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to Music, and a Commentary on the Songs

Allen Ginsberg

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COMMENTARY

ALLEN GINSBERG

To Young or Old Listeners: Setting Blake's *SONGS* to Music,
and a Commentary on the *SONGS*

The songs were first composed on tape recorder, improvised on pump organ in farmhouse upstate N. Y. in two nights after returning from Democratic Convention 1968 Tear Gas Chicago. These are half the *Songs of Innocence & Experience* now finished to music; the rest will be completely tuned in another year.

Inspiration began 21 years, half my life ago, living in Harlem, in mind's outer ear I heard Blake's voice pronounce *The Sun Flower* and *The Sick Rose* (and the *Little Girl Lost*) and experienced an illumination of eternal Consciousness, my own heart identical with the ancient heart of the Universe.

It's taken 2 decades of vision fame, friends' deaths & Apocalyptic history for me to materialize the spiritual illumination received thru these poems, without systematic study of Blake's life & only fragmentary study of later works. I *imagined* this music after 20 summers musings over the rhythms.

William Blake (1757-1827), engraved his own picture plates, hand colored, & printed *Songs of Innocence & Experience* (1789-1794), only a couple dozen copies. Thus every word, every picture & every print of the book he made in his life bore the impress of his own intelligent body; there was no robot mechanical repetition in any copy. The title *Songs of Innocence & Experience* is literal: Blake used to sing them unaccompanied at his friends' houses.

The purpose in putting them to music was to articulate the significance of each holy & magic syllable of his poems; as if each syllable had intention. These are perfect verses, with no noise lost or extra accents for nothing. I tried to hear meanings of each line spoken intentionally & interestedly, & follow natural voice tones up or down according to different emphases and emotions vocalized as in daily intimate speech: I drew the latent tunes, up or down, out of talk-tones suggested by each syllable spoken with normal feeling.

Piping
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Thus the flute pipes notes down from the hill into the deep valley floor with accurate melody.

Since a physiologic ecstatic experience had been catalysed in my body by the physical arrangement of words in so small a poem as *Ah! Sun Flower*, I determined long ago to think of poetry as a kind of machine that had a specific effect when planted inside

a human body, an arrangement of picture mental associations that vibrated on the mind bank network; and an arrangement of related sounds & physical mouth movements that altered the habit functions of the neural network. XX century French poet Artaud noted that certain sound vibrations, certain rhythmic frequencies of music or voice, might alter molecular patterns in the nervous system.

I had been led to hear by ear individual syllables and their spoken tonal intention by a whole American poetic tradition begun at turn of century with Pound who specified that for any prosody (measure of poetry rhythm) adequate to our real speech, the poet should train his ear "pay attention to the tone leading of vowels" instead of the tripping of stressed accents--i.e. hear the musical Aum vowel alterations of note & rhythm pattern, and not get hung up on voiced monotone stressed da dit da dit da dit da dits--like, "Thou too sail on O Ship of State." W. C. Williams, Pound's friend, taught attention to raw spoken talk to learn the "for real" rhythms of American poetry. Later Basil Bunting sharpened my attention to vowels as solid objects in a verse line.

Ma Rainey, Pound, Dylan, Beatles, Ray Charles, Ed Sanders & other singers have returned language poesy to Minstrelsy. As new generations understand & decipher poetical verses for gnostic-psychedelic flashes & practical Artistic messages, I hope that musical articulation of Blake's poetry will be heard by the Pop Rock Music Mass Media Electronic Illumination Democratic Ear and provide an Eternal Poesy standard by which to measure sublimity & sincerity in contemporary masters such as Bob Dylan, encouraging all souls to trust their own genius Inspiration.

For the soul of the Planet is Wakening, the time of Dissolution of Material Forms is here, our generation's trapped in Imperial Satanic Cities & Nations, & only the prophetic priestly consciousness of the Bard--Blake, Whitman or our own new selves--can Steady our gaze into the Fiery eyes of the Tygers of the Wrath to Come.

SONGS OF INNOCENCE

Introduction: Passing thru the Natural World, piping unconscious music, Poet glimpses Eternal Vision, child spirit on a cloud, his own Imagination, that demands he play intuitive feeling music to God, who weeps to hear Man-Poet's answer come true. Mind-Child weeps to find it's possible to show God thru language. Vision vanishes leaving instructions for Poet to lay inspiration out in words to entrance later generations. ("Sentient Beings are Numberless, I vow to save them all" is the first of 4 Buddhist vows.) Poet takes simple materials near his body, hollow reed, & messes up the clear water to make ink & writes it down forever.

The Shepherd: The first song "Every child may joy to hear" utters how sweet it is to do nothing but sit in natural pasture following the flock of mind thoughts that pass thru his brain same as lamb and ewe calling each other knowing a supreme Consciousness aware of everyone is in Everyone.

The Ecchoing Green: But all natural sunrise bells are an apparition on green symmetrical pastures of matter grass & hills in an illusionary echo world. The old folks bodies get tired & wither under older trees & they sit watching Baby games thru eyes that also saw themselves dance play & copulate & friends vanish in graves. Sun descends, we even get tired of joy & want to sleep, a shadow passes over the illusion of Garden & City, consciousness dims & we forget the green ecchoing Field forever as it fades.

The Lamb: Who are we here? What tender being gave us ourselves? Lamb's wool or

soft sexual human skin, voices calling & murmuring our desires to each other till the whole world lights up with our feeling. Who is our Love? Our selves are the same as the Lamb or Christ or Lords that desired to become living meat spirit, to Cry & die, living in the strange material world an eternal minute. The Piper-Poet-Lamb-Child shepherd soul knows & tells fellows who forgot to bless themselves.

The Little Black Boy: Suffering! Race experience burning into the skin & blackening it with the sun-fires of life. White Light Eternal Being, the Abyss of Light, the Void is identical to our own souls: the English child looks "white as an Angel" which he is (or will be when he realizes his soul). "And I am black, but O! my soul is white" is a racist masochistic tearful sentiment from the 18th century Slave Days to modern political eyes: Gnostic (secret knowledge of the Abyss of Light) Vision transforms the understanding, we realize the Bodhisattva's singing to the inexperienced Honkey Material Soul, saying that all matter-body is a cloud of Ignorance. "And we are put on earth a little space that we may bear the beams of love." And when the cloud-bodies vanish we return to our identical Primeval Radiance. Matter itself is a shield against this brightness too vast for human body. ("Life, like a dome of many-colored Glass stains the white radiance of Eternity until death tramples it to fragments. . . ." wrote Shelley who like Blake read Gnostic texts in translation by Thomas Taylor the Platonist. Taylor also translated Pythagoras' line "Whatever we see when awake, is Death; and when asleep, a Dream.") The black boy or Jewish boy trembling rejected by the English Child, his homosexual love rejected by the master race, realizes the English Child's white because his body hasn't yet been blasted by the deep heat of God's love, white is inexperience; & the only place the little Black boy will be fully understood is when their material bodies fall away transparent & they are reunited in the Place of Death.

The Blossom: Sparrow into Blossom: Yang & Yin, Phallus & Vagina, Tantric Lingam & Yoni, Form and Emptiness, Matter & Void, Samsara & Nirvana, Maya and Sunyatta, Aeon & Abyss of Light, Life into Death, are incarnated in the emotional softness of the robin sobbing under green leaves in flower's bosom. Straight sex comes identical with metaphysical Mystery in a little almost unnoticeable ditty in Blake's book.

The Chimney Sweeper: "You know the words by heart, huh?" Peter Orlovsky's voice asks. And the sorrowful horror of child slavery begins tale weeping--18th century London XX century New York, the same skulls sitting at tables reading papers headlining massacre slavery. The material universe so debased, city greed and poverty so unbearable the imagination only breaks out thru the skull in Death--and then comes vision of the Heaven Desire we can imagine once we do accept our soul feelings as more real than the material fix we have been trapped in. Blake was a friend of Tom Paine the Revolutionary & tipped Paine off that the fuzz had a warrant for his arrest in London 1792--Paine skipped the country from Dover across the English Channel to France a couple of hours before the Police arrived. The Chimney Sweeping, infant slavery to society, is also interpreted here as faithful Bodhisattvic work of social revolution--"So if all do their duty they need not fear harm." The vision of angels with bright keys and myriad elevated voice notes of shiny children washing in tearful rivers reminds us of Reality we all desired forever, and always will, and will achieve forever in life or Death, no matter what a cold dark Capitalist/police-state Satanic morning we are born into with bodies.

The Little Boy Lost: Authority, the State, the Mortal Father, all vanish as our Consciousness outgrows Habit & Conditioning (thru Time, Acid, Sex or Vision) & the soul is left alone: to weep, and thus thru intuitive Feeling, Disperse "the Vapors" of Mortal Boring Gloom.

The Little Boy Found: So the soul boy follows wandering imagination, the mind's heart crying tears, & the great Authority (Great as shroudy Death) appears & leads him to Mother Nature Life. She also thought he was lost, they only found each other thru his emotional tears, & she'd wept for him all along too.

Laughing Song: Water & trees are alive, the great grassy hill rocks with laughter, spring spreads green smile in meadows; all illusion material universe giggles in the void, girls young tongues show noises. Birds are only painted sentient, laughing theosophically to themselves in the valley of the shadow. No harm in Maya Dream Life, merry Nuts! Blake's colored picture shows a table at the wood's edge with fruits, nuts, girls & a young man in red skin-tight suit lifting cup dancing laughing facing the trees. The rythmic Paradigm of the laughing song is echoed verse by verse with Ha Ha He's in second chorus making mirror image of universe in pure laughter receding into infinity.

Holy Thursday: Multitudes of sentient children in London 18th century like tender insects waving their hands and singing in the Domed Mortal Universe of St. Paul's Cathedral are the only angels visible in this Eternity. Even the old archons tending them are exquisite. Blake's not being sardonic, he's seeing the central holiness of multitudinous being: "Everyone's an angel": *then cherish pity lest you drive an angel from your door.* The verses can only be read naturally if they syncopate Thames Waters & Wise Guardians--spaced out Orlovsky singing against Don Cherry on Flute and trumpet Zapped the tune up to ecstatic joy instead of a tender lamblike chorus it might also supposed to be.

Night: Most mellow address to Night, sleep, Death & Heavenly Peace. Little visions of lovely earth in the mind's eye vanishing, farewell to the physical fields & woods. And when the break with life comes, Death's Terror's transformed to Eternal peacefulness: "And there the lion's ruddy eyes/Shall slow with tears of gold." Realizing that the Lion Ego abandons his selfhood & lies down with the Lamb to die--all pain Fear and Unsatisfied Desire radiating out of head Consciousness washed away thru experience of the Body & Dissolution of the body--pure feeling consciousness is left eternal shining thru all living Being, "Golden Emptiness" said dead Kerouac same as "Abyss of Light."

SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

Introduction: Prophecies, Futurecies! Great claim of the Bard, to call directly to the Soul hidden in the world, obscured & forgot weeping sunk in material thickness, old Gnostic tune. Ecological intuition, the Holy Word walked among the Ancient Trees. Meanwhile man Prisoned in the starry Universe tries to destroy this planet-prison with Electrical Machines and pollutes the wat'ry floor with DDT Detergents. Blake calls thru civilization to Earth Man to return to knowledge of his own soul & live in place with the Material Universe as his to control only till Death's daybreake.

Nurse's Song: The deepest voice of Experience tells the tale of vanishing bodies and Time--our Guardian says innocent play ignores sexual glory till too late--the Nurse's face turns green & pale remembering the body love & eye soul she refused to realize as a child; and now old in winter & night she is afraid to show her still childlike Desire's naked glory because her body ages near death & it becomes repulsive to her.

The Sick Rose: English Poetry is pure Mantra here as penetrant & capable of causing Transcendental Knowledge as any Hindu Hare Krishna or Hari Om Namō Shivaye.

What's the Rose? Genital Flowers? Body Life? God? What's the Worm? Cancer Syphilis? Mind Time? Death? Or If the Rose is Eternal God, the worm may be human consciousness. If the Rose is all Life itself what dark Secret Love eats at our Being? Does the Universe Die? Is God Death?

Ah! Sun Flower: The Sun Flower, our own Soul Desire, tho root-trapped in earth turns to the source of Desire, the Sun of Death, "where the travellers journey is done." Youth's and Virgin's desire are unsatisfied unsatisfiable mortal forms only not Immortal Union in the Golden Clime where the Sun goes at Night. The Sun flower, rooted in earth, alive, can only turn longingly to follow the sun's path beyond life itself.

The Garden of Love: Consciousness builds a Church of Fear in the body's Garden. Flowers of desire die, & lovers' graves appear in time; but Mind priests take Mad advantage by punishing & forbidding desire altogether while we're here in the garden.

London: The first modern Prophetic poem de-hypnotizing the city & exorcising the Money phantoms that "charter" or "own" space--time Garden plots, cover rivers & riversides of Thames (or Hudson) with Robot Mental smog Money Real Estate Usury Exploitation Law Possession Greed Cancer Stone-Metal Pollution & Spiritual & Physical Death Banks. Walk out in 17th century London or XX century Wall Street look directly in Man's eyes see Marks of weakness marks of woe--the direct imprint of anxiety visible on face masks of Folk caught in City Mental prisons which are concepts of Money gain & exploitation of other beings and nature. Slaves to Machinery! Matter Junkies with oil Burner Habits! Manhattos' Zombies, "In meine Heimat/Where the dead walked/and the living were made of cardboard." Brainwashed by Moloch & the CIA & the Mafia & Chase Bank, So they have destroyed Mother Nature a hundred miles around. And the hapless soldier's sigh runs in Blood down White House Walls. Boys sobbing in armies Berkeley to Vietnam! All Love turned financial commercial makes the Honeymoon car a Hearse of Desire. A death Lament for the Machine Nations filled with Satanic Mills.

The Human Abstract: The Gods made Nature free but Ego greeds grow weird false Universe trees in the human physical Brain. Hear it vibrating in your own & realize the dead mechanical universe is a mind trap Illusion created by your senses "To the Eyes of a Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself"--Blake in letter to Rev. Trusler.

To Tirzah: Blake stuck this poem in *Songs of Experience* ten years after the other poems were arranged--late wisdom, Gnostic-Kabalistic-Buddhist transcendental put-down of the entire phenomenal sensory universe as a mental Illusion mothered by Ruha, Tirzah, Sophia, Momma Nature Creatix Consciousness herself a shadow reflection of the Abyss of Light shuddering a second flashing on itself. In Beginning the Word (Sophia Mother Wisdom Knowledge Tirzah) flash-imagined all Aeons down to Jehova's Garden. The Serpent was the Caller of The Great Call, disguised messenger from the Abyss of Light, according to the Mandaean Gnostic* heresy suppressed around 313 A.D. Rome when Constantine Emperor (CIA) accepted Christ took over Religion & suppressed revolutionary metaphysical hip gnostic Illumination of the fake Authority of the Material Universe itself. The Roman State coopted religion at Council of Nicea & burned all Dissenting metaphysical doctrines. This established the Satanic State, presently headed by Richard Nixon, Jehovah in disguise forgetting to whom he is beholden, son of Elohim, Descendant of Ialdaboath, only a flash of Sophia's Consciousness, herself a flash of selfconsciousness in the Infinite Abysse of Light. The Shekinah was too great for the 7 cups the 7 Sephiroth, the seven Chakra centers of the human body, which shattered. Now the Rabbis are occupied giving the light back to God. We will return to the Abyss of Light. "It is raised a spiritual body."

*See *The Gnostic Religions*, by Dr. Hans Jonas, Beacon Paperback.

The Grey Monk: (This poem is separate, later than *Songs of Innocence & Experience*) On the Revolution, French then, American now, these fragments of Blake's thought returned to my mind in melodious form on a bus up Bayshore Freeway Los Gatos to San Francisco August 10, 1968 or thereabouts riding back from visit to wooden urned ashes of the body of Neal Cassidy old love friend & heroic American mind angel died in mid-life. "They never can work war's overthrow." He'd been imprisoned by the State 1959-61 several years for giving a free grass cigarette to the secret police, ruined off his railroad vocation and plunged into homeless psychedelic exploration thereafter till death. "Fayette Fayette thou'rt bought & sold, & sold is thy happy morrow," & other Blake verses remembered after touching Cassidy's ashes were the first music that occurred to me tuned to Blake's rhymes. "This hand," wrote in *Howl*, "Moloch whose fate is a cloud of Sexless Hydrogen." My brother is Leroi Jones; Thy father's sword was drawn in North Vietnam; The Panthers have armed themselves in steel to avenge the wrongs thy children Feel: But Vain the sword & vain the Bow, They never can work war's overthrow. Violent Vengeance perpetuates self-righteous Tyranny, and A sign is the Sword of An Angel King.

Allan Ginsberg
 Dec 14-15, 1969
 New York City - returned again
 from Chicago as defense witness,
 Conspiracy Trial.

DISCUSSION "With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought"

JOHN BEER: PETERHOUSE, CAMBRIDGE

A Reply to John Grant

In Part Two of his article on the Arlington Court picture (*Blake Newsletter*, 4 [August 1970], 12-25), John E. Grant devotes some time to my interpretation of the design in my *Blake's Visionary Universe*. I hope that his very dismissive remarks about my work will not deter the readers of the *Newsletter* from reading it and giving serious attention to my ideas.

In one instance, to be sure, he has spotted a mistake. When I read Keynes's article on the preliminary drawing for the Arlington Court picture, I was pleased to find that this, also, had in the past been described as possibly an illustration to Revelation 22:17. In memory, however, this ascription became conflated with the fact that another ascription ("The River of Oblivion") had actually been pencilled by someone on the back of the drawing itself. The point ought to have been picked up when I checked my references, but I missed it; I hope that it may be possible to correct it