

Works by Michelle Ekizian and Louis Karchin  
New World 80425-2

On September 22, 1987 the Group for Contemporary Music presented a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the American Composers Alliance (ACA), an organization dedicated to bringing contemporary composers and their audiences together. The concert included Elliott Carter's *Riconoscenza* and the works offered on this recording. Michelle Ekizian and Louis Karchin represent a generation of American composers that has seen postwar American serialism enriched by other compositional approaches, both new and old. The process of stylistic synthesis and individualization, evidenced in the works presented here and in others, continues unabated today.

Michelle Ekizian was born in Bronxville, New York in 1956. She holds degrees in composition from the Manhattan School of Music and Columbia University (D.M.A., 1988), where she studied with Chou Wen-chung, Mario Davidovsky, Nicolas Flagello, and Vladimir Ussachevsky. Among the honors she has received are the American Prix de Rome, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the 1987 Commerce Bank International Composition Award, the 1990 Indiana State University/Louisville Orchestra New Music Competition Prize, the Aram Khachaturian Award, and commissions from the American Composers Orchestra, the Jerome Foundation, the Fromm Music Foundation, the Barlow Endowment, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Her works have been performed by orchestras and chamber ensembles throughout the United States and Europe.

Ekizian received an ACA Recording Award for her 1986-87 composition "Octoéchos" for Double String Quartet and Soprano. Written in between the first and second installments of her ongoing orchestral cycle, *The Exiled Heart Series*, which now includes "The Exiled Heart" (1986), "Morning of Light" (1988), and "Beyond the Reach of Wind and Fire" (1989), "Octoéchos" shares with the latter two works a two-part structure: an opening movement for instruments alone, followed by an epilogue, which features vocal settings of poems by Theodore Roethke found in his 1964 collection *The Far Field*. As Ekizian has indicated: "In these compositions, I have tried to expand the notion of musical structure as journey into that of musical journey as a course of exile: Displacements and disorientations establish a path marked by the tension between restlessness and resolution."

Ekizian continues: "Octoéchos" derives its name from the term used for the eight liturgical modes of the Byzantine Church. Freely speaking, it means 'eight ways,' referring to the fact that, in the work's opening movement [Inquieto], each of the eight instruments presents the thematic material in an individual manner. Moreover, each of the two quartets is subdivided [violins I & II, viola/cello]; each pair or unit forms one strand in which the two instruments merge either contrapuntally or harmonically. Thus, each quartet presents two major strands of contrasting activity cast in symmetrical gradations of change about a tranquil homophonic 'apex' section in the middle of the Inquieto. The second quartet functions primarily by augmenting, contracting, inverting, or harmonically enhancing material presented by the first quartet."

By presenting sharply contrasting ideas simultaneously, the first movement of "Octoéchos" generates an intense and agitated expressiveness that strives for stability, found briefly in its apex section and more subtly during its conclusion. The Epilogue: Tranquillo strikes the final resolution: By focusing on the thematic material of its apex

section, and through the Roethke text, the path traveled in “Octoéchos” reaches its ultimate destination.

Louis Karchin was born in Philadelphia in 1951. His advanced musical training at the Eastman School of Music and at Harvard University (Ph.D., 1978) included composition studies with Samuel Adler, Joseph Schwantner, Earl Kim, Fred Lerdahl, and Arthur Berger. He has received honors from Tanglewood (Koussevitzky Award), Columbia University (Bearn's Prize), the National Opera Association (for his opera *Romulus*), the National Endowment for the Arts, and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, as well as commissions from Parnassus, the Portland (Maine) Symphony, the Griffin Ensemble of Boston, and cellist Fred Sherry. Karchin is currently an Associate Professor of Music at New York University, and is a co-founder and conductor of the Chamber Players of the League-ISCAM. His *Duo for Violin and Cello* (1981), performed by Rolf Schulte and Fred Sherry, is available on CRI (SD-518).

Karchin composed “Songs of John Keats” in 1984: Voices of Change, a contemporary music ensemble based in Texas, gave the piece its premiere later that year in Dallas. The work, which is scored for soprano, flute, clarinet, violin, cello, percussion, and piano, received a 1986 ACA Recording Award and was also cited in the 1985 Hinrichsen Award given the composer by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. In addition to numerous performances in its original form, an orchestral version was presented in 1990 by soprano Andrea Cawelti and the Chamber Symphony of Princeton, which awarded the work first prize in its biennial competition.

Karchin writes: “The plan of the work is relatively simple. Two Keats poems, the spirited 'Song' and the more reflective sonnet 'To Sleep', are linked by a short musical interlude. The lighter opening poem, set to quickly moving music, provides a foil for the longer weightier second song. The contemplative character of 'To Sleep' is broken occasionally by brief outbursts and a final climactic moment; otherwise, a sense of calm is pervasive. Motivically, the first song emphasizes ideas, based on a pattern of fourths, which eventually generate the primary motive of the second song, introduced under its opening line. This motive settles on the pitch E, which becomes the primary pitch center for 'To Sleep' (and, in retrospect, the entire work). The motive itself recurs throughout the second song, whether literally, through suggestion, or in transformation.”

Capriccio for Violin and Seven Instruments was composed in 1976-77 and received its premiere in Boston shortly thereafter. The work received its New York City premiere in 1981 as a result of winning the New Music Consort's first new-music competition. The accompanying ensemble includes flute/piccolo, oboe, bass clarinet, percussion, piano, viola, and double bass. As the composer has indicated, the solo violin part is at times quite difficult, but it serves primarily to lead a very active supporting ensemble, more in the character of a Baroque concerto grosso than a Romantic virtuoso concerto.

The composer continues: “The Capriccio is based on numerous transformations of an initial group of slowly unfolding musical ideas. Over the course of the work's first half, the rate of presentation of these transformations gradually increases. Within each presentation of material, two kinds of music are heard: a first set of ideas light and fleeting in character, and a second set, darker and more contrapuntal. This darker material is always introduced to the accompaniment of tom-toms. The first half of the Capriccio culminates in a violin cadenza that is the fastest transformation yet of the opening

material. Thereafter the speed of the material reverses course, but the transformations become less predictable, eventually settling into a closing section which is more slowly paced than the opening. Despite some elements of asymmetry, the music seeks to maintain the overall feeling of an arch form.” —RICHARD KASSEL

*Richard Kassel is a composer, educator and twentieth-century-music scholar, with a special interest in the work of Harry Partch. He resides in New York City*

## **I Waited**

*by Theodore Roethke*

I waited for the wind to move the dust;  
But no wind came.  
I seemed to eat the air;  
The meadow insects made a level noise.  
I rose, a heavy bulk, above the field.

It was as if I tried to walk in hay,  
Deep in the mow, and each step deeper down,  
Or floated on the surface of a pond,  
The slow long ripples winking in my eyes.  
I saw all things through water magnified,  
And shimmering. The sun burned through a haze,  
And I became all that I looked upon.  
I dazzled in the dazzle of a stone.

And then a jackass brayed. A lizard leaped my foot.  
Slowly I came back to the dusty road;  
And when I walked, my feet seemed deep in sand.  
I moved like some heat-weary animal.  
I went, not looking back. [I was afraid.]

The way grew steeper between stony walls,  
Then lost itself down through a rocky gorge.  
A donkey path led to a small plateau.  
Below, the bright sea was, the level waves,  
And all the winds came toward me. [I was glad.]

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From *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* by Theodore Roethke.

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## **Song**

*by John Keats*

Hence Burgundy, Claret, and Port,  
Away with old Hock and Madeia,  
Too earthly ye are for my sport;  
There's a beverage brighter and clearer. I  
nstead of a pitiful rummer,  
My wine overbrims a whole summer,  
My bowl is the sky,  
And I drink at my eye,  
Till I feel in the brain  
A Delphian pain—  
Then follow, my Caius! then follow:  
On the green of the hill  
We will drink our fill  
Of golden sunshine,  
Till our brains intertwine  
With the glory and grace of Apollo!

### **To Sleep**

by *John Keats*

O soft embalmer of the still midnight!  
Shutting, with careful fingers and benign,  
Our gloom-pleas'd eyes, embower'd from the light,  
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine:  
O soothest Sleep! if so it please thee, close;  
In midst of this thine hymn, my willing eyes,  
Or wait the amen, ere thy poppy throws  
Around my bed its lulling charities.  
Then save me, or the passed day will shine  
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes,  
Save me from curious Conscience, that still lords  
Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole;  
Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards,  
And seal the hushed Casket of my Soul. 3 4

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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**ANDREA CAWELTI** has appeared in noted performances of both operatic and concert works. A recipient of numerous prizes and awards, including the Zachary Competition and the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, she has appeared with the New York Philharmonic, the American Composers Orchestra, and the Columbus Symphony.

Cawelti's performance of Marina in *Boris Godunov* with the New York Philharmonic was broadcast by PBS as a part of the *Great Performances* series. On the opera stage she has appeared with the American Opera Center at The Juilliard School and the Oberlin Opera Theater in such diverse roles as Romilda in Handel's *Xerxes*, the title role in Orff's *The Wise Woman*, and as Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*.

**BENJAMIN HUDSON** is known for his performances and recordings of both period and contemporary works. He has appeared as a soloist and concertmaster under conductors James Levine, Pierre Boulez, Dennis Russell Davies, Gerard Schwarz, and Lukas Foss; with American, European, and Asian orchestras. He is currently concertmaster of several ensembles, including the Brooklyn Philharmonic, the Hanover Band, and the Drottningholm Theater Opera Orchestra, and is a member of New York City's Speculum Musicae. Hudson is on the faculty of Columbia University and the Eastman School of Music. He has recorded for the Columbia, Sony Classic, Nimbus, Angel, Hyperion, RCA, and Bridge labels.

**HARVEY SOLLBERGER** is active as a composer, conductor, flutist, teacher, and concert organizer. As a flutist and conductor he has toured and recorded extensively with numerous ensembles, including the San Francisco and San Diego symphonies, and the American Composers Orchestra. He has given premiere performances of works by a number of contemporary composers, including Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, Mario Davidovsky, Donald Martino, Roger Reynolds, and Charles Wuorinen. As a composer he has received awards and fellowships from an array of prestigious institutions, among them the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and the Koussevitzky Foundation. His compositions have been performed here and abroad by numerous ensembles, including the New York Philharmonic and the San Francisco Symphony.

**THE GROUP FOR CONTEMPORARY MUSIC** was founded by Charles Wuorinen and Harvey Sollberger in 1962 for the purpose of presenting new music exclusively and appropriately, with the necessary preparatory time and understanding. A recipient of an American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters citation, the Group has played an important part in the dissemination of contemporary music in the United States, and the development of the careers of such performers as Ursula Oppens and Fred Sherry. Although currently less active as a performing organization, the Group continues to record contemporary American concert music. Recent releases include a collection of Milton Babbitt works on CRI (CD-521), and compositions of Charles Wuorinen on New World (80385-2).

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**Michelle Ekizian:**

“Octoéchos” for Double String Quartet and Soprano

1. **Inquieto—Strings** (16:16)

2. **Epilogue: Tranquillo—Strings and Soprano** (10:37)

**Poem by Theodore Roethke**

**Louis Karchin:**

3 “Songs of John Keats” for Soprano and Six Instruments (10:02)

4. Capriccio for Violin and Seven Instruments (10:46)

“Octoéchos”: Andrea Cawelti, soprano; Robert Chausaw, Dennis Cleveland, Benjamin Hudson, Dennis Lee, violins; Lois Martin, Linda Moss, violas; Bonnie Hartman, Jeanne LeBlanc, cello; Harvey Sollberger, conductor.

“Songs of John Keats”: Andrea Cawelti, soprano; Patricia Spencer, flute; Allen Blustine, clarinet; Benjamin Hudson, violin; Jeanne LeBlanc, cello; Stephen Paysen, percussion; Aleck Karis, piano; Harvey Sollberger, conductor.

Capriccio: Benjamin Hudson, violin; Patricia Spencer, flute; Henry Schuman, oboe; Dennis Smylie, bass clarinet; Linda Moss, viola; Donald Palma, contrabass; Stephen Paysen, percussion; Aleck Karis, piano; Harvey Sollberger, conductor.

Produced by Marc Aubort and Joanna Nickrenz

Engineered by Elite Recordings, Inc.

Recorded September 23, 1987 at Rutgers Presbyterian Church, New York City.

Cover art: Philip Taaffe. Zone of the Straits (1991). Mixed media on linen, 114 x 114 inches. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery, New York City.

Cover design: Bob Defrin

“Octoéchos” and Capriccio published by the American Composers Alliance

“Songs of John Keats” published by C.F. Peters

This recording was made possible with grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The American Composers Alliance, and the New York State Council on the Arts.

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