

Alec Roth – CHINESE GARDENS – words by Vikram Seth

for voice (tenor or mezzo-soprano) and guitar

commissioned by the Chester Summer Music Festival

first performed by Claire Bradshaw (mezzo-soprano) and Craig Ogden (guitar) at the Town Hall, Chester, 13 July 1998

version for tenor first performed by Mark Padmore (tenor) and Morgan Szymanski (guitar), Town Hall, Rochdale, 15 November 2008

1. The Tarrying Garden
2. The Master-of-Nets Garden
3. The Gentle Waves Pavilion
4. The Humble Administrator's Garden

COMPOSER'S NOTE

Chinese Gardens is a setting of poems by Vikram Seth which were inspired by visits to four of the famous Ming Dynasty gardens in the Chinese city of Suzhou. Unlike Vikram, I have never been to mainland China but during a visit to Vancouver in 1991 I was introduced to that city's remarkable Chinese garden. Completed in 1986, it was constructed by a team of over 50 artisans from China in authentic Ming Dynasty style, taking four of the original Suzhou gardens as models. By an astonishing coincidence, the four gardens chosen were exactly the same four that appear in the poems. I immediately fell in love with this magical place and spent several hours there sketching musical ideas, but mostly just absorbing its exquisite calm and refined beauty. It was some years before I got around to completing the songs, but the memory of that wonderful afternoon remained fresh and inspiring, thus explaining my dedication of this work "to the Dr Sun Yat Sen Classical Garden, Vancouver".

The first song, *The Tarrying Garden*, introduces us to some of the main features of a classical Chinese garden: the covered walks, courtyards, rocks and pools, the poetic inscriptions on whitewashed walls and the characteristic zig-zag paths offering no long vistas, but constantly changing views and impressions. We are also instructed in how to enjoy our visit to the garden: "Meander, tarry, amble, pause, admire".

The second song is a nocturne evoking the atmosphere of the exquisite Master-of-Nets Garden on a moonlit night.

The third song records the somewhat whimsical observations of a visitor to the Garden of the Gentle Waves Pavilion.

The final song remembers Mr Wang, the self-styled Humble Administrator, who (somewhat mysteriously, considering his official income) managed to create one of Suzhou's most famous treasures. The cycle ends with a gentle walk around this, "the loveliest of all gardens".

DURATION

ca. 12 minutes

FORCES REQUIRED

Version 1: mezzo-soprano and guitar

Version 2: tenor and guitar

PERFORMANCE MATERIALS

Score (Version 1: mezzo-soprano and guitar)

Score (Version 2: tenor and guitar)

RECORDING

Chinese Gardens is recorded by Mark Padmore and Morgan Szymanski on the Signum label ([SIGCD124](#))

Individual track may be sampled and downloaded at [iTunes](#)

SCORE SAMPLE

Click here for sample pages of the [Score](#) (tenor version)