

OPERA NEWS ONLINE

RECORDINGS
Choral and Song
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KLINE: JOHN THE REVELATOR

With Lionheart, ETHEL. No texts. Cantaloupe CA21047



Phil Kline is one of the most interesting composers currently active in the New York City area. Early on, Kline made a name for himself through his annual extravaganza, *Unsilent Night*, in which holiday music is performed over multiple boom boxes. Subsequently, he was a key figure in the Knitting Factory's *Alternative Schubertiade*, in which Kline and several other leading lights of New York's "Downtown" scene composed works inspired by those of Franz Schubert. A highly prolific artist, Kline has created a vast canon of works for everything from electronics to symphony orchestras.

John the Revelator served as the season opener for WNYC's 2006–07 concert series in the World Financial Center's Winter Garden. A work of forty-five minutes' duration, it is a setting of the Latin Mass with several accompanying Propers and two instrumental meditations. The title comes from a song by blues legend Blind Willie Johnson. However, this is not to imply that the work is a "Blues Mass." Although Kline makes reference to traditional blues, shape-note hymns and other indigenous American music genres, *John the Revelator* is a unique and original work, written in a language that is quite personal and Kline's own. This language not only incorporates elements from American traditional music but manifests traces of medieval, Renaissance and modernist styles. It is welcoming music that will appeal to a range of listeners, from the most adventurous to those who do not particularly like classical music.

The texts for the Propers in *John the Revelator* are taken from a variety of sources, including the Old Testament, shape-note hymnody, Samuel Beckett and David Shapiro. *John the Revelator* hints in part at the tragedy of the World Trade Center attack of 2001. This aspect comes across most clearly in Shapiro's texts and in the pleading, generally sober character of the work. While not a somber work, *John the Revelator* is decidedly an earnest one. A particular musical highpoint in the work is achieved in *Dark was the Night*, a vocalise for the singers and instrumentalists, inspired by — but again not imitative of — a wordless blues moan of the same title, again by Blind Willie Johnson.

This recording features the performers for whom it was written — Lionheart, the six-voice ensemble best known for its glowing interpretations of organum and Renaissance music, and ETHEL, the musically adventurous string quartet. Kline himself makes a cameo appearance on the recording, adding subtle harmonic reinforcement on organ to the Credo movement. As was true at the world premiere, these performers produce a performance of great power and beauty. Cantaloupe Music is to be commended for producing this superb recording of one of the most essential works to come out of New York in the past decade. □

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