

KZSU-FM, Stanford University

By Larry Koran

This song cycle by Mark Abel, who dropped out of Stanford in the late 60s and was later foreign editor of the S.F. Chronicle, explores the psychology and geography of California via seven characters and locales. The lyrics describe people pursuing variations of archetypal California dreams. Issues confronted include competition, ladder-climbing, greed, immigrant struggle, dysfunctional relationships, loneliness, and racism. The music blends classical, rock and jazz elements The vocalists sing the thought-provoking lyrics clearly and possess likeable voices.

Playlist guide:

1. Helen (Los Angeles) - Soprano; a "perfect" life gone off the rails. "Phantom of the Opera" style.
2. Todd (Taft) – Baritone; a man has affection for his largely devastated hometown, decayed and frozen in time. Somewhat dissonant, quiet, bleak. Emptiness and gray skies.
3. Naomi (Berkeley) - Mezzo Soprano; Berkeley skewered: politically correct "hill people" cast a cool eye on less refined neighbors. Windy day view of the Bay, with post-Debussy strings, winds and percussion.
4. Carol (San Diego) - Mezzo Soprano; materialism, anti-intellectualism and intolerance of other lifestyles. Stephen Sondheim "Sweeney Todd" style.
5. Lonnie (Richmond) – Bass; witness to history of racial scapegoating and its costs. Immensely sad.
6. Luz (Soledad) – Contralto; acceptance and assimilation of Hispanics in the Salinas Valley. A blend of Aaron Copland, "American in Paris" and a whiff of "West Side Story" styles. Mostly sunny, but dry, not moist, heat.
7. Adam (Arcata) – Tenor; celebration of youth, its self-absorption and doubts, and worries re limits to California's future. Interesting rhythms, tough messages, modal melodies.