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THE IDEAS INSIDE (2007)

Program notes:

The Ideas Inside was written during a residency with Opera Omaha in February 2007. As part of a series of community events surrounding the world premiere of Anthony Davis' opera *Wakonda's Dream*, Opera Omaha held a poetry competition, open to the public, on the theme of "dreams". The four winning poems in each age category (elementary, middle school, high school, and adult) were given to me to set to music. Each of the poets treats the subject of dreams differently – playing off the dual meaning of dreams as either unconscious night-time thoughts or conscious goals and aspirations. "Dreaming" is youthful and ebullient, making reference to the transformative power of dreams. "People have told me" is more introspective and is a poem of remembrance which embraces dreams as those things we strive for as opposed to being just "meant for sleeping". "What does it mean?" follows a similar line of thought and asks the question – are dreams just fantasy or "something that will help you succeed"? Finally, "This is not the dream you dreamt of having" follows the meandering journey our minds take during sleep, making the point that real dreams are not built on a "billion-dollar movie set". Due to the distinct personalities of each poem, I felt it necessary to set them each to quite different music. The first song is lively and bright, with a sharply punctuated piano accompaniment. The second song uses the 5-tone *pelog* scale from Javanese gamelan music, which to many composers (most notably Benjamin Britten) has suggested the world of dreams in a particularly evocative way. The third song sets the repeated word "dream" melismatically against music based on a typical Jewish and Middle Eastern scale containing an augmented second between the 2nd and 3rd scale degrees, giving the music a certain pungency that to me reflects its questioning attitude. The fourth song is based on a series of ghostly and (for lack of a better word) "dream-like" chords accompanying a softly lyrical, rising and falling vocal part. I have also chosen to borrow the recitative from the world of opera (appropriate given this composition's context) to set some of the text in this poem. The song cycle ends on a somewhat unresolved note, which is how I often feel after waking up from an intense dream, or how most of us feel when we reflect back on how we have or have not achieved our "dreams". The title, which I believe neatly encompasses both definitions of "dreams", is taken from a line in the fourth poem.

- I. Dreaming
- II. People have told me
- III. What does it mean?
- IV. This is not the dream you dreamt of having

Instrumentation: Soprano, Flute, Clarinet, Violin, 'Cello, and Piano

Duration: 10 minutes

Premiere: March 2007, Tara Cowherd, Soprano, with members of the Omaha Symphony, and Gabriel Gould, Piano, at the University of Nebraska-Omaha