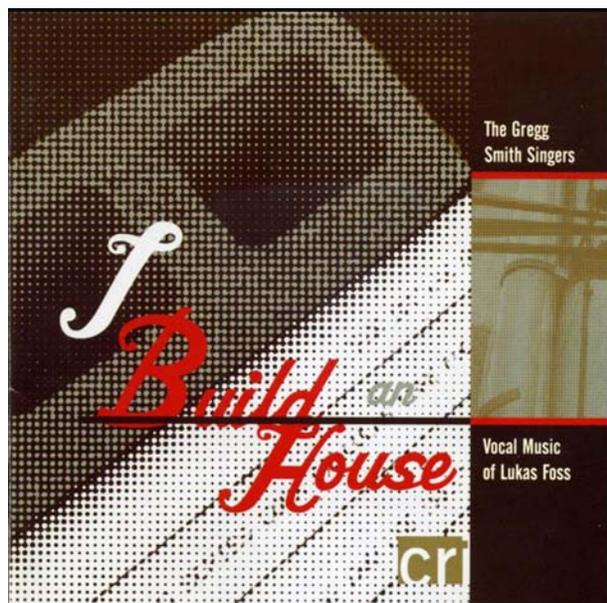


NWCR880

The Gregg Smith Singers

Vocal Music of Lukas Foss



1. *Behold! I Build an House* (1950) (11:26)
The Gregg Smith Singers; Thomas Schmidt, organ; Gregg Smith, conductor
 2. *Adon Olom* (1951) (5:14)
The Gregg Smith Singers; Ronald Forsmo, tenor; Thomas Schmidt, organ; Gregg Smith, conductor
 3. *Introductions and Good-byes* (1961) (9:20)
Libretto by Gian Carlo Menotti
The Gregg Smith Singers; Jay Willoughby, baritone; Gregg Smith, conductor
 4. *Three Airs on O'Hara's Angel* (1974) (9:21)
Women of The Gregg Smith Singers; Rosalind Rees, soprano; Lukas Foss, narrator; David Starobin, mandolin; Joseph Passaro, percussion; Oresta Cybriwsky, piano; Gregg Smith conductor
 5. "...And then the rocks on the mountains begin to shout" (1977-78) (12:42)
The Gregg Smith Singers; Gregg Smith, conductor
 6. *De Profundis* (1983) (9:49)
The Gregg Smith Singers Quartet; Rosalind Rees, soprano; Megan Friar, alto; Drew Michael Martin, tenor; Joseph Neal, bass; Gregg Smith, conductor
- Total playing time: 57:54
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Notes

Behold! I Build an House dates from 1950 and was commissioned to be performed at the dedication of a chapel at Boston University. Lukas Foss found an apt text for the occasion in a passage from Second Chronicles describing the building of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. The first section is an extract from Solomon's letter to the King of Tyre, in which Solomon requests master workmen to aid him in the building's design and construction. This is followed by a rapid vivace movement which sets an extract from the temple dedication ceremonies. The third and final section, subtitled "Prayer," brings the work to a conclusion with a phrase from a long prayer the monarch himself offered at the dedication ceremonies: "That thine eyes may be open upon this house ..."

In these few short extracts, Foss summarizes the complex process of any house of worship's planning, construction and consecration. The tripartite setting, with its forthright and expressive organ accompaniment, clearly delineates the chosen text, lending each section the elements of gravitas, exuberance and transcendence as appropriate.

—Watson Bosler

Adon Olom

In his choice of the "Adon Olom" text, Foss encapsulates the interconnectedness of tradition. This ancient text, possibly written by a predecessor of Lorca's, has been sung for hundreds of years in synagogues from Marrakech to Manhattan.

Here it is set to twentieth-century music by a product of Berlin and Paris who is now a citizen of the United States. Many peoples, one world.

—Watson Bosler

Introductions and Good-byes

In the early spring of 1959, Gian Carlo Menotti commissioned a number of composers to write miniature operas for his Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy. The present nine-minute opera is the outgrowth of three long-distance calls from New York to California. The purpose of Impresario Menotti's first call was to present the idea and, in case I should be interested, to urge me to search for a suitable libretto. I was interested, and I searched and reported two libretto possibilities. My suggestions were not found acceptable, and a second long-distance call advised me to that effect. My immediate response was "Then *you* provide the libretto." The third call came and with it the idea of "introductions and good-byes." If I had harbored any regret about my rejected suggestions, it vanished during the course of this telephone conversation. Menotti's idea struck me as completely ingenious for our miniature project.

A few days later the one-page libretto arrived in the mail. I added little indeed, lest the libretto lose its abstract charm. But I decided to frame the opera by a prelude and epilogue, in an effort to round out the work; for my task, as I understood it, was to create an opera, not an opera scene. This nine-minute work was to be complete with overture, solos, ensembles—a work which begins, develops, comes to a close.

It was a special challenge to try to make music with little more than a collection of names and to cause the names to form phrases and melodies (broken up though they must of necessity be), with each name given an appropriate characterization and intonation.

The structure of the libretto is musical, with a natural built-in crescendo and diminuendo. (From one person on stage, there is a gradual increase to ten persons, then a gradual decrease back to one.) Just before the first good-bye, I composed a texture made up of name-composites. My intention here was to create an effect of simultaneous conversations, a jumble, for which I used, true to style and project, only titles and names (example: general or-de-la-tour-y-guadding-ton-stein).

I decided that the prelude and epilogue would be “Dry-Martini Music” (xylophone solo). Some limited action (in front of an inner curtain?) could accompany the prelude (preparing and mixing the martinis) and the epilogue (cleaning, emptying the martini glasses, putting them away).

A successful opera, be it nine minutes or nine hours long, creates a vehicle for at least one singer. In order to avoid the pitfall of providing ten negligible parts, I decided to let the host do all the solo singing, accompanied by a small orchestra and a vocal quartet (or small chorus) in the pit. “How do you dos” and “Good-byes” do not come from the stage but are distributed among the pit singers. Only the host sings on stage. Nine silent actors (or dancers) shake hands, smile, and pantomime. This arrangement seemed to me in line with a theatrical abstraction, in which a cocktail party is pruned down to its bare essentials, shown (and shown up) as a meeting where one is introduced—and is bidden good-bye.

The first performance of *Introductions and Good-byes* was in 1961 at Carnegie Hall by the New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein conducting.

—Lukas Foss

Three Airs on O’Hara’s Angel, composed between 1954 and 1959, is a moving setting of a poem by Violet Lang written in memory of fascinating modern art expert and MOMA curator Frank O’Hara, along with some verses written by O’Hara himself. O’Hara died in a freak accident in 1966—one of his own “early dead”—leaving behind him the memory of one of the truly gifted men of his time, not only a true connoisseur of the arts, but a fine poet and musician as well.

Foss’s combination of music, speech and movement is emblematic of his later stylistic developments, giving a more prominent part in the very creation of the piece to the performers of it. One can be sure that O’Hara would have appreciated this paean to his angel who so desperately wanted to “go / straight up into the sky and look around and then come down.” In a sense, is that not what all good music helps us to do?

—Watson Bosler

“ . . . and then the rocks on the mountains begin to shout”

—Charles Ives

In this composition for a *cappella* choir, the chorus does not sing words, it vocalizes, with the many repeated notes set to vowels.

A five-note chord dominates the work. It is endlessly repeated, varied, permuted, transposed and inverted. It invades the entire piece via persistent, pulsating, echoing and criss-crossing quarter notes. Only an explosion near the end liberates us from its domination.

All this can be analyzed and explained. But I cannot explain why this chord lingers until the “rocks on the mountain begin to shout,” nor do I know what it is that rocks shout. Perhaps Charles Ives does; perhaps rocks cry “help” for us who cannot see when we are in danger; or perhaps they merely shout a reminder of what a work of art tries to tell us—that we must change our lives.

—Lukas Foss

De Profundis

A wordless introduction marked “No Tempo” (time standing still) opens this Psalm setting from 1982.

Some freedom of choice is then given the singers, as per Foss’s score instruction: “Each singer should choose one pitch for his ‘low range’ and one for his ‘medium range’ and check those choices with other singers of the section, so there is no duplication within the tritone range available.”

The opening passages of Psalm 130 are heard in Latin, followed by the “old hymn that has ministered to the church for generations” to which Ives referred. The “Aus Tiefer Not” heard here is a variation on Luther’s own 1524 setting, and the English text is a rhymed translation of his German paraphrase.

The two texts and the two styles—pitched and free—play against one another until the entire Psalm is sung, and, in a return to the wordless opening passage, the various parts slowly descend to C-flat in the soprano and tenor and F in the alto and bass. A final whispered invocation of the opening Latin words ends the piece.

Foss has been quoted as saying: “If you are going to have a big foot in the future, you’ve got to have a big foot in the past—then you stand well balanced.” *De Profundis* clearly shows that he practices what he preaches.

—Watson Bosler

Text

Behold! I Build an House!

Behold, I build an house to the Lord my God,
and the house which I build to the name of the Lord is great:
for great is our God.

Behold, when they lifted up their voice, and praised the
Lord with trumpets and cymbals and instruments of
music, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever:

Behold, then the house was filled with a cloud, for the
glory of the Lord had filled the house of God.
That thine eyes may be open upon this house.

—2 Chronicles

Adon Olom

Adon olom asher molach
bíterem kol yítzeer nivro
léys naaso vícheftzo kol
azai melech shímo nikro.
Víacharay kichlos hakol
lívado yimloch noro
víhu hoyo víhu hoveh
víhu yihíye bísiforo.
Víhu echod víen shaynee
líhamsheel lo líhachbeero
bílee rayshees bílee sachlees
vílo hooz víhamisro.
Víhu aylee víchai goalee
vítzur chevlee bíays tzoro
víhu nisee umonos lee
mínos kosee bíyom ekro.
Bíyodo afkeed ruchee
bíays eeshan víoero
víim ruchee gíveeyosee
Adonoy lee víloero.

The Lord of all, who reigned supreme,
Ere first creation's form was framed,
When all was finished by His will,
His name almighty was proclaimed.
When this, our world, shall be no more,
In majesty He still shall reign
Who was, who is, who will remain:
His endless glory we proclaim.
Alone is He, beyond compare,
Without division or ally,
Without initial date or end,
Omnipotent He reigns on high.
He is my God, my Savior He,
To whom I turn in sorrow's hour
My banner proud, my refuge sure,
Who hears and answers with His power.
Then in His hand myself I lay,
And trusting sleep, and wake with cheer;
My soul and body are His care;
The Lord does guard, I have no fear.

—traditional, translated by
Israel Zangwill (1864–1926)

De Profundis

De profundis clamavi ad te Domine:
Domine exaudi vocem meam.
Fiant aures tuae intendentes in vocem
deprecationis meae.
Si iniquitates observaveris Domine, Domine,
quis sustenebit?
Quia apud te propitiatio est:
et propter legem tuam sustinui te Domine.
Sustinuit anima mea in verbo ejus:
speravit anima mea in Domino.
A custodia matutina usque ad noctem,
speret Israel in Domino.
Quia apud Dominum misericordia:
et copiosa apud eum redemptio.
Et ipse redimet Israel ex omnibus
iniquitatibus ejus.

Out of the depths I cry to Thee
Lord hear my lamentation:
Bend down Thy gracious ear to me
And grant my supplication.
For if Thou fix Thy searching eye
On all sin and iniquity,
Lord, who can stand before Thee?
But love and grace with Thee prevail,
O God, our sins forgiving.
The best and holiest deeds must fail
Of all before Thee living.
Before Thee none can boasting stand
But all must fear Thy strict command
And live alone by mercy.

—Psalms 130

Lukas Foss (b Berlin, 15 Aug 1922) is a unique figure in American music, holding an extraordinary legacy as conductor, composer, pianist and pedagogue.

As one of the country's leading and most respected composers, Foss has over 120 compositions of all genres to his credit. At age twenty-three, he was the youngest composer to be awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship; he has since received numerous commissions, awards and honors for his works, many of which have been played throughout the United States and Europe by world-renowned artists and ensembles. Recognized as a major contributor to American music, he has been elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1995 the New York Philharmonic saluted Foss by dedicating an entire week of concerts to his works.

At the age of eighteen he was already known as a musical wunderkind (G. Schirmer published his first work when he was fifteen), having graduated from the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied conducting, composition, and piano. He went on to study with Koussevitzky at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, and Hindemith at Yale.

A recipient of fifteen honorary doctorates, Foss has held the position of composer-in-residence at Harvard University, Carnegie Mellon University, Yale University, Manhattan School of Music, UCLA, the Tanglewood Institute and Boston University, where he has been professor of music since 1991.

Foss has conducted all of the most celebrated orchestras in the world, including the Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Sym-

phony, Berlin Philharmonic, Leningrad Symphony and London Symphony Orchestra. He is conductor laureate of both the Brooklyn Philharmonic and the Milwaukee Symphony.

The Gregg Smith Singers

Gregg Smith founded his choral group in 1955 when he was a graduate teaching assistant in the music department at UCLA.

By 1958 the group took its first step toward international recognition with a European tour that included an appearance at the Brussels World's Fair.

Soon after, the Singers came to the attention of Igor Stravinsky, and in 1959 began a twelve-year association with him which ended with Smith traveling to Venice, at the family's request, to prepare the chorus and orchestra for Stravinsky's funeral.

In 1961 the Singers made their second tour of Europe which culminated in an overwhelmingly successful concert at the Edinburgh Festival and a subsequent *Time* magazine article. They were immediately offering a national touring contract by impresario Kenneth Allen. To date, the Gregg Smith Singers have made forty consecutive national tours, sixteen tours of Europe and three tours of the Far East.

The Singers' recording activity has been a key ingredient in their overall history. Since 1960 they have recorded over one-hundred albums, winning three Grammys, two Montreux Awards, and the *Stereo Review* 1966 Record of the Year award for their Columbia recording of the music of Revolutionary American composer William Billings. This CD of the music of Lukas Foss is the fifth recording GSS has made for CRI.

Production Notes

Publishing:

Behold! I Build an House: Theodore Presser (BMI)

Adon Olom: G. Schirmer (BMI)

Introductions and Good-byes: Carl Fischer (BMI)

Three Airs on O'Hara's Angel: Editions Salabert (G. Schirmer, Inc.) (BMI)

"...and then the rocks on the mountains begin to shout": Lukas Foss (BMI)

De Profundis: Lukas Foss (BMI)

Recorded by David Hancock: *Behold! I Build an House* and *Adon Olom* at Holy Trinity Church, New York in 1997; *"...and then the rocks on the mountains begin to shout"* at Holy Trinity Church, New York in 1988; *Introduction and Good-byes* at the American Academy of Arts & Letters; *Three Airs on O'Hara's Angel* at the American Academy of Arts & Letters in March 1976. *De Profundis* was recorded by Stephen Epstein at SUNY Purchase, New York 1994. Digitally recorded.

Mastered at Music Designs Masters Studio, New York studio

Mastering Engineer: Adrian Carr

This CD was mastered using SONY Superbit Mapping.

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