

James Primosch - *Songs for Adam*

James Primosch

Born October 29, 1956, Cleveland, Ohio.

Currently resides in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Composition History

James Primosch's music and Susan Stewart's poetry for *Songs for Adam* both were commissioned by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The score was composed in 2008 and 2009. Songs three through six were previewed by Daniel Eiffert, baritone, with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, James Gaffigan conducting, on March 16, 2009. The work is scored for baritone soloist and an orchestra consisting of three flutes and piccolo, three oboes and english horn, three clarinets and bass clarinet, three bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, percussion (vibraphone, crotales, bell tree, suspended cymbals, anvil, large and small tam-tams, tenor drum, bass drum, temple blocks, marimba, tubular bells, glockenspiel, woodblocks, metal wind chimes, triangle, tom-toms, claves, and log drum), piano, celesta, harp, and strings. Performance time is approximately thirty minutes.

Performance History

These are the world premiere performances of James Primosch's *Songs for Adam*. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra also gave the world premiere performances of Primosch's *From a Book of Hours* on January 10, 11, and 12, 2002, with Lisa Saffer as soloist and Antonio Pappano conducting.

Songs for Adam

James Primosch was introduced to Orchestra Hall audiences in January 2002, when the Chicago Symphony gave the world premiere of his *From a Book of Hours*, a setting of four poems by Rainer Maria Rilke that the Orchestra had commissioned. Primosch, who studied at Cleveland State University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University, credits Mario Davidovsky, George Crumb, and Richard Wernick as his principal teachers. He has received many honors, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, two prizes from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Pew Fellowship in the Arts, the Stoeger Prize from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and a fellowship to the Tanglewood Music Center, where he studied with John Harbison. He has been commissioned by the Koussevitzky and Fromm foundations, as well as by many performing arts groups. In 1994, he served as composer-in-residence at the Marlboro Music Festival.

In addition, Primosch is an active pianist, specializing in contemporary music, and he was a prize winner at the Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition in Rotterdam. He also has worked as a liturgical musician and as a jazz pianist. Since 1988, he has been a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania, where he directs the Presser Electronic Music Studio.

Primosch's music often draws on literature and the visual arts for inspiration. His String Quartet no. 2 harkens back to the time of *The Holy House of Nazareth* by the seventeenth-century Spanish painter Francisco de Zurbarán. The sextet *Sacre Conversazinone*, for chamber ensemble and tape, reflects the pictorial convention of saints who convene for an audience with the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child. Primosch has set texts by many poets, including Shakespeare (*Songs and Dances from the Tempest*, composed in 1998) in addition to Rilke.

Susan Stewart, who collaborated with Primosch on these new *Songs for Adam*, is the author of several collections of poetry, including *Columbarium* (2003), which received the National Book Critics Circle Award, as well as *The Forest* (1995), *The Hive* (1987), and *Yellow Stars and Ice* (1981). She has also published several books of criticism and essays on art. She currently is professor of English at Princeton University, where she teaches the history of poetry and aesthetics.

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

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