

## Three Songs on Poems of Apollinaire

### Program Note

*Three Songs on Poems of Apollinaire* are both visual and sonic works. They are intended to perform double duty, providing both material for a live performance and a visual analog of the music, frozen in time.

Fusing the two media is inherently contradictory, since music lives in time, and graphic art is traditionally static. To create a bridge between the two, the songs approach musical notation as a graphic element and graphic elements as musical notation. Above all, they abandon the front-to-back, linear succession by which music is ordinarily read. Instead, they aim at capturing the entire structure of the pieces in a single image – simultaneity trumping succession.

To accomplish this, the songs employ a mixture of classical notation, in which specific pitches, rhythms, tempos, and instrumentation unroll in both free and specified sequences, and graphic notation, in which visual elements guide the performers. They also draw upon Roman Haubenstock-Ramati's musical mobiles, grids whose melodic cells can be played through a number of different routes. The soprano's part employs traditional notation as well as 'noteless' typographical events, whose variety of fonts and sizes suggest various means of interpretation.

Graphic notation cannot produce the exactness or predictability of classical notation. It creates instead a relatively open-ended, continuously evolving environment in which musicians are encouraged to produce material of a complexity and freedom that challenges the practicality of ordinary notation. Even when the songs use specific pitches and rhythms, other elements are frequently left to the discretion of the players: tempos, dynamic, registers, or, in some cases, the direction in which the material may be played (left to right, right to left,

up, down, a combination of all). The result is a set of material in a constant state of flux, combining potential and certainty, and able to assume different characters at different times and situations.

The songs depend on their performers to give them structure. In the first piece, *Montparnasse*, the instrumental material forms a continuous border around the soprano's part. The left hand and upper lines are for percussion, flute and clarinet, while the right and lower lines are for the three strings; the four boxes are events which all players share. Each of the individual parts consists of small musical units that can be played, skipped, revisited, varied, and strung together in a continuous musical line. The soprano's part is composed of disembodied words, phrases, syllables, and letters, extracted from the original poem and set, out of order, into a mix through which she moves and develops her part. Her reservoir of sounds combines usual sung sounds with half-sung (between speech and song) and sung-speech à la Schoenberg. She also whistles a small repeated figure in the circle. As the players forge their raw material into complete parts, they become active participants in the overall creation of the song, reacting to and interacting (negatively, positively, actively, passively) with the events around them. It is the nature of the piece that both the horizontal (individual parts) and vertical planes (the relationship of one part to another) are unforeseeable. The players are free to collaborate on a pre-conceived form, or let the piece unfold spontaneously, reacting to each other in different ways and creating a newly-woven musical tapestry with each performance.

The second song, *Hôtel*, is a mandala, with the instrumental parts encircling the soprano's spare entries. If the first piece is angular, active and nervous, its companion here is slow-moving, calm and meditative. Its dynamics are shades of soft and its pace of change is slow. Each player chooses one of the four cardinal points of the circle as a starting place and passes slowly through one or more of that quadrant's sustained sounds. The soprano's change to her next held note

(always accompanied by the sound of a cymbal or gong), signals the players to move on to the next quadrant. At the end of the third phase, everyone joins together for the completely notated and coordinated phrase in the center of the score; after its completion, the players return to their interrupted sections. Following the singer's closing lines, the players select and repeat, or hold, one of the musical bits as the piece fades into its conclusion. In this song, most of the original poem is only alluded to via the opening words of its lines.

The third song, *Océan de Terre*, is the reverse image of the first, with the soprano now surrounding the instrumentalists' material. Her part is truly linear, evolving from the whispering, muttered incantation of the bottom-left opening, through speech-song, to sung melodies and the simple single-noted closing chant. Two of the ensemble's three resource areas are mobiles, a musical form developed in the late 1950's by Roman Haubenstock-Ramati. Their individual elements are like parts of the sculptural mobile, appearing in new relationships and contexts as they are approached, now from the side, now from above or below. The top left mobile is joined with the left hand and half of the soprano's upper lines; the right mobile with the remaining upper part and right side; the large square provides material for the rest of the song. The texts of the first two poems are fragmented and rearranged: *Océan de Terre* is the only song that contains the entire Apollinaire text, and – for the most part – maintains its original order. It also has a good deal more coordination between singer and ensemble. At the large "VITES" atop the score, for example, the soprano signals in an instrumental outburst, followed by her series of soft, receding hand claps; at the close of her part, her passage from melody to melody is echoed in the ensemble's progression within the large rectangle. At the work's conclusion, instrumentalists pass into the lowest boxes to create an ending from held or repeated figures.

*Three Songs on Poems of Apollinaire* was composed in 1988 and premiered in 1990 by Anna Carol Dudley and Music Now, under the direction of the composer.