

ALSO BY WILLIAM FERRIS ON CEDILLE RECORDS



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"If you're a choral music fan — and especially if you enjoy Christmas music — you really can't afford to miss this unique recording. It offers not only a host of new and pleasing discoveries but also serves as an introduction to a lesser-known but revered American composer/conductor . . . whose friends/colleagues included Barber, Menotti, and Rorem. It's easy to applaud — and recommend — important new additions to the recording catalog, and this is definitely one of them."

— *ClassicsToday.com*

A photograph of a forest path. The path is covered in fallen leaves and is flanked by tall, dark trees. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a warm, golden glow and long shadows on the ground. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

CORRIDORS OF LIGHT

MUSIC OF WILLIAM FERRIS

Cedille FOUNDATION

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MUSIC OF WILLIAM FERRIS (1937–2000)

1 Gloria for Mixed Chorus, Solo Quartet, and Orchestra (18:57)

Patricia Spencer, soprano
Kathleen Meredith, alto
John Vorrasi, tenor
Philip Skeris, bass

William Ferris Chorale
Composer Festival Orchestra
William Ferris, conductor

Recorded in concert May 15, 1992, in Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, Chicago; Hudson Fair, engineer

Ed È Subito Sera, Solo Cantata for Tenor and String Orchestra (23:14)

- 2 I. Ride la gazza, nera sugli aranci (9:48)
- 3 II. Ora che sale il giorno (5:00)
- 4 III. Ed è subito sera (1:03)
- 5 IV. Forse il cuore (7:22)

John Vorrasi, tenor
Chicago String Ensemble
Alan Heatherington, conductor

Recorded in concert March 10, 1989, in St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Chicago and March 11, 1989, in Christ Church of Oak Brook, Oak Brook IL; Richard Werner, engineer

6 Bristol Hills, a Reflection for String Orchestra (7:45)

London Symphony Strings
Arnie Roth, conductor

Recorded January 12, 2001, Abbey Road Studios, London; Arnie Roth, producer; Jonathan Allen, Andrew Dudman, and Dave Forty, engineers

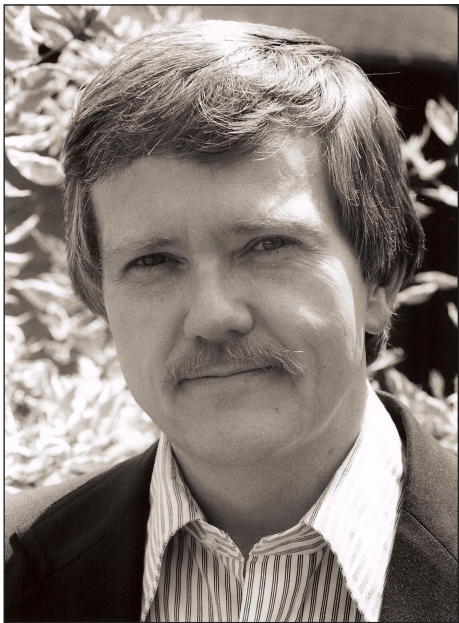
7 Corridors of Light for Baritone, Oboe, Piano, Percussion, and String Orchestra (21:18)

John Shirley-Quirk, baritone
Sara Watkins, oboe
William Ferris Chorale
Composer Festival Orchestra
William Ferris, conductor

Recorded in concert May 19, 1995, in Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, Chicago; Hudson Fair, engineer

World Premiere Recordings

Total Time: (71:40)



William Ferris
Photo by Lisa Howe-Ebright

MUSIC OF WILLIAM FERRIS

Notes by Francis Crociata

William Ferris was a born storyteller. Through words, gestures, and the alternately wistful, playful, and passionate melodies that were the heart of his compositions, he communicated, in vivid detail, his experiences of life, love, faith, and art.

I am not the first to observe that the quality and beauty of William Ferris's music is far out-of-proportion to its relative obscurity. Nor am I the first to marvel that when Bill was taken from us in 2000, he left more than 500 works for virtually every medium. It is regrettable that his premature death (at age 63, as he led his Chorale in the opening bars of the "Lux Aeterna" of the Verdi *Requiem*) denied him the joy of this disc — the first widely-distributed recording of a significant selection of his orchestral music. This is what Bill desired most of all — the chance for his music to be heard by listeners with open ears and open hearts.

I believe William Ferris would have created his significant body of music even if he had not attracted the loyal, fervent band of admirers and benefactors who followed his career, swapping dubs of the rare orchestral and chamber music performances, subscribing to season after season of his William Ferris Chorale concerts, enjoying the privilege of being present at the creation of music we were convinced would stand the test of time. Having been one of their number and having enjoyed the friendship of Bill Ferris for 41 years, I can honestly say I have never encountered anyone else involved in the making of art who was more thoroughly convinced that he was put on this earth for one purpose: to create this lyrically conceived and lucidly expressed music — his music.

William Ferris was born in Chicago in 1937, the son of Irish-American-Catholic parents. He was the product of Catholic parochial education, the survivor of an extended hospitalization for polio, and a believing

Catholic whose faith stayed with him all his life. Habits of study, instilled early, also stayed with him. He was widely and eclectically read in fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. During his long, productive career, in addition to writing music, he constantly worked as an organist/choirmaster, taught composition, and directed the William Ferris Chorale, often augmented by an orchestra that over the years became "his" orchestra. With his lifelong partner and collaborator, the tenor and poet John Vorrasi, Bill made miraculous music and miraculously raised money to provide a forum for composers such as William Walton, Ned Rorem, David Diamond, Robert Ward, Dominick Argento, Howard Hanson, Vincent Persichetti, William Schuman, Gian Carlo Menotti, John McCabe, William Mathias, and many more, all of whom he recognized as kindred spirits. They were composers with highly personal styles, too conservative for the academically prevailing avant garde and too modern for conservatives. What attracted Ferris the performing

musician to them was also most important to Ferris the composer: they were artists who stayed true to their own styles, regardless of the winds of fashion. When Bill encountered that integrity in a fellow composer, his commitment to the person and his music was absolute.

Ferris's own musical gifts were recognized early. As a child, his pleasing boy soprano voice was called upon at the boisterous gatherings of his extended family, heard at countless morning masses, and won prizes on radio amateur hours. As he finished high school, his keyboard skill and facile score-reading ability won him the position of organist at Chicago's Holy Name Cathedral, a post he held during his studies with Arthur Becker, Paul Stassevitch, and Alexander Tcherepnin at DePaul University. Bowled over upon discovering the *Organ Symphony* of fellow-Chicagoan Leo Sowerby, he queried Dr. Becker and learned that Sowerby taught at a local conservatory. Ferris soon became Sowerby's student on

an informal, master-apprentice basis.

One story illustrates the most important lesson Bill derived from his five years in Sowerby's studio. He had just heard, for the first time, a live performance of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, presumably at one of Hans Rosbaud's memorable Chicago Symphony concerts. Bill was thunderstruck and his sense of himself as a creative artist was shaken to the core. William Ferris was the most self-reflective person I've ever known and when it came to wrestling with his own emotions, there was nothing half-way. Sowerby, who knew a thing or two about laboring in semi-obscurity, assured his protégé that any composer "worth his salt" would feel humbled and challenged by this bedrock composition that did so much to free the creativity of 20th century artists. But he added that any good composer would look inside himself, find something worthwhile to say, and get it down on paper. "And forget about copying Stravinsky or anyone else. You can no

more change your style than you can change your face. So you might as well get used to it and learn to use it. . . . And besides, Bill, would you really want to be the composer of *The Rite of Spring*?" Bill's answer is heard on this disc — works from the 1960s and 1990s, all exhibiting the composer's distinctive sound.

In the course of his life, Bill was fortunate to meet and receive the help of key figures who provided decisive assistance at crucial periods. Sowerby and Vorrasi were two of these. So was the legendary Catholic priest and preacher, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, who invited Bill to serve as composer-in-residence at his Cathedral in Rochester, NY. There was John Edwards, president of the Chicago Symphony, who arranged a commission for Bill's organ concerto, *Acclamations*, and engaged him to play it four times with the Symphony in Orchestra Hall. And, lastly, Father Thomas Healy, who brought Bill to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish on Chicago's North Side, giving him

the freedom to write and perform like the great composer-organists who inspired Ferris — his teacher, Sowerby, the Frenchmen Viérne, Dupré, Widor, and Messiaen, and the lesser-known Italians, Lorenzo Perosi and Licinio Refice. These composers were all encouraged by partners and benefactors who believed in them and their music. Ferris was similarly blessed by the friendship and support of Sowerby, Vorrasi, Sheen, Edwards, and Healy, all of whom, directly or indirectly, touch upon the creation of the four works presented here.

Gloria (1992)

Foremost among Ferris's favorite composers (in addition to the host of Americans and British he championed) was an eclectic group composed of Verdi, Puccini, Delius, Bartók, Ravel, Honegger, and Poulenc. Despite this, one would be hard pressed to find a thematic or even stylistic connection between Ferris's festival *Gloria* and Poulenc's famous concert work. The connection

lies in the impulse to recreate in the concert hall the sheer joy this moment in the familiar Catholic liturgy engenders in the faithful. And, indeed, this is a defining work in the music of William Ferris, with all of his stylistic hallmarks, captured here in an incisive and exultant performance, conducted by Ferris himself.

For the premiere of his *Gloria* on May 15, 1992, the composer provided these thoughts:

This large-scale setting of the ancient Latin hymn of praise was composed in celebration of the 20th anniversary season of the William Ferris Chorale. The individual sections are all defined by the text. The chorus and solo voices are influenced by the words in two distinct ways: primarily, as one would expect, by their literal meaning, and then by the rhythmic and formal shape which the vowels and consonants lend to the musical texture. The antiphonal use of orchestral and vocal choirs creates a rich and varied tapestry

of musical color. Although filled with contrasts, the work flows forward in an inevitable manner.

The mood is one of fervent prayer and rich celebration. The angelic song echoes again on high: "Gloria in excelsis Deo!"

Ed È Subito Sera (1965)

This work was among Bill's first for the concert hall that I heard him play at his beloved Yamaha upright and croak in his tobacco-tinged, once-tenor voice. Our mutual friend, John Vorrasi, was soloist in the work's long-delayed March 10, 1989, premiere. This reflection is adapted from the notes Vorrasi penned for that first performance:

Italian author Salvatore Quasimodo (1901–1968) wrote the words Ferris set for Ed È Subito Sera. Quasimodo won the 1959 Nobel Prize for Literature "for his lyrical poetry, which with classical fire expresses the tragic experience of life in our own times." Along

with Giuseppe Ungaretti and Eugenio Montale, he is one of the foremost Italian poets of the 20th century. Quasimodo's mature style is marked by increased clarity and sensitivity. He chose to interpret man's history and fate with an underlying lament for human defeat in a violent universe.

Ed È Subito Sera was composed in 1965, just as Ferris's mentor Leo Sowerby was leaving Chicago to found the College of Church Musicians at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC. It was a composition he never showed to Sowerby for advice because, as he said, there are just some works you cannot share with your teacher. Sowerby was a great classicist and no doubt Ferris was afraid that tinkering with the free flowing form of the work or superimposing formal structure would damage it. Originally conceived as a chamber work for tenor and string quintet, Ferris revised the instrumentation for full string orchestra in the

spring of 1988, at the request of conductor Alan Heatherington. *Ed È Subito Sera* is quite operatic in scope and reflects, in a highly personal way, the sense of human fragility and the power of love so evident in the verse.

Bristol Hills (1969)

When Bill moved from Chicago to Rochester NY, he was “adopted” by the Vorrasi family and especially by John himself. Vorrasi took it upon himself to organize an orchestral concert, engaging a core of players from the Rochester Philharmonic, which provided the context for Bill to conduct a symphonic movement entitled *October–November*. The concert also involved a modest, but intense and driven church musician, David Fetler. Fetler managed to mount an annual season of chamber orchestra concerts for the Rochester Chamber Orchestra, which gave the first performance of this lush work for strings. Vorrasi recalls the circumstances and inspiration that

gave rise to its composition:

On a trip to the nearby Finger Lakes region, I took Bill to the top of what seemed an unassuming hill. But once you climbed to the crest, you were suddenly at a great vista — the expanse of the green valley below and the light of the sun reflecting down on the distant Canandaigua Lake — all enveloped in an amazing silence broken only by a gentle wind and the muffled chirping of birds. This experience is captured in Bristol Hills, a work which bears the dedication: “To John, who taught me of the hills.”

Corridors of Light (1994)

James Buonemani was a student in Sacred Heart Cathedral School when Bishop Sheen called Bill to Rochester. Jim became Bill’s first composition student and, in adulthood, a renowned organist, composer, and conductor. For the first performance of *Corridors of Light*, Ferris provided the following commentary:

*In 1993, when James Buonemani, the Director of Music at the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany in Washington, D.C., asked me to compose a work in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the historic parish’s founding, I was at once taken with the idea and accepted the commission. I was especially happy to accept since the first performance of the work was to be given by two remarkable artists: baritone John Shirley-Quirk and oboist Sara Watkins. Added to that, the text selected for the occasion was Stephen Spender’s *The Truly Great*. This extraordinary poem, written in 1934, is one of Spender’s most radiant and transcendental.*

Although I felt humbled by the challenge of these words, I fell immediately under their spell and began work in earnest during February of 1994. The short score was finished on May 4, 1994, and the orchestration (for baritone, chorus, oboe, piano, percussion

and strings) between May 25 and June 15.

Corridors of Light is a through-composed setting of the text, meaning that it is a non-formal, continuous structure, always reflecting the rhythm, shape and atmosphere of the words. There are several themes, harmonic textures and rhythmic motives of real importance that recur and commingle throughout the composition, but it is always the text itself which generates the music’s flow and gives the work its form.

The soloist and chorus are fairly equal partners throughout, but the oboe takes on a unique role. It serves to provoke the protagonist Baritone and chorus into song, and follows these vocal acclamations with rich periods of meditation in coloristic dialogue with the orchestra.

The oboe music also acts as a ritornello, giving the otherwise

free structure points of reference. The music is modal and richly chromatic, but always very lyrical, and though filled with contrasts of mood and energy, moves relentlessly toward an inevitable, ecstatic conclusion.

It is my fond hope that this musical harbinger will help us reflect on the profound quality of Spender's clarion call to faith and true humanity as we travel our short while toward the sun.

As a young student and parish organist in Rochester, NY, Francis Crociata would rush from his own church to Sacred Heart Cathedral to hear music performed and, more often than not, written by William Ferris. When the last church he served as organist/choirmaster was leveled to make way for an Eastman Kodak parking lot, Crociata took it as a sign from above, gave up performing, and later became a noted writer and lecturer on the lives of Sergei Rachmaninoff and Ferris's teacher, Leo Sowerby. He has been president of the Leo Sowerby Foundation since 1993 and works in the advancement division of Saint Leo University in Florida.

☐ Gloria

*Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Et in terra pax hominibus bonae
voluntatis.
Laudamus te.
Benedicimus te.
Adoramus te.
Glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam
gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus Rex caelestis, Deus
Pater omnipotens,
Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe.*

*Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius
Patris:
Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere
nobis, suscipe deprecationem
nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
miserere nobis.
Quoniam tu solus Sanctus.
Tu solus Dominus.
Tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe.
Cum Sancto Spiritu, in gloria Dei
Patris.
Amen.*

Glory to God in the highest.
And on earth peace to men of good
will.
We praise You.
We bless You.
We adore you.
We glorify You.
We give You thanks for Your great
glory.
Lord God, heavenly King, God the
Father almighty,
Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten
Son.
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the
Father:
You who take away the sins of the
world, have mercy on us, receive
our prayer.
You who sit at the right hand of the
Father, have mercy on us.
For you alone are holy.
You alone are the Lord.
You alone are the most high, Jesus Christ.
With the Holy Spirit in the glory of
God the Father.
Amen.

Ed È Subito Sera

Text by Salvatore Quasimodo

② I. Ride la gazza, nera sugli aranci

Forse è un segno vero della vita:
intorno a me fanciulli con leggeri
moti del capo danzano in un gioco
di cadenze e di voci lungo il prato
della chiesa.

Pietà della sera, ombre
riaccese sopra l'erba così verde,
bellissime nel fuco della luna!
Memoria vi concede breve sonno;
ora, destatevi.

Ecco, scroscia il pozzo per la prima
marea.

Questa è l'ora: non più mia, arsi,
remoti simulacri.

E tu vento del sud forte di zàgare,
spingi la luna dove nudi dormono
fanciulli, forza il puledro sui campi
umidi d'orme di cavalle, apri il mare,
alza le nuvole dagli alberi:
già l'airone s'avanza verso l'acqua
e fiuta lente il fango tra le spine,
ride la gazza, nera sugli aranci.

I. The Magpie Laughs, Black Upon the Orange Trees

Perhaps it is a very sign of life:
around me, children in a game
of cadences and voices dance
with easy movements of the head
along the meadow of the church.

Piety of evening, shadows
rekindled on the grass so green,
loveliest in fire of the moon!
Memory grants you brief sleep;
but now, awake.

Behold, the well churns for the first
tide.

This is the hour: mine no longer, burnt
and distant semblances.

And you, south wind thick with orange
blossoms, drive the moon where
children sleep naked, force the
foal to fields damp with the tracks
of mares, bare the sea, lift the
clouds from the trees: the heron
now moves waterward and slowly
sniffs the mud among the thorns,
the magpie laughs, black upon the
orange trees.

③ II. Ora che sale il giorno

Finita è la notte e la luna
si scioglie nel sereno,
tramonta nei canali.

È così vivo settembre in questa terra
di pianura, i prati sono verdi come
nella valli del sud a primavera.

Ho lasciato i compagni,
ho nascosto il cuore dentro le
vecchie mura, per restare solo a
ricordarti.

Come sei più lontana della luna,
ora che sale il giorno e sulle pietre
batte il piede dei cavalli!

II. Now Day Breaks

The night is done, the moon
slowly melts in the serene,
sets in the canals.

September lives so in this land
of plains, the meadows are as green
as in the valleys of the south in spring.
I have left my comrades,
have hid my heart within the old
walls, to rest alone remembering
you.

How you are more distant than the
moon, now day breaks and on the
stones the hoofs of horses beat!

④ III. Ed è subito sera

Ognuno sta solo sul cuor della terra
trafitto da un raggio di sole:
ed è subito sera.

III. And Suddenly It's Evening

Each alone on the heart of the earth
impaled upon a ray of sun:
and suddenly it's evening.

5 IV. Forse il cuore

Sprofonderà l'odore acre dei tigli
nella notte di pioggia.
Sarà vano il tempo della gioia, la sua
furia, quel suo morso di fulmine che
schianta.
Rimane appena aperta l'indolenza,
il ricordo d'un gesto, d'una sillaba,
ma come d'un volo lento d'uccelli
fra vapori di nebbia.
E ancora attendi, non so che cosa,
mia sperduta; forse un'ora che
decida, che richiami il principio o la
fine; uguale sorte, ormai.
Qui nero il fumo degli incendi
secca ancora la gola.
Se lo puoi, dimentica quel sapore di
zolfo, e la paura.
Le parole ci stancano, risalgono da
un'acqua lapidata; forse il cuore ci
resta, forse il cuore...

IV. Perhaps the Heart

The acrid odour of the lindens
will sink within the night of rain.
The time of joy, its fury, will be vain,
its lightning bite that shatters.
There scarce remains the indolence,
the memory of a gesture, of a syl-
lable, but like a slow flight of birds
in fumes of fog.
And still you await, I know not what,
my lost one; perhaps an hour that de-
cides, that recalls the end or the be-
ginning; henceforward, equal fates.
Here black the smoke of fires still
dries the throat.
O if you can, forget the taste of
sulphur, and the fear.
Words wear us out, they rise again
from a stoned water; perhaps the
heart is left us, perhaps the heart...

7 Corridors of Light

The Truly Great

From **SELECTED POEMS** by Stephen Spender.
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I think continually of those who were
truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered
the soul's history
Through corridors of light, where the
hours are suns,
Endlessly singing. Whose lovely
ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with
fire,
Should tell of the Spirit, clothed from
head to foot in song.
And who hoarded from the Spring
branches
The desires falling across their bodies
like blossoms.
What is precious is never to forget
The delight of the blood drawn from
ageless springs
Breaking through rocks in worlds
before our earth.

Never to deny its pleasure in the
simple morning light
Nor its grave evening demand for
love.
Never to allow gradually the traffic to
smother
With noise and fog, the flowering of
the spirit.
Near the snow, near the sun, in the
highest fields,
See how their names are fêted by the
waving grass
And by the streamers of white cloud
And whispers of wind in the listening
sky.
The names of those who in their lives
fought for life,
Who wore at their hearts the fire's
centre.
Born of the sun, they travelled a short
while toward the sun
And left the vivid air signed with
their honour.

JOHN VORRASI

Tenor John Vorrasi is known for his performances on the concert and opera stage, and for his work as a librettist (for William Ferris), translator (for William Mathias), essayist (for numerous recordings and journals), and program annotator (for the Chicago Symphony Chamber Music Series). He has been a featured artist with the Virginia Philharmonic, Chicago Opera Theatre, Aldeburgh Festival, Spoleto Festival: USA, International Music Festival at Genève, and the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music at the Vatican.

His recitals, often with composers William Ferris, Lee Hoiby, and Ned Rorem as his accompanist, have been broadcast by the BBC, Radio Vaticana, NPR, and Chicago radio stations WNIB and WFMT. He gave the Chicago premieres of Gian Carlo Menotti's opera *The Egg* and *Missa: O Pulchritudo*, both under the direction of the composer. He can be heard on the Cedille, CRI, Musical Arts Society, New World, and WFC Live labels.

In partnership with composer William Ferris, he helped create the William Ferris Chorale, designing its public image, organizing its business affairs, and most importantly, lending his artistry as the Chorale's tenor soloist. He now serves as the ensemble's Artistic Director.

JOHN SHIRLEY-QUIRK

One of Britain's most renowned and distinguished musicians, John Shirley-Quirk is known particularly for his masterly performances of orchestral repertoire with leading conductors and orchestras around the world including in Amsterdam, Chicago, New York, London, Paris, Vienna, and Berlin. He has given recitals in these same venues with pianists such as Ashkenazy, Britten, Schiff, and Perahia. He has performed in the world's major opera houses including Covent Garden, La Scala, and the Metropolitan Opera. His discography on all major record labels has exceeded the century mark.

Although his repertoire reaches back into the classical and baroque eras, Shirley-Quirk has always maintained an active association with new music. His first operatic venture was a performance of Henze's *Elegy for Young Lovers*. He created roles in Tippett's *The Ice Break* and in Britten's last five operas, culminating in the sevenfold role of The Traveller in *Death in Venice*.

John Shirley-Quirk first appeared with the William Ferris Chorale in January 1993, when he joined Lady Susana Walton for a performance of *Façade*. He is a member of the voice faculty of the Peabody Conservatory.

SARA WATKINS

Born and raised in Chicago, Sara Watkins began her oboe studies at age nine. Within a year she was performing oboe concertos in public. After receiving her degree at Oberlin Conservatory, she was on her way to being recognized as one of America's most gifted instrumentalists.

Ms. Watkins performed for 13 years as principal oboist of various American orchestras, including the Washington National Symphony under Antal Dorati and Mstislav Rostropovich. In her subsequent career as soloist and conductor, she collaborated with world-class musicians and ensembles including the Amadeus, Emerson, and Guarneri Quartets; the Moscow Philharmonic; and the Austrian Radio Symphony.

Believing in the importance of new music, Ms. Watkins gave more than 30 world premieres of works by eminent composers such as Benjamin Britten and Henri Dutilleux.

At the time of her sudden death in 1997 at age 52, she was gaining an enviable international reputation for her conducting, with performances in London, Glasgow, Paris, New York, Washington, and Miami as well as at the Aldeburgh and St. Endellion Festivals in the United Kingdom. She was married to John Shirley-Quirk.