

from **THE ECSTATIC PILGRIMAGE** (1988-91)  
POEMS BY EMILY DICKINSON    MUSIC BY LEO SMIT

**Cycle 1, Childe Emilie** (1989) (29:42)

**14 songs about memories & fantasies of childhood**

1. I was the slightest in the house (3:20)
2. Through Lane it lay--through bramble (1:06)
3. It troubled me as once I was (2:07)
4. The Child's faith is new (1:35)
5. Softened by Time's consummate plush (2:25)
6. Papa above! (:51)
7. We talked as girls do (2:15)
8. They shut me up in Prose (1:22)
9. I cried at Pity--not at Pain (3:25)
10. Let Us play Yesterday (2:17)
11. A loss of something ever felt I (2:25)
12. Good Morning--Midnight (1:31)
13. Up Life's Hill with my little Bundle (1:18)
14. I'm ceded--I've stopped being Theirs (2:33)

**Cycle 2, The Celestial Thrush** (1988) (23:17)

**12 songs about music & birds**

15. I was a Phoebe--nothing more (1:06)
16. The Bird her punctual music brings (:49)
17. The earth has many Keys (1:42)

18. 4. The Bobolink is gone (1:08)
19. 5. A train went through a burial gate (1:56)
20. 6. I cannot dance upon my Toes (2:04)
21. 7. Upon his Saddle sprung a Bird (1:18)
22. 8. Better-than Music!--For I--who heard it (4:09)
23. 9. Bind me--I still can sing (:42)
24. 10. Within my Garden, rides a Bird (1:33)
25. 11. Heart, not so heavy as mine (3:43)
26. 12. I shall keep singing! (1:30)

**Cycle 6, The White Diadem** (1989) (11:35)

**7 songs about poets & poetry**

27. 1. I reckon--when I count at all (1:46)
28. 2. I dwell in Possibility (1:29)
29. 3. The Martyr Poets--did not tell (1:18)
30. 4. The Poets Light but Lamps (:48)
31. 5. I would not paint--a picture (1:54)
32. 6. To pile Like Thunder to its close (2:18)
33. 7. Me--come! My dazzled face (2:21)

*Rosalind Rees, soprano    Leo Smit, piano*

Childe Emilie, the first cycle of fourteen songs, is about memories and fantasies of childhood. The title reflects the spelling of her name that Dickinson fancied until she was well into adulthood. When someone remarked on its archness, she dropped it on the spot.

### 1. **I was the slightest in the House** (P486)<sup>1</sup>

In the first poem of "Childe Emilie," Dickinson introduces herself as the "slightest" in the house, occupying "the smallest room," lit by "a little lamp," furnished with "a basket," and adorned by "one geranium."

Smallness reduced to insignificance is one of the poet's deadly deceptive strategies, designed to disarm the reader before the atomic explosions are detonated.

In her quiet, monastic cell, she catches the "Mint" — her inspired verses — "that never ceased to fall —" She continues, "I never spoke — unless addressed —" That is not altogether true. She herself recorded that as a child she was a chatter-box, and was once locked in a closet by her father as punishment for her relentless bantering at the dinner table.

Toward the end of this self-effacing portrait, the poem turns dark, as she broods over the possibility that she might die "noteless" — unrecognized, and denied the immortality that obsessed her throughout her life.

### 2. **Through Lane it lay — through bramble** (P9)

On a lonely road in a forest, Emily encounters "Banditti," the curious wolf, the puzzled owl, and the stealthy serpent. Tempests "touch" her dress, lightning flashes, and, on a high crag, a vulture screams. A satyr's fingers beckon, the valley murmurs, "Come —," as she breathlessly runs home.

<sup>1</sup>"P" refers to the number of the poem in Thomas H. Johnston's edition of *The Complete Poems Of Emily Dickinson*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, (1960).

Skeptical of her parent's dire warnings about the dangerous world around her, Emily once wrote:

When much in the Woods as a little Girl, I was told that the Snake would bite me, that I might pick a poisonous flower, or Goblins kidnap me, but I went along with them and met no one but Angels, who were far shyer of me, that I could be of them, so I haven't that confidence in fraud which many exercise.

### 3. **It troubled me as once I was** (P600)

In the next poem we find Childe Emilie looking up at the weighty Heavens and wondering why they do not fall on her. She admits that life has set her "larger" problems, which she will address in time, but the memory of the fixed, solid, blue sky, looming overhead, still awaits her understanding.

### 4. **The Child's faith is new** (P637)

In this poem of Innocence and Experience, we see a child — wide-eyed, credulous, without a doubt, laughing at conscience, and believing in false appearances.

But little by little the child learns the hard, sad lesson that mere men are not to be mistaken for Kings.

### 5. **Softened by Time's consummate plush** (P1738)

This poem presents a view of childhood's pain often found in Dickinson's work. Compared to the "bisected," "bleaker" griefs of adulthood, the despair of "childhood's realm" is easily repaired, a startling idea that challenges the Freudian assertion of the primacy and permanence of infantile trauma.

### 6. **Papa above!** (P61)

This early poem, ironically addressed to our Father in Heaven, and perhaps to the poet's father on earth, is the first in a long list, increasingly bitter and condemning of

God and his Son. But for the present, "Mouse" Emily pretends to be overpowered by "Cat" God, nibbling in seraphic cupboards while time wheels endlessly away.

**7. We talked as Girls do** (P586)

A touching poem, close to autobiography, tells of the wrenching loss of love and friendship and contains a clue to Emily's developing self-protective, reclusive nature.

Emily and a girlfriend are happily talking late into the night, speculating "on every subject, but the Grave." They fondly discuss their eventual maturity, when, as women, they will "occupy Degree."

They part, vowing to love each other and to write, "But Heaven made both impossible, / Before another night."

**8. They shut me up in Prose** (P613)

Punished for her volubility when, as a little girl, Emily was locked in a closet by her unappreciative papa in a futile attempt to keep her still. "Still," Emily shouts. If only he could look inside her brain and see it whirling around.

And then comes her lovely credo, easier to state than to experience, even for her: all one has to do to "abolish captivity" is to will it away, and laugh.

**9. I cried at Pity — not at Pain** (P588)

A moving poem, possibly Dickinson's rebuke to her family's expressions of pity when they read a newspaper article chiding "poor, lonely and unhappy," women poets for their "literature of misery." In their eyes, Emily was the obvious target. Ironically, it is believed that this essay was the work of Samuel Bowles, adored by Emily and the recipient of many poems, including love poems, which she included in her letters to him.

It is fascinating to watch the great artist at work, as she moves the subject from the reality of the moment back to a fantasy of childhood's bleakness — lacking in

"health, and Laughter," without gifts, not even the memory of tenderness - only a sobbing lullaby, just when she and death have come to an understanding.

**10. Let Us play Yesterday** (P728)

This complex poem, a double fugue in structure, intertwines two symbolic themes — growth and freedom. Dickinson states that no bird (or human) can return to the shell (or womb), and cries out for freedom from the despotic "God of the Manacle."

**11. A loss of something ever felt I** (P959)

A special favorite of mine, this poem warns of a peculiarly American preoccupation, nostalgia, to which even Dickinson occasionally falls victim.

As far back as she can remember, Emily has been burdened by a secret sense of loss — of what, she does not know. Her parents, absorbed in their own lives, take no notice of her as she mopes about, "bemoaning a Dominion / Itself the only Prince cast out —" Androgynous overtones appear more than once as Dickinson casts herself as boy, King, Earl, and even Czar. As she once explained, "When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse — it does not mean — me — but a supposed person."

Now older, wiser, and "fainter," she still finds herself searching for her "Delinquent Palaces," the unrealized castles of her childhood dreams. Slowly, "a Suspicion, like a Finger," touches her forehead, and the truth dawns on her. She has been wrongly looking at the past for "the Kingdom of Heaven" instead of facing the present, where the solutions lie.

**12. Good Morning — Midnight** (P425)

This seemingly light-hearted poem is tinted with dark shadows. Day, symbolizing life, has rejected the little girl. She then appeals to Midnight, death, to accept her instead. Before leaving "sweet Sunshine," she takes one last look at the sunrise

and the hills, which ravish her heart.

### 13. **Up Life's Hill with my little Bundle** (P1010)

In this short, heartbreaking poem, Emily, life's refugee, sets out from home in search of a new abode, finally accepting homelessness as permanent.

It is one of the extraordinary prophecies of the great poet, touching upon the heart of one of this century's terrible tragedies — the exile, the displaced person, homeless wanderers of a homeless planet.

### 14. **I'm ceded — I've stopped being Theirs** (P508)

This grand, triumphant poem is Emily Dickinson's Emancipation Proclamation. Standing erect on the threshold of womanhood, she categorically rejects the symbols of childhood, her baptism without choice, her dolls, her spools of thread. She glories in her "second Rank," the power and grace of her poetry. This time, she declaims, with the will to choose or to reject, she chooses "just a Crown."

**The Celestial Thrush** (1988), 12 songs about music and birds.

#### 1. **I was a Phoebe - nothing more** — (P1009)

The shy "Phoebe" Emily defines the art of making as "The little note that others dropt I fitted into place —" and ruefully concedes that she expects to make but "a little print / Upon the Floors of Fame —"

#### 2. **The Bird her punctual music brings** (P1585)

The bird-poet places her art "in the Human Heart / And in the Heavenly Grace —" She asks what relief can an artist find in her "thrilling toil," and answers, "But Work might be electric Rest / To those that Magic make —"

#### 3. **The earth has many Keys** (P1775)

Although keys have many meanings, it seems certain that Dickinson here uses the

word in a musical sense. "Where melody is not / Is the unknown peninsula" implies that music is everywhere in nature — in the sounds of bird song, wind, thunder, insects, fire. Therefore she concludes that "Beauty is nature's fact." Holding up the cricket as fellow-artist, the poet extols its "utmost / of elegy to me."

#### 4. **The Bobolink is gone** (P1591)

With the "Rowdy of the Meadow" gone, the poet takes over its territory, inviting "The Presbyterian Birds" to "resume the Meeting/ He boldly interrupted" when "He swung upon the Decalogue / And shouted let us pray —"

#### 5. **A train went through a burial gate** (P1761)

A bird eulogized at a funeral with ecstatic song "till all the churchyard rang." He then changed the melody, "bowed, and sang again." He felt it incumbent upon himself "to say good-by to men."

#### 6. **I cannot dance upon my Toes** (P326)

In this extraordinary poem Dickinson combines two themes: first, exultant joy in her poetic-musical art, "A Glee possesseth me;" second, a vision of classical ballet in all its elegant artificiality. "And though I had no Gown of Gauze — / No Ringlet, to my Hair, Nor hopped to Audiences — like Birds, / Nor tossed my shape in Eider Balls, / Nor rolled on wheels of snow" as if in eerie adumbration of Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker ballet, composed six years after Dickinson's death. In the end, her art triumphs over balletic antics as she cries out, "it's full as Opera."

#### 7. **Upon his Saddle sprung a Bird** (P1600)

Alighting on an unoccupied fence, an anonymous bird-bard "squandered such a note / A Universe that overheard / Is stricken by it yet —" Dickinson's life in an egg shell.

#### 8. **Better-than Music! — For I — who heard it** (P503)

When I first read this complex and engrossing poem, I was surprised at the

range of musical references, climaxed by the appearance of Mozart's name - "perfect Mozart," as the poet correctly put it.

The list of terms related to music includes, besides music itself, birds, tunes, stanza, play, composer, keyless, melody, strain, bells, cadence, humming, and rehearsal.

Dickinson envisages a new and higher kind of music (and poetry), freed from conventional restraints, epitomized by Mozart's great innovations of melody, chromatic harmony, and asymmetrical forms.

How did the poet know about Mozart's "better music?" Along with other great poets, Dickinson was a seer, and her technique was prescience.

The last stanza tells of her working to achieve a new level of poetic art, which she will then "drop into tune — around the Throne —" her passport to immortality.

#### 9. **Bind me — I still can sing** (P1005)

Orphic Emily declaims that even Death cannot still her voice as "my Soul shall rise / Chanting to Paradise —"

#### 10. **Within my Garden, rides a Bird** (P500)

A hummingbird (the name marks it as a musician) rides "Upon a single Wheel — / Whose spokes a dizzy Music make / As 'twere a travelling Mill —"

Accurate descriptions of the bird in flight and feeding on the wing follow, until his "Fairy Gig / Reels in remoter atmospheres — And I rejoin my Dog." Carlo, her companion Newfoundland, assists his mistress in spotting the elusive hummer by pointing "To just vibrating Blossoms!" He earns the compliment of being "the best Logician."

#### 11. **Heart, not so heavy as mine** (P83)

A light-hearted stranger passes by Emily's window late at night, whistling "a tune — / A careless snatch — a ballad — / A ditty of the street —" which pleases

her, despite her feeling of depression. Recalling a caroling bobolink and "a chirping Brook" that "set bleeding feet to minuets," the poet anticipates night coming again and the hope that the other heart will pass by her window once more.

#### 12. **I shall keep singing!** (P250)

The grand prima donna of Amherst delivers her artistic credentials in this ringing manifestation of mature power. She concedes that other birds "will pass me / On their way to Yellower Climes —," but when she finally arrives, "I will bring a fuller tune —." With an ecclesiastical metaphor, "Vespers are sweeter than Matins," she then coquettishly greets the Lord as an 18th-century "Signor."

I end the song with a repetition of the first line, a procedure rarely used, but justified by the great song-bird's promise to "keep singing."

**The White Diadem** (1989), 7 songs about poets and poetry.

#### 1. **I reckon — when I count at all** (P569)

Starting with a play on the word "reckon," a rebellious Dickinson proceeds to overthrow the conventional hierarchy of established values, replacing it with an amazing catalogue of her own:

First Poets — Then the Sun —

Then Summer — Then the Heaven of God —

And then — the List is done —

Slamming her gavel to close her case, the poet has second thoughts:

But, looking back — the First so seems

To Comprehend the Whole —

The Others look a needless Show —

So I write — Poets — All —

With breathtaking authority she declares poets sovereigns of the world, but soon after:

It is too difficult a Grace —

To justify the Dream —

## 2. **I dwell in Possibility** (P657)

This famous poem describes the ideal environment and occupation of an artist. Under "an Everlasting Roof / the Gambrels of the Sky —" she gathers Paradise by "spreading wide my narrow Hands."

## 3. **The Martyr Poets — did not tell** (P544)

Dickinson's moving tribute to her fellow artists, who willingly suffer the pangs of creation to "encourage some —," while seeking in art "the Art of Peace."

## 4. **The Poets light but Lamps** (P883)

Dickinson wrote for herself and once, in a moment of bitter anger, denounced publication as the "Auction of the Mind of Man." In this poem, however, she throws historical light on the creative process and the ability of "vital" works to live through the ages, judged by readers of each generation, which keeps them alive beyond the poet's own life. The final word of this poem, "circumference," appears in many of her poems and reflects a realm beyond life, a boundary she constantly and desperately sought to penetrate. Courageous even to the point of being ruthless to herself, Dickinson once wrote:

"'Tis Dying — I am doing — but

I'm not afraid to know —"

## 5. **I would not paint — a picture** — (P505)

Responding to art as a rush of awe, "such sumptuous-Despair—," Dickinson celebrates the power of painting, music, and poetry to elevate the ordinary mortal to heights "Whose rare-celestial-stir / Evokes so sweet a Torment —." In conclusion,

the poet would rather not be a poet, if she could only "own the Ear —" and "The License to revere," but in a dazzling turn-around, takes up her pen invoking "the Art to stun myself / With Bolts of Melody!"

## 6. **To pile Like Thunder to its close** (P1247)

With apocalyptic voice, Dickinson envisioned a poetry of such stupendous power, verging on chaos, that "Everything created hid." But even this grand poet, who converses with God, angels, and saints, warns that no human, no matter how inspired, can "see God and live —."

## 7. **Me — come! My dazzled face** (P431)

Ecstatic at finding herself in heaven — "In such a shining place!" — and hearing "the sounds of Welcome — there!," Emily Dickinson takes notice of her hesitant step — "Our bashful feet." Recovering her pride and sense of glory, she ecstatically sings out:

My Holiday, shall be

That they — remember me —

My Paradise — the fame

That They — pronounce my name —

How do composers choose words for their songs? Speaking for myself, I either must be charmed, moved, terrified, or mystified. Emily Dickinson's poems provided all of those qualities, and much more. Her poems created my songs, the melodies, the rhythms. I found some harmonies and drew the bar lines. Above all, she gave me the gift of three intensely joyous, wondrous years, which yielded a bouquet of seventy-seven tonal images of her incomparable life and thought.

*Leo Smit, February, 1999*

## Song Texts

**1** I was the slightest in the House -  
I took the smallest Room -  
At night, my little Lamp, and Book -  
And one Geranium -

So stationed I could catch the Mint  
That never ceased to fall -  
And just my Basket -  
Let me think - I'm sure  
That this was all -

I never spoke - unless addressed -  
And then, 'twas brief and low -  
I could not bear to live - aloud -  
The Racket shamed me so -

And if it had not been so far -  
And anyone I knew -  
Were going - I had often thought  
How noteless - I could die -

**2** Through lane it lay - through bramble -  
Through clearing and through wood -

Banditti often passed us  
Upon the lonely road.

The wolf came peering curious -  
The owl looked puzzled down -  
The serpent's satin figure  
Glid stealthily along -

The tempests touched our garments -  
The lightning's poinards gleamed -  
Fierce from the Crag above us  
The hungry Vulture screamed -

The satyr's fingers beckoned -  
The valley murmured "Come" -  
These were the mates -  
This was the road  
These children fluttered home.

**3** It troubled me as once I was -  
For I was once a Child -  
Concluding how an Atom - fell -  
And yet the Heavens - held

The Heavens weighed the most - by far  
Yet Blue - and solid - stood

Without a Bolt - that I could prove -  
Would Giants - understand?

Life set me larger - problems -  
Some I shall keep - to solve  
Till Algebra is easier -  
Or simpler proved - above

Then - too - be comprehended -  
What sorer - puzzled me -  
Why Heaven did not break away -  
And tumble - Blue on me -

**4** The Child's faith is new -  
Whole - like His Principle -  
Wide - like the Sunrise  
On fresh Eyes -  
Never had a Doubt -  
Laughs - at a Scruple -  
Believes all sham  
But Paradise -

Credits the World -  
Deems His Dominion  
Broadest of Sovereignities -

And Caesar - mean -  
In the Comparison -  
Baseless Emperor -  
Ruler of Nought,  
Yet swaying all -

Grown bye and bye  
To hold mistaken  
His pretty estimates  
Of Prickly Things  
He gains the skill  
Sorrowfull - as certain -  
Men - to anticipate  
Instead of Kings -

**5** Softened by Time's consummate plush,  
How sleek the woe appears  
That threatened childhood's citadel  
And undermined the years.

Bisected now, by bleaker griefs,  
We envy the despair  
That devastated childhood's realm,  
So easy to repair.

**6** Papa Above!  
Regard a Mouse  
O'erpowered by the Cat!  
Reserve within thy kingdom  
A "Mansion" for the Rat!

Snug in seraphic Cupboards  
To nibble all the day,  
While unsuspecting Cycles  
Wheel solemnly away!

**7** We talked as Girls do -  
Fond, and late -  
We speculated fair, on every subject,  
but the Grave -  
Of ours, none affair -

We handled Destinies, as cool -  
As we - Disposers - be -  
And God, a Quiet Party  
To our Authority -

But fondest, dwelt upon Ourselves  
As we eventual - be -  
When Girls to Women, softly raised  
We - occupy - Degree

We parted with a contract  
to cherish, and to write  
But Heaven made both, impossible  
Before another night.

**8** They shut me up in Prose -  
As when a little Girl  
They put me in the Closet -  
Because they liked me "still" -

Still! Could themselves have peeped -  
And seen by Brain - go round -  
They might as wise have lodged a Bird  
For Treason - in the Pound -

Himself has but to will  
And easy as a Star  
Abolish his Captivity -  
And laugh - No more have I -

**9** I cried at Pity - not at Pain  
I heard a Woman say  
"Poor Child" - and something  
in her voice  
Convicted me - of me -

So long I fainted, to myself  
It seemed the common way,  
And Health, and Laughter,  
Curious things -  
To look at, like a Toy -

To sometimes hear "Rich people" buy  
And see the Parcel rolled -  
And carried, I supposed - to Heaven,  
For children, made of Gold -

But not to touch, or wish for,  
Or think of, with a sigh -  
And so and so - had been to me,  
Had God willed differently.

I wish I knew that Woman's name -  
So when she comes this way,  
To hold my life, and hold my ears  
For fear I hear her say

She's "sorry I am dead" - again -  
Just when the Grave and I -  
Have sobbed ourselves almost to sleep,  
Our only Lullaby -

**10** Let us play Yesterday -  
I - the Girl at school -  
You - and Eternity - the  
Untold Tale -

Easing my famine  
At my Lexicon -  
Logarithm - had I - for Drink -  
'Twas a dry Wine -

Somewhat different - must be -  
Dreams tint the Sleep -  
Cunning Reds of Morning  
Make the Blind - leap -

Still at the Egg - life -  
Chafing the Shell -  
When you troubled the Ellipse -  
And the Bird fell -

Manacles be dim - they say -  
To the new Free -  
Liberty - Commoner -  
Never could - to me -



'Twas my last gratitude  
When I slept - at night -  
'Twas the first Miracle  
Let in - with Light -

Can the Lark resume the Shell -  
Easier - for the Sky -  
Wouldn't Bonds hurt more  
Than Yesterday?

Wouldn't Dungeons sorer grate  
On the Man - free -  
Just long enough to taste -  
Then - doomed new -  
God of the Manacle  
As of the Free -  
Take not my Liberty  
Away from Me -

**11** A loss of something ever felt I -  
The first that I could recollect  
Bereft I was - of what I knew not  
Too young that any should suspect

A Mourner walked among the children  
I notwithstanding went about

As one bemoaning a Dominion  
Itself the only Prince cast out -

Elder, Today, a session wiser  
And fainter, too, as Wiseness is -  
I find myself still softly searching  
For my Delinquent Palaces -

And a Suspicion, like a Finger  
Touches my Forehead now and then  
That I am looking oppositely  
For the site of the Kingdom of Heaven -

**12** Good Morning - Midnight -  
I'm coming Home -  
Day - got tired of Me -  
How could I - of Him?

Sunshine was a sweet place -  
I liked to stay -  
But Morn - didn't want me - now  
So - Goodnight - Day!

I can look - can't I -  
When the East is Red?

The Hills - have a way - then -  
That puts the Heart - abroad -

You - are not so fair - Midnight -  
I chose - Day -  
But - please take a little Girl -  
He turned away!

**13** Up Life's Hill with my little Bundle  
If I prove it steep -  
If a Discouragement withhold me -  
If my newest step

Older feel than the Hope that prompted  
Spotless be from blame  
Heart that proposed as  
Heart that accepted  
Homelessness, for Home -

**14** I'm ceded - I've stopped being Theirs -  
The name They dropped upon my face  
With water, in the country church  
Is finished using, now,  
And They can put it with my Dolls,

My childhood, and the string of spoils,  
I've finished threading - too -

Baptized, before, without the choice,  
But this time, consciously, of Grace -  
Unto supremest name -  
Called to my Full -

The Crescent dropped -  
Existence's whole Arc, filled up,  
With one small Diadem.

My second Rank - too small the first -  
Crowned - Crowing -  
on my Father's breast -  
A half unconscious Queen -  
But this time - Adequate - Erect,  
With Will to choose, or to reject,  
And I choose, just a Crown -

**15** I was a Phoebe - nothing more -  
A Phoebe - nothing less -  
The little note that others dropt  
I fitted into place -

I dwelt too low that any seek -  
Too shy, that any blame -  
A Phoebe makes a little print  
Upon the Floors of Fame -

16 The Bird her punctual music brings  
And lays it in its place -  
Its place is in the Human Heart  
And in the Heavenly Grace -  
What respite from her thrilling toil  
Did Beauty ever take -  
But Work might be electric Rest  
To those that Magic make -

17 The earth has many keys.  
Where melody is not  
Is the unknown peninsula.  
Beauty is nature's fact.

But witness for her land,  
And witness for her sea,  
The cricket is her utmost  
Of elegy to me.

18 The Bobolink is gone -  
The Rowdy of the Meadow -

And no one swaggers now but me -  
The Presbyterian Birds  
Can now resume the Meeting  
He boldly interrupted  
that overflowing Day  
When supplicating mercy  
In a portentous way  
He swung upon the Decalogue  
And shouted let us pray -

19 A train went through a burial gate,  
A bird broke forth and sang,  
And trilled, and quivered,  
and shook his throat  
Till all the churchyard rang;

And then adjusted his little notes,  
And bowed and sang again.  
Doubtless, he thought it meet of him  
To say good -by to men.

20 I cannot dance upon my Toes -  
No Man instructed me -  
But oftentimes, among my mind,  
A Glee possesseth me,

That had I Ballet knowledge -  
Would put itself abroad  
In Pirouette to blanch a Troupe -  
Or lay a Prima, mad,

And though I had no Gown of Gauze -  
No Ringlet, to my Hair,  
Nor hopped to Audiences -  
like Birds,  
One Claw upon the Air,

Nor tossed my shape in Eider Balls,  
Nor rolled on wheels of snow  
Till I was out of sight, in sound,  
The House encore me so -

Nor any know I know the Art  
I mention - easy - Here -  
Nor any Placard boast me -  
It's full as Opera -

21 Upon his Saddle Sprung a Bird  
And crossed a thousand Trees  
Before a Fence without a Fare  
His Fantasy did please

And then he lifted up his Throat  
And squandered such a Note  
A Universe that overheard  
Is stricken by it yet -

22 Better - than Music! For I -  
who heard it -  
I was used - - to the Birds - before  
This - was different -  
'Twas Translation -  
Of all tunes I knew - and more -

'Twasn't contained - like other stanza -  
No one could play it -  
the second time -  
But the Composer - perfect Mozart -  
Perish with him - that Keyless Rhyme!

So - Children - told how  
Brooks in Eden -  
Bubbled a better - Melody -  
Quaintly infer - Eve's great surrender -  
Urging the feet - that would - not - fly -

Children - matured -  
are wiser - mostly -  
Eden - a legend - dimly told -  
Eve - and the Anguish -  
Grandame's story -  
But - I was telling a tune - I heard -  
  
Not such a strain - the Church -  
baptizes -  
When the last Saint - goes up the Aisles -  
Not such a stanza splits the silence -  
When the Redemption strikes her Bells -  
  
Let me not spill - its smallest cadence -  
Humming - for promise - when alone -  
Humming - until my faint Rehearsal -  
Drop into tune - around the Throne -

**23** Bind me - I still can sing  
Banish - my mandolin  
Strikes true within -

Slay - and my Soul shall rise  
Chanting to Paradise -  
Still thine.

**24** Within my Garden, rides a Bird  
Upon a single Wheel -  
Whose spokes a dizzy Music make  
As 'twere a travelling Mill -

He never stops, but slackens  
Above the Ripest Rose -  
Partakes without alighting  
And praises as he goes,

Till every spice is tasted -  
And then his Fairy Gig  
Reels in remoter atmospheres -  
And I rejoin my Dog,

And He and I, perplex us  
If positive, 'twere we -  
Or bore the Garden in the Brain  
This Curiosity -

But He, the best Logician,  
Refers my clumsy eye -  
To just vibrating Blossoms!  
An Exquisite Reply!

**25** I heart, not so heavy as mine  
Wending late home -  
As it passed my window  
Whistled itself a tune -  
A careless snatch - a ballad -  
A ditty of the street -  
Yet to my irritated Ear  
An Anodyne so sweet -  
It was as if a Bobolink  
Sauntering this way  
Carolled, and paused, and carolled -  
Then bubbled slow away!  
It was as if a chirping brook  
Upon a dusty way -  
Set bleeding feet to minuets  
Without the knowing why!  
'Tomorrow, night will come again -  
Perhaps, weary and sore -  
Ah Bugle! By my window  
I pray you pass once more.

**26** I shall keep singing!  
Birds will pass me  
On their way to Yellower Climes -

Each - with a Robin's expectation -  
I - with my Redbreast -  
And my Rhymes -

Late - when I take my place  
in summer -  
But - I shall bring a fuller tune -  
Vespers - are sweeter  
than Matins - Signor  
Morning - only the seed of Noon -

**27** I reckon - when I count at all -  
First - Poets - Then the Sun -  
Then Summer - Then the  
Heaven of God -  
And then - the List is done -

But, looking back - the First so seems  
To Comprehend the Whole -  
The Others look a needless Show -  
So I write - Poets - All -

Their Summer - lasts a Solid Year -  
They can afford a Sun

The East - would deem extravagant -  
And if the Further Heaven -

Be Beautiful as they prepare  
For Those who worship Them -  
It is too difficult a Grace -  
To justify the Dream -

**28** I dwell in Possibility -  
A fairer House than Prose -  
More numerous of Windows -  
Superior - for Doors -

Of Chambers as the Cedars -  
Impregnable of Eye -  
And for an Everlasting Roof  
The Gambrels of the Sky -

Of Visitors - the fairest -  
For Occupation - This  
The spreading wide my narrow Hands  
To gather Paradise -

**29** The Martyr Poets - did not tell -  
But wrought their Pang in syllable -

That when their mortal name  
be numb -  
Their mortal fate - encourage Some -

The Martyr Painters - never spoke -  
Bequeathing - rather - to their Work -  
That when their conscious  
fingers cease -  
Some seek in Art - the Art of Peace -

**30** The Poets light but Lamps -  
Themselves - go out -  
The Wicks they stimulate -  
If vital Light

Inhere as do the Suns -  
Each Age a Lens  
Disseminating their  
Circumference -

**31** I would not paint - a picture  
I'd rather be the One  
Its bright impossibility  
To dwell - delicious - on -  
And wonder how the fingers feel

Whose rare - celestial - stir -  
Evokes so sweet a Torment -  
Such sumptuous - Despair -  
I would not talk, like Cornets -  
I'd rather be the One  
Raised softly to the Ceilings -  
And out, and easy on -  
Through Villages of Ether -  
Myself endued Balloon  
By but a lip of Metal -  
The pier to my Pontoon -  
Nor would I be a Poet -  
It's finer - own the Ear -  
Enamored - impotent - content -  
The License to revere,  
A privilege so awful  
What would the Dower be,  
Had I the Art to stun myself  
With Bolts of Melody!

**32** To pile like Thunder to its close  
Then crumble grand away  
While Everything created hid  
This - would be Poetry -  
Or Love - the two coeval come -  
We both and neither prove -

Experience either and consume -  
For None see God and live -

**33** Me - come! My dazzled face  
In such a shining place!  
Me - hear! My foreign Ear  
The sounds of Welcome - there!

The Saints forget  
Our bashful feet -

My Holiday, shall be  
That They - remember me -  
My Paradise - the fame  
That They - pronounce my name -

## Rosalind Rees

Known and admired by musicians for her wide range of repertoire, Rosalind Rees is considered a "composer's singer" with over 100 premieres and dedications from such luminaries as William Schuman, Elliott Carter, Louise Talma, Ned Rorem, and husband Gregg Smith. Recently released recordings featuring Ms. Rees include: *Hearing--32 Songs of Ned Rorem* (Premier); the premiere recording of *Orchestral Songs of Elliott Carter* (CRI); and *20th Century Voices in America: works of Cage, Carter, Schuman, Imbrie, Blumenfeld, Smith and Kolb* (Vox).

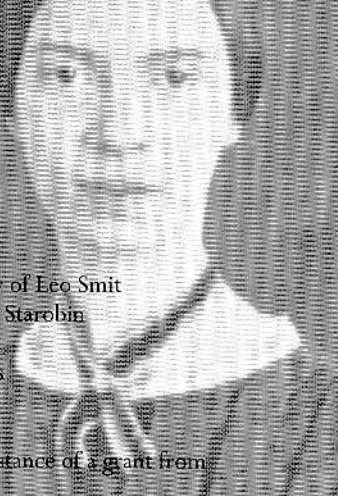
Rosalind Rees first met Leo Smit in 1971. A long time friend of husband Gregg and a composer often featured by the Gregg Smith Singers, Leo was the newly married Smith's first dinner guest! Soon afterwards Roz and Leo began working together and over the years they have performed numerous concerts and made several recordings together. In October of 1995 they performed Smit's *Childe Emilie* and *The Celestial Thrush* at the Jones Library in Amherst, Massachusetts--three blocks from the Dickinson house. In the fall of 1996 Ms. Rees and Leo Smit appeared at Queens College, in Charlotte, North Carolina for a residency on Emily Dickinson. There, they premiered the third cycle heard on this recording--*The White Diadem*.

## Leo Smit

I was born in Philadelphia in 1921 and lived over a Chinese laundry; migrated first to Cincinnati, following my father, violinist with Fritz Reiner; to Moscow at the age of eight with my mother, where I scholarshiped with Dmitri Kabalevsky (who taught me *adagio*); then via Curtis Institute scholarship to New York City and Isabella Vengerova (who taught me *legato*) and José Iturbi (who taught me *forte*); Nicolas Nabokov, who taught me music and ordered my first composition (father now with Arturo Toscanini at NBC); Igor Stravinsky, who rehearsed me as pianist at age 15 in three of his ballets for George Balanchine's American Ballet; and Aaron Copland, who freed my last lingering musical inhibitions, and who conducted my *Capriccio for String Orchestra* so beautifully one lovely afternoon at the Ojai Festival.

Then Valerie Bettis, who danced to my music (*Virginia Sampler, Yerma*), lifting it off the ground; an afternoon with Béla Bartók, when I played Schumann, Debussy and his *Mikrokosmos*, and he brought me a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice with a rare smile; the golden years in Rome with the high-spirited companionship of Alexei Haieff, Harold Shapero and Lukas Foss; later in California, drawn into the galactic mind of Fred Hoyle, who guided me down the Grand Canyon ('Even Bartók cannot compete with Nature's stridency', I overheard him saying to the Canyon) and who taught me some of the facts of matter in a great and subtle masterpiece, the Universe; the profound poets, Theodore Roethke (who asked me for the "poop" on Mozart), W.H. Auden (who had the "poop" on Mozart), and Anthony Hecht (who loved the "poop" on Mozart); Frank Brown, whose vast knowledge and dramatic gifts brought the ancient Roman world to life; Paul Pascal, who translated amorous Ovid and bawdy Martial for my private pleasure, and Naomi Pascal, who taught me how to write English (I already knew how not to); the painters Jennings Tofel, who gave me drawing lessons when I was five, Seymour Drumlevitch and Harriet Greif, who allowed me to watch how pictures are painstakingly made, and Eugene Berman, who mentally drew me as a pianist-centaur (did he know that Liszt had been so described?); Leonard Bernstein, who set a high-jump record while conducting the climax of my *Second Symphony*; Mary Goodwin and her friends from the Taos pueblo--singing, dancing and drumming under the New Mexican night sky filled with infinity of cold, clear stars; and Emily Dickinson, who has been running my life for the past ten years and inspiring me to write songs to eighty-three of her stupendous poems.

--April, 1999



**Producers:** Becky and David Starobin  
**Engineer:** David Merrill  
**Mastering Engineer:** Adam Abeshouse  
**Editor:** Silas Brown  
**Notes:** Leo Smit

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Front cover photo of Emily Dickinson courtesy of Leo Smit

Photo of Rosalind Rees and Leo Smit by Becky Starobin

**Piano:** Yamaha CFIII S Concert Grand Piano

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