

GITANJALI:
A STUDY OF THE SONG CYCLE BY
RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND JOHN ALDEN CARPENTER

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by

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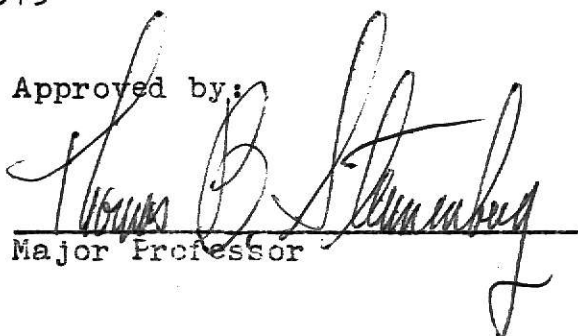
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INTRODUCTION

The history of song is perhaps as old as the history of mankind. For song was the heritage of the people; it had confided the joys and sorrows of the people. In the broadest interpretation of the word, song might include such varied forms and methods of joining words and music as folk song, art song, liturgical chant, madrigal, motet, etc. Therefore, song is a dual art and at its best there is a fusion of text and tone.

During the nineteenth century composers created an abundance of unusually beautiful art songs. This was because the period had such great lyric poets as Goethe, Heine, Müller, Mörike, Mallarme. Moreover, the piano by this time had attained its mechanical perfection. It is apparent that the outstanding literary production gave great impetus to the composition of songs. The symbol of the art song, for instance, Schubert was not too particular in his choice of poems. But he had the fortune to be born at a time when much poetry of a high order was being written in Germany, and this enabled him to produce more than six hundred songs. Among those there are forty-four songs included in his two cycles, Die Schöne Müllerin and Die Winterreise, based on the poems of Müller. Hereof, naturally one thinks of the Dichterliebe song cycle, one of the best examples, in which the beauties of the poetry of Heine and the music of Schumann are joined.

In 1913 the Gitanjali song cycle was produced out of the union of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry and John Alden Carpenter's music. Tagor and Carpenter were contemporaries as Schubert and Müller or

Heine and Schumann were, but they nevertheless were living in two different parts of the world. It is interesting to note how the Indian poet became known in this western country. The Nobel Prize in Literature made Tagore world-famous even though the award in 1913 to him for his Gitanjali was a complete surprise to the world.

However, Tagore was known in the United States before the award of the Nobel Prize. During his half-year's sojourn in this country he lived in Urbana, Illinois, visited many places in the country, and delivered lectures at Harvard University, the Universities of Chicago, Illinois and elsewhere. It was Carpenter's fortune to live in Chicago where Harriet Monroe published some poems of Gitanjali in the local magazine of verse, Poetry, which was perhaps the first journal in the West to publish Tagore's poems.

Undoubtedly, those poems from Gitanjali that appeared in Poetry led Carpenter to be interested in the whole work. And the beauty of Gitanjali stimulated Carpenter's musical images. The choice of these six poems from the entire work of one hundred and three was due to Carpenter's love of nature and his interest in children. His intention to rearrange the order of the poems in this song cycle is also noticeable.

The study of this Gitanjali song cycle attempts to present how Carpenter gave the form to his music based on the movement of the verse; how he fitted the words of the text into his melodic line; and how he furnished the mood for each song by using the flexible medium, piano, to illustrate and intensify the meaning

of the poetry. Consequently, the general organization and the vocal line of each song were analyzed and included in this report.