

CRI-SD-186

Alan Hovhaness

Koke No Niwa, Op. 181 “*Moss Garden*” (1960)

Melvin Kaplan, English horn; Walter Rosenberger and Elden Bailey, percussion; Ruth Negri, harp;
Alan Hovhaness, conductor

Ezra Sims

Chamber Cantata on Chinese Poems (1954)

Richard Conrad, tenor; Elinor Preble, flute; Felix Viscuglia, clarinet and bass clarinet; William
Hibbard, viola; Judith Davidoff, ‘cello; Helen Keany, harpsichord; Daniel Pinkham, conductor

Lawrence Moss

Four Scenes for Piano (1961)

Seymour Fink, piano

Sonata for violin and Piano (1959)

Matthew Rairnoni, violin; Yehudi Wyner, piano

Alan Hovhaness (b. 1911) grew up in the suburbs of Boston, son of an Armenian father and a Scottish mother, and his musical training was received wholly in a Boston milieu, at the New England Conservatory and at the Tanglewood Berkshire Music Center. The 1940s were years of relative obscurity and of hard work as teacher and above all as composer, and it was during this period that Hovhaness developed his distinctive musical language based on a synthesis of Oriental and Western musical usages. While Armenian elements were dominant at first, Hovhaness has since expanded his palette to encompass elements of classic Japanese and Indian music, this in part as a result of a world tour in 1959.

The 1950s were for Hovhaness the years of dramatic national and international recognition, of major awards from every quarter and of scores of commissions from foundations, musical institutions, theater, television, and radio. During this period, Hovhaness not only composed such works as *Mysterious Mountain* (recorded on RCA Victor LSC/LM 2251) and *Meditation on Orpheus* (recorded on CRI 134), but a dozen symphonies, and a host of choral pieces - all permeated not only with the musical flavor of the Near and Far East, but with its mystic and pantheistic spirit as well. It was also during the 1950s that Hovhaness put into order the vast amount of music he had composed during the previous decade, and the result has been a catalog whose opus numbers are now well past the 200 mark.

Not all of Hovhaness’s output has been for large instrumental and vocal combinations, and the *Koke No Niwa* is a highly representative example of the Hovhaness style as applied to a non-standard chamber ensemble of the type so popular among composers of the post-World War II, post-Boulez period.

“In March, 1960,” Mr. Hovhaness tells us, “a Tokyo television station commissioned a musical tribute to the Moss Temple in Kyoto - Koke Dera - to be entitled *Koke No Niwa* (“Moss Garden”). The music is scored for English horn, harp, and two percussion players performing on timpani, tam-tam, glockenspiel, and marimba.

“It is a tribute to all the Buddhist temples of Kyoto as well as to Koke Dera. The first phrase is sounded by English horn over harp, Timpani, tam-tam, and glockenspiel. A series of scattered sounds follows on timpani, tam-tam, glockenspiel, and harp - the latter snapping the finger against a bass string. A new phrase is sounded by English horn against the continuing scattered sounds. A dialogue between marimba and harp leads to English horn accompanied by harp harmonics and timpani. Then a free rhythm interlude for marimba, harp, and timpani leads to the final phrase, sung by English horn over murmuring harp and marimba in free rhythm. The music is a garden of sounds and silences.

“The first performance of Koke No Niwa in its final version took place in Munich on May 4, 1961.”

Ezra Sims (b. 1928) hails from Birmingham, Alabama, and it was there that he received most of his basic musical training. Subsequently he took a B. Mus. degree at the Yale University School of Music, and an M.A. in music from Mills College. Even during his high school years in Birmingham, Ezra Sims displayed a flair for composition; for he taught himself harmony and became acquainted with 20th century techniques to the point where he had a work performed in public by the High School Orchestra which, as he put it, “was already containing things not covered in Goetschius.”

Mr. Sims studied with Quincy Porter at Yale and with Darius Milhaud and Leon Kirchner at Mills, but observes: “Since finishing formal schooling, I have begun to learn the important things.”

Both during his school and post-school years, Mr. Sims has held a wide variety of musical and non-musical jobs, ranging from choirmaster and school teacher to mail clerk and steel worker; and up to the time of receiving a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1963 was on the staff of the Harvard University Music Library.

Besides the early Chamber Cantata on Chinese Poems recorded here, Mr. Sims has composed three string quartets (No. 3 commissioned by the Endicott Fund of Boston), a Mass for Small Chorus, a 'Cello Sonata, and a work for unaccompanied voice commissioned by Cathy Berberian. During the year of his Guggenheim grant, Mr. Sims was an observer at the electronic music studio of the Nippon Broadcasting Company in Tokyo.

Writes Mr. Sims of his Chamber Cantata: “While studying Chinese at the Army Language School at Monterey, California, I was struck by the fact that the language when sung was unintelligible, even when the words were in the style of ordinary conversation (‘white language’, one might call it.) So, naturally, I got interested in writing something in the language which *could* be understood.

. . . So when I got to Mills, I set to work, only to find myself choosing - I fear, with characteristic perversity - highly literary poems which can only partly be understood by ear. But the interesting part remained: writing music which I liked that was at the same time properly 12-tone (I did that for awhile) and properly careful of the four tones of Mandarin Chinese. (There's one ‘mistake’ - I turned the words ‘Wu-ling princes’ into ‘the Wu-ling company’ for lack of a suitable next note in the series.

“The Cantata is the first piece I would let out to cross the street by itself and bears only the faintest family resemblance to my later things. I’m no longer 12-toning - though I retain a lot of the technical processes to use as they seem appropriate to the matter at hand. In fact, I’m no longer content with just the twelve tones, though for reasons of convenience, I keep the tempered scale as the basis of my new stuff.

“The Chamber Cantata on Chinese Poems is a cycle of the year, beginning with New Year’s Day (early Spring, in China) and continuing through to the end of Winter, with the first buds showing on the still snowy tree branches - which explains the somewhat anti-dramatic character of the music, this in line with the Chinese preoccupation with the youth - middle life - old age - and rebirth progression. The Cantata was to have been much larger, with a more rigorously patterned apportionment of the four tone-rows. Good sense won out over pretty planning, however.”

Chamber Cantata on Chinese Poems – Text Translation

PROVERB I

He who knows how
does not find it difficult;
He who finds it difficult
does not know how.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

The New Year comes in
to the sound of firecrackers.
A myriad of families
put up new charms on their doors.
Wang Wu-Shih

LO-YANG ROAD

The Wu-ling princes out riding
on auspicious days.
The jade of their saddles
clattering as they ride.
Ch’u Kuang-Hsi

SPRING EVENING

One minute of an evening in spring
is worth untold gold.
The flowers –
The sound of the sing-song girls’ silken swings –
The moon rising.
Su Shih

PROVERB II

The husband above;
the wife below.
The husband sings;
the wife accompanies.

THE SUMMER HOUSE

Sitting in the bamboo grove,
I sing a little, read a little.
No one knows this place.
The moon rises and looks in.

Wang Wei

AUTUMN ON THE RIVER SEN

The north wind drives the clouds
ten thousand *li* from the river Sen.
My heartstrings quake.
I can't stand the sounds of Autumn!

Su T'ing

NIGHT THOUGHTS

The moonlight on my bed
looks like frost.
I lift my head and look at the moon;
I drop it and think of my Northern home.

Li Po

EARLY SPRING

The tree has put forth two or three blossoms
on its south side.
Standing in the snow,
I run their pollen between my fingers.
The moon and mist rise,
gently capturing each other.

P'ai Yu Ch'en

PROVERB III

Hard work succeeds, of course.

Lawrence Moss (b. 1927) is a native of Los Angeles and he holds a Ph.D. in composition from the University of Southern California. He has held a Fulbright grant as well as two Guggenheim Fellowships and a Morse Fellowship from Yale, where he taught 1960-68. He is (1971) presently head of Composition at the University of Maryland.

Mr. Moss's catalog of works - in addition to those recorded here - includes *The Brute*, a chamber opera, *The Queen and the Rebels*, a full-length opera, *Music for Five*, brass quintet, *Omaggio* for piano, 4-hands, and *Remembrances* for chamber ensemble, all published by Presser Company, as well as *Timepiece* for Violin, Piano and Percussion, published by Fereol Publications. In addition there are works for full orchestra, voice and chamber ensemble.

Says Mr. Moss of the Violin Sonata "It is the first large work I wrote after completing my studies with Leon Kirchner, to whom it is dedicated. My indebtedness to my teacher is shown. I think, in the large romantic gestures of the music, bravura treatment of both instruments, and the essentially tonal framework of the piece, which is particularly evident in the close of the first and of the third movements.

"In retrospect I see - for me at least - some new directions as well. For example, the clustered harmonies of the second movement have certain affinities with my later work. The *cantabile* section of the first movement of the Piano Scenes comes to mind, and there are more extended examples in some of the music I am writing now (1964).

"Between the Violin Sonata and the Four Scenes for Piano I spent a year in Italy on a Guggenheim Fellowship. The Piano Scenes were the first work written after my return. There were commissioned by my good friend, Seymour Fink, to whom they are also dedicated.

"The Scenes mark for me a new way of working in which traditional formal and tonal schemes which had sufficed up to then (1961) are much less in evidence. Their place is taken by what might be called 'constellations' of relatively fixed pitches which are rhythmically articulated or pulsed. These are contrasted in different areas of the piece, bringing about phrasing and ultimately sectional distinctions. The duration of the larger sections is exactly proportioned according to an overall scheme which will probably escape the listener, but which was nevertheless important to me in the conception of the work. Such pre-compositional 'scaffolding' may be compared to its literal counterpart in the erection of a building. In both cases the realized structure bears little outward (or better: obvious) relation to what has gone before, but at the same time could not stand without it. The 'performance' of each comes about in its environment - the building site or the concert hall.

"Both the Violin Sonata and the Scenes contrast opposing moods, the fiery and the contemplative. Because this confrontation seems to me more dramatic in the latter piece, I thought of the title, Scenes. I meant by this no specific program, but an imaginary theater piece in which the *dramatis personae* are not actors but moods, confronting each other and changing according to the vicissitudes of an imaginary script - the score. I hope it is not presumptuous to recall the imaginary creations of a composer I very much admire, the Florestan and Eusebius of Schumann's early piano pieces."

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)