

Musical Treasure Chest #20

I had planned to write today on the joys of teaching—with my colleges resuming and my students checking in about their repertory for the semester, I have this aspect of my life very much on my mind. However, a chance e-mail from an MofM patron about a piece I play by **Richard Einhorn** changed my direction. And this morning I listened to a BBC World program about John Cage's ASAP (As Slow As Possible) and a 639 year performance, further confirmed that I want to write today about Richard.

A position on the New York State Council of the Arts panel back in the 1990s offered my first meeting with Richard. A small group, we spent long days together a few times a year reviewing applications. The process involved intense discussion and examination of New York State arts organizations,, and Richard was always well-prepared and quite articulate. Evenings were free, and at the end of a particularly grueling session, Richard mentioned that the Sirius String Quartet was premiering one of his works that night and invited me to come. I did attend, and was quite impressed with the piece. The next day, I told him how much I liked his music, and he gave me a CD of another work of his, ***Voices of Light***. Written as the "accompaniment" to the 1928 Carl Dreyer silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, the piece is played live with small orchestra, chorus and vocal soloists, while the film is viewed.

I returned home from the meeting and watched the film with the musical score. I was stunned, overwhelmed and deeply moved. The film is an absolute masterpiece (and I have included a link to it below). Renee Jeanne Falconetti, who was cast as Joan, is mesmerizing. I have never had a silent movie grip me the way this one did. Her eyes convey such suffering and intensity that one has the sense she has spoken. Joining the film with the music adds even another level of emotional conveyance. Richard chose to use minimal orchestral forces, with the glorious addition of a gamba and the sampling of the church bells from Joan's hometown church in Domremy, France. The texts, entirely medieval and taken from the writings of female mystics, are sung in their original languages of old

French, Latin and Italian. Excerpts of letters Joan dictated to scribes are included too. (I have included a link to Richard's webpage that gives interesting detail on the creation of the piece—click on the program notes button).

I am such a fan of *Voices of Light* that I have taught it in my college music appreciation classes. To see college students, who are not always comfortable openly expressing emotion, react so strongly to the film is tremendously gratifying. I also convinced David Janower to program it with Albany Pro Musica back in 2006. David, too, was a tremendous proponent of the work, so much so that he repeated *Voices* in 2010. The first performance was at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in downtown Albany. The cavernous and medieval reminiscent sacred space was the perfect venue for it. Richard's evocative score literally swirled around the sanctuary. One particularly gut-wrenching scene features a solo violin with very little other accompaniment. Brilliantly conceived with lots of double stops (two notes played together), the sound begins to build up, with one echoing set of notes piling onto the new notes. It's an amazing and eerie effect that perfectly couples with the film's visual action.

I have included links not only to Richard's program notes and silent film, but also a review by Roger Ebert of the original film, and a link to a performance of *Voices of Light*. Though nothing is better than seeing it in person, you can get a DVD with both the movie and Richard's score. Make certain to have a box of tissues nearby!

Richard has remained a friend for more than twenty years. He was kind enough a few years ago to make a transcription of *Voices* for Musicians of Ma'alwyck to use in performance with stills of the film. He also has written two works for violin and piano, as well as a wonderful new work for solo violin which I hope to learn and perform soon.

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-the-passion-of-joan-of-arc-1928>

<https://vimeo.com/169369684>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UFJmrjgbgE>

<https://www.richardeinhorn.com/voices-of-light-1>