

JOHN HARBISON

FIVE SONGS OF EXPERIENCE (William Blake)

The Cantata Singers and Ensemble

Jane Bryden, soprano; D'Anna Fortunato, mezzo-soprano; Karl Dan Sorensen, tenor; Mark Baker, bass; Rose Mary Harbison, Erica Miner, violins; Betty Hauck, viola; Jay Humeston, cello; Benjamin Carriel, William Wiley, percussion; John Harbison, conductor.

BERMUDA TRIANGLE

Albert Regni, tenor saxophone; Helen Harbison, amplified cello; Robert D. Levin, electric organ

TRIO

The Wheaton Trio (Nancy Cirillo, violin; Jay Humeston, cello; Victor Rosenbaum, piano)

JOHN HARBISON (b. 1938) is one of the growing number of contemporary composers who, like their classical ancestors, are also skilled at performance. As musical director of Boston's Cantata Singers (1969-73) Harbison made a strong impression on Boston musical society by the depth and subtlety of his performances. His skill is apparent in the vivid interpretation of FIVE SONGS OF EXPERIENCE on this recording.

Harbison's formal education at Harvard (B.A. 1960) and Princeton (M.F.A. 1963) was supplemented by activities as a jazz pianist, and some of his later compositions in a 'serious' vein reflect that early experience. BERMUDA TRIANGLE in particular displays some highly authentic-sounding phrases of advanced improvised jazz—all written down precisely.

The composer's gifts have been acknowledged by commissions from the Fromm and Koussevitzky Foundations, a Brandeis Creative Arts Citation (1971) and the 1972 award by the American Academy-National Institute of Arts and Letters which made this record possible. He is now (1973) Associate Professor of Music at M. I. T.

About his music, Harbison writes:

“I had long contemplated setting some of Blake's short poems to music, but given their finality and completeness, and their intense private meaning to each reader, I maintained a healthy wariness. Through my experience conducting the Cantata Singers and Ensemble, particularly in Schütz's music, a choral approach to the poems suggested itself. I began to hear them as incantation, response, or litany, in many kinds of vocal combination. A timely request for some music by Craig Smith, music director at Emmanuel Church, Boston, resulted in these FIVE SONGS OF EXPERIENCE.

“The calls for regeneration and reconciliation in the poems required a welcome effort to get back to beginnings and to be as inclusive, as little time-

bound, as possible. The apparent simplicity, transparency, and subdued rhetoric of the poems suggested the creation of apparently-simple rhythms and harmonies - an approach I had been intending to take for some time. This tendency continues in a full-length opera based on Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, now in progress.”

“BERMUDA TRIANGLE is the third and final part of December Music, a series of pieces based on an old cantus firmus (appearing most clearly here in the final soap-opera organ passages). All three of the pieces in the series reflect my early experience as a jazz musician, this one more than the others. The first piece of December Music, *Parody — Fantasia*, is recorded on CRI SD 293 by Robert Miller.

“The piece is cast in one continuous movement, and presents a conversation between the sax and the cello, with the organ playing many roles — from synthesizer-style background to dominating force. The cello, the most traditional of the three instruments, is gradually influenced by the saxophone. By the end it has begun to sound like something from the middle- or far-East, while the sax has softened into waltz fragments.

“The color range of the Hammond H-112 organ is explored but hardly exhausted by the piece. The music is extremely loud in performance, and home listeners are encouraged to make their own adjustments accordingly.

“BERMUDA TRIANGLE was commissioned by the New York Camerata.

“TRIO was conceived as a lyric intermezzo to be played at concerts by this arch-19th century combination. It draws on the sound of both the classical trio and the restaurant trio.

“During 1968 and 1969 I was fortunate to be composer-in-residence on a Rockefeller grant at Reed College: the rain-forest vegetation in Oregon seemed mysteriously to give rise to more verdant textures, cropping up first in a *Serenade* for six players, then in this TRIO. The piece may be heard as variations; there are several small closed phrases interspersed with fleeting recollections and reminiscences. The counterpoint is mainly elaborative and atmospheric.

“TRIO was composed for its first performers, Bentley Layton, Helen Harbison, and Robert Levin.”

THE CANTATA SINGERS AND ENSEMBLE were founded in Boston in 1964 and have rapidly achieved critical and public success. They have performed more than seventy of Bach's Cantatas, as well as earlier music and twentieth century works. Their new musical director is Philip Kelsey. Reviving an early choral music practice, the group generally draws its soloists from the regular membership. The Cantata Singers, with John Harbison conducting, have also recorded music by Schütz and Bach for Advent Corporation.

The singers on this recording are:

Sopranos: Jane Bryden, Sue Carlson, Nancy Dunkly, Sallie Gordon, Joanna Griscom, Sue Ellen Kuzma, Hazel O'Donnell, Caroline Stouffer, Carole Taynton, Lisl Urban, Joyce Walworth; Altos: Anne Dow, D'Anna Fortunato, Pamela Ikauniks, Susan Lovell, Blair McElroy, Eleanor Russell, Colleen Schwitzgebel, Mary Anne Segó, Esther Traub, Barbara Winchester; Tenors: Christopher Carlson, Bruce Fithian, N. Thorne Griscom, Charles Husbands, Robert Loud, John Scullin, Karl Dan Sorensen; Basses: Mark Baker, Richard Butler, Edward Candidus, Lawrence Chvany, Eugene Gover, John Graef, Warren Pyle, David Rockefeller, Jr.

The WHEATON TRIO is in residence at Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts, where the members teach on the music faculty. The trio receives the highest praise as an ensemble and the individual members as soloists in performance at major musical centers.

ALBERT REGNI, HELEN HARBISON and ROBERT D. LEVIN are heard frequently in New York, Ms. Harbison as a member of the DaCapo Chamber Players, Mr. Regni as a guest artist with the Contemporary Chamber Players and Speculum Musicae, and Mr. Levin with the New York Philomusica Chamber Ensemble.

FIVE SONGS OF EXPERIENCE (William Blake)

1. Introduction

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who present, past and future, sees; Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walked among the ancient trees,

Calling the lapsed soul,
And weeping in the evening dew;
That might control
The starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew!
"O Earth, O Earth, return!
Arise from out the dewy grass;
Night is worn,
And the morn
Rises from the slumberous mass.

"Turn away no more;
Why wilt thou turn away?
The starry floor,
The wat'ry shore,
Is giv'n thee till the break of day."

2. *Earth's Answer*

Earth rais'd up her head
From the darkness dread and drear.
Her light fled,
Stony dread!
And her locks cover'd with grey
despair.

"Prison'd on wat'ry shore,
Starry Jealousy does keep my den:
Cold and hoar,
Weeping o'er,
I hear the father of ancient men.

"Selfish father of men!
Cruel, jealous, selfish fear!
Can delight,
Chain'd in night,
The virgins of youth and morning
bear?

"Does spring hide its joy
When buds and blossoms grow?
Does the sower
Sow by night,
Or the plowman in darkness plow?

"Break this heavy chain
That does freeze my bones around
Selfish! vain!
Eternal bane!
That free Love with bondage bound!"

3. *Ah! Sun-flower*

Ah, Sun-flower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the Sun,
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveller's journey is done:
Where the Youth pined away with desire
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow
Arise from their graves, and aspire
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.

4. *The Voice of the Ancient Bard*

Youth of delight, come hither,
And see the opening morn,
Image of truth new born.
Doubt is fled, and clouds of reason,
Dark disputes and artful teasing
Folly is an endless maze,
Tangled roots perplex her ways.
How many have fallen there!
They stumble all night over bones of the dead,
And feel they know not what but care,
And wish to lead others, when they should be led.

5. *A Divine Image*

Cruelty has a Human Heart,
And Jealousy a Human Face;
Terror the Human Form Divine,
And Secrecy the Human Dress.

The Human Dress is forged Iron,
The Human Form a fiery Forge,
The Human Face a Furnace seal'd,
The Human Heart its hungry Gorge.

This recording was made possible by grants from the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University, Wheaton College and the American Academy-National Institute of Arts and Letters, which awarded John Harbison a recording prize for musical excellence in 1972.

THIS IS A COMPOSER-SUPERVISED RECORDING

(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)