

NED ROREM's
A QUAKER READER
played on the Alice Tully Hall Organ
by LEONARD RAVER

Notes by Ned Rorem

“I was moved also to cry against all sorts of music which stirred up people's minds to vanity,” said George Fox. Two centuries later another famous Quaker, the poet Whittier, hoped that no “deeftoned organ” might disturb his thoughts. In our time Elizabeth Vining speaks of the “religious distractions of ritual music.” Yet Quakers as a group, unlike Puritans, never claimed music to be injurious, only superfluous, to meditation.

Myself, raised in Quaker silence, I craved Catholic sound. Is that why some invisible hand urged me as a child toward the arts? To this day, although Quaker tenets influence my reason, my fancy is more sparked by the fire of the Mass. Being unreligious so far as ordered belief is concerned, it is not the purpose but the pomp — not salvation but sensuality — which attracts me in worship.

To be a birthright member of the Society of Friends and to be a composer is to embody the paradox of reconciling implicit quiet with explicit sound. Yet, though I have set to music all manner of profane and sacred texts, from Sappho through Byron to Roethke, not to mention huge chunks from the Testaments and from Roman Liturgy both in Latin and English, never in any professional way have I linked Quakerism to music, partly because I take Quakerism so for granted, partly because there is no singable Quaker literature.

But if there exists no Quaker music, there can be music by a Quaker. And if my religion means silence while my craft means sound, that craft (that sound) has always very consciously been devoted to banishing the noise which forms an ever vaster cloud between humdrum and mystical realities.

With the present suite my intention has been to meld, finally and practically, my nominal religion with my craft. Since no Song is used — no actual musicalizing of words — each piece is headed with an epigraph from Friends' writings, many of which, in their urge toward pacifism as solution, extol absolute quiet and absolute light. The music represents a blaze of silence.

I am indebted to Jessamyn West's invaluable *The Quaker Reader* from which is fashioned much of my own nostalgic primer. Here are some notes on each movement:

1. First-Day Thoughts

*“In calm and cool and silence, once again
I find my old accustomed place among
My brethren, where, perchance, no human tongue
Shall utter words; where never hymn is sung,
Nor deep-toned organ blown ...”*

— John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)

“Whittier,” says Jessamyn West, “joined not one but two unpopular causes: poetry and abolition. The cause of poetry is always suspect; and abolitionists in the Civil War period were about as popular as Freedom Riders today.” John Greenleaf Whittier wrote First Day Thoughts in 1852 when he was forty-five. His verses evoke my own First Days (Quaker Sundays or meeting days) which, however, were confined to a Chicago childhood often colored by a wandering mind.

2. Mary Dyer did hang as a flag . . .

"Mary Dyer did hang as a flag for others to take example by", said General Atherton, one of her persecutors.

Only in America did Quakers ever receive outright death sentences, as opposed to prison terms. In *Mary Dyer of Rhode Island* Horatio Rogers describes that woman's career of fighting for liberty of worship. She never gave up, never offered the public repentance which might have saved her, and died on the gallows of Boston Common one June morning in 1660. Everywhere is a whirl of wind, the ever-weakening C-sharp pedal trill depicting the *entrechat* spasm of the martyr's feet, and her silent scream.

3. Evidence of Things Not Seen

"... he that lives to live ever, never fears dying. Nor can the Means be terrible to him that heartily believes the End. For tho' Death be a Dark Passage, it leads to Immortality, and that's recompense enough for Suffering of it. And yet Faith Lights us, even through the Grave, being the Evidence of Things not seen. And this is the Comfort of the Good, that the Grave cannot hold them, and that they live as soon as they die. For Death is no more than a Turning of us over from Time to Eternity. Death then, being the Way and Condition of Life, we cannot love to live, if we cannot bear to die . . ."

— William Penn

In 1693 William Penn published a collection called *Some Fruits of Solitude*. His fierce yet comforting phrases on Death are quoted at some length under my third title, *Evidence of Things Not Seen*. Like George Fox's *Ocean of Darkness* is Penn's *Dark Passage*, and both of these thinkers — these doers — extolled the bright nutritive total tranquility at the core of all storms.

4. "There Is a Spirit That Delights to Do No Evil . . ."

— from the dying words of James Naylor (1660)

This piece comes from a little tune, on a George Peel poem, composed in Paris twenty-two years ago. A fragment of the tune was later used in my *Prayers and Responses*. Today it is bestowed as a balm to James Naylor who perished so painfully in London the same year as Mary Dyer in Boston.

5. The World of Silence

"There must be a hush from the din of the world's noises before the soul can hear the inward Voice; . . . a closing of the eyes to the glare and dazzle of the world's sights before the inward eye can see that which is eternally Real . . ."

— Rufus Jones

"Man and mystery first meet in silence," declares the Swiss philosopher, Max Picard. "The sphere of faith and the sphere of silence belong together . . . When there is only noise in and around man, it is difficult to approach the mystery. When the layer of silence is missing, the extraordinary easily becomes connected with the ordinary." Yet from a strictly physical standpoint, is not the "silent world" beneath the sea in tact a din of fish squawks and liquid cyclones, like the deafening Niagara of our own bloodstream? One of my definitions of silence: Activity within the brain during the low-decibel hour of a Friends' meeting. The activity is not always serene (could it be today?) and sometimes calls forth noisy chords.

6. "Bewitching attire of the most charming simplicity ... "

— Hector St. John de Crevecoeur,
on Quaker dress in Nantucket, ca. 1770

No coincidence comes as a surprise when I'm at work. Thus, while composing *A Quaker Reader* in Nantucket, I happened to open Crèvecoeur's *Letters From An American Farmer*. Instantly I fell upon the alluring essay about Nantucket Quakers 150 years ago. Their dress, their self-reliance, their grace and wit, their gift (in the absence of songs or cards) to spin yarns about whaling trips, their cheerful flirtations, all that seemed so close to home that it entered the music as naturally as the continual cry of the gulls.

7. A Secret Power

"When I came into the silent assemblies . . . I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart."
— Robed Barclay

Like much programmatic music, this little chaconne (a 6-note ground thrice stated) was named after the fact, the way babies are named. But if the music did not emerge from the prose, the context for *A Secret Power* is nonetheless inspiring in itself. Robert Barclay (1648-1690), a Scotsman who arrived at Quakerism via other faiths which gave him "impressions contrary to the principle of Love", said further: "When I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart, and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up . . ."

8. ". . . No darkness at all . . ."

"God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all"
— Walt Whitman, recalling fifty years later how
Elias Hicks thus quoted Christ

Here the cycle seemed to need something spare. Recalling a little hymn I wrote several seasons back, I renoted it for the purpose, just as Whitman recalled, and doubtless reworded, from a half-century earlier the harangue by Elias Hicks who cried that God is light, and that in Him was "No Darkness at all." Which explains the title. (How hard it is to be easy! During long years as a composer I've scarcely grazed the simplicity — call it honest economy, if you will — which surely inhabits the richest art.)

9. One Sigh Rightly Begotten

Again William Penn. He wrote: "If you confine Christ's dwelling to a local heaven" (I thought of naming this movement 'A Local Heaven') "you are ignorant of that which is the greatest joy that can be: Christ dwells in the heart" (but since, as I see it, the heart too is a local heaven, the title would have carried no weight beyond itself — no afterthought). Penn adds: "Nothing reaches the heart but what is from the heart, or pierces the conscience but what comes from a living conscience . . ." Also: "Never marry but for love, but see that thou lovest what is lovely." And finally: "One sigh, rightly begotten, outweighs a whole volume of self-made prayers . . ." an *aperçu* both tender and tough, and ever so musical.

10. Return Home to Within

“Return home to within: sweep your Houses all. The Groat is there, the little Leaven is there, the Grain of the Mustard Seed you will see which the Kingdom of God is like ... and here you will see your Teacher, not removed into a Corner, but present when you are upon your Beds and about your Labour, convincing, instructing, leading, correcting, judging and giving Peace to all that love and follow Him.”

— Richard Howgill, ca. 1670

Is the recurring pedal D a calling horn, a lonely dinner bell from the “other side?” The title is from Howgill, but Boutroux too speaks of “The beyond that is within,” and the poet Vaughn wrote: “My soul, there is a country far beyond the stars.” The longest road leads into our own Heart of Darkness, and, despite Hicks' contention, that road moves through an ocean of black . . .

11. Ocean of Light

“. . . there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness.”

— George Fox

. . . or so thought George Fox. But his thought, like that of all strong innovators, was of necessity optimistic. “I should have a sense of all conditions,” wrote Fox early in his career. “How else should I speak to all conditions; and in this I saw the infinite love of God. I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God; and I had great openings.”

Nantucket, October 1976

NED ROREM (b. Richmond, Ind., 1923) is widely known for his eight books, including four volumes of diaries, and for his hundreds of art songs. He has also composed symphonies, operas, piano concertos, ballets, and music for smaller combinations of instruments.

During his early years in Chicago, Rorem studied piano, and after two years at Northwestern he received a scholarship to the Curtis Institute. After receiving his B.A. and M.A. at the Juilliard School, where he studied composition with Bernard Waagenar, he chose to remain in New York, studying composition with Virgil Thomson, while serving as Thomson's copyist.

In 1949, he left for a decade in Europe, and during that time was honored as a Fulbright and a Guggenheim Fellow. After his return to New York, his honors included an award from the National Institute/Academy of Arts and Letters, as well as performances by leading soloists, orchestras, the New York City Opera Company (*Miss Julie*), and, most recently, the Pulitzer Prize in 1976. His *PIANO SONATA NO. 2*, *POEMS OF LOVE AND THE RAIN*, *SOME TREES*, *BOOK OF HOURS*, and *ROMEO AND JULIET* are available on CRI.

LEONARD RAVER, official organist of the New York Philharmonic, is on the organ faculty of The Juilliard School in New York. In addition to his many recitals and concerts of the standard repertoire, he specializes in the music of contemporary composers and has premiered many new works composed for him by - among others - Richard Felciano, Ronald Perera, Vincent Persichetti, Daniel Pinkham, Ned Rorem, and Elliott Schwartz.

Raver studied with D. Robert Smith at the University of Puget Sound, Arthur Poister at Syracuse University and Vernon de Tar at Union Theological Seminary School of Sacred Music. As a Fulbright scholar to the Netherlands, he studied for two years with Gustav Leonhardt at the Amsterdam Royal Conservatory specializing in organ, harpsichord and the performance practice of baroque music.

Raver has served as National Secretary and as a member of the National Council of the American Guild of Organists.

SPECIFICATIONS OF THE ALICE TULLY HALL ORGAN

STOPLIST:

Grand Orgue

1. Bourdon	16'	61 pipes
2. Montre	8'	61 pipes
3. Flûte harmonique	8'	61 pipes
4. Bourdon à cheminée	8'	61 pipes
5. Prestant	4'	61 pipes
6. Flûte ouverte	4'	61 pipes
7. Quinte	2 2/3'	61 pipes
8. Doublette	2'	61 pipes
9. Fourniture V	1 1/3'	305 pipes
10. Cymbale III	1/2'	183 pipes
11. Cornet V, from low F to treble G, 51 notes	8'	255 pipes
12. Doucaine	16'	61 pipes
13. Trompette	8'	61 pipes
14. Clairon	4'	61 pipes

Positif

15. Qunitaton	16'	61 pipes
16. Salicional (lower 12 stopped)	8'	61 pipes
17. Bourdon	8'	61 pipes
18. Prestant	4'	61 pipes
19. Flûte à fuseau	4'	61 pipes
20. Nazard	2 2/3'	61 pipes
21. Doublette	2'	61 pipes
22. Qaurte de nazard	2'	61 pipes
23. Tierce	1 3/5	61 pipes
24. Larigot	1 1/3'	61 pipes
25. Cymbale IV	4'	61 pipes
26. Cromorne	8'	61 pipes

Tremblant

Récit

27. Bourdon doux	16'	61 pipes
28. Principal étroit	8'	61 pipes
29. Viole de gambe	8'	61 pipes
30. Voix céleste, from low F	8'	61 pipes
31. Flûte à cheminée	8'	61 pipes
32. Principal conique	4'	61 pipes
33. Flûte traversière	4'	61 pipes
34. Flûte des bois	2'	61 pipes
35. Plein jeu V	2'	305 pipes
36. Basson	16'	61 pipes
37. Trompette	8'	61 pipes
38. Hautbois	8'	61 pipes
39. Clairon	4'	61 pipes
Tremblant		

Positif de chambre

40. Bourdon en bois	8'	61 pipes
41. Quintaton	8'	61 pipes
42. Flûte conique (lower 12 stopped)	4'	61 pipes
43. Doublette	2'	61 pipes
44. Quinte	1 1/3'	61 pipes
45. Piccolo	1'	61 pipes
46. Cymbale III	1/3'	183 pipes
47. Sesquialtera II	2 2/3'	122 pipes
48. Régale	8'	61 pipes
Tremblant		

Pédale

49. Principal	16'	32 pipes
50. Soubasse	16'	32 pipes
51. Quintaton	16'	32 pipes
52. Principal	8'	32 pipes
53. Bourdon	8'	32 pipes
54. Prestant	4'	32 pipes
55. Flûte à cheminée	4'	32 pipes
56. Flûte à bec	2'	32 pipes
57. Fourniture V	2'	160 pipes
58. Bombarde	16'	32 pipes
59. Basson	16'	32 pipes
60. Trompette	8'	32 pipes
61. Chalumeau	4'	32 pipes

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