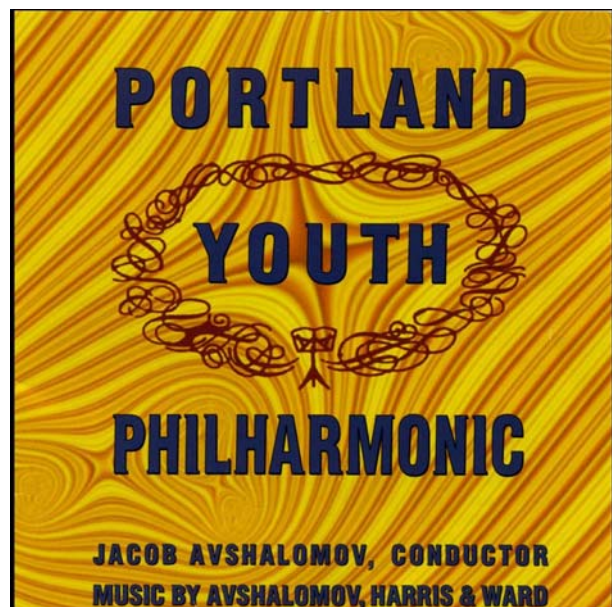


NWCR664

Portland Youth Philharmonic

Jacob Avshalomov, conductor

Music by Avshalomov, Harris, and Ward



Avshalomov:

- Phases of The Great Land* (1958) (15:33)
1. I. The Long Night; Klondike Fever (8:26)
 2. II. The Summer Days; Anchorage Aloft ... (7:03)

Harris:

3. *Elegy and Dance* (1958) (9:46)

Ward:

- Divertimento for Orchestra* (1961) (18:01)
4. I. Fanfare and Allegro (4:45)
 5. II. Intermezzo (5:37)
 6. III. Finale: Vivace (7:31)
- Portland Youth Philharmonic; Jacob Avshalomov, conductor

Avshalomov:

7. *Cantata: How Long Oh Lord* (14:45)
- Neil Wilson, baritone; Portland Symphonic Choir,
Frank Holman, director

Total playing time: 58:30

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Notes

Oregon's Portland Youth Philharmonic is America's first youth orchestra, founded in 1924 and celebrating its seventieth anniversary in the 1993-94 season. A decade ago, a highlight of its sixtieth anniversary was the joint concert given with the New York Philharmonic and Leonard Bernstein en route to a European tour. In 1992, the orchestra toured in Japan and Korea. In June 1994, it will make its sixth international tour to Germany to play at major venues in Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Augsburg, Munich, and Berlin.

The orchestra has more than one hundred players, ages twelve to twenty-two. Another one hundred are trained in the Preparatory Orchestra. Six concerts are given each season for adults and children in Portland's major halls with audiences ranging from 1,500 to 2,700. In addition, the Orchestra does "run-out" concerts and joins hands with students at schools and colleges in the region.

The Portland Youth Philharmonic Association maintains a scholarship program for lessons during the season and for study at prestigious summer music programs. An annual scholarship to Tanglewood, the Berkshire Music Center, has been ongoing for forty years. The Orchestra also holds a competition for piano soloists and collaborates with choruses, dance groups, art students, language classes, and other educational and civic groups.

In its seventy year history, the Orchestra has had only two conductors: its founder Jacques Gershkovitch, and Jacob Avshalomov, who conducts his fortieth anniversary concert this season. Avshalomov has written two books that give detailed accounts of the Orchestra's work and

accomplishments: *Music Is Where You Make It* and *The Concerts Reviewed*.

An important and ongoing aspect of the Orchestra's activities has been the commissioning, premiering, and recording of new works. The Orchestra had a special relationship with the late Ernest Bloch, a long-time Oregon resident, and it continues to perform works by David Diamond, Roy Harris, Benjamin Lees, William Bergsma, and Robert Ward. The works have been recorded for CRI.

This is CRI's second CD reissue of the Orchestra's performances of American music. Two of the Rockefeller commissions are contained herein, the Harris and Ward, along with two works by Jacob Avshalomov. The other Rockefeller commissions by Bergsma, Diamond, and Lees, along with two works by Bloch, were reissued in 1992 on CD 634.

This CD is dedicated to the memory of Ruth Saunders Leupold, who was the assistant concertmaster in the original Orchestra of 1924, and whose heirs have funded this recording.

Jacob Avshalomov was born in 1919 in Tsingtao, China, of an American mother and a Siberian father, the composer Aaron Avshalomov. The young Avshalomov received early musical instruction from his father, and he was educated at American and British schools in China before working in factories in Tientsin, Shanghai, and Peiping. In 1937, he returned to the United States with his mother. He subsequently studied in Los Angeles with Ernst Toch, and spent two years in Portland, Oregon, at Reed College in the Junior Symphony (now the Portland Youth Philharmonic),

studying with the conductor Gershkovitch. He subsequently studied composition and orchestration at the Eastman School of Music with Bernard Rogers.

During World War II, an assignment at the China desk of the O.S.S. in Washington brought Avshalomov into contact with another Chinese born American composer, Vladimir Ussachevsky. Following the war, Avshalomov received an Alice M. Ditson Fellowship and joined the music faculty of Columbia University where he taught from 1946 to 1954. While at Columbia, he conducted the American premieres of Bruckner's *Mass in D* and Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*.

Among his awards and honors, Avshalomov received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1951 and the New York Critics Circle award in 1953 for his choral work *Tom o' Bedlam*. He wrote the symphony *The Oregon* in 1959 on a commission for the state's centennial. Avshalomov's orchestral work, *The Taking of Tung Kuan* and a choral work, *Prophecy*, are available on CD 667.

Avshalomov wrote the following note for this recording's original release: "*Phases of the Great Land* had its beginnings in the spring of 1958 when Robert Shaw asked me if I would write an orchestral work for the Anchorage Festival of Music, of which he was the director. I was happy to comply, and began at once to consider what might make a piece related to Alaska. I read extensively in journals and history, and talked at length with people who had been there. But the person whose boundless enthusiasm for Alaska really conveyed its contemporary spirit to me was my friend Ivan Bloch, an industrial consultant and man of imagination, who happens to be the son of the late composer Ernest Bloch.

"As I sifted the impressions I had accumulated, certain aspects of the country stood out: The rotation of night into day was not only a daily manifestation but also seasonal—it seemed to me that no one could live in the North without being affected by this. Then, of the American past, the gold rushes seemed important, bringing people in, and generally establishing contact with the outside world. Now, in the heightened activity of development throughout Alaska, the pace is set by Anchorage. And, as a point on the transpolar air route, the settlement that grew around an anchorage for seagoing vessels now serves the same function for vessels of the air. Of these elements I fashioned my work. When I learned that Ala-aska meant 'great land' in Aleut, I had my title.

"The first movement, *The Long Night*, is a three-part form, in which the first part projects stillness, quiet, darkness, and loneliness, followed by a musical image of polar lights. The human element appears with a mandolin playing 'Sweet Betsy from Pike' and thereupon we stumble into a saloon going full blast in the roaring 1890s. This forms the second part of the movement, and is made of a polytonal web whose strands are three of the best-known waltzes of the period: 'Casey Would Dance with the Strawberry Blonde,' 'After the Ball is Over,' and 'She's Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage.' Fragments of each appear in the first, then they go two, or more, at a time, and just as they seem to be getting into the home stretch, a Temperance Band tries to drown them out with 'Sign Tonight.' The ensuing commotion finds us tossed out on our ringing ear. And as we pass by the lone mandolin tune again we are conscious only of the Night.

"In the second movement, *The Summer Days (Anchorage Aloft)*, the ideas are not so explicit; but there are sounds of takeoff and sensation of flight at the lofty anchorage, and a resolute bustle of activity. The feeling of the Summer Days is evident in the warm sounds of the brasses and in a bucolic

rondel, 'Now welcom somer with thy sonne softe.' These are all fused into a warm, positive, lofty feeling, yearning forward, just as the first movement regarded the past.

"I conducted the premiere of *Phases of the Great Land* in Anchorage in 1958 and the following season with the Portland Junior Symphony."

Roy Harris (1898-1979) was born and raised on a farm in Oklahoma. He studied in California at Berkeley and UCLA, and privately with Arthur Farwell. At the MacDowell Colony in 1926, he met Copland, who encouraged him to study with Boulanger. Harris subsequently worked under her tutelage from 1927 to 1929. Harris's first national recognition came through Koussevitzky, who premiered his Symphony No. 1. He went on to write thirteen symphonies, the most popular being No. 3, and the last of which was written for the American bicentennial in 1976. On account of his large catalogue of works for orchestra, band, chamber, and vocal ensembles, and because of his numerous teaching positions at universities across the country, Harris became an important figure in the establishment of an American music. He wrote the following note for the first recording of *Elegy and Dance*:

"When I was invited to write a work especially for the Portland Junior Symphony, I accepted with great anticipation and some apprehension. The youth of today are so gifted and knowing in the world of music. They expect miracles because they have lived with miracles of the past: the best works of the greatest composers of the last 300 years from all of Europe.

"A satisfactory work would have to meet these standards of clear expression and yet belong to our time, our people, our youth.

"With these thoughts guiding me I decided to remember the days of my late teens. What was I like, what did I do, what were my expectations? To my great surprise and pleasure I found that I was quite similar to my own children (we have five). Forty years ago and today the youth live in a shining world of expectations: Idealism is as high as the life which surrounds them will permit.

"We did live then and do live now in two worlds, a dream world—and an action world. So I decided to write 'dream' music and 'action' music: *Reverie and Dance*. (The *Reverie* has been re-titled *Elegy*.) In both there are folk-like songs, traditional and original, which my own family sing and love. In the *Dance* there are fast contemporary dance rhythms. Perhaps I should add that the harmony is consonant rather than dissonant; but it is a modern sense of consonance, seeking for bright, clear color."

Robert Ward was born in 1917 in Cleveland, Ohio. He attended the Eastman School of Music and majored in composition under Bernard Rogers and Howard Hanson. Later, at the Juilliard School, he studied composition with Frederick Jacobi and conducting with Albert Stoessel and Edgar Schenkman. He also worked with Aaron Copland at the Berkshire Music Center. Ward has held a number of important positions as a music educator and administrator, including music director of the Third Street Music School Settlement in New York, and President of the American Composers Alliance. Ward's most widely performed work is the opera *The Crucible* which won the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Music Critic's Circle Award in 1962. He has written five other operas and over a dozen orchestral works.

Ward wrote the following note on his *Divertimento*: "When I came to decide on a title for the music I had already written for the Portland Junior Symphony, it occurred to me that 'Divertimento,' as used by the composers of the classical

period, was precisely right. Actually, the structure and overall plan of my piece is very similar to that of the conventional three-movement symphony, except that it is rather lighter in mood and less extended in form than is characteristic of the symphony. I also tried to incorporate some of the performance problems, which are an enjoyable challenge to the younger player. I was fully aware that the asymmetrical rhythmic structure of the last movement might present some problems at initial rehearsals, but I am convinced that these are the kind of rhythms which young Americans feel deeply and instinctively. The dance is not far off in any of the movements.

“The allegro that follows the opening fanfare is a condensed sonata form. The second movement is an extended three-part form, and the finale a scherzo, but again in sonata form with,

more lyric second theme serving as a trio. The work has no extra-musical connotations for me. I but hope that all performers and listeners will find it diverting.”

Jacob Avshalomov’s cantata, “*How Long, O Lord . . .*” was composed in 1948 and dedicated to Aaron Avshalomov, with Biblical texts drawn from Isaiah, Habakkuk, and the Psalms. Both the text and the music unmistakably reflect the aftermath of war and the hope for enduring peace. The composer observes: “The flavor of the music is Eastern, perhaps as close to that of Bloch as it is to that of Aaron Avshalomov.” The Columbia University Chorus and Orchestra first performed the piece in 1951 under the composer’s direction. A baritone in this recording sings the solo part, instead of the contralto designated in the score.

Production Notes

Jacob Avshalomov (BMI):

Phases of the Great Land – American Composers Alliance, NYC, recorded at the Oriental Theater, Portland, OR.

Roy Harris (BMI):

Elegy and Dance – Associated Music Publishers, NYC.

Robert Ward (BMI):

Divertimento for Orchestra – Highgate Press, NYC. Recorded at Civic Auditorium, Portland, OR.

Jacob Avshalomov (BMI):

How Long, O Lord . . ., recorded at Northwest Recording Studios, Portland, OR, May 1966. Published E.B. Marks Music Company, NYC.