

California Songs

Program Note

California Songs is the homage of a native son and daughter to the extraordinary coupling of sweet illusion and bitter harshness through which this "island of dreams" was conceived.

"To Babylon" pays tribute to the heady allure of California's seductive beauty. "Alice in Holyland" depicts a young woman's dizzying encounter with some of the complex spiritual paths that make California the New Jerusalem of the Aquarian Age. "The Blind Mules" describes the environmental depredation and sacrifice of conscience upon which the richness of the State was founded (mules, taken into the deep mines where they lived the whole of their lives, eventually went blind); it also includes the narrative of one of California's many contemporary immigrants. The memory of early California's unspoiled beauty powers the final movement; it also pays tribute to the tenacity with which its residents continue to live their dream, and pays homage to Hollywood with its echoes of a classic movie theme.

Texts by Francesca Hersh. [Opening word chain of II by the composer.]

I - To Babylon (Siren's Song)

In the night
California speaks to me.
She breathes the songs of crickets
far off howl of coyotes.

*Come to me.
The full moon hovers
over pine groves
this is my porchlight
calling you home.*

In my sleep she calls me
distant rush of wave
spray of salt on cheek
ache of night-bird song.

*Come to me.
Pale stars float
over sandy beaches.
These are my eyes
searching for you.*

In the dawn
she beckons me
first touch of gold to oak leaf
dew gleams on cusp of flower.

*Come to me.
I am mountains
of clean and wild rise
these are my teeth
waiting to grasp you.*

In my awakening
she entreats me
touch of light on skin
feather of breeze in hair.

*Come to me.
I am gold
concealed beneath soil
this is my heart
beating for you.*

In the full breath of day
She comforts me.
Hum of insects in meadow
red flowers in garden's shade.

*Come to me.
I am the sunlight
and the smell of dried grass
this is my smile
glowing for you.*

In the afternoon peace
she welcomes me.
Soil's sweet fiber
water's clean spread.

*Come to me.
I am rolling hills
fields of endless purples and gold.
These are my arms
open for you.*

In the evening
She enchants me.
Dusk like silk hair
falling over the land.

*Come to me.
I am the river
past granite boulders
this is my voice
singing for you.*

*Come to me.
I am the air,
sweet waft of perfume
 this is my skin
aching to touch you.
So come to me
come to me
come to me...*

II - Alice in Holyland

Tao
Tao Zen
Read me, Alice
Meditation, Divination,
Hatha Yoga, Bhakti Yoga,
Yogananda, Kriananda,
Hare Krishna, Krishnamurti,
Rebirth, Roling, Gaia, Goddess,
Aleph, Gimel, Wikken, Lotus,
Pancha Karma, Vedic Maya, Pentecostal Ayurveda

Alice
what a lucky girl you are
slip into a California dream
let the earth unfold
in new ways.

Hear me, Alice
meditate and find
your breath, your center
your heart.
breathing, step outside of time.

There was darkness,
fear, I so small
wrapped in no-light
became darkness
became fear.

Eat me, Alice,
instant flowers of
eternal youth.

My life grows
translucent layers of new sight.
I paint my body, dance
with the warrior within.

Drink me, Alice
poison nectar
Heaven's Gate
freedom.

I remember darkness
see it in my being,
I taste it here too
rich and frightening flavors.

*I am flame of fire,
I am spark of light
I am wild storm.*

Pentecostal Ayurveda
Meditation, Divination,
Hatha Yoga, Bhakti Yoga,
Yogananda, Kriananda,
Hare Krishna, Krishnamurti,
Rebirth, Roling, Gaia, Goddess,
Aleph, Gimel, Wikken, Lotus,
Pancha Karma, Vedic Maya

Tao Zen
Tao

III - The Blind Mules

gold rush towns
full of graveyards
bones of infants
border the edge of
of moonscape.
The skeleton
of the earth
shines white
in the sun.

the ground
trembles from a mine's
forgotten heart.
footsteps slow
burdens heavy
the blind mules
march.

born
where wide sky
meets the sweet grass
darkness is velvet
starshine
in brown eyes.

dawn never comes
in the mines,
only harness.
stars flee
from dulled eyes
ears like furred
questions
search the air.

*in this new country
where I do not exist
my being rises
from pain of my back
 heat of my skin
flow of my blood.*

*the fruit I grow
the clothes I stitch
the lawns I mow
are real where I am not.*

*voiceless, faceless,
unseen.*

lost
in a wounded
earth
the blind mules
sleep.

IV - from my skin (Island of Dreams)

From the ground
my skin
from tilled fields and parking lots,
gardens and lawns and parks,
from gutters and sidewalks,
boardwalks and shopping malls,
from riverbanks and cluttered streets,
the sweet powerful lure
of memory
of dream
of golden hills and the spread
of a gentle land
the scents of a thousand
orange blossoms rise.