitchcock's sixty-fifth birthday in 1988. The title derives from his celebrated distinction between the "cultivated" and the "vernacular" in music, while the texts employed are two of those set by Giulio Caccini (c. 1551- c. 1618) in *Le Nuove Musiche*, the modern edition of which, with translations and annotations, was one of Hitchcock's earliest musicological contributions. In no other sense of which I am aware are my choruses indebted to Caccini, and if there is any intimation of mannerism, I can only hope that the manner is mainly mine."

Although the pieces are serial, the three-note melodic phrases that predominate are made from the diatonic scale, and are consequently easy both to learn and to enjoy. One soprano, after rehearsing the phrase "prendi questo mio strale" from the first madrigal, observed that the dynamics were "very expressive," perhaps because rhythm and dynamics reflect the text accents especially well in this spot. More often, however, the rhythm and dynamics bear a more mysterious relation to the text.

Miriam Gideon (1906-1996) studied first with her uncle, Henry Gideon, an organist and choirmaster in Boston, to whose memory the *Habitable Earth* is dedicated. She subsequently studied with Lazare Saminsky, and, like Babbitt, studied privately with Roger Sessions. She has taught at the

Jewish Theological Seminary and the Manhattan Scholl of Music.

When this cantata was first performed in Town Hall in May 1965, by the New York Lyric Ensemble conducted by Ilana Rubinfeld, the *New York Times* credited it with "prickly honesty" and "dry strength." It was not performed again until Peter Schubert rediscovered it a quarter century later in the archives of the American Music Center, and obtained a grant from Chorus America to perform it. Part I is predominantly in homo-rhythmic declamation, either for the full chorus or for alternating pairs of sections. Part II features the solo quartet in a variety of textures, most strikingly *a cappella* with oboe. Part III begins with a variant of the opening of Part I, but turns to the most consonant chord of the piece at "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom."

Jacques-Louis Monod (b 1927) was born in France and studied with his godfather, Paul-Silva Hérard, who was an organist and choirmaster, and subsequently with Olivier Messiaen and René Leibowitz. He regularly conducted for the BBC, and gave American premieres of Schoenberg and Webern. Babbitt's *Du* and *The Widow's Lament In Springtime* were written for him and soprano Bethany Beardslee, then his wife, with whom he toured as accompanist.

Cantus Contra Cantum IV is part of a larger work in progress, but it can be performed separately. Because it is a setting of a text about the Thirty Years' War, we have chosen here to perform it with sackbuts instead of trombones (for which it is originally scored) in order to give a seventeenth-century resonance, recalling the music of Heinrich Schütz. Monod uses a most unusual method of "chorus-tration": There are only three polyphonic parts, or melodic lines, but they are sung by constantly changing sections of the chorus, which is divided into as many as ten parts. For instance, here is how the top line migrates upwards on one spot: "Heir durch die Schanz und Stadt" (Sung by Tenor I, Alto I and II) "rinnt allzeit" (Alto I & II), "frisches Blut" (Alto I, Soprano II), "Dreimal sind's schon sechs Jahr" (all sopranos).

Maurice Wright (b 1940) wrote his set of madrigals in 1977. Three of them were first performed by the Barnard-Columbia Madrigal Chorus in Putney, Vermont, and the whole set was sung often by New Calliope Singers. Like their historical models, they contain almost no indication of dynamics or expression, which must be added by the performers. Generally, the dynamics on our performance are determined in accordance with the rhetoric of the text. In the fourth Madrigal, for instance, the singers have been guided by the principle that text repetitions (marked by Wright in parentheses) generally be sung more softly except for the two climactic recapitulations.

Wright has pursued a broad range of compositional interests, ranging from the orchestra to experimental computer music. Like Druckman and Babbitt, he has worked at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center. He has been commissioned by the Emerson String Quartet, the American Brass Quintet, and the Berkshire Music Festival at Tanglewood. He currently is professor of music composition in the Boyer College of Music at Temple University.

Steven R. Gerber (b 1948), inspired by the success of the New Calliope Singers' premiere performance of his earlier settings of Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, began setting four of the poems from a section of *Une Saison en Enfer* for chorus. While *Illuminations*, like much of his earlier music, was relatively spare in texture and atonal, he now used diatonic material, and thicker sonorities, influenced by Stravinsky's small choral works. He subsequently added

recitative sections for contrast, setting the prose sections of Rimbaud's text. In these sections the soloist gives the impression of drawing the piano along, preparing the notes that the piano will play, not unlike eighteenth-century recitative. In the choruses different techniques are used, such as inverted lines sounding simultaneously in unusual spacings (as in the first chorus) or sliding seventh chords (as at "plus de lendemains" in the third).

Throughout the career of the New Calliope Singers and throughout this recording of contemporary works, we have endeavored to enhance the musical expression through attention to the various texts. In so doing, we pay homage to our namesake, Calliope, the muse of eloquence and heroic poetry.

—Peter Schubert

The **New Calliope Singers** performed from 1969–1991, appearing as guests of the Group for Contemporary Music, the League-ISCM, New York Philomusica, the Guild of Composers, Manticore, and the Composers Ensemble. In addition, they presented annual recitals of choral chamber music in major halls, traveled to nearby states, and have been broadcast over WBAI, WQXR, WKCR, many NPR stations, and French National Radio. The group presented more than thirty-five premieres, many of which were dedicated to it. The

idealistic goal of the group was to "live with" a new piece until it can be performed with the same verve and assurance as traditional music.

Peter Schubert, conductor, has studied with Nadia Boulanger, James Harrison, Helmuth Rilling, and Jacques-Louis Monod. He has conducted film scores and chamber orchestra programs as well as choruses. After many years on the faculty of Barnard College he now is on the faculty of McGill University in Montreal.

Michael Skelly, pianist, was the accompanist for the New Calliope Singers from 1978, performing with them regularly in the tri-state area. He is also active as a solo recitalist and is on the faculty of Columbia University in New York City.

William Parker, baritone, appears regularly in recitals throughout the world, including New York, Boston, Toronto, Lisbon, Hannover, Amsterdam, Paris, London, and Vienna. He has performed with the Netherlands Opera, the Opera du Rhin in Strasbourg, and the Vienna Volksoper, and has been a guest soloist with the New York Philharmonic and San Francisco Symphony, among others. Known for his advocacy of American music, he most recently has commissioned and premiered an ongoing series of works by numerous composers entitled *The AIDS Quilt Songbook*.

Production Notes

Produced by Judith Sherman.

Recorded in the auditorium of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, NYC, June 7 – July 12, 1990.

Druckman: Theodore Presser

Babbitt: University of Michigan Press

Gideon: ACA (BMI).

Monod: APNM

Wright: APNM

Gerber: AMC

This recording was made possible with the generous assistance of

Marilyn & Ira Hechler

Leona Gerber

Nancy Cardozo

Bryuce Bush & Judith Johnston

Bethany Beardslee Winhem

David Matarasso

This recording is a joint project between New Calliope Singers and the Guild of Composers, Inc.