

## **RONALD PERERA**

### **THREE POEMS OF GÜNTER GRASS**

**Elsa Charlston, soprano;**

**Boston Musica Viva, Richard Pittman, conductor**

**Tape part produced at Smith College Electronic Music Studio**

RONALD PERERA (b. Boston, 1941) is an Associate Professor of Music at Smith College and Director of the electronic music studio there. Before coming to Smith in 1971 he taught at Dartmouth College and Syracuse University. He received A.B. and M.A. degrees in music from Harvard, where his composition teacher was Leon Kirchner. He has also studied with Randall Thompson, Mario Davidovsky and Gottfried Michael Koenig.

He has written works for both conventional and electronic media, and has received awards or fellowships from Harvard University, the Paderewski Fund, the Goethe Institute, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Massachusetts Arts and Humanities Foundation, and ASCAP. He is co-editor of *The Development and Practice of Electronic Music*. His music has been recorded on the CRI and Opus One labels.

THREE POEMS OF GÜNTER GRASS was commissioned by the Goethe Institute of Boston for the Boston Musica Viva and was premiered by the Musica Viva in Cambridge on November 19, 1974. The three poems, which are set as separate movements, are *Gleisdreieck*, *Klappstühle*, and *Schlaflos*.

*Gleisdreieck* is a station on the Berlin elevated railway, and was a frontier crossing point between East and West before the Wall was erected. While the poem is specifically about a contemporary German caught between opposing political or ideological systems, *Gleisdreieck*, like all three of these poems, is metaphorical. Its theme of choosing between conflicting alternatives, whether political, ethical or personal, can be transposed to any time or culture. The musical setting alternates between an introspective and recitative-like music and an extroverted, 'jazzy' music reminiscent of the twenties or thirties cabaret.

*Klappstühle* (Folding Chairs) is a waltz fantasy on a melody from the Strauss waltz, *Künstlerleben* (Artist's Life), which is first heard played on an old-fashioned music box. The music recalls the style of certain German late romantic composers while simultaneously foreshadowing fragments of the Nazi march, *Die Jugend Marschiert*. This somewhat bizarre musical setting was suggested by the bitter-sweet, at times almost nostalgic character of a poem about refugees embarking on the trans-Atlantic journey to a new land while the culture they have left behind is engulfed.

*Schlaflos* (Sleepless) is about a man who tries to count himself to sleep, and in doing so begins to count up everything he has done in his life to see what it all "adds up to." But the impressions on his mental "playback reel" remain surreal, and resist any orderly interpretation. Counting back he finally arrives at the events of the war and comes face to face with a guilt which he cannot erase, and for which, in his waking life, he can obtain only a token absolution. The music makes a dramatic and narrative journey into his past.

*Notes by Ronald Perera*

## **STEPHEN ALBERT**

### **TO WAKE THE DEAD (James Joyce)**

**Sheila Marie Allen, soprano; Pro Musica Moderna, Charles Fussell, conductor**

STEPHEN ALBERT, (b. 1941, New York City) began writing music at age 13 and attended the Eastman School of Music, the Philadelphia Musical Academy and the University of Pennsylvania. He has taught at Smith College, Boston and Stanford Universities and currently lives with his wife and two children in Massachusetts. He has been the recipient of a number of awards including a B.M.I. 1st Prize, the Bearns Prize of Columbia University, the Prix de Rome, a Ford Foundation Grant, a Fromm Foundation Commission and two Guggenheim Fellowships. His works have been performed by the Chicago Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the RAI Orchestra of Rome and the Berkshire Music Festival Orchestra at Tanglewood. TO WAKE THE DEAD was written on a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts. The composer writes:

“TO WAKE THE DEAD is based on excerpts from *Finnegan's Wake* by James Joyce. It is in seven movements, six of which are songs, and one is for instruments alone.

“Joyce's work is infamous for being one of literature's most challenging, if not incomprehensible novels. This cycle is an attempt to set extended passages from that work to music. One of the attractions of *Finnegan's Wake* for the composer is that the language, while obscure so much of the time, is informed by rich imagery, a mysterious atmosphere and an almost hypnotic rhythm. As the language of the novel is kin to the language of dreams, it seemed an intriguing prospect to translate this dream-state into something more palpable, less surreal.

“The music tries to offset the novel's dissociated and fragmented sensibility by speaking in a relatively direct manner which is strongly melodic and tonal throughout. This paradoxical matching of words to music seemed natural and was, in fact, the driving force during the germination of TO WAKE THE DEAD. The texts of the songs were chosen for their relative clarity and unified theme, (Birth, Death and Transfiguration).”

The music of the cycle is largely based on the only tune that Joyce includes in *Finnegan's Wake*. It is quoted in its entirety in the opening of the second movement where it is given a music-box setting to Joyce's version of “Humpty Dumpty.” A few thoughts from Joseph Campbell's book, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegan's Wake*, follow:

Tim Finnegan of the old vaudeville song is an Irish hod\* carrier who gets drunk, falls off a ladder, and is apparently killed. His friends hold a death watch over his coffin; during the festivities someone splashes him with whiskey at which Finnegan comes to life again and joins the general dance.

. . . Finnegan's fall from the ladder is Lucifer's fall, Adam's fall, the setting sun that will rise again, the fall of Rome, a Wall Street crash ... it is Humpty Dumpty's fall and the fall of Newton's apple. And it is every man's daily recurring fall from grace . . .

. . . By Finn's coming again (Finn-again) — in other words, by the reappearance of the hero — . . . strength and hope are provided for mankind.

\*A long-handled box for coals or for holding bricks and mortar, carried over the shoulder.

"cause for rejoicing"

— Allen Hughes, *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

ELSA CHARLSTON has been heard in music of all periods, but is especially noted for her convincing performances of contemporary works. She is a member of Ralph Shapey's Contemporary Chamber players of the University of Chicago, and the Boston Musica Viva. Her opera debut was made in Berg's *Lulu* with the Santa Fe Opera, her New York recital debut at Alice Tully Hall. Ms. Charlston has sung with the Chicago Lyric Opera, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and major orchestras throughout the country. Her recordings are on CRI, Delos, and Musical Heritage. The BOSTON MUSICA VIVA is internationally admired for its distinguished performances of older music as well as contemporary works, of which it has premiered 35. RICHARD PITTMAN, who founded it, has also conducted leading orchestras here and abroad. Members of BOSTON MUSICA VIVA on this record are: J. Fenwick Smith, flute; William Wrzesien, clarinet; Evelyn Zuckerman, piano; Daniel Stepner, violin; Aaron Picht, viola; Bruce Coppock, cello. The recording was made for the Hessian Radio in Frankfurt, which licensed it to CRI. SHEILA MARIE ALLEN is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory and the Eastman School of Music and has sung leading roles as a member of the Baltimore, Chautauqua, and Rochester Opera Companies. She is presently on the faculty of the State University of New York at Fredonia, THE PRO MUSICA MODERNA of the University of Massachusetts was founded in 1969. Its repertory has ranged from the music of Maxwell Davies, Tippett, Varese, Bernard Rogers, Burrill Phillips, Busoni, Janacek and Stravinsky, to composers, both faculty and students, now at work on the University of Massachusetts campus, Amherst. Its members on this recording are: Joanne Tanner, Flute-Alto-Flute; Joseph Contino, Clarinet-Bass Clarinet; Goivina Sessions, Violin-Viola; Leopold Teraspulsky, Cello; Fernande Kaeser, Piano; Joseph Cuda, Harmonium. CHARLES FUSSELL studied at the Eastman School with Bernard Rogers in composition, Herman Genhart, in conducting, and Jose Echaniz, in piano. He has taught at Smith College, the North Carolina School of the Arts, and in the Summer Master Classes of Friedelind Wagner at Norton, England. He currently (1980) teaches at the University of Massachusetts.

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*(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*