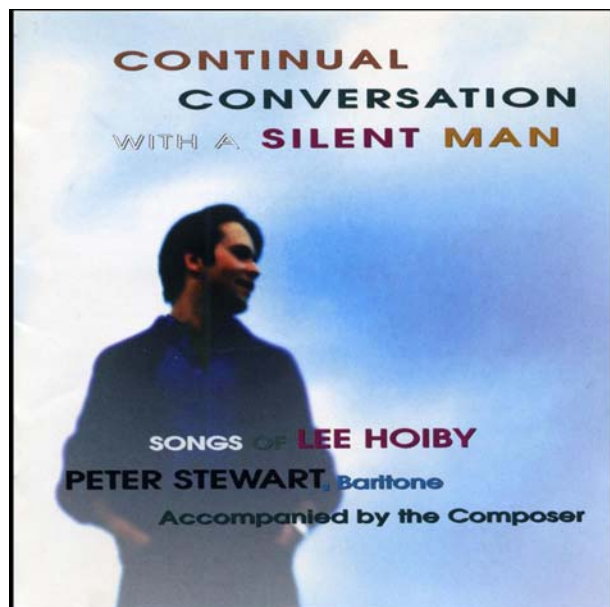


NWCR685

Songs by Lee Hoiby

Continual Conversation with a Silent Man

Peter Stewart, baritone; Accompanied by the composer



3. A Clear Midnight (2:47)
4. O Captain! My Captain! (5:22)
5. Joy, Shipmate, Joy! (1:15)

Two Songs of Innocence (William Blake) (1987)..... (5:25)

6. The Lamb (3:25)
7. The Shepherd (1:56)

8. An Immorality (Ezra Pound) (1952) (1:19)

O Florida (Five Songs on Poems by

Wallace Stevens) (1983) (18:56)

9. Floral Decorations for Bananas (3:19)
10. Gubbinal (1:26)
11. Continual Conversation with a Silent Man (4:31)
12. Before My Door (3:07)
13. O Florida, Venereal Soil (6:25)

14. Why Don't You? (Robert Beers) (1984) (2:39)

15. Night (Anonymous; translated by Alkman) (1952) (1:55)

16. What If... (Samuel Taylor Coleridge) (1986) (2:28)

17. Investiture at Ceccoli's (James Merrill) (1991) .. (5:23)

18. Where the Music Comes From (Lee Hoiby) (1973) (3:08)

I Was There (Five Songs on Poems

by Walt Whitman) (1988)..... (14:48)

1. Beginning My Studies (2:14)
2. I Was There (3:04)

Total playing time: 56:49

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Notes

One of the most intriguing questions that has confronted me as a singer has been, "What kind of music do I really want to sing?" Surely something that sounds so simple must be obvious. But in 1989 I was given the opportunity to commission some songs for my New York recital debut, and choosing a composer was not such an easy decision. I wanted the songs to be serious, in the tradition of *Lieder*, but to speak with a genuine, American voice. Rather than looking for experimental or abstract expressions, I realized I craved a direct, lyrical vocabulary with elements of melody; phrases that were crafted to bring out the beauty of the human voice. Who to choose?

A friend suggested Lee Hoiby. We arranged to meet, and soon, with the help of Mark Shulgasser—who selects most of the texts Lee sets—*I Was There*, the first group of songs represented here, was written.

In the process of his getting to know my voice, we went through much of his music. Finding so many pieces that were previously unrecorded gave me the idea for this project.

This collection spans Lee Hoiby's entire compositional life. "An Immorality" is the first song Lee wrote that has been published; it dates from 1952, along with "Night." These early songs reflect the influence of one of Lee's teachers, Samuel Barber, in the richness of their harmonies and the simplicity of their musical gestures. The two William Blake songs follow this tradition of straightforward phrasing to complement the innocence of the ballads.

Perhaps the most intricate poetry that Lee has set is that of Wallace Stevens. Lee uses the lush and obscure imagery to experiment with more sophisticated techniques: subtle cannons, dance rhythms, a twelve-tone row used as a decorative flourish. "Floral Decorations for Bananas" juxtaposes the two worlds of Stevens's subject matter, using an extravagant tone to introduce the sensuality of the tropics into his prim northern context. "Gubbinal" combines humor with irony in his argument with a "gubbins," a barbarous person. A more introverted mood is found in "Continual Conversation with a Silent Man," which uses the images of ordinary, daily life to reflect on larger questions. "Contrary Theses (1)," here renamed "Before My Door," contrasts impressionistic visions of light and verdure with images of violence and bloodshed. And in "O Florida, Venereal Soil" the words and music vacillate between the everyday and the voluptuous, before finally giving way to an ode to the moon rising over the sea.

Lee turns to a more vernacular, popular idiom for "Why Don't You?," a reference to Diana Vreeland's column for *Harper's*, which offered advice on how to live a stylish life. Robert Beers's camp departure on that form affords Lee the opportunity to write his most playful song.

Coleridge's "What If..." and James Merrill's "Investiture at Ceccoli's" are both dreamscapes, in which Lee uses dark colors and free structures to create ethereal atmospheres. "Investiture" was written as part of the 1991 AIDS Quilt

Songbook project. Lee wrote both the words and music to the final song on this recording, "Where the Music Comes From." It seems fitting to conclude with a piece that best demonstrates the qualities of Lee Hoiby's music that I love the most: simplicity, genuineness, and hope.

—Peter Stewart

Composer **Lee Hoiby** (b Madison, WI, 17 Feb 1926) can be regarded as a modern American Romantic, not of the latest "neo-Romantic" variety but in a continuum with Barber and Menotti. Indeed it was Menotti that Hoiby studied with for four years at the Curtis Institute and who persuaded the Institute to commission Hoiby's first opera, *The Scarf* (1958). Hoiby's penchant for the solo voice and his dramatic flair have been his hallmarks for his entire career. He has written over a dozen stage works including the New York City Opera commission *Natalie Petrovna* (1964), over fifty songs, numerous choral works, and incidental music for over twenty plays. In 1991 Hoiby's *Bon Appetit!*, a light-hearted setting of a chocolate cake recipe by Julia Child, received an extended

off-Broadway run with Jean Stapleton performing as the famous chef. As a pianist, Hoiby made his solo debut in an acclaimed Alice Tully Hall concert in 1978. He has since appeared widely in concert, often accompanying noted singers in performances of his songs and arias. His Piano Concerto was released on CRI in 1968.

Peter Stewart has performed widely in the U.S. and Europe, with such companies as the Santa Fe Opera, the Madeira Bach Festival, and the Mark Morris Dance Company in Brussels. He made his solo recital debut in New York's Alice Tully Hall, where he gave the premiere of a song cycle written for him by Lee Hoiby. Stewart created roles in Robert Wilson's *Medea* and Hans Werner Henze's *We Come to the River*, and the title role in Morris Cotel's *Dreyfus*. He has toured Europe, Japan, and Australia with Philip Glass and Robert Wilson in *Einstein on the Beach*, which was recorded by Nonesuch. Stewart has also made recordings with the early music group Pomerium, and appeared on Toby Twining Music's debut recording for the Catalyst label.

Production Notes

Produced by Marc Aubort and Joanna Nicrenz.

Recorded at Rutgers Church, New York City, on September 13-14, 1993.

Engineering: Elite Recordings, Inc. NYC.

Publishing:

"Beginning My Studies," "I Was There," "A Clear Midnight," "O Captain!, My Captain!," "Joy, Shipmate, Joy!," "The Lamb," "The Shepherd" (G. Schirmer); "An Immorality" (New Directions) (G. Schirmer); "Floral Decorations for Bananas," "Gubbinal," "Continual Conversation with a Silent Man," "Before My Door (Contrary Theses I)," "O Florida, Veneereal Soil" (Alfred A. Knopf) (Rock Valley Music); "Why Don't You?," "Night" (author) (Rock Valley Music); "What If...," "Where the Music Comes From" (author) (G. Schirmer); "Investiture at Ceccoli's" (author) (Boosey & Hawkes).

This recording is lovingly dedicated to the memory of James Tyeska.

Special thanks to Lea Ceria, Joanna Levy, and Chet Biscardi.

This recording is made possible by grants from the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, and generous gifts from the following: Stephen O'Donnell, Joseph McCrindle, Charles Ryskamp, Lily Auchincloss, Alexandra Herzan, Werner Hoeflich, Jeannemarie Osterman, Carl and Barbaralee Spielvogel, Ben and Lois Stewart, Glorious Food, and the Gilman Paper Foundation.