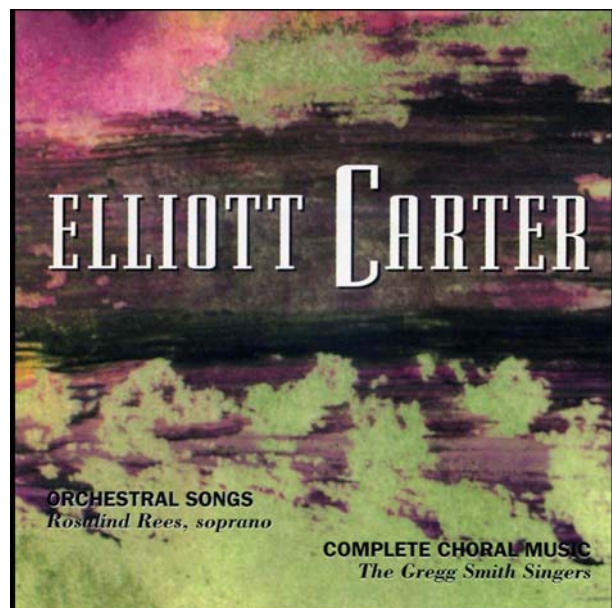


NWCR648

Elliott Carter

Orchestral Songs * Complete Choral Music



1. *Warble For Lilac-Time* (1943) (6:55)
 2. *Voyage* (1945) (5:49)
- Three Poems of Robert Frost*
3. *Dust of Snow* (1:17)
 4. *The Rose Family* (1:31)

5. *The Line-Gang* (1:52)
Rosalind Rees, soprano; Adirondack Chamber Orchestra; Gregg Smith, conductor
6. *Tarantella* (1936) (5:19)
Paul Suits & Jerald Stone, pianists
7. *Emblems* (1947) (14:32)
Men's choruses of the Gregg Smith Singers and The Long Island Symphonic Choral Association; Paul Suits, piano; Gregg Smith, conductor
8. *The Harmony of Morning* (1944) (9:26)
Women of the Gregg Smith Singers and Chamber Orchestra; Gregg Smith Singers
9. *Heart Not So Heavy As Mine* (1938) (4:28)
10. *Musicians Wrestle Everywhere* (1945) (3:13)
11. *To Music* (1937) (7:09)
The Gregg Smith Singers; Rosalind Rees, soprano; Gregg Smith conductor
12. *The Defense of Corinth* (1941) (14:12)
Jan Opalach, narrator; Edward Green & Mark Suttonsmith, pianists; Columbia University Men's Glee Club; Gregg Smith, conductor

Total playing time: 76:38

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Notes

It is always fascinating to explore the vocal music of a master composer who is regarded primarily as an “instrumentalist” to the musical public. The case of Elliott Carter is particularly interesting because the composer’s output of vocal music is mostly from his earliest creative period, the 1930s and 1940s. Carter’s choral music is limited entirely to these years, the most recent work dating from as long ago 1947. After a flurry of songs in the early 1940s, he did not return to vocal literature until 1975 when he created three important works for solo voice and ensemble from the years 1975 to 1981 (*A Mirror on Which to Dwell*, *Syringa*, and *In Sleep, in Thunder*). But the case of Carter’s choral and vocal music is doubly interesting because the works display a deliberate accessibility, characterized by popular American themes and diatonic writing – traits in sharp contrast to Carter’s demanding later music.

The five “orchestral songs” contained herein date from 1943 to 1945. (The three Frost songs and *Voyage* were orchestrated in the 1970s.) The only other solo vocal works from the period are several lost or unpublished Joyce songs from the 1920s, a Shakespeare song for alto and guitar from 1938, and an unpublished song to a text of Van Doren dating from 1944. Thus, this recording contains virtually the complete available vocal music of Elliott Carter’s early period.

In a preface to the published orchestral score of *Warble for Lilac-time* (1943), Carter states that the work was written

“during a period when I was particularly concerned with giving my compositions an American flavor and consequently set poems by American poets like Robert Frost, Hart Crane, Mark van Doren and Walt Whitman. Whitman’s *Warble for Lilac-time* (from the Sequence “Autumn Rivulets”) is a return in reminiscence to impressions of spring in America and a transcendental vision of its meaning. In the song, I tried to catch Whitman’s visionary rapture, using smooth-flowing diatonic lines in the accompaniment and a lyric vocal line that becomes increasingly rhapsodic as the song progresses.” The song received the first performance of its orchestral version 1946 by Helen Boatwright and the Yaddo Orchestra, Fredrick Fennell, conductor, at Saratoga Springs, New York.

Voyage is a setting of Hart Crane’s poem “Infinite Consanguinity” taken from a collection of poems entitled *Voyages*. It was composed in 1945 and orchestrated in 1979. In contrast to the other vocal works of the period, *Voyage* is more heroic, if not tragic in conception. David Schiff, in his authoritative book, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, cites motivic similarities between the flowing accompaniment of *Voyage* and the Symphony No. 1 (1942, rev. 1954) and the *Elegy* for cello and piano (1943).

The charming settings of poems by Carter’s fellow New Englander Robert Frost date from 1942; the composer’s 1980 orchestration is dedicated to Rosalind Rees and Gregg Smith. Schiff rightly says that these are the closest Carter comes to

the light vocal styles of Copland and Barber. Indeed, the accompaniments, especially in the orchestral versions, beautifully accentuate the nostalgia and sentiment of the poems. "The Line-Gang," in particular, is full of musical evocations of cutting through a forest to make way for telephone and telegraph wires and the awesome technological advances they bring.

Throughout Carter's student years, he took an avid interest in choral music. As a member of the Harvard Glee Club he wrote three important male choruses for the group. During his years as a student in Paris he sang in madrigal groups directed by his teacher Nadia Boulanger and the music scholar Henri Expert. Organizing a madrigal group of his own, he explored the vast literature of vocal music other than that of the French *chanson* which dominated Boulanger's and Expert's interests.

The choral music medium was a natural outlet for a young composer of Carter's particular intellectual and scholarly interests. All of his choral works show a close affinity to the Renaissance approach to vocal composition: the style is linear and contrapuntal and features strikingly imaginative word-painting textures. This is eminently singable music, full of rich harmonies and opulent choral sonorities. In addition, Carter's acute rhythmic sense permeates each work, providing not only a wonderful propulsiveness to the music but also a profusion of pregnant motifs for word coloring.

Tarantella (Latin text by Ovid translated by the composer), which dates from 1936, is Carter's earliest choral composition, although it was not published until 1981. A celebration of spring, which is personified by the Roman goddess, Flora, it has the rhythmic propulsion that is Carter's trademark, and the tempo never flags from beginning to end. Also notable is the exciting four-hand piano writing that interweaves with the chorus on an equal basis.

Emblems (text by Allen Tate) is the most stylistically advanced of Carter's choral works and according to the composer, his most important. Although composed in 1947, it had to wait for its first complete concert performance until 1980, when it was given by the Gregg Smith Singers. The most unusual section is the first, sung entirely *a cappella*, which contrasts very bare with very dense textures. In the complex but beautiful second movement, which employs a solo piano part, Carter leaves behind the neoclassicism of his early manner to reveal new aspects of his style. The third movement is fast, rhythmic and primarily choral. The final page, in a return to *a cappella* writing, is rich and pungent, containing make chorus sonority at its best.

The Harmony of Morning (text by Mark Van Doren), commissioned by Temple Emmanuel for its 100th anniversary, was written for women's chorus and chamber orchestra (strings, winds and piano). It is a joyful, ebullient work full of exciting rhythms and colorful choral and orchestral writing. The work has three main sections: The first, which was suggested to Carter by a work of medieval composer Guillaume de Machaut, consists of rapid orchestral passages underlying the lovely sustained lines of the women's chorus. The second section is a short, primarily choral, interlude. The third combines chorus and orchestra in fugal textures punctuated by repeated forte-pianos which, in response to the text, create brilliant "bell" effects.

The three *a cappella* pieces *Heart Not So Heavy As Mine* (text by Emily Dickinson), *Musicians Wrestle Everywhere* (text by Emily Dickinson), and *To Music* (text by Robert Herrick), though Carter's only works for mixed chorus, are superior examples of twentieth-century choral music. With their lyrical

counterpoint, rich textures and exemplary texts, they remain model works of their kind.

Heart Not So Heavy As Mine is a clear A-B-A form. The slower first and third sections explore crescendos and diminuendos in beautiful passages of word painting. In contrast, the texture of the middle section, in conformity with the text, is full of accents and staccatos. The return to section "A" has a structure often found in Carter's music, a superimposing of the second theme on the first.

Musicians Wrestle Everywhere is a five-part chorus consisting of a constant flow of turbulent polyphony full of syncopations and accents. Particularly ingenious and dramatic is the ending, in which the men's voices suddenly stop in high range, leaving the women's voices suspended on a middle C major triad.

To Music is a major achievement in the repertory of American *a cappella* choral music. It features Carter's characteristically rich counterpoint as well as some of his most sonorous harmonic writing. Although in general a through-composed work, six distinct sections that vary with the text can be discerned: 1. *Charm Me Asleep, and melt me so...*, 2. *Ease my sick head, and make my bed...*, 3. *Thou sweetly cans't convert the same from a consuming fire...*, 4. *Then make me weep my paines asleep...*, 5. *Fall on me like a silent dew...*, 6. *That having ease me given...* The final section, with the soprano solo, shows Carter's ability, due to his marvelous ear for the medium, to create sumptuous choral sounds.

The Defense of Corinth (text by Rabelais translated by the composer) is a misleading title for what is essentially a humorous work that develops into a tour de force of rhythmic word-play. Using a narrator, this Rabelaisian story is set in ancient times when the city of Corinth was under siege. As the city makes preparations for its defense, the old philosopher Diogenes "prepares" in his own very eccentric fashion. To describe Diogenes's "preparations" Carter has composed a series of rhythmic word games that become increasingly complex musically for both the four-hand piano team and the men's chorus.

—Notes by Gregg Smith and Joseph R. Dalton

—Song Notes by Elliott Carter

Elliott Carter (b 1908, New York City) is one of America's leading composers. His awards and honors are the highest a composer can receive: two Pulitzer Prizes, honorary degrees from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Cambridge (England) universities; membership in both the American Academy and the Institute of Arts and Letters (with a gold medal for Eminence in Music awarded by Aaron Copland who called Carter "one of America's most distinguished artists in any field"); the Akademie der Künste in Berlin; an honorary membership in the Academia di Santa Cecilia in Rome; and the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize (1985) previously awarded to composers Benjamin Britten, Olivier Messiaen, and Pierre Boulez and many eminent performers. He was the first composer to receive the National Medal of Arts awarded by the President of the United States of America (1985) and was made a Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the Order of Merit of the Republic of Italy (1991).

Carter's works have been celebrated by music festivals worldwide, and he has received commissions from the New York Philharmonic, the San Francisco, the Chicago, and BBC orchestras; the Juilliard String Quartet, the Ensemble InterContemporain, the Fromm and Paul Sacher foundations (among others).

He writes:

"I am told that the line of continuity of my works is very definite, each deriving from the previous one with little apparent relations to the various musical trends that have come and gone during the past forty years. The initial influence may have been the constructivism prevalent in American Music in the '20s and '30s somewhat related to Scriabin, Roslavetz, and the Schoenberg school. Ives, Varèse, Ruggles and Ruth Crawford all had certain tendencies in that directions as did Copland and Sessions.

"In fact, I was very much attracted to the avant-garde in the '20s and '30s with its interest in randomness, its collages, its fun and games with audiences and its artistic paradoxes, and have felt that this cause was effectively presented then and did not need to be repeated again. The next step had to be taken and this is what I have tried to do in so far as my work can be said to adopt any aesthetic position, for I have been more concerned with writing the works than in demonstrating aesthetic notions."

The very name **Gregg Smith** connotes the finest tradition of American choral music. For more than thirty years the Gregg Smith Singers have made an impressively wide range of contributions to American music. They are primarily known

for their performances and recordings of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Ives—for the latter they were awarded two of their three Grammys. The Singers have recorded over 100 albums and toured nationally and internationally. As a conductor and teacher Gregg Smith has fostered and encouraged the work of numerous American composers and, indeed, an entire generation of American choral directors.

Rosalind Rees is known and admired by musicians for her wide range of repertoire and astonishing virtuosity. She is considered a "composer's singer" with many premieres and dedications from such luminaries as William Schuman, Ned Rorem, and yes, Elliott Carter. In addition to her activity with the Gregg Smith Singers (she is wife of conductor-composer, Gregg Smith) Rosalind Rees has made solo appearances with the Boston Symphony, Detroit Symphony, National Symphony, and St. Paul Chamber orchestras. She is featured in the 1992 Musicmaster release of *Stravinsky, the Composer, Volume II* as soprano soloist in *Les Noces* and in October 1993, Premier Recordings will be releasing *Hearing -332 Songs of Ned Rorem* with Ms. Rees accompanied by Mr. Rorem at the piano.

Production Notes

Producer, Gregg Smith.

Recording Engineer, David Hancock.

Warble for Lilac-Time (1943) recorded July 20, 1982; *Voyage* (1945) recorded July 18, 1982; *Three Poems of Robert Frost* (1942). Recorded August 3-4, 1982, St. Agnes Catholic Church, Lake Placid, N.Y. *Tarantella* (1936) recorded May 1982; *Emblems* (1947) recorded May 1982, Central Islip High School auditorium, Islip, NY. *The Harmony of Morning* ((1944) recorded Spring 1976, Whitman Hall, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY. *Heart Not So Heavy as Mine* (1938), *Musicians Wrestle Everywhere* (1945), and *To Music* (1937) recorded 1983, Episcopal Church of the Holy Trinity, New York City. *The Defense of Corinth* (1941) recorded Spring 1975 at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York City

Warble For Lilac-Time and *To Music* published by Peer International Corporation. *Voyage*, *Three Poems of Robert Frost*, *Tarantella*, *The Harmony of Morning*, and *Heart Not So Heavy As Mine* published by Associated Music Publishers. *Emblems*, *Musicians Wrestle Everywhere*, and *The Defense of Corinth* published by Merion Music, Inc. c/o Theodore Presser Company. All works BMI.

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