JEFFREY NYTCH, Composer

DOCTORAL RECITAL

Wednesday, March 10, 1993
8:00 p.m.
Lillian H. Duncan Recital Hall

RICE UNIVERSITY
PROGRAM

Three Preludes (1992) (Premiere)
Laura Melton, piano

Three Songs of War (1992)
(Text by Wilfred Owen)
James Court, tuba
Jeffrey Nytch, countertenor

INTERMISSION

Reflections from a Middle Place (1991)
(Text by C.E. Cooper)
Aftermath
Put your head soft on my shoulder ...
The Eye Inside
Prelude
Jeanne Stein, soprano Neal Kurz, piano

The Kaleidoscope Variations (1991-92) (Premiere)
Introduction and Themes: Intense, charged
Variation 1, aloof (flute and clarinet),
molto espressivo (bassoon)
Variation 2, suspended
Variation 3, swirling
Variation 4, cadenza
Variation 5, Vivace
Variation 6, slow, pulsing
Epilogue: Serene, calm
Elizabeth Buck, flute
Joanne Court, clarinet
James Rodgers, bassoon
Three Preludes was written as an artistic response to over a year's worth of writing for large ensembles. My desire was to write brief, compact pieces with a minimum of musical material. These short piano pieces were the result. Each has a distinct character, the first being lilt­ing and fluid, the second being harsh and aggressive, and the third having a suspended, meditational nature.

When I was first asked to write a piece for Jim Court, I was admittedly at a loss for ideas. When a friend suggested I write for tuba and counter­tenor, my initial reluctance turned to enthusiasm. Three Songs of War was the consequence of realizing that I would have to write a most serious piece, lest this odd combination become a comical parody. The tragic, sometimes graphic poems by the English poet Wilfred Owen were my immediate choice. Written during his service in France in 1917, the poems depict the hell of the western front, the destruction of innocence, and the poet's despair over the death of a friend. The widely differing timbres of the dark, brooding tuba and the ghostly, other-worldly countertenor provide a dramatic tension reflective of the dehumanizing struggles — physical, psychological, spiritual — of waging war.

Reflections from a Middle Place was commissioned by Paul Cooper in memory of his wife and collaborator of 30 years, C.E. Cooper. The second and third songs in this cycle come from the larger set of poems bearing the title “Reflections from a Middle Place,” while “Aftermath” and “Prelude” come from elsewhere in the poet's output. Taken together, these four poems paint a picture of a relationship in transition. A sense of peace (welcomed acceptance or resignation?) closes the work as music from the first song provides the material for the last. In addition, the soprano's opening line from the last song is heard in the accompaniment to number one, a statement that the “prelude” to the new phase of relationship reached at the end of the cycle was in fact anticipated much earlier.

The Kaleidoscope Variations was initially commissioned by the wind trio Kaleidoscope. The trio later disbanded, however, leaving the piece unpremiered. The title is more than merely an homage to the first group; it also describes the nature of the work. Rather than the traditional idea of theme and variations, each instrument in the trio has its own theme, stated in the introduction. The result is that there are in fact three sets of variations taking place simultaneously, with the themes relating to each
other in a constantly shifting kaleidoscope of color, texture and counter-point. The piece is highly virtuosic, as each instrument is asked to play at the extremes of its range with both grace and control, while weaving lines often more suited to a stringed instrument. It is this extremity of writing that gives the piece a level of tension and excitement above that of the unfolding variations – and for the players, provides an opportunity for both emotional expression and virtuosic display.

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree. Mr. Nytch is a student of Paul Cooper.