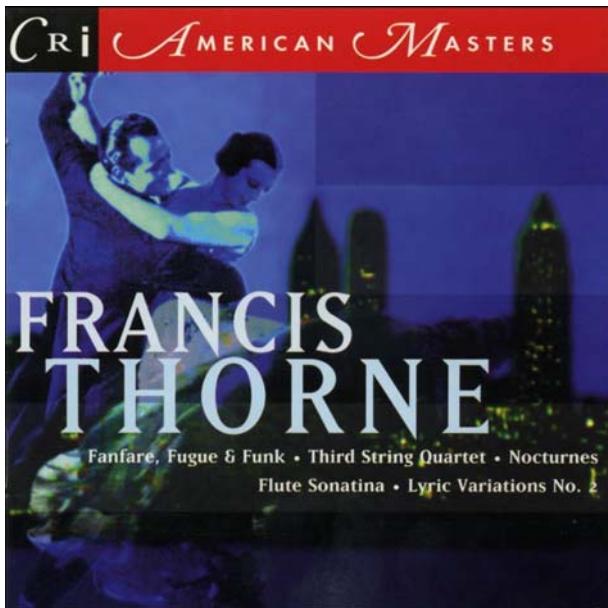


# NWCR828

## Francis Thorne



1. *Fanfare, Fugue and Funk* (1972) ..... (11:25)  
Springfield Symphony Orchestra;  
Robert Gutter, conductor
- String Quartet No. 3 (1975) ..... (20:32)
2. *Adagio cantabile* ..... (7:53)
3. *Scherzo: Allegro leggero* ..... (4:22)

4. *Variations: Adagio cantabile* ..... (8:18)  
The Group for Contemporary Music String Quartet: Benjamin Hudson and Carol Zeavin, violins; Janet Lyman Hill, viola; Jerry Grossman, cello
- Nocturnes* for voice and piano (1962) ..... (12:53)  
Poems by Robert Fitzgerald
5. *Night Song* ..... (2:46)
6. *Song After Campion* ..... (2:51)
7. *Horace I, 25* ..... (3:37)
8. *Before Harvest* ..... (3:38)  
Catherine Rowe, soprano; Francis Thorne, piano
- Sonatina* for solo flute (1962) ..... (7:31)
9. *Allegro con spirito* ..... (2:10)
10. *Adagio* ..... (3:17)
11. *Presto giocoso* ..... (2:05)  
Harvey Sollberger, flute
12. *Lyric Variations No. 2* (1972) ..... (11:35)  
Boehm Quintet: Donald Stewart, clarinet and director; Susan Stewart, flute; Phyllis Bohl, oboe; Joseph Anderer, horn; Richard Vrontney, bassoon; Richard Fitz, percussion

Total playing time: 64:20

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### Notes

Thorne, in the flesh: Hollywood is responsible for many of the composer clichés that continue to plague us. One of the most prevalent is that of The Great Choice: to remain true to one's art, and starve? Or sell out to commercialism, or lust, or greed, and prosper? In the 1946 film *Deception*, composer-cellist Paul Heinreid remains hungry but pure, and gets to play his concerto at the story's climax (actually it's by Korngold), while Bette Davis, living the high life, is damned for having sold out to Claude Rains's musical casting-couch. Nevertheless history is full of examples of great composers whose careers have contradicted this grand Either/Or. Handel was a speculator and investor who made, and occasionally lost, vast fortunes with operatic ventures. The Russian aristocrat-composers, from Glinka to Tchaikovsky, lived prosperous lives despite having defied Daddy's career choice of law or medicine. Charles Ives sold insurance, of all things, and wrote tangled and wonderful music on the train, while commuting to and from the office.

The career of **Francis Thorne**, born in Bay Shore, Long Island, in 1922, has seen a series of choices, shifts, deliberations; yet, there is little question that his own music today is richer for his years as a banker, stockbroker, and music-administrator. Perhaps best known as a founding father of the American Composers Orchestra, Thorne was born to a family filled with financiers and musicians. His maternal grandfather was the scholar Gustav Kobbé, whose *Kobbé's Complete Opera Book* has remained a standard work since its appearance in 1919 (11th ed., 1997). On his father's side were several generations of business savvy—though his father's

ragtime pianism made just as deep an impression on the young Francis, who began playing jazz piano while still in short pants.

Growing up in the midst of one of jazz's golden ages, when Ellington, Armstrong, and Goodman were in their prime, Thorne can hardly be blamed for having spent so much of his youth playing piano. At Yale his musical education took a serious turn, though, as he studied harmony with Richard Donovan, and composition with Paul Hindemith, graduating with a BA in music in 1942. It was Hindemith himself who dealt Thorne his first musical reality-check: he advised him to "enjoy being a composer, but don't try to make a career of it." Meanwhile there was little time to think of career choices—a war was on. During four years of naval duty, Thorne distinguished himself as an excellent commanding officer, first on a sub-chaser, and later on a PC patrol boat. Returning to the States in 1946, he said he was "easily persuaded to follow the family tradition," in order to support a growing family of his own. He remained on Wall Street for nearly a decade, continuing his studies with the composer Alexei Haieff. It was a chance encounter with Duke Ellington, who heard Thorne play at a party in 1955, that turned things around. Ellington was impressed enough to arrange for an engagement at New York's Hickory House, the first of a series of successful club stints.

But Thorne soon tired of what he called the "jazz-New York rat-race," and in 1958 he went with his wife, Ann, and their three daughters, to Florence, where he finally took the plunge and devoted himself to composing. He spent the next six

years as pianist and composer, and eventually as a student of David Diamond, under whose guidance he formulated a highly personal style that fused contrapuntal skill and 12-tone techniques, with jazz notions of sonority and harmony—"top-notch craftsmanship and entertainment," as Diamond later characterized his pupil's progress.

Thorne cites the 1964 performance by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra of his *Elegy for Orchestra* as the real beginning of his career as composer. Returning to the United States that year, he used his business know-how to become one of the most successful arts-administrators that contemporary music has ever seen. Among the influential organizations that he has directed and guided are the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation, the Music Theater Group, the American Composers Alliance, the Thorne Music Fund (which has given fellowships to composers such as Stephan Wolfe, Ben Weber, Lou Harrison), the Manhattan School of Music, the MacDowell Colony, and the League of Composers (ISCM). Since 1976 he has served as president and CEO of the Alliance's celebrated spin-off, the American Composers Orchestra, an ensemble that has truly changed the face of American music.

"You'd never guess that Francis Thorne is a powerhouse," writes musicologist H. Wiley Hitchcock, alluding to Thorne's humble appearance and demeanor, "until you hear him play swing piano and sing Tin Pan Alley classics, or consider his overseeing of the American Composers Orchestra, ...or listen to one or another of his hundred or so concert-music compositions." Among Thorne's official honors are three NEA grants, two MacDowell fellowships, grants from the Ford Foundation, BMI, the American Music Center, Harvard University, and the National Institute of Arts and Letters, as well as commissions from the New York State Council on the Arts (1974), the Group for Contemporary Music (1975 and 1977), and the Concord String Quartet (1977). In 1988 he was elected to membership in the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Currently the septuagenarian's output includes 112 compositions—the most recent of which, at the present writing, is the 1998 *Lyric Variations No. 8* for flute, celesta, and cello—and comprises seven symphonies, sixteen concertos, four string quartets, numerous vocal works, theater works including the ballets *After the Teacups* and *Echoes of Spoon River*, and a chamber opera *Mario and the Magician* (1994). His music features a wide variety of approaches and styles, in which instruments and idioms of jazz and pop are often cast in a framework of gravely serious intent. The works on the present disc, spanning the years 1962 to 1975, reveal many of the essential aspects of Thorne's musical persona.

#### *Fanfare, Fugue and Funk*

Composed in 1972 on commission from the Springfield (MA) Symphony Orchestra, *Fanfare, Fugue and Funk* was first performed by that ensemble in 1973, under Robert Gutter's baton. The tripartite work opens with a jazzy take on the traditional fanfare idea, which is enlivened with peculiar percussive effects, and even a bit of "wawa" on electric guitar. The fugue subject is introduced by the cellos, with tiny, counter-subject-like interpolations. Three solo trumpets ("an attempt to emulate the Duke Ellington brass section," the composer says) interject a bit of the chaos of the fanfare into the fugue's tidy structure, and at the same time foreshadow the *Funk* to come. A huge climax leads to the furious scherzando of the *Funk* section, which moves forward with frantic celerity, and dense scoring. The final climax is punctuated with a police whistle.

#### String Quartet No.3

Thorne's third String Quartet was composed in 1975 and bears a dedication to a life-long friend of the composer Letitia Baldrige (known authority of modern etiquette). Cast in three movements, it opens with an atonal but nonetheless hymn-like *Adagio cantabile*. It erupts, however, into a cavalcade of dazzling contrapuntal devices. The composer's instructions are minutely detailed: pizzicato chords are indicated as to direction (some are plucked upward, some downward), vibrato is encouraged then withheld. A Bartokian spirit imbues the scherzo (*Allegro leggero*), which is marked by complex rhythms (three against four against five, all at once—but precisely!), and a pensive middle section resembling the cantabile spirit of the opening movement. The movement closes with a series of harmonics, and *sul ponticello* effects. The finale (*Adagio cantabile*) is a set of variations on a grand tune that wavers between atonality and tonal pull; it receives a sophisticated contrapuntal treatment, complete with retrogrades and inversions and the like. Each variation takes on an individual mood and character, and the piece ends with a sort of atonal glance in the direction of late Beethoven.

#### *Nocturnes* for voice and piano

The poetry of Robert Fitzgerald provided the inspiration for the *Nocturnes* for voice and piano (1963), specifically four poems published in 1956 in the New Directions volume *In the Rose of Time*. Originally composed for voice and string quartet, then adapted for voice and mixed ensemble, the songs were revised for voice and piano in 1973 and performed that year at the Composers Theater May Festival at New York's New School. *Night Song*, a sort of prayer, shows immediately the composer's fine ear for speech-like vocal line. The *Song after Campion*, with its running left-hand eighth notes, demonstrates special sensitivity to the ends and beginnings of lines of texts. *Horace I*, 25 creates a boozy, bar-room mood, complete with left-hand boogie stride, to convey a sad sentiment about the horrors of becoming old and unloved. *Before Harvest*, delicate and childlike, again displays the composer's knack for declamatory vocalism.

#### Sonatina for solo flute

The composer cites the flute sonatina (1961-62) as the first work he wrote on commission. "I was introduced to Silvano Ciaccheri while standing in the shallow end of a public swimming pool in Florence," Thorne says of the piece, which bears the stamp of the composer's studies with Diamond. "He asked me to write a jazzy solo piece for flute for him to take on a tour of Italy. It is in three short movements: a jazzy *Allegro con spirito*, a lyric *Adagio*, and a breakneck *Presto giocoso*. It is the first piece that I wrote after completing my compositional studies with David Diamond in Florence." The work requires virtuosity and great flexibility of tone and gesture.

#### Lyric variations No. 2

The most challenging and intriguing work on this disc is the *Lyric variations No.2*, composed in 1971-72, as one of a series of similarly titled works for a variety of forces (eight in all). Commissioned by the Group for Contemporary Music, it is cast in a single movement of Weernesque concentration. As in the last movement of the Third String Quartet, here each variation takes on a different tempo, mood, and character. The entire structure (*Adagio-Andantino-Allegro-Lento pensieroso-Allegro con brio-Adagio: con intensità*) converges into a complex final chaos of quick counterpoint, which opens into a light-hearted tarantella and a brief, quiet coda

—Paul J. Horsley

*Night Song*

Anguish and delight are now  
Coiled in darkness on the bough,  
And iron time deflowers spring  
Secretly, the secret thing.  
Mind and body, as they must,  
Invent a terminus to lust,  
Preserving the despair they make...  
Pray the Lord my soul to take.  
When this incontinent despair  
Turns sick with love in sunless air,  
A firmer bed than bed of stone  
Take up my cast of flesh and bone,  
A sharper song than rue or willow  
Weep me dead upon my pillow:  
I who strangled life with sleep...  
Pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
Pray the Lord my soul to keep.

*Song After Campion*

Ravished lute, sing to her virgin ears,  
Soft notes thy strings repeating;  
Plucked harp, whose amorous song she hears,  
Tell her that night is fleeting;  
Night-tide and my distress of love  
O speak, sweet numbers,  
That pity her heart may move before she slumbers.  
Pale moth, that from the moon doth fly,  
Fickle enchantments weaving,  
Night faery, come my lady nigh,  
When the rich masques are leaving;  
Tell her who lieth still alone  
Love is a treasure  
Fair as the frail lute's tone

And perished measure.

*Horace I, 25*

The young men come less often—isn't it so?  
To rap at midnight on your fastened window;  
Much less often. How do you sleep these days?  
There was a time when your door gave with  
proficiency  
On easy hinges; now it seems apter being shut.  
I do not think you hear many lovers moaning  
“Lydia, how can you sleep?”  
“Lydia, the night is so long!”  
“Oh, Lydia, I'm dying for you.”  
No. The time is coming when you will moan,  
And cry to scornful men from an alley corner  
In the dark of the moon when the wind's in a passion  
With lust that would drive a mare wild  
Raging in your ulcerous old viscera.  
You'll be alone and burning then  
To think how happy boys take their delight  
In fresh and tender buds, the blush of myrtle,  
Consigning dry leaves to the winter sea.

*Before Harvest*

Deep and soft and far off over country  
A train whistle is explaining something strange  
To the cool night, so long, sweet, far away.  
In your dark rooms under the elm branches, stir, O  
sleepers in the country towns,  
Auburn, Divernon, Chatham, Jacksonville...  
This is the ebb and weary hour of night.  
Only a child benumbed with dreaming  
Wakes and listens to the visiting rain  
Lick its tongues in the leaves and pass away.

Nocturnes: poems by Robert Fitzgerald (from *In the Rose of Time*, Poems, 1931-1956; published by New Directions Publishing Corporation. ©1956)

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## Production Notes

CD mastered by Robert Wolff, engineer at Sony Music Studios, NYC.

String Quartet No. 3 originally released in 1982 on CRI/SD 479; recorded by David Hancock, New York City, April 1982; produced by Carter Harman; recording made possible by grants from the Contemporary Music Society, and the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University.

*Fanfare Fugue and Funk* originally released in 1974 on Opus One Records/OP19; produced by Max Schubel.

Sonatina for solo flute produced by Mullen Boyd; originally released in 1976 on Serenus Records/SRS12058.

*Nocturnes* produced by J. Tucker Batsford; originally released in 1975 on Serenus Records/SRS12035.

*Lyric Variations No. 2* originally released in 1976 on Serenus Records/SRS12058.

Publishing:

*Fanfare Fugue and Funk*, String Quartet No. 3, and *Lyric Variations No. 2*: Merion Music;

*Nocturnes*: General Music. (BMI)

This compact disc has been made possible through the generous support of Paul Underwood.

CRI Production Manager: Allison Wolf

CRI American Masters

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton