

Seymour Shifrin

Chronicles (1970)

The University of California at Berkeley Chorus and Orchestra Roger Patterson, tenor; Allen Shearer, baritone; Michael Senturia, director

Three Songs (1952)

Spring and Fall

No Second Troy

The Cat and the Moon

Five Songs (1979)

Sonnet LX

White Flowers

The Pool

Anacreontike

Astrophil and Stella

Christine Whittlesey, soprano; Robert Levin, piano

Seymour Shifrin (1926-1979) was born in New York City and educated at the High School of Music and Art and at Columbia University; his most influential teachers were William Schuman, Otto Luening and Darius Milhaud. He taught for many years at the University of California at Berkeley and was Professor of Music at Brandeis University. His commissions include those from the Koussevitzky Foundation, the League of Composers—ISCM, the Fine Arts Foundation, the Fromm Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. He received the Bearns Prize, the Copley Award, the Horblit Award and Fulbright and Guggenheim Fellowships. His *Satires of Circumstance*, issued by Nonesuch Records, received the Koussevitzky International Recording Award in 1970. Two years later, Shifrin's *Three Pieces for Orchestra* (1958), a Naumburg Award-winning composition, again received the Koussevitzky as CRI SD 275. Shifrin's work may also be heard on CRI recordings: *Serenade for Five Instruments* (1955) on CRI SD 123, *String Quartet No. 4* on CRI SD 358, and *Cantata to the Text of Sophoclean Choruses* on CRI SD 511.

About *Chronicles*, Shifrin has written: *Chronicles*, completed in 1970, was commissioned by Temple Ernmanu-El of San Francisco on the occasion of the 120th anniversary of its founding. The work is set in the Hebrew of the Old Testament and divides into five parts. The first three parts are given to public and social matters. Part IV conveys a private sense of despair and loneliness, followed by Part V, in a heightened poetic voice, offering a mandarin response if not an answer.

Part I draws its text from the first three chapters of *Chronicles*, a genealogical account from Adam to David and Solomon, and is set for chorus and orchestra. Part II continues with the David of *Chronicles* I, chapter 22, at the moment when he tells Solomon, his son, that he is to build the Temple, for David's hands have been bloodied in war. This text is sung by the solo tenor and is preceded and followed by baritone narrative. The closing text is from Isaiah, chapter 60. Part III is a setting for chorus and orchestra of portions of Isaiah, chapter 55, taking as its theme the joyous strain of social justice celebrated in this Book. Part IV is a setting from Job, chapter 10, for bass and orchestra, that narrates his complaint against prodigious arbitrariness. Part V, again set for full chorus and orchestra, takes its texts from what are thought to be among the oldest portions of Job, chapters 28 and 33, and speaks of search, wonder, and calm.

"I am indebted to Professor Naftali Brandwein of Brandeis University, Michael Lerdahl, other friends, and my wife, Miriam, for their help with the Hebrew text. Any errors of transliteration are, however, to be laid at my door. The work is dedicated to my parents on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of their marriage."

Michael Senturia, since 1962 the director of the University Symphony Orchestra of the University of California, Berkeley, gave the Berkeley premiere of Seymour Shifrin's *Satires of Circumstance* as well as *Chronicles*. He has premiered many other works, including Roger Sessions' *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*, with the University Chorus and Orchestra. The Chorus and Orchestra draw their membership from the University at large, including students, staff and members of the community. Roger Patterson is a minister as well as a tenor; Allen Shearer is active both as a singer and as a composer in the Bay Area

While finding my own way I should not like to give up anything that has ever been won in the way of subtlety, richness and complexity; yet I retain a taste for the simple and the vernacular. The qualities I value in music have to do with strong intent, the interaction of the small and the large and the will to make whole what seems disparate. What I hope continues to evolve in my work is a highly inflected, pliable, elegant language.

—Seymour Shifrin

Notes on Songs:

Shifrin's regular and repeated returns to text-setting punctuate his thirty year career as a composer and afford us the opportunity to chronicle his evolution toward the goals he set for himself in the words above.

Three Songs (1949-52): The first piece in the group of early songs, a setting of Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Spring and Fall," was completed last of the three, in 1952; it is both the richest in harmony and the subtlest in elucidating textual correspondences through musical allusions.

Through similarities in interval choice and melodic contour, the composer associates "Goldengrove unleaving" of the first stanza with the second stanza's "worlds of Wanwood leafmeal lie," thereby creating a large-scale sequence that builds across the first two stanzas. The melodic fragment of descending whole tones used for these lines also initiates the poem's last line, "It is Margaret you mourn for," linking finally the falling of leaves to mourning for Margaret. The C# to G# progressions that delimit both the "like the things of man..." and the "It is Margaret" lines in the voice help to strengthen this association across stanzas, as do pitch classes B and C#, which frame the voice's cadential lines in all three stanzas.

Melodic lines move between this golden whole-tone world of leafy Wanwood and the half-steps used to sing of "the things of man," such as "grieving," "the heart," "a sigh," "a weep and knowing why," "sorrow's springs," "mouth," "mind," "blight" and "mourning." This motion from initial whole tones to cadential half-steps charts the progression the child will have to go through as she stops mourning only for the lost leaves and grows to regret the passing of her own life.

The piano's solo close refers back to the accompaniment for the words "(grieving) over," as if to say that Margaret will be grieving over and over, over the fall of Goldengrove, over the things of man, over her own self, until all such grieving, too, will be over, as the piano's final "word" textlessly suggests.

His 1951 setting of W. B. Yeats "No Second Troy" offers particularly clear examples of Shifrin's use of other musical resources such as dynamics, *tessitura*, and texture to sensitively render his reading of a text. Already in the opening *Largo* one senses, despite the singer's opening "Why should I blame her," that he is in fact reluctant to stop blaming her. The true state of his agitated feelings is betrayed in his long crescendo and persistent rise in *tessitura* which accompany the rest of the stanza and lead up to the high F for his final *ff* derisive dismissal of "ignorant men," "had they but courage equal to desire." The authorial implication is that our singer's desire is strong enough to drive him not only up to a high E but to "most violent ways," as well. On the word "desire" Shifrin has the soloist crescendo into nothing; the piano then assumes the burden of his passionate fantasy, thereby enabling the singer to concentrate on "her" as, in singing her "high and solitary" praises, he tries to make a case in her defense.

The only other high F in the piece is reserved for the other high point of passion, the opening of the last couplet, "Why, what could she had done . . ." But this time the high F is attacked piano, and leads to a *meno mosso, ritardando*, and *diminuendo* as the singer, willfully asserting the courage equal to his own desire by starting on the high F tries once more to persuade himself that, "being what she is," he really has no just cause to blame her.

Shifrin's setting of "The Cat and the Moon," also a Yeats poem, was composed first of these three, in 1949, and is dedicated to the composer's wife, Miriam. The song divides into two parts, with the fifth, sixth and seventh stanzas corresponding to the first, second and fourth. Its limited harmonic palette of diminished sonorities and octatonic melodic lines helps to reinforce the unsettled, zany, slightly uncanny atmosphere of Yeats' text. These relatively static circulating harmonies aptly characterize the cat who "went here and there," the moon that "spun round like a top," and the cat's "pupils" which "will pass from change to change," "from round to crescent" and "crescent to round." Like the movements of this odd and rangy couple, the ostinato figures at the piece's close may appear to be heading somewhere, but never in fact do more than to spin 'round tolike "from moonlit place to place."

Five Songs (1979): The Five Songs, were Shifrin's last work. Unlike the songs in the earlier group, these five were composed in their performed order. The choice of texts is remarkable, their arrangement uncannily prescient. Taken in sequence, they move from a "Do not go gentle" attitude toward aging and dying to an acceptance and even a yearning for death that culminates in the opening plea of the last poem, "Come sleepe, O sleepe, the certain knot of peace, the balm of woe, the prisoner's release," etc.

The setting of Shakespeare's *Sonnet LX* which opens the cycle depicts the familiar cycle of coming to a begrudging acknowledgement of mortality, to raging against the dying, to the poet's hoping somehow to outlive Time's cruel hand by writing. The second poem, Michael Fried's "White Flowers," expresses the fragility and untenability of life's precious things such as "Your rare spasms of exuberance," which, "like the nameless white flowers . . . can be cut but not held" This poem is set quite rhapsodically, with capricious rare spasmodic outbursts in both accompaniment and voice. The third poem, also by Shifrin's friend Fried, is about "old age" which, like the "blandly cruising" fish it pauses to watch, "forgets how it came to be there" and "for what ultimate purpose (it was) so deliberately stockpiled." This poem functions as a kind of meditative mid-cycle *fermata*: lush whole-tone riddled chords color the texture with little sense of urgency, places to get to, or things to resolve.

The turning point comes in the fourth poem, Robert Herrick's "Anacreontike," where death is first viewed as a potential relief: after claiming to have been undone and betrayed "by so many," the poet expresses his wish that after death, accounts will be settled, right will be recognized and accorded its proper due. It is in this song that the singer goes over the edge. Highly agitated, she pushes again and again past her previously established upper Ab, limit to the A natural; as if obsessed with her discovery that death will at least bring release, if not vindication (and what better way to go, than with the

glorious high A she reaches the second time she sings the word "erected," having only made it up as far as Ab, the first time around!)

The vocal line of the last song, to Sir Philip Sidney's "Come Sleepe" sonnet, retraces the path up to high A, which then resolves down a half-step to G#, the note we know from the first song to be the sign of ineluctable closure. The A-G# progression is not as strident, insistent or disjunct as it was in the first song; the poet calls out for death now, and the downward *appoggiatura*-like motion from A almost caresses its neighbor G#, no longer an unwelcome guest to that "wearie head" in the poet's "chamber deaf to noise, and blind to light."

In the years between the two song cycles, Shifrin's musical language evolved into a more complex atonal one, tightly constructed and eloquently wrought. His lifelong concern with clear phrasing and with goal-directed linear and harmonic motion, nourished here by his always unusually probing reading of poetry, is given mayor, individual and satisfying expression in this late work.

-Susan Blaustein

Soprano **Christine Whittlesey** is a musician of notable versatility. She has sung leading roles in opera and operetta in Europe; as a Lieder singer, she has been heard in recital on both sides of the Atlantic and in live performances on the French and Austrian radio. For two years, she was soprano soloist with the New York Pro Musica Antiqua, performing Medieval and Renaissance works. As an oratorio singer, she has appeared numerous times with Helmuth Rilling, and regularly performs contemporary works, many of which are written for her. Trained as both pianist and singer, she has studied with the Irde Prilla, John Moriarty, Jerry Forderhase and Robert Thomas. She attended Tufts University and the Boston and New England Conservatories, continuing her operatic training at the Sante Fe and Wolf Trap companies and at the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. She has performed at the Spoleto, Corfu, Sarasota and Lockenhaus festivals. Whittlesey has recorded for the Musical Heritage Society, and may be heard on CRI SD 445.

Pianist and harpsichordist **Robert Levin** is well-known as a soloist and chamber performer throughout the United States and Europe, and especially for his Mozart performances, which include stylistic embellishment and improvisation. He was associated with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and its Chamber Players over a five year period, and has been pianist of the New York Philomusica since 1971. In addition to his performance activities, Levin is a recognized Mozart scholar and theorist, having authored numerous articles and reconstructed Mozart fragments. Levin studied piano with Louis Martin and composition with Stefan Wolpe in New York, and then with Nadia Boulanger in Paris while still in high school. After graduating from Harvard, he was invited by Rudolf Serkin to head the theory department at the Curtis Institute of Music, a post which he held until 1973. Since 1972 he has been a member of the faculty of SUNY Purchase, and since 1979 of the Fontainebleau School of Music, at the request of Boulanger. He has recorded for the Nonesuch, Candide, Deutsche Grammophon, Philips and Turnabout labels, and may be heard on CRI SD 313.

(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)

I

Chronicles 1:1, 2, 3

Adam, Seth, Enosh; Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared; Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech;

II

Chronicles 22:7, 8, 9, 10

'And David said to Solomon: 'My son, as for me, it was in my heart to build a house unto the name of the LORD my God. 'But the word of the LORD came to me, saying: Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build a house unto My name, because thou has shed much blood upon the earth in My sight. 'Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name; and he shall be to Me for a son, and I will be to him for a father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever.

Isaiah 60:18

Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, Desolation nor destruction within thy borders; But thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, And thy gates Praise.

III

Isaiah 55:1, 12, 13

Ho, every one that thirsteth,
come ye for water,
And he that hath no money;
Come ye, buy, and eat;
Yea, come buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.

For ye shall go out with joy,
And be led forth with peace;
The mountains and the hills shall
break forth before you into singing,
And all the tree of the fields shall clap their hands.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress,
And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
And it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,
For an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

IV

Job 10:1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 20, 21

My soul is weary of my life
I will give free course to my complaint;
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.

Is it good unto Thee that Thou shouldest oppress,
That Thou shouldest despise the work of Thy hands,
And shine upon the counsel of the wicked?
Hast Thou eyes of flesh,
Or seest Thou as man seeth?
Are Thy days as the days of man,
Or Thy years as a man's days,
That Thou inquirest after mine iniquity,
And searchest after my sin,
Thy hands have framed me and fashioned me
Together round about; yet Thou dost destroy me!
Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh,
And knit me together with bones and sinews.
Are not my days few? cease then,
And let me alone, that I may take comfort a little,
Before I go whence I shall not return,
Even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death;

V

Job 28:7, 8, 12, 14, 15

That path no bird of prey knoweth.
Neither hath the falcon's eye seen it;
The proud beasts have not trodden it,
Nor hath the lion passed thereby.
But wisdom, where shall it be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
The deep saith: 'It is not in me';
And the sea saith: 'It is not with me:
It cannot be gotten for gold,
Neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof.

Job 33:15, 16, 17

In a dream, in a vision of the night,
When deep sleep falleth upon men,
In slumberings upon the bed;
"Then He openeth the ears of men,
And by their chastisement sealeth the decree,

"That men may put away their purpose,
And that He may hide pride from man;

Three Songs (1952)

Spring and Fall

Margaret are you grieving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leaves, like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Ah! as the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of Wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you will weep and know why.

Now no matter, child, the name:
Sorrow's springs are the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:

It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

No Second Troy

Why should I blame her that she filled my days
With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways
Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire?

What could have made her peaceful with a mind
That nobleness made simple as a fire,
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern.

Why, what could she have done, being what she is,
Was there another Troy for her to burn?

William Butler Yeats

The Cat and the Moon

The cat went here and there,
And the moon spun 'round like a top,
And the nearest kin of the moon
The creeping cat looked up.

Black Minalushe stared at the moon,
For wander and wail as he would,
The pure cold light in the sky
Troubled his animal blood.

Minalushe runs in the grass.
Lifting his delicate feet.
Do you dance, Minalushe, do you dance
When two close kindred meet?

What better that call a dance?
Maybe the moon may learn,
Tired of that courtly fashion,
A new dance turn.

Minalushe creeps through the grass
From moonlit place to place;
The sacred moon overhead
Has taken a new phase.

Does Minalushe know that his pupils
Will pass from change to change,
And that from round to crescent,
From crescent to round they range....

Minalushe creeps through the grass,
Alone, important and wise,
And lifts to the changing moon
His changing eyes.

William Butler Yeats

Five Songs (1979)

Sonnet LX

Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;

Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toll all forwards do contend.

Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked, eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.

Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow:

And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

William Shakespeare

White Flowers

Your rare spasms of exuberance
Are fragile as this cold dusk
Through which we walk without speaking.
Without feeling the cold.

Like the nameless white flowers
Your warm breath creates out of nothing
But insane anguish,
They can be cut but not held.

Michael Fried

The Pool

Old age that comes
On a desperate errand
But forgets its purpose
Pauses at the verge

Of a magnificent pool.
In its translucent depths
Fish and the shadow of fish
Cruise blandly forth

Or else simply lull
On the bright, figured tiles
Of its priceless floor.

These too have forgotten

In that azure sea
How they came to be there,
And for what implacable purpose
They were so deliberately stockpiled.

Michael Fried

Anacreontike

I must/Not trust/Here to any;
Bereav'd/Deceiv'd/By so many:
As one/Undone/By my losses;
Comply/Will I/With my crosses.
Yet still/I will/Not be grieving;
Since thence/And hence/Comes relieving.
But this/Sweet is/In our mourning;
Times bad/And sad/Are a turning;
And he/Whom we/See dejected;
Next day/We may/See erected.

Robert Herrick

Sonnet XXXIX from "*Astrophel and Stella*"

Come sleepe, O sleepe, the certaine knot of peace,
The bating place of wit, the balme of woe,
The poore man's wealth, the prisoner's release,
Th' indifferent judge betweene the high and low;

With shield of prooffe, shield me from out the prease
Of those fierce darts, dispaire at me doth throw:
O make in me the civill wars to cease;
I will good tribute pay if thou do so.

Take thou of me smooth pillowes, sweetest bed,
A chamber deaf to noise, and blind to light:
A rosie garland, and a wearie head:

And if these things, as being thine by right,
Move not thy heavy grace, thou shalt in me
Livelier than elsewhere Stella's image see.

Sir Philip Sidney