



Stephen Douglas Burton



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STEPHEN DOUGLAS BURTON
SYMPHONY NO. 2 "ARIEL"

Diane Curry, mezzo-soprano · Stephen Dickson, baritone
Syracuse Symphony Orchestra · Christopher Keene, conductor

Stephen Douglas Burton

(b. 1943)

Symphony No. 2 "Ariel" (51:25)

- 1) I. Ariel – The Night Dances (11:33)
(Ms. Curry)
- 2) II. Contusion – Fever 103° (9:09)
(Mr. Dickson)
- 3) III. Paralytic (6:00)
(Ms. Curry)
- 4) IV. Daddy (10:59)
(Mr. Dickson)
- 5) V. The Moon And The Yew Tree (13:42)
(Ms. Curry, Mr. Dickson)

Diane Curry, mezzo-soprano; Stephen Dickson, baritone
Syracuse Symphony Orchestra; Christopher Keene, conductor

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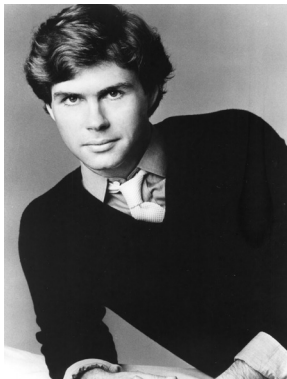
Executive Producers: Becky and David Starobin

Symphony No. 2 "Ariel" was recorded in April, 1978 in Syracuse, NY. The recording was released on an LP by Peters International. Bridge Records is pleased to re-release the re-mastered recording by arrangement with the owner of the recording, its producer, Henry Fogel. Bridge wishes to thank Mr. Fogel for his dedication to and support of this recording.

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Permission to re-print the poems of Sylvia Plath was unavailable at press time. The poems are currently available online at <http://www.americanpoems.com/poets/sylviaplath>

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Stephen Dickson (1951-1991), was born in Oklahoma City, and performed at age 21 in a minor role at the Santa Fe Opera. His professional debut was in 1976 when he sang *Albert Herring* with the St. Louis Opera Theater. He made his Metropolitan Opera debut in 1981 singing Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*; sang Figaro in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with the Houston Grand Opera; Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, Prince Paul in *La Grand Duchesse de Gerolstein*, and Nino Rota's *The Italian Straw Hat* at Santa Fe and made his New York City

Opera debut as Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, returning as Grieg in *Song of Norway*, and Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*. He also made appearances at Covent Garden, Bayreuth, the Bavarian State Opera, and many other European opera houses. Weeks before Stephen Burton's "Ariel" Symphony was to be premiered by the National Symphony the scheduled baritone withdrew. Conductor Antal Dorati asked the composer to audition and engage a singer. Mr. Burton relates that "after auditioning a number of baritones, I despaired of finding one who combined the technical expertise, the ability to learn quickly and accurately, and, most of all, the command of a wide range of vocal color and timbre. The voice I had in mind when writing the piece was Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, one of a kind. When someone suggested I hear the 24-year old Stephen Dickson, who had just begun his career, I found my Dieskau and engaged him immediately."

Notes by Henry Fogel

Stephen Douglas Burton was born in Whittier, California, on February 24, 1943, and began composing when he was twelve. His first major performance was when the Berlin Philharmonic performed his *Ode to a Nightingale* in 1963. In addition to this recording of his Second Symphony, *Ariel*, which was made in 1978 immediately following the work's New York premiere at Carnegie Hall, his Third Symphony, *Songs of Tulpehocken*, was recorded by the Louisville Orchestra with Burton conducting and tenor soloist Kenneth Riegel. His opera, *The Duchess of Malfi*, was premiered at Wolf Trap in 1978 to triumphal reviews.

Burton has composed in many genres, but at the core of much of his writing is the human voice, be it songs for voice and piano, choral works, opera, or music for voice and orchestra. Joseph McClellan, writing in the *Washington Post* after the premiere of *The Duchess of Malfi*, said: "It is a rare experience to sit front and center at the world premiere of an opera, though I feel privileged to have done so seven times in my career. Never before Wolf Trap, however, have I experienced such total involvement from the assembled audience, and never such a consummate thrill as a new creation was laid out before chillingly critical ears...It seems very safe to project that it will be heard again, not just because it is new, but because it is very, very good."

Burton's music for voice is so successful because fundamental to his musical belief is that music *sings*. During the 1970s and 80s this was not the norm for new symphonic music, but Burton thinks melodically as well as harmonically. He is also a masterly orchestrator, and the combination of a strong melodic line and the great variety of color in his orchestral palette is unique, and riveting to audiences. He happily admits to being a “romantic,” but he certainly does not avoid newer techniques and devices in his scores. But those devices are at the service of expressiveness.

Symphony No. 2 “Ariel” was a Bicentennial commission by the National Symphony Orchestra, and was first performed by them under Antal Dorati. Christopher Keene and the Syracuse Symphony gave it its second performance in December, 1977. It was so successful with critics and audience that Keene performed it in the Orchestra's first-ever concert in Carnegie Hall the following April. This recording was produced in Syracuse a few days after the New York performance. Such was the performers' enthusiasm for the project that despite the complexity of the long score, the Orchestra completed the recording in one three-hour-and-fifteen minute session! Those familiar with the process of recording will know how rare that is for a work of this size and nature.

In describing *Ariel* Burton has said: “For some time I had envisioned a work for voice and orchestra on the scale of Mahler which would



Diane Curry is a native of West Virginia, studied at the Westminster Choir College and made her professional debut with the Philadelphia Lyric Opera. Performances include the Deutsche Oper Berlin as Fricka in *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, Azucena in *Il Trovatore*, and a 1987 tour of Japan as Fricka in the Ring Cycle and appearances with the Hamburg State Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Seattle Opera, and the New York City Opera, where she sang

Dido and Aeneas, Neriz in *Medea*, Cornelia in *Giulio Cesare*, Ottavia in *L'Incarnazione di Poppea*, Geneviève in *Pelléas et Mélisande* and Mrs. Jones in Kurt Weill's *Street Scene* (broadcast on PBS). She has made appearances with dozens of other companies, including Hamburg State Opera, Florence, Palermo, Spoleto Festival, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the Seattle Opera. She made her debut at the Metropolitan Opera in 1987 as the Nurse in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and also appeared there in *Boris Godunov*, *Lulu*, *War and Peace*, and *Jenufa*. She has performed with many orchestras, including the Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, and the National Symphony. Her discography includes the Verdi *Requiem* with Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony and Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*.



Christopher Keene (1946-1995) General Director of the New York City Opera. After his early death at 48, Peter G. Davis wrote in the *New York Times*, "Keene is one of the few authentic cultural heroes New York has left, thanks to his many acts of courage, personal as well as artistic." Conducting opera at Berkeley while a student and organizing his own performances, by 20 he was assistant

conductor of the San Francisco Opera, the youngest conductor to debut at the Metropolitan Opera House at 25, and conductor at New York City Opera at 23. In his 30's, Keene was Music Director of the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, founded the Long Island Philharmonic, and directed three festivals (Spoleto, Spoleto USA and ArtPark). In his 26-year association with the New York City Opera, Keene conducted numerous premieres, wrote librettos and translations and was a great champion of American music. James E. Oestereich in the *New York Times* wrote that Keene "was destined to be forever identified with his first love, opera, and the company for which he worked for more than half his life."

consummate development of an entirely new style in my music, and towards which it has been tending for many years, a style which would combine the tonality and forms of the past with the techniques of the twentieth century." After a long search for a text, the last book of poetry by Sylvia Plath was suggested by John Edwards, General Manager of the Chicago Symphony. It immediately struck a responsive chord and Burton composed *Ariel* at a feverish pitch in 1974, although a year passed before he completed the orchestration. The poem, *Ariel*, was written just five months before Plath's eventual suicide. "Ariel" was the name of the horse Plath rode at a riding school in south Devon. Ted Hughes, Plath's husband, has commented: "Ariel was the name of the horse on which she went riding weekly. Long before, while she was a student at Cambridge (England), she went riding with an American friend out towards Grantchester. Her horse bolted, the stirrups fell off, and she came all the way home to the stables, about two miles, at full gallop, hanging around the horse's neck."

The Symphony is in five movements. The first combines two poems, "Ariel" and "The Night Dances" and is set for mezzo-soprano. The second also combines two poems, "Contusion" and "Fever 103," sung by the baritone. The third movement, the astonishingly evocative "Paralytic" (in which the music mimics the horribly mechanical breathing of an iron

lung), is again for the mezzo, and the fourth movement, for the baritone, sets one of Plath's most famous poems, "Daddy." The finale, "The Moon and the Yew Tree," employs both singers, and takes the form of a huge passacaglia.

Burton originally wrote the work to be sung by low voice, male or female, or by male and female voices in alternation. The original performance was sung entirely by baritone Stephen Dickson. When asked why he chose a male voice to sing any of the poems of Plath, a symbol of feminine liberation, Burton says that first of all it is the voice he heard in the music as he conceived it. Furthermore, he points out that this also helps to "translate into music this universal poetry which transcends the boundaries of sex, as it does, indeed, of life and death."



Stephen Douglas Burton was born in Whittier, California in 1943. His first major performance was a setting of Keats' "*Ode to a Nightingale*" which he had written at age 19 after study at Oberlin Conservatory and the Mozarteum in Salzburg. The "*Ode*" was performed on the Berlin Music Festival by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in 1963. The soloist was Sylvia Brigham, the conductor Hans Werner Henze. While still in his 20's, his First Symphony was performed by the Berlin Radio Orchestra (SFB), the National Orchestra of France (ORTF), and the Israel Philharmonic under Sir Georg Solti who also performed it with the Chicago Symphony. Other performances followed with the National Symphony under Antal Dorati who commissioned and premiered "*Ariel*," Symphony No. 2, based on poems of Sylvia Plath. Burton's opera "*The Duchess of Malfi*" was premiered at Wolf Trap in 1978, conducted by Christopher Keene, also the librettist, and was performed at ArtPark in 1979 with Burton stage directing. National Public Radio, who broadcast the opera, called it "America's finest opera." The recipient of many awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship, Burton was given a lifetime appointment as the endowed Heritage Chair in Music at George Mason University. Retired, he lives with his wife of 50 years, Louise, in the Berkshires.

