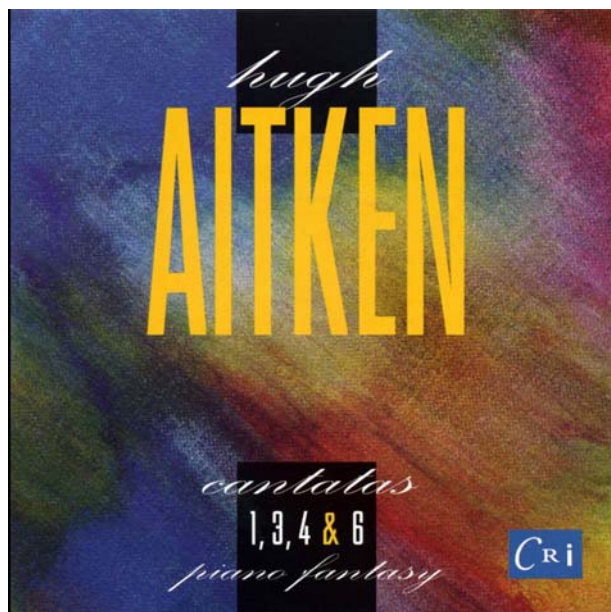


NWCR774

Hugh Aitken

Cantatas 1, 3, 4 & 6; Piano Fantasy



Cantata No. 1 (1958) (9:50)
on Elizabethan texts

1. a) Recitative: Behold! O Man (2:53)
2. b) Song: Pluck the fruit and taste
the pleasure (1:30)
3. c) Recitative: What if a day (1:07)
4. d) Song: Drink today and drown
all sorrow (1:00)
5. e) Aria: Fair is the Rose (2:37)
6. f) Song: Hey nonny no (..... (00:37)

Charles Bressler, tenor; Melvin Kaplan,
oboe; Helen Kwalwasser, violin; Ynez
Lynch, viola; Fortunato Arico, cello

Cantata No. 3: From *This White Island* (1960) (12:26)
on poems by Willis Barnstone

7. 1. For Death will come still too soon (1:29)
8. 2. An Island (2:42)
9. 3. There (1:39)
10. 4. Now (2:39)
11. 5. On this Greek Island (1:58)
12. 6. Atlantic Coast: Afterward (1:59)

Charles Bressler, tenor; Melvin Kaplan,
oboe; Ynez Lynch, viola

Cantata No. 4 (1961) (14:09)
on poems by Antonio Machado

13. Desnuda está la tierra (2:46)
14. Mi bufón (1:22)
15. ¡O tarde luminosa! (2:16)
16. Pegasos, lindos pegasos (1:17)
17. El sol un globo de fuego (2:29)
18. Campo (3:58)

Jean Hakes, soprano; Karl Kraber, flute;
Melvin Kaplan, oboe; Fortunato Arico, cello;
Julius Levine, bass

19. Piano Fantasy (1967) (16:39)
Gary Kirkpatrick, piano

20. Cantata No. 6: *Remembering* (1981) (20:54)
on poems by Rainer Maria Rilke
Jan Opalach, bass-baritone; Ted Taylor, piano

Total playing time: 74:22

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Notes

My first solo cantata originated when Melvin Kaplan asked me to write a work for his New York Chamber Soloists—for tenor and a few instruments. In preparation, I found myself reading *Gather ye rosebuds while ye may*-type poetry, and singing tonal tunes. When sections of the piece seemed to want to be purely tonal, without even the obligatory wrong notes, I decided to let it go its own way. It felt wiser to trust my intuition than to fret about what sort of music one “should” be writing. This music is not parody: I believe we can once again compose more or less in former styles (I say “more or less” because to write entirely in a former style one would have to turn off one’s taste and imagination—that would be doing homework for a theory class, not composing). The past is available to us in ways it has not been before, and we need not fear using it in our own ways. It is not at all that I advocate the use of earlier styles by those who would not find it sympathetic: the world is wide, and many styles are likely to co-exist for some time to come. Surely, however, one of the truly vital things that is happening is this inclusion of earlier

musical styles—whether merely as quotation and collage, or, more significantly, as an integral part of the language.

Nine other cantatas have followed, three of which are included here. *From This White Island* was scored for the core touring-instrumentation of the Chamber Soloists—tenor, oboe, and viola. It was the flavor and feel of Barnstone’s splendid poetry to which I responded with music. In Cantata No. 4, I pay my respects to the strong, stark, Spanish of Antonio Machado.

As for *Piano Fantasy*, although I was not consciously thinking in those terms at the time, I realize now that this work is concerned with greatly-contrasting expressive qualities, such as tense nervousness and utter calm, or almost-bombastic assurance and hesitancy. These are subsumed under, and comprehended by, a formal scheme which, though intuitively arrived at, makes obvious use of traditional gestures and procedures.

The most recent work on this disc is Cantata No. 6 (1981), *Remembering*, which was commissioned by Jan Opalach for the Alice Tully Hall concert that was a part of

his award for winning the Naumburg Vocal Competition. I wrote it with his marvelous voice very much in mind, and found it quite gratifying when dim echoes and memories of German lieder found their way into the music, summoned up, no doubt, by the unavoidably evocative German of Rilke's intense and moving poetry.

—Hugh Aitken

Hugh Aitken (b New York City, 1924) began his musical studies with his grandmother and his father, both of whom were musicians. After studying at New York University for two years, he served during the Second World War as navigator with the Army Air Corps in Italy. In 1946 he entered the Juilliard School, where he studied clarinet with Arthur Christmann, and composition with Vincent Persichetti, Bernard Wagenaar, and Robert Ward. Since graduating in 1950, Aitken has lived and taught in the New York area. From 1960 to 1970 he taught theory and music-literature at the Juilliard School. Several summers were spent in residence at the MacDowell Colony, three on the staff of the Bennington Composers Conference, and two lecturing on new music at the American Academy in Paris.

In 1970 he joined the faculty of William Paterson University

in Wayne, NJ, as chair of the music department, where he revamped the curriculum, and helped design several new degree programs. He also served briefly as associate-dean for fine and performing arts, but resigned all administrative posts after a few years, in order to have more time for composing. He retired from teaching in 1996. Greenwood Press has published his *The Piece As A Whole*, an auxiliary college text which integrates technical and expressive analysis. Devoting most of his time to composing, Aitken lives in Oakland, NJ, and Lancaster, NH, with his wife, Laura Tapia. They have two children and two grandchildren.

Aitken has been commissioned by, among others, the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation at the Library of Congress, the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation, Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony, the Aspen Music Festival, the New York Chamber Symphony, and the duo of Yo-Yo Ma and Emanuel Ax. Among his nearly ninety works are three violin concertos, two operas, a number of orchestral works, and ten solo cantatas, four of which are included on this disc. His publishers are Oxford University Press, Theodore Presser, and ECS Publishers.

Production Notes

Digitally remastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Robert Wolff, engineer at Sony Music Studios, NYC.

Cantata No. 6: Recorded by Adrian Carr at Music Designs Studio, New York City, 1997.

From CRI SD 365: Cantata No. 1, Cantata No. 3, Cantata No. 4, and Piano Fantasy: recorded by Jerry Bruck. Original recording made possible by a grant from the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University.

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