Loose Pages

songs on the poetry of Samuel Greenberg (1893-1917) for soprano, alto, and piano

by

Justin Henry Rubin
Loose Pages

I Early Ghosts (duet)
II Serenade in Grey (duet)
III Killing (alto solo)
IV Life's Mortality (duet)
V The Holy Ghost (soprano solo)
VI The Glass Bubbles (duet)
I had never heard of Samuel Greenberg. I was deeply involved with the works of Hart Crane, had set a number of his poems, and was even inspired to write purely instrumental compositions based on some of his fantastic imagery. It was through Crane that I stumbled upon the *Loose Pages* through his documented praise of Greenberg. I found myself remarkably engrossed with these terse works - their pure surrealist tone, which antedates the more famous movement begun after World War I, are imbued with an expressiveness that immediately penetrated my mind. My response, these songs which were composed in the Fall of 2000, were written with a number of characteristics in mind to help convey hopefully more than just the sentiments (if that is indeed possible!) of the texts of the Poet. His poems are "orgies of supersensibility" (Louis Untermeyer, 1940) wherein "words… poured …forth with a wild, chaotic passion" (James Laughlin, 1939) and therefore a narrative structure would not have been a favorable choice of settings. Instead, I tried to take a distinct musical point of view with them.

The only image of Greenberg I know is that of him at the time of his Bar Mitzvah: the dusty, dark synagogues of early 20th century New York instantaneously came to mind. The unison rhythmic, declamatory intonations of Jewish chant, the cascade of words as if a supplication, the propulsive nature of the poems themselves, the sinuous, fleeting emotions that characterize Greenberg's words, the intimate yet universal essence of his utterances, the quality of the voice of youth turned adult only to be cut down in premature death, the fact that he played piano, the speed with which the texts were written - all of these factors contributed to my choice of sounds that surround and clothe them.

Note: All unique spellings from the original texts have been adjusted for ease of reading.

JHR October 10, 2000

The texts used in these works are based on transcriptions made by Michael Smith <smith@logopoeia.com> from Samuel Greenberg's original manuscripts and are used with permission. Those transcriptions are available online at: http://logopoeia.com/greenberg/
I Early Ghosts

Music: Justin Henry Rubin
Poem: Samuel Greenberg

Luxurient; Very Slow

Articulate each arp. with a different character

very slowly

Rit. poco  A Tempo

sotto voce con espressivo

When first I beheld The sight of

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Rit.

self alone. Here standing upon a floor...

Meno mosso

Drifting

new sensitive throne...

Tempo primo
Rit. poco

By dark corners

round I shaded myself, in hope

That some light or people

Would be seen through, seen through a grate...

Meno mosso
II Serenade in Grey

Music: Justin Henry Rubin
Poem: Samuel Greenberg

Leisurely, but with motion

Soprano

Alto

Piano

\textit{ad lib.}

\textit{Fol-ding eye-lid of the dew doth set,}

\textit{The}

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cover remains in the air; And it rains the street,

one color set, Like a huge grey cat held bare.
The shadows of light...

light, of light...

The shadows in shade...

shade, in shade, of

dim. e rit. poco a poco

light...

light, in shade...

light...
Rit. molto

Tempo

Mine eyes feel dim and scorched from...
grey...
The neighboring lamps throw grey

stained gold...
Houses in the distance like mountains
seem,  The bridge lost in the mist...

...es - sence of life re-mains a screen;  Life it -

self in many grey spots that tri - ckle the
Like the earth invisibly

ground, like

Like the earth invisibly

ble in change doth strive.

Black spots, that rove here...

here and there,
Spot and grey were close together, Spot and grey were close together, When color mixes its choice,
lo-ver, a lo-ver.

Rit. al fine
Long

lo-ver.
III Killing
Music: Justin Henry Rubin
Poem: Samuel Greenberg

Subdued, but expressive
\( j = 150 \)

Alto

\[ \text{Lo! the foolish fell.} \]
\[ \text{Silence about...} \]

Piano

\[ \text{While the hero stood} \]
\[ \text{And saw the gathering crowd.} \]
\[ \text{What an awkward} \]

\[ \text{Fall is this...} \]
\[ \text{An unseen conquerer,} \]

Note: breath pauses at double-bars.
A 17

Af-ter look-ing toward the shout-ing throng.

A 21

Rit.

Poco meno mosso

A 26

head

For those who stood

by...

A 31

by.

Pno.

Pno.
IV Life's Mortality

Music: Justin Henry Rubin
Poem: Samuel Greenberg

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globe forever, we also Would

want to feel the other side of

heaven... we also Would
want to feel the other side of heaven... of heaven...
(second time only)

Our bodies are fully given, no

and if we

and if we
As the mud pools receive the dripping rain, we see the reappearance of...
eye-bubbles dissolving water shade... dissolving water shade.

Long
spark - ling vis - ion - ary

light in which we reveal the dream

lies as a looking glass In our
future...
and the remains...
the

skeleton abode...
In our future...
the skeleton abode.

Rit. molto! (subito e non-dim.)
V The Holy Ghost

Music: Justin Henry Rubin
Poem: Samuel Greenberg

\( \text{l = 130} \) Not rushed; with rubato

Soprano

\( \text{A dark scar - let robe co - vered the bo - dy,} \)

Piano

\( \text{As he lay near a mo - na - stary cel - lar door.} \)

\( \text{Ho - ly spi - rit of death swayed o' - er him,} \)

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**Poco rit.**

Meno mosso

A plain-tive seen skull, features sunk, That let resonate

frigh-tens the life in the wit-ness...

The

gau-zy jet black veil.

In the grey, sha-dowed

Door-light the ex-tin-guished form lay in
S

36

dignity Against the wall;

Pno.

36

dim.

Pno.

41

and the low and high corners In shadows were

Pno.

C

let resonate

Pno.

Poco più mosso

ghastly, ad-hered a-round the

Pno.

S

Pil-lars Of iron, placid skeleton thrown

Pno.
to the cold sand Bot- tom, for-got-ten and un-

let resonate

re-cog-ni-za-ble where he lay at

mid-night; strange... we of-ten

share the un-ex-plained won-der... strange... we of-ten
Poco rit.

share the unexplained wonder.

Rit.
VI The Glass Bubbles

Music: Justin Henry Rubin
Poem: Samuel Greenberg

Plodding; Quiet and Pale

Soprano

Alto

Piano

The motion of the glass looks Must either Burst or remain in motion

loops of water Must either Burst or remain in motion

Allow sonority to fade into this section

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strength of its power, of its power...

...when they Begin they

Like sand on the Beach each...ble Contains...plete

they gather Like sand on the Beach each bub... Contains a com...
Rit. e dim. poco a poco

eye of water, eye of water.