

CRANE

School of Music at SUNY Potsdam

Evening Concert Series

2023 – 2024 Season

Proscenium Theater – Performing Arts Center

Sunday, November 19th at 7:30 PM

The Music of Gregoria Karides Suchy (1923-2018)

A Centennial Celebration

A Concert of Vocal Solo and Chamber Music

When I Was But a Foolish Boy (1960)

Donald George, tenor
Andrew Voelker, piano

Entries (1974)

Steven Groth, baritone
Risa Okina, piano and incidental percussion

Mo-Goose Revisited (1964)

Margaret Chalker and Donald George, *sprechstimmen*
Andrew Voelker, piano

My Heart Leaps Up (c. 1952?)*

The Chords We Sound (1950)

Though Man May Say (1950)

Deborah Massell, soprano
Dan Sato, piano

*World premiere

The Ass in the Lion's Skin (1974)

Katie Burnham, soprano
John Lindsey, violin
Christine Hoerning, clarinet/bass clarinet
Keilor Kastella, piano
Brienne Borden, trumpet
Christopher Hernacki, trombone
Bailey Yerdon and Wyatt Calcote, percussion
Brian Doyle, conductor

Twelve Greek Maxims (1989/2007)

Steven Groth, baritone
Julianne Kirk Doyle, clarinet
Maxwell Grube, bassoon
Jessica Suchy-Pilalis, harp

Gregoria Karides Suchy (1923-2018) wrote for a variety of media, including electronic. Her compositions, many of which received awards and prizes, have been performed by eminent artists and groups including the New York Contemporary Chamber Ensemble; the International Society of Contemporary Music; Rudolph Ganz, piano; Leonard Sorkin and Gerald Fischbach, violins; also, the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra (American Composers Festival); and the



National Association of Composers-USA. "Greg," as she was known, was born into a Greek immigrant extended family of photographers and musicians. This ethnic influence comes through melodically in some of her most frequently performed works such as *Greek Rhapsody* and *Three Lovers*. Yet she wrote:

Although my Greek heritage provided my first musical experiences, and though I feel those ethnic rhythms and modal melodies to be part of my very essence, I have never felt restricted or bound by those musical impulses. Rather, I have always enjoyed setting new compositional parameters for myself, be it an odd combination of instruments or timbres, the pre-determined necessities of a ballet, the enrichment of multimedia, the confines of serialism, or the artistic exploration of the technological frontier. I do not feel as if I have only one style or any preferable genre,

and I am still exploring. It is the joy of the challenge and the fulfillment of creating that exhilarate me, and this I wish for all of my students...

As Professor of Composition and Music Technology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where she taught for over fifty years, she was a passionate teacher and mentor. Her own mentors included J. Thomas Oakes, Anthony Donato, Alexander Tcherepnin, Rudolph Ganz, and Ralph Shapey.

Composition for me is sometimes a flurry, a tumultuous engulfing of ideas. More often, it is a painstaking process of inspired crafting guided by a dash of dependable intuition. My best efforts have often come in the middle of the night or in the dark hours of the morning when the world was remote, and the ideas buried within could speak more clearly to me. Composing is often a lonely process, the initial nakedness of one's ideas makes retreat seem desirable, but then the musical thoughts are clothed and ready to be set forth into the world. That is an exciting, yet formidable moment. Will others share the beauty I sense? Perhaps it shouldn't matter; I compose neither just for myself nor solely for others, but simply because I must.

PROGRAM NOTES

"When I Was But a Foolish Boy" for tenor and piano was written in 1960. The English verses, by Donald E. Emerson, were based on the composer's translation of a favorite Greek folk song, "Βοσκοπούλα" ("The Shepherd Girl"), with lyrics by poet and writer, Georgios Zalokostas (1805-1858).

When I was but a foolish boy, I loved an envied maiden. She was a charming shepherd girl, admired most of all by me. Oh, Maro dearest, let me say the longing that I feel. I whispered softly, "Maro dear, I love you, I love you, I do." As she smiled, I whispered, "Maro dear, I love you, I love you, I do."

We sat upon the grass in Spring, while woods and fields were blooming. She held me tight and looked in my eyes, and on my eager lips kissed me. Maro sighed, "Alas, you dream that love will always bring you joy." She sighed and whispered "Love can bring pain and love can be heavy with woe." As she sighed and whispered, "Loving is sorrow, love can be heavy with woe."

No longer am I a foolish boy, but still I love the envied maiden. My heart with sorrow learned what she said, and now I know it's true, for Mara's heart seeks another, and she has forgotten the orphan boy. But I will never cease loving Maro, never forget her kiss. I swear to never cease loving Maro, never forget our kiss.

Of *Entries* the composer says,

These somber, thought-provoking texts (some very quiet, some not) by Charles Wright were a challenge; and I kept asking myself, how, through musical means, can I sharpen and intensify the poet's statement, not merely try to interpret it?" The result is a set of songs in which the form and imagery suggested by the texts is the basis for the composer's choice of musical structure and style. It is interesting to note in these songs,

with their dissonant, disjunct lines and intricate rhythms, the interrelationships of text, vocal line and accompaniment. For example, in the third entry, "What Does One Say to the Mad?" the use of dynamic and register contrasts in the melodic line achieves the desired dramatic effect as the composer takes the voice to its highest range and abruptly plummets it to its lowest, only to have it soar again moments later. Meanwhile, the piano and incidental percussion forcefully, emphatically highlight and punctuate both text and melodic line.

Entries was premiered by the Contemporary Chamber Music Players of New York, Arthur Weisberg, Director, in 1974.

ENTRIES
(Crescent Bay Beach)

--The seepage from what you have killed in one part of your life will rise, eventually, through your rooms no matter what doors you might try to close.

--Always it is the same dark you touch, wherever you touch, its odors, its watery flesh closing about you, spreading across your hands like new skin.

--What does one say to the mad? They hang from their trees like swollen fruit, unwilling to fall, untouched by the weather. What meetings can hold them there? What candor?

--The shed skin, the broken rind, your life but a catch now in your own throat...

--So one has to dive, sinking more rapidly than what sinks in advance of you: once down, once under it all, the quieter it becomes, the less fearful it becomes, the quieter it becomes.

[Last verse omitted from setting]

Mo-Goose Revisited had its origins in a set of pieces written for solo piano, out of frustration, for the composer's daughter, Jessica. The composer wrote:

Because obstreperous little Jessica refused to read music (finding it a much slower process than "by ear" for the predictable harmonies typical of children's pieces), "Mother Greg" set out to outsmart the youngster by writing music that would force the eye to the page.

This she did by abandoning traditional harmony and using various transformations of a twelve-tone row. The result was the piano suite, *Mother Goose Rhymes in Twelve Tone*. Several of these twelve-tone gems were featured in *Clavier: A Magazine for Organists and Pianists*, vol. II, no. 6. When Rudolph Ganz premiered these in a concert of the International Society of Contemporary Music, he told the audience, "I cannot keep this

music to myself and I am taking it upon myself to see that it is heard.” He was true to his word, also mentioning the collection in an article about piano pedagogy.

Twelve-tone music for children raised not a few eyebrows, as well as quite a bit of skepticism as told in this memory of the “obstreperous” daughter:

Although Ganz premiered *Mother Goose Rhymes in Twelve Tone* in concert in Chicago, I suspect I gave the first performance(s) less formally. My mother was invited to speak about these pieces to various groups. I remember my father driving us to some town in Wisconsin (he was my mother’s ever-present but largely invisible chauffeur) for what seemed to me to be a piano teachers’ convention. We entered a large room filled with ladies dressed in immaculate day suits and hats. They were seated primly in rows that curved around a grand piano. My mother spoke about why she composed *Mother Goose Rhymes in Twelve Tone* and the pedagogical advantages that these miniature pieces provided for students who were reluctant to read music. She had me perform at least a few—I don’t remember how many or which ones. Not all (if any!) of the ladies in the room were convinced and certainly had never thought of twelve-tone music for children. In retrospect, I would bet that some had never even heard anything atonal before. One teacher was quite vocal about her qualms and commented that there was no melody, nothing a child could sing. I must have sensed the discomfort—my mom was being challenged! Unasked, I did the woman one better: I sang the right hand of one of the rhymes while playing only the left hand, something I had never tried before. On the drive home, I remember my mother saying to me in a failed attempt to suppress her pride, something like “You little s—t!” Even now, more than half a century later, some of those melodies still waft through my head.

Mo-Goose Revisited is *Mother Goose Rhymes in Twelve Tone* when performed with speaker(s) and pantomime. The premiere of this version was artfully and humorously done with Prof. Bill Duval as speaker, Myron Nadel, Prof. of Dance, providing the pantomime, and the composer at the piano. They had the audience laughing throughout the performance, the inaugural concert of the Fine Arts Dance Theater at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee on Nov. 14, 1965. Suchy did not leave specific written instructions regarding performance. However, when coaching, she gave the speaker the liberty to speak loosely or strictly in rhythm with the music. The text could precede, follow, accompany, or be interspersed with the various rhymes, as the speaker wished. Pauses could be inserted for dramatic effect. While the ordering of the rhymes is up to the performers, they should “flow” into one another. Suchy loved pantomime and was thrilled when all three performers were involved, at least to some degree. Props were fine, too. She wanted the performers and the audience to have fun!

“My Heart Leaps Up,” “The Chords We Sound,” and “Though Man May Say” for voice and piano, all set in the early 1950s, exhibit lyricism within dissonance. “My Heart Leaps Up” was written by William Wordsworth in 1802 and published in his *Poems, in Two Volumes*. As with many of his poems, the wonder of nature is expressed with the hope that child-like

enthusiasm be held throughout life. No record of previous performances has been found, thus making tonight's a world premiere.

"The Chords We Sound" and "Though Man May Say" are settings of poems by Raymond W. Suchy, Gregoria Karides Suchy's husband. Both settings were composed in 1950, just a few years into their marriage, and were paired together in performance. No date appears on the poems, and it is not known if Suchy found her husband's poetry or requested it. No other poems of his have been found.

My heart leaps up
When I behold a rainbow in the sky.
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man,
So be it when I shall grow old.
Or let me die!
The child is father of the man;
And I wish my days to be bound
Each to each by natural piety.

The chords we sound
Are those of the dissonance and harmony,
Dissonance and harmony of all mankind.
This instrument in my hands, a living thing,
Becomes that with which to create with which to grow.
We summon the world and call to the heavens,
As mirrors of joy and mirrors of grief,
Which reflect the universe and light;
Each being causes those who listen
To respond to the power which is ours.
For the chords we sound
Are those of the dissonance and harmony
Of all mankind.

Though man may say what love's great depth,
And singer express its joyous caress,
No crown can greater command such breadth.
Or more certainly be what it may bless
Than he who has, one reigning supreme.
For they who have, have that to give,
Asking no surety to abide in them forever.
An everlasting dream, unbounded, unfettered,
but in security in a union of sacred unity.

The Ass in the Lion's Skin was composed in 1974. It was dedicated to Adolph Suppan, Dean of the School of Fine Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and premiered at a concert in his honor. The composer wrote:

This piece is a rambunctious musical realization of the well-known fable attributed to the Greek slave, Aesop (c. 600 B.C.). Here, as is often the case with fables, the characters are animals, who illustrate human faults and virtues. The perpetually changing meters, dynamic rhythm, and disjunct vocal and instrumental lines serve as an apropos musical setting for the deviously manipulated, repositioned, and transpositioned words (modification of the text of the poem of the same name by the late William Ellery Leonard), nuances of their satirical message being jocosely accentuated by the musical punctuation and commentary of the various instruments.

An Ass put on a Lion's skin and went
About the forest with much merriment,
Scaring the foolish beasts by brooks and rocks,
Till at last he tried to scare the Fox.
But Reynard, hearing from beneath the main
That raucous voice so petulant and vain,
Remarked, "O Ass, I too would run away,
But that I know your old familiar bray.

That's just the way with asses, just the way.

The text setting is a good example of tongue-in-cheek when the composer's very proper "tongue-in-check" let loose.

Twelve Greek Maxims has been described as "droll intellectual terrain ... aphorisms handed down by ancient thinkers and cast in resonant wit..." (The Milwaukee Sentinel). This song cycle for voice and piano was included in the SCI Journal of Music Scores, vol. 17, where it was given the following preface:

Twelve Greek Maxim consists of concisely expressed musical settings of precepts by ancient Greek Philosophers, predecessors having a common origin with the composer, who, lest one think her pretentious, is quick to refer to the first maxim by Plutarch, "It is indeed a good thing to be well descended, but the glory belongs to the ancestors." The remaining eleven maxims are equally pithy. As for the overall impression of this musical cycle, as one passes from one maxim to the next, it is one of a continuing relationship, elements of each passing on to the next. For example, at the end of the relatively quiet second maxim, the rhythm of the spoken "Aristotle" becomes the rhythmic impetus for the lively next maxim, "Do Not Train Boys". Also, in the same pair of maxims, the A-sharp at the end of maxim II becomes the enharmonic B-flat for the start of maxim III. Finally, it should be noted that in all the maxims the piano is almost as prominent as the solo voice, and comments at times like a Greek chorus, interpolating now and then to either foretell what the voice will say or to verify and substantiate what it has already stated. At other times, the piano provides an atmosphere setting for the words as it does in "Weep Not Fresh Tears", where it heightens the several microtonal passages of the vocal line.

The *Maxims* underwent a re-birth(day) transformation in 2007, the version you will hear this evening.

Some mothers have a way of saying they don't want gifts on that special day. My mother would usually follow such a statement with something like, "Learn something, make something... I don't need presents!" I've always loved these settings and wanted to be an integral part of them. For years, my mother had encouraged me to arrange some of her music for chamber ensembles, etc., so I did. She visited Crane for the world premiere of this version. She was very pleased!

Twelve Greek Maxims is included on the CD, "America Sings" (Capstone CPS-8613) in its original piano version.

- I. It is indeed a good thing to be well descended, but the glory belongs to the ancestors.
--Plutarch
- II. In part, art completes what nature cannot elaborate; and in part it imitates nature.
--Aristotle
- III. Do not train boys to learn by force and harshness, but lead them by what amuses them, so that they may better discover the bent of their minds.
--Plato
- IV. Waste not fresh tears over old griefs.
--Euripides
- V. Life is a theatre in which the worst people often have the best seats.
--Aristonymus
- VI. The first business of the philosopher is to part with conceit, for it is impossible for a man to learn what he thinks he already knows.
--Epictetus
- VII. He is a fool who let slip a bird in the hand for a bird in the bush.
--Plutarch
- VIII. A lie is useful only as a medicine to men. The use of such medicines should be confined to a physician.
--Plato
- IX. Do nothing secretly; for time sees and hears all things and discloses all.
--Sophocles
- X. In prosperity it is very easy to find a friend; in adversity, nothing is so difficult.
--Epictetus
- XI. He is not only idle who does nothing, but he is also idle who might be better employed.
--Socrates

XII. Time will reveal everything. It is a babbler and speaks even when not asked.

--Euripides