

Elinor Remick Warren

ABRAM IN EGYPT

Text from The Dead Sea Scrolls and Genesis

RONALD LEWIS, baritone solo

Roger Wagner Chorale

ROGER WAGNER, conductor

London Philharmonic Orchestra

SUITE FOR ORCHESTRA

Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra

WILLIAM STRICKLAND, conductor

THE COMPOSER

Elinor Remick Warren has long held a place of distinction in the musical life of America. Los Angeles-born, Miss Warren displayed pianistic talent and a flair for composition from early childhood, and she was still a student when G. Schirmer first accepted her compositions for publication. It was as concert pianist and as accompanist for well-known singers that Miss Warren gained initial professional renown, this after studies in Los Angeles and in New York. In 1955 she was awarded an honorary *Mus. Doc.* by Occidental College for her achievements as a composer. Her years of study in this country encompassed also intensive work in composition, which was supplemented by further study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. Her catalog of published works is now well past the 100 mark, and besides many songs choral works, and piano pieces, it includes such large-scale works as *The Passing of King Arthur* for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, *Singing Earth* for soprano and orchestra, *The Harp Weaver* for solo baritone, women's chorus, harp, and orchestra, as well as *The Crystal Lake* for orchestra, and the Suite for Orchestra recorded here. *Abram in Egypt* is the latest and one of the most impressive solo-choral-orchestral scores to come from Elinor Remick Warren's pen. All of these works have had major performances in the musical centers of America and Europe.

THE MUSIC

Abram in Egypt was commissioned by the well-known Chicago baritone and music patron, Louis Sudler. Its first performance in its present choral, orchestral form took place on June 7, 1961 at the Los Angeles International Music Festival, with Donald Gramm in the role of Abram and Roger Wagner conducting his own Roger Wagner Chorale. Mr. Sudler had sung the work earlier as a solo cantata in Chicago under the baton of Thor Johnson.

Aside from the dramatic effectiveness of the music itself, which is cast in neo-romantic idiom, special interest attaches to the text of *Abram in Egypt*, in that the familiar story from Genesis (XII-10-17; XIII-14) is filled out with hitherto new material derived from the much-discussed Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumram by the Dead Sea in 1947. The story of how these fragile 2000-year-old writings of the Essene sect were painstakingly opened and deciphered is one of the great archeological tales of our times, and Edmund Wilson's book detailing it has become something of a classic.

Concerning her own adaptation of the Genesis and Dead Sea Scrolls text for *Abram in Egypt*, Miss Warren tells us, "While both sources deal with the same subject, the Scroll reveals for the first time why Abram urged Sarai (they were later commanded by the Lord to call themselves Abraham and Sarah) to conceal her true identity, and adds many touching and absorbing details found neither in Genesis nor in other ancient writings.

"As the narrative in the Scroll is in the first person, it was necessary to change the excerpts from Genesis from the third person to the first, for the sake of continuity. Otherwise the text follows the narrative as found in Genesis and the Dead Sea Scroll.

"The portions of the text from the Dead Sea Scrolls, as published in *A Genesis Apocryphon*, were translated from the original Aramaic into Hebrew by Dr. Nahman Avigad and Dr. Ygael Yadin, and from Hebrew into English by Sulamith Schwartz Nardi. The composer gratefully acknowledges permission given by the Heikal ha-Sepher (Shrine of the Book) at Jerusalem, to use this material."

Text of ABRAM IN EGYPT compiled by the composer from The Dead Sea Scrolls and Genesis CHORUS

Now there was a famine in the land, so Abram and Sarai went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land!

ABRAM

I, Abram, dreamed a dream on the night of our entering into the land of Egypt; I woke from my slumber that night and I said to Sarai, my wife, "A dream have I dreamed, and I am frightened by this dream!" And she said to me, "Tell me thy dream, tell me that I may know." And I began to tell her: "Lo! I saw in my dream one cedar tree and one palm, and men came and sought to cut down and uproot the cedar, and to leave the palm by itself. The palm cried out and said, 'Cut not down the cedar, for cursed is he who would fell it!' And for the sake of the palm the cedar was saved. I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold, and when the Egyptians see you they will say 'This is his wife!' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, that my life may be spared on your account." And Sarai wept at my words that night.

CHORUS

When Abram and Sarai entered Egypt, the Princes of Pharaoh saw that Sarai was beautiful, and they praised her to Pharaoh: "How beautiful the look of her face, and how fine is the hair of her head; how fair indeed are her eyes, and all the radiance of her face. Her arms, goodly to look upon, and her hands, how perfect! Above all women is she lovely, and higher is her beauty than that of them all! And with all her beauty, there is much wisdom in her." When the King heard these words, he sent at once to bring her to him. And Abram wept with grievous weeping, wept that night when Sarai was taken from him by force.

ABRAM

That night I prayed and entreated in sorrow as my tears fell: "Behold, now I cry before Thee, my Lord, against Pharaoh Zoan, King of Egypt, because my wife has been taken from me by force. Do Thou judge him for me, and let me behold Thy mighty hand descend upon him and all his household!" And I wept and grieved.

CHORUS

That night the Most High God sent a pestilential wind that was evil, a wind to afflict Pharaoh and all his household. It smote him and all his house and he could not come near Sarai. Then Pharaoh called for all the wise men of Egypt, and all the wizards, if perchance they might heal him and his house. And all the wizards and wise men could not rise up to heal him; for the wind smote them all, and they fled! The plagues and the afflictions became grievous and strong! Then came a Prince of Pharaoh, and sought Abram to come and pray for the King, that he might live.

ABRAM

I cannot pray for the King while Sarai, my wife, is with him. Go now and tell the King to send away my wife, and I will pray for him and he will live.

CHORUS

So Pharaoh called Abram and said to him, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me Sarai was your wife?"

ABRAM

I did it because I thought, "There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife!" So I said to Sarai, "At every place where we come, say of me—he is my brother!"

CHORUS

Then Pharaoh said, "Behold thy wife! Take her, go thy way and depart from all the land of Egypt; and now pray for us and all our house, that this evil wind may depart from us!" And Abram prayed, and the plague departed and the evil wind was gone, and he lived!

ABRAM

Pharaoh gave orders concerning us; they sent us on our way with all that we had.

CHORUS

Then the Lord said, "Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward, eastward and westward. Arise! And walk, lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, and walk through the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you and your descendants, forever and ever!"

ELINOR REMICK WARREN'S SUITE FOR ORCHESTRA was premiered in 1955 by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra under Alfred Wallenstein's direction. Like that of *Abram in Egypt*, the musical language of the Suite is neo-romantic and in this instance finds its inspiration in the vast mountain panorama to be seen from the composer's *Corona del Valle Ranch*.

"At our mountain ranch," writes Miss Warren, "we look out over broad sweeps of desert to the rugged snow-clad mountain ranges of the High Sierra. I have been particularly moved by the ever-changing pictures of the sky, at all hours and in varying seasons. Although my Suite has no story or program behind it, the overtones of this pageantry of the sky and the long shadows of the towering mountains are doubtless in the fabric of the work. The mood of each movement is indicated by a few lines chosen from the writings of John Gould Fletcher. These poems are included on the flyleaf to the full score of the Suite."

I. ALLEGRO MODERATO — Black Cloud Horses

Across the mountains race the dark clouds;

Like black horses the shadows of clouds charge across the sky.

II. ANDANTE MOLTO TRANQUILLO — Cloud Peaks

Aloft in the sky

Drowsily rode

Toppling peaks, autumnal clouds;

Cream-colored snow dissolving

Into chill chasms of blue.

On through the sky

We watched them go.

Host, we wished we could climb their glistening sides

And rest on their summits together.

III. SCHERZINO: ALLEGRETTO — Ballet of the Midsummer Sky

The iridescent vibrations of midsummer light

Dancing, dancing, suddenly flickering;

The palpitant mosaic of the midday light

Colliding, sliding, leaping and lingering;

O, I could lie on my back all day,

And mark the ballet of the midsummer sky.

IV. MODERATO — Pageant Across the Sky

The balancing of broad pavillions

Of summer against the breeze;

Earth is streaked and spotted

With great splashes of sunlight;

The sun throws an immense circle of light upon the world,

Rolling slowly in ponderous rhythm musically forward.

THE PERFORMERS

ROGER WAGNER was born in France, son of the organist at Dijon Cathedral. He came to Los Angeles when still a boy and began his professional music career there at the tender age of twelve, having been named organist and choral director of the Church of St. Ambrose. He returned to France for undergraduate college study, returning to Los Angeles in 1937. While earning his livelihood as a member of the MGM chorus, he presented concerts of his own at St. Joseph's Church, and in time established a 12-voice madrigal group that grew into the superbly polished 50-voice Roger Wagner Chorale. Over the past decade, the Roger Wagner Chorale has achieved international renown in concert and on records, not only by virtue of brilliant and polished performance, but also because of the enormous scope of its repertoire, which ranges from Palestrina and Monteverdi to Carl Orff and Lukas Foss (see CRI 123/123 SD).

As a consequence of his increased activity on the European scene as concert conductor and recording artist, Mr. Wagner in recent years has established a Roger Wagner Chorale in Europe, and it is this group which sings Elinor Remick Warren's *Abram in Egypt* on this CRI recording, assisted by the renowned London Philharmonic Orchestra, and with one of England's most gifted oratorio and operatic baritones, Ronald Lewis, as soloist.

WILLIAM STRICKLAND, in the course of his nearly twenty-five years of orchestral conducting activity, has made more remarkable recordings in widely varied locales than almost any other conductor on discs. Besides the usual centers of Vienna and New York and the somewhat more off-the-beaten track cities of Oslo, Norway and Göteborg, Sweden, Mr. Strickland has done something like a dozen-and-a-half contemporary American scores for CRI in Tokyo with the Imperial and Japan Philharmonic orchestras, as well as a series scheduled for 1964 release with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra recorded in its new Reykjavik concert hall.

It was as concert organist and choral conductor that Mr. Strickland first made his reputation, beginning at St. Bartholomew's Church in New York City. He was founder-conductor of the Nashville Symphony, and in subsequent years has conducted scores of orchestras throughout the U.S.A. and Europe, always championing contemporary repertoire both of the acknowledged masters and the up and coming younger men composers. In 1955 he was conductor of the New York Oratorio Society, but since then his activities have literally become spread out over the face of the globe, from Manila and Tokyo to Reykjavik and Oslo.

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)

