

Envoi (2000)

Arnold Black/William Bolcom

“Arnold Black had been working on a composition for the Verdehr Trio when he passed away unexpectedly during the summer of 2000. His wife, Ruth, sent me a large fragment of a movement which she found in his computer. It happened that I saw William Bolcom the next day after receiving the fragment, and knowing he had been a great friend of Mr. Black, I asked if he might be able to complete the movement. He thought that his schedule would make this impossible, but the next day came a telephone message from him saying he had completed the movement overnight!”

—Walter Verdehr

The world premiere of *Envoi* was on October 25, 2000 in a Tribute Concert for Arnold Black at Symphony Space, New York, New York with William Bolcom at the piano.

Arnold Black (1923–2000), composer, conductor, and violinist, was born in Philadelphia. He was a graduate of The Juilliard School where he majored in composition and violin. He performed as a violinist with the NBC Symphony and the Casals Festival and became concertmaster of the Baltimore Symphony and assistant concertmaster of the National Symphony Orchestra. He was founder and Artistic Director of Mohawk Trail Concerts, an award winning Chamber Music Festival in northwestern Massachusetts for over forty years.

Black wrote extensively for the theater, film, television, and the concert hall. He was Composer-in-Residence at The Circle in the Square, and he wrote the scores for numerous productions by the National Shakespeare Company and the Eugene O'Neill Center. He wrote songs and extended pieces for Judy Collins, Jan DeGaetani, Marni Nixon, Joan Morris, and Robert White, and he was closely associated with the noted cartoonist, R.O. Blechman, composing the music for his films and commercials. Their projects together include Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale* which won an Emmy and for which Black supervised the music and the musical integration. Films for which he wrote music include *River Song*, a prize-winning film about the Grand Canyon, *Black Harvest*, *Memorial Day*, *Empire of Reason*, *Peace for Our Time* which he co-composed with Eric Clapton, and *Illuminata*, composed in collaboration with William Bolcom.

Concert works include the sextet *Laments and Dances from the Irish for String Quartet and Two Guitars* premiered by the Alexander Quartet and recorded by the Turtle Island String Quartet with guitarists Michael Newman and Laura Oltman on the Music Masters label; *Calliope Overture* for the Calliope Renaissance Band; *Serenade for the Grand Canyon*, performed at the Grand Canyon Chamber Music Festival; *Homage to Green Tara*, a cantata for tenor, harmonica and strings; and *The Ballad of Chosen Dumpling* for soprano and orchestra, commissioned originally by Judy Collins for her Carnegie Hall concerts.

Black worked with artist Maurice Sendak on a series of films which are frequently shown on international television. His opera, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, based on the children's classic by Norton Juster, premiered in 1995 with Opera Delaware to critical acclaim with a touring version produced by Music Theatre International.

His last complete work was a string quartet, *My Country 1998-99*, commissioned by the St. Petersburg Quartet, which premiered at the Mohawk Trail Concerts thirtieth summer season and was played by them at the 2000 Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina.