

*Meditations and Digressions* (2005)

John Biggs

"In 1898, Giuseppe Verdi wrote a choral piece entitled *Ave Maria* in which he used the "*scala enigmatica*" or "enigmatic scale" as the basis for his melodic and harmonic structure. I heard this piece only once and thought it quite mysterious and beautiful. I made a notation of the scale, filing it away for possible use in the future. Spelled out, it reads: C C# E F# G# A# B C. When I received a commission in 2005 from the Verdehr Trio and Michigan State University to create a new piece for the violin-clarinet-piano trio, I decided to use the scale as the basic building block for the piece. It served me well, from the opening melody to every aspect of the piece, both melodically and harmonically. I thank Signore Verdi for bringing it so beautifully to my attention, and hope it might inspire other composers as well."

—John Biggs

The world premiere of *Meditations and Digressions* was on September 24, 2006 with the Lansing Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Music Series, Plymouth Congregational Church, Lansing, Michigan.

John Biggs (born 1932, Los Angeles, California) received his master's degree in composition from the University of California at Los Angeles, doing further study at the University of Southern California and the Royal Flemish Conservatory in Antwerp, Belgium. His teachers include Roy Harris, Lukas Foss, Ingolf Dahl, Flor Peeters, Halsey Stevens, and Leonard Stein.

Biggs has amassed a catalog of works that includes fifty-two choral works, forty-two chamber works and twelve orchestral scores. He has won numerous awards and honors including a Rockefeller Grant, Fulbright Grant, Atwater-Kent Award, an ASCAP Serious Music Award every year since 1974, and a number of Meet the Composer grants from diverse parts of the United States.

Unlike many American composers, Biggs chooses to work independently from his home in Ventura, California. However, before devoting himself fulltime to composition, he taught at Los Angeles City College, the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of California, Berkeley. He served as composer-in-residence to six colleges in Kansas under a grant from the Department of Health, Education & Welfare.

As a performer, he founded the John Biggs Consort, which toured internationally under Columbia Artists Management for twenty years, singing and playing music from the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and twentieth century.