

EDWIN LONDON (b. 1929)
JOVE'S NECTAR
80564-2

Edwin London (born 1929) is one of the most original and accomplished composers in America today. Unwilling to ally himself with any trendy school of composition, and refusing even to see himself as either a radical or a conservative, he has gone his own way for many years, creating beautiful, challenging, inventive, marvelous music.

Ed is accomplished not only as a composer and performer. He is also a virtuoso in his use of the English language. To converse with him is to experience an unending phantasmagoria of telling witticisms, pointed perceptions, delectable turns of phrase, and delicious puns. An example: Ed recently telephoned me. It was a bad connection. "You sound far away, Ed," I said. Without missing a beat, he improvised: "I'm in Ceylon! I'll just sail on."

I first met Ed in the early 1970s at one of the festival/conferences of the American Society of University Composers. Ed was for several years (1977–81) the national chairman of that organization, but even well before he took over and helped to rejuvenate the Society, he was always to be found at its national festivals. I remember at one such event sitting in a hotel room with him and several of my colleagues very late one evening, listening to Ed read, in magisterial tones, from the classified ads of *The New York Times*. His reading went on for a long, long time, and the understated drama in his voice would not have been greater had he been reading from Shakespeare. This incident shows the quintessential Ed London. He is whimsical, unconventional, gentle, and enormously creative. In his soft-spoken way, he challenges people in a thoroughly unpretentious manner.

Over the years, down to the present, Ed has been a tireless and selfless promoter of all sorts of new music—mostly American, always fascinating. In various administrative positions and as a conductor, he has helped the careers of many little-known as well as several well-known composers. With a number of ensembles—notably the two groups he founded (the choral group The Ineluctable Modality and the Cleveland Chamber Symphony) but also several other groups—Ed has performed a tremendous amount of deserving music that other ensembles were not playing. It is no exaggeration to say that without Ed London, American musical culture would be considerably impoverished.

But Ed's greatest achievement lies in his own music. Alternately experimental and traditional, it is invariably deeply musical and beautiful. Ed belongs to no school; no "isms" describe his work. Often theatrical, sometimes literary, occasionally humorous, his music is the product of a widely experienced musician who has always followed his own path.

Some examples of Ed's musical humor include the composed-out hiccups in the second movement of *Jove's Nectar*; the nonsense syllables sung in a nasal tone that intrude in that work's fifth movement; the way that work's sixth movement extracts the words "to me" from the text ("Drink to me only with thine eyes") and repeats them until they, too, become nonsense syllables. Ed's sense of humor also animates *Psalm of These Days V*. Who else but Ed London would think to set the words "For the Lord most high is terrible" with such decidedly un-terrible music as the almost dance-hall-like sounds he chooses? Who else but Ed would have the imagination to transform the Psalm's words "the excellency of Jacob whom He loved. Selah" into "the excellency of Jacob whom He loved. C'est la vie"?

Ed began his musical career as a French horn player. He played principal horn in the Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela and also played with the Oscar Pettiford Jazz Band, the jazz band Americans in Rome, and the 774th United States Air Force Band in Alaska. His background in jazz comes through in the delicate harmonies of the final movement of *Jove's Nectar*. His knowledge of the concert band—a notoriously difficult ensemble to compose for successfully—allowed him to produce stunning music in *Psalm of These Days V*.

Like many contemporary composers, Ed is vitally interested in music of the past. Today's composers are rediscovering the past in the most direct way: by recomposing it. One can hear Ed's involvement in various traditions in *Jove's Nectar*. The first movement, for example, is modeled on the *estampie*, a stamping dance that originated in France and Italy in the thirteenth century. The fourth movement, "Dr. Lassus," is Ed's personal view of sixteenth-century vocal style, one of whose main composers was Lassus. While the music is surely indebted to that of Lassus, it does not sound all that much like his motets or masses.

In *Bach (Again)* the relationship to tradition is more direct. A Bach chorale (actually, *any* Bach chorale of the performers' choosing) is deconstructed, as each sonority, indeed each note, is elongated so that it comes to be appreciated more for its inherent beauty than for its participation in a harmonic and contrapuntal progression toward a cadence. In this particular performance, only the first phrase of the chorale is used. It is first performed as Bach composed it, and then it is taken apart and made into something very different.

Ed's literary side is evident in *Moon Sound Zone*. The poem he wrote, which in turn generates the piece, is beautiful. It is considerably more literary than many other verbal texts penned by composers. This work shows Ed in a constructivist mode. While the mood of the poem is reflected in the atmospheric harmonies of the music, it is neither the verbal meaning nor the tone that propels the piece, but rather an arithmetic fact (Ed calls it an "arbitrary numerical correspondence"), namely that $1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8+9+8+7+6+5+4+3+2+1 = 3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 3$. Rather than being cold-blooded, as we might expect from Ed's description of his compositional process, the result is uncannily beautiful. This is hardly the music we might expect from a procedure that utilizes all twelve notes of the chromatic scale in a mathematically derived distribution.

This kind of constructivist thinking is also apparent in *Psalm of These Days I*. Like *Moon Sound Zone*, this work is concerned with using all twelve notes in a way that produces beautifully slow-moving harmonies. Two different musical textures alternate throughout, one freely and one strictly conceived in terms of rhythm and declamation. At first, each rigorously uses a different diatonic set of pitches: the white notes, in this case centered on E (although the sound is not quite like the ancient Phrygian mode) versus the black notes with the addition of the all-important E. The note needed to complete the second set as a full diatonic scale is B, the tone on which the soprano soloist enters and centers. As the piece moves along, always alternating the two different types of music, each gradually picks up more and more of the notes of the other, so that we have the sense of two distinct harmonic worlds gradually fusing. The freer of these two types of music is always punctuated by, of all things, a kazoo. This is something of a pun: The player, holding the kazoo to his/her lips, is instructed to repeatedly articulate the words "in my mouth" into the instrument.

Not all of Ed's pieces are constructivist, and not all use advanced techniques. The main section of *Psalm of These Days V*, for example, is a straight-ahead work for chorus and band, with many sounds evocative of traditional music. Yet this section is flanked by a prologue and an epilogue that use indeterminate rhythmic notation, different tempos simultaneously (the chorus clapping

in the prologue, inspired by the text line “Oh clap your hands, all ye people”), and sound masses. What is striking is not the differences between these disparate compositional approaches, but rather how they merge into the special musical personality of Ed London.

And so it is with all the compositions on this disc. Vastly different in conception, they are nonetheless all expressions of the complex and multifaceted personality of their composer.

—Jonathan D. Kramer

Jonathan D. Kramer is a composer and professor of music at Columbia University.

Jove's Nectar. In the early eighties I composed a sort of pop-music-like cabaret song cycle meant for theatrical performance. Utilizing lyrics gathered from poets such as Andrew Marvell and Ben Jonson, the work *Metaphysical Vegas* had several performances, including memorable ones in Las Vegas and Milwaukee. Though I moved on to other endeavors, many of the songs from the show continued to flow through my system. The first work derived from the earlier material—*Two A. Marvell's for Words* (baritone and chamber orchestra)—was completed in 1989 and subsequently performed in the U.S.A. and Europe.

Jove's Nectar (seven variants on a text by Ben Jonson)—is yet another grapple with a prominent tune from *Metaphysical Vegas*, this time the well-known lyric “Drink to me only with thine eyes,” originally titled by Jonson *To Celia*. *Jove's Nectar* is a series of seven character variations which move from a high energy *estampie* (a medieval stomp) through to a dirge with bells at the end—in essence a complete life cycle. In between there is a tender view of Celia's respiratory difficulties when confronted with affection, a homage to the Dizzies of the world from Disraeli to Gillespie, a comprehensive exam for the doctoral candidate Orlando Lasso (did he complete his studies in sixteenth-century counterpoint?), a study of the text sung in the stilted manner of English in translation from a mythical Eastern language, and a spirited martial struggle prior to the concluding dirge.

The commissioning of *Jove's Nectar* was made possible by a grant from the Meet the Composer/Reader's Digest Commissioning Program in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts and the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. The members of the commissioning consortium were the Dale Warland Singers, the Desert Chorale (Santa Fe), the Larry Parsons Chorale (West Virginia), the Oregon Repertory Singers, and The Gregg Smith Singers.

To Celia

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup
And I'll not ask for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine;
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
I would not change for thine.
I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
Not so much honouring thee
As giving it a hope that there

It could not withered be;
But thou thereon didst only breathe,
And sent'st it back to me;
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,
Not of itself but thee!

—Ben Jonson

Moon Sound Zone. One hesitates to burden listeners with a catalogue of prescriptive devices used to generate any given work, but I take the liberty to do so in this case with the thought that anyone interested enough in the process can whip up their own piece from this simple recipe. *Moon Sound Zone* was prepared from a “discovery” of an otherwise arbitrary numerical correspondence between music and poetry: Create a poem of 17 lines in which the first and last line contain one syllable, the second and next-to-last, two, and so forth (the ninth line alone has nine syllables); the result is a poem with 81 syllables (note the related rhyme scheme).

MOON
SOUND ZONE
SOFT AND CALM
IN PEACEFULNESS
THE NIGHT TURNS INTO
GRACEFUL AWAKENING
CLINGING THE WHILE TO PROMISE
OF SWEET CONTINUOUS PRESENT
IN WHICH THINGS CHANGING ARE BUT A DREAM.
AGELESS YOUNG HEARTS BEAT FULFILLMENT
SET FREE ADRIFT IN TONE KISS
DESTINED ALWAYS TO SING
OF LIFE TO RENEW
IN WARM CARESS
THIS OUR PSALM
WELL KNOWN
TUNE

Assign three different pitches of the chromatic scale to each of four voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) so that all 12 pitches are in play. Through rotation of these tones a total of 81 different harmonic combinations are manifest. Carefully designate (one may want to ponder the means leading to an effective progression) one harmony per syllable; choose a way to distribute durations and dynamics. By composing such a poem (the form) and adhering to the suggestions, a great number of different compositions are possible. In *Moon Sound Zone*, however, the harmonic successions were selected to explore the residual resonance of the space in which it is to be performed. *Moon Sound Zone* was written for the Randolph-Macon College chorus, Gordon Brock, conductor. The string quartet was added for the second performance.

Psalm of These Days I and V. These two pieces are the opening and closing segments of a cycle of five interrelated, but varied, vocal/instrumental works based on Psalm texts and written between 1977 and 1980. Inspired in part by ideas suggested by *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, the fascinating treatise written by the eminent American psychologist/philosopher

William James, the cycle offers impressions of religious character types and postures ranging from the “once born soul” through rationality to the “sick soul,” the “mystic experience” and the eventual emergence of the “twice born” soul. The cycle is not religious music per se, but rather is *about* religious music.

Psalm of These Days I is a rendering of extracts from Psalm 34. It is a sort of set of variations on a fixed and inflexible pitch (E above middle C). In some sense the central idea is to bind the “once born soul” to a positive belief that cannot be shaken. The recurring kazoo (D#) tries as hard as possible to confute the women’s chorus (sometimes aided by the soprano soloist), but all ends (one hopes for the sake of the music) with a victory for the by-now triumphant commitment to the original tonal center. *Psalm of These Days V* is a rendering of Psalm 47. There is a prologue that acts as a transition from “mystic” orientation into the domain of the “twice born soul,” and an apparently ostentatious resolution in a publicly consecrated manner. There is, however, an epilogue that returns matters to prehistory—a sort of “primordial ooze”—which precedes any concept of, or adherence to, theological/denominational sensibility.

Psalm of These Days I was commissioned by the remarkable choral conductor Iva Dee Hiatt for the Smith College Chamber Singers. The first performances, with the composer conducting, were given in May and June 1977 in New York, London, Strasbourg, Paris, Geneva, Chartres, and elsewhere. *Psalm of These Days V* was commissioned by the University of Wisconsin at River Falls. The first performance was given there on May 1, 1980. The performance on this recording is by the Ohio State University Chorus and Band, the composer conducting.

Psalm of These Days I (from Psalm 34)

I will bless the Lord at all times;
His praise shall be continually in my mouth.

Psalm of These Days V (Psalm 47)

Oh clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the sound of triumph.
For the Lord most high is terrible; He is a Great King over all the earth.
He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet.
He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom He loved. Selah.
God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises unto our King, sing praises.
For God is the King of all the earth: Sing ye praises with understanding.
God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of His holiness.
The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham:
for the shields of the earth belong unto God: He is greatly exalted.

Bach (Again). During my decade at the University of Illinois (1969–78), I annually taught among other activities a course in music composition for doctoral candidates in choral conducting. One day, I tried to impress upon them the real-life fact that J. S. Bach not only had to rehearse his forces for weekly services but also had to compose the music for them. As mind-boggling as this usually proved to be for these incipient Kapellmeisters, I quickly added that, quite often, Bach would turn to the music of his predecessors for inspiration and quick fixes. On the spur of the moment I offered the concept of *Bach (Again)* as an example of how one could transform all of the Bach chorales through creative embroidery. Later, the resourceful and

innovative choral conductor Frank Pooler of Long Beach State University became attracted to the concept, added the very effective choralography, and performed the work with great success all over the world. The performance notes to the published edition of *Bach (Again)* read:

There is a long-honored tradition of making music out of music. Just as J. S. Bach (with true artistry and respect for his sources) used traditional chorales to build a grand series of musical gems, so may we (with humility) utilize his harmonizations as a starting point on the road to new processes and compositions. The following suggestions are only a few of the literally infinite number of possibilities which can be used in the approach toward developing the internal essences of the hallowed masterpieces of the past into a contemporary context. Each conductor, in both collective and individual collaboration with the singers, may want to bring other valuable insights to bear in the assembling of a performance.

1. The mood is meditative.
2. The pace is relatively slow.
3. Everyone starts together.
4. Choral sections may be cued in one-by-one.
5. Individuals (not sections) move at their own speed, but only after having reached the end of a breath.
6. The singers may want to listen to the beauty of each new harmonic connection.
7. The duration of the work is anywhere from three to twenty-five minutes long.
8. Each individual note contains an implied crescendo and diminuendo.
9. The original text may be employed or other sounds (vowel or consonant) may be substituted so as to create a mellifluous progression.

Bach (Again) can be performed using any of the 371 chorales, but for some reason most groups seem to prefer “Komm Süßer Tod,” which is the chorale used on this recording.

—*Edwin London*

Edwin London has served living music throughout his distinguished career. Described as a “champion of new American music,” the composer-conductor has founded two highly acclaimed ensembles: The Ineluctable Modality, a new music choral ensemble, in 1968, and the Cleveland Chamber Symphony in 1980. For his efforts he has earned the ASCAP–John S. Edwards award for “the strongest commitment to New American Music” and the Laurel Leaf award, conferred by the American Composers Alliance for “distinguished achievement in fostering and encouraging American music.”

London began his career playing principal French horn in the Orquesta Sinfónica de Venezuela and with other ensembles including the Oscar Pettiford Jazz Band. A graduate of Oberlin College, he received his doctorate from the University of Iowa, where he studied with P. G. Clapp and Philip Bezanson. Subsequently his teachers included Luigi Dallapiccola, Darius Milhaud, and Gunther Schuller. He has taught at Smith College (1960–69) and the University of Illinois (1969–78), was visiting professor at the University of California at San Diego (1972–73), and since 1978 has been a professor at Cleveland State University.

Founded in 1955 by Gregg Smith, **The Gregg Smith Singers** remain peerless as performers of choral music. Their repertoire ranges from the music of Monteverdi and Stravinsky to today’s living masters, with twentieth-century American music accounting for approximately two-thirds

of their overall programming. The Singers have made over thirty-five national tours, a dozen European tours, and three trips to the Far East. Their recordings have won three Grammys and two Montreux Awards. This particular recording of the choral music of Edwin London came out of first performances at the Adirondack Festival of American Music in Saranac Lake, New York, and subsequent New York City performances in The Gregg Smith Singers' winter series of 1997 and 1998.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- Auricles Apertures Ventracles*. The Gregg Smith Singers. New World 80477-2.
- Before the World Was Made*. Christine Schadeberg, soprano; Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, conductor. Albany Records TROY 208.
- Better Is*. Smith College Chamber Singers, Iva Dee Hiatt, conductor. Ubres CS302.
- Bjørne Enstable's Christmas Music*. The Ineluctable Modality, Edwin London, conductor. Advance FGR-18S.
- Brass Quintet*. Ronald Bishop, John Brndiar, James Darling, James De Sano, Richard Solis. CRI 852.
- Day of Desolation*. University of Connecticut Concert Choir, John Poellein, conductor. CRI 852.
- Dream Thing on Biblical Episodes*. Smith College Chamber Singers, Iva Dee Hiatt, conductor. CRI 852.
- In Heinrich's Shoes*. Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, conductor. New World 80477-2.
- A Hero of Our Time*. Russian State Symphonic Capella, Edwin London, conductor. New World 80511-2.
- Overture to The Imaginary Invalid*. Washington High School (Cedar Rapids, Iowa) Orchestra, Jack Ranney, conductor. Crest MID-76-4.
- Peter Quince at the Klavier*: Music by Edwin London, text by Wallace Stevens. Paul Sperry, tenor; Kiev Camerata Orchestra, Edwin London, conductor. Troppe Note/Cambria 1442.
- Portraits of Three Ladies (American)*. Marilyn Coles, soprano; Royal MacDonald, narrator; University of Illinois Contemporary Chamber Players, Edwin London, conductor. New World 80562-2.
- Psalm of These Days II*. Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble. CRI 852.
- Psalm of These Days III*. University of Illinois Contemporary Chamber Players, Edwin London, conductor. CRI 852.
- Psalm of These Days IV*. Barney Childs, Philip Rehfeldt. Roncorp EMS 021.
- Sacred Hair*. University of Illinois Concert Choir, Harold Decker, conductor. Ubres CS302.
- Sonatina*. Ernst Wallfisch, viola; Lory Wallfisch, piano. Advance FGR-7.
- Sonnet Haiku*. Trio Bariano. New World 80477-2.
- Trio*. University of Illinois Contemporary Chamber Players. Ubres CS301.
- Two A. Marvell's for Words*. P. Larson, bass-baritone; Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, conductor. GM 2045.
- Una novella della sera primavera*. Harry Sargous, oboe; Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, conductor. Albany Records 298.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- London, Edwin. "Four Scores by Santoro." *Yearbook for Inter-American Musical Research*, Volume VII 1971, p. 51–58.
- . "Making Music out of Music." *Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought*, Volume 1, p. 291–300; Routledge, London 1993.

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Proceedings (Volume III), of the Summer Institute in Compositional Studies of the American Society of University Composers, August 1968, Ann Arbor, Michigan, p. 123–145. Panel discussion: Mixed-Media Composition. Moderator: Ross Lee Finney: Panel: George Cacioppo, Edwin London, Salvatore Martirano.

Schwartz, Elliott, and Daniel Godfrey. *Music Since 1945*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1992, p. 163, 297–298.

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Producer: Edwin London

Jove’s Nectar, *Moon Sound Zone*, *Psalm of These Days I*, and *Bach (Again)* were recorded in February 1997 and 1998 at the Church of Notre Dame, New York City.

Engineer: Stephen Epstein

Psalm of These Days V was recorded April 9, 1985, at Weigl Hall, Ohio State University.

Engineer: Tom Wells

Additional editing: David Yost

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EDWIN LONDON (b. 1929)

JOVE’S NECTAR

80564-2

Jove’s Nectar (1994)

(publ. by C. F. Peters Corp.)

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|--------------------|------|
| 1. Estampie | 2:10 |
| 2. Celia’s Hiccups | 3:58 |
| 3. Canon for Dizzy | 1:37 |

4. Dr. Lassus 5:39
5. Strangers from the East 2:43
6. Fanfaronnada 3:11
7. Dirge with Bells 7:04

The Gregg Smith Singers; Alyssa Reit, harp; Sato Moughalian, flute/alto flute; Linda Kaplan, oboe/English horn; Edward Gilmore, clarinet/bass clarinet; Barry Centanni, percussion; Gregg Smith, conductor

8. *Moon Sound Zone* (1980) 10:56
(publ. by C. F. Peters Corp.)

The Gregg Smith Singers; Elaine Koenig, Sophie Arbuckle, violins; Lucy Gelinas, viola; Matthew Goeke, cello; Gregg Smith, conductor

9. *Psalm of These Days I* (1977) 12:55
(publ. by C. F. Peters Corp.)

The Gregg Smith Singers; Eileen Clark, soprano; Pedro d'Aquino, kazoo; Elaine Koenig, Sophie Arbuckle, violins; Lucy Gelinas, viola; Matthew Goeke, cello; Sato Moughalian, flute; Gregg Smith, conductor

10. *Psalm of These Days V* (1980) 16:27
(publ. by C. F. Peters Corp.)

Ohio State University Chorus and Band, Edwin London, conductor

11. *Bach (Again)* (1974) 5:29
(publ. by Aberdeen Music Inc.)

The Gregg Smith Singers; Gregg Smith, conductor

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