

## **David Del Tredici: Steps, Haddocks' Eyes**

New World 80390-2

David Del Tredici was born in 1937 in Cloverdale, California. He began piano lessons at age twelve, progressing so remarkably that five years later he performed with the San Francisco Symphony. Piano studies continued with Bernhard Abramowitsch, and later, Robert Helps.

But, in 1958, at the Aspen Festival, Del Tredici discovered composing in a seminar with composer Darius Milhaud, and wrote his first work, *Soliloquy* for piano (New World 80380-2). This marked a turning point in his musical life. He studied composition at the University of California at Berkeley, with Arnold Elston and Seymour Shifrin; and later, as a Woodrow Wilson fellow at Princeton University with Earl Kim and Roger Sessions. His early scores came to the attention of Aaron Copland, who would become one of his staunchest supporters.

Del Tredici has received commissions from the Koussevitsky Music Foundation and the Fromm Foundation, among others, and his awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship and the 1980 Pulitzer Prize. Currently distinguished professor of music at the City College of New York, Del Tredici has held appointments at Harvard and Boston universities. From 1988 to 1990, he was composer in residence at the New York Philharmonic.

David Del Tredici first came to public attention in 1976, with the premiere of *Final Alice*—a grandiose, exhilarating monodrama for amplified soprano and orchestra, which sounds a little bit like *Der Rosenkavalier* on amphetamines, full of soprano whoops, lush orchestral explosions and an agreeably cracked vision of the world. It made Del Tredici famous and a musical movement dubbed “neo-Romanticism,” simmering for years, came to a boil.

At that point, Del Tredici had already been well known in the musical community for some time, initially as a talented young pianist and later as the composer of knotty, expressionistic works in the post-Schoenbergian manner. Yet even in such formative compositions as *I Hear An Army* (1963) and *Szygy* (1966), the discerning listener will be aware of a strong lyrical impulse that is distinctly Del Tredici's own.

*Final Alice* came as a surprise—not only to Del Tredici's colleagues but to the composer himself. “I certainly didn't sit down and decide to become a tonal composer,” he said in 1983. “I fought it all the way. I came of musical age in the 1960s when atonality, whether you happened to like it or not, was widely considered the only viable contemporary musical language. So I had a lot of conditioning to shed. I simply set Lewis Carroll's words in what seemed to me the most appropriate way—that is to say, tonally. As a ‘modern’ composer, I kept waiting to write the obligatory dissonances, for the wrong notes to arrive. But they never did.”

In the fifteen years since *Final Alice*, Del Tredici has continued to explore his own quirky and distinctive use of traditional Western tonality. The present recording unites two

recent works: *Haddocks' Eyes* (1985), another manifestation of Lewis Carroll; and *Steps*, a 1990 work written on a joint commission from the New York Philharmonic and the Meet the Composer Orchestra Residencies Program.

*Steps* was first performed by the New York Philharmonic at Avery Fisher Hall on March 8, 1990. Del Tredici places *Steps* with two earlier orchestral works—*March to Tonality* (1985) and *Tattoo* (1988). The use of tonality in *Steps* is considerably different from the sweetly nostalgic purposes to which it was often put in the “Alice” pieces. “Shot through with dissonance, these chord progressions have a menacing, even pathetic character,” he has said. “The startling first chord of *Steps* suggests a somewhat malevolent atmosphere. I always wanted to write a thriller, the musical equivalent of one of those page turners that you can't put down, something which grabs you from the first minute and won't let you go. *Steps* is a monster—violent, powerful, inexorable.”

*Steps* is cast in one movement, divided into four interconnected sections. “Giant Steps,” which opens the piece, is a dark, driven, faintly Mahlerian march; “The Two Step,” a vast, agitated dance; “Giant Giant Steps” provides a frenzied climax, complete with wildly virtuosic writing for the large orchestra, while “Stepping Down,” as it were, restores the peace.

Ernest Bloch, in comparing Debussy to a painter who finishes a painting, looks at it and then decides what he can take out, added that when Richard Strauss finished a painting, he looked at it and then threw all his remaining paint on the canvas. The latter observation comes to mind when listening to the later “Alice” pieces—particularly “In Memory of a Summer Day” (1980)—with their tremendous size and spectacular orchestrations. For those who desire something more intimate than these vast fantasias—say, the difference between *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Ariadne auf Naxos*—*Haddocks' Eyes* provides a cogent and satisfying distillation of Del Tredici's “Alice” style for soprano and a mere ten instruments.

*Haddocks' Eyes* was commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, which presented the premiere on May 2, 1986 in New York's Alice Tully Hall. It is set to a portion of Chapter VIII of *Through the Looking Glass*, in which the White Knight rescues Alice from the Red Knight, who had made her his prisoner. In true Victorian fashion—a bow to the Savoy Operas?—Del Tredici has called the “White Knight's Song (K)” “a ‘patter’ song, the words spilling out with increasing frenzy as the blissfully confused Knight careens from one hilariously cracked image to another.”

The musical setting is “funny, brusque and breathless—a kind of infernal *perpetual mobile* machine ever in danger of flying apart,” Del Tredici continues. “Only at the penultimate line, ‘That summer evening long ago,’ does the music mellow. Indeed...this line becomes a crucial motif, bearing the listener again and again to the rapturous, bittersweet depths of Carrollian sentiment for child friends now grown, gone....”

However, the centerpiece of the work is not by Carroll but by one of his contemporaries, the poet Thomas Moore—a yearning, idyllic setting of “My Heart and Lute,” which Del

Tredici designates as an aria. It is followed, in turn, by a furious instrumental interlude; a return to the “White Knight's Song”; and a final “Farewell” which makes effective, intertwining use of both the knight's song and the aria. The piece concludes with, as Del Tredici puts it, “a bit of knightly confusion:

“That summer evening long ago,  
A-sitting on a gate.”

“Which line should end the poem? The knight tries one, then the other. He combines bits of each. Finally as the music vanishes, nonsense reigns. “

long ago, on a gate  
long ago, a gate  
ago, a gate  
a”

Del Tredici has said that a composer's primary objective in composing is to translate his personality into music. “I've been told that there is something childlike in my character. If that is true, then perhaps the compositions here can be said to represent two distinct sides of that child—something charming, something monstrous.” —*Tim Page*

*Tim Page is the chief classical music critic for Newsday and the host of a radio program on WNYC-FM in New York. His books include The Glenn Gould Reader (1984) and Selected Letters of Virgil Thomson (1988).*

#### **The following comments are from the composer:**

Massive and grandiose, violent and raucous, *Steps* moves like an enormous procession across half an hour's time. The single arching movement divides into four sections. “Giant Steps” begins a somber forward march. “The Two-Step” is boisterous—a contrasting, clattering dance. “Giant Giant Steps,” a climactic recapitulation, is full of furious activity, while “Stepping Down,” the coda-finale, brings some measure of serenity. The ending itself is equivocal.

“*Steps* is music written for the Easter Island statues, should they decide to walk,” said a friend after hearing my own piano rendition of it. I like the image, suggesting as it does inexorable movement and the larger-than-life. It is no accident, after all, that the adjective “giant” appears three times in the subsection titles. The image of a huge machine moving relentlessly forward haunted me through the composition of three successive orchestral pieces, *March To Tonality*, *Tattoo*, and now *Steps*. Each piece manipulates obsessive rhythmic repetition, metallic orchestral textures and high-decibel sonorities to create the illusion of unstoppable alien energy, at once terrifying and fascinating. *Steps* stands tallest; it is, if you will, the Kong of the three.

Then, too, *Steps* is my most dissonant tonal piece...I tried to create a harder-edged tonality: one with fewer referential glances, less consonant glow. In the process, dissonance began to assume an almost programmatic role. Dissonance as destroyer, dissonance as chromatic infector, dissonance as tonality-devouring Mothra—these became enlivening images as I explored a twilight tonality that was taking me far from

the steps of Carroll's Christ Church College (or so it seems to me now, ex post facto, as I struggle to make verbal sense of what was, after all, an entirely intuitive, aural process).

*Steps* has three principal themes and begins with a signature-sound: heavily muted brass playing a dominant-seventh chord ravaged by dissonant alterations. This harsh rasp is a musical signpost that recurs again and again. The first theme is a mournful dirge played only by muted strings. It is joined, at the first *fortissimo*, by a crawling, chromatic “spider”-theme heard in the bass (so called because the theme is drawn from a work-in-progress, my setting of the familiar poem *The Spider and the Fly*).

Thereafter, and particularly in “Giant Giant Steps,” the two themes are locked together, juxtaposed. Like Godzilla battling Megalon, each struggles to dominate the other, creating havoc and excitement along the way, but little resolution.

A third theme stands apart. It is not introduced until the work's trio section, “The Two-Step,” and returns only in the coda, “Stepping Down.” Vigorous and diatonic, sober and straightforward, this theme brings a measure of stability, providing firm footing on an otherwise slippery and twisting tonal path.

*Steps* is dedicated to Paul Arcomano.

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Is the White Knight, who sings Alice his famous nonsense song in *Through the Looking Glass*, really a caricature of Lewis Carroll himself? Martin Gardner, in *The Annotated Alice*, thinks so.

Like the knight, Carroll had shaggy hair, mild blue eyes, a kind and gentle face. Like the knight, his mind seemed to function best when it saw things in topsy-turvy fashion... Of all the characters Alice meets on her two dream adventures, only the White Knight seems to be genuinely fond of her and to offer her special assistance... His melancholy farewell may be Carroll's farewell to Alice when she grew up (became a queen) and abandoned him. At any rate, we hear loudest in this episode that “shadow of a sigh” that Carroll tells us in his prefatory poem will “tremble through the story.”

This interpretation of the eccentric Knight won me over the moment I read it. Music, I realized, could not only serve his madcap verse but could, as well, bring to life a touchingly personal dimension.

I learned further from Mr. Gardner that when Alice says, “But the tune *isn't* his own invention, it's *I give thee all, I can no more*,” she is actually quoting the opening line of a Thomas Moore poem, *My Heart and Lute*. Reading Moore's complete text reveals a lyric full of yearning and unrequited love. Is Carroll hinting here at the true depth of his infatuation for the real life Alice? The thought quickened my musical pulse—unrequited love, after all, has enjoyed a long and singularly requited association with music.

Finally, Gardner declares, “It is quite possible that Carroll regarded Moore's love lyric as the song that he, the White Knight, would have liked to sing to Alice but dared not.” Well, I thought, if he dares not sing his song then I will! The desire to set these diverse yet provocatively conjoined texts became irresistible, so much so, in fact, that one night I dreamed the first two measures of the WHITE KNIGHT'S SONG. That led to the hard part—believing in, accepting such a mysterious serendipity. However, once those “dream” notes were written down the whole piece seemed quite suddenly to just *be*. Each day, while I sat at the piano, the music would come unbidden, unexpected, and unpremeditated, leaving me in a state of exhaustion and excitement. Twenty such days provided the twenty minutes of *Haddocks' Eyes*.

At the center of the piece I have placed Moore's “forbidden” love lyric. This ARIA is preceded by a CADENZA and followed by an INTERLUDE. Moving further from the center, dual settings of the WHITE KNIGHT'S SONG form the next “surround.” Completing the symmetrical frame, standing as the outermost parentheses, as it were, are an INTRODUCTION and a FAREWELL.

*Haddocks' Eyes* is dedicated to Sylvia Keiser.

From the program of the premiere performance by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Used by permission.

### **Introduction**

“You are sad,” the Knight said in an anxious tone: “let me sing you a song to comfort to comfort you.”

“Is it very long?” Alice asked, for she had heard a good deal of poetry that day.

“It's long,” said the Knight, “but very, *very* beautiful. Everybody that hears me sing it-- either it brings the *tears* into their eyes, or else—”

“Or else what?” said Alice, for the Knight had made a sudden pause. “Or else it doesn't, you know. The name of the song is called *'Haddocks' Eyes.'*”

“Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?” Alice said, trying to feel interested.

“No, you don't understand,” the Knight said, looking a little vexed. “That's what the name is *called*. The name really IS *'The Aged Aged Man.'*”

“Then I ought to have said *'That's what the song is called?'*” Alice corrected herself.

“No, you oughtn't: that's quite another thing! The *song* is called *"Ways and Means"*: but that's only what it's *called*, you know!”

“Well, what IS the song, then?” said Alice, who was by this time completely bewildered.

“I was coming to that,” the Knight said. “The song really *is "A-Sitting On a Gate"*: and the tune's my own invention.” So saying, he stopped his horse and let the reins fall on its neck: then, slowly beating time with one hand, and with a faint smile lighting up his gentle foolish face, he began.

*The White Knight's Song*

‘I'll tell thee everything I can;

There's little to relate.

I saw an aged aged man,  
A-sitting on a gate.  
'Who are you, aged man?'  
I said, 'And how is it you live?'  
And his answer trickled through my head  
Like water through a sieve.  
He said 'I look for butterflies  
That sleep among the wheat:  
I make them into mutton-pies,  
And sell them in the street.  
I sell them unto men,' he said,  
'Who sail on stormy seas;  
And that's the way I get my bread—  
A trifle, if you please.'  
But I was thinking of a plan  
To dye one's whiskers green,  
And always use so large a fan  
That they could not be seen.  
So, having no reply to give  
To what the old man said, I cried,  
'Come, tell me how you live!'  
And thumped him on the head.  
His accents mild took up the tale:  
He said 'I go my ways,  
And when I find a mountain-rill,  
I set it in a blaze;  
And thence they make a stuff they call  
Rolands' Macassar Oil—  
Yet twopence-halfpenny is all  
They give me for my toil.'  
But I was thinking of a way  
To feed oneself on batter,  
And so go on from day to day  
Getting a little fatter.  
I shook him well from side to side,  
Until his face was blue:  
'Come, tell me how you live,' I cried,  
'And what it is you do!'  
He said 'I hunt for haddocks' eyes  
Among the heather bright,  
And work them into waistcoat-buttons  
In the silent night.  
And these I do not sell for gold  
Or coin of silvery shine  
But for a copper halfpenny,  
And that will purchase nine.

[Maybe even ten!]

'I sometimes dig for buttered rolls,  
Or set limed twigs for crabs;  
I sometimes search the grassy knolls  
For wheels of Hansom-cabs.  
And that's the way" (he gave a wink)  
"By which I get my wealth—  
And very gladly will I drink  
Your Honour's noble health.'  
I heard him then, for I had just  
Completed my design  
To keep the Menai bridge from rust  
By boiling it in wine.  
I thanked him much for telling me  
The way he got his wealth,  
But chiefly for his wish that he  
Might drink my noble health.  
And now, if e'er by chance I put  
My fingers into glue  
Or madly squeeze a right-hand foot  
Into a left-hand shoe,  
Or if I drop upon my toe  
A very heavy weight,  
I weep, for it reminds me so,  
Of that old man I used to know—  
Whose look was mild, whose speech was slow,  
Whose hair was whiter than the snow,  
Whose face was very like a crow,  
With eyes, like cinders, all aglow,  
Who seemed distracted with his woe,  
Who rocked his body to and fro,  
And muttered mumblingly and low,  
As if his mouth were full of dough,  
Who snorted like a buffalo—  
That summer evening, long ago,  
A-sitting on a gate.'  
Aria My Heart and  
Lute by Thomas Moore  
I give thee all—I can no more—  
Though poor the offering be;  
My heart and lute are all the store  
That I can bring to thee.  
A lute who's gentle song reveals  
The soul of love full well;  
And, better far, a heart that feels  
Much more than lute could tell.

Though love and song may fail, alas!  
To keep life's clouds away,  
At least 'twill make them lighter pass  
Or gild them if they stay.  
And ev'n if Care, at moments, flings  
A discord o'er life's happy strain,  
Let love but gently touch the strings,  
'Twill all be sweet again!

Of all the strange things that Alice saw in her journey Through The Looking-Glass, this was the one that she always remembered most clearly. Years afterwards she could bring the whole scene back again, as if it had been only yesterday—the mild blue eyes and kindly smile of the Knight—the setting sun gleaming through his hair, and shining on his armour in a blaze of light that quite quite dazzled her—the horse quietly moving about, with the reins hanging loose on its neck, cropping the grass at her feet—and the black shadows of the forest behind—all this she took in like a picture, as, with one hand shading her eyes, she leant against a tree, watching the strange pair, and listening, in a half dream, to the melancholy music of the song. 'But the tune *isn't* his own invention,' she said to herself: 'it's "*I give thee all, I can no more.*"' She stood and listened very attentively, but no tears came into her eyes. As the Knight sang the last words of the ballad, he gathered up the reins, and turned his horse's head along the road by which they had come.

"You've only a few yards to go," he said, "down the hill and over that little brook, and then you'll be a Queen—But you'll stay and see me off first?" he added as Alice turned with an eager an eager look in the direction to which he pointed.  
"Of course I'll wait," said Alice: "and thank you very much for coming so far—and for the song—I liked it very much."  
"I hope so," the Knight said doubtfully: "but you didn't cry so much as I thought you would."

FROM *THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, AND WHAT ALICE FOUND THERE*  
BY LEWIS CARROLL (CHAPTER VIII)

ZUBIN MEHTA has been music director of New York Philharmonic since the 1978-79 season. When he relinquishes his post in the 1990-91 season, he will have become the longest-tenured music director in the orchestra's modern history. Concurrently he is music director for life of the Israel Philharmonic. Mehta was born in Bombay, India, the son of the Bombay Symphony's co-founder. At eighteen he began studies at Vienna's Academy of Music; he made his conducting debut in Vienna at the age of twenty-five. From 1961 to 1967 he was music director of the Montreal Symphony, and in 1962 became music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Mehta conducts leading opera companies and orchestras around the world, including the Vienna State Opera and the Royal Opera at Covent Garden. His recordings are on the CBS Masterworks, Columbia, London, Deutsche Grammophon, RCA, New World, and Sony Classical labels.

THE NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC, founded in 1842, is the oldest symphony orchestra in the United States and one of the oldest in the world. Among its celebrated conductors have been Gustav Mahler, Arturo Toscanini, Artur Rodzinski, Dimitri Mitropoulos, Leonard Bernstein, and Pierre Boulez. The orchestra has performed in 348 cities in 50 countries and on five continents. In June of 1988 it returned from a triumphant tour of the Soviet Union, which culminated in an historic joint concert with the Soviet Ministry of Culture's State Symphony Orchestra in Moscow's Gorky Park. Since its first recording for Columbia in 1917, the New York Philharmonic has made hundreds more on the Columbia, Deutsche Grammophon, London, RCA, and New World labels.

CLAIRE BLOOM made her first appearance on the stage at the age of 16. Her first major role came a year later, when she played Ophelia at Stratford-Upon-Avon opposite Paul Scofield. Her first London appearance was in John Gielgud's production of *The Lady's Not for Burning*. Miss Bloom's films include Charles Chaplin's *Limelight*, *Richard III*, *Look Back in Anger*, *A Doll's House*, and Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. Her most notable stage roles have included Juliet and Ophelia at the Old Vic, Nora in *A Doll's House* and Mme. Ranyeskaya in *The Cherry Orchard* in London's West End. In 1974, for her London portrayal of Blanche du Bois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* she won the three major English theatrical awards. In New York Miss Bloom has had leading roles in *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Rashomon*, and the stage version of Henry James' *A Turn of the Screw*. On television, she appeared in numerous productions of BBS's Shakespeare series, Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, and Philip Roth's *The Ghost Writer*. She has also written an autobiographical book, *Limelight and After*.

SUSAN NARUCKI is a young artist of great versatility whose repertoire ranges from twentieth century concert works to operas of Handel, Mozart, Donizetti and Richard Strauss. She has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, and the Ojai Festival, working with conductors Pierre Boulez, Lukas Foss, and Kent Nagano. In addition to performances of *Haddock's Eyes*, Narucki performed the New York premiere of David Del Tredici's *Vintage Alice* at Town Hall.

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

*Acrostic Song* for solo guitar. David Starobin, guitar. Bridge 2004.

*Final Alice*. Barbara Hendricks, voice; Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Georg Solti conducting. London LDR-71018.

*I Hear An Army; Night Conjure-Verse; Scherzo; Syzygy*. Phyllis Bryn-Julson, voice, Composers Quartet (in *Army*); Benita Valente and Mary Burgess, voices, Mariboro Festival Ensemble, David Del Tredici conducting (in *Night*); Robert Helps and David Del Tredici, piano four hands (in *Scherzo*); Phyllis Bryn-Julson, voice, Festival Chamber Orchestra, Richard Dufallo conducting (in *Syzygy*). CRI ACS-6004.

*In Memory of a Summer Day*. Phyllis Bryn-Julson, voice; St. Louis Chamber Orchestra, Leonard Slatkin conducting. Nonesuch 79043.

*Soliloquy; Virtuoso Alice*. Michael Boriskin, piano. New World 80380-2.

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Producer: Elizabeth Ostrow. Engineers: John Newton, Henk Kooistra. Assistant Engineer: Jeff Zaraya

*Haddocks' Eyes* recorded November 27, 1989 at the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Auditorium, New York. *Steps* recorded March 9 and 10, 1990 at Avery Fisher Hall, New York. Editing: Henk Kooistra, Brad Michel

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White Knight figure illustrated by Barry Moser. © Pennyroyal Press.

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David Del Tredici

*Steps* for Orchestra (31:34)

1. Giant Steps (7:27)
2. The Two-Step (7:20)
3. Giant Giant Steps (9:33)
4. Stepping Down (6:14)

(played without pause)

New York Philharmonic/Zubin Mehta, conductor

*Haddocks' Eyes* (23:05)

5. Introduction (1:49)
6. The White Knight's Song (I) (6:14)
7. Cadenza (:57)
8. Aria: My Heart and Lute (6:06)
9. Interlude (:45)
10. The White Knight's Song (II) (2:30)
11. Farewell (Quodlibet) (4:44)

(played without pause)

Sharon Yamada, violin; Gary Levinson, violin; Irene Breslaw, viola; Paul Clement, cello; Jon Deak, bass; Sandra Church, flute; Stanley Drucker, clarinet; Jerome Ashby, horn;

Philip Smith, trumpet; David Del Tredici, piano Claire Bloom, narrator—Susan Narucki, soprano—Zubin Mehta, conductor

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