

may not originally have had. Even more striking is his treatment of the goddess, Ereshkigal. He avoids the specification, "mother of the god Ninazu," and thus reduces the goddess to elemental "mother." There is some question why Ereshkigal should be described the way the Sumerian and Akkadian originals portray her, but Olson's interpretation makes it clear that *he* thinks the mother lying naked, her body uncovered, her breasts exposed to "you and the judges" is an image of erotic seduction—more like Inanna than her sister. Finally, Olson downplays the "outcry" of the nether world, with all its magical properties, and plays up instead an ambiguity in the original. Is Enkidu really to be seized "for what you have done/ for her"? The statement, never clarified, suggests a descent to the mother/mistress, a life/death goddess because of an action for/against her. The possibilities open up in the Olson version, and no attempt is made to reduce the ambiguities in his "transposition."

Whatever else Olson was doing in his "transpositions" of Sumerian poetry, he was listening for the utterance of man at the "origin," listening for a word of the earliest known poets and myth-makers, a word not yet split into *logos* and *muthos*. The transpositions are likely to strike the scholar and the critic as a little too close to the scholarly translations to be independent compositions, a little less flamboyant than the usual Olson offering. The perception is true, but the judgment is false to Olson's careful listening. Olson's poetry is for the most part highly idiosyncratic—not, indeed, an unusual case among contemporary poets. For Olson, though, the "subjectivism" of Western poetry from the Greeks to at least the beginning of the 20th Century was a major problem, and he proposed instead, "objectism."

Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects.³²

The very fidelity with which Olson keeps close to the Sumerian is evidence of his listening closely, his avoidance of "the lyrical interference of the individual as ego."

Charles Olson's reputation depends, for the most part, on his essay, "Projective Verse," and his long

³² "Projective Verse," *Selected Writings*, 24.

poem, *The Maximus Poems*. Sumerian and Akkadian allusions are many and important to these works, but they are not, of course, the only ancient and non-Western concerns in his works. Olson had a deep interest in Mayan culture, for example, and the Mayan materials were more accessible to him than Sumero-Akkadian materials. Because he does not speak of these matters with immediate reference to his personal life and to the political issues of the day, it is difficult to say how much personal and political causes help sustain the ancient, mythic images in his writing. Olson declined a political occupation after World War II. Certainly he believed that America in the post-war era had certain connections with a very ancient Sumerian civilization. Beyond the overcoming of the Greek "estrangement" by going beyond the Judeo-Christian and the Greco-Roman traditions, though, very specific causes are difficult to discern. It may come as a surprise, though, that the prototype of Maximus, the poet-hero of Olson's complex "long" poem, was Olson's "Bigmans." And the early "Bigmans" is a transposition of what Olson knew of that most sturdy of Sumero-Akkadian heroes, Gilgamesh.³³

APPENDIX

Musical Settings for Cuneiform Literature: A Discography.
J. M. Sasson

Dr. Maier's paper has focused on the effect that a recovered cuneiform literature had on a specific modern poet. To be sure other poets (e.g. A. R. Ammons, "Gilgamesh Was Very Lascivious," "Sumerian," etc.) and novelists (e.g. R. Lehrman, *Call Me Ishtar*) participated in this reshaping of ancient materials into contemporary visions. But it may not be amiss, in this context, to briefly append a listing of musical

³³ The Olson Archives files 566-79, "Bigmans," contain "Bigmans" I, II, and III. "Bigmans" (I) is an invocation, not directly from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Another "Bigmans" (on the verso of the typed sheet, "Bigmans II") is a transposition of the opening of the Akkadian epic. "Bigmans III"—otherwise known as "III The Brother"—is a transposition in different versions of Gilgamesh on the hunter and Enkidu, as the harlot is picked to seduce the wild man. The piece was left unfinished and is, in any case, pretty poor stuff. Olson's partly handwritten, partly typed notes to "Bigmans III" are more interesting. The manuscript is signed and dated August 24, 1950. As is usual with Olson's prose, the notes are difficult and digressive, but they make a point of the "single" and the "double" involved in the complex relationships of Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the harlot.

works, *available on disks*, wherein nineteenth- and twentieth-century composers imaginatively distilled the contents of Mesopotamian myths and epics and presented them either as extended compositions which fused words to music or as shorter, purely instrumental, pieces. This brief survey is but a sampling, and it does not interpret or assess the various attempts. Additionally, I have avoided speculating on the contexts which quickened musical interest in ancient literature. I have, however, included one or two bibliographical citations for those who would like to pursue the topic further. Compositions which depended on classical or biblical formulations regarding Assyria and Babylon (e.g. Handel's *Belshazzar* etc. . . .) are not included. The discography is American; but European equivalent is available. I would like here to thank Dr. Maier for permitting me to usurp a bit of space for this enterprise.

ISHTAR

Vincent D'Indy (1851–1931). D'Indy visited the British Museum in 1887 and was struck by Assyriological monuments that were then displayed: "Quel bel art et quel flagrant délit de vie et de vérité dans ces tableaux d'une civilisation qui valait bien la nôtre! . . . J'éprouve une impression bien plus grande et plus réellement artistique devant l'art assyrien du VIII^e siècle avant J.-C. que devant celui de Périclès. . . ." He composed *Ishtar, variations symphoniques, Op. 42* nine years later. This very complex series of variations purports to duplicate Ishtar's progressive stripping of clothings and ornaments as she reaches her sister's inner sanctum. D'Indy's work, about fifteen minutes in length, reverses the usual approach to thematic variations, and actually presents the melody in its fullest form only when Ishtar is totally naked and defenseless (a musical technique which was later much favored by Sibelius).

Recording: EMI C 069-14043. Orchestre Philharmonique des Pays de la Loire; Pierre Dervaux, Cond.

Bibliography: L. Vallas, *Vincent D'Indy, II: La Maturité; la vieillesse (1886–1931)*. 1950. 236–41. [Quotation is from 238, n. 1.]

Bohuslav Martinů. (1890–1954). The Czech composer wrote *Istar* (H. 130) in Prague during 1918–21 and added "The Dance of Priestesses" while in Paris in 1923. The ballet, in three acts and five scenes, was inspired by the Sumerian accounts regarding Dumuzi and Inanna, freely expanded to include materials drawn from *Ishtar's Descent*, from *Gilgamesh's* 6th tablet, and from Julius Zeyer's mystical imagination. The first act told of Tammuz's capture by Irkalla, the evil (sic) goddess of the Underworld; the second of Ishtar's arrival before her sister and her recovery of her dead lover. The last act finds Ishtar and Tammuz emerging into a world which progressively warms up and regains happiness. The

gods, in their joy, eternalize the pair and they ascend to the highest heaven. The score, about two hours in duration, is for a very large orchestra, but Martinů, then strongly under French musical influence, often achieves impressionistic settings. The added 'Dance of Priestesses' includes a woman's chorus that is reminiscent of Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe*. Recording: (Selections) Supraphon 1 10 1634. Brno State Philharmonic Orchestra; Jiří Waldhans, Cond. N. B. Orchestral suites based on *Istar* (arranged by B. Bartoš) are sometimes individually recorded.

Bibliography: H. Heilbreich, *Bohuslav Martinů*. 1968. 324–6. B. Large, *Martinů*. 1975. 26–7.

GILGAMESH

Bohuslav Martinů. In 1954 Martinů was in Nice. By the end of the year, upon finishing a cantata about Christ's passion, *Mount of Three Lights*, he immediately turned to composing the Oratorio, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (H. 351) and used Campbell Thompson's translation. With a German libretto by A. H. Eichmann, *Gilgamesh* lasts about an hour and is scored for largish orchestra, chorus, soloists, narrator, and speaker. Part I, derived from Tablet 1 and 2, introduces Gilgamesh, a lonely king for whose benefits the gods produce Enkidu. After his own *éducation sentimentale*, Enkidu challenges and befriends Gilgamesh. Part II focuses on Gilgamesh's reaction to Enkidu's death (Tablets 7, 8, 10) and on his awareness of human mortality. Part III, loosely based on tablet 12, contains Gilgamesh's 'invocation,' his meeting with Enkidu's ghost, and his multiple inquiries which are met by detached responses. The oratorio ends with Gilgamesh never quite learning anything beyond what he already knew; a rather startling philosophical development from Martinů's previous involvement with Near Eastern literature (see above). It is worth noting, perhaps, that Martinů's imagination invests the 12th tablet with more legitimacy than does the Assyriologist's.

Recording: Supraphon 1 12 1808. (Sung in Czech). Czech Philharmonic Chorus; Prague Symphony Orchestra, Jiří Bělohávek, cond.

Bibliography: Halbreich *ibid.*, 279–82; Large, *ibid.*, 110–1. See also the informative remarks added to the recording.

Augustyn Bloch (1929– Grudziądz, Poland). Written in 1968, the ballet-pantomime *Gilgamesz* has been recorded only in its concert version, and that is what I report on. The piece, about twenty-five minutes long, is inspired by the Akkadian epic. The author contends that its sections rejoice over happiness, exult over power, and lament over death. A chorus punctuates the orchestral music with quasi-Gregorian chants. The score, however, is often striking since it eschews violins, oboes and horns, in favor of saxophones and percussion.

Recording: Musa SX 1208. Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir, Andrzej Markowski, cons.

Bibliography. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. (s.v.)

Per Nørgård (1932–, Gentofte, Denmark). *Gilgamesh, Opera in Six Days and Seven Nights* was composed in 1971–72. As of this writing, the release of this opera had just been announced, and I have not had access to it. Nørgård's interest in Mesopotamian culture goes back at least to 1966 when his oratorio, *Babel* (for clown, rock singer, cabaret singer, chorus and small orchestra) was produced.

Recording: Denmark-DMA 025-6. Members of the Swedish Radio Orchestra, Tamas Veto, cond.

Bibliography: *The New Grove Dictionary* . . . , s.v. [The Swedish journal, *Nutida musik* 17 (1973–4), 5ff. has devoted a whole issue to *Gilgamesh*].

THE SEVEN (EVIL) GODS

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953). Having just completed his *Classical Symphony*, Prokofiev decided to compose “something cosmic” to parallel the momentous events of the summer of 1917: “The revolutionary events that were shaking Russia penetrated my subconscious and clamored for expression. I did not know how to do this, and my mind, paradoxically, turned to ancient themes. The fact that thoughts and emotions of those remote times had survived for many thousands of years staggered my imagination.”

Once more (cf., *Songs*, Op. 9, 23), Prokofiev turned to the poetry of the “Decadent Symbolist” K. D. Bal'mont (1867–1943), and chose the last's resetting of a “Chaldean Invocation engraved in ancient Assyro-Babylonian cuneiform on the walls of an Akkadian temple” (“In the deep abyss/Their number is seven;/ In the Azure sky,/Seven, they are seven” From *Voices of Antiquity*. 1908.) Prokofiev shortened the poem, harped on the number seven, and added a quatrain which was certainly meant to comment on contemporary events, although it is still a matter of debate whether Prokofiev sought thusly to exorcize the Russian Revolution or the German advances toward Petrograd.

The score is for a piece that, pointedly enough, lasts seven minutes. It has a highly expressionistic series of thunderous *tutti* alternating with deafening silences. Shrill piccolos, shrieking choruses, beating drums, and bleatting woodwinds evoke slaughter and plead laments. Greeted as an example of bourgeois decadence, it was not performed in Russia until the late '60s.

Recording: Quintessence PMC 7196. Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, cond.

Bibliography: I. V. Nestyev, *Prokofiev*. 1960. 149–54. [Quotation from 151, note.] On Bal'mont, E. Lo Gatto, *Histoire de la littérature Russe*, 1965. 629–32.

ENUMA ELISH

Vladimir Ussachevsky (1911– Manchuria; US citizen). Ussachevsky works in two areas of music, choral, where he is influenced by Russian liturgical music, and electronic, where he displays a predilection for transforming pre-existing material. In 1959 he took part in the founding of “Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center.” *Creation-Prologue*, composed in 1960–61, is an eight minute piece recorded at a concert where other compositions, each remarkably different in texture and invention, found first presentation. I quote from the record's jacket:

The work begins in Akkadian, the language of Babylon, implying the chaotic state but giving no description of it. The composer says: “I felt a need of interpolating some such description from another ancient source, and thus the opening lines of [Ovid's] *Metamorphoses*, rendered in Latin, are inserted, or musically speaking superimposed on *Enuma Elish*. I sought to exploit the contrast between the archaic quality of Akkadian and the sound of classical Latin . . . the antiphonal manner of the performance assists in sharpening this contrast.” The composition is written for four full choruses and may be performed in various combinations of live performers and pre-recorded chorus, or simply as an entirely recorded work from two or four tape tracks. Antiphonal treatment of the material is frequently employed, and in several instances a dense dissonant texture is achieved by the use of multi-choral polyphony.

Recording: Columbia MS 6566. [I know of this recording thanks to A. Hurowitz and, especially, to Sh. Paul.] An apparently more elaborate version of this composition is listed in the *International Electronic Music discography*, 1979, under the composer's name as *Three Scenes from the Creation* (CRI, SD 297, a record not available to me).

Bibliography: *The New Grove Dictionary* . . . , s.v.; E. Schwartz, *Electronic Music: A Listener's Guide*, 1973, 55ff.