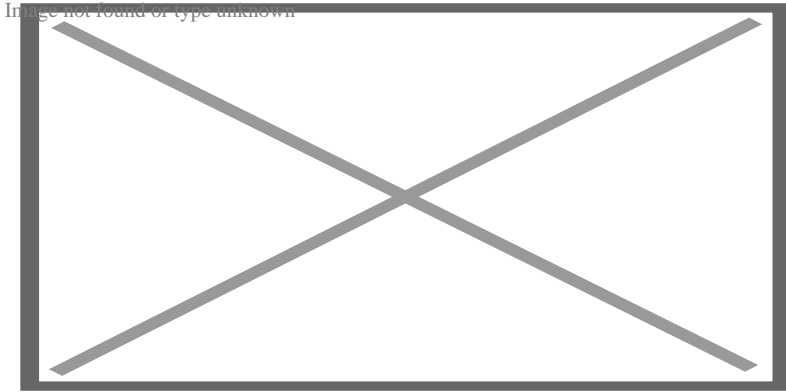


# Other Minds Festival: OM 11, Blitzstein Centenary Celebration Program, part 3, More Selected Songs



## Identifier

OMF.2005.02.26.1.03

## Description

As a gay man, Blitzstein often gravitated toward some of the more sexually explicit poems of Walt Whitman which he set to music. Some of these were considered too risqué to perform at the time they were written. "O Hymen O Hymenee" is described by Eric Gordon as "an eerie, panting apostrophe to fleeting love, employing dissonant bi-tonality and incorporating a daring vocal glissando: 'O why do you now cease? / Is it because if you continued beyond the swift moment / you would soon certainly kill me'". "I Am He" is set to bluesy, Gershwin-like harmonies: 'I am he that aches with amorous love; / Does the earth gravitate? Does not all matter, aching, attract all matter? / So the body of me to all I meet and know'. "What Weeping Face," written in 1925 while the composer still was a student at the Curtis Institute, touchingly captures Whitman's observation of the sorrow on a tearful face behind a window.

"What Will It Be?" is from the opera comique "Regina", written between 1946 and 1949. Based on Lillian Hellman's play "The Little Foxes", this song expressing a young girl's anticipation of love was named the best tune of the year by the New York Daily News.

"No for an Answer" is an anti-fascist, anti-war, opera set in an upstate New York resort where workers decide to organize to fight exploitation. A remarkable excerpt from that work is the song "Francie," selected by Blitzstein as a personal favorite for his own composer portrait on a Westminster LP in the mid-1950s. Mixing speech and music, we hear Joe, a labor organizer, smitten with love and longing for a female character Francie who has been completely taken in by a strike-breaker, Paul, and is ruminating about what a nice guy he is. Here's a man just out of jail with one thing on his mind and his woman operating on a different emotional plane. Blitzstein separates their roles neatly by having Joe sing wistfully while Francie chatters.

The duet "Love at First Word" from "Reuben Reuben" is more straightforwardly romantic yet very playful. It was first performed by Eddie Albert and Evelyn Lear as Reuben and Nina.

**Musical Selections**

O Hymen O Hymenee [text by Walt Whitman] (1927) -- I Am He [text by Walt Whitman] (1928) -- What Weeping Face [text by Walt Whitman] (1925) -- What Will It Be? (1946-49) -- Francie (1937-40) -- Love at First Word (1949-55)

**Artists**

Other Minds Festival (features)

Blitzstein, Marc (features)

Whitman, Walt, 1819-1892 (features)

Cahill, Sarah (features)

Neuburg, Amy X, 1962- (features)

Duykers, John (features)