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PASC 430

The Music of Harl McDonald, Volume 2

Pristine
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Producer's Note

This second release devoted to the works of Harl McDonald (1899 - 1955) begins with a Concerto for Two Pianos whose eclecticism reflects the wide-ranging influences of the American composer. The second movement variations start with a Bach-like original theme, while the third is inspired by a dance of northern Mexico called the *Juarezca*.

My Country at War gathers together three of McDonald's prior works into a suite. The first movement, originally titled *Overture 1941*, premiered two days before the Pearl Harbor attack that drew America into the war that was already raging in the rest of the world. The second was inspired by the unsuccessful attempt by American forces to withstand a long siege at Bataan. The final two movements were originally set for baritone and orchestra, but revamped without soloist for the suite.

The cycle *Songs of Conquest*, based on poems by Phelps Putnam, looks back with pride at the achievements of the American pioneers while looking forward with unease at the then-current world situation. The first song celebrates humankind's triumphs ("Man has prevailed ... over insect and beast/He has forgotten the variable seas"). The second depicts man as alone and terrified ("I am one who am solitary ... I have hurled my questions into the universe/I have pressed them into the earth and into my flesh"). The third makes a statement about nations being able to resolve their differences rationally, a sentiment which must have already seemed like a lost cause by the time this was recorded ("Let us declare ... That the weight of seeing is upon us"). The final song returns to the pioneer theme ("We have cut ourselves from our home as with an axe/The sea could not stop us, being our simple road") before ending with a reprise of "Man has prevailed".

The *Miniature Suite* presents McDonald in the rôle of arranger. John Christopher Smith was a protégé of Handel, who later became an amanuensis to his patron when the older composer became blind. The three movements were drawn from Smith's *My Hand and Musicke Book*, published in London in 1784.

Like his suite *From Childhood* on Volume One (PASC 402), McDonald drew upon nursery rhymes for his *Children's Symphony*. Here, he introduces young people to symphonic structure by using familiar tunes in a four-movement framework, each of which has a principal and a secondary theme. The songs used are "London Bridge is Falling Down" and "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep" in the first movement; "Little Bo Peep" and "Oh, Dear, What Can the Matter Be" in the second; "The Farmer in the Dell" and "Jingle Bells" in the third; and "Honey Bee" and "Snow is Falling On My Garden" in the final movement, with a reprise of "London Bridge" to close.

Mark Obert-Thorn

The Music of Harl McDonald

Volume Two

Concerto for Two Pianos & Orchestra

with Jeanne Behrend and Alexander Kelberine

My Country at War

Songs of Conquest

John Christopher Smith Miniature Suite

Children's Symphony

Leopold Stokowski • Eugene Ormandy
Arthur Fiedler • Harl McDonald

The Philadelphia Orchestra
Arthur Fiedler's Sinfonietta
University of Pennsylvania Choral Society

Studio Recordings • 1937 - 50

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Obert-Thorn

THE MUSIC OF HARL McDONALD *Volume Two*



Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra (1936)

- 1 1st Mvt. - Molto Moderato (6:57)
- 2 2nd Mvt. - Theme and Variations (7:36)
- 3 3rd Mvt. - Juarezca – Allegro (6:57)

Jeanne Behrend & Alexander Kelberine *Pianos*
The Philadelphia Orchestra *Leopold Stokowski*

My Country at War – Symphonic Suite (1941-43)

- 4 1st Mvt. - 1941 (6:48)
- 5 2nd Mvt. - Bataan (7:50)
- 6 3rd Mvt. - Elegy (2:35)
- 7 4th Mvt. - Hymn of the People (4:43)

The Philadelphia Orchestra *Eugene Ormandy*

Songs of Conquest (1937; rev. 1939) (Text: Phelps Putnam)

- 8 The breadth and extent of man's empire (3:50)
- 9 A complaint against the bitterness of solitude (2:52)
- 10 A declaration for increase of understanding among the peoples of the world (1:40)
- 11 The exaltation of man in his migrations and in surmounting of natural barriers (3:27)

University of Pennsylvania Choral Society *Harl McDonald*

John Christopher Smith (freely transcribed by Harl McDonald): *Miniature Suite* (1938)

- 12 1st Mvt. - Prelude (1:56)
- 13 2nd Mvt. - Air (2:24)
- 14 3rd Mvt. - Allemande (3:38)

Arthur Fiedler's Sinfonietta *Arthur Fiedler*

Children's Symphony (On Familiar Tunes) (1948)

- 15 1st Mvt. - Allegro moderato (3:37)
- 16 2nd Mvt. - Andante patetico (4:12)
- 17 3rd Mvt. - Allegro scherzando (3:04)
- 18 4th Mvt. - Allegro marziale (4:00)

The Philadelphia Orchestra *Harl McDonald*

Producer and Audio Restoration
Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover artwork based on a photograph
of Harl McDonald taken in 1944

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Details of the recording venues and dates,
catalogue and matrix numbers, together
with further details on the recordings can
be found online at:
www.pristineclassical.com/pasc430.html

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