Sonnets of Apology: Motion and Reflection

a cantata on the poetry of Samuel Greenberg (1893-1917)

for

Soprano and Alto soloists

-with-

string quartet

and piano

by

Justin Henry Rubin
Forward

I had never heard of Samuel Greenberg. I had been 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 Greenberg through his documented praise. 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 was the composition of a set of songs for soprano, alto, and piano (*Loose Pages*), which were written in the Fall of 2000. They were endowed with a musical character to help convey more than simply the sentiments (if that is indeed possible!) of the texts of the Poet. His works 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 try to take a distinct, non-narrative 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 *speed* with which the texts were written - all of these factors contributed to my choice of sounds that surround my settings of his works. I returned to Greenberg with a cantata, choosing poems from his large collection of *Sonnets of Apology*. I revisit this collection once more, bringing ideas from the earlier song cycle together with my approach in the cantata settings.
Note: All misspellings from the original text have been preserved in their re-print (below), but some have been altered in the musical settings for ease of reading.

**Motion**

The vespers lie between sparkling lust that stirs in motives life!
No lance! but kindered thought can clomb unto its might
As flawless spirits sings within, that shapes its mystic dite
Pure harmony, the faith of lyre, must meet and vary in its choir
Hence the Plum with effulgence gently shimmers in its silky wind
Petted by health - o'er its sequestered sire
that o'er its depth doth flow - ne'er doth tire
The fawns of taste has left its shore
From Rome to England bore, the phase
That chased, vailed beauty's law!
No more shall chant thy verbal lore
But O thy minds lofty flight
that greets its nocturne, through diurnal light
Legends of charm, that glanced thy Path upon our door!

**Reflection**

O all power sweet singing lyre
In my lonly self hath found complete
Content, and view of thy vast
Graceful - unfelt, - untold beauty
From my seat, I see chasms
Of spacious breathing forests
And heavens ocean wide
Of sinking quality, as clouds that
Force neath their shadows creat
Seems as if life's limit sorrows
After death - who shall inherit
Its eternal grande, and Breath
Eternities seat, O lord - thy
Promise of immortality is as thy everlasting growth
motives life! No lance! but kind-er'd thought can clomb un- to its might as

flaw-less spi-rits sings with-in.
that shapes its mystic dite

Pure harmony, the faith of the lyre,
must meet and vary in its choir

-5-
Plum with effulgence gently shimmers in its silky wind.

Petted by health, o'er its sequester'd sire that o'er its depth doth...
flow, ne'er doth tire

The fawns of taste has left its shore
From Rome to England bore, the phase That chas'd, vail'd beauty's law, beauty's law!

No more shall chant thy verbal law
But O thy minds lofty flight that greets its nocturne, through diurnal light
Legends of charm, that glanc'd thy Path upon our door, that glanc'd thy Path upon our door!
**Very slow and gentle**

S

O all power sweet singing lyre In my

A

lone-ly self hath found complete, complete Content, com-

Vln. 1

lone-ly self hath found complete

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

Pno.

136 esp.

pp

141

141

141

Sim.
Beneath the Con
tent,

Graceful, unfelt, Beauty

and view of thy vast Grace untold

-14-
From my seat,

I see cha - sms Of
Who shall inherit

life's limit sorrows After death...

-18-
Its eternal grande, And Breath Eternities O lord,

O immortality is as they everlasting

O lord, Pro...
Sonnets of Apology:  
Motion and Reflection

Piano

Lightly \( \frac{\text{d}}{= 90} \)

Music: Justin Henry Rubin  
Text: Samuel Greenberg

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quasi-attacca

**Very slow and gentle**

**[Sheet Music Image]**
Sonnets of Apology:
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Violin 1

Lightly \( \frac{\text{value}}{\text{notes}} \)

Music: Justin Henry Rubin
Text: Samuel Greenberg

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H  Very slow and gentle

I

J

-3-
Sonnet of Apology:  
Motion and Reflection

Music: Justin Henry Rubin
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Viola

Lighly \( \frac{\dot{4}}{7} = 90 \)

\( \frac{\dot{7}}{\dot{4}} \)

\( \frac{\dot{13}}{\dot{A}} \)

\( \frac{\dot{20}}{\dot{B}} \)

\( \frac{\dot{26}}{\dot{3}} \)

\( \frac{\dot{35}}{\dot{2}} \)

\( \frac{\dot{45}}{\dot{C}} \)

\( \frac{\dot{58}}{mf} \)
G

mp

H

Very slow and gentle

legato

I

J

8

8

-3-
Sonnets of Apology:
Motion and Reflection

Violoncello

Lighly  \( \frac{B}{4} = 90 \)

A

B

C

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Very slow and gentle