

SYRINGA (texts) p.1

Messa Soprano
poem of
John Ashbery

BASS
(in classical Greek)
Orphic sayings, and poems
of Orpheus, Minnermus, Hesiod,
Archilochus, Sappho, Ibycus,
Homer, Anaclytus, Euripides,
texts from Plato's
Cratylus and Symposium.

silence

Ὁ Χρόνος ὤϊόν
ἔβλεπνεν.

Chronos gave birth to
the seeds.

Orpheus liked the glad personal quality
Of the things beneath the sky. Of course, Eurydice was a part
Of this.

First-born Chronos was
the first to marry, and he wedded
his sister Tethys, daughter of his mother.

Then one day, everything changed. He reads
Rocks into fissures with lament, Gullies, hummocks
Can't withstand it. The sky shades from one horizon
To the other, almost ready to give up wholeness.

"Come, to earthquakes to earthquakes faster, and from (Love) learn among the
Aegean's
in you see,
and do, get
to (to) some place, fate
in you, it's done, it's done, you, anyone, dig with
for the distance of justice, another
eternity!

Then Apollo quietly told him: "Leave it all on earth:
Your lute, what point? Why pick at a dull pavan few care to
Follow, except a few birds of dusty feather,
Not vivid performances of the past." But why not?

Doon's chest hard by
Yours (fathoms-deep)

All other things must change too.
The seasons are no longer what they once were,
But it is the nature of things to be seen only once,
As they happen along, bumping into other things, getting along
Somehow. That's where Orpheus made his mistake.

Τις τίς βίος, τίς τίς νεκρός ἔρος καρπὸς Ἀπολλωνίου;
ρεθραίοι, ὅρα ποὺ περὶ ταῖρα μέλας
κουραζοῦν ὄφρα καὶ μελίχρα δάρα

Of course Eurydice vanished into the shade;
She would have even if he hadn't turned around.

Κουράζων ἄλλοτε οὐδὲ ἔτι οὐδ' ἀπόμωρος
οὐδὲ θανάσιος, ἐρεθὶς ζῆος παρὰ Ὀλυμπίου
ἐκ περὶ τὰς ἰσθμὸς νιφ' ἀποκρίσας ὄρα

No use standing there like a gray stone toga as the whole wheel
Of recorded history flashes past, struck dumb.

Ὁ ΝΟΙΟΣ ΜΕΛΙΧΡΑΣ ΝΥΚΤΟΣ
ἔρωτος
γὰρ κενὸν βῆθος
ἐριστοῦ ἐπὶ ὄρατος
ἔπος ὡς ἀέριος καρ' ἔπος ὄρατος ἔρωτος.

unable to utter an intelligent
Comment on the most thought-provoking element in its train.

There can be nothing
unexpected, nothing
marvelous, since
Zeus, Olympian, father
at noon, made night
obscuring the light
of the sun.
Dream in the black
night, sweet god.
Eros has shaken my soul
like the wind which
comes from the mountain
and falls the oak.

Only love stays on the brain, and something these people,
These other ones, call life. Singing accurately
So that the notes mount straight up out of the well of

continued on p. 1 (no page)

Drafts of the *Syringa* libretto by Elliott Carter, with poem text by John Ashbery in the left column and Greek texts of the Orpheus myth in the right column.

