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PUJA (1997)

Program notes:

Puja is a setting of a 15th century Hindi devotional poem by the poet-saint Raidas. The word *puja* means “worship”, and refers to the act of Hindu devotion. This composition is an exploration of two popular genres of Indian music: Hindi film music and *bhajans* (Hindu devotional songs). “Bollywood”, the Hindi-language film industry centered in Bombay, produces many hundreds of films each year, most of which are musicals. The Bollywood combination of melodrama, slapstick, action, and romance is an unforgettable experience, and although my initial reaction to the music was somewhat negative, I soon became a zealous convert. The soundtracks to these films are fascinating studies in East/West musical exchange, featuring a *masala* of Indian folk drumming, European dance beats, *mariachi* trumpets, and countless other influences. *Bhajans* are hymn-like devotional songs, which often express a personal relationship with God not often found in modern Western religious music. The fine line between religion and popular culture in India is epitomized by the many recordings of *bhajans* set to tunes from secular films, but also in the films themselves, where gods make an occasional appearance. *Puja* was commissioned by the Dogs of Desire and was premiered in September 1997, with Alex Sweeton and Lisa Bielawa as the soloists, and David Alan Miller conducting.

Translation of Hindi text:

How does one escape? Repeat God’s name.

Lord, you are sandalwood, I am water;
Your fragrance pervades my body.

Lord, you are a cloud in the forest, I am a peacock,
Gazing at you like the chakora bird at the moon.

Lord, you are a lamp, I the wick,
Whose light burns day and night.

Lord, you are a pearl, I the thread,
Glistening brighter than gold.

Lord, you are the master, I the servant;
Such is the devotion of Raidas.

-Raidas (Translation by Susan Prill)

Instrumentation: Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, and [Amplified] Chamber Orchestra

Duration: 7 minutes

Premiere: September 1997, HVCC, Troy, NY, Alex Sweeton and Lisa Bielawa, soloists, with the Dogs of Desire under the direction of David Alan Miller