

last things, I think, to think about

JOHN ASHBERY, text
ROGER REYNOLDS, music

PHILIP LARSON, baritone • ALECK KARIS, pianist

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about

*A song cycle
with Text by
John Ashbery
and Music by
Roger Reynolds*

PHILIP LARSON, baritone
ALECK KARIS, pianist

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1	<i>Text 1</i>	:37
2	I Had Thought	3:59
3	<i>Text 2</i>	:12
4	The Painter	3:10
5	softest passage	5:40
6	<i>Text 3</i>	:18
7	Sonnet	3:48
8	<i>Text 4</i>	:43
9	At North Farm	3:44
10	<i>Text 5</i>	:51
11	Landscape	7:06
12	<i>Text 6</i>	:44
13	Faust	11:52
14	<i>Text 7</i>	1:10
15	Hotel Lautrémont I	3:12
16	Hotel Lautrémont II	3:36
17	Hotel Lautrémont III	4:15
18	Hotel Lautrémont IV	4:14
19	<i>Text 8</i>	:26
20	Myrtle	2:06
21	<i>Text 9</i>	:21
22	Illustration I	3:11
23	<i>Text 10</i>	:27
24	Illustration II	3:33
25	<i>Text 11</i>	:32

Total: 69:58

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Whether symptomatic of health or of crisis, music of the late twentieth century has been marked by a number of composers whose imaginative worlds, and sometimes careers, have drawn from domains nominally distant from musical ones: Xenakis was an architect; Babbitt, a mathematician; Boulez studied engineering; Murail, economics and classical Arabic; Christian Wolff was a professor of classics at Dartmouth. But the cultural distance spanned by the young Roger Reynolds as a student at the University of Michigan—founding the celebrated ONCE Festival with such avant-garde composers as Robert Ashley and Gordon Mumma, while pursuing a degree in engineering physics that led to a position in military defense—is unique. Although he was soon to renounce engineering for music, the contradiction is a lasting image, for Reynolds' multifaceted artistic personality is one that has continually exposed his craft to the influence of other media and forms, deeply

and sometimes violently. "Anything can find its way into the work," he once remarked to Toru Takemitsu; "...inevitably, anything I do, everything I see, becomes a part of my music." His continual questioning of the composer's relationship to tradition has produced a music of strength and fragility, and it plays a role both in the American experimental tradition and in the path of the artist in the postmodern age: a "searcher's path," to use the title of one of his own writings.

Reynolds is probably best known for the ambitious, large-scale works that combine instrumental, electronic, and sometimes visual media like the 1997 BBC commission, *The Red Act Arias*, the multimedia VOICESPACE series, and the 1982-83 Ircam commission *Archipelago*. *last things, I think, to think about*, a setting of poetry by John Ashbery that Reynolds wrote in 1994 for baritone Philip Larson and pianist Aleck Karis, is on quite another scale, one as intimate as a poetry reading.

Electronics are sparingly employed, no less effective for their restraint. Yet there is vastness in the work's catalogue of emotions, of musical styles, of a virtuoso range of vocal techniques. Above all, in its intricate exploration of the possible relations between music and text, it implies a commentary on the vocal repertoire—from lied to opera, from musical theater to Gregorian chant—by subverting those relations that are manifest, and uncovering those that are latent. *last things*, as the composer writes in a prefatory note to the score, is not "unlike a song cycle or even the tradition of nineteenth century melodrama," but it is "both more and other than any of these rich but circumscribed media."

For the work is both rich and defiantly uncircumscribed. It continually demarcates its boundaries only to break them, in a kind of widening spiral; the form is thus in a continual state of development. Like *Archipelago*, *last things* is a kind of mosaic: the ten discrete settings of poems (drawn from disparate points in Ashbery's career) are musical islands floating in the stream of an eleventh poem,

called *Debit Night*, that Ashbery wrote specifically for the work. Ashbery taped a reading of *Debit Night* under Reynolds' supervision, and the recording preserves Ashbery's unaccompanied voice but stereo-phonically spatializes it. The tape was then divided into ten fragments that are distributed throughout the work as intercalations between the movements of the work proper, suggesting both continuity and fragmentation, two different approaches that characterize the music's "reading" of the poetry in a general sense. An archipelago, as it were, of songs in a sea of spoken words: but whereas the elaborate musical mosaic of the earlier *Archipelago* was, according to the composer, "purely architectural in notion—the plan for the work was entirely devised before any music was composed"—*last things* is an exercise in spontaneity, the composer reacting to the poetry with the same capricious immediacy that Ashbery (of all poets) demands of his reader: "the associative mobility characteristic of human thought caught while musing," as Reynolds describes it. This is a compositional method that prioritizes extemporaneousness, and it was taken to

an extreme during the composition of the work's final movements, when the composer allotted himself an hour to set each remaining line of text, committing himself to a nearly improvisatory style of composition. Reynolds has described the composition as a whole as his way of coming to terms with Ashbery's provocative texts; "the surest way for me to comprehend his writing was to manifest it musically." Writing music is understood as reading poetry. If Reynolds' strategy thus represents a novel repositioning of the composer with regard to his material, it is a liberating one, and one that forms an organic part of a work based on incessant repositionings.

Indeed, the theme of repositioning, of reorientation, is integral to Reynolds' musical thought. The title of his 1987 work for the San Francisco Symphony, *Symphony*[*Vertigo*], already suggests that its subject is "problems of orientation," as the composer remarked; and the idea is woven throughout *last things*. It appears at the very beginning, affixed to the least complex of vocal images: Ashbery's unaccompanied voice beginning the reading of *Debit Night*.

(Regardless of one's familiarity with Ashbery's reading style, his deadpan, quotidian tone, so at odds with the poetic language, never fails to momentarily stun; and hearing his voice in the context of a musical work is particularly striking.) That the poet's voice is not processed electronically but spatialized (literally repositioning itself) creates an immediate tension: we are rooted in that most familiar of vocal phenomena, the human voice speaking; and yet the voice is disembodied, rootless, moving unrestrained through an imaginary physical space that music will shortly fill. "A listener will hear the poet's voice," Reynolds comments, "wandering through a space of images *physically* (as a result of the computer's ministrations), as well as metaphorically." The work begins before the music begins; we are not hearing poetry filtered through a musical setting, but the reverse.

That Reynolds inverts the conventional hierarchy of music and poetry, and that tradition's near total prohibition of speech, is suggested by the fact that Reynolds considers his first composi-

tional act for *last things* the selection and subsequent arrangement of the poems. The composer's elevation of what would at first appear a preliminary stage in the work's genesis to the status of an act of composition speaks not only to the esteem Reynolds holds for Ashbery's work, but to Reynolds' position on text-setting in general: he is critical of much of twentieth-century vocal music for its willful obscuration of the poetry. For Reynolds, the poetry interprets the music as much as—if not more than—the musical settings interpret the poetry. In this way, the piece is always interpreting itself. The form is simultaneously synchronic and diachronic: the complex narrative of songs, itself is continually challenging its own linearity, is broken not just by the spoken intercalations of *Debit Night* but by another static thread woven into the musical material, a catalogue of what Reynolds terms "musical images" or "musical nodes." These are distinct musical motifs consisting of essentially independent progressions in themselves, which are assigned to certain words—"prayer," "night," "city," and eight others—that Reynolds has identified as recurring across the different land-

scapes of the various poems. At each appearance of these words in the text, the music—whatever its momentary direction—must submit to the distinct musical material indexed by the text. The words are thus links in a kind of musical hypertext, like so many windows through which we catch glimpses of scenery, as if passengers in a train periodically emerging from tunnels: labyrinths interlaced with labyrinths.

The overall form of the cycle, then, is wholly intuitive, but it is moving in its elegance and simplicity. The ten movements divide themselves into two halves of five movements each. For the first half, a condensed first movement leads to a lengthy second piece, *The Painter*, which is followed by three relatively brief settings. The second half of *last things* echoes and exaggerates this form: *Faust*, the sixth movement, is weighty, and the subsequent *Hotel Lautréamont* is the grandest, the last three the briefest, of the cycle's songs.

The ten songs form an encyclopedia of vocal techniques. (As diverse as the vocal part, if perhaps more subtle in its expansiveness, is the piano writing, exploring its own geography of technical resources and cultural history—more often than not, as the composer has noted, independently of the voice.) The first movement, *I Had Thought...*, is rhapsodic, mercurial, subtly allusive, bringing to mind Reynolds' objective of seeking "a musical medium appropriate to the allusive dimensionality" of Ashbery's writing. Are the slightly whole-tone sonorities of the block chords accompanying Ashbery's line "The cathedral is slated for demolition" a gesture to Debussy's *La Cathédrale Engloutie*, a brief *tombeau* to the French composer? As in Ashbery's text, the density of the material and the speed with which it is sometimes deployed suggests (but never confirms) that allusions are illusory. The piano part shifts between meandering threads, chordal writing by turns strenuous and ethereal, and arpeggiations of slow-moving harmonies. The stylistic shifts in the vocal line are but a preview of the range in poetic register to come. And yet the form of *I Had*

Thought... is straightforward; motifs develop logically and audibly, reconciling their differences by the end. It is as if the composer is laying a stable rhetorical structure that will presently be subjected to a host of potentially destructive forces.

The second movement, *The Painter*, introduces the figure of an artist, "Sitting between the sea and the buildings... painting the sea's portrait": an impossible task, of course. The confrontation of man and nature—Stevens' "rage for order"—is answered (atoned for?) by the movement's middle section, an exquisitely barren *senza tempo* Reynolds parenthetically marks *Prayer*. It is among the most expressive passages in his music.

The next two movements—the weighty but compact *Sonnet*, the fleeting, lyrical *At North Farm*—lead to *Landscape*, rounding off the first half of the work with as many questions as answers. Here a virtuoso vocal line is set against minimal, consoling piano writing. It is here, just as *last things* approaches its midpoint, that Reynolds introduces elec-

tronics for the first time, in two guises. The first is a recording of an unadorned reading of Baudelaire, wonderfully spoken by Christopher Thiéry, reflecting Ashbery's intercalations in a different language. The second is an enigmatic, solemn electronic melody whose long tones inevitably bring to mind a *cantus firmus* of a medieval motet, but a *cantus firmus* posed upon *terra infirma*. After a penultimate section in which the music's urging towards a cadence is arrested by bitter fragmentation, the singer voices an impassioned lament, Ashbery's translation of a Baudelaire line: "building here out of my fiery thoughts". There is a last breath of the Baudelaire text—the lament in its original language (as so often in Reynolds' music, the developed or translated material precedes its source). The final, unaccompanied cadence of the singer, wavering between song and whisper, closes the first half of the work in a calm but shaken spirit.

With *Faust*, the sixth movement that marks the beginning of the second half of the cycle, the music pivots suddenly from the still closure of *Landscape* to a wildly exaggerated, half-spoken, half-sung declamation that might well reflect both the poet's and the composer's ambivalence to the grand tradition of nineteenth-century European literature and opera that the title suggests. The following movement, *Hotel Lautréamont*, is the most imposing song of the cycle, a setting of the poem that Reynolds described as "monstrous" to set. It opens with another shock: the electronic component, heretofore used so subtly, bursts forth with a searingly violent processing of the Sibelius violin concerto, to which Ashbery's poem refers. This piercing image—a mechanized simulacrum of one of classical music's beloved works—suggests a dehumanized world, a response in music to the ominous subtext of the *Hotel Lautréamont*'s first lines:

Research has shown that ballads were produced by all of society working as a team...

...in a few seconds
The world, as we know it, sinks into dementia, proving narrative passé,

In a sense, this movement is the centerpiece of the whole cycle. Nearly the whole range of technical resources Reynolds demands of the baritone in the entire work—recitative, declamation, *Sprechstimme*, speech, shouting, glissandi, chest tones, falsetto, opera, even pop music’s “crooning,” among many other techniques—are juxtaposed here against equally virtuoso piano writing; at times the two layers are synchronized, but more often they clash. Ashbery’s poetry reading makes an appearance, here within, not outside, the musical movement; and the Baudelaire is heard again as well, the speaker’s voice at times unprocessed, at times fragmented algorithmically. Even the ocean sounds heard on the electronic tape—a reappearance of the sea, subject of *The Painter*—are violent, subject to the same algorithmic editing applied to the Sibelius material. “History,” the baritone intones near the end of *Hotel Lautréamont*, “...is shrouded, veiled: we must have made some ghastly error.” The movement ends with a tiny gesture of the piano, marked “freely” on the score, but it is the feeblest of liberations.

The final three movements, the briefest of the cycle, are prefaced by Ashbery’s voice, posing a question: “Then peace, of a sort?” But the music is ever restless. *Myrtle* jumps back and forth between lyricism and strange, caricatured rhythmic speech; and the shimmering, sweeping gestures of the penultimate *Illustration I* are succeeded by the meditative *Illustration II*, where, for the first time in some time, there are places where the melody genuinely comes to rest. When Ashbery’s denuded voice of the intercalations appears at the work’s end, integrating itself into the musical texture proper, we have the sense of a path being closed. “Because it is the end,” the singer intones finally, simply. Ironically? Has the path led us to a destination, or have we simply traveled, like Ashbery’s disembodied voice in the intercalations, full circle, ready to rebegin the cycle? The music seems to be telling us that a final homecoming is not to be expected after such wanderings; but that, in this hesitant but luminous calm, we have nevertheless earned a “peace, of a sort.”

Joshua Cody

last things, I think, to think about

A song cycle with Text by John Ashbery and

Music by Roger Reynolds

DEBIT NIGHT

We were coming down from the city the city is where you come when you don't want to listen or be excused from listening. It is a hard hat out and some days "stiletto" heels — but who told you about hat we don't know about hat too much or about how "hat" grows. Coming down we passed through a former violet producing center. Around World War I there were maybe a hundred violet farms in this region of New York state conducive to violets. It is a very labor intensive thing now there are no longer any except one or two. Up until the end of World War II it was the fashion for ladies to wear bunches of violets but then

I HAD THOUGHT...

I HAD THOUGHT THINGS
WERE GOING ALONG WELL

But I was mistaken.

THE CATHEDRAL IS

Slated for demolition.

OUT OVER THE BAY
10 THE RATTLE OF FIRECRACKERS

And in the adjacent waters, calm.

WE WERE ON THE TERRACE
DRINKING GIN AND TONICS

When the squall hit.

*it changed. Now no one had any use for them. Now everyone likes violets I don't see.
Yes but you don't see anybody wearing them or buying any. Some even think of them
as weeds. ...*

THE PAINTER

Sitting between the sea and the buildings
He enjoyed painting the sea's portrait.
But just as children imagine a prayer
Is merely silence, he expected his subject
To rush up the sand, and, seizing a brush,
Plaster its own portrait on the canvas.

So there was never any paint on his canvas
Until the people who lived in the buildings
Put him to work: "Try using the brush
As a means to an end. Select, for a portrait,
Something less angry and large, and more subject
To a painter's moods, or, perhaps, to a prayer."

How could he explain to them his prayer
That nature, not art, might usurp the canvas?
He chose his wife for a new subject,
Making her vast, like ruined buildings,
As if, forgetting itself, the portrait
Had expressed itself without a brush.

Slightly encouraged, he dipped his brush
In the sea, murmuring a heartfelt prayer:
"My soul, when I paint this next portrait
Let it be you who wrecks the canvas."
The news spread like wildfire through the buildings:
He had gone back to the sea for his subject.

Imagine a painter crucified by his subject!
Too exhausted even to lift his brush,
He provoked some artists leaning from the buildings
To malicious mirth: "We haven't a prayer
Now, of putting ourselves on canvas,
Or getting the sea to sit for a portrait!"

Others declared it a self-portrait.
Finally all indications of a subject
Began to fade, leaving the canvas
Perfectly white. He put down the brush.
At once a howl, that was also a prayer,
Arose from the overcrowded buildings.

They tossed him, the portrait, from the tallest of the buildings;
And the sea devoured the canvas and the brush
As though his subject had decided to remain a prayer.

... Nevertheless the former violet business has left its trace in place-names here such as Violet Lane and Violet Hill. They are beautiful aren't they until you stop to think that violets could be weeds and of a reason why nobody buys them anymore. Yes but I will still think the

SONNET

Each servant stamps the reader with a look.
After many years he has been brought nothing.
The servant's frown is the reader's patience.
The servant goes to bed.
The patience rambles on
Musing on the library's lofty holes.

His pain is the servant's alive.
It pushes to the top stain of the wall
Its tree-top's head of excitement:
Baskets, birds, beetles, spools.
The light walls collapse next day.
Traffic is the reader's pictured face.
Dear, be the tree your sleep awaits;
Worms be your words, you not safe from ours.

names

A sandbox sometimes had weeds growing in it including one that looked like a dandelion only it was tall and thrifty. Always was the sand more beautiful after the rain when there was a dried wet crust on top with pebblelike pores starring its surface. But mostly it was out of sight. There was not a window of the house where it wasn't around the corner so naturally it is seen less and thus gets worn into the mind like a crease in a road map that has been folded up the wrong way too many times.

AT NORTH FARM

Somewhere someone is traveling furiously toward you,
At incredible speed, traveling day and night,
Through blizzards and desert heat, across torrents, through narrow passes.
But will he know where to find you,
Recognize you when he sees you,
Give you the thing he has for you?

Hardly anything grows here,
Yet the granaries are bursting with meal,
The sacks of meal piled to the rafters.
The streams run with sweetness, fattening fish;
Birds darken the sky. Is it enough
That the dish of milk is set out at night,
That we think of him sometimes,
Sometimes and always, with mixed feelings?

Jana prefers the city. Says there's more light in it, or the light gets divided up by the streets more so a little goes a long way. Light is something that should not be wasted so as to produce its maximum effect as it is even on some boulevards where it stretches out too much, too wide and too long into the future. This is true but in the country it gets more soaked up in the bushes and buildings so a little more is always required and a little more is all there is. ...

LANDSCAPE

(After Baudelaire)

I want a bedroom near the sky, an astrologer's cave
Where I can fashion eclogues that are chaste and grave.
Dreaming, I'll hear the wind in the steeples close by
Sweep the solemn hymns away. I'll spy
On factories from my attic window, resting my chin
In both hands, drinking in the songs, the din.
I'll see chimneys and steeples, those masts of the city,
And the huge sky that makes us dream of eternity.

How sweet to watch the birth of the star in the still-blue
Sky, through mist; the lamp burning anew
At the window; rivers of coal climbing the firmament
And the moon pouring out its pale enchantment.
I'll see the spring, the summer and the fall
And when winter casts its monotonous pall
Of snow, I'll draw the blinds and curtains tight
And build my magic palaces in the night;
Then dream of gardens, of bluish horizons,
Of jets of water weeping in alabaster basins,
Of kisses, of birds singing at dawn and at nightfall,
Of all that's most childish in our pastoral.

When the storm rattles my windowpane
I'll stay hunched at my desk, it will roar in vain
For I'll have plunged deep inside the thrill
Of conjuring spring with the force of my will,
Coaxing the sun from my heart, and building here
Out of my fiery thoughts, a tepid atmosphere.

... In the city you can eavesdrop on brick walls and this is called "repainting." What comes up in the inevitable ensuing conversation is sure funny but doesn't look ahead to the future of philosophy or decide how life should ultimately be lived. There is no conversation even about half-serious things like the theater. Instead everybody makes a unique little mess like a child shitting in its pants that's proud of it. The auto horns scare everything near away anyhow. The place pivots; this has already been patented. You can go down to sleep by the river or in a movie. See that boat? It's real.

FAUST

If only the phantom would stop reappearing!
Business, if you wanted to know, was punk at the opera.
The heroine no longer appeared in *Faust*.
The crowds strolled sadly away. The phantom
Watched them from the roof, not guessing the hungers
That must be stirred before disappointment can begin.

One day as morning was about to begin
A man in brown with a white shirt reappearing
At the bottom of his yellow vest, was talking hungers
With the silver-haired director of the opera.
On the green-carpeted floor no phantom
Appeared, except yellow squares of sunlight, like those in *Faust*.

That night as the musicians for *Faust*
Were about to go on strike, lest darkness begin
In the corridors, and through them the phantom
Glide unobstructed, the vision reappearing
Of blonde Marguerite practicing a new opera
At her window awoke terrible new hungers

In the already starving tenor. But hungers
Are just another topic, like the new *Faust*
Drifting through the tunnels of the opera
(In search of lost old age? For they begin
To notice a twinkle in his eye. It is cold daylight reappearing
At the window behind him, itself a phantom

Window, painted by the phantom
Scene painters, sick of not getting paid, of hungers
For a scene below of tiny, reappearing
Dancers, with a sandbag falling like a note in *Faust*
Through purple air. And the spectators begin
To understand the bleeding tenor star of the opera.)

That night the opera
Was crowded to the rafters. The phantom
Took twenty-nine curtain calls. "Begin!
Begin!" In the wings the tenor hungers
For the heroine's convulsive kiss, and Faust
Moves forward, no longer young, reappearing

And reappearing for the last time. The opera
Faust would no longer need its phantom.
On the bare, sunlit stage the hungers could begin.

18 *So after we had done the chores and brought back living to the house there was something on its mind like a ball of yarn. Yes, a ball of yarn is what is there as I wanted to say. Say, stay anyway will you? I might. I've got things to do. Yes, but this is one of them. That's true. But I still have things to do I might go. Oh no you're not. Oh no? Okay then I really will stay because I want to really. Really she said? Then I will show you this dried crust of bread which is the truth, you must never forget it. Oh I never will I said it's what I wanted all along. How many acres do you want? Oh I never sought them they always came to me until quite recently. Indeed? Well here comes another one it's green or black. It must be yours she said. You played the mandrake right. Yes well here comes another and a whole lot of them. By George she said we should have been ready for them, but that's the way*

HOTEL LAUTRÉAMONT

I

Research has shown that ballads were produced by all of society working as a team. They didn't just happen. There was no guesswork. The people, then, knew what they wanted and how to get it. We see the results in works as diverse as "Windsor Forest" and "The Wife of Usher's Well."

Working as a team, they didn't just happen. There was no guesswork. The horns of elfland swing past, and in a few seconds We see the results in works as diverse as "Windsor Forest" and "The Wife of Usher's Well,"

or, on a more modern note, in the finale of the Sibelius violin concerto.

The horns of elfland swing past, and in a few seconds The world, as we know it, sinks into dementia, proving narrative passé or [on a more modern note,] in the finale of the Sibelius violin concerto. Not to worry, many hands are making work light again.

The world as we know it sinks into dementia, proving narrative passé. In any case the ruling was long overdue. Not to worry, many hands are making work light again, so we stay indoors. The quest was only another adventure.

II

In any case, the ruling was long overdue.
The people are beside themselves with rapture
so we stay indoors. The quest was only another adventure
and the solution problematic, at any rate far off in the future.

The people are beside themselves with rapture
yet no one thinks to question the source of so much collective euphoria,
and the solution: problematic, at any rate far off in the future.
The saxophone wails, the martini glass is drained.

20 Yet no one thinks to question the source of so much collective euphoria.
In troubled times one looked to the shaman or priest for comfort
and counsel.

The saxophone wails, the martini glass is drained,
And night like black swansdown settles on the city.

In troubled times one looked to the shaman or priest for comfort and counsel.
Now, only the willing are fated to receive death as a reward,
and night like black swansdown settles on the city.
If we tried to leave, would being naked help us?

III

Now, only the willing are fated to receive death as a reward.
Children twist hula-hoops, imagining a door to the outside.
If we tried to leave, would being naked help us?
And what of older, lighter concerns? What of the river?

Children twist hula-hoops, imagining a door to the outside,
when all we think of is how much we can carry with us.
And what of older, lighter concerns? What of the river?
All the behemoths have filed through the maze of time.

When all we think of is how much we can carry with us,
Small wonder that those at home sit, nervous, by the unlit grate.
All the behemoths have filed through the maze of time.
It remains for us to come to terms with *our* commonalty.

Small wonder that those at home sit nervous by the unlit grate.
It was their choice, after all, that spurred us to feats of the imagination.
It remains for us to come to terms with our commonalty
And in so doing deprive time of further hostages.

IV

It was their choice, after all, that spurred us to feats of the imagination.
Now, silently as one mounts a stair we emerge into the open
and in so doing deprive time of further hostages,
to end the standoff that history long ago began.

Now, silently as one mounts a stair we emerge into the open
but it is shrouded, veiled: we must have made some ghastly error.
To end the standoff that history long ago began
Must we thrust ever onward, into perversity?

But it is shrouded, veiled; we must have made some ghastly error.
You mop your forehead with a rose, recommending its thorns.
must we thrust ever onward, into perversity?
Only night knows for sure; the secret is safe with her.

You mop your forehead with a rose, recommending its thorns.
Research has shown that ballads were produced by all of society;
Only night knows for sure. The secret is safe with her:
the people, then, knew what they wanted and how to get it.

*it is you can't be and you are. Think of World War I, it's green and black and surely there
was less daylight around then, more fog and boats on the East River with people lining up
to go on them. Yes it was a premonition of these our times she said and so I conjure you,
don't go around telling what you know to people, you are likely to get it back. Then peace,
of a sort? ...*

MYRTLE

How funny your name would be
if you could follow it back to where
the first person thought of saying it,
naming himself that, or maybe
some other persons thought of it
and named that person. It would
be like following a river to its source,
which would be impossible. Rivers have no source.
They just automatically appear at a place
where they get wider, and soon a real
river comes along, with fish and debris,
regal as you please, and someone
has already given it a name: St. Benno
(saints are popular for this purpose) or, or
some other name, the name of his
long-lost girlfriend, who comes
at long last to impersonate that river,
on a stage, her voice clanking
like its bed, her clothing of sand
and pasted paper, a piece of real technology,
while all along she is thinking, I can
do what I want to do. But I want to stay here.

... The high-minded sun combs the tallest man-made structures on earth and then you get a little peace and some darkness down in the lobbies where everything begins to happen. No one in his handsome and enduring stable. Just having to endure is like going for the jugular but it should be a caravanserai ...

ILLUSTRATION

I

A novice was sitting on a cornice
High over the city. Angels

24 Combined their prayers with those
Of the police, begging her to come off it.

One lady promised to be her friend.
"I do not want a friend," she said.

A mother offered her some nylons
Stripped from her very legs. Others brought

Little offerings of fruit and candy,
The blind man all his flowers. If any

Could be called successful, these were,
For that the scene should be a ceremony

Was what she wanted. "I desire
Monuments," she said. "I want to move

Figuratively, as waves caress
The thoughtless shore. You people I know

Will offer me every good thing
I do not want. But please remember

I died accepting them." With that, the wind
Unpinned her bulky robes, and naked

As a roc's egg, she drifted softly downward
Out of the angels' tenderness and the minds of men.

25

... The problem is to get over what is being endured but hasn't been and to make for the middle distance, after the teacups and asters but before philosophy and "last things," where thighs shine astride dim neighboring curbs and strangers greet you convulsively. These are more last things, I think, to think about

II

Much that is beautiful must be discarded
So that we may resemble a taller

Impression of ourselves. Moths climb in the flame,
Alas, that wish only to be the flame:

They do not lessen our stature.
We twinkle under the weight

Of indiscretions. But how could we tell
That of the truth we know, she was

The somber vestment? For that night, rockets sighed
Elegantly over the city, and there was feasting:

There is so much in that moment!
So many attitudes toward that flame,

We might have soared from earth, watching her glide
Aloft, in her peplum of bright leaves.

But she, of course, was only an effigy
Of indifference, a miracle

Not meant for us, as the leaves are not
Winter's ...
all along along what I wanted all along
... because it is the end.

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 - Mr. Reynolds' work is handled exclusively by the C. F. Peters Corporation, New York

Philip Larson, baritone

Philip Larson has been premiering and recording contemporary vocal works for over thirty-five years. He has performed, recently, at major music festivals in Munich, Lisbon, Paris, Bucharest and Rotterdam, and appeared as a soloist with the Ensemble Intercomporain, Speculum Musicae, the Xenakis Ensemble, the Metropolitan Opera Chamber Ensemble, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, and UCSD's own SONOR Ensemble. Larson's work appears on numerous new music recording labels including: CRI, Nonesuch, Neuma, Koch, Lovely and Mode. He has a long-standing collaborative relationship with trumpeter Edwin Harkins and has worked closely with figures of such distinction as John Cage, Roger Reynolds, Gunther Schuller, Toru Takemitsu, and Iannis Xenakis.

Larson is currently an Associate Professor at the University of California, San Diego.

Aleck Karis, pianist

At home with both contemporary and classical works, Aleck Karis has performed internationally in recital, with orchestra, and as a chamber musician. He is the pianist with the New York ensemble Speculum Musicae.

Karis has recorded for Nonesuch, New World, Neuma, Centaur, Roméo, and CRI Records. His solo debut album for Bridge Records of music by Chopin, Carter and Schumann was nominated as "Best Recording of the Year" by OPUS Magazine (1987). Since then he has recorded solo piano music by Mozart, Stravinsky, Cage ("Critic's Choice", Gramophone 1999), Reynolds, Davidovsky, Babbitt, Glass, Anderson, Krieger, Yuasa, and Primosch.

He studied with Artur Balsam, Beveridge Webster, and William Daghljan, whom he considers a key mentor.

Karis is currently a Professor of Music at the University of California, San Diego.

Roger Reynolds

Reynolds' compositions incorporate elements of theater, digital signal processing, dance, video, and real-time computer spatialization, in a signature multidimensionality of engagement. The central thread woven through his uniquely varied career entwines language with the spatial aspects of music. This center first emerged in his notorious music-theater work, *The Emperor of Ice Cream* (1961-62), and is carried forward in the VOICE-SPACE series, *Odyssey*, and *JUSTICE*.

In addition to his composing, Reynolds' writing, lecturing, organization of musical events and teaching have prompted numerous residencies at international festivals. He was a co-director of the New York Philharmonic's Horizons '84, has been a frequent participant in the Warsaw Autumn festivals, and was commissioned by Toru Takemitsu to create a program for the Suntory Hall International Series. Reynolds' regular masterclass activity in American universities also extends outward: to the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, Ircam in Paris, to Latin America and Asia, to

Thessaloniki. His extensive orchestral catalog includes commissions from the Philadelphia, Los Angeles and BBC orchestras.

In 1988, perplexed by a John Ashbery poem, Reynolds responded with *Whispers Out of Time*, a string orchestra work which earned him the prestigious Pulitzer Prize. Critic Kyle Gann has noted that he was the first experimentalist to be so honored since Charles Ives. Reynolds' writing, beginning with the influential book, *Mind Models* (1975), has appeared widely in Asian, American and European journals, while his music, recorded on Auvidis/Montaigne, Mode, New World, and Neuma, among others, is published exclusively by C.F. Peters Corporation, New York. In 1998, The Library of Congress established the Roger Reynolds Special Collection. Writing in *The New Yorker*, Andrew Porter called him "at once an explorer and a visionary composer, whose works can lead listeners to follow him into new regions of emotion and meaning."

For further information:
<http://www.rogerreynolds.com>

CREDITS:

The recording of John Ashbery's reading of his text, *Debit Night*, as well as Mr. Larson's singing, was done by Josef Kucera, at the Warren Studios of the Department of Music, University of California, San Diego.

Timothy Labor was Mr. Reynolds' Musical Assistant for this project.

Christopher Thiéry's reading of the original Baudelaire text, *paysage*, was recorded at Ircam in Paris.

Algorithmic processing of sound materials for *last things, I think, to think about* was done by Mr. Reynolds, who also supervised all recordings.

The entire cycle was recorded, edited and mastered by Mr. Kucera in UCSD's Warren Studios.

last things, I think, to think about – Mr. Ashbery's text, *Debit Night*, and Mr. Reynolds' music – was commissioned by funds administered by Meet The Composer/Readers' Digest Commissioning Program, in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts and the Lila Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund. It was premiered at the Kathryn Bache Miller Theater in New York on 17 November 1994 by Philip Larson, bass-baritone, and Aleck Karis, pianist. The invaluable assistance of John Duffy, founding Director of Meet The Composer, is gratefully acknowledged.

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