

MIRIAM GIDEON

QUESTIONS ON NATURE

Jan de Gaetani, mezzo-soprano; Philip West; oboe; Samuel Lipman, piano; Barry Jekofsky, percussion

THE CONDEMNED PLAYGROUND

Phyllis Bryn-Julson, soprano; Constantine Cassolas, tenor; Felix Galimir, violin; Michael Tolomeo, viola; Fortunato Arico, cello; Paul Dunkel, flute; Jack Shapiro, violin; Alexander Heller, bassoon; conducted by Fritz Jahoda

MIRIAM GIDEON (b. 1906 Greeley, Colo.) has composed in all media. Her works have been performed in Europe and South America as well as in the United States. In recent years she has been particularly interested in settings of texts in various languages for solo voice and instrumental groups.

Miriam Gideon is Professor of Music at the City College of the City University of the State of New York and at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. She was recently awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for a work for orchestra and solo voice, and is a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Other music by Gideon may be heard on CRI 128, 170, 286 and 288. She writes:

“QUESTIONS ON NATURE is a setting of the questions propounded by the English philosopher Adelard of Bath in the early 12th century. In Adelard's words: 'When I returned to England not long ago . . . a certain nephew of mine ... being more involved in the causes of things than able to explain them, asked me to relate something new from my Arab studies. In order to present things succinctly I set down the chapter headings first. Then I shall reply to my nephew on the causes of things.'

“It is some of these chapter headings which I have set for voice, oboe, piano, glockenspiel, and tam-tam. The instrumental sonorities as well as the character of the vocal line are intended to convey the mystery and the childlike directness of the topics contemplated.

“THE CONDEMNED PLAYGROUND is the title of a series of essays by the late British critic Cyril Connolly. He wrote: 'The Condemned Playground refers in a sense to Art itself: for Art is man's noblest attempt to preserve imagination from time . . . and yet even the masterpieces whose permanence grants them a mystical authority over us are doomed to decay.'

“In this cycle the reference is extended to suggest the impingement of the sinister upon the pleasurable, not only in Art but in Love (*Pyrrha*), Life (*Hiroshima*), and Knowledge (*Litanies of Satan*). The setting is for soprano, tenor, flute, bassoon, and string quartet. Each text is sung in two languages:

#1. *Pyrrha* (Horace: Ode 1, Book V) is sung first in the English translation by John Milton, then in the original Latin;

#2. *Hiroshima* (Gary Spokes) is sung first in the original English, then in a Japanese translation by Satoka Akiya;

#3. *Litanies of Satan* (Baudelaire) is sung mainly in the English translation of Edna St. Vincent Millay, with refrains in the original French.”

HUGO WEISGALL

END OF SUMMER (1973-74)

Charles Bressler, tenor; Melvin Kaplan, oboe; Eugene Drucker, violin; Ynez Lynch, viola; Fortunato Arico, cello (NEW YORK CHAMBER SOLOISTS)

HUGO WEISGALL (b. Czechoslovakia, 1912) has devoted most of his composing to music for voices. Seven operas, six song cycles, and much choral music form the core of his output. The vocal impulse is primary. The voice is always at the musical centerpoint of Weisgall's musical fabric, often in the form of arching, long-breathed melodies. The composer's involvement with vocal music and its performance, his intense concern with intellectual problems, and his skill in handling American speech have led to a distinctive body of work.

Weisgall was completely American-educated after moving to the U. S. as a child of seven. Following the performing bent of his father, an opera singer and cantor, he sang lieder and conducted choral music from childhood. Weisgall later studied with Fritz Reiner at Curtis and during the 1940s conducted regularly symphony as well as opera both here and in Europe.

Since the premiere of the huge and deeply penetrating *Nine Rivers From Jordan* (1964-68), Weisgall has veered away from opera. He turned to the themes of the cycles of human life, old age, and death in three successive, larger-scale song cycles: *FANCIES AND INVENTIONS* (CRI SD 273) for baritone and five instruments (1970), *Translations* for mezzo-soprano and piano (1971-1972), and *END OF SUMMER* for tenor, oboe and string trio. This last written between August 1973 and January 1974, commissioned by the New York Chamber Soloists and was first performed by them with tenor Charles Bressler at the Library of Congress, March 15, 1974. The work is dedicated to Randolph S. Rothschild of Baltimore.

The three songs in *END OF SUMMER* are connected by two instrumental interludes. The first, a languid and nostalgic oboe solo, recalls certain passages from Wagner and Mahler as well as an important motive from Weisgall's own *Nine Rivers from Jordan*. The second interlude, a breathless scherzo for the entire ensemble, is special in the composer's output for its brilliant instrumental coloring. The cycle is unified not only by its autumnal moods, but also by musical materials which are used in all five sections.

1. After lunch — Po Chü-i (772-846) (English version by H.W.)
2. Quasi Fantasia
3. Hearing Someone sing a Poem by Yüan Chen — Po Chü-i (English version by H.W.)
4. Scherzo
5. De Senectute -- George Boas

PHYLLIS BRYN-JULSON, JAN DE GAETANI, CHARLES BRESSLER and CONSTANTINE CASSOLAS are stellar names in New York's singing firmament. They are all internationally known as a result of their tours and recordings, both as outstanding interpreters of contemporary music and as exemplary performers of the standard repertory.

The group called the NEW YORK CHAMBER SOLOISTS varies its size from four to eleven players as the music demands. It plays annually at the Library of Congress, at American universities and in the music capitals of the world.

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)