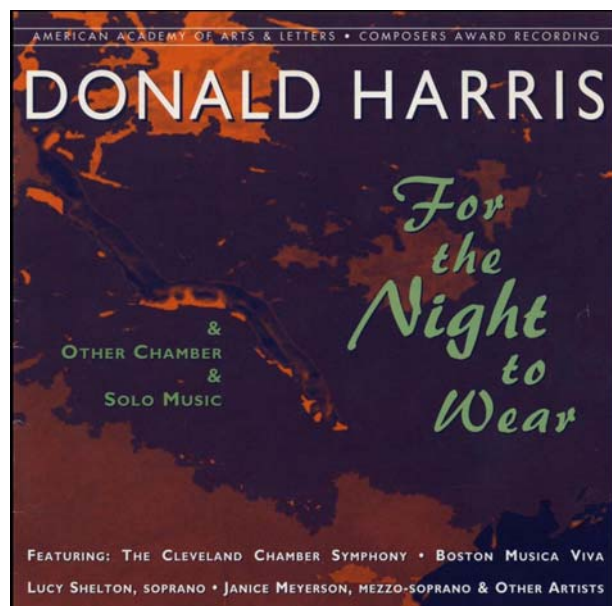


NWCR666

Donald Harris



1. *Mermaid Variations* (1992) (10:13)
Cleveland Chamber Symphony;
Edwin London, conductor
2. *For The Night To Wear* (1977) (7:02)
(text by Hortense Flexner)
Janice Meyerson, mezzo-soprano; Boston Musica Viva, Richard Pittman, conductor; Renée Krimsler, flute and alto flute; William Wrzesien, clarinet and alto clarinet; Robert Annis, bass clarinet, Nancy Cirillo, violin and viola; Mary Ruth Ray, viola; Ron Lowry, cello, Hugh Hinton, piano
3. *Balladen* (1979) (8:45)
Veronica Jochum, piano

4. *Of Hartford In A Purple Light* (1979) (5:42)
(text by Wallace Stevens) Susan Davenny Wyner, soprano; Yehudi Wyner, piano
5. *Les Mains* (1983) (4:52)
(text by Marguerite Yourcenar) Janice Meyerson, mezzo-soprano; Hugh Hinton, piano
- Pierrot Lieder* (1988) (8:34)
Text by Albert Giraud. German Translation: Otto Erich Hartleben
6. I. Der Koch
7. II. Nordpohlfahrt
8. III. Selbstmord
Lucy Shelton, soprano; The Ohio State University Faculty Ensemble. Craig Kirchhoff, conductor; Kathryn Borst Jones, flute and alto flute; Dan Lochrie, clarinet and bass clarinet; Michael Davis, violin and viola; William Conable, cello; Rosemary Platt, piano
9. String Quartet (1965) (9:28)
Composers String Quartet: Matthew Raimondi, Anahid Ajemian, violins; Jean Dupouy, viola; Michael Rudiakov, cello
10. Fantasy for Violin and Piano (1957) (7:17)
Paul Zukofsky, violin; Gilbert Kalish, piano
11. *Ludus* (1966) (8:21)
St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Sydney Hodkinson, conductor

Total playing time: 51:09

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Notes

Donald Harris: *For the Night to Wear* (and Other Chamber and Solo Music)

I have always been absorbed by the relationship of literature to music, or by extension, the incorporation of concepts and themes borrowed from the non-musical world of ideas. But it became a fixation as I worked on *For the Night to Wear*, my first completed work for voice, which, as it turns out, was pivotal to the evolution of my compositional process as a whole. Thus, it is not coincidental that it has been chosen as the title of this CD.

It seems to me that what links all of my ensuing pieces together are literary or extra-musical undertones of some sort or other, or, as in the case of a purely instrumental work, *Balladen*, a reference to other composers, a musical interrelationship with extra-musical imitations of its own. I am hesitant to discuss these relationships in greater depth out of fear they would draw attention away from the fact that in the main they are unifying elements of secondary importance.

They are, nonetheless, explicit enough to contribute more than passing relevance to the meaning and intent of each piece.

The nine compositions on this CD represent a cross-section of my work for solo instruments, voice, and chamber ensemble, spanning a period of nearly four decades, roughly divided between instrumental and vocal music. The first, *Mermaid Variations*, was completed in 1992; the last three, *Fantasy for Violin and Piano* (1957), all date from my formative years. In between are three works from the late seventies, *For the Night to Wear*, *Balladen*, *Of Hartford in a Purple Light*, followed by two from the eighties, *Les Mains* and *Pierrot Lieder*.

What they have in common, I think, is that all are soloistic, brief or compact, and structurally condensed while harmonically and rhythmically complex. Only one is twelve-tone or serial, the earliest, the *Fantasy for Violin*, but understandably so since it dates from the 1950s, when most young composers were experimenting with these and other techniques that required pre-compositional thought.

This one exception notwithstanding, my customary *modus operandi* is intuitive. There are no sketches for any of my works, nor are there preconceived structural plans. Each was composed from beginning to end, one measure or phrase leading to another, with only my inner ear as a guide. My intent consistently has been to be expressive without the constraint of formal or structural rigidity. And just as there has been no systematic attempt to use pre-compositional techniques, there also has been no conscious attempt to avoid tonality, in spite of the heavy reliance on chromaticism, avoidance of octave doublings, and the use of freely derived twelve-tone harmonic rhythm, that could lead the listener to think otherwise. On the contrary, the basic underlying structure of my music is still secured by its dependence on harmonic (or tonal) interrelationships that dictate its ebb and flow.

Mermaid Variations was composed during the summer of 1992 during two residencies at Yaddo, in June-July, and again in September. The title refers to an opera, *The Little Mermaid*, based on an adaptation of the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale by the recently deceased French author Marguerite Yourcenar, on which I have been working on and off since 1985. Nearly complete, I didn't want to interrupt its composition by the introduction of materials extraneous to the creative thought process of the larger composition. Hence I deliberately used materials from the third act, on which I am presently working, as the basis for variations, sometimes playful, at other times contemplative or even stately, on harmonies and textures that might be called upon for later instrumental or vocal development in the opera.

Nonetheless, the piece stands alone. It is not part of a work in progress, but an extension of that work into the realm of the chamber orchestra. Commissioned by the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, music director, with partial funding provided by the Ohio Arts Council's New Works Program, *Mermaid Variations* is a brief, lyric excursion from the full-bodied richness of the dramatic stage to the more intimate world of the chamber orchestra and solo instruments. It was first performed at the Wexner Center for the Arts at the Ohio State University on February 28, 1993.

The French-American author and poet, Marguerite Yourcenar, whose play, *The Little Mermaid* was adapted to serve as the libretto for my opera, has played an important role in my life. Three works on this CD owe something to her presence. *For the Night to Wear* was written by Hortense Flexner, a little known but rather remarkable poet who spent her later years on Sutton Island, off the coast of Bar Harbor, Maine, where she met Yourcenar, who lived in nearby Northeast Harbor. Yourcenar introduced me to Flexner's poetry and translated a collection of her poems into French including, *For the Night to Wear*, which was published in Paris in a bilingual edition.

For the Night to Wear is divided into two sections, each corresponding to the two stanzas of the poem. The first and longest is slow, the second, shorter and faster, emphasizing the somewhat disproportionate structure of the poem. At the beginning, the voice is accompanied by two violas, cello, alto flute, alto clarinet, and bass clarinet—a dark and somber color, particularly when joined to the naturally dark timbre of the mezzo-soprano voice. By the beginning of the second stanza, this texture gradually gives way to a brighter, more agitated atmosphere. The signal is given by the first entrance of the piano at approximately the work's midpoint. From here on, the instrumentation begins to change, alto flute to flute, alto clarinet to clarinet, and first viola to violin, which produces a change of register as well. Shortly before the conclusion of the text (“Orion's belt, hung in the stripped

beech”) a short passage is marked “homage to Charles Ives.” The thought only occurred when I observed that the voice and piano were playing in different rhythmic and metric patterns, somewhat akin to Ives. There is no direct musical citation, but it did seem that the reference might implicitly underline the angular images of the poem and its description of a shifting New England winter landscape.

For the Night to Wear was commissioned in 1977 by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation, and first performed at the Coolidge Auditorium in the Library of Congress on February 3, 1978, by the Boston Musica Viva, Richard Pittman, conductor, and Beverly Morgan, mezzo-soprano.

If there is no direct musical citation in *For the Night to Wear*, quite the opposite takes place in *Balladen*. Completed in 1979 and conceived as a romantic, virtuoso composition for solo piano, the Ballade form, dear to Chopin and Brahms, served as an inspirational and associative model. The composition freely transforms into my own stylistic idiom much of the thematic and harmonic material of Chopin's G-Minor Ballade and the Brahms Ballade, Opus 10, No.1. Only occasional glimpses of each will become apparent to the listener. The intention was one of homage rather than pastiche, assimilation as opposed to quotation. In one sense, *Balladen* is a meditation on three Ballades, my own in addition to those of Chopin and Brahms, thus the plural form of the title. Commissioned by the Goethe Institute of Boston, *Balladen* was premiered at Real Art Ways, Hartford, on December 14, 1980, by Veronica Jochum, to whom it is dedicated.

In a preface to the score of *Balladen* appear two quotations that symbolize, I think, the way in which my musical thought has been transformed by literary or non-musical ideas: the first from Paul Valéry, “*Est-il art plus tendre que cette lenteur?*” The second from *Notes on Chopin* of André Gide, “How charming Albert was yesterday when he cried out, ‘I'd give all of Beethoven's symphonies, yes, you heard me, all the symphonies for a single Ballade of Chopin.’” Both are suggestive of the extent to which I have gone to avoid conventional or preconceived compositional plans in favor of a spontaneous, *sui generis*, and quasi-improvisational unfolding of musical elements, a technique more akin to poetry than to prose and one good reason why I became so attracted to the setting of text. The selections that follow are representative examples of this approach.

Of Hartford in a Purple Light was commissioned by the Connecticut Public Radio for the centennial of Wallace Stevens. It was broadcast over Connecticut Public Radio on October 2, 1979, the poet's one-hundredth birthday. The performers were Susan Davenny Wyner and her husband, pianist-composer Yehudi Wyner. The performance was part of a documentary, *The Poet with the Blue Guitar*, devoted to Stevens's life and work, narrated by Estelle Parsons and Alexander Scourby, and written by Jordan Pecile. This recording is from the original tape used in the radio documentary. *The Poet with the Blue Guitar* was awarded a 1981 Ohio State Award in public broadcasting. Its success led to a second radio project of Marguerite Yourcenar's prose poem, *Fires*, which in turn led to the composition of another song, *Les Mains*. Yourcenar was involved with the radio project from its inception. She adapted the text for my song; she contributed a lengthy spoken interview (one of the few she ever gave in the English language) to preface the broadcast and set the tone; and she approved the translation of the script.

Fires was first broadcast on May 9, 1983. Yourcenar's poetry was read by Anne Baxter, Dina Merrill, Mildred Dunnock,

Linda McGuire, and Lisa Baines, in translation by Dori Katz. *Les Mains* was sung by the mezzo-soprano Mignon Dunn, to whom it is dedicated.

I can't imagine two songs that contrast more than *Of Hartford in Purple Light* and *Les Mains*. Each was written with the sound of a particular voice in mind, but then again it was the choice of text that dictated the quality of voice. *Of Hartford* was conceived for the high, bright, soprano voice of Susan Davenny Wyner, *Les Mains* for the rich, deeper timbre of Mignon Dunn. The Stevens, so fanciful, colorful, and dazzling, seemed to call out for the extended range of the operatic soprano to reflect the range and variety of its graphic, enigmatic images; the Yourcenar, sullen, fatalistic, and obsessed by death, could only have been sung by a low voice that matched the depth of sorrow and pain of its brooding subject matter.

Pierrot Lieder, for soprano and chamber ensemble, lies somewhere in between these two extremes—it is also somewhat more restrained and limited in vocal range. In February 1988, I was asked by Leonard Stein, then director of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute, to join a group of some sixteen other composers in the "Pierrot Project." We were asked to set the remaining twenty-nine poems in the collection, *Pierrot Lunaire: Rondels Bergamasques* by the Belgian poet, Albert Giraud, first published in 1884, from which Schoenberg had selected the twenty-one poems in his own composition, *Pierrot lunaire*, of 1912. Schoenberg had used the 1893 German translation of Otto Erich Hartleben. All participating composers in the project used the same. In addition we were confined to the original Pierrot instrumentation (flute-piccorno, clarinet-bass clarinet, violin-violata, cello, piano), and had the option to use *sprechgesang*, as in the original, if we were so inclined. I was not.

The three poems from the collection that I chose to set were "Der Koch" (The Chef), "Nordpolfahrt" (Arctic Trip), and "Selbstmord" (Suicide), all three intended to be performed as a short cycle. They use the same harmonic and melodic material, and grow one from the other. But there is also a related textural progression, in the sense that the dramatic tension increases with each song. The first is whimsical with a touch of humor; the second announces despair, although not without a touch of whimsy; the third carries despair to its ultimate, tragic solution. The color, white, found in all three poems, binds the cycle together visually in a way suggesting the common harmonic and melodic material that binds them musically.

Pierrot Lieder was composed in the summer of 1988. One of the songs, "Der Koch," was premiered on November 7, 1988 at the Los Angeles County Museum; the two others at the Arnold Schoenberg Institute in Los Angeles on January 25, 1989. The first complete performance of the three took place on the American Music Festival at Ohio State University on February 5, 1989, with Lucy Shelton, soprano, accompanied by a faculty ensemble, Craig Kirchoff conducting. This recording is taken from that concert performance.

The last three selections on this disc were written during the fifteen-year period, 1954-68, when I resided in Paris. I can listen to each with a sense of detachment today. The rudiments of my mature style are, I believe, in evidence, and I find that there is a feeling of continuity generated in part by the interest in textural variety, rhythmic complexity, and a contrapuntal, soloistic character of which I spoke earlier that continued to develop in later works written in this country in the seventies and eighties.

The String Quartet (1965) was commissioned by Samuel Wechsler for performance at the Festival of Contemporary American Music at Tanglewood. The work is in one movement. It is based upon a juxtaposition of two tempi, wherein I have endeavored to let freely unfold the expressive potential structure in which each instrument is employed both as a solo related only to itself and as part of a heterogeneous whole. It strives through closely related associative uses of materials to bring about a constant renewal of its texture and emotional content. The work is dedicated to Toss Lee and Gretchen Finney.

Ludus (1966) is a chamber concerto for ten instruments and was commissioned by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and premiered by that orchestra on April 2, 1966. "Ludus" is the Latin word for "play." By thus entitling the work, I wished to underline certain musical and personal relationships that are important to the composition as a whole. There are two principal elements: three tempi, all interrelated by a basic metrical common denominator; and many different complexes of regular and irregular note patterns. I strove, through rapid and constant alternation of these two factors, to achieve a variety of moods of varying intensities, reminiscent of the many-faceted and quickly changing attitudes and gestures which characterize the imaginative play of a child. One should not, however, conclude that the thrust of the composition is child's play, but an effort to transform the spontaneity of child's play into a well thought-out and logical musical construction.

While in the process of composing *Ludus*, I learned of the untimely death of Louise Wilkinson, the wife of my high school music teacher, Paul Wilkinson, whose support of my decision to become a composer at a time when I was still unsure about it myself, even today brings back fond memories of his confidence in the wisdom of my choice. Toward the middle of the composition, as an homage to Louise Wilkinson, appears a chorale, "in memoriam."

Fantasy for Violin and Piano was composed in 1956 though it was not actually completed until January 1957. It was premiered by violinist, Maurice Crut and pianist André Terrasse at a concert of the Société Nationale de Musique in Paris on April 11, 1962. I had intended to compose a short piece for the violin of a virtuoso nature. Its structure was to be condensed in spite of the rather free nature of the fantasy form, with the result that there are many juxtapositions of tempi and mood within a short time span. The composition is lyric and romantic in style and, as I said, is one of my first attempts at composition utilizing the twelve-tone system. It is dedicated to Max Deutsch, with whom I was studying at the time.

With but three exceptions, the Fantasy for Violin, the String Quartet, and *Les Mains*, all performances on this CD are by either those artists or ensembles who commissioned each composition or who in some way or other were associated with the first performance. But in every instance, the performers represent an extraordinary collection of musicians and ensembles, each of whom has made a unique and major contribution to the advancement of new music in the United States today. It has been an honor to work with them and to be able to present here their performances of my music.

—Donald Harris

Donald Harris, dean of the College of the Arts at Ohio State University has juggled an academic administrative career with that of a composer for almost thirty years. Prior to joining the faculty at Ohio State, he served successively as chair of the Department of Composition and Theory and dean of the Hartt

School of Music, University of Hartford (1978–1988), and assistant to the president for academic affairs, vice president for academic affairs, and executive vice president of the New England Conservatory (1968–1988). From 1954 to 1968, Harris resided in Paris, France, during which period he was a freelance composer and, for a time (1965–1967), music consultant to the United States Information Service (USIA), where among other activities, he presented the first postwar festival of contemporary American music in France, co-sponsored by Radio France.

A native of St. Paul, Minnesota, Harris was born April 7, 1931. He earned a bachelor's and a master's degree in music composition from the University of Michigan in 1952 and

1954, and was a student of Ross Lee Finney. He furthered his studies at the Berkshire Music Center, and during his early years in Paris studied with Nadia Boulanger and Max Deutsch.

A part-time historian and critic, Harris has written on twentieth-century music in general, but in particular that of Alban Berg. In 1987 he completed a twenty-year project leading to the publication by W. W. Norton & Co. of the correspondence between Berg and Schoenberg, which was awarded a 1989 ASCAP Deems Taylor award. In addition to his other activities, Donald Harris is president-elect of the International Council of Fine Arts Deans.

Production Notes

Produced by Donald Harris

Recording Credits:

Mermaid Variations recorded on March 2, 1993 at Cleveland State University. Recording engineer: James Abbott. Assistant engineer: James Damm. *For the Night to Wear* and *Les Mains* recorded May 29, 1993 at Paine Hall, Harvard University. Recording engineer: Joel Gordon. *Balladen* recorded on January 18, 1993 in Weigel Hall Auditorium of Ohio State University. Recording engineer: Allan Dudek. Assistant engineer: Peter Tender.

Of Hartford in a Purple Light recorded on September 20, 1979 at SUNY-Purchase, Music Division Recital Hall. Recording engineer: Richard Lawson.

Pierrot Lieder recorded live in concert on February 5, 1989 in Weigel Hall Auditorium of Ohio State University. Recording engineer: Eric Evans. String Quartet and Fantasy for Violin and Piano recorded at CAMI Hall on May 12, 1971. Recording engineer: David Hancock.

Ludus recorded at Micside Studios, Minneapolis on May 28, 1971. Recording engineer: Robert Schultz. CD mastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Robert Wolff, engineer at Sony Classical Productions, Inc., New York City.

Publishers:

For the Night to Wear, *Balladen*, *Of Hartford in a Purple Light*, and *Les Mains* published by Theodore Presser Co.

Pierrot Lieder published by Gunmar Publishing Co. String Quartet, *Ludus*, and Fantasy for Violin and Piano published by Jobert, Paris (US agent: Theodore Presser Co.). (ASCAP.)

Special thanks to Peter Tender, The Ohio State University, for the editing of *Mermaid Variations*, *For the Night to Wear*, *Balladen*, *Les Main*, *Pierrot Lieder*, *Of Hartford in a Purple Light*, and for general editorial assistance in the preparation of this recording; Dr. Thomas H. Wells, The Ohio State University, for additional editorial assistance of *Mermaid Variations*.