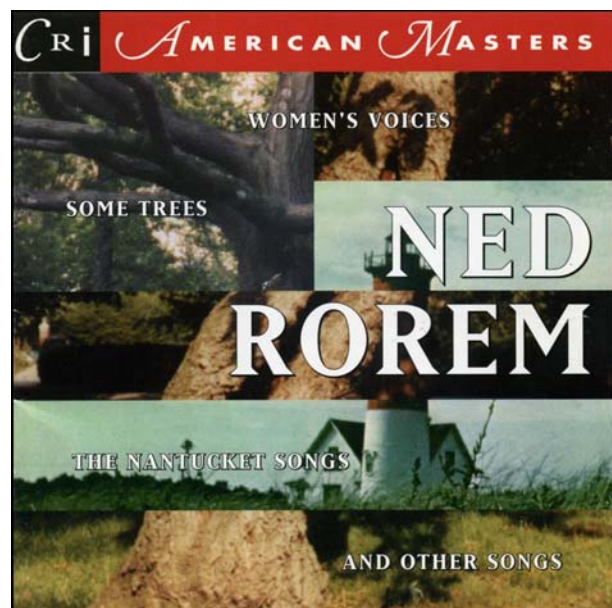


Ned Rorem



The Nantucket Songs (1979) (17:43)

1. From Whence Cometh Song (*Theodore Roethke*)
2. The Dance (*William Carlos Williams*)
3. Nantucket (*William Carlos Williams*)
4. Go, Lovely Rose (*Edmund Waller*)
5. Up-Hill (*Christina Rossetti*)
6. Mother, I Cannot Mind My Wheel (*Walter Savage Landor*)
7. Fear of Death (*John Ashbery*)
8. Thoughts of a Young Girl (*John Ashbery*)
9. Ferry Me Across the Water (*Christina Rossetti*)
10. The Dancer (*Edmund Waller*)

Phyllis Bryn-Julson, soprano

Some Trees (1986) (*John Ashbery*) (22:53)

11. Some Trees
12. The Grapevine
13. Our Youth

Phyllis Curtin, soprano; Beverly Wolff, contralto;
Donald Gramm, baritone

Six Songs

14. Little Elegy (1948) (*Elinor Wylie*)
15. Night Crow (1959) (*Theodore Roethke*)
16. The Tulip Tree (1953) (*Paul Goodman*)
17. Look Down, Fair Moon (1957) (*Walt Whitman*)
18. What Sparks and Wiry Cries (1956) (*Paul Goodman*)
19. For Poulenc (1963) (*Frank O'Hara*)

Phyllis Curtin, soprano, Donald Gramm, baritone

Women's Voices (1975) (22:22)

20. Let Not Charitable Hope (*Elinor Wylie*)
21. A Birthday (*Christina Rossetti*)
22. To My Dear and Loving Husband (*Anne Bradstreet*)
23. To The Ladies (*Mary Lee, Lady Chudleigh*)
24. If Ever Hapless Woman Had a Cause (*Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*)
25. We Never Said Farewell (*Mary Elizabeth Coleridge*)
26. The Stranger (*Adrienne Rich*)
27. What Inn Is This? (*Emily Dickinson*)
28. Defiled is My Name (*Queen Anne Boleyn*)
29. Electrocution (*Lola Ridge*)
30. Smile, Death (*Charlotte Mew*)

Katherine Ciesinski, mezzo-soprano;
Ned Rorem, piano

Total playing time: 63:13

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Notes

It doesn't seem so long ago—about fifteen years for the two cycles, twenty-five for the miscellaneous songs—that the ensuing program notes were penned, yet here I am at seventy, and the earliest work mentioned, *Little Elegy*, dates from 1948. But if perspective alters with the passage of time, viewpoint does not. I can remember like yesterday the actual sensation of writing *Little Elegy*, though I could not write it today (mainly because it's already written). I do envy the innocent knack for hitting the nail on the head without crushing my finger; but though youth can be imitated, it cannot be repeated. Thus, I feel rewarded for the present CRI reissue, a chance to hear again not only my own lost voice, but the voices of certain others who were inimitable singers, some of whom have stopped singing forever.

—Ned Rorem, Autumn 1993

From 1980:

The Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation commissioned me to write a group of songs, stipulating that I must be the pianist not only for their premiere but for an entire vocal program with any singer I wished, within reason. I asked for **Phyllis Bryn-Julson** who (being reasonable) accepted. Thus with her talents

continually in mind I withdrew to the island of Nantucket where, since 1974, I have owned a house, and where, between November 1978 and May 1979, I completed *The Nantucket Songs*. A subtitle might be "Popular Songs," insofar as popular means entertaining rather than classically indirect. Indeed, these songs—merry or complex or strange though their texts may seem—aim away from the head and toward the diaphragm. They are, as collegians say, emotional rather than intellectual, and need not be understood to be enjoyed.

The first rendition of *The Nantucket Songs* occurred in the Coolidge Auditorium of the Library of Congress, October 30, 1979. It was from a broadcast of that public concert that the present recording of the cycle was made.

Nothing a composer can say about his music is more pointed than the music itself. But here is a final thought: the performance of *The Nantucket Songs*, during which Phyllis Bryn-Julson and I, unbeknownst to each other, both had fevers of 102 degrees, is by definition live and unedited.

From 1969:

Every since as a teenager I started writing songs—short settings of quality poems for single voice with piano accompaniment—I’ve been tempted by the flashy, thicker textures of trios and quintets and such. But either from sloth or shrewdness I never did anything about it. Off the opera stage these groupings were rare: the vocal ensemble not being a standard chamber medium, at least not in this century, there seemed little reason for composing one. Even the delicious duets of Mendelssohn and Schumann, or Brahms’s unique *Liebeslieder Waltzes* were exceptions to their time and written more for fun than money. Community fun and amateur participation have not been major preoccupations of modern art (Christmas carols notwithstanding), and even the solo voice recital has verged on extinction. Lately, though, with the Beatles’s advent—not to mention mixed-media happenings throughout the globe—there seems to be a reawakening of the musical pleasure principle and of group participation.

Even so, I would probably never have come to composing an ensemble were it not for a practical impetus. *Some Trees* is a trio designed for specific singers on a specific occasion. The singers are those on this record. The occasion was a recital (Town Hall, December 12, 1968) in which each soloist separately performed a group of my songs. It seemed appropriate to end the concert by joining the artists in a group offering, and so I composed this cycle.

The words are by John Ashbery. I had never set his poetry before, although I had often used that of his friends Kenneth Koch and the late Frank O’Hara with whom he forms the nucleus of The New York School of Poets (roughly my generation), so-called, I guess, because of their championing of The New York School of painters. Each of them and all their younger entourage have written verse that appears ideal for madrigal combinations meant for the joy of collective unity in the modern home and hall.

Little Elegy was composed for, and first sung by, Nell Tangeman in 1948. *Night Crow* is from a group of eight settings of Theodore Roethke poems that were commissioned and first sung by Alice Esty in 1959. *Look Down, Fair Moon* is from a group of five Whitman settings, commissioned and first sung (to his own accompaniment on the virginal) by Wilder Burnap in 1957.

The Tulip Tree and What Sparks and Wiry Cries are settings of poetry by Paul Goodman who once was my Manhattan Goethe: the poet to whom I, as a balladeer, most frequently returned. From *The Lordly Hudson* in 1946, through the *Poet’s Requiem* 1955, to *Sun* in 1966, his verse, prose, and theater beautifully served my short tunes, choruses, and opera. Lives shift, ever faster. We seldom meet anymore, in either speech or song. Paul today seems more drawn toward wisely guiding the political acts of men; this can’t be done through poetry. And I grow more withdrawn. Yet while re-studying this music, all written in France during the early 1950s, I become rekindled with a need for the words and music of that easier decade. The rekindling may not fire more songs of the sort. It will, however, illuminate again a bit of conversation between old friends.

The poem *For Poulenc* was written by Frank O’Hara expressly to be set by me on a commission from Alice Esty who first performed it on a Poulenc Memorial Recital in 1963. The piano music beneath the first two lines of the final stanza is quoted from the “Ave Maria” in *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

From 1980:

In the autumn of 1975 I noted in my journal: “I am composing a cycle of songs for soprano Joyce Mathis [*Women’s Voices*], of whom a not inconspicuous feature, at least to me since I am white, is that she’s black. I have chosen to musicalize poems only by women (I mention this now, and never again, since the main point of the poems is that they’re good), but none of these women is black. For my music there are no apt black female poets, since they mostly deal with the black condition. Can I identify from inside with blackness as I can with femaleness? None of my ancestors were Negro slaves, though half of them were women. Artists contain all sexes but not all races. Still, years ago when I was composing *Ariel*, maybe Robin Morgan’s harsh words were true: “Leave Plath to our sisters, stick to men poets.” If I feel no more need for Plath it’s precisely because she was a woman, and I am not, not even metaphorically... Not that a composer need feel, or even respect, a poem in order to set it well. And some great poems that thrill are more impossible to musicalize than lesser ones that merely ring a bell. The question of which composers select which poets to set to music, and how they set them, is endlessly engrossing. A woman’s setting of women’s poetry might not be better than mine but will be different, not only because she’s another person but because she’s female. How to prove that difference? Is there more disparity between a man and a woman than between one good composer and another good composer? It’s hard to deal with a woman’s poem insofar as that poem dwells on solely womanly problems. Yet I’m writing a cycle on woman’s poems. From *Antigone* to *Phaedra*, through the *Marschallin* to *Blanche DuBois*, great-women roles have been written by men. But in plays and in opera these roles have been part of a larger pattern, a pattern, however eccentric, that we all grow up with. Could a man write a solo lyric poem, *as a woman*, and make it tell?”

When Joyce Mathis asked me earlier that summer to compose a cycle for her, it had been twelve years since anyone had commissioned songs from me. (*War Scenes* in 1969 was conceived as a gift for Gérard Souzay.) So much for my reputation as a major song composer. The eleven poems, probing women’s anger, love, joy, and anguish over five centuries, were accordingly presented by Mathis in Alice Tully Hall on November 4, 1976, with pianist Warren Wilson.

Unlike the live recording of *The Nantucket Songs*, the recording of *Women’s Voices* results from dozens of takes made in an empty church where Katherine Ciesinski and I, and the page turner (the composer Charles Turner, appropriately), all enjoying good health, nibbled apricots while listening to playbacks.

Ned Rorem (b Richmond, Indiana 1923) is one of the nation’s most widely performed composers. As this disc is released, he celebrates his seventieth birthday year. Rorem, who has composed over three hundred songs, is no less accomplished in instrumental writing. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1976 for his orchestral suite *Air Music*. Other honors include Guggenheim fellowships and awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, of which he is now a member. Recent works include the Concerto for Piano Left-Hand, written for Gary Graffman and premiered by the orchestra of the composer’s alma mater, the Curtis Institute; and an English Horn Concerto for the New York Philharmonic. Rorem has also published twelve books. In 1994, Simon and Schuster will bring out a memoir, *Knowing When to Stop*.

Production Notes

From CRI SD 238:

Little Elegy published by Hargail Music, Inc.; *Night Crow* published by Henman Press, Inc.; *The Tulip* and *For Poulenc* published by E.G. Schirmer; *Look Down Fair Moon*, *What Sparks and Wiry Cries* and *Some Trees* published by Boosey & Hawkes Inc., (ASCAP)

Producer: Carter Harman. Recording Engineer: Jerry Newman at Stereo Sound Studio, NYC in January 1969.

CRI American Masters

Executive Producer: Joseph. R. Dalton

The original recordings were made possible by an annual award of the American Academy of Arts & Letters.

From CRI SD 485:

Women's Voices produced by Carolyn Sachs.

Recording Engineer: David Hancock.

Recorded in New York City in June of 1982.

The Nantucket Songs produced by Carter Harman and recorded by The Library of Congress in October 1979 (ASCAP). Published by Boosey & Hawkes Inc. The original recordings were made possible through the generous support of Mrs. Norton Baum, Morris Golde, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Heller, Mrs. Fred Plant, Joseph Machlis, and private individuals.

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