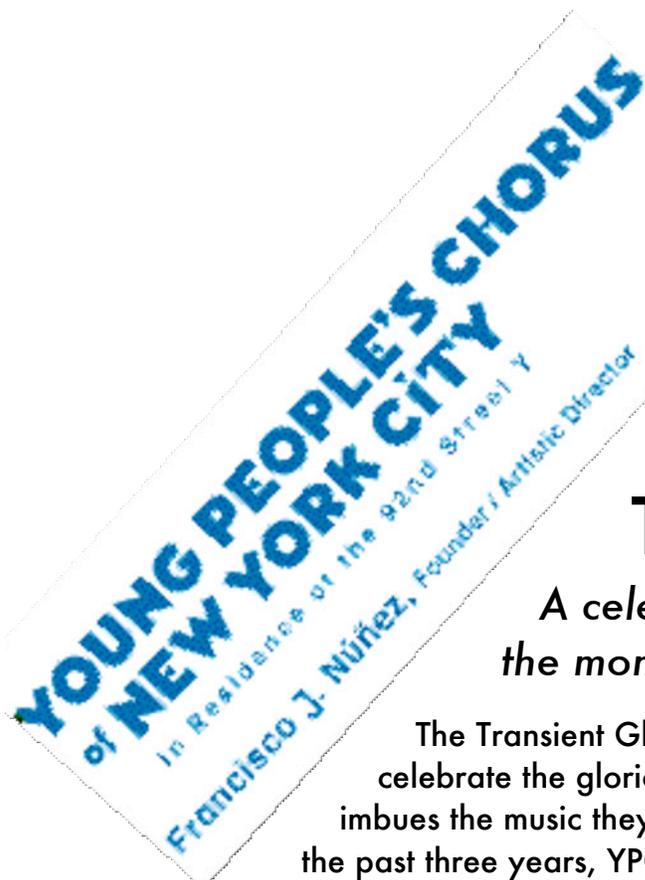


Transient Glory IV Study Guide

Soundcheck w/ John Schaefer | WNYC 93.9FM | April 22, 2004 | 2:00-2:35pm



Transient Glory

*A celebration of living music and
the momentary beauty of the young voice*

The Transient Glory concerts were created by Francisco Núñez to celebrate the glorious, though fleeting, voices of young people, a sound that imbues the music they sing with a particular poignancy and innocence. Over the past three years, YPC's Transient Glory concerts have premiered works commissioned from such prominent composers as Michael Torke, John Tavener, David del Tredici, and many others. Transient Glory has now expanded into a publication series of those commissions spearheaded by Boosey & Hawkes, enabling youth choruses throughout the world to perform this music, and a series of Transient Glory CDs on Vital Records, the first of which was released this past October to critical raves.



Tod Machover | I Dreamt a Dream | William Blake

Tod Machover is an American composer well known for breaking traditional artistic and cultural boundaries and offering innovative syntheses of acoustic and electronic sound. In many ways the collaboration between technology and music grew out of his childhood. While growing up, Machover was influenced by his mother, who was a pianist, and his father, who was a specialist in computer graphics. Although he was trained at a young age in classical music, it was in high school that he began to compose and perform rock music. Later, as his music developed, Machover began integrating his own composed music with designed electronic sounds.

I Dreamt A Dream! is for treble youth chorus and electronics. For this work, the composer chose to set words from *The Angel* by the British poet and painter William Blake, who lived in London from 1757 to 1827. Blake was an artist primarily concerned with the idea that people should value the imagination more than being rational or materialistic. You may have studied the Enlightenment, a European movement based on the idea using reason, science and philosophy as a way of understanding the world. During most of Blake's life his work was misunderstood, and it wasn't until years later that his illustrations, paintings, poetry, and prose gained great importance. Blake published *The Angel* in 1793 in a book of illustrated poems called *Songs of Experience*.

The Angel
By William Blake

I dreamt a dream! What can it mean?
And that I was a maiden Queen
Guarded by an Angel mild:
Witless woe was ne'er beguiled!

And I wept both night and day,
And he wiped my tears away;
And I wept both day and night,
And hid from him my heart's delight.

So he took his wings, and fled;
Then the morn blushed rosy red.
I dried my tears, and armed my fears
With ten-thousand shields and spears.

Soon my Angel came again;
I was armed, he came in vain;
For the time of youth was fled,
And grey hairs were on my head.



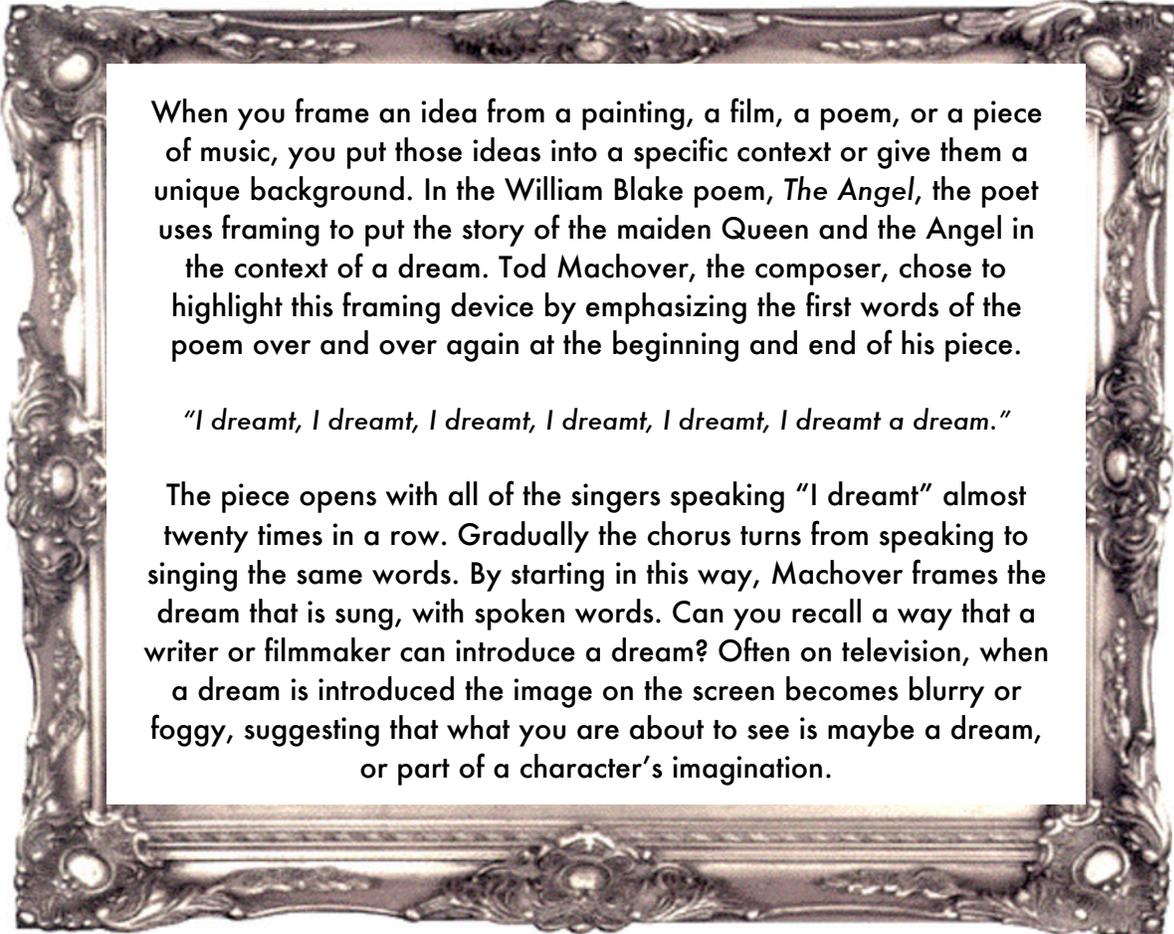
What is your interpretation of this poem? Who is the narrator? Why does the maiden Queen hide her heart's delight? What does "For the time of youth was fled" mean?

Through the lens of a dream, William Blake recounts a girl's loss of innocence, as she turns from youth to adulthood. Here's one interpretation of the dream:

A young girl is being protected by "an Angel mild." But the Angel is really a young man, with whom the young girl is in love. The young man is in love with the girl. But she is playing hard to get. She "hides from him her heart's delight," her real feelings that she is into him. So the young man leaves, thinking that she's not interested in him. In the mean time, she has an encounter with another man that gives her the confidence to feel open-hearted towards her true desire. She learns to conquer her fear of love through this new friend. But deep down she is really in love with the "Angel mild." So she waits for her true love to come back. But when the man returns, she is no longer young, and he is no longer in love with her. It was all in vain, and she lost the opportunity to be with her true love.

But perhaps the most important part of this poem is really the first line. "I dreamt a dream, what can it mean?"

Can you recount a dream you had recently? Do you remember a dream you had when you very young? How do our dreams change as we get older? Adults are often criticized for not taking their own dreams seriously. Do you take your own dreams and wishes seriously?



When you frame an idea from a painting, a film, a poem, or a piece of music, you put those ideas into a specific context or give them a unique background. In the William Blake poem, *The Angel*, the poet uses framing to put the story of the maiden Queen and the Angel in the context of a dream. Tod Machover, the composer, chose to highlight this framing device by emphasizing the first words of the poem over and over again at the beginning and end of his piece.

"I dreamt, I dreamt, I dreamt, I dreamt, I dreamt, I dreamt a dream."

The piece opens with all of the singers speaking "I dreamt" almost twenty times in a row. Gradually the chorus turns from speaking to singing the same words. By starting in this way, Machover frames the dream that is sung, with spoken words. Can you recall a way that a writer or filmmaker can introduce a dream? Often on television, when a dream is introduced the image on the screen becomes blurry or foggy, suggesting that what you are about to see is maybe a dream, or part of a character's imagination.

repetition repetition repetition repetition repetition repetition repetition repetition repetition repetition

One of the main techniques that the composer uses in *I Dreamt a Dream* is repetition. By repeating certain words in the poem, Machover plays with the rhythm of the words and the meaning of certain ideas. The composer plays with the repeated words by changing how fast or slow the singers convey the text, the rhythm of the words, and the emphasis that is given to specific words within phrases. For example, notice how the meaning of this phrase changes when you emphasize certain words:

“I dreamt a dream! What can it mean?” vs. “I dreamt a dream! What can it mean?”

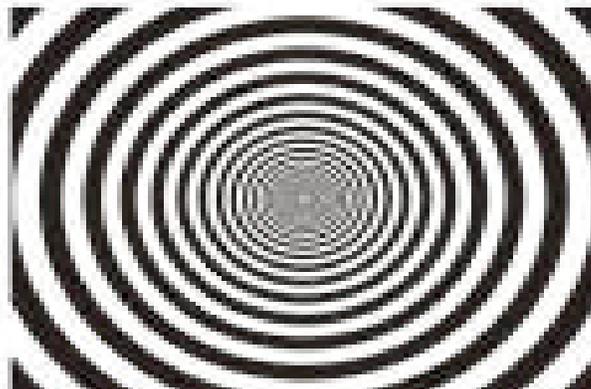
What if some people say “I dreamt” very slowly, while very quickly, others say, “I dreamt a dream! What can it mean?” When two voices are moving at different rates or pronouncing different rhythms, the effect is called counterpoint.

Counterpoint is all about the play of two or more voices against each other. Machover does a fantastic job of grouping certain parts, and juxtaposing others. The clash of rhythms and voices not singing perfectly together gives the music energy and drives it forward. There are many places where we experience counterpoint. For example, at a basketball game, the sound of the ball being dribbled back and forth on the court while the fans are cheering and clapping creates a dialogue or counterpoint between the two parts. Another example of counterpoint is when two people dance together. Perhaps their feet move differently, but together they create a wonderful counterpoint that makes it interesting to watch them both dance together.

In *I Dreamt a Dream*, Machover changes the mood of the music by using less or more counterpoint. The changes of mood are abrupt and create great dramatic contrast. Towards the beginning of the piece, when the singers are asking, “I Dreamt a Dream! What can it mean?” there is a lot of counterpoint. The music is exciting and the audience is intrigued to hear the story of the dream. Later, when the composer sets the words, “And I wept both night and day And he wip’d my tears away,” the chorus sings in a homophonic style, with the lines moving together without counterpoint. Why do you think he does that? It certainly changes the way the music makes you feel.

The piece builds up to a big climax when the whole chorus sings “ten thousand shield and spears.” They hold a high A and then release it in silence. In the poem we don’t know what is about to happen to the young maiden Queen, and Machover reflects this suspense by leaving us with a momentary pause. The music is very quiet, without counterpoint, as the maiden Queen realizes that she has grown old and her dream to be with the mild Angel is no longer possible.

The piece could have easily ended here. The poem does. But the composer continues on, with “I dreamt a Dream!” very fast with a lot of rhythmic play between the voices. Why does he do this? Maybe the most important part of this piece is the idea of dreaming. We forget that it is a dream when we are listening to the story. The chorus repeats “I dreamt a dream! What can it mean?” over and over again until the sounds almost disappear, and it seems like they could continue on forever. Although Machover plays with loud and soft contrasts and sudden rhythmic shifts, the way the words repeat gives the music a hypnotic feeling, like the listener is being induced into a dream state.



Let's listen to *I Dreamt a Dream!* by Tod Machover. Listen for how he uses electronic sounds that mix with the chorus. Does the composers' setting of the text make you interpret the poem in a certain way? How does the composer use counterpoint to make the music more exciting? Do you, the listener, leave *I Dreamt a Dream!* feeling as though you are awaking from an unsettling dream?



Transient Glory IV featured composers include:



Sir Richard Rodney Bennett

The Ballad of Sweet William—World Premiere/YPC Commission

The Ballad of Sweet William by Sir Richard Rodney Bennett is a seven-minute work on a setting of an 18th-century Scottish ballad, which tells of the lost soul of Willie, coming to visit the mortal Margret. Among present-day musicians, there can be few more versatile than British-born Sir Richard Rodney Bennett: composing for concerts and films, playing the piano in contemporary music and in jazz idioms, and singing and playing classic show tunes in cabaret. With a strong gift for melody, of late, Mr. Bennett has settled into a freely tonal idiom, composing music of genuinely broad appeal.

Judith Weir

Little Tree—World premiere/YPC Commission

British composer Judith Weir says she wanted to select poetry for her YPC compositions that the choristers would carry in their minds for a long time. She selected three poems of e.e.cummings—'little tree,' which speaks of compassion; 'i carry your heart with me,' which speaks of love; and 'now is a ship,' which speaks of potential. The music is challenging and includes a complicated rhythmic interplay of voices in 'little tree,' and six-part singing in 'now is a ship.' A wide-ranging composer, Ms. Weir's interest in theater, narrative and folklore has resulted in three full-length operas, collaborations with theater companies and playwrights, a song cycle, and orchestral, concerto, chamber, and recital works.





Bright Sheng

The Boatman's Song—World premiere/YPC Commission

Boatman's Song is based on a folk song from northern Shaanxi Province in China, a simple rhythmic towing song sung by boat-trackers along the river. Bright Sheng says he loves the song for its vivid reflection of the tempestuous turbulence of the river. By adding guiros (a hollowed-out gourd), handclapping, and emphasizing the nonsense words (originally to synchronize the movement of the boat hauling), he hoped to evoke the now-lost scene of hundreds of boatmen pulling large boats against the rage of the river—a hazardous task, he notes, which claimed thousands of lives through history. Born in Shanghai, Bright Sheng is an important leader in exploring and bridging musical traditions in works that transcend conventional aesthetic boundaries. For his work, Bright Sheng is a recipient of the coveted MacArthur Foundation fellowship, commonly known as the "Genius Award."

Benjamin Lees

The Nervous Family—World premiere/YPC Commission

The Nervous Family is the first choral work for young people ever written by American composer Benjamin Lees. In researching a text, he decided that a text rooted in humor would be a natural medium for a young chorus. He had always admired the wit of English poet Edward Lear, and found this poem about a nervous family that even includes a dog, hilarious. Mr. Lees said that when he had written the last note of the piece he had a feeling of total exhilaration. "In my mind's eye," he said, "I already saw and heard the young choristers giggling with delight at their task."



Tod Machover

I Dreamt a Dream!—World premiere/YPC Commission

Tod Machover is an American composer well known for breaking traditional artistic and cultural boundaries and offering innovative syntheses of acoustic and electronic sound. I Dreamt A Dream! is a setting for treble youth chorus and electronics of "The Angel" from William Blake's Songs of Experience, in which two young people meet an angel and are utterly transformed, as is the angel by them. The drama is compact and the moods change abruptly, from calm reassurance to deep sorrow to conscious conviction to resigned regret, leaving the listener feeling as though awaking from an unsettling dream.

Jim Papoulis

Panta Rhei 'All Things in Flux—World premiere

Of Greek descent Jim Papoulis, whose music combines contemporary and world sounds with traditional and futuristic styles, culled the text of Panta Rhei from the works of several Greek philosophers. Mr. Papoulis says that Panta Rhei is reflective of our current society and the choices we make individually and culturally as people in a constant state of flux. This state of flux was also experienced by ancient cultures—the day-to-day pulls and tugs of desire, of nature, mood changes, thought changes, etc. over a lifetime—but has become accelerated today.





Samuel Adler

Songs of the Season—World premiere

Commissioned by YPC, *Songs of the Season* is a brief suite for children's chorus consisting of four songs—Fall, The Late Year, Rain, and Summer—based on the words of Janet Freeman, chair of the English Department at Denison University. Samuel Adler selected the poems especially for urban children who don't often think about the way the year develops in nature. Samuel Adler was born March 4, 1928, Mannheim, Germany and came to the United States in 1939. He was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in May 2001. He is the composer of over 400 published

works, including 5 operas, 6 symphonies, 12 concerti, 8 string quartets, 4 oratorios and many other orchestral, band, chamber and choral works and songs, which have been performed all over the world.

Francisco Nunez

Canticle: In Remembrance—New York premiere

Commissioned by the Ithaca College Women's Chorus, *Canticle* was given its world premiere this past February in Boston. It is based on three passages in the book of Revelation and an Old Testament passage, which together reveal an image of the continuum upon which God places the good works of the individual believer.



Morton Gould & Phil Galdston

There are (No) Children Here—Children's Aid Society Commission

Commissioned by the Children's Aid Society, *There are (No) Children Here* was premiered at the Ethical Culture Society on June 10, 1996 by the Children's Aid Society Chorus under its Artistic Director Francisco Núñez. When asked to compose a work for the chorus, Morton Gould was immediately enthusiastic and asked Phil Galdston to write the text under strict instructions from Mr. Gould, "We don't want anything namby pamby. No cute animals, no childish things." The resulting text was inspired by a book

about life in the Chicago ghetto. Sadly, Mr. Gould did not live to see his final composition premiered, as he died on February 21, 1996.

