

## **SCRITTI DI LEONARDO ("Writings of Leonardo") (1983)**

**by Christopher Fulkerson**

Text in Italian from the Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci

Premiere performance March 14, 1983, San Francisco MOMA

(Introduction): Pensa bene al fine; riguarda bene il fine

*Think carefully about the end; consider the end first*

Madrigal I: Di mi se mai fu fatta alcuna cosa...

*Tell me if anything was ever done...*

Aria I: E tirato dalla mia bramosa foglia, vago di vedere la gran copia dalla artificiosa natura, raggiratomi alquanto infra gli ombrosi scogli, pervenni all'entrata d'una gran caverna; dinanzi alla quale, restato alquanto stupefatto e ignorante di tal cosa... e spesso piegandomi in qua e in la per vedere se dentro vi discernessi alcuna cosa; e questo vietatomi per la grande oscuritta a che la entro era. E stato alquanto, subito salse in me due cose, pauro e desidero: paura per la minaciante e scura spilonca, desidero per vedere se la entro fusse alcuna miraculosa cosa.  
*And drawn by my ardent desire, anxious to see a great multitude of varied and strange shapes made by formative nature, having wandered for some distance among overhanging rocks, I came to the entrance of a great cavern, before which for a time I remain stupefied, having been unaware of its existence... and repeatedly bending first one way and then another to see whether I could discern anything from inside and from this I was prevented by the deep darkness within. And after remaining there for a time, suddenly there arose in me two emotions, fear and desire - fear of the threatening dark cavern, desire to see whether there might be any marvelous thing therein.*

Madrigal II: De' fanciulli che stanno legati nelle fascie. - O citta marine! io veggo in voi i vostri cittadini, cosi femmine come maschi, essere istrettamente dei forti legami, colle braccia e gambe, esser legati da genti che non intenderanno i vostri linguaggi, e sol vi potrete isfogar li vostri dolori e perduta liberta mediante i lagrimosi pianti e li sospiri e lamentazione in fra voi medesimi, che chi vi lega non v'intendera, ne voi lo intenderete.

*Of children wrapped in swaddling clothes. - O cities of the sea! in you I see your citizens both females and males, tightly bound, arms and legs, with strong bands by people who will not understand your language. And you will only be able to assuage your sorrows and lost liberty by means of tearful complaints and lamentations among yourselves; for those who will bind you will not understand you, not will you understand them.*

Aria II: Come si deve figurare una notte. - ...Le figure che son fatto innanzi al fuoco appariscano scure nella chiarezza d'esso fuoco... e quelli che si trovano dai lati, sieno mezze scure a mezza rosseggiante: e quelle che si possono vedere dopo i termini della fiamme, saranno tutte illuminate di rosseggiante lume in campo nero. In quanto agli atti farai le figure che sono appresso farsi scudo con le mani e con i mantelli a riparo del soverchio calore, e, volte col viso in contraria parte, mostrar di fuggire: quelle piu lontane, farai gran parte di loro farsi con le mani riparo agli occhi offensi dal soverchio splendore. How one may go about illustrating a night.

*- ...The figures which are seen against the fire look dark in the glare of the firelight; and those who are discovered at the side are half dark and half red, while those who are visible beyond the edges of the flames will be feebly lighted by the ruddy flow against a black background. As to their gestures, make the figures which are near it screen themselves with their hands and cloaks to ward off the intense heat, and some with their faces turned away as if drawing back. Of those further off, represent the better part of them with their hands raised to screen their eyes, hurt by the intolerable splendor of the flames.*

Madrigal III: Poni mente per le strade, sul fare della sera, i volti d'omini e donne, quando e cattivo tempo, quanta grazia e dolcezza si vade in loro.

*Observe how much grace and sweetness are to be seen in the faces of men and women in the streets, with the approach of evening in bad weather.*

Aria III: La sperienze non fall mai, ma sol fallano i vostri giudizi, promettendosi di quella effetto tale che in e vostri experimenti causita non sono. La sperienza non fall mai, ma sol fallano i nostri giudizi, promettendosi di lei cose che sono in sua potesta. ...con eterno silenzio resta ogni arguizione, a con pace sono fruite dai vere scienze devoti il che far non possono le bugiarde scienze mentali.

*Experience never errs; it is only your judgement that errs in promising itself results as are not caused by your experiments. Experience does not err; it is only your judgment that errs in expecting from her what is not in her power... all argument is reduced to eternal silence, and those who are devoted to the true sciences can enjoy them with a peace which the lying sciences of the mind can never attain.*

(Conclusion): ...Perche, dato un principio, e necessario che cio che siguita di quello e vera conseguenza di tal principio...

*...Because, given a beginning, what follows from it must be its true consequence...*

(Sources of the Texts: Cod. H 139v; Kenneth Clark LEONARDO DA VINCI, p. 147; Arundel 155r; Atlanticus 145r; Ashburnham 17a; Atlanticus 100v; AH 86 ra; Atlanticus 154a; Trattato 29; Atlanticus 154a.)

Nicolas Slonimsky included the following entry in his Supplement to Music Since 1900:

14 March 1984

Scritti di Leonardo, the first musical setting of words by Leonardo da Vinci, by the 29-year-old American Composer Christopher Fulkerson, for tenor solo, vocal quartet and instrumental ensemble of viola, guitar, harp, flute and bass clarinet and set in a "simultaneous form" arising from the sometimes overlapping, sometimes sequential and sometimes simultaneous placement of its numerous arias, quartets and instrumental pieces, receives its first performance by Patrick Neve as tenor soloist and the vocal ensemble Ariel at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the composer conducting.