

ShamanSong (1991, revised 1998)

ShamanSong is a concert suite comprised of selected excerpts from a film score I originally composed for "Anima," Elizabeth Harris Productions, with additional material composed specifically for this new recording. The film tells of a woman's journey into the desert, carrying the "baggage," literally and emotionally, of a lifetime. There, she performs the labors and rituals necessary to enter "the world where magic happens." As there was no dialogue in the film, I wanted to create music that would have a correspondence to the visual perspective of the film, done on location in White Sands National Monument in New Mexico, and so most of the voice and percussion recordings were done at a location high up in the rocky cliffs of Diablo Canyon, New Mexico, utilizing the natural acoustical situation, with ravens and echoes, birds and thunder. As the film made extensive use of symbolism, I chose to relate certain instruments to a particular character, event, or feeling, and used specific sonic motives to signal symbolic image references. Thus, the voice is a comforting spirit ("The Voice of the Land"); the cello reflects the main character's somewhat Victorian nature; the raven is a messenger; the drums mirror the exuberant youthful energy of a young stallion, the woman's sole companion on her journey; the music-box waltz is memory, and so on. In creating The Voice of the Land I alluded to the softly undulating landscape with microtonal melismas reflecting the complicated shifting terrain of the dunes. I used a series of resonating plucked sounds for cello, harp, and music box to refer to specific image material: crystals and stones dropping, stars twinkling and falling. For some of the "memory scenes" I manipulated sounds to alter their quality: a metal rod strummed across the ridges of a cut glass crystal bell I modified electronically to heighten and soften the edges of the sound; a sharply heaved sigh I stretched and twisted to reveal its innate otherworldliness. Plaintive descending chords of soft hammers striking a *gender* (from an ancient gamelan), *tar* and *dumbek*, *shakubachi*, music-box tines, rain-stick, and African rattles all are blended with sighs and whispers, lamentations and ululations, calls, cries, lullabies, and vocal winds to weave a strange mystery.

Movements/scenes:

- Prologue through Entrance of the Woman
- The Journey Continues
- Music Box Waltz
- Dreamscape
- Fertility Rite
- Ritual of Fire
- Lullaby for Kyrie

ROTHKO (1986)

Rarely does one get the opportunity to rethink a work twelve years after its completion. I had the chance to reconsider how to shape the tonal materials; I also rediscovered my voluminous notes from interviews with artists about specific painting techniques, and from books on Mark Rothko's work—specifically, the paintings for the Chapel. I was then able to reconstruct my methodology and thinking processes.

The moment I set foot in the Rothko Chapel in 1973 I felt the need to do a piece there, reflecting the music I felt, washes of color becoming washes of sound, saturating the air as the paint saturated

the fibers of the canvas. It happens sometimes that an artist confronted with the work of another artist feels a profound connection/communication, a resonance. I thought about the work for many years and my early sound paintings on tape, including *Twelvesong* (1977) and *Klee Alee* (1979) approached the transfer of ideas from one medium to another, the extension of a visual experience to sound. At New Music America—1985 in Los Angeles, I presented the premiere of *A Rothko Study*, a preparation for the later work, placing musicians at eight stations onstage and around the Bing Auditorium at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art—creating a spatial effect similar to the placement of the panels in the octagonal space of the Rothko Chapel. In composing *ROTHKO*, I followed some of the painter's layering techniques by recording many washes of voices all around a tonal center, and then in the final mix letting some of the lighter vocal colors float through the heavier bowed piano tones, just as Rothko applied many thin washes of paint, one over another, allowing some of the colors in the bottom layers to appear through the top coat of pigment, achieving the effect of a hidden light source. For the premiere of *ROTHKO* in the Rothko Chapel at New Music America—1986 in Houston, I created several tapes of multiphonic and microtonal voice choirs and bowed pianos, placing speakers at specific points in the space and alternating the mixes from the tapes to the speakers so that no audience member would experience exactly the same sound, just as visually each person experiences a differing relationship to the 14 paintings. For this new recording I selected and superimposed layers of voices and bowed pianos, sometimes letting the drama of the overtones ring through the texture, providing both light and poignancy. *ROTHKO*, then, is a series of sound paintings designed to reflect the mood, texture, and emotion of Mark Rothko's final paintings for this very special chapel—dark, intense, but with an inner light and moving figures that are sometimes heard, sometimes hidden.

Calligraphy II/Shadows (1995)

Calligraphy II/Shadows for voice and Chinese instruments was commissioned by the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company for a premiere at St. Mark's Danspace on June 8–11, 1995. In preparing to compose this score, I did research on the development of calligraphy and looked at different periods and personal styles throughout Chinese history, also trying my hand at traditional Chinese brushes and inks to get a feel for the intricate gestures and shifting movements involved in practicing this art form. I also attended rehearsals of The Chinese Music Ensemble of New York to learn more about the specific instruments I wanted to use. Having chosen to write for *diizi* (bamboo flutes), *erhu* (a silk-stringed violin-like instrument), *yangqi* (hammered dulcimer played with bamboo mallets), and various percussion instruments (some traditionally used only for Chinese opera), I then set out to compose a score that would reflect the gestural qualities and physicality of calligraphy as well as explore the indigenous, intrinsic sounds of the instruments I had chosen. As I prefer the freedom and flow of drawing my own scores onto blank unlined pages, I was able to incorporate portions of the specific calligraphy used by the choreographer for inspiration, lifting certain strokes and twisting or turning them to fit into the musical space of time and notation. The flow and form of this music reflects the shifting energy patterns and fluid lines of her dance, counterbalancing a variety of ensemble textures with solo material. The "Shadows" of my title refers to the musical score as a shadow or reflection of the movements and gestures of both calligraphy and dance.

JOAN LA BARBARA's career as a composer/performer/sound-artist explores the human voice as a multifaceted instrument expanding traditional boundaries. She has created works for multiple voices, chamber ensembles, music theater, orchestra, and interactive technology, developing a unique vocabulary of experimental and extended vocal techniques: multiphonics, circular singing, ululation, and glottal clicks that have become her "signature sounds." Awards she has received in the U.S. and Europe include the DAAD Artist-in-Residency in Berlin; National Endowment for the

Arts fellowships in Music Composition, Opera/Music Theatre, Inter-Arts, Recording, Solo Recitalist and Visual Arts; the ISCM International Jury Award; Meet The Composer and ASCAP; and numerous commissions for concert, theater, and radio. La Barbara has collaborated with artists Lita Albuquerque, Judy Chicago, Kenneth Goldsmith, Melody Sumner Carnahan, and Steina and Woody Vasulka; and choreographers John Alleyne, Nai-Ni Chen, Martha Curtis, Catherine Kerr, and Merce Cunningham have utilized her music. Her work in film includes a score for voice with electronics for Steve Finkin's signing-alphabet animation for Children's Television Workshop/Sesame Street, created to assist hearing children in learning to communicate with the deaf, broadcast worldwide since 1977; and music for films by Richard Blau, Monica Gazzo, Jodi Kaplan, Amy Kravitz, Elyse Rosenberg, and Steven Subotnick. La Barbara also composed and performed the "Angel Voice" for actress Emmanuelle Béart in the feature film *Date With an Angel* and performed the "Newborn Vocals" for *Alien: Resurrection*. La Barbara has premiered landmark compositions written for her by noted American composers, including Robert Ashley, John Cage, Charles Dodge, Morton Feldman, Philip Glass, Alvin Lucier, Mel Powell, Morton Subotnick, and James Tenney, and has been soloist in her own and other composers' works with the orchestras of New York, San Francisco, Den Haag, Houston, and Los Angeles, and at international festivals including the Brisbane Biennial, Festival d'Automne à Paris, Warsaw Autumn, Frankfurt Feste, Lincoln Center, Metamusik-Berlin, and Olympics Arts Festivals.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Awakenings. Music & Arts CD 830.
Berliner Träume. Joan La Barbara, soprano. Lovely LCD 3001.
Erin. Joan La Barbara, soprano. Lovely LCD 3001.
Klee Alee. Joan La Barbara, soprano. Lovely LCD 3001.
L'Albero dalle foglie azzurre. B. Herr Orland, oboe. Centaur CRC 2166.
73 Poems. Joan La Barbara, soprano. Lovely Music LCD 3002.
ShadowSong. Joan La Barbara, soprano. Lovely LCD 3001.
Silent Scroll. Joan La Barbara, soprano; Newband. Mode 18.
Time(d) Trials & Unscheduled Events. Joan La Barbara, soprano. Lovely LCD 3001.
Urban Tropics. Joan La Barbara, soprano. Lovely LCD 3001.

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ShamanSong:

Location and studio recording engineers: David Dunn, Joan La Barbara
Film score engineer: Tom Lazarus

ROTHKO:

Recording engineers: Joan La Barbara (voices), Jack Veas (pianos)

Calligraphy II/ Shadows:

Recording engineer: David Voigt
Recorded June 13–14, 1995 at RPM Studios, New York

Produced by Joan La Barbara and Michael Hoenig
Mixing and Sound Design: Michael Hoenig and Joan La Barbara
Mixed at Metamusic Productions, Los Angeles May–June 1998
Photograph: Jack Mitchell
Cover design: Bob Defrin Design, Inc., NYC

This recording was made possible with a grant from Francis Goelet

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JOAN LA BARBARA (b. 1947) 80545-2

ShamanSong

- 1 *ShamanSong* (1991, revised 1998) 25:24
Joan La Barbara, voice, percussion, computer, electronic keyboard, synthesizer; Polly Tapia Ferber, hand drums: *tar* and *dumbek*; Erika Duke Kirkpatrick, cello; Kristina Melcher, *gender*
- 2 *ROTHKO* (1986) 24:37
Joan La Barbara, voices; Gaylord Mowrey, bowed piano
- 3 *Calligraphy II/ Shadows* (1995) 20:00
Joan La Barbara, voice; Tao Chen, *dizi*; Si-Si Chen, *yangqi* and percussion; Bao-Li Zhang, *erhu*

All music composed and published by Joan La Barbara (ASCAP)

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