

CRI SD 250

ALLAN BLANK

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird (1964-5)

Valarie Lamoree, soprano; Contemporary Chamber Ensemble: Paul Zukofsky, violin/viola; Arthur Bloom, clarinet/ bass clarinet; Thomas Nyfenger, flute; Michael Rudiakov, cello; Gilbert Kalish, piano; Arthur Weisberg, conductor.

Two Parables by Franz Kafka (1964)

Valarie Lamoree, soprano; Matthew Raimondi, violin; Eugenie Dengel, viola; conducted by the composer.

Poem (1963)

Antonia Lavanne, soprano; Michael Sussman, clarinet; John Goberman, cello; Susan Jolles, harp; Edward Gerber, conductor.

WILLIAM FLANAGAN

Another August

June Barton, soprano; Noel Lee, piano; Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; Newell Jenkins, conductor.

The song-cycle, THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A BLACKBIRD was commissioned by Mr. Stanley Hoffman and first performed at Town Hall under his direction on January 28, 1967. The soprano on that occasion was Yoshiko Ito. The text is a poem by Wallace Stevens. The score calls for, in addition to the soprano, flute/piccolo, clarinet/bass clarinet, piano, violin/viola and cello.

Mr. Blank writes:

"My involvement with the Wallace Stevens poem, THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A BLACKBIRD, dates back to approximately 12 years before the completion of the work. The attraction of the poem then, as later when I decided to return to the sketches, was not its poetic rhythms but the central issue of movement. I saw the movement crystallized in a number of key words and images, which interlock throughout. From these I derived the initial impulse to search for musical counterparts, such as pacing, speeds and densities. Then I searched, through trial and error, for the formal characteristics: line, melody and motives.

"Formally the work combines variational procedures with closed, non repetitive lines. The overall grouping of the 13 sections subdivides into a pattern of 5 + 3 + 5. Sectional divisions, instrumental grouping, tempo fluctuations and dramatic plotting all interact. Key words and images, with their musical counterparts, supply interlocking references throughout. The harmonic/melodic approach is influenced by serial thinking."

TWO PARABLES BY FRANZ KAFKA, a two-part song cycle, was written for the Intimate Chamber Players and was performed by them with Valarie Lamoree in Town Hall in 1965.

"The two sections," writes the composer, "like Kafka's prose-poem texts, display contrasting characteristics but share common features. Both may be divided formally into three subsections. In the first parable, the deployment of material is subdivided by three hummed passages. In the second parable, a tempo change (*subito doppio lento*) emphasizes the subdivision.

The overall textural balance shows a gradual shift from the solo vocal opening of the first parable to the purely instrumental closing of the second. This is emphasized by the intervallic similarities found in these two strategic positions. Vocal and instrumental shapes are built around ten tones that are

clearly associated with the first words of the text. Generally, an intervallic priority is given to fourths and fifths, and thirds and sixths, reinforcing the predetermined instrumental sonority. The instrumental writing utilizes a large number of double stops, harmonics and glissandi, and tends to expand characteristics presented in the vocal line."

The genesis of POEM was a commission to write a work for this specific instrumental combination and approximate length by its first performer, Antonia Lavanne.

"Though I had used the poetry of e. e. cummings on four earlier occasions," writes the composer, "I stumbled upon this poem accidentally. I immediately felt it would be suitable for the instrumental colors forming in my ear. I was particularly touched by an accompanying note which cited this as his last poem. Rhythmic features of the poem, such as the opening spondee, represent an important point of departure for the musical shape.

"The programmatic impulse derived from the poem serves as a background for all the surface events. It led to the desire to construct an environment of sound that might loosely be thought of as evoking a summer night. My aim was to allow the vocal line to unfold in a free manner without contradicting the control assigned to several pitch and rhythmic cells which recur throughout, and which follow serial procedures."

ALLAN BLANK'S musical background includes early violin studies, study at the High School of Music and Art, Juilliard School of Music (conducting fellowship) and a career as a professional performer (he played violin with the Pittsburgh Symphony for two years). He has degrees from New York University and the University of Minnesota, and has done advanced musical studies at Teachers College and the University of Iowa. He has taught at the University of Alabama, Western Illinois University and currently (1969) teaches at Paterson State College.

WILLIAM FLANAGAN was born in Detroit in August, 1926, and died in New York in August, 1969. During his too-short life, he made himself a sturdy reputation both as journalist and musician, being, at the time of his death, a respected record reviewer and a composer whose strongest point was one that is increasingly uncommon: a gift for warm melody.

ANOTHER AUGUST was composed during the summer of 1967 on commission from New York's Clarion Music Society. Although Clarion's musical director, Newell Jenkins, varies his programs of unfamiliar music of the past with works by living composers, ANOTHER AUGUST is the first new work especially commissioned by Clarion.

Mr. Flanagan wrote:

"The commission seemed a valuable one when I accepted, but I had no idea of the challenges and conditions it was to subject me to. To begin with, I was expected to provide a showcase for Pettine Ann Croul, a young soprano from New Zealand. Her voice is one of steely brilliance, power and agility, in the tessitura roughly encompassing the Gs on either side of high C. Below this her voice is pretty enough, but of a less unusual character, so I felt obliged to compose in a range that makes words all but incomprehensible.

"There was a further challenge: I was asked to compose the work with a piano obbligato—a stylistic fancy of the conductor, who was fond of an obscure work by Mozart that uses the same combination. Having made my peace with this requirement, my head began to fill with the fairly luxuriant sounds of a 'standard' classical orchestra. Thus I sketched more than half of the music while Jenkins was in Italy and we were more or less out of touch, only to learn that I would be restricted to even smaller forces, with a string section of only 19 players. It was at this point that I decided to add the harpsichord, which was on hand for another work on the program for its colorful sound (it was an unplanned impulse that led me to write for it as a harmonic rather than traditionally, as a contrapuntal instrument).

"With the first rehearsal, it was clear that my trials were not over, for it was necessary to make on-the-spot changes, which I admit I did with a yielding flexibility that most of my colleagues would frown upon. When I took my seat for the premiere, I honestly was no longer certain exactly what I had composed; I nursed a wistfully anxious hope that it would be received by an awesomely distinguished audience with at least polite applause. But my 'freak' piece was accorded something closer to a bona fide ovation than I had even dreamed of, making that evening the most memorable and continually mystifying one of my life.

"Unlike the Mozart piece, ANOTHER AUGUST is not a concert aria, it is simply an extended song. I will admit that I indulged here in my first strictly 12-tone composition, although I modified it with passages of white-note tonality. I also herewith extend printed-apology to the poet, James Merrill. The sensitivity of his achingly beautiful poem gave me my piece; but its words and phrases are the sacrificial victims of the high, florid vocal writing.

"ANOTHER AUGUST is dedicated to my dear friends, Judge Julius Isaacs and his wife, Betty."

VALARIE LAMOREE is known among aficionados of the difficult and the far-out in contemporary music as the singer who does not make mistakes. She owns, in addition to her high intelligence, a voice of great beauty and flexibility.

ANTONIA LAVANNE was born in Hungary, received her training in the Israel Academy of Music and now makes her home in New York. She is a thoroughly-grounded recitalist, but is perhaps best known for her exquisite performances of contemporary music.

JUNE BARTON is a young Australian soprano of unusual attainments, as this recording demonstrates: not only has she a voice of great beauty and the ability to assimilate difficult modern intervals, but manages Mr. Flanagan's G in alt without apparent strain.

THE ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA has been maintaining its worldwide reputation since Sir Thomas Beecham's death, with a broad spectrum of recording and concert activities. They may be heard on CRI 239 (piano concertos by Ben Weber and Charles Wourinen) and 236 (Lou Harrison's SYMPHONY ON G),

THE CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER ENSEMBLE was created by its gifted conductor, Arthur Weisberg. It spent its first years in residence at Rutgers University, and since then has existed as a free lance organization. It made its record debut on CRI, for which it has recorded works by Easley Blackwood, Ramiro Cortes, Iain Hamilton, Donald Martino and Robert Moevs.

The Flanagan recording was made possible by a grant from the American Academy-Institute of Arts and Letters.

(Original Liner Notes from CRI LP Jacket)