

BACH THE CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

CALIFORNIA BACH SOCIETY
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SOLOISTS

Charles Bressler, Evangelist

Kari Windingstad, Soprano

Miriam Abramowitsch, Alto

William Parker, Bass

The California Bach Society celebrates the 300th anniversary of Bach's birth.

For a complete season schedule write: The California Bach Society,
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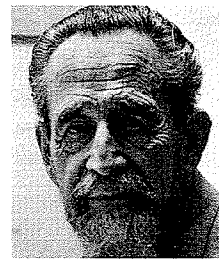
Loge \$19, First Tier \$17, Orch. \$15, Upper Orch. \$13,
Second Tier and Side Terr. \$9, Center Terr. \$6.50.

To order tickets: Please enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope
with your order and mail to: Symphony Box Office, DAVIES
SYMPHONY HALL, San Francisco 94102. Telephone (415) 431-5400.
Tickets also available at leading agencies. VISA/MasterCard accepted.

Sunday, November 25th, 7:00 o'clock
DAVIES SYMPHONY HALL

Dane Rudhyar

TROIS CHANSONS DE BILITIS



DANE RUDHYAR was born in Paris in 1895, came to the United States in 1916, and now lives in Palo Alto. He has composed for a variety of instruments and is perhaps best known for his often-performed piano music (like the Pentagrams and Granites), and for his highly individualistic compositional style, combining a post-Stravinsky harmonic language with a ruggedly American formal and architectural conception. The *Trois Chansons de Bilitis* were composed in 1916-18 and revised and orchestrated in 1981. They were premiered at the California Institute of the Arts on 10 March 1984, conducted by Stephen Mosko. The songs are scored for woman's low voice (solo), flute, oboe, B-flat clarinet (and bass clarinet), horn, trombone, string quartet, double bass, piano, harp, celesta, and vibraphone.

THE *TROIS CHANSONS DE BILITIS* are among Rudhyar's most ambitious works and something of a landmark in the composer's long and vital career. Although Rudhyar has written other works for large ensemble (*The Surge of Fire*, *Ouranos*, *Thresholds*, and a few others), he has mostly written for solo piano. Composer and author Peter Garland, in his book *Americas: Essays in Music and Culture 1973-80*, says, "The piano music of Dane Rudhyar constitutes his major musical statement, and the amount of work is extensive and varied. It is also one of the most personal, introspective bodies of music in all keyboard literature." In Rudhyar's piano music, one senses a singularity of vision comparable to that of Ruggles and Varèse, as well as a consistent search for a new harmonic, formal, and sonic language. In the *Chansons*, his pianistic style is transferred to a timbrally brilliant orchestral context, and it gives clear evidence of Rudhyar's stated admiration for Debussy and Stravinsky. Rudhyar's music was born in fin de siècle Paris, but was nurtured in the American frontier.

I began to be haunted by the ideal of the "seed man," the man who, having condensed within his mind—conscious and unconscious—the sum total of the essential values of his slowly disintegrating culture, may be taken by winds of destiny to some virgin soil within which, in due time, he may become "father" of a new culture. Stravinsky's *Sacre du printemps* (I was at the tumultuous first performance) was, directly, an intense and cathartic experience of the unleashed power of "tone," and, indirectly, the cause of my becoming associated with a dancer and her friend who in turn were responsible for my coming to New York in the fall of 1916. The seed was indeed being actually blown across the ocean to a "New World" which I saw in dreams through the magic of Walt Whitman's poems.

The *Trois Chansons de Bilitis* are characterized by a slow and lyrical soprano lines over a relatively homophonic instrumental texture. Beginning with the initial clarinet and flute of the first song,

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Photo of Dane Rudhyar © 1977 Betty Freeman.

San Francisco Symphony November 1984

≈ 60 or a little slower
 Flute *mf, very even*
 Clar. (in C) *I, very even, legato*
 Harp *mf end appears to with beginning of the bar - not too fast*
 Celesta *7# - G - Ab somewhat outstanding*
 Piano *mf*
 Viola *mf*

each movement explores a wide variety of soft, accompanimental, and rather extraordinary ostinati. The three instrumental groupings (winds, strings, and “keyboards,” the latter including harp and vibraphone) are used both as independent timbral entities and as component hues for a subtle but enormously diverse orchestral palette. Like Debussy, Rudhyar is a precise, sophisticated, and unusual orchestrator—so good, in fact, that this aspect of his craft is often overlooked. In *Chansons*, as in Debussy’s *La Mer*, the details and nuances of the instrumentation technique are so well integrated into a single set of direct timbral gestures that the listener may not even consciously perceive the myriad of subtle sonic events that adorn the piece, as individual blossoms adorn a well-planned garden.

Rudhyar’s own description of the piece and its history (from his notes for the premiere performance, 10 March 1984) is perhaps the best introduction for the audience:

When Pierre Louÿs published *Les Chansons de Bilitis* in 1894, he took great care to present them as a translation of poems written by an unknown Greek woman of the century of Sappho. But it soon became apparent that he had invented this personage and written the lovely poems himself. In 1898 Debussy made a musical interpretation of three of them. During the summer 1916, in Seal Harbor, Maine, I selected three others for a somewhat similar treatment. The work was completed only recently, when I had rediscovered the manuscript, revised it, and provided a new instrumental background for the voice.

The three poems are “Hymn to the Night,” “Remorse,” and “Love.” The atmosphere is delicate and sensual, pervaded with the feeling of the fin de siècle during which I was born. The instrumental background should never be obtrusive, though having an intensity of its own.

—L. P.