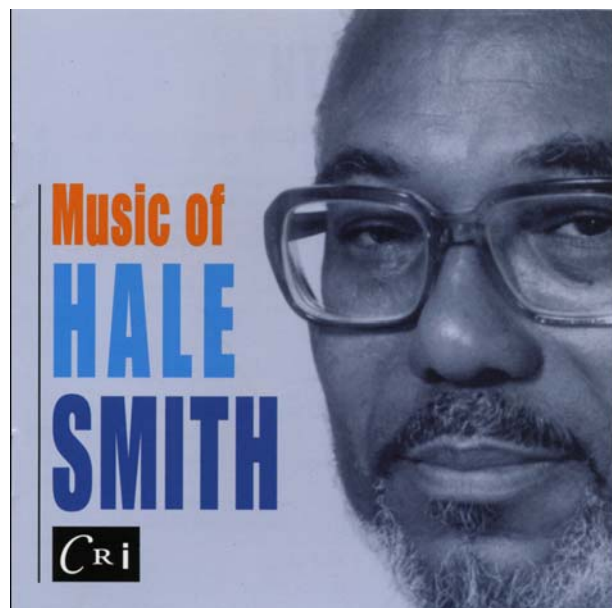


Music of Hale Smith



1. *Dialogues and Commentaries* (1990-91) (12:46)
Boston Musica Viva; Geoffrey Bursleson, piano;
Bayla Keyes, violin; Mary Ruth Ray, viola;
Jan Muller-Szeraws, cello; William Wrzesien,
clarinet, Renée Krimsier, flute; Dean Anderson,
percussion; and Richard Pittman, conductor.
2. *Variations à due* (1984) (11:23)
 - I. *Variations à due I* (6:09)
 - II. *Variations à due II* (3:27)
- III. *Variations à due III* (1:57)
Timothy W. Holley, cello; Dr. Ira Wiggins,
saxophone
3. *Innerflexions* (1977) (13:54)
Slovenic Symphony Orchestra; Anton Nanut,
conductor.
The Valley Wind (1955) (14:55)
 4. I. *The Valley Wind* (4:08)
 5. II. *Spring* (1:57)
 6. III. *Envoy In Autumn* (5:39)
 7. IV. *Velvet Shoes* (3:12)
Hilda Harris, soprano; Zita Carno, piano.
8. *Toussaint L'Ouverture, 1803* (1979) (5:58)
Mark Husey, piano; Alexandra Choral Society,
Kerry Krebill, conductor.
9. *Evocation* (1966) (3:18)
Natalie Hinderas, piano.
In Memoriam—Beryl Rubinstein (1953) (6:29)
 10. I. *Moderato* (2:15)
 11. II. *Poème D'Automne* (2:56)
 12. III. *Elegy* (1:18)
Kulas Choir and Chamber Orchestra; Robert Shaw,
conductor

Total playing time 69:19

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Notes

Until recently, American concert life has permitted few inroads for African American composers. Performers have fared better, especially in opera, where singers like Leontyne Price, Simon Estes, and Jessye Norman have altered our whole view of vocal style. Yet while orchestras, opera companies, and arts presenters eager to diversify have encouraged a rich array of performers and conductors, the repertoires have remained largely European.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century signs point toward new approaches. The sheer globalization of American culture has sparked new interest in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, as artists, institutions, and music lovers recognize the wholeness of the arts rather than easy divisions into categories and sub-categories. The very notion of the “black composer” has begun to fall, as persons of all colors write music of all kinds. Likewise, the old “all-black” concert is being replaced, gradually, by music in which racial background is just one of many enriching elements.

Performances of works by African American composers of broad stripe have arisen; the music of Scott Joplin, William Grant Still and Ulysses Kay is now supplemented by explorations of works by Nathaniel Dett, William Dawson, Undine Smith Moore, Howard Swanson, Julia Perry, Olly Wilson, Adolphus Hailstork, Anthony Davis, Hannibal, and others. With styles as diverse as American life itself, these composers (as well as others such as Roberto Sierra, Tania

León, and Bright Sheng) cast new light on notions of serious music, and threaten to alter, if not supplant, the European basis of traditional symphonic music. Though some of these artists use elements of African American culture freely and subtly, often weaving it into traditional forms, many also draw upon European traditions of modernism, expressionism or dodecaphony.

One of the more rigorous members of the generation that includes George Walker and Julia Perry is **Hale Smith**, who was born in Cleveland in 1925 and resided there until 1959. His early training on the piano began at age seven, and his initial performance experience included both classical and jazz music. After military service during World War II (1943–45), he attended the Cleveland Institute of Music, where his primary teacher in composition was Marcel Dick. He earned a bachelor’s degree in 1950 and a master’s in 1952. Also in 1952, his *Five Songs* won the BMI Student Composer Award. A decade later, BMI (a driving force in the fostering of black composers) commissioned Smith’s *Contours* for orchestra (1961), which was recorded on the celebrated Louisville Orchestra series.

Smith married Juanita Hancock in 1948, and over the years the couple had four children. In Cleveland, Smith became involved in Karamu House, a group of artists that encouraged black painters, musicians and poets, including Langston Hughes. The experience left a deep mark: for one thing, it

fostered an interest in poetry of African Americans, some of which Smith would later use for his vocal music.

He moved to New York in 1959. Like many young composers, he began as an editor for music publishers: C.F. Peters, E.B. Marks, and others. His father, Hale Smith Sr., owned a printing shop and Smith credits his own early experience in printing for his later interest in the publishing business. He also cites his early dual experience with both classical and jazz idioms for engendering a later ease of coexistence. "The two musics have lived comfortably side by side," he wrote in 1963. "All the world's culture is there for me to dip into," he remarked on another occasion.

Hale was always involved with jazz. He collaborated with a number of jazz musicians (Chico Hamilton, Eric Dolphy, and Ahmad Jamal), and arranged spirituals for Kathleen Battle and Jessye Norman; he cites his major influences in jazz as Duke Ellington, Benny Carter, Earl Hines, Art Tatum, Teddy Wilson, and Jimmy Jones. Hale was music advisor and arranger for the Black Music Repertory Ensemble of the Columbia Center for Black Music Research in Chicago.

In 1973, Smith became the first African American to receive Cleveland's Arts Prize in Music. Other awards include the Outstanding Achievement Award from the Black Music Caucus of the Music Educators National Conference (1982), and an appointment to the New York State Arts Council. He served on the boards of the American Composers Alliance and Composers Recording, Inc. New-music proponent and composer Francis Thorne called Smith "a valuable composing colleague—the real thing."

The complexity of academic life was never important in nurturing Smith's music, but working as a practitioner in music was. Working with publishing houses, however—such as E. B. Marks, Frank Music, Fox and C. F. Peters—enabled him to function in academia. After a stint on the faculty of C. W. Post College of Long Island University, he accepted a position at the University of Connecticut at Storrs, where he taught from 1970 until his retirement in 1984. He was one of the directors of the American Music Center from 1981 to 1983. During the 1970s and 80s he also became an important spokesman for composers in America.

In his lectures, he has urged young musicians and composers to resist pigeonholing. "Unless the work of Afro-American artists (musical or otherwise) is allowed to succeed or fail by comparison—or in competition—with the works of the entire national and world cultures," he wrote in 1971, "we will have no valid standards of measurement by which they can be measured and judged on their own merits. We *must* be a part of the mainstream in this country or all of the black programs are a sham. Place our music not on all-black programs; we can do that ourselves, for the benefit of our own people. Place our work on programs with Beethoven, Mozart, Schoenberg, Copland, and—if they can stand the heat—the current avant-gardes—we don't even have to be called black. When we stand for our bows, that fact will become clear when it should—*after* the work has made its own impact."

Smith's music has borne out this principle. While influences from jazz are not foreign to its fabric, devotion to more cerebral styles such as twelve-tone composition is just as palpable. The thought processes contained therein are challenging, at times brainy, though a sense of playfulness is often present as well. He has written for film, radio and television, yet at the same time he has never shied away from complex symphonic forms.

The works in these recordings span nearly 40 years, and give a glimpse of the breadth and subtlety of his art. *Dialogues and Commentaries* from 1990–91 demonstrates how a whole piece is generated from the tiny motivic cell heard in the first

bar, essentially an ascending grace-note followed by a descent. The work is a complex exploration of various ramifications of this simple fragment, which returns intermittently to lend coherence. These techniques are found throughout Smith's work.

Variations à due, composed in 1984 for cello and wind performer (who plays flute, soprano and alto sax, and clarinet) reveals something of Smith's jazz roots, with a stride bass line that is subtly infused with jazz harmonies alluded to, toyed with, and often averted. After the opening, the cello takes up melodic material, and then uses a pizzicato guitar effect. A brief final section ends the work on a quizzical note.

Innerflexions for orchestra (1977) is one of Smith's most emphatic orchestral statements, and is rich in dissonance and conflict. It was written for a series of New York Philharmonic concerts celebrating music by African Americans, under the auspices of the orchestra's education director at the time, Dr. Leon Thompson. Composed from June to early August of 1977, *Innerflexions* received its premiere by the Philharmonic that fall and has since been taken up by a number of orchestras worldwide. "I frequently chose titles that reflect the inner structure of focus of my music, and *Innerflexions* is no exception," Smith wrote. "The reshaping (bending, or flexion) of motives at every level (melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and orchestral) contributes to the impressions of unity, flexibility and expansiveness remarked upon by many listeners. Various listeners have also perceived *Innerflexions* as having both philosophical and emotional meanings. I consider such responses interesting, legitimate, and welcome—though not required for an appreciation of the music."

Representing an earlier phase in Smith's output is the song cycle *The Valley Wind* (initially titled *Four Songs*), composed from 1952 to 1955 and published in 1974. Through settings of wide-ranging texts dealing with changing seasons, each by a different author, the songs explore the full range of the voice and its expressive qualities. The American composer Wallingford Riegger called the set "an important contribution to our quite limited good song literature." The same motivic elements are found, "in various transformations and combinations," Smith wrote. "Hardly a single measure can be shown to be free of the influence of these musical ideas, which I believe to be part of my basic signature pattern, meaning these characteristics by which I can be identified as a composer. They are to be considered not as four separate songs, but as a single compositional unit — and should be performed as such."

Toussaint L'Ouverture, 1803, composed in 1979, is a choral paean to the great black hero of Haiti, with a tragedy-tinged text by Adelaide Simon (1921–1967). Its dense harmonies are imbued with sensitive text painting and a glowing conclusion depicting the death of the imprisoned Toussaint.

The Amaryllis lilies
Josephine brought up from Martinique
spike through this winter's gloom.
Napoleon and his ministers
range down Malmaisons halls,
not stopping at the bloom.
The scarlet, roaring flames of flowerheads
that shatter the pink damask
and the white sheer muslin.
In a prison while the tyrant strides
prating of empire,
Toussaint in ankled mire longs for the sun
and torched flamboyant trees.
All winter the Black Liberator lingers,
heartsick and cold
remembering flowers of fire and freedom

rocketing in Western skies,
and this White Prince who lies.
So when the spring sends out her first thing fingers
He turns upon his cot, and coughs, and dies.

— *Adelaide Simon*

Evocation (1966) is a short, dense contemplation for solo piano, a concentrated illustration of Smith's dodecaphonic technique at its best. Originally titled *Aphorism*, the piece was commissioned by the International Library of Piano Music, and dedicated to the composer's Cleveland friends Bascom and Sue Little. Pianist Nancy Voigt played the premiere at a 1966 concert of the Cleveland Composers Guild. "The entire piece derives from the row exposed in the first stave," the composer writes, "and in several places has faint but definite rhythmic affinities to jazz phrasing. This doesn't mean that it's supposed to swing—it isn't, but the affinities are there."

The earliest work in these recordings dates from 1953, when Smith was still in Cleveland and exploring the poetry of black Americans. In *Memoriam—Beryl Rubinstein*, for chorus and chamber orchestra, is the first of a series of works dedicated to the memory of friends, in this case the former director of the Cleveland Institute. It is a dark, moody work in three movements. The first (*Moderato*) is a wordless lament suggesting the sadness of autumn, the second a setting of a Langston Hughes poem published in 1926, and the third a brief, simple casting of a poem by Russell Atkins.

In an unpublished interview Smith spoke to the issue of the composer's role: "One of the biggest mistakes that's being made now in our society, and has been made in American culture from the very beginning, is the failure to recognize that art is as indispensable to life as a job. I happen to believe it is. To me, it is not a luxury. Art, in its finest manifestations, is a necessary part of our life quality. The artist is one of the

more fundamental cogs in any civilization."

— *Paul Horsley, 2000*

Boston Musica Viva (BMV), founded in 1969 by music director Richard Pittman as the first professional ensemble devoted to contemporary music in Boston, has become one of the most highly respected ensembles of its kind, with an international reputation for innovation and excellence. In its thirty-one-year history, BMV has performed over 517 works by 221 composers, including 118 works written specifically for BMV, 130 world premieres, and 61 Boston premieres.

BMV is particularly proud to have been early champions of composers such as Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, John Harbison, and Joseph Schwantner who later went on to win the Pulitzer Prize. BMV is unique in its consistent support of composers to produce challenging music and assuring them of a top-level premiere. As interest in new music has grown, BMV has served as a model for new music ensembles in Boston and in other parts of the country.

BMV is unique in the scope of its programming, presenting many music-theater and multi-media productions that often involve collaboration with other organizations such as theater and dance groups. In recent years, BMV has collaborated with the Beth Soll Dance Company and presented the fully staged world premiere of Marin Brody's opera, *The Heart of a Dog*.

In addition to its five-concert season, BMV regularly offers programs throughout the United States and Europe. Domestic tours have brought the ensemble to Lincoln Center; the Library of Congress, Carnegie Recital Hall, the 92nd Street Y, Tanglewood, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Michigan, and numerous other colleges and concert series. BMV has toured Europe seven times, most recently by invitation to the Settembre Musica Festival in Turin, Italy.

The Valley Wind (1995)

I. The Valley Wind

Living in retirement beyond the World,
Silently enjoying isolation,
I pull the rope of my door tighter
And stuff my window with roots and ferns.
My spirit is tuned to the Spring-season:
At the fall of the year there is autumn in my heart.
thus imitating cosmic changes
My cottage becomes a Universe.

Lu Yün. Copyright 1919, 1941, renewed 1947 by Arthur Waley. Reprinted from *Translations from the Chinese*, trans. by Arthur Waley, by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

II. Spring

When daisies pied and violets blue
and lady-smocks all silver-white
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he, Cuckoo;
cuckoo, cuckoo: O words of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear!
When shepherds pipe on oated straws,
And merry larks are ploughmen's clocks,
When turtles tread, and rooks, and daws,
And maidens bleach their summer smocks,
The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he, cuckoo;
Cuckoo, cuckoo: O word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear!

From Act V, Scene II, *Love's Labour's Lost* by William Shakespeare.

III. Envoy In Autumn

hear the doleful rains,
And one would say the sky is weeping
the death of the tolerable weather.

Tedium cloaks the wit like a veil of clouds

In Memoriam—Beryl Rubinstein (1953)

II. Poème D'Automne
The autumn leaves
Are too heavy with color.
The slender trees
On the Vulcan Road
Are dressed in scarlet and gold
Like young courtesans
Waiting for their lovers.
But soon
The winter winds
Will strip their bodies bare
And then
The sharp, sleet-stung
Caresses on the cold
Will be their only
Love.

Langston Hughes, from *The Weary Blues*, p. 45, Alfred A. Knopf, 1926.

And we sit down indoors.

Now is the time for poetry coloured with summer.
Let it fall on the white paper
As ripe flowers fall from a perfect tree.

I will dip down my lips into my cup
Each time I wet my brush.

And keep my thoughts from wandering as smoke
wanders,
For time escapes away from you and me
Quicker than birds.

Tu Fu. Printed by permission by Imago Publishing Co.

IV. Velvet Shoes

Let us walk in the white snow
In a soundless space;
With footsteps quiet and slow,
At a tranquil pace,
Under veils of white lace.

I shall go shod in silk,
And you in wool,
White as a white cow's milk,
More beautiful
Than the breast of a gull.
We shall walk though the still town
In a windless peace;
We shall step upon white down,
Upon silver fleece,
Upon softer than these.

We shall walk in velvet shoes:
Wherever we go
Silence will fall like dew
On white silence below
We shall walk in the snow.

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III. Elegy

I stand far to the East
Watching
the light—
Austere—disconsolate
come and faintly
His narrow keen
barely and soon fully
over the crucial earth
is up
and dying over.

Russell Atkins, from *Experiment*, a quarterly of new poetry, 1947, Alan Swallow, Ed.

Production Notes

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

Dialogues and Commentaries: Recorded at The Studio, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. Engineered by Patrick Keating. Published by Theodore Presser

Variations à deux: Engineered by Dwight Robinett at Robinett Recordings. Recorded in June, 1999 at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Durham, NC. Published by Theodore Presser.

Innerflexions: Recorded at Cankarjiz Hall in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia on September 3, 1990. Engineers: A. Dezman and R. Cedilnik. Published by Merion Music.

The Valley Wind: Produced by Carter Harman. Recorded by David Hancock. This original recording was made possible by a grant from the American Composers Alliance and a Ford Foundation–Antioch College joint grant. Published by E. B. Marks.

Toussaint L'Ouverture, 1803: Recorded June 26, 27, 28, and July 1, 1995 at Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, MD. Recording Engineer: Mark Huffman. Digital Editing and Mastering Curt Wittig. Producer: John Stephens. Produced by AmCam Recordings. Published by Merion (BMI).

Evocation: Produced by Horace Grenell. Engineered by David Jones. Recorded at Rutgers Church, NYC from September-October, 1970. Published by C. F. Peters.

In Memoriam—Beryl Rubinstein: Published by ACA.

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