
“THE SIMPLE GIFTS”

a cantata based on themes of the

American Shakers



Composed for and recorded by the
Teen-age Chorus of 125 voices at

Shaker Village Work Camp

a work education project for teen-agers

NOTES ON THE CANTATA

The cantata was composed for and recorded by the All-camp Chorus of 125 voices at Shaker Village Work Camp. Composed by Jacob Druckman, it is the first work for choral use inspired by Shaker songs. The Shakers were an early-American religious sect which was outstanding for its craftsmanship in all fields of work. They also became famous for the original music and dances used in their religious ceremonies. This cantata was commissioned as an expression of the Work Camp's interest in using material which is indigenous to the historic site now occupied by the teen-age project. This recording was made at the premiere performance of the composition.

The Composer

Mr. Druckman was born in Philadelphia in 1928. He has studied at Juilliard School of Music and was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship for study in France. In addition to his "Concerto for String Orchestra," which was commissioned by the Tanglewood Alumni Association, many of Mr. Druckman's works have been performed publicly.

The Cantata

In composing the work, Mr. Druckman followed the pattern of the religious ceremonies formerly held by the Shakers at the site of the Work Camp around 1850. Throughout the cantata, seven different songs of Shaker origin are woven into the composition. "Come Life, Shaker Life," was widely used by the Shaker communities and apparently came out of the "Western" groups that settled around Ohio. It was accompanied by shaking motions that originally gave the sect its name, "Shaking Quakers." Next follows the soprano solo, "Oh! Heaven of Heaven!" Then, "One, Two, Three Steps," is heard and is a song used as an aid in dancing the famous Shaker "Square Order Shuffle." The fourth tune to be recognized begins with the line, "To those who follow the little narrow path of self-denial . . ." and is a base solo. After a spoken

interlude, beginning "A band of angels," another tune, "I Have a Little Union Bell," is a merry dance song, typical of the make-believe or play song widely used in the great Shaker "revival" of the early 1840's. Then, "I Set My Face for Zion's Kingdom," is introduced before the final funeral chant which begins, "Our Brother's Gone." The funeral chant includes a short haunting tenor solo, "Oh, death where is thy sting?"

The Chorus

The choral group, directed by David Conviser, is non-professional and includes all teen-age campers at Shaker Village Work Camp. The Work Camp is operated as a non-profit project by the Work Education Foundation. Its primary purpose is to provide teen-age boys and girls with an experience in work education in accordance with the principles developed since the project was established in 1947. These principles are based upon the philosophy that one's daily work is not only the source of his livelihood, but can also be the means of more complete development and realization of the individual. The encouragement of sound work attitudes is the basic educational objective of the project. Activities in fine and folk arts, such as the study and performance of this cantata, are included as an aid in development of good work attitudes and group craftsmanship. Other activities range from projects in farming, building construction, masonry, electricity and forestry to workshops in modern dance, theatre and art. Many activities revolve around the restoration of the historic site occupied by the Work Camp and the re-creation of the early American crafts formerly carried on by the Shakers.

Teen-agers are enrolled for the project during the Winter and Spring for the following summer. For information, address:

Shaker Village Work Camp

Post Office Box,
Pittsfield, Massachusetts

Again the cloud is lifted up
 From the Ark of God its taken
 Moves the tribes of Israel
 Enter the Land of Canaan
 A fiery pillar goes before
 To mark the way for soules travel
 Then the Priesthood bears along
 The Covenant of the people
 Elder Abram Pertin

An example of manuscript music, written in the original notation system used by the Shakers during the 1800's which provided the inspiration for the Cantata.

1956

SHAKER SONGS - RECORDING "14 Shaker Folk Songs"

Titles of songs:

1. The Humble Heart
2. Living Souls Let's Be Marching
3. Ina Vine Violet
4. The Lamb's Revelation
5. I Love Mother
6. Who will bow and bend like a willow
7. I'll Tell Thee of Heaven
8. The Way Lies Open
9. Mother Ann's Closet
10. Look up through the clouds
11. Join in solemn worship
12. I have a little Drum
13. Come Shaker Life
14. Come to Zion

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