

CRI 241 MODERN CHORAL MUSIC

ROGER REYNOLDS: Blind Men
The Peabody Concert Singers and Chamber Ensemble

KARL KOHN: Madrigal
JACK BEESON: Three Rounds
SOLOMON PIMSLEUR: Two Songs for Mixed Voices

The Gregg Smith Singers, Myron Fink, pianist Conducted by Gregg Smith

Gregg Smith is an extraordinarily gifted and prolific conductor whose recordings of choral music are in high demand. He is equally renowned for his work with Venetian antiphonal music, for the classics and for modern novelties (he recorded the soundtrack for the film 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY). He is particularly eloquent in serious contemporary music, which he himself composes. The works on this record span the gamut from chromatic polyphony to light humor to nostalgic moods to an experimental approach to the perception of time.

The last named is Roger Reynolds' BLIND MEN, which was commissioned by The Fromm Foundation. Mr. Reynolds has the following explanation:

“BLIND MEN (1966) is based on an assemblage of fragments extracted from Herman Melville's JOURNAL UP THE STRAITS, 1856-1857. The textual whole is not expected to project clearly, but to provide a reservoir of mood and meaning that can stimulate strongly personal vocal responses from the individual singers. The choral materials tend to be collective, are frequently unsynchronized, and concern themselves with projecting the basic (pre-verbal) significance of the Melville text:

Multitudes of blind men —
Flies on the eyes at noon—
Desert and verdure,
splendor and squalor,
gloom and gaiety.
Too much light
and no defense against it.

The content of these brief phrases seemed to me particularly apt in view of present day living conditions. To the Melville text, which was provoked by his observations of blindness in Cairo. I have added subsidiary words and phrases. They function as verbal resonances through correspondences of meaning and sound:

MULTI-T-U-D-E-S OF BLI-N-D M-E-N
delu-d-e-s the mi-n-d
subdu---ed, resigned men bend

“BLIND MEN is continuous and comprises segments of three sorts: 5 *Timed Mixtures* and 7 Measured sections, which are bridged by 11 *Links*. Link 3 (extended trumpet G) and Link 7 (a unison D in the brass that gradually spreads to a cluster) set off the three large areas of the work, and their growth character — not shared by the other Links — is clearly marked.

“The decision to construct the form around a succession of temporarily characterized segments (rather than by means of the more normal proportional methods) stemmed from extensive reading I did in the field of time perception during 1966. The Timed Mixtures and Links represent modest first experiments with structural ideas that were quite new for me. The Timed Mixtures, for

example, are group effects, each 60 seconds long and uncondensed. Their total extent is filled with a uniform level of activity (i.e., there must be no feeling of gathering or losing momentum). The sound textures should always remain clear, though complex and constantly changing. No one line or concurrence of lines should necessarily attract attention. By halting our normal ongoing, goal-seeking tendency in these sections, I hoped to allow the listeners' ear to scan in the way that the eye does when presented with a complex, unmoving subject. No special responsibilities for uncovering relationships exist in these reflective sections.

“The Links consist of single, though sometimes complex, events which have natural limitations on their durations (the capacity of one breath, the decay time of a struck object's resonance, the time required to reach consensus in a joint task). These processes, once initiated, are not interfered with, and project — because of the experience we have with such processes in daily life—a particular sensation of time: variable yet anticipated duration. One's expectations are played off against the skills and endurance of the players.

“The conducted sections, normally much longer or shorter than 60 sections, depend on the conductor's metric indications in the usual way. On first hearing one has no clue as to their objective length, nor can one anticipate structural properties easily.

“Partially as a result of the various passive and active time states mentioned above, it is hoped that listening might become more reflective and individual, less a situation in which one is 'obliged' to accept pre-determined points of view.”

ROGER REYNOLDS was born in Detroit in 1934 and earned a degree in Engineering Physics at the University of Michigan. Subsequently he studied composition with Ross Lee Finney and Roberto Gerhard. He has received a Fulbright Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Rockefeller Foundation Grant and spent three years in Japan under the auspices of the Institute of Current World Affairs. He now (1970) teaches experimental studies (notation, time-perception, etc.) at the University of California at San Diego Music Department.

Singers in this work are: Victoria DiGiosafat, Maribeth Hartwig, Cecelia Novotny, Ellen Sonafrank, Patricia Price, Barbara Baker, Delores Ambrister, Diantha Clark, Pamela Layman, Christine Niehaus, Mary Stanton, Virginia Tice, Sam Brown, Barry Greenberg, David Hogan, Harold Kafer, William Phemister, Louis Turner, David Crawford, Ross Crolius, Kenneth Gould, Robert MacDougall, Michael Smith, Pat Mason.

Instrumental players are: Charles A. Lewis, Jr., Ronald Bange, Craig Seaman, trumpets; Greg Miller, Kenneth Kennedy, James Ryon, trombones; Richard Nahatzki, tuba; Robert Miller, Robert Spalding, percussion; Martin Berkofsky, Ronald Roxbury, piano.

KARL KOHN, composer of the most romantic of the selections on this record, is a prolific and well-established composer. He was born in Vienna in 1926, and moved to the U. S. before the War. He studied piano and conducting at the New York College of Music, served as a bandmaster in the Army and returned to Harvard to study composition with Irving Fine and Walter Piston. His teaching and conducting career in the Los Angeles area and at Tanglewood has been interrupted by visits abroad as a result of various distinguished awards. He writes:

“MADRIGAL was composed in 1966 as one of the offerings to be included in a *Festschrift* by the Harvard Music Department in celebration of G. Wallace Woodworth's sixty-fifth birthday. The four undergraduate years that I served as accompanist to the Harvard Glee Club under his direction gave me a familiarity with the idiom that has been the source of all my choral music. In these years I had the privilege of becoming imbued with and enriched by Woody's forceful musical gifts, his learned enthusiasm, and his vivid devotion to teaching.

“I found an appropriate text in the first stanza of a poem by Robert Chester (c. 1600) entitled “A Welcome home to the Right Worshipful John Salusbury.”

“I chose to set it in a style that refers to the contrapuntal manner and pictorialism of the Elizabethan madrigal. While composing, I found myself very much aware of Woody's musical personality, and

conscious of anticipating how he might respond to certain sonorities and qualities in the music and in my setting of the text. To use the piano in a flamboyant *concertante* style seemed to me a proper personal reminder of our happy association: benevolent conductor-professor and eager undergraduate accompanist.

“Woody did not hear a performance of MADRIGAL. In July 1968, a year before his death, at our last meeting, I played and sang it for him. I shall always remember the reciprocal warmth and affection during that final encounter with 'my still please freinde!'”

A WELCOME HOME

Your eares having hard the Nightingall soe long,
I feare will blame my hoarse throat ravens song;
The swanns that lave their blacke feet in the streames,
Have in their sweetnes sang you golden theames;
Court bewtefying Poets in their verse,
Homerianlike sweete stanzoes did rehearse;
Then blame not my homebred unpollisht witt,
That in the Nightowles cabinet doe sitt;
Yf that my lines be blunt, or harsh, or ill,
Seeing they proceed from rustick Martius quill;
Yet how I strive to please my still please freinde,
Let my true harty thoughts my lines commende.

From “Poems by Sir John Salusbury and Robert Chester” Oxford, 1913. With the kind permission of The Council of the Early English Text Society.

JACK BEESON is a native of Muncie, Indiana (1921) and a product of a lifelong dream to compose operas. Along the way, he studied with Burrill Phillips, Bernard Rogers and Howard Hanson at the Eastman School and, later, Bela Bartok in New York. His HELLO OUT THERE, THE SWEET BYE AND BYE and LIZZIE BORDEN and, most recently, MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS, have been extensively produced and happily heard, and his orchestral and smaller works also command respect. He, too, has won a Guggenheim Fellowship, as well as Fulbright and Rome Prize Fellowships. Among his important activities in the musical field are positions with the Composers Forum, the Alice M. Ditson Fund and the American Music Center. He is Chairman of the music department at Columbia University.

Mr. Beeson's ROUNDS, set to anonymous texts, are light but skillful examples of the composers' craft. They are GIVE THE POOR SINGER A PENNY, GREENER PASTURES and BOYS AND GIRLS TOGETHER. Jack Beeson's SYMPHONY No. 1 in A appears on CRI 196.

The singers in these works are: Luanne Lee, Darryl Naylor, Rosalind Rees; Linda Eckard, Geraldine Kuczynski, Rose Sherwin, Shirley Traxler; Brent Erlanson, Bruce Gifford, William Lyon Lee; Leslie Dorsey, William Graf and James Pfafflin.

GIVE THE POOR SINGER A PENNY

I'll sing you a song,
Though not very long,
Yet I think it as pretty as any.
Put your hand in your purse,
You'll never be worse;
Give the poor singer a penny.

GREENER PASTURES

Oh that I were where I would be,
Then would I be where I am not;
But where I am, there I must be,
And where I would be, there I can not.

BOYS AND GIRLS TOGETHER

If you don't like my apples,
Then don't shake my tree;
I'm not after your boy friend,
He's after me.
Judge, judge, tell the judge,
Mama has a baby.
It's a boy, full of joy,
Papa's going crazy.
Wrap it up in tissue paper,
Send it down the elevator.
How many pounds did it weigh?
One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight,
nine, ten, eleven.

SOLOMON PIMSLEUR was born in Paris in 1900 and died in New York in 1962. He studied composition at Columbia University with Daniel Gregory Mason and then with Rubin Goldmark at the Juilliard School of Music. In a career devoted to the creation and support of music, his numerous activities centered around New York, where many of his compositions were performed. His two works for vocal quartet, included here, **I NEVER SEE THE RED ROSE CROWN THE YEAR** and **THERE ARE TWO FORMS OF LIFE**, are from his Op. 21. They are settings of sonnets by John Masfield.

I NEVER SEE THE RED ROSE

I never see the red rose crown the year,
Nor feel the young grass underneath my tread,
Without the thought "This living beauty here
Is earth's remembrance of a beauty dead.
Surely where all this glory is displayed
Love has been quick, like fire, to high ends,
Here, in this grass, an altar has been made
For some white joy, some sacrifice of friends;
Here, where I stand, some leap of human brains
Has touched immortal things and left its trace,
The earth is happy here, the gleam remains;
Beauty is here, the spirit of the place,
I touch the faith which nothing can destroy,
The earth, the living church of ancient joy.

THERE ARE TWO FORMS OF LIFE

There are two forms of life, of which one moves,
Seeking its meat in many forms of Death,
On scales, on wings, on all the myriad hooves
Which stamp earth's exultation in quick breath.
It rustles through the reeds in shivering fowl,
Cries over moors in curlew, glitters green
In the lynx' eye, is fearful in the howl
Of winter-bitten wolves whose flanks are lean.

It takes dumb joy in cattle, it is fierce,
It torts the tiger's loin, the eagle's wings,
Its tools are claws to smite and teeth to pierce,
Arms to destroy, and coils, and poison stings;
Wherever earth is quick and life runs red
Its mark is death, its meat is something dead.

Sonnets by John Masfield, with permission from The Society of Authors for the John Masfield Estate.

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(Original Liner Notes from CRI LP Jacket)