

opus
3

A composer portrait
PETR EBEN
Johannes Landgren

FOOTPRINT



Petr Eben
A Composer Portrait
OP 9102

Laudes

1. Largo 5'59
2. Allegro solenne 4'10
3. Fantastico 5'23
4. Gravemente 6'30
Johannes Landgren, organ

Desire of Ancient Things

5. On an Air of Rameau 4'08
6. By the Pool 3'32
7. A Tune 2'01
The Rilke Ensemble
Gunnar Eriksson, conductor

8. **Cantico delle Creature** 5'19
The Rilke Ensemble
Gunnar Eriksson, conductor

Okna

9. Blue Window 3'51
10. Green Window 5'19
11. Red Window 4'53
12. Golden Window 5'05
Paul Spjuth, trumpet
Johannes Landgren, organ
Elisabeth Arkstedt Siljebo, assistant
Per Högberg, assistant

13. **Song of Ruth** 5'54
Helena Ek, soprano
Johannes Landgren, organ
Elisabeth Arkstedt Siljebo, assistant

Total: 62'04



Comments

Laudes

Eben writes: “The basic idea for this composition springs from the realization that our century is full of ingratitude – ingratitude to people around us, to the world and above all to the Creator himself. Everyone hears demands, complaints, discontent and rebelliousness, but nowhere is there a trace of gratitude. So perhaps the most pressing concern of art must be to praise, because otherwise ‘the very stones will cry out.’ Hence ‘Laudes.’

From this inward program the piece achieved its distinctive form, which is the same for all four movements; despite hints of a triple position, all the movements are basically divided into two parts, consisting of the introductory atmosphere and the song of praise engendered by it. Each movement has a different starting point: amazement at the divine majesty in the first movement; an element of burgeoning mysticism (reminiscent of electronic sounds) in the second; a dramatic turmoil and anxiety in the third; and a sombre, fateful searching – permeated by the spectre of depression – in the final movement.

Every movement is based thematically on a Gregorian chorale. In the second part of the first movement we hear (softly at first) the Alle-

luia sequence for Easter, the intervals of which are compressed into small leaps of a second. At every repetition of the theme the intervals are enlarged according to exact mathematical proportions until they reach ‘chromatic sixths and sevenths.’ At the climax, the theme, in its original form, is heard in the pedal.

In the introduction to the second movement, a theme from the Doxology (Gloria Patri – Glory be to the Father) is presented by the double pedal with a sombre registration. In the second part, the song of praise bursts forth, accompanied towards the end by a rhumba rhythm in the pedal.

The third movement opens with the hymn ‘Lauda Sion Salvatorem,’ in modal vein. The trumpet solo towards the end of the movement imitates a kind of jazz improvisation.

The quotation in the fourth movement comes from ‘Hinkmar’s Songs of Praise,’ with the Easter tune “Christus Vincit” presented in a fragmented structure (fortissimo in the pedals and pianissimo in the manuals). With every repetition the theme becomes clearer, more distinct and more confident of victory. The cycle ends with a toccata on the theme of ‘Christus Vincit’.”

Desire of Ancient Things

Eben comments: “I wanted to write three madrigals for mixed choir, which were commissioned by the ‘Westport Madrigal Singers,’ USA. Having in my mind the sound and the repertoire of a madrigal choir, I was looking for a more introverted subject, which would be in some way connected to the past, from which most of the repertoire of a madrigal choir is drawn. I was very impressed by three poems by Arthur Symons, written at the very end of the last century. They express a romantic nostalgia for lost times and worlds, which is quite a familiar feeling nowadays: a longing for quietness, for unspoiled nature and unspoiled minds. This is expressed by the title of the cycle, drawn from the first poem: *Desire of Ancient Things*. The music expresses this romantic mood (there is even a quotation from a Chopin Prelude), viewed, of course, through a 20th century musical style.

The first madrigal, ‘On an Air of Rameau,’ begins in this nostalgic mood; one could even feel the sound of an old harpsichord somewhat out of tune. The second section introduces a quotation of Rameau from the harpsichord piece ‘La Villageoise,’ which is sung with half-opened vowels and creates a contrast to the expressive question of the

men’s choir ‘Pallid lovers, what unforgotten desires once whispered are retold in your whisperings?’

From the five strophes of the poem ‘By the Pool’ only the 2nd and the 4th are the main choral settings, the first being an introduction, the 3rd an interlude and the 5th the coda. The introduction has a written-out aleatoric technique and shall create an impressionistic sound as of an aeolian harp, into which the men’s choir enters with its theme. After this complicated sound, the 2nd verse brings a very different color of a clear simplicity and is moving in a warm piano nuance.

After the nostalgia of the first madrigal and the landscape-lyric of the second, the third madrigal enters with a dramatic character, using the words ‘a foolish rhythm turns in my idle head,’ set with strong accents and dynamic contrasts. This rhythmical passage becomes a background to which the soprano addresses the listeners with that wonderful thought of the poet: ‘Why is it when love, which men call deathless, is dead, that memory, men call fugitive, will not die?’ In the middle section and to the words ‘Yet I hear the tune,’ a melody of one of the Chopin preludes is quoted but after three bars, there is suddenly an abrupt change to the afflicted and bitter words ‘in my lonely bed,’ after which comes the reprise of the initial rhythmical passage.”

Words

On an Air of Rameau

A melancholy desire of ancient things

Floats like a faded perfume out of the wires;

Pallid lovers, what unforgotten desires,

Whispered once, are retold in your whisperings?

Roses, roses, and lilies with hearts of gold,

These you plucked for her, these she wore in her breast;

Only Rameau's music remembers the rest,

The death of roses over a heart grown cold.

But these sighs? Can ghosts then sigh from the tomb?

Life then wept for you, sighed for you, chilled your breath?

It is the melancholy of ancient death

The harpsichord dreams of, sighing the room.

By the Pool

I heard the sighing of the reeds

In the grey pool in the green land.

The sea-wind in the long reeds sighing

Between the green hill and the sand.

I heard the sighing of the reeds

Day after day, night after night;

I heard the whirring wild ducks flying,

I saw the sea-gull's wheeling flight.

I heard the sighing of the reeds

Night after night, day after day,

And I forgot old age, and dying,

And youth that loves, and love's decay.

I heard the sighing of the reeds

At noontide and at evening,

And some old dream I had forgotten

I seemed to be remembering.

I hear the sighing of the reeds:

Is it in vain, is it in vain

That some old peace I had forgotten
Is crying to come back again?

A Tune

A foolish rhythm turns in my idle head
As a wind-mill turns in the wind on an empty sky.
Why is it when love, which men call deathless, is dead,
That memory, men call fugitive, will not die?
Is love not dead? yet I hear that tune if I lie
Dreaming awake in the night on my lonely bed,
And an old thought turns in the wind on an empty sky.
(Arthur Symons)

Cantico delle Creature

Eben writes: “This early Italian text by St. Francis is one of the first examples of Italian poetry. It has inspired many composers with its great abundance of contrasts.

My setting of ‘The Song of the Sun’ is not grandiloquent but rather suffused with a cheerful liveliness which comes close to the original, humble character of the poem.

Following an introduction, evocative of plainsong, the presentation of the main theme of the song of praise mingles with a typical Italian Tarantella rhythm and a touch of blues. Through its form (Introduction-A-B-C-A-B-D Coda), the piece reflects the differing characters of the various elements addressed in the song: a vigorous song of praise to the sun, the tranquillity of the moon and the stars, the lament of the wind, the flames of fire, the heaviness of the earth and the drama of death.”

This work was commissioned for a European choral festival for young people in Neerpelt, Belgium, where it was a required piece for the international choral singing competition.

Words

Altissimo, onnipotente, bon Signore,
tue so le laude, la gloria et l’honore
et onne benedictione.

Laudato si, mi Signore,
cum tucte le tue creature,
spetialmente messer lo frate sole,

loqual è iorno, et alumini noi per lui.

Et ellu è bellu e radiante
cum grande splendore de te, Altissimo,
porta significatione.

Laudato si, mi Signore,
per sora luna e le stelle,
in celu l'hai formate,
clarite, pretiose e belle.

Laudato si, mi Signore,
per frate vento et per aere nubilo
et sereno et onne tempo,
per loqual'alle tue creature
dai sustentamento.

Laudato si, mi Signore, per sora acqua,
la quale è molto utile
et humile et casta.

Laudato si, mi Signore per frate focu,
per lo qual'ennallumini la nocte
et ello è bello et iocundo,

et robustoso et forte.

Laudata si, mi Signore
per sora nostra matre terra,
laquale produce diversi fructi
con fiori et herba.

Laudato si, mi Signore
per sora nostra morte corporale
dala quale null'homo vivente po
skappare.

Laudate et benedicite mi'Signore
et rengratiate, servitelo
cum grande humilitate.

Altissimo!

Okna (Stained Glass Windows after Marc Chagall)

Eben writes: "The title of this cycle can be taken symbolically: the window as a source of light, the window as a direction of view from the twilight of the room to the sky, with the clouds sailing in it, a direction away from the concrete reality around us to the world of imagination.

But the direct stimulus for both title and subject came from the experience of a work of visual art. This cycle of four pieces was inspired by the discovery of Chagall's stained glass windows. The power of vividness of his wonderful creation irresistibly evoked in me the festive sound of the organ, to which the intensity of its refulgent colors added the metal of the trumpet.

The Blue Window (Ruben) surges on the tossing waves of the sea, with fishes in the water and birds in the air, all in one continuous ascending movement. After Water: the Earth.

The pastoral image of **the Green Window** (Issachar), glows softly like a subtle oriental tapestry. Chagall's contented donkey, with its human mien, lies in a pasture surrounded by the flowers and vines of plenty. This is an oriental pastorage.

The Red Window (Zebulun) – one of those unbelievably violent sunsets over the sea, with two gaily colored fishes leaping through the air in a dramatic arc, a symphony of blazing reds.

The Golden Window (Levi) is the most liturgical image. As a tribute to Chagall, born in the Russian town of Vitebsk, this window combines the painter's Russian and Jewish origins. It is based on a hymn from the Russian Orthodox liturgy which is always sung by a male

choir; this sound is expressed by the organ's 8' Principal stop. To this the Trumpet adds chorale elements of the synagogue songs, superimposing on the Orthodox chorale the velvet tones of its Judaic beauty. In the second part, the piece moves on towards the more brittle and metallic colors of the Occident. The color, gold, is that of a solemn and joyous festival, all is plunged into the glare of light with candle flames, candlesticks, a cup of fruit and other liturgical objects.

The specific method of composition is partly prompted by my experience of the difficulties of combining various instruments with the organ (due to the lag of the organ tones, the distance of the soloist from it and the dispersion of the acoustic source), and this led to what is mostly a free rhythmic structure for both parts, meeting at the crossways of syrrhythmic places but quickly resuming the adventure of their separate melodic ways."

In discussion, Petr Eben has mentioned that each movement is connected Old Testament texts:

First Movement: Genesis 49:3-4

Second Movement: Genesis 49:14-15

Third Movement: Genesis 49:13

Fourth Movement: Deuteronomy 33:9-10

“Lied der Ruth” (from the Book of Ruth, 1:16-17)

Eben comments: “ ‘Lied der Ruth’ is based on one of the most enthralling texts anywhere in the Old Testament. It is a song, a Hohenlied, of steadfastness – a promise of fidelity even unto death.

‘Wither thou goest, I will go! Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die’

These words, understandably enough, have served as a wedding song in all ages and have inspired many composers right down to our own times. What touches me most about this text is the fact of the words uttered, not by the girl to her lover, not by the wife to her husband but by the daughter to her mother-in-law. This makes the surrender even more unselfish.

The words inspired me with an archaic ‘da capo aria,’ in which I found it natural to combine the classical melodic formation with contemporary elements.

The dominant characteristic of the melody is the tonal sequence from the minor third via the major third to the augmented fourth.”

Words

Wo immer Du hingehst,
dahin will ich auch gehen.

Und wo du bleibst, wo immer du wohnest,
dort bleibe ich mit dir, dort werde ich wohnen.

Dein Volk ist mein Volk
und dein Gott ist mein Gott.

Wo du auch stirbst, wo immer du stirbst,
dort sterbe ich auch.

Wo du findest dein Grab,
in derselben Erde, die dich aufnimmt,
begraben will ich sein, in ihr nur sei auch mein Grab.

Mir soll geschehen, was Gott mit mir vorhat.

Er strafe mich schwer, sollte etwas Anderes,
denn der Tod mich von dir scheiden.

Nur der Tod scheide zwischen mir und dir.

JOHANNES LANDGREN was born in Arjeplog, Lapponia, in 1961. In 1980 he began his studies at the School of Music and Musicology (now “The Academy of Music and Drama”) at the Gothenburg University. There he took his exam in Church Music, received his soloist diploma in organ repertoire and organ improvisation, and got his choir conductor’s exam. In 1997 he presented his dissertation on Petr Eben’s organ music.

Since the end of the 80’s Landgren has been teaching and conducting research at the Academy of Music and Drama at the University of Gothenburg.

As a conductor and organist Johannes has toured in most countries in Europe as well as USA and Russia. He has, as conductor and organist, made recordings for radio and television in Sweden, Belgium, Ireland, Czech Republic, Germany, Russia, Denmark, Finland and Estonia. He has made more than thirty CD recordings, including renaissance, baroque and contemporary music.

At present Johannes Landgren is Pro-Dean at the Faculty of Fine, Applied, and Performing arts, at the University of Gothenburg, Professor of Organ and Improvisation at the Academy of Music and

Drama at the same university and guest professor at the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm.

Read Johannes Landgren’s Thesis *Music – Moment – Message*, on Petr Eben’s organ works. The document is available [here](#).

For more information on the artists in this recording, see footprintrecords.com/artists

Production: AudioProdukter

Producer and Recording Engineer: Bo Hansson

Recorded: Jan. 18 and 19, 1991; April 2, 1991; June 8, 1991; and July 5, 1991

Converted to the digital domain using the original Telefunken M15 machine.

Conversion to DSD256, Using Horus Premium AD from Merging Technologies, Switzerland

DSD256 versions: No processing

DXD and 96 kHz versions: Gentle dynamic processing

AAC version: Mastered for iTunes, slightly reduced dynamics

Conversions and mastering made by Per Sjösten

Sound Processing Studio, Sweden

per@sound.se

This production has received support from the Swedish Arts Council